



Getting Married in St Brigid's Parish



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Congratulations on your decision to marry! That decision is perhaps the most important you will make in your life. This is a very special time for you. Marriage involves much more than one day; it is about the rest of your life. Planning your wedding is important; everyone wants it to be a wonderful and memorable occasion. But preparing for marriage is about much more than planning your wedding day. Good preparation will enrich your understanding of marriage as a source of great happiness. It will enable you see marriage as a life-long calling based on the firm and realistic decision to face together the responsibilities and challenges of married life. On your wedding day you are:

- consciously and freely committing yourself to a lifelong loving relationship;
- consciously involving God in your relationship and seeking God's blessing;
- consciously involving God's people, i.e. the Church, and seeking their prayerful support.

Your decision to marry may raise some questions for you about the living of your Christian faith. Your preparation will give you an opportunity to discuss these and at the same time to grow in a deeper understanding of married life.

There are also certain practical issues to be considered and decisions to be made as you plan your marriage; e.g., invitations, reception etc.; but there is also the Wedding Service itself, which is at the very heart of your wedding day. By attending to everything carefully, you will ensure that your wedding day will be as happy as you wish it to be, and everyone wishes it to be for you.

It is important to give the Parish good notice of your intention to marry. For example, it is essential that you contact the Parish before booking your hotel for the reception. This is to ensure that both priest and church will be available on the day, and at the time, you choose. Six months is required as it allows for time to address some essential things and to attend to all the necessary documentation. (In any case, most hotels have to be booked at least twelve months before a wedding reception.)

What do you need to know and what do you need to do?

There are three essential things that you must attend to before you focus on the wedding ceremony:

- Marriage preparation;
- Civil Registration;
- Completion of Church documentation.

The **first thing to do** is to **make contact with the Priest in St. Brigid's Parish** through the Parish Office (Tel: 028 90665409; email – stbrigids@downandconnor.org). The Priest is responsible for advising you and helping you to prepare for marriage; he will be happy to discuss matters with you and answer your queries; he will help you meet the three essential things mentioned above.

Marriage Preparation

Why have you decided to have a church wedding?

"I wanted a religious setting for our wedding"

"It is more romantic getting married in a church"

"Our families expect us to get married in church!"

"We believe marriage is sacred and want to make our vows before God and God's people represented by your families and friends."

Frequently there is more than one reason why couples seek to marry in church. You might find yourselves agreeing with some of the above, or perhaps all of it! In our society, family expectations still play an important part in deciding where couples marry. Once you announce your plans, family members, and friends too, are eager to advise you what you should do, what the custom is and what is expected of you. You may find advice from family and friends helpful, or intrusive, or both! It is important that *you make the choice* where, when and how you marry each other and that *you are clear about the responsibilities your choice entails*.

As suggested earlier, getting married in the Catholic Church involves more than getting married in a church building. Marrying in church means taking on the hopes and the ideals of Christian marriage; hopes and ideals that originate with Jesus Christ. On your wedding day the priest will ask you for an assurance that you clearly understand what you are undertaking: i.e. to love each other all the days of your life, having as your ideal Christ's standard of love

If you choose to marry in church, we will help you to meet the responsibility of preparing yourselves to celebrate the sacrament. One way of doing this is taking part in a **Marriage Preparation Course**. St Brigid's Parish recommends ACCORD. This is a marriage support service and can be contacted at **028 9033 9944** (9.00am–1.00pm) or email accordbelfast@btconnect.com

The preparation for what you will do in the Church on the day of your marriage is the greatest investment you can make as you approach the momentous day when you become husband and wife. And remember that 'putting yourselves out' for your marriage beforehand is a good sign that you will 'put yourselves out' for each other afterwards.



Civil Registration:

Even though you will marry in a church, you, as a couple, have a civil responsibility to notify the local Registrar of your decision to marry. This will involve each of you completing a *Notice of Marriage* form. These act as an application for your '*MARRIAGE SCHEDULE*.' This is the civil form you sign in the church on the occasion of your marriage. Before submitting these application forms to the Registrar, they must be signed by the priest who will officiate at your marriage.

Read the following guidelines carefully.

