

Getting married
at
Sacred Heart and
St Bernadette's



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Welcome to the Parish of Sacred Heart and St Bernadette

The parish community offers its prayers and support to both of you as you begin to plan your wedding liturgy and as you look ahead to your married life. Our community celebrates and cherishes God's love for both of you and we hope you find our parish a place of welcome and support that seeks to help you deepen your relationship with Christ and the Church.

This booklet has been prepared to familiarise you with some guidelines for preparing for marriage in the Catholic Church. The information contained in the booklet is compiled from the experience of those who come here to be married and those who assist them in the preparation. By no means does it answer all the questions concerning weddings here but we hope it will be a useful tool for you as you prepare for marriage. At any time, please feel free to contact the priest assigned to your wedding with any questions you may have.

First things first!

Do you live in Sacred Heart and St Bernadette's Parish? (If in doubt, ask the priest)

Do you worship at Sacred Heart or St Bernadette's frequently? (at least one Sunday a month)

If you have answered 'yes' to both or either of these questions, then read on. If you do not live in this parish and do not frequently worship here, then you **must** speak to the priest of the parish in which you live before asking if you can get married in Sacred Heart. Marriage in state and church law works according to where you live, not just where you want to get married. You need to ask the priest of your home parish to complete all the paperwork with you and to celebrate the wedding service itself. You will still have to attend the preparation outlined below.

If you do live in the parish or worship here on a regular basis, then you need to contact the priest and make an appointment to come and see him. He will guide you through the whole process of preparation. At least six months notice is needed to get married, so speak to him in plenty of time.

At least one of you has to be a baptised Catholic for you to get married in the Catholic Church.

Please note, St Bernadette's Chapel of Ease is not licensed for marriages.

Documents

Each person intending to marry in the Catholic Church must be interviewed by a priest so that freedom to marry may be established, and is required to sign a document stating that s/he understands the Church's teaching that marriage is a sacrament; that it is a lifelong, indissoluble and exclusive union and carries with it obligations of mutual love and support, fidelity and obligations with regards to the procreation and upbringing of children. This is a necessary and important declaration that must be secured before a wedding is celebrated.

Each person is to provide the parish with a **recent** baptismal certificate and confirmation record. Please contact the parish of your baptism and confirmation and request that these documents be mailed directly to Sacred Heart parish for the attention of the priest dealing with your marriage. If you received either or both of these sacraments at Sacred Heart or St Bernadette's, we will verify your information here.

The civil law requires that a marriage licence be obtained from a registrar. **The licence is necessary for your marriage to take place.** This must be presented to the priest or deacon prior to your wedding date. You will need to contact your district registry office to obtain this certificate, allowing at least six weeks between the day of application and the day of the wedding.

Depending on your situation, there may be other forms to be completed, but you will be advised of this by the priest assigned to your wedding.

Scheduling the wedding date

Weddings are scheduled with respect to the couple's wishes and to the availability of the church and the priest. At Sacred Heart, weddings are scheduled for Saturday afternoons, between 1.30pm and 4.00pm and at other times in the week subject to negotiation. These times are established round the parish schedule of the weekend.

Generally, wedding rehearsals are held on the Thursday evening prior to the wedding.

Because of time constraints, Sacred Heart cannot host weddings on Sundays unless another priest is conducting the service and the time does not impinge on regular service times.

Do not simply book your reception then try and book the church. You may find that the date is not available.

Preparation

Getting married is possibly the most important decision you will ever make. The church recognises this and requires every couple getting married in the church to prepare well, so that you are able to enter into marriage with a greater understanding of the commitment you are making.

The priest assigned to your wedding will need to meet with both of you on at least four separate occasions in order to complete all the paperwork and help you prepare for the wedding day.

Sacred Heart parish also requires each couple to attend a locally run marriage preparation day run by Marriage Care; an organisation in the church concerned with marriage preparation and relationship counselling and guidance. You will be given details of this day when you get in touch.

Some common questions and advice

If one of us is not Catholic, can we still get married in the Church?

Yes but permission (a dispensation) is required. The priest will explain this to you.

What if we are living together already and have children?

Many couples today are in this situation. The fact that one of you is a baptised member of the Catholic Church means that you are welcome to marry in the Catholic Church. If you are both ready to make a public commitment to each other, the Church welcomes and supports you.

Are those who are not Catholic required to become Catholics?

No. Becoming a member of the church is a separate commitment and can be made at any time. The Church *does* ask that the non-Catholic partner supports their partner in practising their faith.

Do we have to make any promises?

If one partner is not a Catholic, then the Catholic partner is asked to make the following declaration;

'I declare that I am ready to uphold my Catholic faith and to avoid all dangers of falling away from it. Moreover, I sincerely undertake that I will do all that I can within the unity of our partnership to have all the children of our marriage baptised and brought up in the Catholic Church.'

The priest will discuss this statement with you both and the non-Catholic partner is simply asked to support their partner in the practise of their faith.

Should we have a Nuptial Mass or Wedding service?

