

WEDDINGS - Frequently Asked Questions

Welcome to these frequently asked questions.

WHO'S WHO

The Parish Priest for the parishes of Bentworth, Lasham, Medstead and Shalden is: Rev'd Canon Edward Pruen. The Rectory, Trinity Hill, Medstead, Hants. GU34 5LT. 01420 561154. edpruen@gmail.com

The Benefice Administrator is Mrs. Sarah Rees:
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You are very welcome to contact either Canon Ed or Sarah Rees to discuss your wedding.

WHY MARRY IN CHURCH?

Churches are special places and there are some things about a church wedding that you just can't get anywhere else.

A church is so much more than simply a venue for your wedding. Unique and special things become part of your marriage, on the day itself and beyond:-

- A church wedding will add a spiritual dimension to your marriage. The ceremony includes God and looks to him for help and guidance. God's blessing is the main attraction for many couples, whatever their beliefs.
- The Vicar has a very particular role to play in your wedding. They can blend ancient tradition and modern experience to reflect your story. Because of the relationship with the Vicar, your wedding can be made personal, memorable, meaningful and beautiful.
- Church buildings offer outstanding beauty. Old or new, intimate or grand, our 16,000 churches are some of the nation's most stunning wedding venues, with two-thirds being listed buildings.
- Church buildings offer centuries of history. Imagine all the couples who have married in your local church, some of whom may well be your family. You can feel you're becoming part of history itself, the bigger plan, by marrying in the same place as your relatives. We know these sorts of connections can make your day even more special.
- You can be involved in making choices about your ceremony.
- For some people, a church simply seems like the proper place to get married. Churches can be described as 'peaceful', 'serene', or having an atmosphere that makes marrying there a particularly special experience.

CAN WE BE MARRIED IN CHURCH?

As far as it is legally possible, we want to welcome you for a church wedding and Church of England churches have been celebrating this moment with couples for centuries.

It is both a privilege and a duty for your vicar to join a man and a woman in marriage. The good news is that you can marry in church regardless of your beliefs, whether or not you are christened and whether or not you have been a regular churchgoer.

Because getting married gives you a whole new legal status with many benefits, there are considerations for the vicar to make in both UK civil and church law. There are some basic requirements but there could be complications if:-

- One or both of you is a national from a country that is outside the European Economic Area. Special procedures apply to the legal preparations for these marriages, to protect and celebrate those which are genuine and to help prevent those which are not.

If one or both of you has been married before. There may well be a way forward for you to be re-married in church but the vicar has certain considerations in these circumstances. See below: **WHAT IF I HAVE BEEN MARRIED BEFORE?**

Although same-sex marriage legislation has changed, it remains the case that it is not legally possible for same-sex couples to marry in the Church of England.

MARRYING AWAY FROM WHERE YOU LIVE

It's possible to get married in a church that's away from where you live if you have a certain kind of connection with it. You may be legally connected to a number of churches in different ways.

It's possible there are a number of churches that you can get married in legally, as a bride and groom-to-be can marry in a church away from where they live if either of them can show just one of seven connections with the parish. Those connections are listed below.

If you're not sure which is your local church, try searching on www.achurchnearyou.com to find it. Enter your road name or post code into the search box, wait for the address to drop-down and then select it. Click on the search arrow and your local church should be shown within its parish boundary. If you want to search for a church in a different place, type in the place name instead and churches in that area will be listed in the search results.

CAN WE BE MARRIED IN BENTWORTH, LASHAM, MEDSTEAD OR SHALDEN?

You can marry in any of these churches if you can show that one of you:

- has at any time lived in the parish for a period of at least 6 months, or
- was baptised (christened) in the parish concerned, or
- is confirmed and your confirmation was entered in the register of confirmations for a church or chapel in the parish (this will usually be the case if you were prepared for confirmation in the parish), or
- has at any time regularly gone to normal church services in the parish church for a period of at least 6 months

or

That one of your parents, at any time after you were born:

- has lived in the parish for a period of at least 6 months, or
- has regularly gone to normal church services in the parish church for a period of at least 6 months

or

That one of your parents or grandparents:

- was married in the parish

PLEASE NOTE: If you have one of these 'qualifying connection' with Bentworth, Lasham, Medstead or Shalden, you can be married in any of these four churches.

