

Renewal

Pastoral Care Policy
Relationship Support

Principles

- Renewal believes that marriage is a God given institution in which one man and one woman enter into a legal contract and spiritual covenant to provide companionship and oneness with each other.
- We would like the marriages in our church to be successful (significantly greater than the national average) and be examples of how relationships between the married couple can cause the two people in the marriage and their families to thrive.
- We believe that marriage presents the opportunity to witness to the world the love and oneness that Jesus desires between himself and his people. We believe marriage is a great opportunity to show the world that Jesus lives through our love for one another in the context of marriage
- As a church we take a whole team approach to supporting relationships, pastors, pastoral care team members, relationship support team and other team members work together to strengthen relationships across our church community and our reach areas. We partner with FamilyLife UK to deliver some of our events and content. We also use HTB marriage preparation course.
- The relationship support team have been trained to level three in couple support. They deliver all our courses as well as offer mentoring (under supervision) and first line pastoral support to couples and individuals. The course includes a number of tools useful when supporting a couple, some essential knowledge about couple dynamics, safeguarding and skills practice. There is a strong emphasis on self-reflection and self-care.
- Our couple support mentoring is intended to engage with couples from the point at which commitment is made through marriage and ongoing throughout the marriage. Although there will be an emphasis on supporting couples through difficulties we are hoping to change the culture in the church to one where we are making a difference even to marriages who function well. We think that all marriages can improve towards what God really intended it to be.
- We also offer signposting to further support for relationships, the list of who we recommend is included in the appendix to this policy.

Processes

New marriage

- We insist that any couple getting married at any Renewal location undertakes the pre-marriage course. We recognise our responsibility to those taking marriage vows and want to ensure we have done all we can to prepare them and give them the tools for a successful marriage.
- If people have been married before, or have been in a long term cohabiting relationship it is our normal practice to insist they complete the pre-marriage course, however we recognise that there may be additional issues that need discussing and supporting due to previous relationships. This may require additional meetings and support following Pre-marriage course. The pre-marriage team will liaise with the minister conducting the ceremony when this is the case to ensure the further support is appropriately given before the wedding day.
- The first interaction is for the prospective couple to meet with the minister they wish to complete the ceremony. This meeting should be scheduled for at least 90 minutes. 30 minutes should be given to discussing the ceremony, and 60 minutes given to talking through the attached questionnaire.
- Once the first meeting has taken place if the minister is happy to conduct the ceremony then the questionnaire should be passed to the pre-marriage team and the couple booked onto the pre-marriage course.
- The relationship support team will allocate a mentor couple to the couple seeking marriage.
- Following attendance at the pre-marriage course, the relationship support team will add any notes onto the questionnaire and pass it back to the minister conducting the wedding. If the relationship support team have identified further issues that need discussing with the couple they will liaise with the minister to decide who will meet with the couple.
- The minister has to ensure that any issues highlighted have been thoroughly discussed with the couple before proceeding with the ceremony.

After the ceremony

- The date of the marriage will be entered onto Church Suite.
- The mentor couple will stay in touch with the couple every six months for three years. Should any pastoral issues arise the mentor couple will discuss them in supervision and the couple may be signposted to further support or back to the minister who conducted the ceremony.

Marriages requesting support

If a couple or individual request pastoral support for their marriage the following routes are available:

- In cases of Domestic violence or abuse the Team Pastor for Pastoral Care must be consulted and no further action taken until a risk assessment and safety plan has been considered. For further information see the briefing note on Domestic Violence.
- For couples seeking pastoral support where abuse is not a factor then a member of the relationship support team will offer the first contact and appointment. They can offer on-going mentoring to the couple and signposting to other areas of support. The support will be discussed in the supervision with the clinical lead for therapy service to ensure appropriate practice and boundaries. The clinical lead or relationship support team may request further support from the pastoral team. At this point the couple must be informed that further support is being requested and consent must be gained to share information with the pastoral team.
- We recognise that all marriages are an opportunity for great joy and great hardship. Those in leadership, especially in senior leadership will face pressure on their marriages. We recognise the stress that leadership can place on marriages and the isolation that can occur. We also recognise the potential grief that a failure of a high profile marriage can bring to the wider community. For those in high profile leadership (regional leaders, heads of departments, team pastors and location leaders) the clinical lead for therapy services can be contacted

directly for support. Any sharing of information will be discussed by the clinical lead with the couple before anyone else is informed.

Divorce

If a couple or an individual request a divorce or a support to commence a divorce or separation the following principles and procedures apply.

