



St Elizabeth's, Richmond

Marriage Guide



Getting Married in the Catholic Church

Introduction

Congratulations on your engagement. Preparing for marriage can be a daunting task. This Guide explains what is involved when you ask to get married in a Catholic Church. Whether you hope to get married at St Elizabeth's or have a wedding elsewhere, we ask you to read this Guide before completing the Wedding Enquiry Form on our parish website. We will endeavour to respond within a few days to let you know whether we are best placed to help you or whether we need to refer you elsewhere.

Please note: no dates can be confirmed until you have both met with the parish priest.

1. Basic Information

The following norms apply to all Catholic weddings:

- In order to celebrate the Sacrament of Matrimony in the Catholic Church at least one of you must be a Catholic;
- Ordinarily Catholics are expected to get married in their home parish;
- In England a Church wedding is recognised by the State and you must not have a separate civil (Registry Office) ceremony prior to the Church wedding;
- The parish preparing your paperwork needs at least six months notice. (In some dioceses twelve months notice is required);
- It is always advisable to confirm with the church before making plans for a reception venue.

2. Marriage Preparation Course

Every couple is required to complete a marriage preparation course recognised by the Catholic Church. You can even complete one online at

<http://catholicmarriageprepclass.com> or <https://marriagepreparation.com>

3. Special Circumstances:

3.1 A Catholic marrying a baptised non-Catholic Christian:

You will require a special permission for a mixed marriage which can be granted by your parish priest. To obtain this the Catholic partner is asked to make a commitment not to give up their faith and to baptise and bring up their children as Catholics.

3.2 A Catholic marrying someone who is not baptised

You will require a special dispensation which can only be granted by the bishop. The priest looking after your paperwork will have a form for this. The Catholic partner is asked to make a commitment not to give up their faith and to baptise and bring up their children as Catholics.

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3.3 Getting Married in a non-Catholic Church

Under exceptional circumstances the bishop is sometimes willing to grant a dispensation for a Catholic to marry a non-Catholic in a non-Catholic ceremony. This is called a "Dispensation from Canonical Form" and without it the Catholic Church does not recognise the sacramental validity of the wedding ceremony. The Dispensation is not automatic and should be sought **before** arrangements are made for the wedding. There is a special form to apply for this dispensation.

3.4 Getting Married Abroad

If you are getting married abroad the paperwork has to be prepared in the parish where you live. It is then sent on to the place of wedding.

3.5 Convalidation

If you have already married in a non-Catholic Church or Registry Office (without a Dispensation from Canonical Form), while we recognise the Civil validity of the ceremony, we do not recognise its sacramental validity (non-Catholic churches do not regard marriage as a Sacrament).

For the wedding to be fully recognised in the Catholic Church a 'convalidation' is required. The ecclesiastical paperwork for a convalidation is the same as for any other marriage. The convalidation ceremony itself is very informal and 'low-key'. You will be asked to make your wedding vows to each other as if for the first time (not simply to renew them as you might at an anniversary celebration). Two witnesses also need to be present.

4. Weddings at St Elizabeth's

4.1 Important

Our Church is very beautiful and we get very many requests for weddings to take place here from Catholics and non-Catholics alike. We are only able to provide wedding ceremonies to our own parishioners (who live within the boundaries of the parish) or people who live outside those boundaries but have attended Sunday Mass here every weekend for at least two years and have written permission from their own parish priest¹.

4.2 Date of Wedding

Except in very exceptional circumstances the wedding ceremony will take place on a Saturday. It is important to remember that the Church is not always available and you must therefore speak to us before confirming a venue for the reception.

Lent is a penitential season and no weddings take place here during Lent. The Saturday before Christmas is not available for wedding ceremonies to take place here.

Please speak to the priest about the time of the ceremony which may be between 11.30am and 1.30pm.

4.3 Music

¹ This permission is a requirement of Canon Law, cf Canon 1115.

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Our Director of Music is Stephen Bick. Please contact him to arrange music for your wedding. His email address is: bickstephen@gmail.com.

Stephen can recommend local organists who are familiar with our organ.

If you would prefer a flautist or a flute and harp duo, please contact Rachel Smith. Her email address is: rsmithflute@gmail.com

All arrangements, including fees, must be made directly with the organist.

