



What is life like if you or someone in your family is divorced and remarried? And what can your parish do to make a difference?

What is Life Like?

“I’m remarried and not allowed to receive Holy Communion. Does that mean I won’t go to heaven?”

“Marrying a divorcee has meant our marriage has not been blessed and I cannot be a sacramental practising Catholic.”

“My divorce was painful. I found happiness with a new spouse, but this has brought inner turmoil between what I’ve done and what the Church teaches.”

“Pray for the children - it’s not their fault!”

“A young child, giving thanks when her mother remarried, said, “We are a family again now.”

“I feel that God is angry with me.”

“I feel I am a second class Catholic.”

“There are times when the church seems to come between God and me.”

“To tell people who are not ‘in good standing’ to stay away from Communion is like telling people who are cold to stay away from the fire.”

‘It is important to emphasise that seeking or receiving a divorce, where there are serious and objective reasons for it, is not in itself a barrier to receiving communion.’ (Cherishing Life #136)

Challenges for the Parish

There are people in our parishes that feel:

- a longing to receive Communion
- the pain of exclusion from Communion
- different and excluded
- they don’t belong

So the challenge is:

- To be aware that there are an increasing number of people in this situation in every parish and that this has a ‘knock-on’ effect on families.

- To demonstrate by words and actions that each of us is a child of Christ and that the Holy Spirit is at work in the mind and heart of every individual in the church.
- To provide the very best Marriage Preparation and follow up.
- To provide contact information for the local Marriage Tribunal and to include up to date literature about the annulment process in a parish library
- To provide contact details of relevant support groups both Catholic and secular
- To reflect on parish practice in the light of the guidelines for the pastoral care of the separated, divorced and divorced-remarried
- To have a commitment to these challenges

‘Sensitivity in the way we treat and talk about those whose marriages have failed or, who for a variety of reasons, have entered second irregular marriages is a skill that needs to be learnt.’ (CBCEW Guidelines, 1996)

Prayer and Liturgical Opportunities

‘While those who have entered a second relationship after divorce are not permitted to participate fully in the Sacraments, the Church warmly invites and encourages them to become involved in the life and prayer of the local Church community as much as possible.’ (Cherishing Life #136)

There are many opportunities to encourage and enable all members of the parish, including those divorced and remarried, to play their part in the prayer and liturgical life of the community such as:

- Mass
- Stations of the Cross
- Evenings of reflection
- Weeks of guided or themed prayer
- Opportunities for Eucharistic adoration
- Involvement in ministries
- Cell/House/Prayer Groups

And other ways. It is important however to invite involvement sensitively and to be both explicitly welcoming of those divorced and remarried and reflective of their experience.

Spiritual Communion

‘Even though some may not receive sacramental communion, all are united in some way with the Holy Spirit. The traditional idea of spiritual communion is an important one to remember and reaffirm. The invitation often given at Mass to those who may not receive

sacramental communion - for example, children before their First Communion and adults who are not Catholics - to receive a 'blessing' at the moment of Communion emphasises that a deep spiritual communion is possible even when we do not share together the sacrament of the body and blood of Christ.' One Bread, One Body #43.

Prayer for a Spiritual Communion

Loving Jesus, present here in the sacrament of the Eucharist and in your body gathered around your table, I offer you all that I am and welcome you always into my heart. Guide me with your loving presence and help me to remain always united with you and your church in hope, in faith and in love. Amen.

Helpful Resources

Association of Separated and Divorced Catholics offers spiritual and practical support through local groups, events and newsletters. Website: www.asdcengland.org.uk

[Beginning Experience](http://www.beginningexperience.org) offers weekend retreats to those who have lost a partner to help them come to terms with their grief so that they can begin again. www.beginningexperience.org

[Rainbows for all God's Children](http://www.rainbowsgb.org) assists in establishing peer support groups for children, adolescents and adults who are grieving a death, divorce or other painful loss in their family. www.rainbowsgb.org

[Diocesan Marriage Tribunals](http://www.clsghi.org.uk) will answer enquiries about the annulment process. Addresses of local Tribunals are available on the Canon Law Society website: www.clsghi.org.uk

[Marriage Care](http://www.marriagecare.org.uk) offers counselling and marriage preparation facilitator training. www.marriagecare.org.uk

Guidelines for the Pastoral Care for the Separated, Divorced and Remarried. Catholic Bishops' of England and Wales 1996. Available at www.catholicfamily.org.uk

Care for the Family provides practical resources for step-families including a marriage preparation programme specifically for couples who each have children already. www.careforthefamily.org.uk

A Guide to the Annulment Process, 3rd edition, by the National Board of Catholic Women is available to download at www.catholicannulment.info

This leaflet is one of a series devised to assist parishes to become more welcoming, friendly and family-sensitive. For further information contact: Marriage and Family Life Project Office, 39 Eccleston Square, London, SW1V 1BX Email: Elizabeth.Davies@cbcew.org.uk