1. Contact the local Registrar and each obtain a *Notice of Marriage* form. You can do this up to twelve months before your marriage, but the minimum time is three months.
2. If you and your Fiancé(e) are Non-European Union Citizens, you will need to apply for a marriage visa in the country of your citizenship.
3. You should complete the forms and arrange for the priest who is officiating at the wedding (the Officiant) to sign the form. The priest must be a *registered Officiant (i.e. on the Registrar's register)*. If the priest officiating is not working in Northern Ireland, he may not be a registered Officiant and you should contact, for advice, the priest of the church in which your marriage is to take place.
4. Return the completed and signed forms to the local Registrar, along with the fee and any other documents that you were asked to bring. Do this approximately 6-8 weeks before the marriage. The official minimum period is 15 days but leaving things so late could result in the postponement of your marriage.
5. The local registrar should have the '*MARRIAGE SCHEDULE*' ready for you to collect 14 days before the marriage. You can collect it when convenient but note: **the bride or bridegroom must collect it in person.**

6. Bring the '*MARRIAGE SCHEDULE*' to the parish office a few days before the marriage or to the wedding rehearsal – **the parish must have the '*MARRIAGE SCHEDULE*' the day before your marriage.** Make sure that you give it to the parish secretary or the priest in person. **Please note that you cannot be married without the '*MARRIAGE SCHEDULE*'.**
7. After the marriage the priest celebrating your marriage will give you back the '*MARRIAGE SCHEDULE*' and ask you to sign a receipt. You must return the '*MARRIAGE SCHEDULE*' to the local registrar within 3 days.
8. Please note that the legal age of the witnesses, that is the best-man and main bridesmaid, is eighteen years or over.
9. *If you have any question, you can ask the Registrar when you first visit the Registrar's Office.* For those marrying in St. Brigid's Church the Registrar's Office is: **Registrar of Marriages, City Hall, Belfast, BT1 5GS**

Telephone: 028 9027 0274. www.belfastcity.gov.uk/bdm/index



Church Documentation:

You will require the following documents in order to celebrate marriage in the Catholic Church:

1. **A Certificate of Baptism is required for Catholics.** This is obtained from the parish in which you were baptised. (If you are not sure or do not know in which parish you were baptised, your parents will be able to tell you.) It should be a recent certificate (i.e. issued during the six-month period before your marriage). It is important that you inform the person issuing the certificate that you require it for your marriage preparation. For all other Christians, a record of baptism suffices.
2. **A Certificate of Confirmation.** When you receive your recently issued baptism certificate, check if your confirmation is also recorded on that certificate. If it is, then you do not need an additional confirmation certificate: if it is not, you will need a separate confirmation certificate from the parish in which you were confirmed.
3. **A Pre-nuptial Enquiry Form.** (*You sign this form to indicate that you understand and accept the sacrament you are undertaking*). The priest completes this form with you; therefore, you will need to make an appointment to meet with the priest at least three months before your marriage. Bring your recently issued baptism and confirmation certificates with you, as well as the certificate issued by ACCORD stating that you have completed your marriage preparation course.
4. **A certificate or statement** regarding the form of marriage preparation undertaken.
5. Should one half of the couple not be a Catholic then a **sworn affidavit** is required attesting that he/she has never been married civilly or religiously in any jurisdiction. For **Inter-Church Marriages** (i.e. mixed marriages) you both will need to become familiar with inter-Church guidelines. The guidelines give advice about the celebration of the ceremony, its form, and the possible involvement of ministers of other Christian Churches (which is welcomed). The priest will be glad to meet you both and answer any questions.
6. If the marriage is to be celebrated outside of Ireland, a **sworn affidavit** is required for both the bride and the groom attesting that neither have ever been married civilly or religiously in any jurisdiction.

It is important to note that all Church bookings are considered “provisional” until the above documents are assembled.

Planning your Wedding

The most important part of your wedding day will be the Wedding Ceremony when you will exchange your marriage vows. This is not only a solemn moment, but a sacred moment. As well as celebrating your love for each other, you celebrate also your faith in Jesus Christ.

