

BAHÁ'Í MARRIAGE IN NORTHERN IRELAND

INTRODUCTION

A Bahá'í marriage in Northern Ireland has legal standing provided that it is solemnised in accordance with the Marriage (Northern Ireland) Order 2003. The Bahá'í Marriage Officer and the local Spiritual Assembly concerned in the performance of a Bahá'í marriage have the responsibility of ensuring that not only the law of the land but also Bahá'í law are observed in every detail.

REQUIREMENTS ACCORDING TO THE LAW OF THE LAND

- The bride and bridegroom must both have attained the age of sixteen. Proof should be provided by way of a long-form birth certificate or passport. If the person is under 18 years of age, consent is required from each parent (if any) and each guardian (if any) of the young person. The consents must be in prescribed form and produced to the registrar in the prescribed form before the marriage schedule is issued.
- There are no residential qualifications. That is to say, any two people of any nationality may marry in Northern Ireland provided that they comply with the provisions of the Marriage (Northern Ireland) Order 2003. If either or both parties are not normally domiciled in the United Kingdom they should produce a certificate issued by a competent authority in their own Country indicating that there is no legal impediment to the marriage. In the absence of such certification without good reason it may not be possible to grant facilities to marry in Northern Ireland. A person who cannot submit such a certificate, either because his or her country does not use them, or for any other reason, will be expected to state in his or her Marriage Notice the reason for such non- production. (Some countries do not recognise as legal any marriage not performed according to their own national laws.)
- Neither party should be already married to third person or part of a civil partnership. If either has been married before, a death certificate of the other spouse, or a copy of the decree of civil divorce, dissolution or annulment needs to be produced.
- A man may not marry any woman related to him in a degree specified in column 1 of Appendix "A" to this Guidance Note and a woman may not marry a man related to her in a degree specified in column 2 of Appendix "A" to this Guidance Note. Where there is some kinship between the parties other than those listed in Appendix "A", guidance should be sought from the National Spiritual Assembly.
- The parties must not be of the same sex.

Where any Bahá'í is in doubt about any of the above requirements he or she would be well advised to consult the local Spiritual Assembly, the Bahá'í Council or the National Spiritual Assembly well in advance (at least 2 months) of the proposed marriage.

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REQUIREMENTS ACCORDING TO BAHÁ'Í LAW

- If either party is a Bahá'í, he or she must be a Bahá'í in good- standing.
- The couple must ensure that they have certification from the appropriate local Spiritual Assembly, stating that the prerequisites for a Bahá'í marriage have been met, i.e.: -The Assembly must be satisfied that the parties to the marriage and their natural living parents have given their consent to the marriage;
 - ⊗ Where the natural parents have been impossible to trace, the Assembly must be satisfied that every effort has been made to trace them;
 - ⊗ Where it is claimed that one or more of the parents is dead, the Assembly must have proper evidence of death;
 - ⊗ Where either party to the marriage is a Bahá'í who was divorced after becoming a Bahá'í, the Assembly must have proper evidence that a Bahá'í divorce has been obtained.
 - ⊗ The couple must be a man and a woman.

(for detailed guidance on the prerequisites for Bahá'í marriage, see Guidance Note number 13 on Bahá'í Marriage).

Where any Bahá'í is in doubt about any of the above requirements, he or she would be well advised to consult the local Spiritual Assembly, the Bahá'í Council or the National Spiritual Assembly well in advance (at least 2 months) of the proposed marriage.

THE RESPONSIBILITY OF THE BAHÁ'Í MARRIAGE OFFICER

There are presently three Bahá'í Marriage Officer who have been authorised by the Registrar General of Northern Ireland to solemnise Bahá'í marriages in any part of Northern Ireland.

It is the Marriage Officer's responsibility to ensure that the couple have proper certification, stating that the prerequisites for Bahá'í marriage have been met. The Bahá'í Marriage Officer is also responsible for ensuring that the Marriage Schedule is produced at the beginning of the ceremony, that the marriage is duly witnessed, that the Bahá'í and statutory declarations are properly made, and that the Marriage Schedule is completed at the end of the ceremony.

The names of the current Bahá'í Marriage Officers are available from the National Office or from the Bahá'í Council for Northern Ireland.

