

Guide to Performing Religious Ceremonies and Legally Binding Ceremonies in Denmark

The Evangelical Lutheran Church in Denmark (folkekirken) is the largest denomination in the country, with 72% of the population as members. Each year, thousands of ceremonies such as baptisms, confirmations, weddings, and funerals are performed. For pastors outside folkekirken, navigating the process of registering ceremonies and obtaining licenses can be confusing. This guide provides an overview and explanations of each ceremony.

Registration as a Faith-Based Community

Denmark's Ministry of Ecclesiastical Affairs, led by a government-appointed minister, ensures that folkekirken functions as an independent structure within the Danish governmental framework. The Ministry also oversees religious matters for any faith-based community not part of folkekirken. You can register as a faith community in Denmark, which is not a requirement but offers benefits such as tax exemptions and a standing wedding license. Registration requires transparent bookkeeping, annual general assemblies, and at least 50 members with the right to live and work in Denmark.

[Read more about registration as a faith-based community.](#)

Baptism

Baptisms can be performed without permission, nor do you have to register a baptism. They carry no legal weight in the Danish system, and there is no requirement for any form of education of the person performing the baptism. Folkekirken is the exception from this rule though. As it has been given a special status within the Danish Constitution, a baptism in folkekirken would be registered in the church books, and you will automatically be enrolled as a member of folkekirken.

Folkekirken, being Lutheran, does not permit 2nd baptism (anabaptism), but it will recognize any type of baptism no matter how it was performed. An official certificate of baptism is given when baptized in folkekirken, and can always be obtained by contacting your local parish within folkekirken.

Confirmation

Not all denominations perform confirmations. If you do, they carry no legal weight in the Danish system, and there is no requirement for any form of education of the person performing the confirmations. You can read more on our webpage on confirmations here.

Weddings

Weddings do require a license to be legally binding. In this text we will run through the different possibilities. It is not an exhaustive list of requirements but the most important.

Civil marriage

The easiest way is simply to ask the couple to enter a civil marriage. These are normally performed at city hall and are legally binding. After that has been performed, a religious ceremony can be carried out. There is no requirement for a religious ceremony when the couple has entered a civil

marriage, as the ceremony carries no legal weight in Denmark. No one under 18 can be married in Denmark, and Denmark do not recognize marriages performed abroad if either the bride or bridegroom was under 18 at the time of the marriage. You can read more on weddings here [if you wish to get married in Denmark \(borger.dk\)](#)

Marriage in folkekirken

Weddings in folkekirken are legally binding and will automatically be registered in the civil registration system by the church. At least one of either the bride or the bridegroom needs to be members of folkekirken. Pastors outside folkekirken cannot perform weddings on behalf of folkekirken. They can only be done by a pastor in folkekirken.

Legally binding marriages performed outside of folkekirken

If you are a pastor in a church outside of folkekirken, it is possible to obtain a license to perform marriages that can be legally binding. There's no legal difference between a wedding performed outside of folkekirken and one performed in folkekirken, if it is done by an officiant with license. There are two types of licenses, ad hoc or standing license. To obtain it, it is a requirement that the officiant is a member of a registered denomination. Your local congregation therefore must be recognized on its own or be a local chapter of a national denomination that's recognized.

Requirements to obtain a license

For ad hoc licenses you must apply by the Ministry of Ecclesiastical Affairs, prove that you are a member of a recognized denomination, that you have command of the Danish language, and that you have finished a course in Danish family law, freedom and democracy. You can apply to attend the course through the Ministry of Ecclesiastical affairs. After that, you can apply for the ad hoc license. It is also a requirement to send in a description of the marriage rituals to be used in the ceremony.

Requirements to perform the marriage after license has been obtained

To perform the marriage, you must obtain a "prøvelsesattest" (preliminary license for legality of marriage). These are issued by the local kommune. You must apply at least one month before the ceremony. For the ceremony itself, two witnesses must be present. They will sign the physical marriage certificate. The officiant, the bride and bridegroom must also sign the certificate. When all required signatures have been carried out, and the preliminary license for legality of marriage has been signed, the marriage is legally binding.

Standing marriage license

Same requirements as above, but also a clear child certificate. These can be obtained via the Police online. They show if you have any convictions for harm to children. If that is the case, you cannot obtain a marriage license.

Funerals in Denmark

Handling the death of a loved one involves significant emotional strain and numerous responsibilities. Here are the key steps and considerations for arranging funerals in Denmark, and you can read more in Danish [here](#):

Death Certification

When a person dies, a medical doctor must issue a death certificate. This certificate is essential for initiating burial or cremation procedures. The death certificate is forwarded to the Danish burial authority, which is folkekirken, regardless of the deceased's religious affiliation.

Funeral Arrangements

Application: To perform a funeral, you must apply through the local funeral authority, usually the nearest folkekirken pastor, even if the deceased was not a member of folkekirken. Applications are typically processed online.

Timing: Funerals must occur within 14 days of death unless an exemption is granted by the burial authority. The ceremony cannot happen within the first 24 hours after death, as it takes time to issue the death certificate and register the burial.

Ceremony Location: The funeral does not have to take place in a church. It can be conducted directly from the crematorium or any other suitable building. The casket is usually closed during the ceremony.

Burial Sites

Burials in Denmark are regulated and must occur in designated burial spots, which can be religious or civil cemeteries. Here are the details:

Cemeteries: Most cemeteries are managed by the local kommune or folkekirken. These include Christian, Muslim, Jewish, and other religious burial grounds, as well as civil burial sites.

Burial Rituals: Different denominations can perform their own burial rituals within these designated sites. If a community wishes to inaugurate its burial plots, this must be done as part of an official burial ground and requires local authority permission.

Exemptions: In rare cases, exemptions can be granted for alternative burial practices, such as scattering ashes on private property or in the ocean or transferring the body abroad. Approval must be sought from the local burial authority.

Undertaker Services

While it is not mandatory to use an undertaker, it is highly advisable due to the complexity of funeral arrangements. Here's what undertakers can do:

Logistics: Undertakers manage all logistical aspects of the funeral, including transporting the body, arranging the ceremony, and ensuring compliance with legal requirements.

Documentation: They assist with the necessary paperwork, including obtaining death certificates and applying for burial or cremation permits.

Ceremony Coordination: Undertakers coordinate with religious leaders, if applicable, and arrange for the location and timing of the funeral service.

Civil Funerals: They can also perform civil funerals if the family prefers a non-religious ceremony.

Support: Undertakers provide emotional support and practical advice to the bereaved family, helping them navigate the process during a difficult time.