

Marriage



Marrying in church is personal, meaningful and spiritual, just as you want it to be. Churches are special and unique places to get married in - the prayers, promises, and the whole service of celebration become part of your marriage, on the day itself and beyond.

Just engaged

There are certain things that must happen in a church wedding to ensure the marriage complies with both UK civil and church law.

In marriage, you take on a whole new legal status. The priest knows how to advise and prepare you for your wedding day and everything must comply with all relevant UK and Church of England laws.



These are the main legal points to consider before you begin planning:

- **You must be old enough -**
If you are under 18 years old, you will need your parents' consent to marry and by law you cannot be married in the UK until you are 16.
- **Changes to same-sex marriage legislation -**
Although same-sex marriage legislation is now in force, 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 is possible to get married in a church that is 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.
- **Time of the wedding -**
The wedding must take place between 8am and 6pm on any day.
- **Guidelines for divorcees -**
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 priest about your situation to explore the possibilities for you.
- **Reading of Banns -**
Most Church of England marriages will require banns to be published before the wedding can take place. You will not need to arrange banns until about four months before your wedding date. 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.
- **Licences -**
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 priest will let you know if these apply to you.

Documents you will need:

- All couples will need to show the priest their passport as proof of nationality. If you do not have a passport, there are other documents which would be acceptable, so ask your priest about this.
- If either or both of you are divorced, you will need to bring your Decree Absolute for the priest to see.
- 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 priest will guide you on acceptable documents for your particular connection.



Finding a church

Lots of people marry in their own local church, but you might like to marry in a different church because it has special significance for you through family or other connections. It is 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.

Who can be married in the Akeman Benefice?

You can marry in a church in the Akeman Benefice 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

And did you know that if you move house, you are immediately connected to the church there? That means you can marry in the church of your new parish.

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 priest well in advance to discuss the options open to you.

Why marry in church?

Churches are special places and there are some things about a church wedding that you just cannot 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.
- You can make important vows, or promises, in a church. You can only make vows this big in a church. These vows, made in public, will help you to stay together and grow together. God and your church are there for you to help you keep your vows.
- The priest has a very particular role to play in your wedding. He or she can blend ancient tradition and modern experience to reflect your story. Because of the relationship with the priest, your wedding can be made personal, memorable, meaningful, and beautiful.
- Church buildings offer outstanding beauty. Each of our village parishes has its own historic church offering a unique wedding venue for your marriage.
- 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 are 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.
- And after your wedding, you will realise that a church is more than simply a wedding venue. We will always be here for you.

Can I marry in church?

As far as it is legally possible, we want to welcome you for a church wedding in the Akeman Benefice. It is both a privilege and a duty for your priest 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 priest 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 priest has certain considerations in these circumstances.



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. Churches are so much more than a wedding venue though. Churches in the Akeman Benefice offer friendship, prayer, and support before and after a wedding, whether it is a church wedding or not.

Hymns for your wedding

Hymns are a traditional part of church weddings and there are so many to choose from. Whether you opt for a popular tune, or something different, there is a hymn to suit different parts of the service. There are usually two or three hymns sung during a wedding service. The first is sung near to the beginning and helps everyone to feel that they are together in this place for a special purpose. The second hymn is usually in the middle, after the vows and before the prayers. The last hymn comes right before the final blessing, and reflects a mood of celebration and joy. If you can find hymns that are familiar to your guests and are easy to sing, it will encourage everyone to join in. The priest or the organist at the church where you are to be married will be pleased to help you decide. The capabilities of the organist and the type of organ they have in church need to be taken into account, so do seek their opinion even if you have already decided which hymns you would most like to have. To help you get started, here is a list of some of the most well-loved church wedding hymns.

- All Things Bright And Beautiful
- Amazing Grace
- As Man And Woman We Were Made
- At Cana's Wedding Long Ago
- Be Still For The Presence Of The Lord
- Come To A Wedding
- For The Beauty Of The Earth
- Give Me Joy In My Heart
- God In The Planning And Purpose Of Life
- Great Is Thy Faithfulness
- Jerusalem
- Lead us Heavenly Father
- Lord And Lover Of Creation
- Lord Of All Hopefulness
- Lord Of The Dance
- Love Divine All Loves Excelling



Bible readings for your wedding

Choosing your readings is one of the ways a wedding can be made really personal. Popular Bible passages are given below, but your priest can help with choosing alternatives if you would like something different.