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THE RESPONSIBILITY OF THE LOCAL SPIRITUAL ASSEMBLY

The local Spiritual Assembly in the area where the marriage is to take place is responsible for providing the Bahá'í Marriage Officer with certification to the effect that the prerequisites for the Bahá'í marriage ceremony have been met. (Where there is no local Assembly the couple seeking marriage should obtain such certification from the National Spiritual Assembly, which may appoint an individual or another local Assembly to act on its behalf.)

The local Spiritual Assembly is also responsible for the approval of the two witnesses to the marriage, who need not be Bahá'ís but who must be at least sixteen years old. The general guidance on Bahá'í marriage (found in Guidance Note number 13) should be studied in conjunction with this guidance on “Bahá'í Marriage in Northern Ireland”, as all its provisions continue to be applicable except in those places where it is modified by the laws of Northern Ireland.

THE RESPONSIBILITY OF THE COUPLE

After having consulted the Bahá'í Marriage Officer regarding the time and place of the proposed marriage, the couple furnish the District Registrar with all the necessary documentation which will enable them to submit a Marriage Notice (see section on Marriage Notice below). They should also supply the local Assembly (or the individual representing the National Assembly) with all the necessary information to enable that Assembly to issue the Bahá'í Marriage Officer with certification stating that all the prerequisites for the Bahá'í marriage ceremony have been met. The choice of two witnesses to the marriage (who need not be Bahá'ís but who must be at least sixteen years old) must be approved by the local Assembly in advance and the Bahá'í Marriage Officer informed of their names. The couple are responsible for submitting the Marriage Notice and ensuring that the Marriage Schedule is in the hands of the Bahá'í Marriage Officer well before the ceremony and returning the completed Schedule to the District Registrar after the ceremony so that a Marriage Certificate may be issued. It is also the responsibility of the couple to make all the necessary arrangements with regard to the ceremony itself: i.e. choosing appropriate prayers and readings; requesting the Bahá'í Marriage Officer (or some other person) to say the appropriate words of introduction, if desired; and ensuring that the physical arrangements for the room where the ceremony is to be held are adequate.

THE MARRIAGE NOTICE

Each party must submit to the District Registrar of the district in which the marriage is to take place a form known as the “Marriage Notice” which gives notice of the intention to marry. The Marriage Notice must be in the prescribed form.

This form may be obtained from any District Registrar's Officer in Northern Ireland and when it is submitted it must be accompanied by a birth certificate or passport, any evidence (if appropriate) of divorce, dissolution or annulment of a previous marriage or civil partnership, or death of a previous spouse, as well as the prescribed fee. The Marriage Notice must be given in person. If any of the necessary documents are not available, the District Registrar will require the information, which was on those documents, with authentic support. If such documents are in any language other than English, a certified translation is required.

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Notice can be given up to one year in advance. It is certainly necessary to carry out the above documentation some 4-6 weeks before the proposed date of the marriage so that the Registrar may make any enquiries that may be required. Notice can be given by post if necessary. The Marriage Notice must be signed by the Bahá'í Marriage Officer to confirm that he or she is willing to solemnise the marriage.

The Registrar keeps a record of certain particulars required by him from the Marriage Notice and the date of its receipt. Anyone claiming that they have reason to object to an intended marriage may inspect this record.

THE MARRIAGE SCHEDULE

The parties to the marriage must agree with the Bahá'í Marriage Officer the time and the place of the marriage in advance of the submission of the Marriage Notice, since the Bahá'í marriage may only take place on the date and at the place specified in the Marriage Schedule.

The District Registrar will issue a Marriage Schedule to the parties in advance of the notified date for the wedding. It cannot be issued earlier than 14 days after the date that notice was given, or 14 days before the date of the wedding

The parties have to personally collect the Marriage Schedule from the District Registrar's office. This Marriage Schedule must be delivered to the Bahá'í Marriage Officer before the ceremony and the ceremony cannot proceed without it. The marriage will not be authorized by the Marriage Office unless it is produced. ,

The Registrar may only issue the Marriage Schedule when he or she is satisfied that there is no legal impediment to the marriage and can only waive the 14-day restrictions if a written request has been received from one of the parties and there has been authorisation from the Registrar General for Northern Ireland.

The date and place of marriage shown on the Marriage Schedule cannot be changed without the authorisation of the Registrar.

