

Marriage - FAQs

How do you get married in a Church of England church?

Most couples who marry in the Church of England do so by having their "Banns" read on three Sundays in their parish church.

If (a) you and your partner both live in England or Wales **and** (b) are both British citizens, a national of a member country of the European Economic Area (EEA) (<https://www.gov.uk/eu-eea>) or a national of Switzerland then you can usually marry by Banns.

If you and your partner do not meet the above criteria, then it may be necessary to get married by Common Licence or by obtaining a Superintendent Registrar's Certificate (SRC). Please see the separate questions relating to marriage by Common Licence or by obtaining an SRC for further information.

How do you get married by Banns?

Short answer

In order to marry by Banns, your Banns need to be published on three Sundays prior to your marriage in the parish where you will be getting married, and also in the parish in which you reside (if this is not the same as the parish in which you are proposing to get married).

Long answer

If you think that you are eligible to marry by Banns (i.e. both you and your partner are resident in England or Wales, you are both British citizens, nationals of a country within the EEA or nationals of Switzerland and you have a qualifying connection), then it is important to ensure that your Banns are read correctly.

Your Banns should be published on three Sundays preceding your marriage by a member of the clergy. This does not need to be consecutive Sundays. This must be done no earlier than three months before your wedding.

Your Banns will need to be read in the parish where you will be getting married, and also in the parish where you both live (if this is different). This means, for example, that if you and your partner do not live together and currently live in separate parishes and you are getting married in a different parish (i.e. not the parish in which either of you live), you will need to have your Banns read in all three parishes.

It is important that you discuss this with the minister who will be conducting your wedding ceremony and ensure that all of the required paperwork is completed, both for the parish where you will be getting married and the parish/parishes where you live (if applicable) as early as possible. If your Banns have not been read correctly or in the correct parishes, you will not be able to get married without taking additional steps.

If you find out that your Banns have not been read correctly and there is insufficient time for this to be rectified (i.e. there are less than three Sundays before your wedding), then please contact the Diocesan Registry as soon as you become aware of that fact as you may be able to obtain a Common Licence which will then enable you to proceed with your wedding in church.

When is it necessary to have a Common Licence?

If you and your partner are both British citizens, nationals of a member country of the EEA or nationals of Switzerland, but:

- you or your partner is resident outside of England or Wales; or
- you plan to marry in less than a month and therefore there is insufficient time for your Banns to be read;

you will not be eligible for marriage by Banns and will therefore need to apply for a Common Licence before you can marry in a Church of England church.

(Please note that if you or your partner are not British citizens, nationals of an EEA member country or nationals of Switzerland, you will need to apply for an SRC before you can marry in a Church of England church.)

Do I need a Common Licence to get married in church if I am divorced?

If you are divorced, the general position is that you can marry by Banns in the usual way. However, this is subject to the agreement of the officiating minister, and your being eligible to marry by Banns (see above).

In some cases, however, divorcees may wish to marry by Common Licence if they do not feel comfortable having their Banns read publicly. In this situation, you should contact the Diocesan Registry and we will discuss your options with you.

What are the steps required to apply for a Common Licence?

Short answer

The application process involves filling in some paperwork and supplying the Diocesan Registrar with certain documents. You will then need to meet with the Diocesan Registrar in order to swear an affidavit, which is an oath to the effect that there is no obstacle to your marriage and that you meet the eligibility criteria for a Common Licence.

Long answer

Please contact the Diocesan Registry as soon as possible if you think you need a common licence so that the Diocesan Registrar can confirm whether or not you need one. The Diocesan Registry will be able to provide you with copies of the relevant forms and answer any questions.

If you do need a Common Licence, then you will need to provide the Diocesan Registry with the following documents (by email or post) as soon as possible so that we can check that everything is in order prior to your meeting with the Diocesan Registrar:

- questionnaire for completion by applicant for marriage licence;
- copies of your and your partner's passports or a valid European Economic Area identity card (please contact the Diocesan Registry if you or your partner do not have either of these documents so that we can discuss alternative documents that we can accept as evidence of your identity);
- copies of proof of address for you and your partner, such as a driving licence or a utility bill;
- proof of your qualifying connection with the parish; and
- if you or your partner are divorced, you will also need to provide us with a marriage after divorce form, or signed letter from the minister who will be officiating at your wedding confirming that he or she knows that you are divorced and is happy to proceed on this basis (if applicable).

