

A Church of England Wedding in the Windrush Benefice – Qualifying Connections – the Law

The Windrush Benefice comprises five distinct parishes. To marry in one of the churches of this benefice you or your fiancé must either:

- Live in one of these ecclesiastical (i.e. as distinct from ‘civil’) parishes, namely; Aldsworth (St Bartholomew), Great Barrington (St Mary), Little Barrington (St Peter), Sherborne (St Mary) or Windrush (St Peter), all of which are in the Church of England Diocese of Gloucester
- Or, already be a regular worshipping member of one of these churches
- Or, have another sort of ‘Qualifying Connection’ (see below)

Qualifying Connections were established by the Church of England and Parliament in 2005.

This means that you may also marry in a particular parish church if you or your fiancé:

- Were baptised or confirmed in that parish church
- Your parents or grandparents were married in that parish church
- You have, in the past, lived in that parish for at least six months
- During your lifetime, one or more of your parents has lived in that parish for at least six months
- During your lifetime, one or more of your parents has habitually worshipped in that parish church for at least six months
- A Qualifying Connection in one of the parishes of a benefice (a legal group of churches) will serve for any one of the other churches in the benefice.

These are the *only* Qualifying Connections the law allows.

This means that if you live in one of the five parishes of this benefice, or have a Qualifying Connection with one or more of them, then you may be married here.

However, if you live in another parish and have no Qualifying Connection with a parish or church in this benefice, then you should approach your local parish church or a church with which you do have a Qualifying Connection.

What if one of us is divorced?

The Church of England holds two understandings in tension: the belief that marriage is a faithful, life-long commitment between a man and a woman, along with the recognition that, for all sorts of reasons, this is not always the case. If either of you has been previously married, a request for a subsequent marriage will be considered by the Vicar only after a personal interview.

The Practicalities

Please be aware that a legal right to marry in this benefice does not extend to the decision about the day or the time; that is by request and only with the agreement of the Vicar. Christ Church is not a “Wedding Venue”; it is a lively, busy, Church and some days and times are unavailable. The Church of England considers the Marriage Service to be an ordinance of the Church, and so there are some restrictions on what is, and what is not, acceptable in the ceremony. Once you have made contact, you will be guided through both the legalities and the practicalities of your Church wedding to make sure that your day is as special and memorable as it should be.

You may find the following link helps to answer other questions that you have about a Church wedding.

<https://www.yourchurchwedding.org/article/legal-requirements/>