Please note: it is a legal obligation that you inform musicians and vocalists if you intend to record any part of the ceremony and their fees may vary accordingly. More information about recording music at weddings is available here: <http://churches.uk.ccli.com/activities/weddings-funerals/>

4.4 Flowers

Excessive flower displays can obscure rather than enhance the beauty of our church. We permit up to two mid-size floral arrangements. Wedding flowers replace our weekly flower display and at least one floral arrangement must be left in the church (i.e. not taken to the reception). Pew ends are welcome but must not be attached by tacks or sticky tape. Florists may have access to the church from 9.00am on the Saturday morning.

4.5 Confetti

Confetti is not permitted on Church grounds.

4.6 Parking

There is no parking available at St Elizabeth's.

5. Understanding the Paperwork

There are two sets of paperwork required to get married in a Catholic Church. The civil paperwork is required for the marriage to be legal and recognised by the State. The ecclesiastical paperwork is required by the Church for her own records.

These are two separate processes and it is important to remember that it is your responsibility to ensure the civil paperwork is complete and permission is given for the wedding. Without this permission the wedding cannot go ahead in the Church.

5.1 Civil Paperwork

To get married in a Catholic Church you must have permission from the Registrar who will issue a **schedule** giving permission for an **Authorised Person**² to witness your marriage. In the past the Authorised Person recorded the wedding in the civil marriage register and issued a wedding certificate. As of May 2021, the Authorised Person now returns the completed Schedule to the Registry Office who record the wedding and issue certificates. That means you will no longer receive a Marriage Certificate on the day of your wedding.

² An Authorised Person is a person delegated by the civil authorities for this purpose and usually looks after weddings at a specific Church.

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To find out how to obtain permission for the marriage to take place in a Catholic Church it is imperative that you contact your own local Registrar's Office as soon as possible as the law sometimes changes at short notice.

For further information you should visit the local Registrar's Office website:

www.richmond.gov.uk/home/services/registration_services.htm

5.2 Ecclesiastical Paperwork

The following list explains the documents that need to be provided for a Catholic marriage. You will need to give these documents to the person looking after your paperwork. They are kept in a file along with the Church's Pre-Nuptial Enquiry Form. After the wedding they are stored in the parish's marriage archive.

If your paperwork is prepared at St Elizabeth's but you are getting married in another Catholic Church in England and Wales, we are required to send all the documents to the diocesan offices who will ensure they are forwarded to the Church where the wedding will take place.

If you are getting married in another country please ensure you read Part Six of this document (p.7).

5.2.1 A Baptised Catholic needs:

- A **new** copy of their Baptism Certificate issued **within six months** of the date of the wedding;
- Evidence of Confirmation (if confirmed);
- A Letter of Freedom or Statutory Declaration of Freedom³.

5.2.2 A Baptised Non-Catholic Christian needs :

- Their Baptism Certificate (can be the original)
- A Letter of freedom or Statutory Declaration of Freedom.

5.2.3 A Non-Baptised person needs:

- A Letter of freedom or Statutory Declaration of Freedom.

³ The person organising your paperwork will explain what these are.

6. Getting Married Abroad

6.1 Additional Paperwork

If you are getting married abroad we will need to make a copy of the photo page of your passports and your birth certificates to accompany the other paperwork. Please bring these with you to the office.

6.2 France

Marriages in France require a Letter of Intention (“Lettre d’intention”) from each party to accompany the marriage papers. They must be done personally by each spouse and are an opportunity to give expression in your own words of the meaning you attach to the commitment you are about to make. Explicit mention must be made of the four pillars of Christian marriage: freedom, fidelity, indissolubility, and openness to children.

A suggested wording might be:

Dear (name of priest or deacon marrying you)

I, (your name), am free to marry. I see marriage as an exclusive covenant of love between husband and wife and I intend my marriage to be a lifelong commitment to (name of spouse).

I will be faithful to (name of spouse) and am open to welcoming children into our marriage.

Signed:

Date:

7. Wedding and Administration Fees

Preliminary Paperwork:

This refers to the paperwork required by the Church. The paperwork associated with the civil registration of the marriage is prepared at your local registrar’s office and is subject to separate charges.

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|-------------------------------------|------------|
| 1. For weddings at St Elizabeth’s | No charge. |
| 2. For weddings elsewhere in the UK | £ 50.00 |
| 3. For weddings overseas | £ 75.00 |

Wedding Ceremonies at St Elizabeth of Portugal

It is customary to make a donation to the Church which is separate to flowers and organist fees. The recommendation is that it should not be less than 10% of the total cost of the wedding.

Cheques should be made payable to “St Elizabeth’s Church”.



www.CatholicRichmond.org

St Elizabeth of Portugal is a parish of the Roman Catholic Archdiocese of Southwark, a registered charity 1173050