A Church of England wedding must have at least one reading from the Bible and you can also include other readings or poems. Read some of these Bible passages together and see if what they say seems important to you. There are many different versions of the Bible, some using modern language and some with a more traditional style – talk to your priest about different versions if you would like to learn more.

- Love, actually!
The number 1 most popular reading for weddings is (1 Corinthians Chapter 13)
- God creates women and men to look after the earth.
(Genesis, Chapter 1, verses 26-28)
- A love poem between two lovers.
(Song of Solomon, Chapter 2, verses 10-13; Chapter 8, verses 6&7)
- Jesus teaches how to live a life that brings true happiness.
(Matthew, Chapter 5, verses 1-10)
- Jesus teaches about marriage, and welcomes children.
(Mark, Chapter 10, verses 6-9 and 13-16)
- What happens when Jesus attends a wedding reception.
(John, Chapter 2, verses 1 - 11)
- Committing to each other.
(Ephesians Chapter 5, verses 21-33)
- Seeing the good side...
(Philippians Chapter 4, verses 4 - 9)
- Getting the perfect relationship.
(Colossians Chapter 3, verses 12 - 17)
- Being a good lover!
(1 John Chapter 4 verses 7 - 12)

If you have some special ideas of your own your priest will be pleased to discuss your choices.



You choose

You have choices in how your wedding ceremony shapes up, making it uniquely yours. With the help of your priest, you can make decisions for your ceremony, on the following:

- Which hymns you would like
- What music you would like to have playing as you walk in and leave the church
- Whether you would like other music, like a CD played at certain points
- Which Bible reading(s) you would like
- If there are any other readings or poems you would like to be included
- If you have any special requests for prayers
- If you have a special request for the 'giving away' part of the service.
- You have choices about who does the readings and prayers, which enables you to involve your family and friends.

There are more optional extras, which you may like to add to the basic service. These things will cost extra on top of the legal fee, and are charged at the church's local rate. They include:

- Whether you have the organist to support the singing of hymns
- Whether or not you have a vergier to support your guests and help with handing things out, or tidying things away
- Having the church bells rung at the end of the service
- Having flowers and flower displays provided by the church or by your own florist
- Heating – requirements can vary from one church to another depending on how large it is, or the time of year. Not all churches have modern heating systems, so whether or not you have heating, and how much you have, is your choice.

Your priest is trained and experienced to advise you on all of these things, and knows your church very well, so with his or her help, you will be able to make choices that you are all happy with.

Ceremony planning

Whether you plan to get married in a couple of years or in just a few months, we will help you through the process of booking and planning the ceremony. As far as possible, the church wants you to hold your wedding on a date that is convenient for you, your guests and the church itself. Each church in the Akeman Benefice varies in what it can offer and when, so do check when you book, particularly if you would like to get married soon.

The below timings follow a typical pattern and may serve as a general guide.



One - two years ahead -

It is often about 18 – 24 months ahead when couples start planning. The first step is usually booking the reception venue, but make sure you talk to the priest as well to agree the date so that everything fits together. The priest will make arrangements for your first meeting with them so that he or she can get to know you a little and complete the necessary forms. Now is the time to ask whether you will require a licence to get married. Most people will not – the priest will advise if this applies to you at your first meeting. The priest will also explain to you about having to get your banns read, especially if that will be in more than one church.

One year - six months ahead -

During the next few months, you will probably pop in to your reception venue a few times. In a similar way, you might take time to go along to the church and find out more about what happens there. If you are creating a connection to the church by attending for six months, this is the time to go along regularly each month. You may not hear from us until about six to nine months before the wedding – especially if you have booked a long time ahead. But do not worry, we will be in touch.