SOLEMNISATION OF MARRIAGE

The Bahá'í Marriage Officer is able to solemnise a marriage without the attendance of the District Registrar.

The Bahá'í Marriage Officer is able to marry anyone in Northern Ireland who meets both the legal and the Baha'i marriage law requirements.

The Bahá'í Marriage Officer can only solemnise a marriage when he or she is in receipt of a Marriage Schedule. Immediately after the marriage ceremony the Schedule must be signed by the parties, two witnesses who are over 16 years of age, and the Bahá'í Marriage Officer.

The bride should sign the Marriage Schedule in her maiden name.

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There is no requirement for buildings to be licensed or registered for religious marriages in Northern Ireland.

If a specified Bahá'í Marriage Officer is unable to solemnise a marriage another approved Bahá'í Marriage Officer may perform the ceremony.

THE BAHÁ'Í MARRIAGE CERTIFICATE

Two Bahá'í Marriage Certificates are to be completed at the marriage ceremony and sent as soon possible to the office of the National Spiritual Assembly.

If the marriage is taking place under the jurisdiction of a local Assembly, two copies of type III certificate are needed. Where the marriage takes place directly under the jurisdiction of the National Spiritual Assembly, two copies of type IV certificate are needed. For details, please refer to the general guidance note on Bahá'í Marriage, (number 13). For samples of the different types of Bahá'í Marriage Certificate, please see the Appendices.

Note: After registration of the Bahá'í marriage, a stamped original will be returned to the couple and, where appropriate, a photocopy will be sent to the officiating local Spiritual Assembly.

THE CIVIL MARRIAGE CERTIFICATE

The following persons shall sign the Marriage Schedule immediately after the solemnisation of a marriage; (a) both parties to the marriage, (b) both witnesses to the marriage; and (c) the Bahá'í marriage officer.

The Bahá'í Marriage officer shall cause the marriage to be registered as soon as practicable after the Marriage Schedule is signed by returning the completed Schedule to the District Registrar within 3 days..

The District Registrar is responsible for registering the marriage.

Certified copies of the marriage entry may be obtained from the District Registrar.

MARRIAGES TO BE FOLLOWED BY A SECOND CEREMONY

It may happen that a Bahá'í marrying a non-Bahá'í wishes to have the marriage followed by a ceremony of his or her spouse's own religion. As Bahá'í Marriage in Northern Ireland is legal marriage, such a ceremony must follow the Bahá'í one and no Marriage Schedule may be issued for the second ceremony. Consequently, no religious marriage ceremony which is legal in one country may follow the Bahá'í marriage ceremony (e.g. a Church of England ceremony in

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England). The Registrar will need to know in advance if such a second ceremony is planned to follow the legal Bahá'í ceremony.

If a Bahá'í is marrying a non-Bahá'í in Northern Ireland and the latter wants a ceremony of his or her own religion, it is quite acceptable for the non-Bahá'í ceremony to be the legal one. The Bahá'í ceremony, which would then follow on the same day, would not be the one registered with the Registrar General. The District Registrar of the legal ceremony should be informed in advance, since in this instance the Bahá'í marriage ceremony would be regarded as a “blessing ceremony” only.

USE OF AN INTERPRETER

If he or she feels it to be necessary, the Bahá'í Marriage Officer may require an interpreter to be present at the ceremony. The interpreter is not permitted to be a party or witness to the marriage. The District Registrar should be notified of interpretation arrangements at the time of notification.

PAYMENT OF EXPENSES INCURRED BY THE BAHÁ'Í MARRIAGE OFFICER

A fee would normally be charged for the services of a Marriage Officer but, in the case of Bahá'í Marriages in accordance with the Marriage (Northern Ireland) Order 2003, the services of the Bahá'í Marriage Officer are given free of charge. However, expenses should be offered to the Bahá'í Marriage Officer, particularly if he or she has had to make telephone calls and travel any distance to the place where the marriage is to take place.

(A copy of this Guidance Note is available from the National Assembly's office, and will be sent to any couple wishing to be married under the Marriage (Northern Ireland) Order 2003).

