

THE HARLAXTON GROUP OF PARISHES

Church of England Diocese of Lincoln

Rector: Revd Keith Hanson

MARRIAGE IN CHURCH AFTER DIVORCE

Thank you for your enquiry about a marriage in The Harlaxton Group of Churches. Because one of you has been married before and the previous spouse is still living this is not completely straightforward, nor can it be assumed that it will be automatically arranged. These notes are to explain the Church of England's position and the process that follows from here.

The Church of England holds that marriage is created by God to be a lifelong union between a man and woman. The expectation is therefore that all couples seeking marriage intend to live together "for better for worse... till death us do part".

Where that has not happened there will be many regrets and it is clearly not a light matter to seek to marry again. For the sake of all concerned it is therefore important to explore the circumstances fully before deciding whether or not it is appropriate to proceed further.

It is on this basis that this church is sometimes prepared to conduct further marriages.

It is important that you realise that there is no automatic right to be married in a Church of England church where one of the couple has been divorced (and the former partner is still living).

It is a matter of conscience for clergy as to whether or not they are prepared to conduct such marriages and at present not all clergy are prepared to do so. If then, for any reason, the vicar is not available to conduct the marriage service, then you need to know that it may not be possible for the wedding to go ahead if a replacement cannot be found. (Clergy are taken ill just like everyone else.)

It may be possible under those circumstances to offer a service of Prayer and Dedication (Marriage Blessing) following a civil marriage at a Registry Office. It is important therefore that you are aware that there is a risk involved here.

Procedure

Firstly, you need to visit the Weddings page of our parish website to download and complete the Church of England 'application form' for Marriage in Church after divorce and return it to me before we meet.

The information on this will form the basis of our conversation.

I will call you after I have read the form to arrange a time for us to meet so that we can talk through what has brought you both to this point. That will inevitably involve talking about the previous marriage, what led to its irretrievable breakdown and how you feel about it now. There are guidelines to help clergy decide when it is and when it is not appropriate to conduct a further marriage in church.

Experience has shown that:

- the *decree absolute* needs to have been granted at least **two years** previously to allow sufficient time for the dust to have settled and pains of the previous split to have been healed.

- everything to do with the previous marriage, all child care (if appropriate) etc., needs to have been long since settled so that you are free emotionally to enter into a new marriage.
- the person concerned needs to have worked through whatever may have contributed to the breakdown and the effects of it so that these don't unwittingly harm the new marriage.
- the new relationship should not have been connected with the breakdown of the previous marriage.
- The couple should have a sense of the spiritual nature of a Christian marriage service. There also needs to be a recognition that marriage is not a temporary arrangement and therefore the failure of a previous marriage is something which requires repentance and forgiveness, even if we may feel that 'it was not our fault'. Vows were made and these were not kept, so there is a need to face this in prayer looking for God's grace and healing to lift the burden so that we can walk on into a new life. A short service of prayers before a further marriage will be part of the marriage preparation and this will be something we do privately in the church, with just the three of us present.

If you would like to explore Christian marriage I will be very happy to talk it through with you. When we meet I will need to see an original certified copy of the *decree absolute* (photocopies are not sufficient).

The bishop may need to be consulted to talk through with him whether or not it is in order for the Marriage Service to be conducted in church. It may not, therefore, be possible to give you an answer straight away. That is not necessarily a bad thing, since marriage should never be rushed into, especially where it has not worked once before.

I will wait to hear from you and in the meantime you will be in my prayers.

Yours sincerely

Revd Keith Hanson

Rector of The Harlaxton Group of Parishes

St Andrew, Denton. St Mary & St Peter, Harlaxton. All Saints, Stroxton.

St James, Woolsthorpe by Belvoir. St Catherine, Wyville with Hungerton.

6 Rectory Lane

Harlaxton

Grantham

NG32 1HD

01476 594608

hanson.keith@sky.com

www.harlaxtongroup.co.uk

Jan 2011