If you cannot demonstrate any of the above connections, you could create one, simply by attending your chosen church's usual services at least once a month for six consecutive months. If you decide to do this, leave enough time after your attendance for the banns to be read before your wedding too – about another two months should be enough.

Talk to the Vicar well in advance to discuss the options open to you.

WHAT IF I HAVE BEEN MARRIED BEFORE?

There are special guidelines on marriage in the church if you are divorced. There may well be a way forward, but you will need to talk your Vicar about your situation to explore the possibilities for you.

Even if one or both of you are divorced, there may be a way for you to marry in church, but you will need to talk to your vicar as soon as possible.

Your church wishes you a lifetime of love that grows within God's protection. But we recognise that some marriages do fail for all sorts of sad and painful reasons. So in certain circumstances the Church of England accepts that a divorced person may marry again in church and this has been the case since 2002.

The first step is to make an enquiry with the vicar of the church where you'd like to marry. Every vicar will want to help you, though there are some who don't feel able to offer a wedding to couples where one or both of the partners has been divorced. In any case, your vicar will want to talk frankly about your past and hopes for the future and will then be able to advise you.

Even if it is not possible to do your wedding, they may offer a blessing service after a civil wedding.

Visit the Church of England website for more detailed information about marrying again in church if you're divorced.

BOOKING THE DATE

There are a few things to discuss with the vicar before your wedding date can be confirmed at a church, so make contact sooner rather than later to ensure you can synchronise the date with your reception venue.

Once you know which church you'd like to marry in, give the vicar or Parish Administrator a call to tell them your good news and when you'd ideally like to get married.

It's best to make this contact around the same time as you contact or visit your reception venue, so you can synchronise the dates. There are a couple of important reasons to have this conversation in good time.

- It will ensure the vicar has time to advise you about the legal requirements for marrying at the church.
- Churches can become booked up for weddings several months in advance, or there could be other things happening like community events at the church on or around your preferred date.

When you first make contact with a church, as well as discussing practical things like dates, it will be the start of a special relationship, particularly with the vicar if you don't already know them.

Their personal attention, advice and support will help you create the wedding of your dreams and offer you everything that being connected to a church can mean, not just for your wedding, but also well beyond the big day.

- The vicar will be delighted to hear from you and will want to meet you both. They may ask a couple of questions about the basic legal requirements. It may even be possible to set the date then if all seems well and the church is free on your preferred date.
- The first meeting with the vicar will help them confirm the basic requirements and give you a chance to ask questions.
- We will need to have your contact details, addresses, telephone numbers and emails. This information is solely for the preparation of your wedding and with your agreement will be shared only with those who are involved in organising the marriage service.
- In preparation for the Marriage Registers and your Marriage Certificate we will also need your father's full names and occupation.
- Keep in touch with the church by going along to services from time to time if you can, just as you might go along to your reception venue for a meal. You will always be welcome and will be able to get to know the people there. Don't worry if you don't hear from your church until closer to your wedding day – they will be in touch, and you can contact them at any time if you have questions.

MEETING THE VICAR

Once you've decided to marry in church, your first contact is most likely to be the vicar, although sometimes you may speak to a church administrator first.

The vicar's job is to make you feel welcome and comfortable about your wedding day and to help you make decisions about the ceremony – they will have had lots of experience in making sure everything runs smoothly.

The first meeting

For the first meeting, there will be two main areas the vicar will want to cover:-

1. To get to know you
Vicars enjoy meeting people and getting to know them. When you marry in a church, you have the vicar's personal, individual attention. If you haven't met before, they'll be interested in your story, how you came to be together, whether they might know any of your relatives and why you decided to get married in the church. The relationship with the vicar often goes well beyond the wedding day. It's possible you could keep in touch with them for many years. They may even be part of other big occasions in your life, like christening your children.

2. To check all is well legally with your intention to marry
There will be some forms to complete which are necessary for the vicar's records and they will need to ask a few questions that confirm you're free to marry and that you have a legally-recognised connection with the church. These details are really important to ensure your marriage will be legally sound.
At your first meeting, it will be useful for you to bring a passport if you both have one. This provides confirmation of your nationality, which the vicar requires. If you don't have a passport, the vicar will let you know what other documents would be suitable alternatives.

