

Holy Trinity Church, Cannes

“Services of Blessing” for a marriage

Thank you for considering a ‘service of blessing’ at Holy Trinity Church here in Cannes. We are delighted that you wish to ask God’s help and blessing on your new marriage.

We hope that the following notes will answer some of your questions. Please bear with us if they seem rather long and complicated, but we wish to be as clear as we can about what we can and cannot offer.

A Christian ceremony to ask God’s touch on a new marriage is often called a “Service of Blessing”, and for simplicity’s sake, we shall use the phrase in this document. However, this isn’t an official title used by the Church of England, and such services may take various forms, depending on the circumstances.

1. The legal situation.

Under French law, we cannot solemnise Holy Matrimony, which has to be conducted by the civil authorities (“the *Mairie*”).

However, you may wish to ask God’s blessing on a marriage which has been contracted either at the *Mairie*, or at some other legally recognised ceremony outside of France, and we may be able to help here.

Nevertheless, we wish you to be quite clear that any “service of blessing” we may offer is not a legal wedding service, and must not be construed to be one. There is no signing of marriage registers, and no wedding certificate is issued. We must also avoid any suggestion that your civil marriage is not valid. You will come to the church service as “man and wife”, and recognised as such by God and the Church.

Sometimes people attend ceremonies abroad which have the appearance of a wedding, but which have no legal status. To avoid any such confusion, before we can go ahead with the “Blessing”, you must show us documentation to prove that you have been legally married. (*Diocese in Europe Handbook* p. 43 Section IIb)

If your wedding is conducted in a country which recognises church weddings (e.g. in the UK), we are very happy for you to have a church wedding there instead of a civil ceremony. A church wedding in England need not be an extravagant or expensive occasion, particularly if you are holding the main “family event” here in Cannes.

2. Various approaches to a “Service of Blessing”

The circumstances under which we might offer a ‘service of blessing’ can be rather varied, and they will affect the precise wording we use (*Diocesan Handbook* p.42-43, Section I & IIb).

For instance, the ceremony may take place:

A. A matter of hours after a civil ceremony in Cannes or nearby. If neither party has been married before, we would normally use a form of words very close to an actual Church of England wedding service.

B. A few days after a wedding ceremony conducted by a Registrar or equivalent in another country (e.g. the UK). If neither party has been married before, we use wording similar to the Church of England wedding service. If the marriage was conducted by a Registrar because a Church of England wedding would not have been appropriate, we would use the "Service of Prayer and Dedication after a Civil Marriage".

C. As soon as practicable after a church wedding in another country. This would allow friends and family in the Cannes area to attend a "re-enactment" of the wedding ceremony which they were unable to attend in a foreign country. The wording would be very close to a Church of England wedding service.

D: On a special wedding anniversary, we would be very happy to offer an act of thanksgiving and renewal of your marriage vows. This could be a very simple, private occasion, or a big family celebration.

The wording of the wedding service and the Service of Prayer and Dedication are found on the Church of England web-site:

www.cofe.anglican.org/worship/liturgy/commonworship/

The chaplain will be very happy to discuss possible wording and format with you.

3. Issues we must consider

At Holy Trinity, we are part of the Church of England's Diocese in Europe, and the Diocese gives guidelines on marriage and "services of blessing" in its *Handbook*. You can access these on the website:

www.europe.anglican.org/admin/hbB_divineservice.htm.

Here are some of the main considerations we must take into account.

A: Marriage Preparation. It is our duty to do all we can to help make your marriage lasting and happy: so we insist that you should attend a marriage preparation course (*Diocesan Handbook* B15. Section 7).

If you live in or near Cannes we will be delighted to arrange this for you. If you live elsewhere, we require you to contact your local church and ask for marriage preparation there. If you live in England, you can find your parish church via the website www.achurchnearyou.com. Just type in your post-code.

We would want to have some confirmation from your local church: (a) that they are happy for us to conduct a 'service of blessing' here and (b) that you have attended marriage preparation there. This will also give you the opportunity to make contact with your local church (if you don't yet know them).

In either case, the chaplain will want to meet you in advance of the service, preferably face to face.

B: Connection with Holy Trinity. The Diocese requires that one of you should have a “demonstrable link with the chaplaincy” (*Diocesan Handbook* p. 42 Section 5). Normally this would mean for example that you have attended the church, you are an English-speaker living nearby, or your parents or close relatives worship here. The chaplain has discretion as to what constitutes a “demonstrable link”, but the guidelines are intended to discourage wedding arrangements which are disconnected from an actual Christian community. This also means that we will not arrange a wedding blessing through a commercial third party (e.g. a wedding planner), and will only normally deal directly with you yourselves - rather than indirectly through parents or others (*Diocesan Handbook* p. 42 Section 7).

C: If one of you is divorced. If either of you has been married before and has a former spouse still living, we cannot proceed without permission from our Bishop (*Diocesan Handbook* p. 43 Section IIa). As long as your relationship did not lead to the break-up of the previous marriage, such permission will probably be granted, but you must show us evidence that the previous marriage has been legally dissolved.

The Chaplain will approach the bishop on your behalf.

E: Other Christian denominations. If one of you belongs to a Christian Church other than the Anglican Church, you should seek to ensure the goodwill of your own Church for the ceremony to be held at Holy Trinity. We would be happy to involve your clergy in the ceremony where appropriate (*Diocesan Handbook* p.46 Section V).

F: Civil Partnerships. The Church of England teaches that “marriage is in its nature a union permanent and lifelong, for better for worse, till death them do part, of one man with one woman ...” (Canon B.30 - 1). For this reason, the Church does not consider same-sex partnerships to be the same as marriage. The House of Bishops has issued a Pastoral Statement which “affirms that clergy of the Church of England should not provide services of blessing for those who register a civil partnership” (paragraph 17).