The celebration of marriage can take place in two ways and you can choose which way suits your circumstances:

- (i) **within Mass**; this is often the case when both the bride and groom are practising Catholics;
- (ii) **within a Liturgy of the Word**; when the Mass is not celebrated. This is recommended if the bride and groom rarely, if ever, take part in the Eucharist. It is also recommended if one or other of the party is not be a Catholic. This is for the very positive reason of allowing the wedding ceremony to emphasise that which unites you both, and it permits everyone to comfortably participate. It also provides for the welcome participation of a minister from another Christian denomination. The priest will gladly discuss this with you and help you to come to a decision.

When preparing the Wedding Ceremony a very useful website to consult is: www.accord-ni.co.uk/marriage-preparation-courses (Go to “Resources”, hit “Links”, then “Getting married”.)

Prepare the Liturgy well

There is available a wide range of scripture readings which are particularly suitable for weddings. You can view these readings on the **Accord** website (address above). Also, the priest will be happy to advise you about the readings, as well as about the choice of liturgical texts for the wedding vows, prayers, etc. If you are preparing a booklet for your wedding, to ensure that everything is in the right order, it is best to ask the priest officiating at your wedding to look it over a draft copy before printing.

Choosing the Readings

Normally there are two readings: the first Reading is taken from the Old Testament. It is followed a Psalm (which may be sung). Then there is usually a second Reading, taken from the New Testament. It is followed by the Gospel Acclamation (i.e. the Alleluia verse, which may be sung). Finally, there is the Gospel.

If you know someone who is commissioned to read in Church, you could ask that person to read, or, alternatively, you could ask a member of your family or a friend

who is willing and able to carry out the task. If you choose to have two readings, you can, of course, have two readers. Keep in mind that they will be doing more than just reading, they will be proclaiming the Word of God, through which Christ speaks to his people. It is assumed that those reading at a Wedding Mass are practising Catholics; practising Christians are welcome to read at a Wedding Service outside of Mass. The priest is always willing to help and advise you so that your Wedding Celebration will be perfect.

The Rite of Marriage



The actual marriage rite is divided into three parts:

- a) Address of the priest (*how the Church's understands Christian Marriage*).
- b) Declaration of consent (*exchange of the marriage vows by bride and groom*).
- c) Blessing and exchange of rings (*symbols of never-ending love*).

Prayer of the Faithful

These intercessions can be read by members of your family and friends. It is important that who lead these intercessions feel comfortable with reading in public.

Bringing up the Gifts

If there is to be a Nuptial Mass, the gifts of bread and wine are formally brought to the priest. You can ask members of your family or friends to carry the gifts forward during the ceremony.

Music

Music is an important part of the ceremony and will add to the prayerfulness of the occasion. The priest will be willing to advise in regard to experienced church musicians; of course, you may know others who are experienced church musicians and choose to ask them. Keep in mind that your wedding is a religious ceremony with a particular emphasis; it is important that music and hymns **appropriate to the ceremony** are chosen. Not all hymns, although beautiful in themselves, are suitable for a marriage celebration, particularly so if Mass is also celebrated. As you plan the music for your wedding ask the priest officiating at your wedding for his advice.

Signing of the Register

The '*MARRIAGE SCHEDULE*' is signed at the end of the wedding ceremony. It is signed on a table in the sanctuary area.

Photography

A Wedding Day is very special indeed, so of course it is important to capture aspects of it in photographs. At the same time care has to be taken to ensure that the “enthusiasm” of the photographer doesn't disrupt what is a sacred occasion. The photographer is welcome to take photographs of the arrival of the groom and bride at the entrance of the Church; during the procession of the bridal party into the church; and during the signing of the '*MARRIAGE SCHEDULE*', and afterwards. **Please inform your photographer, when you engage him/her, that photographs are not to be taken during the Wedding Ceremony.** A video of the ceremony may be taken, provided it is done with discretion.

Flowers

Flowers add greatly to the sense of celebration, but perhaps keep in mind that a “noble simplicity” can often be very beautiful. You are welcome to decorate the sanctuary area with two bouquets, and, also, if desired, two bouquets in the porch area. If you decide to have pew ends, please ask your florist not to use pins. (Some couples also like to put, for example, bay trees at the main entrance.) **If you want additional arrangements please check with the priest as to what is possible as the parish has to comply with health and safety regulations, particularly in regard to free standing arrangements in the church aisle, or lighted candles in the body of the church.**

Please – no confetti.

