

PLANNING YOUR WEDDING CEREMONY IN ST PETER'S CHURCH, BELFAST

There are two marriage services in the Book of Common Prayer: an old language version, and a modern language version. If you would prefer the older service then please speak to the Rector as soon as possible, otherwise these guidelines will presume that you want to use to modern service.

You need to apply for a marriage license not less than three months before the date of the wedding. The Officiant will need to fill in some details on the application form, so please bring it to him with plenty of time to spare. The Officiant is the Minister who will officiate at your wedding; normally this will be the Rector.

Around that time, the Officiant will meet you in the church and discuss the various parts of the ceremony. Some parts of the service are set in stone and cannot be changed, whereas other parts depend very much on your own preferences. The Officiant will explain all of this to you. In the meantime, the information below will draw your attention to some matters that you should be thinking about.

THE MARRIAGE SERVICE

The Church of Ireland marriage service consists of the following sections:

1. Bride's Procession: during which the Bride enters the church and processes to the front to be with the Groom. You need to decide:

- (a) Will the Bride process *in front of* the Bridesmaids according to British/Irish custom, or will she process *behind* the Bridesmaids according to American custom?
- (b) What music will be played during the procession? This should be played by the organist or another musician, instead of using a CD.
- (c) How many Bridesmaids will there be? The basic rule is that the same number of women should be standing beside the Bride as the number of men standing beside the Groom. The recommended maximum is five Bridesmaids.

2. Introduction: in which the Officiant outlines the meaning of marriage as understood by the Church of Ireland. This includes a reference to having children. If for you any reason you would prefer that the Officiant did not mention having children, then please mention this to him. (You don't need to give an explanation).

3. Readings: consisting of one or more readings from the Bible, and a very short sermon. You need to decide:

- (a) How many readings do you want? You must have at least one, but it is normal to have two or three.
- (b) Which readings do you want? The Officiant will help you to choose, and please note that the readings must be approved by him. They should somehow fit with the themes of love or commitment. Recommended Bible readings for weddings can be found on the parish website.
- (c) Who do you want to read? You can choose members of your family or friends, or the Officiant can read some or all of the readings. Make sure that you choose people who are confident reading in public.

4. Marriage: during which the Bride and Groom consent to becoming Husband and Wife. The rings are exchanged, and the Officiant declares that the couple are now married. You need to decide:

(a) will there be a ring only for the Bride, or will there be two rings?

(b) do you want the Officiant to say “You may kiss the Bride”? These words are no longer in the service, but may be added if you would like.

(c) do you want to pray the newly married couple’s prayer? This would be prayed only by the two of you, read from a sheet.

5. Blessing: in which the Officiant prays that God will bless the married couple.

6. Affirmation: in which the congregation show their support for the married and couple.

7. Acclamations: in which the congregation praise God using a very short litany.

8. Register: at which point the Register is signed by the Husband and Wife, the Officiant, and the two Witnesses. You need to decide:

(a) do you want to sign the register in private away from the congregation, or are you happy for it to be signed in full view of them?

(b) do you want this to happen *before or after* the prayers?

(c) will there be music played for the benefit of the congregation?

9. Prayers: during which the Officiant prays for the health and happiness of the married couple, and then blesses the congregation.

10. Married Couple’s Procession: at which point the married couple, the bridal party, and close friends and family leave the church. You need to decide what music will be played during this procession? This should be played by the organist or another musician, instead of using a CD.

WHAT HAPPENS NEXT?

Obtain a marriage license application form (either online or in person at your local council offices), fill in your own details, and then contact the Officiant. Make sure that everything is signed and returned on time! When you meet the Officiant to go through the service, bring this sheet with you, and talk about the various ideas that you have had.

Within a week before the wedding, you will meet again with the Officiant for a rehearsal, but you will also need to invite anyone who is involved in the ceremony: readers, musicians, bridesmaids, groomsmen, ushers, etc.

If you have any questions then please contact the Rector by emailing stpeters@connor.anglican.org or telephone 90777053.