

GETTING MARRIED AT SS PHILIP & JAMES CHURCH

FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS

At Ss Philip & James Church, we regard it as an honour and a privilege to be able to marry couples and be a tangible part of your newly forming family story. Given the age of the parish church, many 'Whitton families' have found their moment of first union within our doors. Wherever possible we will try and find ways of allowing you your moment in the lengthening history of the area. However, there are a few issues that govern the possibilities, and this sheet is designed to bring some early clarity to those things, and maybe to allow you to keep a church wedding within the options available to you.

My partner and/or I are divorced. Can we get married at Ss Philip & James?

The right to marry divorced persons or not rests with the Incumbent of the parish, who in this case is the Vicar. As he acts as registrar on behalf of the Crown, and also as the spiritual leader on behalf of the community whose church would host the ceremony, the consent of the Incumbent is necessary for any marriage to take place in the church. Some priests, in accordance with their own conscience and theological perspective, refuse to marry divorced persons as a matter of course. However, Fr David will carefully and prayerfully consider each case before reaching any decision, but reserves the right to refuse to marry applicants in certain circumstances. The Vicar works within the framework set out by the Diocese of London and the advice given by its bishops (copies of this are available through the London Diocese website). In all cases, the enquiries are not an arduous task, but rooted in conversations with the Vicar. The process is also transparent, so that the Vicar will make clear any reason for refusal – often backed up in writing later.

Do we have to live in the parish? How do we find out if we do?

To find out within which parish you and your partner live, follow this link <http://www.achurchnearyou.com/> and enter your postal code into the box provided. It will tell you in which parish you are resident. In recent years, the regulations governing residence have been considerably relaxed, in order to allow the church greater scope to allow the joy and privilege of marriage within its walls. However, you are not automatically able to marry in any church, but require a "*qualifying connection*". Only one of you needs to demonstrate a qualifying connection, and the list of means is long. A conversation with the Vicar can easily clarify your connection if one exists.

If no qualifying connection exists, then in special circumstances, consent can be given. Such circumstances are to be regarded as the exception, however.

One or both of us are not UK citizens. Can we still marry at Ss Philip & James?

In normal circumstances, if you are both non-UK citizens, it is unlikely that we would be able to host your marriage in church, although non-legal ceremonies like Blessings can be accommodated

gladly and with similar levels of 'the big day'. However, if one of you is a UK citizen, an alternative route is taken to prepare for the marriage from that of Banns which affects all other couples. You would, in this situation, apply for a Bishop's Licence which involves meeting with a Diocesan Surrogate for Marriage. That officer will take copies of passports, visas and other legal documents from both parties and will ask you to confirm by oath various things. This, in association with the Incumbent's agreement to perform the marriage is normally sufficient for a Bishop's License (known commonly as a 'Common License'). In all such situations, you are required to meet with the Vicar before any such application can be made. Costs for Licenses should also be born in mind, and they currently cost in the region of £170.

What are Banns of Marriage?

Banns are public consultations called in parish churches designed to assure the safety and legality of the application of a couple to marry. They are the time when people have an appropriate opportunity to legally object to the union and they must be read both in the parish church where the marriage is to take place as well as any parish churches where you may be resident at the time that they are read. Banns must be read within the principal Sunday service and on three separate occasions. Where a Common License is granted, the need for Banns is removed. It is important to note that the responsibility for obtaining a Banns Certificate (proof that the Banns have been called and that no objection was made and upheld) rests with the couple. Banns Certificates are required by the Vicar on or before the rehearsal, and a failure to present a Certificate in advance of the ceremony will form cause for it to be cancelled.

What is involved in a church wedding?

Churches weddings are typically the most meaningful and special way to marry if you have some sympathy with the beliefs of the Christian faith. Priests and ministers are trained and often very gifted in this type of ministry and we believe that we go well beyond other forms of marriage ceremony which can have the feel of being too quick or lack meaning beyond the words of the vows themselves. We are proud of this ability to deliver a memorable and significant service that is more than a brief preamble for a party! We believe that the reception is a celebration of the union newly formed in a wedding ceremony of its own meaning and significance, and there are many ways that we can enhance that experience in line with your own tastes and wants.

Church weddings will involve three or four hymns, a reading from the Bible, the legal bits, the pomp and ceremony that the church organ delivers in the fanfares of marriage, opportunities for friends and loved-ones to participate, the music of your choice, and of course your place in the long history rooted in the church and the community it serves. A church wedding lasts anything up to an hour (though typically 45 minutes) and at Ss Philip & James we are blessed with beautiful buildings and grounds that serve as the perfect backdrop to the Big Day.

Specific plans for the ceremony are made directly with the Vicar who will help you to prepare the service step-by-step. The choices will, wherever possible, be yours – and the Vicar's job is simply to help you receive the marriage ceremony of your dreams.

What happens if, in the end, we cannot marry at Ss Philip & James?

There are other ways of celebrating your marriage. If you wish that God be part of the union that you will share but cannot marry in the church, we are able to offer services of Blessing following a civil marriage and registration. Blessing services carry all of the meaning of a standard marriage service, just without the legal side of things. Vows can be renewed (though not said as though for the first time) and many of the components of the marriage service can be incorporated. We believe that one of the most important parts of any church wedding is that moment when the couple receive God's blessing on their marriage. In specific Blessing services, this is the central focus of the service rather than the vows and registers.

If a Blessing is the way forward, or you are unsure what you can have, please speak to the Vicar in the first instance. He will do everything possible to facilitate a suitable celebration of your marriage, and will commit to making it as meaningful.

