

# What's so great about a Church of England wedding?

**G**enna (31) and Michael (29) Quigley met in Tunbridge Wells in 2009, and married at the Church of St James there in June 2014. Like many couples, they set up home together before deciding to marry. Genna said, "We both still lived at home with our respective dads at this point, but after a couple months of being together Michael moved in with my dad and me. Then after being together just shy of a year we moved into our first home – a little flat in Tunbridge Wells. We were engaged about three-and-a-half years later."

Although Genna's parents are divorced, she had always wanted to be married and had no reservations about the institution. She said, "I've always wanted to get married. It wasn't something Michael ever needed, but he knew that it was important for me. About a year after we saved up and bought our first home together, a ring finally appeared! I say finally because his mother had given him the family ring (his great grandmother's) two years earlier! I had actually found it twice because he is so bad at hiding things – or, as he says, I could sniff it out!"

Michael's parents are also divorced. He said, "I went to St Andrew's school in Edenbridge, so as a child I went to church and school Mass. Once I went to secondary school I wasn't a



Photos by Martin Briggs at Briggs Photographic

regular church-goer; neither of my parents are very religious but my grandmother is. She played a big part of her parish in Godstone and was a member of the General Synod. My parents divorced in my teenage years but I'm not sure whether that actually changed my views on marriage. It was never something I saw myself doing when I was younger. It wasn't until I met Gen that marriage became something factored into my future."

Vicars are able to decide whether they are comfortable marrying a couple when one of

that couple has been divorced. This is not the case for a couple who may have divorce in the family, so there was every reason why Genna and Michael should be welcomed into the church. Genna said, "Although my parents are divorced, they were married for 25 years. I had a wonderful upbringing and great parents to look to for advice or a basis for future relationships. Marriage is something I have always wanted and even though my parents couldn't make theirs work, that hasn't altered my view on marriage

and what I think it stands for. If anything, it makes me more determined to work at ours."

Genna was raised as a Catholic, attending St Augustine's Catholic Primary School and St Gregory's Catholic Secondary School. She said, "Since leaving school, I have not been a regular church-goer. My dad is Church of England though, so I go with him at Easter or other random occasions. When I was younger my mum would take us to Catholic Church every Sunday and at school I did take my first Holy Communion. Thinking about it now, I guess I would say Church and religion were a big part of my childhood; they were definitely always there." Like a lot of young couples today, Michael was concerned about finance and future

security. He was also worried about the day getting out of control. He said, "I was more reluctant to get married, not because of the actual idea of marriage but more the wedding day itself. It can sometimes be what I like to call a 'circus', with all the politics of the day and the demands on the couple."

In contrast, Genna had never really contemplated adult life without being married. She said, "It never felt like a decision to marry in a church – for me, it went without saying. My Dad is a religious man; he attends church, does readings and plays a part in the life of the church. (He's also in charge of vacuuming and he actually vacuumed the aisle after the wedding ceremony, to clear up the flower petals from our flower girl!) Michael's nan is religious too. We chose

both of them to do our readings on the day along with one of our ushers, so we knew it would mean a lot to them to have our wedding in a church."

Friends and family often focus on the wedding day, but for the couple, aside of the planning, there is also some 'wedding preparation' to be done in conjunction with the vicar. Michael said, "It was good to meet the vicar beforehand and get to know him before the service. I was actually surprised at how much I enjoyed the day after my initial fears. I was nervous waiting for Gen to arrive, but as the service went on we both started to relax. The part I remember the most is the vows, you do forget everyone's there and it's such an important moment. I wouldn't have had any service other than a church service. I am a complete traditionalist, so the idea of not having a Church service didn't even factor in my thoughts; it was always going to be that."

Genna had always imagined a Church wedding. She said,

**"I couldn't imagine a wedding with no mention of God. I knew with a civil ceremony there are no prayers or readings involving God and it just wouldn't feel right to me."**

"Michael is a real traditionalist, so to him getting married in a church was a no-brainer!"

The Church of England has tried to make access to church weddings as easy as possible for everyone, and has recently changed the rules. As long as a couple can demonstrate



Photos by Martin Briggs at Briggs Photographic



Photos by Martin Briggs at Briggs Photographic

any proper connection to a parish church, they can ask to be married there. Genna said, "We married in St James' Church, which is the one my dad attends. We wanted to get married in a church that meant something to us. We first thought of the church Michael's parents got married in and it's actually where his grandparents are buried. Since neither of us grew up in the parish of Godstone, we felt we wanted to marry nearer to our home, so we chose dad's church."

Anxieties about meeting the vicar were soon dispelled, as Genna recalls.

**"We absolutely loved our vicar! The Rev Canon Jim (Stewart) was really helpful beforehand."**

"We went over to his house a month before our big day, and he went through the service with us, explaining every section of the service including the importance of the vows. He related the service back to

his own memories and what he has encountered through his years. It was a really lovely part to our wedding build-up. I think because of that our service felt so personal, it was the best part of the day. We had our rehearsal the week before and that was when it started to feel real. I remember being really emotional the day after. The gravity of what I was about to do really hit me. But it was great! Jim knew that we'd be nervous and we would have so much to take in; so he assured us that he'd help us through on the day and if we forgot anything he'd guide us through it all and cover any mistakes we might make. He was brilliant through the service, helping us with where to be, and pacing us if we spoke too quickly." We were both really nervous at the beginning of the service but when it comes to the vows you forget that there is a church full of people watching you. It felt like it was just us and what we were saying was just to

each other. We are so happy we had a Church service and we wouldn't have done it any other way. Now I have such a personal connection with St James' church, I think I'll definitely be going more than my once a year trip!

Philosophically, Michael was concerned with the longer-term future, but after the event he said, "My priority was to get us a house and a firm base for our future, the wedding came second. I pretty much left Gen to the planning, which she was more than happy with! We had a brilliant day and I would say people should definitely not feel that they can't get married in a church because they aren't regular church-goers. As long as it means something to you, I think it's something people should think of. We had a great experience and are really happy with it all."

For more information about the Church weddings visit [www.yourchurchwedding.org](http://www.yourchurchwedding.org)