Principles

- All divorce is caused by sin, but not all divorce is sinful. In cases of adultery and abuse it may be that the church supports the action of one party to seek a divorce.
- Other than taking immediate action to secure safety, decisions to separate and divorce are huge, and should not be taken hastily, but after discussion and prayer with skilled members of the pastoral team.
- As a team we acknowledge and support the autonomy and personal responsibility of individuals to act in their own best interest. Some Christians may feel that they need 'permission' to divorce, from the church or from a specific minister. The team will only ever offer support in the decision making process rather than taking a directive role. The pastoral team's role is to help people reflect on how their Christian faith affects their own decision making.
- There are always two sides in every relationship breakdown, where possible we will seek to hear both parties.
- If there is a party who is in sin in the marriage, then they should be offered the route of church discipline. The challenge and ultimate sanction of being asked to leave the church is a safety net for all of us to be able to be called back into line and away from danger. If a person is refuses to hear or engage with the church on issues of discipline then it may change the approach taken.
- The issues surrounding marriage breakdowns are rarely simple. We acknowledge the complexity involved in supporting and pastoring people facing a divorce and we seek to avoid passing judgment and offering easy solutions.

Process

- The relationship support team will offer a first contact and appointment for those wishing to discuss a possible divorce. The purpose of the meeting will be to find out the current circumstances, the reasons for discussing divorce, whether any abuse is present, and what support the whole family may need going forward.
- After the initial meeting the relationship support team will liaise with the Team Pastor responsible for Pastoral Care to plan the church's support role going forward. In most cases a team of people will be involved in supporting and meeting with the couple going forward.

Other things to consider

- Vulnerable adults may need additional support in any intimate relationships. In these cases reference should be made to the local authorities safeguarding adults procedures.

List of further support Renewal can signpost couples too:

Marriage Care

We specialise in helping couples – married or not – build and sustain strong, fulfilling, healthy relationships, and in providing support in times of relationship difficulty.

Why? Because better relationships make for better lives, more stable families and a stronger society.

Marriage Care offer events and relationship counseling.

<http://marriagecare.org.uk/>

0800 3893801

FamilyLife UK

FamilyLife helps to transform relationships through providing hope and practical tools. We base our events and resources on research, experience of what works and we use the Bible as a key reference point. Our events and resources are suitable for those who are married, preparing for marriage, remarried or in a long term relationship... struggling or solid.

<http://familylifeuk.org/>

RSVP

Free counselling service for those who have experienced a rape or sexual assault.

<http://rsvporg.co.uk>

0121 643 0301

Women's aid

For those experiencing domestic violence and abuse.

<http://bswaid.org>

0808 800028

Beyond the Horizon

Beyond the Horizon Charity [BTHC] helps children, young people and families who have been affected by loss, bereavement, divorce or separation; working through their challenges to achieve hope for a healthy future and emotional wellbeing.

The service is free for children who live in Birmingham or attend a Birmingham school – there is a small charge for those who live outside Birmingham.

<http://www.beyondthehorizon.org.uk>

Questions for first meeting between minister and couple seeking to marry.

The pre-marriage course will cover all the foundational areas needed for a strong relationship – however it is helpful for the minister conducting the ceremony to also discuss the following areas.

Any issues or concerns must be highlighted to the pre-marriage team, please let the couple know what you will be sharing with the pre-marriage team and gain their consent to do so.

(Instructions in brackets are the next steps a minister may need take following this discussion)

Relationship

How did you two come together? How would you describe the relationship so far? Are there any concerns about possible issues or tensions you are facing currently, or may face once married?

Previous relationships

Have either of you been married before, or in a long term cohabiting sexual relationship? If so what lead to the break down of that relationship? (At this point please discuss the divorce and separation course) What did you learn from that relationship?

Have either of you been in an abusive relationship in the past? Have you received support to recover? (If concerned please contact Team Pastor for Pastoral care)

Children

Do either of you have children? How do they feel about the possible marriage? What will be the challenges of a blended family?

Have you discussed whether you want children? Are there areas of disagreement?

Have you discussed your childhood experiences and how you would wish to parent?

Finances

Have you discussed how you will manage your joint finances? Have you discussed where you will live once married? Is this financially realistic? Are you both comfortable with the wedding budget? Will be going into debt to

get married? (Please highlight this isn't a good idea!) Do either of you have current debts, and have you discussed how this will affect your joint finances?

Wider family

How have the wider family reacted to the engagement? Do you foresee any future issues? Have you discussed how you will navigate them? Are there any issues with the wedding plans and family involvement?

Sex

Do you both feel prepared and well informed enough to be sexually active once in the marriage? Are you planning to discuss contraception? (We recommend 'A celebration of sex for newly weds' by Douglas Rosenau)

(Please note they may not wish to discuss the following three questions in this meeting, especially if their fiancée is unaware of past history – please highlight that they can contact you privately or contact the social action coordinator if necessary. And please highlight the need to seek support before entering into the marriage.)

If either of you have experienced a rape or sexual assault in the past, have you sought support for this?

How are currently managing your boundaries to stay sexually pure before the wedding day? Are there any previous issues or history you would like to discuss?

If you have been sexually active in the past are you sure you are STI clear and are there any further discussions you want 1-1 before the marriage?

Church

Have you agreed on a place of worship – and what level of involvement you expect to have in the first 12 months?

Finally

Are there any other areas you want to talk about?

Are you happy for me to talk to the couple who will do your pre-marriage course and let them know about this discussion so they can best support you in your prep?