P A G A N L I F E R I T E S

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Handfasting Guidelines for Couples

Your Handfasting is a big occasion, whether it is a small or large ceremony, whether it is a purely spiritual ceremony of commitment or one that includes your legal marriage as well. It is one of the biggest, most important and most wonderful occasion of your lives. It is that moment when you stand together and declare your love and commitment to one another in the presence of your witnesses and begin the next stage of your lives together.

All of our clergy are trained to perform these ceremonies and will take all the necessary time and care you need to ensure that your ceremony is the perfect ceremony for you. We do not perform “off the shelf” ceremonies and we will take the time to tailor the ceremony in terms of content and wording to fit your beliefs and feelings about one another.

You probably already have a good idea about the where and the when you wish your ceremony to be held. You may have, if yours is a legal ceremony as well, contacted the General Registry Office. Choosing the right celebrant and solemniser is the next step. So once you’ve done that, it is time to contact your chosen celebrant.

First contact and arranging to meet your celebrant.

- Generally you will either telephone or email the celebrant of your choice and enquire about their availability for your special day. Many of our celebrants have their own websites, so you can find out a bit about them by visiting their personal websites and it will give you a good indication as to whether they are the right celebrant for you.
- On receipt of your call or email, they will arrange to meet you. Many celebrants prefer that you, as a couple, come to see them personally, so that you can see them in their own environment and that they have to hand anything that you might want to see that they might include in the ceremony. However, if this is not possible for you, then they will make alternate arrangements to meet you at a mutually convenient place and time.
- If you are travelling some distance, then you may find that, initially, email and Skype contact is easier for you to arrange.

What to expect on meeting your celebrant.

- A draft copy of a ceremony. They may offer you a pick and mix of components that you can include; i.e.” you can do this, you can do that, you can add anything you want, you can take away anything you don’t want with certain exceptions”. Therefore, you will be presented with a core ceremony with add-ons. For a legal ceremony your ceremony

must include a “no legal impediment” clause, and a section where you formally declare that you take each other as your legal spouse.

- You may have a very clear idea of the form you would like your ceremony to take, and your celebrant will do their best to facilitate this. They will arrange to add any particular readings, music and your own personal vows, should you choose to write them, within your ceremony. However, you must be aware that whatever form you choose for your ceremony, it will contain a pagan element to it.

- They will give you a clear idea of what you’re going to be charged. This will be their fee and any extras in terms of travel time, expenses, etc – an initial meeting is included in the fee for the day. Our clergy fees are set by each individual clergy member.

- At this point you will be asked to pay a deposit, which is non-refundable.

- They will also arrange to be paid the balance on the day of your ceremony

- They will have prepared and will show you the items that they will provide and use during your ceremony.

- You will also be given a list of the things that you will be expected to provide for the ceremony, this may be candles, incense, bread, wine and whatever is appropriate and personal to you both as a couple and your beliefs.

- They will have some questions for you about your history as a couple, such as how long you’ve been together, how you met, do you have any family that you would like to be included in the ceremony, that sort of thing.

- If you have any children and you wish it, they will incorporate their part in your lives into the ceremony. There are a variety of ways of doing this, it may be in a candle lighting ceremony, a sand ceremony or having your children holding the ends of your handfasting cord after your hands have been bound together.

- Our celebrants encourage you to make your own handfasting cord together – if you haven’t done so already. The suggested length is approximately 3 metres. You may use any materials you choose different ribbons and cords of colours significant to you as individuals and as a couple, plaited together. You can add charms, crystals or even scraps of fabric from things that hold importance to you to it. If you do not wish to make your own handfasting cord, there are companies online who make them.

- Your celebrant will ask you HOW pagan you would like the ceremony, emphasising that it is pagan, but that they also understand you may have relatives present who may be offended if it is too pagan in content.

- Your celebrant will also check where the ceremony is taking place. In a legal ceremony you will have to register the venue with the registry office when you apply for your Marriage Registration Form, so you will also be advised of the suitability and legality of the venue by the General Registry Office. It must be in or on the grounds of a building with public access. A legal ceremony cannot be held in a private premises. If your venue involves them travelling a distance to reach it, this will be included in their expenses which will be added to their basic fee.

- Your celebrant will ask you to have someone attending the ceremony or an employee at the venue to liaise with them when they arrive at your venue, in order for them to collect what you've asked you to provide and to show them where the altar is to be set up, etc. They will also ask for an emergency contact phone number for your liaison so that they can reach them easily on arrival.

On the day of the ceremony.

- Your celebrant will arrive in good time.
- They will meet with the person you have assigned to liaise with them, who will give them the materials that you are providing, including your handfasting cord, rings (if you do not have a ring bearer) and any personal items that you may wish to be placed on the altar.
- They will set up their altar in the space provided for the ceremony, and do any other setting up that you have discussed in your meeting/s with them.
- They will have everything they need for the ceremony ready for you, so when you enter that space there is nothing for you to worry about. They will conduct the ceremony and guide you through it. So, at that point, all you need to think about is the love you hold sacred for one another.

After the ceremony.

- Your celebrant will provide you with a presentation copy of your ceremony and a Pagan Life Rites handfasting certificate for you to keep, that will be signed by each of you and the celebrant.
- Your celebrant will collect the balance of their fee either from you personally or from the person that you have assigned to liaise with them.
- Your celebrant will clear away everything that they have brought with them, and make sure that your personal items are placed in a place previously agreed upon or with your liaison, so that they may be returned safely to you.

Additional notes on legal marriage.

If, in addition to your handfasting, your celebrant is solemnising your legal marriage, then there are a few things that you need to do and be aware of.

- You must register your intent to marry with the General Register Office at least three months before the date of the ceremony. You will be charged a fee for this, which is entirely separate to the fee charged for your celebrant's services. The GRO will let you know what you are legally required to supply in terms of personal information. All the information on dealing with the GRO and declaring your intent to be legally married may be found here.*

  https://www.welfare.ie/en/Pages/Getting_Married.aspx

- You need to make sure that you put down the name of your chosen celebrant on your Marriage Registration Form and that your chosen celebrant is registered as a legal solemniser with the GRO. (Most of our celebrants are registered with the GRO, but if your chosen celebrant is not registered, then one of our registered celebrants would be glad to join them to conduct the legal ceremony)

- As long as you have registered your intent to marry at least 3 months prior to the ceremony, you are able to change any details on your MRF, should that be necessary.

- Your celebrant will check the identity details of your witnesses. (passport/driving licence or some other form of identification) to make sure that they are entered correctly on your MRF.

- Your celebrant can make necessary changes to the MRF, for example, if a witness is unable to make it at the last minute, there is a portion of the form reserved for changing their names and putting in the details of an alternate witness, which will be checked and initialled by them.

- It is your responsibility as a couple to return the completed and signed MRF to the GRO for the official registration of your marriage. This must be done within a month of your wedding day. You will then have to pay an additional small fee to receive your marriage certificate

We hope that we have answered all the questions that you might have here, but if you need to make any other enquiries with regard to our wedding and handfasting services, then please contact us on paganliferites@gmail.com and we will do our best to answer any other questions that you might have.