



This academic year sees the start of an exciting new project in the department of Humanities at Roehampton University. Awarded £46,000 funding by Plater Trust (<http://plater.org.uk/>) the academic team, led by Dr. Clare Watkins, from the Ministerial Theology programme, along with Dr. John Moxon and Dr. Martine Thompson (Research Assistant) will work in collaboration with the charity Catholic Marriage Care (<http://www.marriagecare.org.uk/>) to investigate couples' and practitioners' experience of marriage preparation courses provided by [Marriage Care](#) as a way of discovering more about what the Catholic ethos of the charity contributes to this work.

The project will look into how Marriage Care's approach to marriage preparation helps couples understand what the Church teaches about marriage and family life and learn the skills and behaviours needed to build a healthy, lifelong relationship. Recognising the radical shift in culture over recent generations in relation to marriage and relationship, vividly illustrated in the debates around the legal developments of same sex marriage and adoption of children by same sex couples, and the increasing practices of co-habitation, divorce and 'blended families', the research sets out to help the charity seek to understand better its mission as a characteristically Catholic charity in a context of such- social diversity and contention.



In order to do this Dr. Watkins, Dr. Moxon, Dr. Thompson and the Marriage Care team, working with a variety of experts, will employ Theological Action Research methods,¹ comprising of the carrying out of interviews among significant parties to evoke articulation of the 'real experiences and practices' of Marriage Care's marriage preparation course. It will investigate how Catholic approaches to right relationship, marriage, family and society are communicated through the preparation process for both Catholics and non-Catholics in this course. By locating these reflections in the context of Catholic Social Teaching, the research will shed new light on the work of the charity in the alleviation of 'relationship poverty' in our society.

Dr Clare Watkins (centre) with Sue Burridge, the Head of Policy and Research at Marriage Care and Cardinal Archbishop of Westminster, Vincent Nichols, receiving the funding at the Plater Award Ceremony in London on Thursday 26 February.

¹ For this see Helen Cameron, D Bhatti, C Duce, J Sweeney & C Watkins (2010) *Talking About God in Practice. Theological Action Research and Practical Theology.* (London : SCM)

The Catholic Church's teaching on marriage and family is coming under renewed focus at the highest levels. Last October saw the Pope convene the Extraordinary Synod on marriage and family in Rome, which will be followed this October by the Ordinary Synod. Dr Watkins and Professor Tina Beattie have not long been back from their trip to Rome ahead of the XIV Ordinary General Assembly of the Synod of Bishops to speak at events and launch a new book, edited by Professor Beattie, on issues of women's and families roles in the Catholic Church. (*Catholic Women Speak*)

Dr Clare Watkins was a keynote speaker at the International Academy for Marital Spirituality (INTAMS – www.intams.org) conference 'Faithful Voices, Discerning Hearts: Marriage and Family in Church and Society' (10-12 September). The conference was concerned with bringing the voices of married life into discussions around the Synod and reflecting on them theologically. Dr Watkins argued that by putting families at the centre of Church thinking Catholics can learn much about what it means to live Christian lives 'in ordinary' today. She says there is a strong theological reason for thinking 'ordinary' people living married and family life have an essential part to play in any theological or church discussion of these matters. Dr Watkins will return to Rome in October for the closing discussions of the synod where she will represent [Marriage Care](#). The Synod takes place in the Vatican during October, and will be discussing controversial issues around how the Catholic Church deals with marriage, divorce and same sex relationship in the 21st century.



Forthcoming events on Roehampton's Marriage Care project include a 1-day workshop for reflectors involved on the project on Monday 30th November 2015 and the project will end with a colloquium for involved parties and other interested (by invitation). Dates to be confirmed.

If anyone is interested in learning more about the project, occasional updates will be posted on this site and sent to those who select to be on our mailing list. If you are interested in joining this please contact Dr. Thompson at Martine.Thompson@roehampton.ac.uk

The project will run from 1st September 2015 to 31st August 2016.