

Saying 'I Do' in the Holy Land

✖ Christians have long made pilgrimages to the ancient Village of Cana where Jesus performed His first miracle. More recently, couples have begun visiting the Franciscan Wedding Church to get married or renew their marriage vows.

Jesus performed His first miracle, turning water into wine at a wedding, thereby validating and blessing the covenant of marriage.

Father Garret Edmunds, a pilgrimage leader to the Holy Land, points out that Jesus' primary reason for being there was for the wedding.

"He was there to celebrate marriage with his friends. Jesus is anxious to bless marriage."

That concept is not lost on Christians.

Israel's Ministry of Tourism reports that annually 200,000 tourists visit the city, many are couples from a variety of nations and churches who want to renew their vows at the Wedding Church.

While on their first tour of the Holy Land earlier this year, Nancy and Joe Karabinus had a spur-of-the-moment opportunity to renew their vows at Cana. And the year was significant: their 50th wedding anniversary was just a couple months later on Oct. 10.

"We thought it was an awesome experience and would recommend it to any couple because of the history and the sacramental value of the occasion and the location," Joe tells *Travelujah*, "Nancy and I are Catholic and are very aware of the sacramental significance of Cana as Jesus' first miracle."

God's blessing on marriage is inherent in the land, said one of the nuns who serves at the church.

"Here in the place where Jesus came to bless the couple, there is something more significant," the nun tells *Travelujah*. "For couples, we explain, when you got married you received the blessing of God from the sacrament. Now, here you will receive a double blessing because this is the very place Jesus walked and He himself blessed the place and the couple."

In the lower Galilee near Nazareth, Cana is now an Arab Israeli town where local Christian couples wed in either of the two churches. Ruins indicate that it was a Jewish town during the time of Jesus and then had a Christian presence from the fifth century. The Franciscans have been there since 1641 and began building the present Wedding Church in 1879. Beside it is the Greek Orthodox Church, St. George, built in 1886.

Getting married at the church requires official documentation if it is being done through the Catholic Church. If you are not Catholic you must bring your own pastor to perform the ceremony. The fee is \$200 for the church and \$200 for flowers. For renewals, it is recommended to reserve in advance. Vow renewal is free, but you may receive a certificate afterward for a small donation.

Ohioan David Lohnes said he plans to renew his marriage vows when he and his wife come to Israel in 2011.

"With Cana being the location where Mary asked Jesus to help the wedding party it has great meaning to us as Catholics," he said. "As sinners we are always looking for opportunities to obtain grace from God, and renewing our sacramental wedding vows at Cana is another opportunity for us to have God's graces poured out on our marriage."

Joe Karabinus said the marriage vow renewal and his visit to Israel was life changing. "Having been there, our reading of

the sacred scriptures has never been the same.”

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