

GETTING MARRIED AT THE OXFORD ORATORY



WHAT YOU NEED TO KNOW

Getting married is one of the most significant steps in anyone's life. Perhaps it is the most significant. 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. Anyone getting married in a Catholic Church must have the same understanding of marriage as the Church, even if they are not a Catholic 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 that they are committing themselves to.

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. And please spend some time in prayer, to be able to make the right decisions, for each other, and for all married people.

Preliminaries

You need to give at least three months and preferably 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. These are typically held on a Saturday from 11am to 4pm and include a sandwich lunch. 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.

- 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 needs to be done about three months before the date of the wedding and not less than one month before. 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 baptised 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 baptised 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 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 baptised Catholic. In cases where one of the parties has not been baptised in any Christian denomination a dispensation from the Archdiocese is required and in these cases a Wedding Mass is not possible.

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 choir, soloist and the organist can also play a part. 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 baptised.

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 hymns should be from one of the two hymn books used in this church – they contain a good selection of traditional and modern hymns.

Ideally you should produce your own order of service. The priest will be able to help you with this and will have specimen copies for you to take away. 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. But 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 it 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 £350 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.

For musical costs please contact the Director of Music (see below).

Music

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

If you are having hymns, please choose two or three that people are likely to know and sing! 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. Instrumentalists may be used. You will need organ music for the entry and the exit.

Some of our musicians are dependent on weddings for their livelihood. It may be possible for you to invite your own friends to play and sing, but this should always be with the consent of the Director of Music, and there may be a fee.

Costs: please contact Mr Edward de Rivera, the Director of Music 01844 338393

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. If there are musicians performing there may also be performers' rights issues. If you are videoing or recording please also speak to the Director of Music.

Parking

Parking is extremely limited in the courtyard. There is really only room for a bridal car and perhaps one other. Too many cars make the space very cramped and uncomfortable and make photography difficult.

The Wedding Practice

We usually have a practice 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. We can also talk about last minute details for photography, flowers, music or parking. Please bring the following things with you: a copy of the order of service; the cheques for the church and the musicians, and the civil certificates.

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 an 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

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The Oxford Oratory
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