For these reasons we are unable to offer a “service of blessing” for a civil partnership.

4. The Venue

Here at Holy Trinity Cannes we have a very attractive church building ideally located in the city centre. We have a central aisle to walk down and a chancel step to kneel at, musicians, hymn-books in English and a PA system set up for our building. Our electric organ is of indifferent quality, but we have a good grand piano. There is even scope for a reception in the adjoining church centre, subject to availability. The main entrance is on avenue de Branly, but wheelchair access is from the avenue Général Ferrié. As you would expect, parking in the city centre can often be tricky: but there are large carparks nearby, and arrangements can be made with the *Mairie* for street parking to be reserved. We are situated a short walk from the central railway station.

We are confident that we can make your “service of blessing” a very special occasion at Holy Trinity.

In fact, the Diocese in Europe expects that the ceremony should take place “in the chaplaincy’s usual place of worship or in another consecrated church” (*Diocesan Handbook* p.44 Section III).

This means that we would not normally conduct a “service of blessing” in private houses, bars, restaurants, beaches, etc. We believe marriage to be a very sacred gift from God and would not want to do anything which might seem to trivialise it. There are also many practical reasons why such venues may be inappropriate: guests may begin to make merry before the ceremony begins (with the associated complications); there may be unhelpful sights or sounds distracting you or your guests from the serious vows you are making; the PA system may be inappropriate - e.g. a hand-held microphone when we need hands free for the joining of hands or for prayer over the rings; the setting may make hymn-singing or even praying very difficult.

If there are serious pastoral reasons why a service in Holy Trinity church would be difficult, please discuss this with the chaplain.

5. The shape of the ceremony

The precise form of the “service of blessing” will depend on some of the issues mentioned above under Section 2, and of course on your input in discussion with the chaplain.

The service will normally be conducted by our chaplain, who will be happy to lead the entire service. But we would encourage family and friends to take part: reading a Bible lesson or poem, playing a musical piece, leading the prayers, etc.

Part of the ceremony may be bilingual (probably English and French) if appropriate

We would suggest you choose perhaps 2 or 3 hymns, though none are required. There should be at least one Bible reading, and the chaplain will give a short address.

We assume that you will already be wearing your wedding rings; but depending on legal considerations, you may choose to exchange the rings at the “service of blessing”. You should *not* remove rings which have been exchanged at the wedding itself!

As you will already be married, it is not really appropriate for the “bride” to enter the church separated from the “groom”, still less for her father to “give her away” at the service of blessing.

As mentioned above, there is no signing of registers and no wedding certificate will be issued.

You may choose to have a printed Order of Service, or not: we leave this up to you to organise and produce. If your hymns are not in the church hymn books, an Order of Service is probably advisable (or at least a sheet of paper with the words to the hymns).

We can usually organise a musician, flowers, etc. Let us know in good time if you would like us to help with this.

The chaplain will be very happy to discuss the various options with you, and will of course wish to meet you in advance to discuss the ceremony. Please don't finalise any arrangements until you have spoken with him.

6. Fees

In 2010, the cost of a "service of blessing" at Holy Trinity Church in Cannes is €375. This must be paid to the church in advance of the ceremony: cheques payable to "Holy Trinity Church, Cannes".

This includes the chaplain's fee, heating and lighting, use of the PA system, a vergier to open up, operate the PA system, and tidy and lock up afterwards, etc. These fees may vary from year to year.

Extra charges would apply for a musician, flowers, choir, hire of the church centre, etc. If you require any of these, please contact the church office: we will check availability and get back to you with a quote.

7. Suggestions for hymns and Bible readings

When you have chosen the hymns (normally two or three), please check them with us before printing.

Some hymns can be sung to more than one tune, so you should make sure that the tune you want will be played.

If you decide on a less common hymn you should be sure that it is well enough known for your guests to sing.

Here is a small selection of hymns often chosen for weddings.

All things bright and beautiful
Amazing grace
Great is thy faithfulness
Immortal, invisible, God only wise
Lord of all hopefulness
Love divine, all loves excelling
Morning has broken
Now thank we all our God
Praise my soul, the King of heaven
The King of love my Shepherd is
The Lord's my Shepherd
Through all the changing scenes of life

As mentioned under section 4 above (*The Venue*), we do not have a good organ. You should bear this in mind in choosing music at the start and close of the service: piano pieces will work better.

There will be at least one reading from the Bible. You may choose the Bible reading yourselves, but you should clear the reading with the chaplain or officiating minister (do this when you see him/her in advance of the ceremony). If appropriate, you may choose one reading in English and a second one in another language (e.g. French).

The Bible version normally used at Holy Trinity is the *New International Version* (anglicised edition), but you may use any recognised version of the Bible. If you want an additional reading from a source other than the Bible, you should check this first with the minister.

You might like to ask a relative or friend to do the reading(s).

Here is a list of passages often read at weddings:

Genesis 1.26-28 & 31a

Genesis 2.18-25

Matthew 7.21 & 24-27

Mark 10.6-9.

John 2.1-11

John 15.9-12

Romans 12.1,2,9-13

1 Corinthians 13

Ephesians 3.14-21

Ephesians 5.21-33

Colossians 3.12-17

1 John 4.7-12

8. How to contact us

You are probably reading this via our website, www.holytrinitycannes.org, which gives contact details.

Church Office (Mrs Judith Widdop)

(0) 4 93 94 54 61 holytrinity@freesurf.fr

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Our postal address is:

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2-4 avenue Général Ferrié,
06400 Cannes, France.

You may find these links useful:

The Diocese in Europe's website:

<http://europe.anglican.org/>

The Church of England's website:

www.cofe.anglican.org/

Holy Trinity, Cannes, September 2010.