If either of you are a national from a country that is outside the EEA, the vicar will advise you on applying for a Superintendent Registrar's Certificate, now required for all Church of England marriages of non-EEA nationals.

If either of you are divorced, the vicar will need to see your decree absolute. If you have divorce in your background, the vicar has certain responsibilities in these circumstances and it will be something they will want to talk about in some detail. Every vicar will listen to you sensitively and in complete confidence.

MEETING AGAIN TO PLAN THE SERVICE WITHIN 3 MONTHS OF THE WEDDING

After all the legal preparations have been arranged, and the wedding has been booked, the vicar will invite you to meet with him again within three months of the wedding. This will be to talk about the meaning of the ceremony and what kind of service you're hoping for. You may discuss music, hymns, Bible readings, additional readings if you'd like one, and anything else you'd like to include.

They may ask if you'd like to have the church's organist and/or choir, whether you'd like the church to do the flowers, and whether you'd like to have the church bells rung. Now is the time to talk about how much your ceremony is likely to cost.

We recommend that *before* this visit you look at the Online Ceremony Planner on the Church of England Weddings Site: www.yourchurchwedding.org/section/planning-your-ceremony/. This will help you with ideas before the meeting.

You might like to see the vicar in church too, if you can go to a few services before your wedding day. You'll be able to see the church in use and get to know other people there too.

HOW MUCH DOES IT COST?

If you choose to marry in church, it will be a day that is personal and special for you, but that need not mean you spend a fortune.

There is no doubt that the choices you make about your wedding day can make a huge impact on the total cost. Part of the cost will be for the legal fees, and everyone pays this. There are also optional extras which you can choose or decline, according to your budget.

DEPOSIT TO SECURE THE WEDDING.

We ask for a £100 deposit to secure the wedding booking. This is a returnable deposit should your plans change.

It is essential that you inform the church if you wish to change the plans for your wedding as other couples may want that day!

Compulsory costs

There is a required legal fee for marrying in a church. This national fee is always slightly increased on 1st January of each year.

In 2018, it costs £517 if you marry away from where you live and £474 if you marry in your home parish. This is set by the Church of England nationally and is the same for every church.

This basic legal fee includes the cost of the vicar, the church, calling your banns, a banns certificate, the marriage certificate, lighting and all administration.

This required fee has ancient origins and ensures your church can maintain essential services like weddings, christenings, funerals and all kinds of other ministries for you and your community. Please note that the vicar does not receive a fee as your wedding is part of his work as a priest.

Optional extras

The statutory wedding fee doesn't include extras you may choose or decline, such as:-

- The support of a vergers, who ensures the church is warm, clean and tidy for your wedding and can help with handing out Orders of Service and hymn books etc. They can assist with disability access if needed by your guests and guide people to find their seats, toilets. They free up the vicar to give their full attention to you and the wedding service. The fee for the Verger is £35.
- Additional heating in the church. If required, the fee for the heating is £10.
- Having an organist, choir or bell-ringers – these extra staff will all need to be booked in advance. The fee for the church organist is between £100 - £150.
- Wedding bells: Only Bentworth has a set of bell ringers and their fee is £100. The other churches may charge £30 for the ringing of the single bells.
- Bear in mind that if your wedding is filmed, musicians like the organist can request an increase in their fee to take into account professional performing rights. Check with the church what the local arrangements are.
- Church flowers – some churches have a local flower arranger who can help you with the flower displays in church.
- Extra copies of the marriage certificate cost £10 each.

AFFORDING THE COSTS

Talk to your vicar early on about what the total cost of your wedding is likely to be. It is good practice for the church to provide you with an itemised quote before your wedding so that you can see exactly what you will be paying for.

Once the final church bill has been agreed, some couples are still keen to offer a donation to the church. Donations may help to cover things like administration and the upkeep of the building. While these gifts are very kind, you needn't feel under any

obligation. There is a retiring collection at the end of your wedding service in case members of the congregation would like to give to the church.