This is also the time to consider your ceremony. You have choices in this, which you can discuss with your priest on subsequent meetings with them. You can choose your hymns, other music, and readings. If you are planning to have your wedding filmed, tell your priest now so they can check out any copyright issues. Around six months ahead of the wedding might also be a good time to book your flower arranger and bell-ringers if you are having them.

Many churches offer you the time and space to think about what marriage entails, the meaning of the marriage vows and understanding the service. These kinds of events, to help prepare you for married life, are not compulsory, but if you do choose to take this up, they are usually offered within the six months preceding the wedding. In the Akeman Benefice, we encourage couples planning to marry in one of our churches to attend our short marriage preparation course. This takes a few hours over part of a weekend and offers practical suggestions and advice on strategies to build a firm foundation for marriage even for those who have lived together for years or been married before.

Churches may also contact you during this time to remind you of the dates your banns will be read. If you need your banns read in different churches, now is the time to make sure that has been arranged.



Three months ahead -

The majority of marriages require that banns are read out in church for three Sundays during the three months before the wedding. Many couples like to be in the church when their banns are read.

The congregation will be praying for you and your marriage, and this can be a reassuring and special experience. It also helps you get to know the church if you are unfamiliar with it.

You might like to review how your ceremony is shaping up and make any final decisions with the priest at around this time.

Check with photographers that they are aware of the church's guidelines on photographs. See if you can visit the church together with the photographer and introduce them to the priest. Coordinating your other wedding suppliers with the church team will help things run as smoothly as possible.

One - two weeks ahead -

Most churches will hold a rehearsal for the wedding, which will usually be during the week before the wedding. This will help you relax and ask any final questions about where to stand and so on. It is ideal if everyone who has a part to play on the day comes along, as it all helps to make the day run smoothly.

If you have produced the Orders of Service yourself, these need to be at the church beforehand. Ask the priest if you can bring them to the rehearsal and put them in a safe place for vergers or ushers to find them on the day.

This is also the time to make a final check on your flower order. Whatever transport you have booked for getting to your wedding, make sure they are aware of the timings and whether there are any local events happening on the day that might disrupt your journey to church.

The day before -

This can be a nerve-wracking time for both bride and groom, so finding time to relax in the evening may help you sleep better. You may find it helpful to light a candle and say the following prayer:

*This day has been so long coming, so long planned, so long anticipated,
Help us relax enough to enjoy it.*

Help us to concentrate enough to appreciate it.

Be with those who have a special part to play and with everyone as they travel to join us.

May this day be all we have hoped for.

May it be a wonderful start to the rest of our lives.

Amen.

(Prayer by Andrew Body from *Pocket Prayers for Marriage*)



The Big Day -

When the day finally arrives all that remains is for you to enjoy each moment!

Ushers may want to arrive about 45 minutes early to check Orders of Service are in place, or ready to give them out as people arrive. If you are having a vergers from the church, they can help with this. The groom and best man arrive before the bride too. Everyone (except the bride, her father or the person walking her down the aisle, bridesmaids and/or page boys if you have them), should be seated and ready about 10-15 minutes before the service is due to start. The priest may have a couple of brief notices to read at this point.

When you walk into your beautiful church to make this great commitment, know that God's love and our prayers are with you. Relax and enjoy your day!

Thinking about marriage

The story of your relationship as a couple may have begun fairly recently or years ago. Either way, getting married is a whole new beginning for you, your family and others in your life.

"From this day forward.." - after you are married you have a new legal status, possibly a new name and a new family unit. This changes the way others relate to you too, whether they are close to you or not.

"As long as you both shall live.." - the vows that you make in church with all your wedding guests present, acknowledge that life has its ups and downs, but that you lovingly commit wholly to each other, sharing all that you have and all that you are with the other, for the rest of your lives.

So, marriage means that your choices will always include another person in partnership with you, through good times and hard times. But also, you invite the blessing and guidance of a loving God into your relationship too.

Couples and their families are warmly invited to come to church whenever they can. Even if you move there will be a Church of England church local to you in your new parish, so we are always there for you wherever you are.



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Extracts taken from: <https://www.churchofengland.org/life-events/weddings>