



CORNISH WEDDINGS



DIOCESE OF TRURO

DISCOVERING GOD'S KINGDOM
GROWING THE CHURCH

With so many venues now available for weddings from manor houses to potting sheds, fairgrounds to safari parks, churches are not always the first place considered for couples. But with some gorgeous churches here in Cornwall, steeped in history and heritage, how can we attract more couples to choose church weddings? And with weddings offering a key opportunity to introduce people to what God's love really means, sometimes for the first time, how do we make the most of that?

THE STORY SO FAR

Only one quarter of couples now marry in a church since the Marriage Act 1994 widened the choice of venues for civil ceremonies, allowing weddings pretty much wherever people liked.

Initially, when the Act was first introduced, just three per cent of first marriages took place in other buildings, with 60 per cent still opting for religious ceremonies and most others choosing a register office.

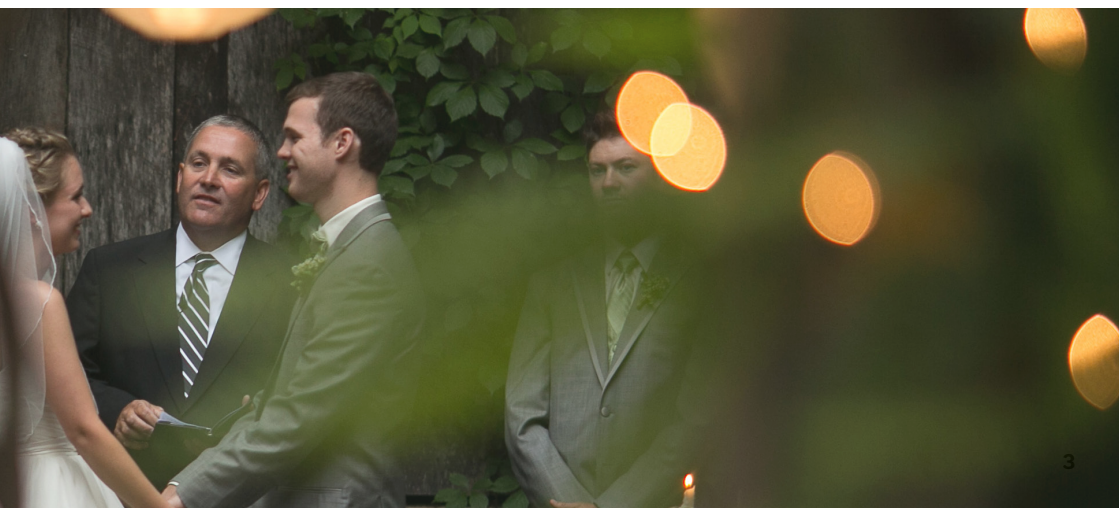


John Haskey, an Oxford University demographer, believes the rapid rise of marriages in alternative venues was one of most dramatic changes of the last 170 years. However, it wasn't just because of the Marriage Act, the 1970s saw the start of a period of enormous social upheaval.

“ Since then there have been large changes in sexual and partnership behaviour, with rates of divorce, cohabitation, pre-marital cohabitation and births outside marriage all rising considerably. Together with growing secularisation, these factors probably reinforced the trend towards civil marriage. ”

WHAT CAN BE DONE TO REVERSE THIS TREND?

In the Diocese of Truro, we have so many beautiful churches in glorious settings to attract couples and make it easy for them to choose their local church for their wedding. To help with that, we've put together a list of ideas from around the diocese to hopefully encourage churches and share some of the excellent practice across the county.



MARRIAGE PREPARATION

All together and all on one day

In some churches, couples who are getting married in the same year meet altogether on the same day to prepare.

They are invited on one of three possible Saturdays to the church to meet various people who will be involved in their wedding service. This can include meeting the clergy, choosing the music and readings, learning about conflict resolution, understanding the legal bits, exploring the spiritual side of marriage and chatting as a couple to formulate their own plans and ideas.

The day would include a simple lunch and refreshments.

One by one

In other churches, clergy hold a series of four or five evenings, meeting each couple separately. This means there is more time for personal interaction and for getting to know the couple well and therefore each marriage service can be personal and individual.

Some of the headings for these sessions include:

The Biblical basis for marriage and God's love for us
Declaration and vows
Communication
Conflict resolution
Expectations
The important legal bits.



OPPORTUNITIES

Some clergy are keen to use every wedding as an opportunity to preach God's lavish love and gift of Jesus.

As one vicar with a huge ministry in weddings said:

“ I don't know if the hundred wedding guests are in church for the first time in their lives, perhaps the only time, so I need them to have the best possible experience they can. ”

Wedding guests can be all too easily dismissed – after all, they might never be seen again. But none of us has any idea where anyone might be on their personal or faith journey. What we do know is that a negative experience of being a guest in any church service, particularly one that marks a life event, makes any future attempts to share God's love for all sound less than sincere.

One clergyman always says yes to even to the strangest requests - can we bring our dog/owl to the service? In other words, bending over backwards to give each couple the perfect wedding. It might not always be possible to have an owl, but it's easy to make children feel welcome and involved in a service.

Something else to consider is that of those that do opt for a church wedding, an increasing number are from independent/free churches wishing to marry in a church building and to involve their own Minister/Pastor in the service. These collaborations are a real blessing, but it is still important to manage expectations and apply Canon Law, clearly and sensitively.

