

## THE SACRAMENT OF MARRIAGE

The decision to get married is an exciting one and the information contained in this section is designed to answer some of the key questions asked by couples wanting to get married in the Catholic Church.

Christians believe that God gives the fullest meaning to their lives and it is natural for them to make their commitment to each other in church and therefore in the presence of God. This is a demonstration to each other how seriously they take their marriage promises. Christians believe that God is always present in the most everyday actions. In addition there are special times in a Christian person's life when they want to celebrate in a clear way God's active presence and love. These celebrations are called 'Sacraments'. For Catholics, Christian marriage is one of these Sacraments.

Your first step should always be to discuss any plans and ideas you may have about your wedding with the parish priest before coming to any other firm decisions.

### Who can get married in a Catholic Church?

All the following couples can marry in the Catholic Church.

- Practising Catholics and also those who have not been to church for a while
- Catholics marrying Christians of another denomination or someone who belongs to a non-Christian faith or religion
- Catholics whose partner does not belong to any particular faith or group.

### What do I need to do to get married in a Catholic Church?

The following basic requirements apply.

#### [a] Notification

It is a general rule in the Catholic Church that six months notice is required before a wedding can take place. However, the Bishop of A&B recommends a year's notice is given.

Six months is required for the couple to have meetings with the Parish Priest to enable the necessary paperwork to be organised and for the marriage preparation programme to be completed. It is highly advisable for couples to delay setting the date for any other arrangements until you have seen your Parish Priest and agreed the date for the ceremony in the church where you hope to marry.

Couples in the first instance should contact the parish office initially to make an appointment to see a member of the Church clergy?

One partner at least must be a baptised member of the Catholic Church.

#### [b] Documentation

The priest who will be involved in your marriage will also advise you about exactly which papers will be required by the Church and civil registrars. In general, you will be asked to produce:

- evidence that you are free to marry: this means, first and foremost, that neither partner has been married previously. If either or both partners have been married before, it is of primary importance that the couple raise the matter with the priest at the first meeting with him. He will be able to advise you in relation to your own particular situation
- **baptismal certificate:** for the Catholic partner, an original issued copy from the church where you were baptised [if you can't find this you should contact the church where you were baptised for a copy]
- **confirmation certificate:** normally it is expected that the Catholic will have been confirmed or is prepared to be confirmed, though this is not an absolute requirement

### **[c] Marriage Preparation**

Marriage preparation is a pre-requisite of the Catholic Church which ultimately provides couples both with a focussed preparation for married life together with a letter or certificate that shows attendance on an approved programme. Priests marrying you outside your home parish will request to see this letter or certificate. All Christian Churches now invite couples to take part in some form of preparation. The parish runs two or three preparation courses over the year and if for some reason these dates are inconvenient there are other parish preparation programmes across the Deanery that you can attend. Details of these programme dates can be found on the Parish and Deanery website.

### **Marriage Preparation**

To give you some flavour of what the preparation programme may cover these are the sort of areas that our course may deal with

- understanding how your relationship works
- how much you know about your partner and yourself
- how to deal with major questions
- how to sort out differences and difficulties
- the importance of how to listen and how to express yourself
- help with the wedding ceremony
- understanding the meaning of your marriage vows

### **What is the role of the parish priest or other members of the clergy?**

The priest's role essentially is to support, help and guide you through the process of preparation, and to discuss with you any particular questions you may have about the Church and marriage.

The priest will:

- Welcome you and discuss your plans with you
- Will set out what needs to be prepared, including:
  - a) The necessary documentation
  - b) Your personal preparation for married life
  - c) The wedding ceremony

These three items are the main tasks involved in getting ready for marriage. There is a lot to be done and to be organised for your wedding, and even more to be appreciated about a life together. The parish priest or other clergy are your best resource and to be called on when you need some support, information, help or guidance even if the wedding is to take place elsewhere.

### **Some Frequently Asked Questions (FAQs)**

**Q. *If one of us is not a Catholic, do we need permission?***

**A.** Yes: it is called a 'dispensation' or 'permission' and is arranged for you by the Priest

**Q. *What if we are living together and maybe have children?***

**A.** Many couples today are in this situation. The fact that one of you at least is a member of the Catholic Church by baptism means that you are able to marry within the Catholic Church. The Church welcomes all couples who feel ready to make a public commitment to each other.

**Q. *Are those who are not Roman Catholics required to become Roman Catholics?***

**A.** No: the Church believes that becoming a member of a Church is a separate commitment; to be chosen freely. The decision to become a Catholic can be made at any time.

**Q. *What happens if we are planning to get married outside the UK?***

**A.** It is usually the custom to get married in the church of the parish where the bride resides. However, if you are marrying overseas it is probable that you will need to prepare documentation in the UK for it to be sent on in advance. Even if one of you is resident abroad where you intend to marry, it is important to allow sufficient time for any paperwork to be completed.