You will then need to contact the Diocesan Registry to arrange a meeting with the Diocesan Registrar. This meeting must take place no earlier than three months before your wedding, as the licence will only be valid for three months. We recommend that the meeting should take place no later than two weeks before your wedding, so that we have time to resolve any issues that may arise.

The Diocesan Registrar is usually available for meetings at Church House in Gloucester on Wednesday mornings, or at our offices in Bristol at other times. Please contact us as soon as

possible to arrange an appointment so that we can ensure that the Diocesan Registrar is available to meet with you.

You will usually have to attend this meeting together. Please contact the Diocesan Registry if you do not think that this will be possible.

The fee for a common licence is currently £200 (although this may change as fees are reviewed on an annual basis), which is payable by cash, debit or credit card, or cheque made payable to Veale Wasbrough Vizards LLP.

Obtaining a Common Licence through a Surrogate

There may be emergency situations which arise only a few days before the date of the wedding. In these circumstances, there may not be enough time or it may not be practicable for you to meet with the Registrar or the Deputy Registrar. If this situation arises, it may be easier for you to meet with one of the Surrogates (that is to say a clergyperson who is authorised to issue Common Licences) within the Diocese, as they are based in various locations across Gloucestershire. We can advise you further if this is necessary.

What is a qualifying connection?

Short answer

In order to marry in the Church of England, you must have a "qualifying connection" with the parish where you wish to marry, such as living in the parish, worshipping there, having lived there for six months in the past or one of your parents having lived there.

Long answer

To be eligible for marriage in church by Banns, Common Licence, or following the issue of an SRC (see below), either the bride or groom must be able to show at least one of the following qualifying connections with the parish where they wish to marry:

- you reside in the parish;
- you previously resided in the parish for at least six months;
- you were baptised in the parish;
- you were confirmed in the parish;
- your parents or grandparents were married in the parish;
- one of your parents resided in the parish for at least six months during your lifetime;
- your name is entered on the Church Electoral Roll of the parish, or you have habitually attended at public worship for at least six months; or
- the name of one of your parents is entered on the Church Electoral Roll, or they have habitually attended at public worship in the parish for at least six months during your lifetime.

Habitual attendance requires you to have attended public worship in the parish in question over a period of six months, at least once a month, or over a period of several years at least three times a year on the same festivals, such as Christmas, Easter, Harvest Festival etc.

Please contact the minister who will be officiating at your wedding for further information on suitable evidence of your qualifying connection.

What process do I need to follow if my partner or I is a national of a country that is not within the EEA or Switzerland?

Short answer

If you or your partner are nationals of a country outside of the EEA or Switzerland, then you will need to obtain an SRC in order to get married. If these circumstances apply, it is not possible to have your Banns read or to obtain a Common Licence.

Long answer

From 2 March 2015, following a change in the law introduced by the Immigration Act 2014, where one or both parties to an intended marriage is a national of a country outside of the EEA or Switzerland, the parties must jointly obtain an SRC to authorise the marriage.

An application for an SRC must be made by both parties giving notice of the proposed marriage together at a designated register office, unless each party who is a non-EEA national is exempt from immigration control (i.e. has been granted permanent residence in the UK or is in a special category, e.g. foreign diplomats) in which case notice must be given at the parties' local register office. Details of designated register offices can be found at:

<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/designated-register-offices-in-england-and-wales> .

Both parties must have been resident for at least seven days in a registration district in England or Wales before the day on which they give notice.

There is then a 28 day waiting period following the giving of the notice, which can be extended to 70 days if requested by the Home Office, before the Superintendent Registrar is able to issue his or her certificate. You do not have to remain in the UK for the whole of the 28 day period (or 70 day period if extended) but you do need to provide contact details so that you can be contacted during the notice period should the Home Office wish to interview you both. This interview would take place in the UK, and therefore where possible it would be sensible to remain in the UK for the duration of the notice period. Once the SRC has been issued, it lasts for up to one year and will enable you to marry either in church or in a civil registry office.

Please note that the Superintendent Registrar (which is a civil appointment) is different to the Diocesan Registrar (which is an ecclesiastical appointment), and we regret that we are therefore not able to issue the SRC or assist with the application process.

The fee for an SRC is currently £35 per applicant.

A couple marrying in the Church of England will continue to be able to apply for an Archbishop of Canterbury's Special Licence (which is granted in limited circumstances, e.g. where compassionate circumstances require the marriage to take place quickly, for example where one of the couple is seriously ill and they wish to marry in hospital or at home). If an Archbishop's Special Licence has been granted it will not be necessary to obtain an SRC.