There are lots of other opportunities to show care and welcome in the last few weeks before a wedding, right up until the day itself. Here are a few examples from some churches in our diocese:

- Invite couples to church to hear their banns and be present when the congregation prays for them. It's a lovely way to welcome them to church and turn a legal process into special, moving occasion.
- Pray with the couple during the wedding rehearsal about the day itself.
- Match each couple up with an older married couple from church, so they can share meals and show support and care to the younger couple before the wedding. Ideally, they would stay in contact after the wedding and continue to pray for them and support them.
- Help guests to keep their promise to pray for the couple by giving them a prayer card, saying, for example:

*"Dear God, pour out the abundance of your blessing on ____
and ____.*

*Let their love for each other be a seal upon their hearts and a
crown upon their heads.*

*Bless them in their work and in their companionship;
awake and asleep, in joy and in sorrow, in life and in death.*

Amen."

FOLLOW UP OPPORTUNITIES

The best news in the research is that families **want and expect churches to keep in touch** with them.

The following occasions are special events which offer the perfect opportunity to invite and welcome families back.



Valentine's Day

- Invite your weddings' contacts, whether newlyweds or soon-to-be married, to the Sunday service closest to Valentine's Day. The service can mark the occasion simply, by offering special prayers for those who are just married or about to be married, or it can be more extravagant with balloons, cake and giveaway chocolate hearts!
- Send your wedding contacts a fun, friendly Happy Valentine's Day card 'With love from your church'.
- One parish in York uses Valentine's Day to invite couples to a quiz night. They host it simply to keep in touch and build a relationship with couples who will be marrying at the church.
- Remember to include banns couples when you get in touch – it will reinforce the message that their church is there for them throughout their married life and gives them an opportunity to have an experience of church contact, right where they live.



ANNIVERSARIES

- Can we celebrate these in any way?
- In one Cornish church, couples and their families are invited back to a service in the autumn – a celebration of marriage. A short service is followed by cake and bubbly and a chance to chat to other couples and families. As so many weddings take place in the summer, there will be many wedding anniversaries too. Remind couples who married last year that their church will always be for them throughout their marriage by sending an Anniversary card.
- Another church sends each couple a welcome invitation to all church services and suggests an Alpha course when it comes around.

OTHER THINGS TO THINK ABOUT

- Make sure your church website is up to date and attractive, with great photos, as this is the shop window for the church. It could also include testimonies from couples who have been married in your church.
- Is it possible to offer your church as a venue for the reception too? If you have chairs instead of pews, can you be flexible with the seating? Could couples have both the ceremony and the party in your church?
- Can you offer the church hall as a venue for a reception?
- Or even a nearby field (with permission, of course) to put up a wedding marquee?

Perhaps you could offer the whole package. Across the diocese, we could compile a list of the best marquee companies and the best caterers, along with flowers, cakes, disco, live bands etc. Just imagine if churches could offer couples a good price for the reception, as well as the wedding service. We could certainly make it cheaper and therefore more attractive to couples. With the recent trend towards quirky homemade, rustic and vintage styles, this could be a real selling point.



WHAT WE CAN DO

There is a growing trend for weddings to happen in other venues, yet we have some beautiful churches with spectacular scenery here in Cornwall. What can we do to reverse the trend? How can we use weddings as opportunities to speak about Jesus and further God's kingdom?

We can showcase our churches using our websites and social media as the shop front.

We can make the rules about who can get married in church easy to understand.

We can be willing to be flexible with wedding arrangements and say yes as much as possible to strange requests.

We can be friendly, warm and kind towards couples, accepting their circumstances and meeting them where they are.

We can stay in touch, inviting couples to special events and keeping contact after the wedding.

In some places, we can think about offering the full package: wedding ceremony and reception all in one place at a bargain price.

Let's make it easier for couples to choose their local church for their wedding, so that their special day is personal, meaningful, spiritual and beautiful.



APPENDIX A

MARQUEES

Coast2coast Marquees, Truro

www.coast2coastmarquees.co.uk

Absolute Canvas, Falmouth

www.absolutecanvas.co.uk

CATERERS

Chef in my home, Newquay

www.chefinmyhome.com

The Round Kitchen

www.theroundkitchen.com

The Good Food Catering Company, Wadebridge

www.thegoodfoodcateringco.co.uk

Westcountry Hogroasts

www.westcountryhogroasts.net

WEDDING CAKES

Cakes by Design, St Ives

www.cakes-bydesign.co.uk

The Little Cake Shop, Newquay

www.lepetitgateaucornwall.co.uk

Cassie's Cakes & Cupcakes, St Austell

www.cassiescakesandcupcakes.co.uk

Nicky Grant, Chocolatier, Helston

www.nickygrant.com

LIVE MUSIC

The Qwest Band

www.theqwestband.com

APPENDIX B

Church of England Weddings

www.yourchurchwedding.org

Diocese of Truro Weddings

trurodiocese.org.uk/faith-life/weddings

Marriage Week

www.marriage-week.org.uk



Jane Wheeler, Diocese of Truro, 2019

GET IN CONTACT

T 01872 360039

E jane.wheeler@truro.anglican.org

www.trurodiocese.org.uk

Church House,

Woodlands Court,

Truro Business Park,

Threemilestone, Truro, TR4 9NH



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