

What procedures take place before a Quaker Wedding or Celebration of a Civil Partnership?

Quaker marriage procedures were approved in Government legislation over 150 years ago. The ability to legally solemnise marriages according to our long-established religious usages is a privilege which Quakers value highly. We have our own Registering Officer whose responsibility it is to see that all is done correctly in relation to legal marriage regulations. In addition to marriages, in 2012 Ireland Yearly Meeting made the decision to permit its Preparative Meetings to hold Meeting for Worship for the Celebration of Civil Partnerships.

The Celebration of a Marriage or a Civil Partnership takes place in the manner of Friends and is a religious ceremony, open to all and often attended by regular worshippers. It requires that the couple be either members of the Religious Society of Friends or attenders that have shown their understanding of, and commitment to, the religious practices of the Society.

Following a request to hold a Marriage or Meeting for Worship to Celebrate a Civil Partnership, members of the Ministry and Oversight will meet with the couple as far ahead of the proposed date as possible. It is important that the couple fully understands the spiritual significance of the commitment within the Meeting for Worship. As a result of these conversations it may be felt appropriate to arrange further meetings in preparation for the Marriage or Civil Partnership.



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SOUTH BELFAST PREPARATIVE MEETING

QUAKER

WEDDINGS & CIVIL PARTNERSHIPS

A MARRIAGE OR CELEBRATION OF A CIVIL PARTNERSHIP IS A SOLEMN CONTRACT MADE IN THE PRESENCE OF GOD IN THE MEETING FOR WORSHIP. QUAKERS BELIEVE THAT A COUPLE SHOULD NOT ENTER INTO MARRIAGE OR A CIVIL PARTNERSHIP LIGHTLY, BUT TAKE ONE ANOTHER IN A LIFELONG COMMITMENT OF FAITHFULNESS AND LOVE.

Where does a Wedding or Civil Partnership take place? Must it be held in a Meeting House?

The Meeting for Worship on the occasion of a Marriage takes place in a Quaker meeting house. The legal registration of the Marriage also takes place there. In the instance of a Civil Partnership the couple require their partnership to be legally registered during a Civil Ceremony at a Registrar's Office, following which the Meeting for Worship to Celebrate the Civil Partnership will take place in the Quaker meeting house.

What does a typical Quaker Wedding or Civil Partnership Celebration involve?

We do not have any clergy and our worship is based on silent prayer and waiting upon the leadings of God's Spirit. Usually, during a Meeting for Worship, one or more of those present will feel led to break the silence and make a simple spoken contribution, a reading or words drawn from their own spiritual experience. At the Meeting for Worship on the occasion of a Marriage or a Celebration of a Civil Partnership, a Friend will begin by explaining briefly what to expect. The couple will usually allow a little time to elapse and will then stand and, taking each other by the hand, make their solemn declaration that they take each other freely and equally as lifelong partners.

They will ask for God's blessing on their union and may pray for strength to support each other. Wedding rings play no formal part in Quaker Marriages and Civil Partnerships, but many couples like to give each other rings after they have made their declarations.

The Meeting then continues as it began in quiet worship, during which any person in attendance, is welcome to speak "in ministry" if they feel a divine leading to do so.

In this way the couple may hear and gain inspiration, strength and support to sustain them during their life together. The end of the Meeting for Worship is signalled by the Elders shaking hands.

In the event of a Marriage the couple, the two witnesses and the Registering Officer sign a legal Marriage Registration Form.

Are there any special aspects of the wedding ceremony that are unique to Quaker traditions?

Amongst the Christian denominations, probably the most unusual aspect of the Quaker Weddings and Celebrations of Civil Partnerships, is the absence of any officiating clergy and the deeply and simply held view that the couple make their commitments to each other without any third-party intervention, in the presence of God's Spirit. The meeting house may be simply decorated with flowers, and no photography is permitted during the Meeting for Worship. Needless expenditure and display on the day is usually avoided. There is no charge for a Meeting for Worship. Any specific requests for e.g. the inclusion



of music as a form of ministry would be discussed with members of Ministry and Oversight.

It is customary for all those present at the Meeting for Worship for a Quaker Marriage or Meeting for Worship for Celebration of a Civil Partnership, to sign a Quaker Certificate of Attendance, Witness and Celebration which is given as a gift to the couple.

After the Ceremony

The Quaker registering officer (marriage) forwards a copy of marriage certificate to the Clerk of the Monthly Meeting, Marriage is also registered with the Registrar General in N.I. and Monthly Meeting will also forward copies to the Recording Officer of Ireland Yearly Meeting in Dublin. The couple (Civil Partnership) forward a copy of the Civil Partnership Certificate to Clerk of the Monthly Meeting, who will then forward copies to the Recording Officer of Ireland Yearly Meeting in Dublin.