The Nuptial Mass is a normal celebration of Mass, with the wedding ceremony taking place after the Gospel and Homily. The Wedding service is a Liturgy of the Word (readings from the Bible) and the wedding ceremony. The main factor in your decision is the people you are inviting. Will the majority of guests be Catholics familiar with the Mass? – in which case a Nuptial Mass may be appropriate. If the majority of people will be unfamiliar with the Mass, then we suggest you opt for a wedding service. With careful preparation and thought, your ceremony should be very beautiful and memorable.

Can we have music?

Music is an integral part of Catholic prayer and worship and can enhance the beauty of a wedding. In choosing your music, be guided by the priest and parish musicians. They will help you decide what is appropriate for the wedding and the people gathered. The priest will give you the number of the person in the parish to contact. As a rule of thumb, only church or sacred music is permitted for a church service.

Are we allowed photographs and videos at the ceremony?

You are welcome to have your wedding photographed and videoed. However, to ensure that the ceremony is not disturbed by a photographer or cameraman, please make them aware of the following.

The balcony in the church can be used, but the photographer or cameraman should not go onto the sanctuary. A video camera must be static, in a place agreed with the priest. A photographer must ensure that he remains unobtrusive throughout the ceremony.

It is usual to ask all guests to refrain from taking photographs or filming during the ceremony.

Confetti

Please ask all guests to throw confetti only when outside the church, and to use only biodegradable material.

Flowers

Please speak to the priest about what is appropriate and for access into the church for the florist. Parish flower arrangers are able to help if you wish.

Time

It is not fashionable for the bride to be late for the ceremony! It only makes the groom more nervous and the priest, registrar, organist and others late for any subsequent appointments they may have. The groom should arrive no earlier than 30 minutes before we start, and the bride five minutes before the ceremony begins.

The difference in time between a Nuptial Mass and a Wedding Service is small; the Nuptial Mass usually takes 1 hour, the wedding service 45 minutes.

Getting married in the Catholic Church

A rough guide to the history

For the first 800 years of the Catholic Church's life, marriages did not really happen in church and the church was not particularly involved in marriages. It got involved because of various problems of injustice and the civil law followed on from church, or Canon, law.

Canon Law carries with it an assumption that a Catholic will marry another Catholic in their home parish church (where they live). Any deviation from this requires some kind of dispensation, or permission.

The Canon Law surrounding marriage in the Catholic Church arose primarily to protect both parties. Very roughly, a problem arose of clandestine marriages. In the first 1200 years of the church, there was no real formality or regulation regarding marriage. It was a simple exchange of consent, with no need for witnesses, registrars or wedding receptions. So, imagine the scenario.

Bill asks Mary to marry him. She agrees. They exchange consent and go on to have three children. In the eyes of the Church and state they are married. Ten years later, Bill meets Amanda. She is much younger than Mary and has blond hair. Bill has always liked blond hair. He leaves Mary and moves in with Amanda. Mary goes round to challenge Bill. "You can't leave me with these children, the mortgage and your mother to look after. You should at least pay some kind of maintenance. After all we are married." "Prove it", answers Bill.

No witnesses, no registrar, no priest can prove that they were married. So the Church, to protect the interests of abandoned women primarily, said that if you want to get married, it must be in your parish church in front of at least two witnesses and the church's official (the priest) and records must be kept. That is why we have laws to regulate marriage.

Some of these laws seem strange today but all rise from the original desire to protect the vulnerable. So for example, a wedding has to be a public affair; you cannot deny anyone entry to the church during the service, the doors must be kept unlocked and it must not take place within the hours of darkness!

And finally!

Fees

The average cost of a wedding, not including the honeymoon?
Recently, it was reported as being £18, 000.

It is not necessary for you to spend this amount to have a wonderful wedding day!

- Cost of the use of the church £100 (cheque made payable to 'Sacred Heart Church')
- The services of the priest in the preparation, legal documentation, preparation of the service and as registrar on the day; £250. (Cheque made payable to 'Fr Joe Wheat') (This is if the priest is from Sacred Heart. If he is from your own parish, you may be expected to also make an offering for his time and effort.)
- Cost of the organist; £80 (cash)
- Choir; £10 each member (speak to the choir master for numbers) (Cash)

These costs do not include flowers. You should arrange flowers through a florist if you want more than is usually in the church. Parish flower arrangers can provide arrangements to your budget if you wish.

If you feel unable to meet these fees, speak to the priest assigned to your wedding.

All fees should be settled at the rehearsal, not on the wedding day.

In all things, be guided by the priest and others who have experience in helping you prepare for the wedding itself and for the rest of your lives together.

If in doubt about anything, just ask.

Some useful contacts and resources

www.gettingmarried.ie – a very good site which will give you lots of info on what you need to think about when getting married. Ignore anything about the civil law as it only applies in Ireland.

www.marriagecare.org.uk – excellent site with loads of info specific to the Catholic Church in the UK.

www.wwme.org – links to information about preparation for engaged couples and help for those already married

Monsoon Wedding – a film about how not to do it?!

How to survive being married to a Catholic – a great book. (Available on Amazon.)