* The figure for marrying in **2018** breaks down as follows for couples marrying in their own parish:-

- the fee set by law payable to the church: £441
- your marriage certificate: £4
- having your banns read at the home church: £29

Total for marrying in your home parish (providing you both live there) in **2018: £474**

If a couple marry in 2018 away from where they live the cost breaks down like this:-

- the fee set by law payable to the marrying church: £441
- your marriage certificate: £4
- having your banns read in the marrying church £29
- having your banns read at your home church: £29
- the banns certificate from your home church: £14

Total for marrying outside your parish in **2018: £517**

READING OF BANNS

Most Church of England marriages will require banns to be published before the wedding can take place. You won't need to arrange banns until about four months before your wedding date. Most Church of England marriages require banns to be read out in church before the wedding can take place. Although a legal requirement, banns can be a special occasion too.

Here's your essential guide to Church of England banns:-

- Banns are an announcement in church of your intention to marry and a chance for anyone to put forward a reason why the marriage may not lawfully take place.
- Banns are an ancient legal tradition and have been read out every week in churches across the land for millions of couples, over many centuries.
- After your forthcoming marriage is announced, the congregation may be invited to pray for you both. It can be quite special and moving to hear this, so do go along if you can.
- Banns need to be read in the parish where each of you lives as well as the church in which you are to be married, if that is somewhere else.
- You must have your banns read out in church for three Sundays during the three months before the wedding. This is usually done over three consecutive Sundays but does not have to be.
- As well as being a legal requirement, your banns readings are special public occasions when people in church hear of your intention to marry. It's an exciting and happy time, so you're welcome to invite your family and friends to hear your banns too, if you'd like.
- If there is not enough notice given for the banns to be read before the marriage is due to take place, or if one or both of you are British but do not live

in England (or Wales), the Common Licence procedure needs to be used rather than banns.

- If one or both of you is a national of a country which is outside the European Economic Area, you will require a Superintendent Registrar's Certificate to marry, rather than have banns read.

If there is not enough notice given for the banns to be read before the marriage is due to take place, or in the case of the marriage of people who are not nationals of a country within the European Economic Area, or if one or both of you does not live in England or Wales, it is recommended that the Licence procedure be used rather than banns.

Being married by Licence instead of by banns

There are some circumstances in which you may need a Special Licence, Common Licence or a Superintendent Registrar's Certificate to marry in church. Your vicar will let you know if these apply to you.

Documents you'll need

1. All couples will need to show the vicar their passport as proof of nationality. If you don't have a passport, there are other documents which would be acceptable, so ask your vicar about this.
2. If either or both of you are divorced, you will need to bring your decree absolute for the vicar to see.
3. You may also be asked to provide evidence of your connection to the church, such as utility bills which show you live or have lived in the parish, or your parents' marriage certificate if they were married there, for example. Your vicar will guide you on acceptable documents for your particular connection.

PRINTED ORDER OF SERVICE

You will need to have Orders of Service printed in good time for the wedding. The vicar will show you examples of Orders of Service and will give you guidance on the running order of hymns, readings etc.

Once you have your draft Order of Service please email this to the vicar so that it can be checked before printing.

WEDDING REHEARSAL

The Vicar will arrange a wedding rehearsal with you in church. This is normally a day or so before the wedding. It is helpful to have only a very few people at the rehearsal. Too many people can make it difficult to learn what you need to remember. Both the Bride and Groom need to attend. In addition, the person giving the bride away is welcome, along with the Best Man and Bridesmaids if available.

- Bring Orders of Service
- Bring Banns certificate

PHOTOGRAPHY

Your Vicar will be pleased to welcome your photographer to the service.

It is often very helpful if the photographer has visited the church before the wedding. We ask that they are as discreet as possible, and to respectfully not to take photos during the wedding vows.

If it is your wish, the vicar will ask the congregation not to take photos or put pictures on social media during the service.

ADDITIONAL FAQs

1. Can I have more than one Best Man? Yes!
2. Can I have lots of Bridesmaids? – as many as you wish, or none at all. It is your choice.
3. Can we have Confetti. Yes. Although to be thrown outside the church and bio-degradable is preferred.
4. Can we have recorded music during the service. Yes. Please discuss with the vicar.
5. Can we have our own organist or musicians. Yes. Please discuss with the vicar.
6. How many can the church seat? This varies between the four churches. The best thing to do is to visit the church where you are to be married and think about where everyone will sit and whether you will require additional seating.
7. Can we use the church's flower pedestals? Yes. Although we don't have many.
8. Parking arrangements? Each church has different parking arrangements. Please ask the vicar of Parish Administrator.