



LEICESTER DIOCESAN REGISTRY

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Guidance on proposed changes to marriage registers

Civil Partnerships, Marriages and Deaths (Registration etc.) Act 2019

The Civil Partnerships, Marriages and Deaths (Registration etc.) Act 2019 was passed in May 2019 and contains provisions affecting marriage registration which are likely to be introduced by the General Register Office (GRO) at the earliest in Spring 2020.

In a nutshell, these changes will:

- move away from the paper-based system to an electronic marriage register; and
- introduce a system whereby parties sign a single marriage document (and so replacing marriage registers and certificates issued at the time of the wedding), which will contain all the information to be entered into the new electronic marriage register.

As an added benefit, the marriage document will be in a form that will enable each party's mother's names to be included in the registration, as well as, or in place of, their fathers' names.

The changes

Practically, this will mean the following:

- officiating priests preparing the marriage document in advance of the wedding;
- the marriage document being signed by the couple, their witnesses and the officiating priest at the wedding (much in the same way that Registers are now);
- the couple needing to ensure that the marriage document is deposited at the local Register Office within 21 days of the wedding; and
- the local Superintendent Registrar recording the details and issuing the marriage certificate (for which there will be a fee).

If you have spotted a potential problem with this in that there is a tendency for couples to go on honeymoon immediately, or pretty soon after, their wedding, then fear not! The deposit of the document can be made on the couple's behalf.

The important thing to note here is that it is intended that it will be the couple's responsibility to ensure deposit of the marriage document, not the officiating minister.

How is it going to be put into practice?

The GRO envisage that clergy will have access to a secure online portal (and couples will be reminded by email if they have not deposited their marriage document within the 21 day period).

However, whilst this is being developed, the marriage document will be available in different formats, including a form that can be handwritten and one that will be 'type to print'.

Other marriage procedure changes

The procedure for Superintendent Registrar's Certificates (SRC) will change, too. This is important to know if one or both of your wedding couple is non-EEA or non-Swiss citizen.

The SRC will become a 'marriage schedule', produced by the Register Office the couple/individual go to and give notice. The Schedule will be signed by all parties (including you as officiating priest) once the marriage has taken place and then lodged with the Register Office within 7 days.

Marriage Registers

As soon as these changes are introduced, the marriage register books that you hold in your churches will need to be closed. As incumbent (or for parishes in a vacancy the Area or Rural Dean), you will – when the time comes and not before - need to strike through every unused entry in your marriage registers. After that, one copy, along with any of your unused stocks of marriage certificates will need to be sent to the local Superintendent Registrar. The other can eventually be deposited in the usual way in the Diocesan Record Office.

Records of marriages

The Church of England may introduce a marriage register book to record weddings in Anglican churches. This will be a non-legal non-certificate issuing record, much as baptisms, confirmations and burials are recorded. As such, it will have nothing to do with the GRO process described above.

When will all this come to pass?!

Regulations need to be laid before both Houses of Parliament before these changes can be put into effect. These Regulations have not yet been published and it is not yet known when they will be. Spring 2020 is the earliest that we have heard so far.

Training

Representatives of the Faculty Office and the legal offices of the CofE and Church of Wales have been in conversation with the GRO in relation to these changes and conscious of the training that will need to be arranged for 20,000+ clergy, have been arguing that a reasonable time needs to be allowed prior to implementing these changes.

The GRO will provide some training but this may be limited. The Faculty Office is going to keep the Diocesan Registrars informed about the process and we will keep you informed as we find out more.

A provisional date of 29 April 2020 has been booked with the Registrar for clergy training at St Martins House, 7 Peacock Lane, Leicester LE1 5PZ.

Mothers' names on marriage registers

In the interim, to put into effect the proposed change of including mothers' names in the marriage register, we understand that the CofE has offered to allow existing registration books to be used, and where it says "father", the name of the mother can be added in brackets.

If you have any queries, please do not hesitate to contact us: registry@stoneking.co.uk

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