

NEW COLLEGE CHAPEL



WEDDING GUIDELINES

Congratulations on your engagement!

At New College we enjoy hosting wedding ceremonies for current and former staff, students and fellows, many of whom have met in their time here. However, the college is a working educational institution that is busy every day of the year. Although we will do what we can to make your day memorable, the college is not a professional wedding venue. We cannot provide exclusive access or the bespoke service you may experience elsewhere, and if you are looking for that kind of occasion we encourage you to seek another venue for your ceremony.

We are only able to host a handful of wedding ceremonies at 11am and 3pm on specific Saturdays in late July and early August. These dates and times are fixed years in advance and no other options are available.* They are usually booked more than a year in advance. We are currently taking bookings for the summer of 2026; **all dates for the summer of 2025 are booked.**

In brief, we can:

- Plan a legal Church of England ceremony for you taken by one of the chaplains, or a Church of England priest in good standing known to you or your family
- Plan a Church of England blessing ceremony for you (with no legal standing) if you are already legally married
- Arrange for another Church of England priest to take your wedding or blessing service if the chaplains are unavailable
- Host a blessing service (with no legal standing, if you are already legally married) taken by a Roman Catholic priest or a minister in good standing from another Christian church. You must choose the priest or minister, who must be approved by the college to take your service.
- Arrange for musicians to play at your wedding (at your expense)
- Assist you with planning the event, including briefing the porters, arranging access when necessary, providing a verger to prepare the chapel and preparing the legal documentation
- Give you access to the cloisters for drinks (from the college caterers, at additional expense) and photographs after your wedding
- Close the college to tourists for the day (but not to other users)

* We can make exceptions in cases of extreme unforeseeable hardship, such as terminal illness.

You cannot:

- Get married in the chapel if you have no affiliation with the college
- Have a non-Christian or civil wedding (see Legal Requirements below)
- Write your own vows, or omit or change **any part** of the Church of England marriage service if you are having a legal marriage service (see Legal Requirements below)
- Have a full reception in hall or elsewhere in college
- Ask a photographer or videographer to take photographs or film during your wedding ceremony, except from the antechapel and organ loft
- Use the chapel livestreaming system
- Throw confetti, rice, rose petals or anything else
- Include your dog or another pet in the ceremony unless it is a trained assistance dog. Note that emotional support animal certification is not recognised in the UK.
- Fly a drone

We cannot:

- Give you exclusive access to the college. Summer schools, conferences and graduations may all be taking place. Postgraduate students are resident all summer.
- Promise that there will be no works in the chapel (including to the organ), the cloisters, the college or the gardens at the time of your wedding.
- Provide parking except for the wedding party, photographer, florist and anyone with access needs.
- Provide accommodation for you or your guests, although you are welcome to email rooms@new.ox.ac.uk to check if we are offering student bedrooms as Bed and Breakfast accommodation. Chapel staff will not organise this for you.
- Print your service sheets, send out invitations, or do any other admin tasks other than preparing the legal documentation.
- Assist you with booking a reception venue, florist, photographer, videographer, accommodation or anything else not directly related to the ceremony and post-ceremony drinks.

Sometimes couples don't want all of the trappings of a wedding. If you want a simple marriage ceremony with fewer than 10 guests we may be able to make other arrangements. Please contact the Dean of Divinity to discuss this.

LEGAL REQUIREMENTS

Marriage law in the UK is complex. If you would like a legal ceremony in chapel, please read these notes carefully to determine if your marriage can go ahead, and if you will be happy with the necessary restrictions.

Who can be married or have a blessing in the chapel?

from New College:

- Current students and their children
- Current staff and their children

- Current and former fellows (including emeritus and honorary fellows) and their children
- Former students (but not their children)
- Former long-serving staff (but not usually their children)

from New College School:

- Current staff and their children
- Current chorister parents (but not usually their non-chorister children)
- Former choristers (but not their children)
- Former long-serving staff (but not usually their children)
- Former pupils of New College School will be considered on an individual basis

There are very rarely exceptions for someone who does not fit these categories with a close connection to the chapel (not the college).

What kind of legal marriages can take place in the chapel? Only marriages conducted according to the rites and ceremonies of the Church of England are legal in New College Chapel; this is a matter of law which is beyond the college's control.

To be legal, your marriage ceremony will need to include **all** of the words of the Church of England marriage service (available [here](#)). This is a legal matter and there is **no flexibility**, as the officiating priest will sign the Marriage Document to affirm that they have married you according to the rites and ceremonies of the Church of England. You can make the ceremony your own by choosing music and readings, and the priest can customise the final prayers for you and your family, but you cannot write your own vows, or omit, change or vary the order of the words of the service as approved by the Church of England.

