

# Catholic Marriage Preparation Survey 2010

## *January Update*

### What's happening?

This year the Bishops' Committee for Marriage and Family Life are conducting a survey of the marriage preparation that is currently available to couples getting married in the Catholic church.

During 2010 the Committee want to build up a much clearer picture of:

- who is involved in this ministry
- what they offer to couples
- how many couples benefit
- what couples think about the preparation they receive

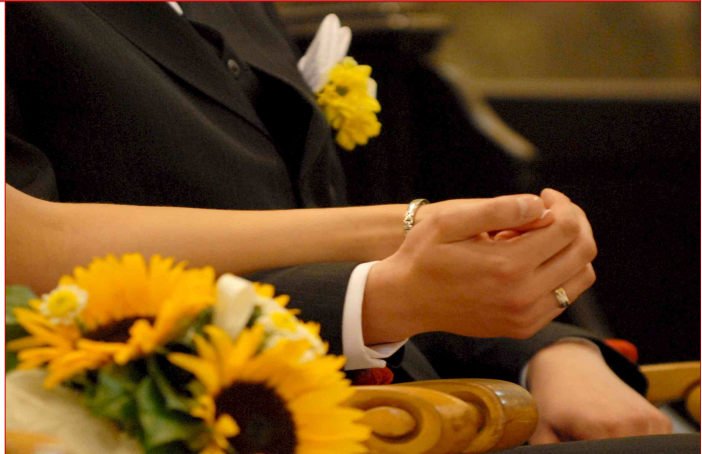
Everyone involved in providing marriage preparation including priests and deacons, plus the couples they engage with, are invited to complete a short online survey available at [www.catholicmarriage.org.uk](http://www.catholicmarriage.org.uk)

The Committee are also offering diocesan and other major programmes of marriage preparation the opportunity for independent evaluation, using evidence based and canonical frameworks.

The data gathered will better inform the work of the Committee as well as diocesan planning and practice by:

- highlighting particular examples of good practice
- affirming the provision of good quality marriage preparation
- pointing to gaps and overlaps
- articulating the value of marriage preparation including its public benefit
- alerting diocesan pastoral teams to possible issues affecting future provision of marriage preparation

[www.catholicmarriage.org.uk](http://www.catholicmarriage.org.uk)



The **survey of marriage preparation providers** asks questions about providers and their programmes or courses. How did they come to be involved? Have they had training and if so, from whom? What ongoing support do they receive? How many courses would they usually provide in a year? To how many couples? What topics are covered? There is space for providers to insert additional comments as well as feedback from couples.

The **monthly statistics survey** asks providers of marriage preparation simply to record the number of couples they prepared for marriage that month. The data from clergy is being collected separately from other providers purely because we think that will help in the analysis. There is a question here too about the religious affiliation of couples.

The **couples survey** asks couples about their experience of marriage preparation. When and where were they prepared? Why did they choose marriage preparation? Was the course easy to access? Were they made welcome? Was it useful? Has it helped their faith? Improved their view of the Church?

Marriage preparation providers can obtain free **prayercards** to give to couples to alert them to the survey and invite them to participate.



## Marriage Preparation: Some Background

A Relationships Foundation report (*Building Strong Foundations*, July 2009) estimates that 24% of individuals marrying each year access some form of preparation prior to their wedding, often delivered within the faith sector. In 2008 9,932 marriages took place in the Catholic Church in England and Wales. Figures from two dioceses (Shrewsbury and Southwark) show they prepared 9% of these couples. In the year ending March 31 2009, Marriage Care also prepared 2,777 couples across England and Wales—28% of the annual total.

All couples marrying in the Catholic Church will be prepared by their parish priest or deacon but some access additional opportunities. The survey is interested in *both* forms of preparation because they are both important and usually complement each other. The dioceses of Arundel & Brighton, Hallam, Lancaster, Leeds, Southwark and Westminster have developed their own programmes and networks of providers. Organisations and movements such as Engaged Encounter, Schoenstatt and Chemin Neuf have also developed programmes of marriage preparation. Premarital inventories such as FOCCUS and PREPARE are common too.

Research into the long term benefits (or protective factors) of marriage preparation is inconclusive (it's particularly challenging to eliminate bias in a controlled study), but a number of studies suggest that at least in the short term (up to three to five years of marriage) good quality marriage preparation improves marital stability by up to 30%. Some programmes are sufficiently challenging to encourage couples to reconsider their intentions. Scott Stanley (a respected marriage and relationships researcher), suggests that one of the major benefits of marriage preparation is that it connects couples with those who can help them sustain their commitment later in life. Sacramental preparation is the norm in the Catholic church and marriage preparation is no exception, though it varies considerably in terms of content, delivery and style.

The Catholic Marriage Preparation Survey 2010 will be launched during Marriage Week UK (February 8-14, 2010) by a press release, the unveiling of a dedicated website and the publication of a prayer card for engaged couples. An information meeting will take place at Eccleston Square on March 4th for anyone involved in marriage preparation in a deanery, diocesan or national capacity wanting to know more about the detail.

Amanda Cosfol, an intern from Notre Dame University will be working part-time on the Survey project until May 2010.

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### Sample Parish Bulletin Insert

*Are you or someone you know getting married in the Catholic church this year? The Bishops' Committee for Marriage and Family Life are gathering information on marriage preparation and want to hear from anyone involved, especially couples, about their experiences. If you can help please visit [www.catholicmarriage.org.uk](http://www.catholicmarriage.org.uk) where you can find more information about the initiative and access the brief online surveys.*