



# CAVERSHAM THAMESIDE AND MAPLEDURHAM

ST PETER | ST MARGARET | ST JOHN

## Policy on Marriage in Church after divorce

### 1. Introduction

- a. In 2000 the Church of England published the document 'Marriage in Church after divorce'. This made clear the following **principles**:
- b. The Church believes marriage to be for life though, sadly, some marriages do fail. In exceptional circumstances, a divorced person may marry again in church during the lifetime of a former spouse.
- c. Some priests may be willing to take such a marriage; others may not be prepared to do so on grounds of conscience. The law of the land permits them this choice.

In 2002, after much discussion and debate, the Church agreed to the remarriage of divorcees on the above grounds.

- d. 'Marriage in Church after Divorce' also made clear the recommended procedure for such cases:
  - i. If a parish priest is willing to discuss the possibility of conducting the marriage, they will want to talk to the couple frankly about the past, their hopes for the future and their understanding of marriage. This may involve more than one confidential meeting.
  - ii. To aid this process, couples will be given an application form to fill in and return to the parish priest before the first meeting.
  - iii. The parish priest is able to consult the bishop or their adviser on this issue, though the decision is theirs alone.
  - iv. The decision is best conveyed to the couple in person, though it may be conveyed in writing if turning down the application.
  - v. If the decision is taken to marry, marriage preparation will be required.
- e. The document also suggested the following **questions** for those clergy who are willing to discuss the possibility of marriage for those couples where one or more persons have been divorced:
  - i. Do the applicants have a clear understanding of the meaning and purpose of marriage?

- ii. Do the applicants have a mature view of the circumstances of the breakdown of the previous marriage and are they ready to enter wholeheartedly and responsibly into a new relationship?
- iii. Has there been sufficient healing of the personal and social wounds of marriage breakdown?
- iv. Would the effects of the proposed marriage on individuals, the wider community and the Church be such as to undermine the credibility of the Church's witness to marriage?
- v. Would permitting the new marriage be tantamount to consecrating an old infidelity?
- vi. Has either of the parties been divorced more than once?
- vii. Do the applicants display a readiness to explore the significance of the Christian faith for their lives so that their further marriage is not an isolated contact with the Church?

The national advice on this matter is clear that it is for individual clergy to decide in conscience whether they will conduct marriages of those previously married. In this parish, each clergy person will be expected to make their own decision on this matter.

For some time the clergy of this parish have been willing to marry in church those previously married, and the PCC implicitly have been supportive of this. Whilst the remarriage of those who have been divorced is, in essence, a matter of individual conscience for the clergy, the national church encourages PCC's to adopt a policy on this matter acknowledging the position of individual clergy.

## 2. Policy

- a. The PCC will follow the policy based on the Church of England's principles as noted above, namely:
  - i. The Parish of Caversham Thameside and Mapledurham is willing to consider the marriage in church of couples where one or more partners have previously been divorced and a previous spouse is still alive.
  - ii. This policy is based on the belief that whilst we consider marriage to be for life, unfortunately an increasing number of marriages do fail, and we are therefore prepared to seriously consider the possibility of remarriage in church after divorce.
  - iii. Entering into a conversation about the possibility of remarriage for a couple does not guarantee that we will be able to remarry them. This would be down to the discretion of the priest concerned.
  - iv. No clergy person in the parish would be expected to conduct marriages for those who have previously been divorced if their conscience indicated otherwise.

### 3. Procedure

The procedure would be as follows:

- a. All couples are expected to contact the Parish Administrator in the first instance.
- b. The parish administrator will make the couple aware of this policy and procedure, available via our website, and ask them to fill in the nationally agreed form.
- c. Upon completion of the form, the parish administrator will send this to one of the clergy who will be responsible for meeting with the couple to determine if they consider that the marriage can take place in church. One or more meetings may be required.
- d. The clergy person meeting with the couple may wish to consult with the bishop or their adviser on this issue before reaching a decision. They may also ask the wardens of the relevant church in which it is hoped the marriage will take place if there is any reason to their knowledge which would prevent the marriage from taking place, e.g. scandal.
- e. The decision will be conveyed to the couple, usually in person or by telephone. It will also be conveyed to the parish administrator who will keep a copy of the application form on file.
- f. If the decision is taken to marry, the priest who is asked to conduct the marriage will be required to offer marriage preparation.

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