Can we ask a priest we know to take our wedding? We are always pleased for couples to ask a priest who knows you or your family well to take your service. That person should be in good standing in the Church of England and will need to provide a reference from their bishop or archdeacon. (See below if you would like a Roman Catholic priest or minister from another church to take your wedding).

Can we have a (non-legal) blessing ceremony? If you are already married and can produce a marriage certificate you can have a Church of England blessing ceremony in the chapel. This is often an option for couples who for family reasons want to have ceremonies in more than one country; visa rules may still apply and it is your responsibility to ensure that you comply.

Can I have a Roman Catholic or other Christian wedding? If you wish to have a Roman Catholic priest or a minister of another Christian Church to officiate at your wedding they must either share the role with a Church of England priest (who will have to take all of the legal parts of the ceremony), or you must make other arrangements for a legal ceremony (such as a civil wedding at a registry office) and have a non-legal blessing ceremony in chapel. To have a blessing ceremony you must first show a marriage certificate. You will need to find the priest or minister yourself; he or she should be in good standing in their church. The college reserves the right to approve your choice of minister or priest.

Can I marry my same-sex partner in the chapel? We are very happy to host blessings of same-sex civil weddings in the chapel; please do speak with us about what is possible. We deeply regret that legally binding same-sex marriages are not yet possible in the chapel, as the law prohibits Church of England clergy from officiating at (legally binding) same-sex marriages, and no other form of legal marriage is possible in the chapel or college.

Can a divorced person be married in the chapel? If one or both of you have previously been married or in a civil partnership, the priest officiating at your (legal) marriage will need to seek the permission of the Bishop of Oxford for your marriage to go forward. Permission is usually granted except if your current relationship was responsible for the break-up of your previous marriage. This is a legal matter that is beyond the college's control; the Faculty Office will not issue a licence without the Bishop's written permission.

What are the citizenship requirements? Special marriage licence applications are usually straightforward for British citizens and EU citizens with settled or pre-settled status. If you do not meet these criteria we advise you to obtain legal advice as soon as possible. We cannot offer legal advice and take no responsibility for ensuring that a special licence will be granted.

Can we have a civil wedding? The college is not licensed to host legal civil marriages of any kind in the chapel or anywhere else, and has no plans to obtain a licence.

Can we have a non-Christian ceremony? The chapel is a Christian place of worship and marriages of other faiths are not possible there. As New College is a Christian foundation, and marriages are not one of our core charitable functions, we regret that we are unable to offer other options to non-Christian couples.

SPECIAL LICENCE

If you have decided you want a legal marriage in the chapel, you will need to obtain a special licence from the Archbishop of Canterbury: see <https://www.facultyoffice.org.uk/special-marriage-licences/couples/do-i-need-a-special-marriage-licence/>

You must apply online for this special licence with the priest who will be officiating at your wedding. There is a fee attached to this, charged by the Archbishop's faculty office (c. £300+, rising annually). You should apply for the licence several months before your wedding. After you have submitted the application, one of you will need to swear an affidavit affirming your details. This can be done at the Faculty Office in Westminster, or in the presence of a Church of England priest (usually the priest who is officiating at your wedding). The licence will be posted to the officiating priest (NOT to you) about two or three weeks before your wedding. If one or both of you is not a UK national you will need to attend an interview in person; please consult the Faculty Office well in advance.

You DO NOT need to arrange for banns to be read; that process is for marriages in parish churches only.

PLANNING YOUR CEREMONY

The priest taking your wedding will meet with you to get to know you and to discuss your plans and to apply for your licence if you are having a legal marriage. The Dean of Divinity of New College is usually available to take about half of weddings in the chapel. She usually meets with couples in the autumn before their wedding and is not usually able to meet sooner than that, unless your situation is especially complicated. The Chapel Administrator can answer questions about the planning of your ceremony.

When the Dean of Divinity is unavailable she can arrange for another Church of England priest to officiate who would also take you through the application for the licence and plan the service with you. If you prefer you may have the ceremony taken by someone who knows you, such as your local parish priest or school chaplain, or (for a non-legal blessing following a civil marriage) a Roman Catholic priest or minister of another Christian church. The officiant must be in good standing with the Church of England or another Christian church, and must be prepared to plan the ceremony with you and (for a legal Church of England marriage) to apply for the licence with you. Please confirm the arrangements with the Chapel Administrator at the time of booking your ceremony date.

What is the capacity of the chapel? The seating capacity of the chapel is 200.

Is the chapel accessible? The Chapel Administrator is happy to discuss your access needs. The antechapel, chapel and cloisters are accessible via low ramps, and there is a step-free route through the college. There is some step-free seating and space for wheelchairs. Couples and witnesses usually use the short flight of steps up to the sanctuary (altar area); adaptations can be arranged to suit your needs.

There is no running water in the chapel and the nearest toilets, including accessible facilities, are a short walk away.

There is a sound system and we are in the process of replacing our outdated relay system with a hearing loop.

