

18 March 2020

Wedding Preliminaries

The Church of England guidance states that weddings services can take place but subject to the rules and guidance on social distancing. Any wedding in a church would need to be on a very small scale. It notes that only five people need to be present at a marriage service: the couple and the clergy person, plus two witnesses.

The Registrar has issued the following guidance to clergy concerning wedding preliminaries;

Banns

- Those which have been read and completed are valid for three months as per normal arrangements
- Those which are partially read and cannot be completed due to the cessation of Sunday worship are not valid and should be considered as incomplete. If a fee has been taken it should be refunded as the Banns were not completed.
- New Banns may not be started due to the cessation of Sunday worship. It would be inappropriate to read Banns in private.

Common Licence

- If Banns cannot be read but the wedding falls within the present 12 week isolation period then a Common Licence should be arranged through a surrogate.
- In Hereford Diocese please contact the Archdeacons for advice on who to approach for obtaining a Common Licence. Even if there is a surrogate in your Deanery please go via the Archdeacons as some clergy are having to self-isolate or are in high risk groups and have declined to act during this period.

Qualification for a Common Licence

One or both parties must:

- have resided in the parish where the marriage is to take place for at least 15 days immediately preceding the date when the affidavit for the Common Licence is sworn; or
- be on the church electoral roll; or
- one of the parties must be able to show a qualifying connection with the parish (Church of England Marriage Measure 2008).

Note that common licences are only valid for 3 months from the date of swearing the affidavit and would need to be re-applied for and the affidavit would need to be re-sworn if the wedding was to be postponed to a later date.

Superintendent Registrar's Certificate

- Where a Common Licence cannot be obtained then a couple can be directed to the local civil Superintendent Registrar however the normal residency rules apply and have not been relaxed.

There is a 28 day notice period (which can be increased to 70 days in the case of non-UK/EEA nationals) between the giving of Notice of Intended Marriage and the issue of the SRC. Therefore as the law presently stands, SRCs cannot be obtained at very short notice.

Special Licence

- In a small number of cases a Special Licence may be the only option. The normal rules for these still apply. Although they will be valid for 12 months instead of the normal 3.

Clergy should also ensure by arrangement with colleagues that there is a reserve minister available to conduct a wedding should they fall ill.

If in doubt please consult your Archdeacon

Annual Parochial Church Meetings (APCMs)

APCMs should where possible be delayed until the end of May – legally they can be held as late as 31st May. National Church may issue guidance concerning APCMs shortly but the Bishop has the power to formally change the date and we may ask Bishop Richard to exercise these powers if the isolation period is extended.

Communion

Clergy should not conduct any public services of communion mid week or behind closed doors in church for small gatherings or carry out home communions. Home Communion using reserved sacrament should also not be conducted.

The exception being where an individual is dying or requires last rites. Clergy should in these circumstances take necessary precautions to protect themselves and any family members present from the virus.