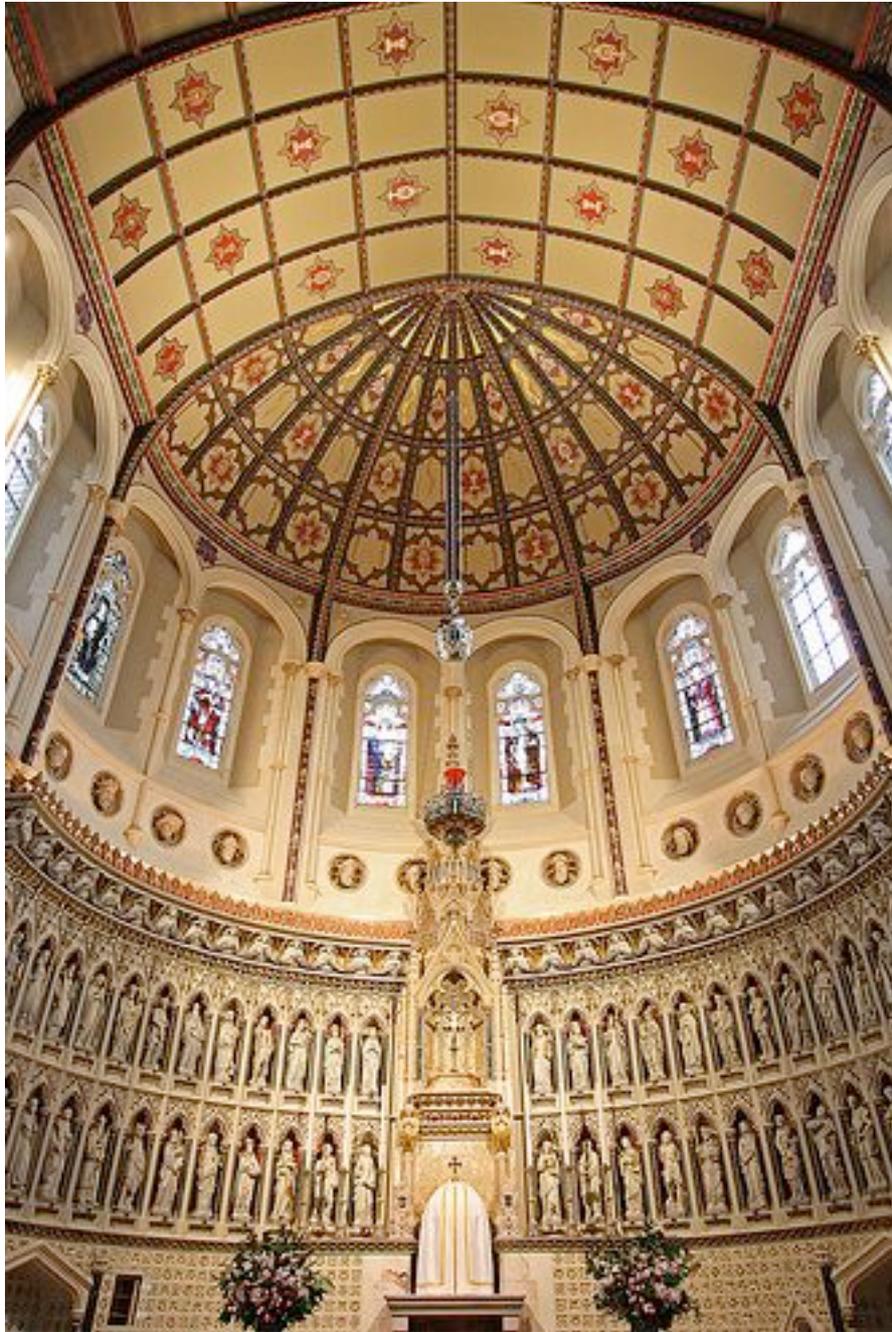


GETTING MARRIED AT THE OXFORD ORATORY



WHAT YOU NEED TO KNOW

Getting married is one of the most significant steps in anyone's life. Two people make vows to each other to remain exclusively together for the rest of their lives, "for better for worse, for richer for poorer, in sickness and in health," until death.

The Catholic Church's understanding of marriage is that it is a unique, indissoluble partnership between one man and one woman, in mutual and lasting fidelity and open to the possibility of bringing children into the world. All those getting married in a Catholic Church must have the same understanding of marriage as the Church, even if they are not Catholics themselves.

It is because the Church attaches such importance to marriage, both for the couple themselves and for society as a whole, that she is concerned that couples intending to marry are adequately prepared, and understand what it is to which they are committing.

These notes are intended to help couples thinking about getting married in the Oxford Oratory. The priest who is marrying you will want some time to get to know you, to make sure you understand the meaning and obligations of marriage, and to help you plan the service so as to make one of the most important days of your lives as good as it can be. He will be able to recommend reading and courses beyond what is outlined here.