What music can I have? The Assistant Organist (assistant.organist@new.ox.ac.uk) will work with you to arrange music for your service, and will provide you with a schedule of fees. Musicians prefer cash on the day and your arrangement is directly with them. Filming your marriage will incur additional fees in accordance with musicians' rights. The full Choir of New College is not available to sing at weddings as they take place during the school holidays, but individual adult members of the choir often sing at weddings.

Who designs the service sheet? The priest who is taking your wedding will send you a template and work with you to put the service together, and will need to approve the final draft. You are responsible for arranging to have it printed and delivered to the college in time for your rehearsal. The Chapel Administrator can supply college crests or images of the college if required.

What about parking and other practical arrangements? You will need to contact the Chapel Administrator several weeks before the wedding to arrange the details with regard to cars, parking, access to the chapel for the florist, etc. The New College Lane entrance can be opened

for the bride just before the service and for the departure of the couple at the end. The bridal car(s) may drive into the main quadrangle. Limited parking will be available for the immediate family, photographer, florists, and guests with access needs in Holywell Quad.

Can I have flowers? The chapel is very large and many couples find that smaller flower arrangements do not have much impact. If you wish to have flowers we recommend one or two large arrangements. There are often two weddings on the same day, and it is therefore possible for couples to share flowers by arrangement.

It is your responsibility to organise flowers, and the chapel cannot provide florists' equipment. Florists may not pin arrangements to the woodwork. Please ask your florist to contact the Chapel Administrator well in advance to arrange access.

Will there be any building work? We do our utmost to ensure that any work is scheduled after wedding dates, but there are sometimes emergencies, and it is therefore possible, though extremely unlikely, that there may be work in the antechapel, cloisters or quadrangles, or on the organ. We accept no responsibility for any disruption to your wedding caused by small-scale works, and will only offer a refund in the unlikely event that the ceremony must be cancelled or postponed because the chapel is closed by emergency works. In addition, there may be roadworks nearby that are outside of our control.

What happens on the day? A rehearsal slot will be reserved for you the day before, usually at 5.00 or 6.00pm. Please confirm which hour would suit you best.

If you are having a choir or musicians, rehearsals will be arranged before the wedding service. There will be access to the chapel in the morning (or previous day) for florists.

The Chapel Manager or a deputy will be present at your wedding, and will be responsible for security, lighting, and setting up all the practical aspects of the service. You will also need to instruct a number of guests to act as ushers, and to give out service sheets.

The priest or Chapel Manager will show your photographer and videographer where they can be during the ceremony. Photographs or video may be taken in the ante-chapel before and after the wedding, from the organ loft without flash during the ceremony, and in the sanctuary only during the signing of the marriage document. Drone flying is not permitted.

Can I have a reception? You may have drinks and canapes and take photographs in the cloisters for an hour after your service. Any food and drink must be provided by the college caterers. You should arrange this directly with the Catering Manager (brian.cole@new.ox.ac.uk) approximately six months prior to the date of your wedding. Full meals or receptions in the hall or other college spaces are not possible.

How do I get a marriage certificate? At the ceremony you and your witnesses will sign a Marriage Document (one side of A4) that the priest will deliver to the registry office the following week. You will need to purchase a marriage certificate from the Oxford registry office or the General Registry Office. This can be done online after your wedding and you must do it yourselves. We cannot provide advice about the processing time for marriage certificates or assist if there are delays or problems with the process, but please do let us know if you are informed that your Marriage Document has not been received or processed.

BOOKING YOUR CEREMONY

Please contact the Chapel Administrator to enquire about available dates. It is helpful if you can specify why you are entitled to be married in the chapel (see Legal Requirements above) and what type of ceremony you wish to have. When your marriage date has been confirmed, the Chapel Administrator will send you a link to a form so that we can keep accurate records of your marriage.

How much does it cost? There is a single fee of £1575 + VAT to be married in the chapel:

£375 + VAT must be paid as a non-refundable deposit as soon as you have fixed your wedding date.

An invoice for the balance of £1200 + VAT will be sent to you 3 months before your wedding date, for payment at least 2 months in advance of the wedding.

Special rates are available for college staff. The chapel office will confirm these individually.

In addition, the Archbishop's Licence costs approximately £300+, payable directly to the Faculty Office.

The college does not profit from weddings, and usually takes a loss, chiefly because of the significant loss of tourist income that is unavoidable when there is a wedding or other large event.[†] Additional donations are appreciated to help cover these costs.

What if our circumstances change? The deposit is non-refundable. The college will not refund the fee if you cancel your wedding within one calendar month of the service. Extenuating circumstances may be taken into account at the college's discretion.

Payment of the deposit constitutes your agreement to abide by these guidelines.

[†] It is not possible to host a wedding and keep the college open to tourists; please do not ask for a reduction of the fee on this basis.