

History as two Irish cardinals to attend royal wedding

Two Irish-born cardinals are to attend a British royal wedding for the first time since the 16th-Century Reformation, when England broke away from Rome and established the Anglican Church.



Sean Brady, the Catholic Primate of All Ireland, as well as the head of the Catholic Church in Scotland, Co Antrim-born Keith O'Brien, will be among three cardinals in the pews at the wedding of Prince William and Kate Middleton in London's Westminster Abbey next week.

As Archbishop of Armagh, Cardinal Brady will be seated in the congregation of the pre-Reformation Benedictine abbey along with Britain's senior leaders of the Catholic Church.

Wearing the scarlet robes of Princes of the Roman Catholic Church will be Cardinal Cormac Murphy O'Connor, the retired Archbishop of Westminster; and Cardinal O'Brien, the Archbishop of St Andrews and Edinburgh.

Confirming his attendance, Cardinal Brady last night said he was "pleasurably surprised" to be invited.

He said he would have to give thought to sending the royal couple "an appropriate gift", and he wished them "happiness, good health and long life".

Ceremony

Although Catholics are barred from the British throne, the Pope and the Catholic Church will be prominently represented at the ceremony.

Also present will be Vincent Nichols, the Archbishop of Westminster; and the Papal Nuncio,

Archbishop Antonio Mennini, will be there as Pope Benedict XVI's ambassador to the Court of St James.

The top-level representation from the Catholic Church contrasts with 1981 when the late Cardinal Basil Hume attended the wedding of Prince Charles and Diana Spencer at London's St Paul's Cathedral.

Cardinal Hume had the distinction of saying a prayer for Prince Charles and Princess Diana as part of an ecumenical group of Christian leaders.

On that occasion, the then Primate of All Ireland, Cardinal Tomas O Fiaich, a staunch republican, was not invited.

No active role in next week's nuptials has been assigned to Cardinal Brady, a native of Co Cavan, and the other Catholic ecclesiastical dignitaries, an informed source in London told the Irish Independent.

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