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APPENDIX
"A"

**BAHÁ'Í MARRIAGE NORTHERN
IRELAND
IN ACCORDANCE WITH THE MARRIAGE (NORTHERN IRELAND)
ORDER 2003**

FORBIDDEN DEGREES OF RELATIONSHIP

<u>Relationship by consanguinity</u>	
A man may <u>not</u> marry his:-	A woman may <u>not</u> marry her:-
Mother	Father
Daughter	Son
Father's mother	Father's father
Mother's mother	Mother's father
Son's daughter	Son's son
Daughter's daughter	Daughter's son
Sister	Brother
Father's sister	Father's brother
Mother's sister	Mother's brother
Brother's daughter	Brother's son
Sister's daughter	Sister's son
Father's father's mother	Father's father's father
Father's mother's mother	Father's mother's father
Mother's father's mother	Mother's father's father
Mother's mother's mother	Mother's mother's father
Son's son's daughter	Son's son's son
Son's daughter's daughter	Son's daughter's son
Daughter's son's daughter	Daughter's son's son
Daughter's daughter's daughter	Daughter's daughter's son

THE ABOVE-MENTIONED RELATIONSHIPS INCLUDE HALF-BLOOD AS WELL AS FULL BLOOD RELATIONSHIPS; AND THEY APPLY EVEN WHERE TRACED THROUGH, OR TO, ANY PERSON OF ILLEGITIMATE BIRTH.

IF A MARRIAGE TAKES PLACES INVOLVING ANY OF THE ABOVE RELATIONSHIPS, THAT MARRIAGE WILL BE VOID EVEN IF THE PARTIES WERE UNAWARE OF THEIR RELATIONSHIP

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Relationships by adoption

A man may not marry his:-	A Woman may not marry her:-
Adoptive mother or former adoptive mother, but may marry the rest of their adoptive family	Adoptive father or former adoptive father, but may marry the rest of their adoptive family
Adopted daughter or former adopted daughter	Adopted son or former adopted son

Step-relationships

People who are step relations or in-laws may only marry in certain circumstances.

IF A MARRIAGE TAKES PLACES INVOLVING ANY OF THE ABOVE RELATIONSHIPS, THAT MARRIAGE WILL BE VOID EVEN IF THE PARTIES WERE UNAWARE OF THEIR RELATIONSHIP

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APPENDIX "B"

BAHÁ'Í MARRIAGE IN NORTHERN IRELAND IN ACCORDANCE WITH THE MARRIAGE (NORTHERN IRELAND) ORDER 2003 BAHÁ'Í MARRIAGE CEREMONY OUTLINE PROGRAMME (this is intended as a guide only)

The Bride, Bridegroom, the Bahá'í Marriage Officer and two witnesses appointed by the local Spiritual Assembly (or the National Assembly if appropriate) must be present during the Declaration.

The Marriage Schedule must be produced before the wedding can commence.

MUSIC- optional

WELCOME AND INTRODUCTION – Optional:- Bahá'í Marriage Officer is usually asked but it is helpful for all present to be acquainted with the legal and spiritual aspects of two forms of marriage being combined in this ceremony.

MUSIC AND READINGS – Optional

STATUTORY DECLARATIONS (ie legal requirements) – Bride and Bridegroom

Man: "I, (name), do take you (name) to be my lawful wedded wife."

Woman: "I, (name), do take you (name) to be my lawful wedded husband"

MUSIC, PRAYERS, READINGS – Optional, but one of the Marriage Prayers revealed by Bahá'u'lláh is advisable.

BAHÁ'Í MARRIAGE VOW – Bride and Bridegroom separately (usually each in turn is called upon by the Marriage Officer to make this declaration):

"We will all, verily, abide by the Will of God."

STATUTORY DECLARATION – Baha'i Marriage Officer

"I declare that you are now husband and wife".

MUSIC, PRAYERS, READINGS – Optional

EXCHANGE OF RINGS – Optional

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COMPLETION OF SCHEDULE OF MARRIAGE AND THE SIGNING OF THE BAHÁ'Í MARRIAGE CERTIFICATE

Arrange with the Bahá'í Marriage Registrar for the Schedule of Marriage to be returned to the District Registrar of the registration district where the marriage takes place within three days of the wedding.

SIGNING OF THE BAHÁ'Í MARRIAGE CERTIFICATE

NOTE: As the signing may take some time, the couple may wish it to take place as part of their ceremony or left to be done after a closing prayer, on the spot, or in an adjacent room.