

St Malachy's Parish



Getting Married

Congratulations on your decision to marry.

This is a special time for you as the decision to get married is one of the most important you will make in your life.

Getting married involves not just one day, but a lifetime.

Marriage is a source of great happiness. However, there are serious responsibilities and challenges to be faced as you prepare to create a happy family home.

For example, your decision to be married in Church has implications:

- You are consciously involving God in your relationship and seeking God's blessing;
- You are also consciously involving God's people, i.e. The Church, and seeking their prayerful support.

On the day of your wedding, the community of the Church will be represented by your families and friends. This decision of yours may raise questions for you about your relationship with God and God's Church.

There are also certain practical issues to be considered and decisions to be made as you plan your wedding. By attending to them you will ensure that your wedding day will be as happy as you wish it to be and all of us want it to be for you.

It is important to give the Parish good notice of your intention to marry. It is essential that you make contact with the Parish before booking your hotel for the reception. Three months is the minimum, but six months is preferred as it allows for more time to address some essential things and to prepare you for your wedding ceremony.

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. Malachy's Parish** through the Parish Office (Tel: 028 90 321 713; email: saintmalachys@hotmail.co.uk). The Priest is responsible from the Church point of view, 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 with 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 the Church".

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 on 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 the Church holds in regard to the sacrament of 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 with Christ's standard of love as your own.

If you choose to marry in church, you take on the responsibility of preparing yourselves to celebrate this sacrament.. One way of doing this is taking part in a **Marriage Preparation Course**. St. Malachy's Parish recommends:

- **ACCORD** - This is a marriage support service and can be contacted at **90 339 944** or email **accordbelfast@btconnect.com**

Take marriage preparation as seriously as you take hotel preparations! 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 church, you as a couple have a civil responsibility to notify the local registrar of your decision to marry. This will involve completing forms for the registrar and bringing the MARRIAGE SCHEDULE to the church for signing on the occasion of your marriage.

Read the following guidelines carefully:

1. You should go to the local registrar and each obtain a *Notice of Marriage* form, preferably 12 weeks before your marriage.
2. If you and your Fiancée 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 the priest who gave you this booklet for advice.
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. 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 witness, 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. Malachy's Church, the Registrar's Office is:
Registrar of Marriages, City Hall, Belfast BT1 5GS
Tel: 028 9027 0274
www.belfastcity.gov.uk/bdm/index
10. **If for some reason, you decide to cancel or postpone your wedding, it is essential that you contact the parish secretary or parish priest. This will ensure that the date you had chosen will become available should another couple wish to marry on that day.**

CHURCH DOCUMENTATION

If you are Catholic, the church documents you require to marry in church are as follows:

1. **A Certificate of Baptism** 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 wedding) and you should inform the person issuing the certificate that you require it for your marriage preparation.
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 3 months before your wedding. Bring your recently issued baptism and confirmation certificates with you.
4. For **Inter-Church Marriages** (i.e. Mixed marriages) you both will need to become familiar with inter-Church guidelines for mixed marriages. The guidelines give advice about the celebration of the ceremony, its form and the possible involvement of other ministers. The priest will be glad to meet you both and answer any questions.

PLANNING YOUR WEDDING DAY

An important part of your Wedding Day will be the Wedding Ceremony. It is important that you think carefully and honestly about the ceremony. Keep in mind that it is a religious ceremony. As well as celebrating your love for each other, you celebrate also your faith in Christ and in the sacrament of marriage.

The celebration of marriage can take place:

(i) within Mass; this is generally the case when both the bride and groom are practising Catholics;

(ii) within a Liturgy of the Word; this means that Mass is not celebrated. This is recommended if the bride and groom who rarely, if ever, take part in the Eucharist or have decided to give up the practice of the faith. This is also recommended when one is not a Catholic, as it allows the wedding ceremony to emphasise that which unites. The priest will 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.catholicireland.net (link: Getting Married)

Prepare the Liturgy well

The priest will discuss with you suitable readings, appropriate liturgical music and alternative liturgical texts. If you are preparing a booklet for your wedding, when you have a proof ready, you can ask the priest officiating at your wedding to look it over.

Choose the Readings

- The first Reading is usually an Old Testament Reading followed by one of the Psalms (which may be sung).

- There is usually a second Reading from the New Testament followed by the Gospel Acclamation (which may be sung).

If you know someone who regularly reads in Church, you could ask that person to read or, alternatively, you could ask a member of your family or a friend, provided he or she has the ability to carry out the task, and an appreciation of the sacredness of the Word. Whoever you ask must be a practicing Catholic (for a Wedding Mass) or a practicing Christian (for a Wedding Service outside of Mass). You will appreciate that to choose a person to read who does not practice the faith, or is not a believer, is not appropriate. Through the readings it is Christ himself who speaks to the people.

The Rite of Marriage

The marriage ceremony is divided into three parts:

- A) Address of the priest (*the Church's understanding of Christian Marriage*).
- A) Declaration of consent (*exchange of your marriage vows*).
- B) Blessing and exchange of rings.

Prayer of the Faithful

These prayers can be read by members of your family and friends. It is important that whoever leads these prayers feels comfortable with - and is capable of - reading in public.

Bringing up the Gifts

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

Music

Music is an important part of the ceremony and will add to the solemnity of the occasion. You can ask the priest about suitable musicians, or you may know someone yourself. Keeping in mind that this is a religious ceremony, it is important that music and hymns **appropriate to the ceremony** are chosen. Love-songs, popular songs, or favourites more suited to the reception, are not appropriate for the Church. Not all hymns are suitable for a wedding, particularly if Mass is also celebrated. The priest can advise you on this matter.

Signing of the Register

The register is signed at the end of the wedding ceremony. It can be signed on a table in the sanctuary area, or in the sacristy. It is not appropriate to sign it on the altar itself.

Photography

Great care is to be taken to ensure that sacred liturgical celebrations, such as a wedding, are not to be disturbed or interrupted by the taking of photographs. Please inform your photographer that the taking of photographs during the actual ceremony is not permitted.

Photographs can be taken, when the consent is given, of the arrival of the groom and bride at the entrance of the Church, during the signing of the register and after the ceremony has concluded. The photographer must not be moving about the church during the wedding ceremony. A video of the ceremony can be taken, provided it is done with discretion.

Flowers

Flowers add greatly to the sense of celebration, but “more is not necessarily best” and can in fact sometimes witness to extravagance rather than beauty. We suggest two bouquets in the sanctuary area, and perhaps a bouquet in the porch area.

However, please note, free standing arrangements at the rear of the Church and in the main aisle of the Church cannot be permitted for health and safety reasons.