If you are thinking of getting married at the Oxford Oratory, please read these notes and then get in touch with one of the priests for a chat. Please also spend some time in prayer, to be able to make the right decisions, for each other, and for all married people.

Preliminaries

All the arrangements should be made directly by the couple getting married: it isn't appropriate for wedding planners or organizers to contact the Fathers.

You need to give at least six months warning prior to getting married in the Oxford Oratory Church. This rule is there to make sure there is enough time to complete the preparations for marriage. These include:

- A period of preparation with the priest who will marry you and attendance at a marriage preparation course.
- We have our own parish marriage preparation day once a year, and the priest who is marrying you can tell you when that is. Younger and older married couples are invited to share their experience with those preparing to be married. There are talks about the meaning of Christian Marriage according to the mind of the Catholic Church and practical advice from an expert on Natural Family Planning.
- If you are not able to come on our parish marriage preparation day, then you must arrange to attend another Catholic marriage preparation course, and have a certificate of attendance issued.
- The priest who is marrying you will probably want to see you three or four times before the service, to get to know you and to talk in more detail about the meaning and importance of marriage.
- The civil and Church paperwork: You need to advise the registrar in the place where each of you lives that you intend to marry. This not less than one month before the date of the wedding. The priest needs to find out whether you are free to marry and to make certain that you are aware of the duties of Christian Marriage. Enquiries will need to be made in the church where you were baptized and sometimes dispensations need to be sought – all of this can take some time.
- The priest will need to have your certificates of baptism. In the case of Catholics this needs to be a recent copy taken from the register of the church where you were baptized within three months of the date of your wedding.
- If neither of you is resident within the boundaries of this parish permission will need to be sought from the Parish Priest of the place of residence of one of the parties.

- **Planning the ceremony:** There is always much to discuss in the planning of the ceremony. A wedding Mass or the wedding service; the readings, hymns and other music; who will be involved; flowers; photography; parking - to name only a few. This is the exciting part but it also needs time to get right. There also needs to be a practice for the big day.

Freedom to Marry

You cannot be married in a Catholic church if either of you has been married before, unless that marriage has been annulled by an ecclesiastical tribunal. This rule includes marriages that have taken place in register offices or in non-Catholic churches (although in the case of Catholics who have been married in non-Catholic services a declaration of nullity may be possible).

At least one of you must be a baptized Catholic. In cases where one of the parties has not been baptized in any Christian denomination a dispensation from the Archdiocese is required and in these cases a Wedding Mass is not possible.

The Duties and Obligations of Marriage

When you stand before the altar on your wedding day, you will make a series of solemn promises to each other, in the sight of God. It is important therefore that you fully understand and accept what you are undertaking.

Christian marriage means a life-long, indissoluble union between a man and a woman, open to the gift of life.

Therefore you will promise:

1. That you will be faithful to each other for the whole of your lives.
2. That you make no conditions whatsoever in giving yourselves to each other.
3. That you will be open to the gift of children, that they will be baptized as Catholics, and that you will bring them up to practise the Catholic faith.

The Ceremony

There are two forms of marriage: the Wedding Service and the Nuptial (Wedding) Mass.

- The Wedding Service is shorter and consists of up to three hymns, three readings, the vows, blessing and signing of the register. The Director of Music is available to play the organ, and you may also have a solo singer, solo trumpeter, or a choir. This service takes about 45 minutes.
- When the wedding takes place in the context of Mass, this is called a Nuptial Mass. All the usual parts of the Mass are present, readings, hymns, choral pieces and perhaps a musical Mass setting. The vows are taken after the Gospel and the sermon by the priest. The registers are usually signed at the end. This service takes about an hour.

Where both parties (and a good proportion of the guests) will be regular, practising Catholics, a Nuptial Mass is highly recommended. It is not possible when one of the parties has not been baptized.

In all other cases the Wedding Service is recommended. This service does not involve Holy Communion – those who would be unable to receive will not feel excluded.

The readings chosen for your wedding must be from the Catholic Lectionary. The priest will be able to give you a booklet containing a good selection. Please make sure your readers know the form for beginning and ending the readings.

The Director of Music will provide you with a list of hymns which are most suitable for weddings, and he will suggest other music too.

Please note that only readings from Scripture are permitted, and that none of the music may be of a secular character.

Ideally you should produce your own order of service. The priest will be able to help you with this and will give you an outline order of service. It should contain at the very least the texts of the hymns and the references to the readings. You don't want your ushers to have to hand out too many different things on the day.

Flowers and Confetti

Please provide your own flowers for your wedding. If you don't know a florist one of the priests will be able to advise you about local firms who are used to working in our church. You should provide at least two large arrangements for the stands in the sanctuary. It is also possible to have flowers elsewhere in church, at the back, in the pulpit or on the ends of pews. Flowers should not be put where they will be in the way of other services, including the space behind the altar rails. You may be asked to find somebody who can remove some of the flowers (like pew ends) straight after your wedding service. We ask you to leave the flowers in the sanctuary so that the church will be decorated for the rest of the week.

The church is in constant use. A few weeks before the date of your wedding please agree a time when the florists can come to church to make the arrangements.

Please ask your guests not to scatter confetti, rice or flower petals. These are very difficult to clear up and quickly look messy.

Costs

The church is highly dependent on weddings for its upkeep and maintenance. We make a charge of £500 to get married in this church, but this may be reduced or waived in cases of hardship or where one of the parties is a resident parishioner or a long time regular worshipper.

In general, you should try to make a contribution proportional to the other costs of your wedding. Some churches suggest a donation of 10% of the overall cost of the wedding.

There is no need of course for a wedding to be costly, and the Fathers will always be accommodating with those who prefer to marry quietly and inexpensively. The vows and the Sacrament of Marriage are much more important than anything else that happens on the wedding day.

For musical costs please contact the Director of Music.

Music

The music used in church should always be of a sacred nature. The reception is the place for other music.

You will need to choose hymns from the list of suggestions, and it is important to choose ones which you believe people are likely to be able to sing well. In addition you may like to have the choir or a soloist sing at particular points in the ceremony, especially during the signing of the register. At a Nuptial Mass there may also be music at the offertory, at communion and for the Mass setting itself, but this may be left to the organist. Instrumentalists may be used. You will need organ music for the Processional entry and the Recessional exit.

Our musicians are professional musicians whom you may hire via the Director of Music. In some circumstances it may be possible for other professional musicians whom you may know to play or sing at your wedding; you should contact the Director of Music. Fees to Oratory musicians will still apply however. All enquiries about music should be sent to the Director of Music.

Photography and Videos

Please make sure that this is discreet during the service. Please ask the photographer or videographer to liaise with the celebrating priest before the service.

It is illegal to photograph the marriage registers, except on a blank page. Please ask your photographer not to take any pictures in the sacristy therefore, until all the registers have been signed; then a posed photograph may be taken.

Parking

Parking is extremely limited in the courtyard. There is really only room for a bridal car. Too many cars make the space very cramped and uncomfortable and make photography difficult. If the wedding car is waiting outside the arch into our courtyard, please make sure that it doesn't block the arch, as our own cars may need to come and go during the wedding.

The Wedding Practice

We usually practise the evening before the wedding, or at some other time a few days before the ceremony. Obviously the bride and groom need to be there, but it also helps if the best man, the chief bridesmaid, the bride's father (or whoever is leading her up the aisle) and any other people taking a prominent part can be there too. We practise the entry and the exit, the vows and the rings. Please note that your hired musicians will not be at this practice. We can also talk about last minute details for photography, flowers, or parking. Please bring the following things with you: a copy of the order of service; the cheques for the church, and the civil certificates.

The Order of Service

You should have your own order of service printed. The priest who is marrying you can guide you as to what needs to be in it, and it is very important that you show him it before it is printed.

The order of service should include a request that absolute silence be maintained within the church, that there be no applause at any point, and that there be no eating or drinking in church (including water bottles). It should also remind the congregation not to throw confetti, rice or flower petals.

If you are having a Nuptial Mass, then the order of service should explain that only practising Catholics may receive Holy Communion, but that others may come to the altar rails and kneel with their arms crossed to request a blessing.

On the day

While it is traditionally fashionable for the bride to arrive late, this should be a matter of two or three minutes, not any longer. Remember that traffic in Oxford is notoriously difficult, so you and your guests should allow plenty of extra time to arrive punctually. If your photographer is to take pictures of the bride before entering the church, then she will need to arrive before the time that the wedding is timetabled to begin.

The church is likely to be in use for something else shortly after your own wedding, and musicians may well have further engagements later on – so if the service starts late then some of the planned music may have to be cut.

If there is more than a very small congregation then you should appoint ushers. Their job is to hand out the orders of service, to direct people to the correct place to sit, to make sure that there is no talking in church, that mobile 'phones are switched off, and to deal with any other questions there may be. It is a good idea if at least one usher comes to the practice, so that the others can be briefed.

Two witnesses should be chosen in advance, who will come to the sacristy to sign the registers after the bride and groom.

Check List

- Have you got your baptism and other certificates?
- Have you chosen hymns?
- Have you chosen readings and readers?
- Have you contacted the Director of Music?
- Have you prepared and order of service?
- Have you notified the register office?
- Have you set a date for the wedding practice?
- Have you arranged a time for the florists to work in church?

Useful Contacts

The Oxford Oratory
25, Woodstock Road
Oxford
OX2 6HA
01865 315800
parish@oxfordoratory.org.uk

The Director of Music
Andrew Knowles MA FRCO
knowles@abingdonpianoschool.co.uk
07855 098792

Oxford Register Office
1, Tidmarsh Lane
Oxford
OX1 1NS
0845 129 5900
registeroffice@oxfordshire.gov.uk

The Oxford Oratory
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