

Diocese of Manchester - Guidance on forthcoming marriage services

Now that public worship has been suspended until further notice and social distancing applies, the issues below will affect any forthcoming marriage services.

It is important to note that, for the time being, clergy need only be concerned with marriage services which are due to be held in a parish where they will be the officiating priest. Marriage services which are due to proceed in another parish or diocese will be the sole concern of the officiant there.

Current national guidance

This is constantly evolving and is therefore subject to change. However, the current advice is as follows:

'Wedding services can take place but subject to the rules and guidance on social distancing'. Therefore any wedding in a church would need to be on a very small scale. Only five people need to be present at a marriage service: the couple and the clergy person, plus two witnesses.'

Pastoral considerations

It is vital that clergy, if they have not already done so, contact all couples who are due to be married in their parishes over the next two months. The couples concerned will need to be reassured and given all information presently available.

The most important message for couples is that no immediate decision regarding whether or not to proceed with the service may be necessary. We would advise that, where marriages are not due to take place before June of this year, the clergy concerned review the situation with the couple again approximately six weeks before the service and then seek any appropriate advice from the Registry.

For now, you may wish to consider the following suggested pastoral guidance:

- Talk to the couple about postponing and help them find a new date if possible.
- Suggest that if the wedding goes ahead there could be a blessing service at a later date.
- If the couple want to go ahead, suggest that the quiet ceremony could perhaps be live-streamed.
- At any service which is held, include prayers for those who cannot be present.
- If a couple want to cancel, or there is no choice but cancel, you must refund their legal fees in full, including any deposit taken.

Should a couple wish to proceed with altered plans and the reading of banns of marriage has already been completed (see below,) it will be a matter for the officiating priest to consider and agree with the proposed arrangements.

Where banns have not been read in full (or at all) couples who are minded to proceed will need to be aware of the information below.

Banns of marriage

The Marriage Act requires banns of matrimony to be published **on three Sundays** preceding the solemnization of the marriage **during either the principal service or both the principal service and another service**. Without any services taking place it is currently impossible to comply with the legislation.

Accordingly for any marriage service to proceed over the coming weeks, it will be necessary to have either:

- fully completed the reading of banns in all appropriate parishes no later than Sunday 15 March; or

- a common licence, obtained from the Diocesan Registry (see below); or
- a special licence, obtained from the Archbishop of Canterbury, via the Faculty Office in London; or
- a Superintendent Registrar's certificate, obtained from the secular Registrar.

Common licence for marriage

Where it has not been possible to start or complete the required reading of banns, an application for a common licence should be made to the Registry. A common licence, once issued, will be valid for a period of three months.

To make an application for a common licence, the Registry must be provided with the following:

- Evidence of nationality for the bride and groom (as per the checklist below);
- Evidence of the couples right to marry in the parish concerned (as per the Church of England Marriage Measure Application Form below)

The same qualifying criteria apply as for banns generally apply but if the right to marry was in the process of being established solely by attendance at services and it will now be impossible to complete the required six month period, a common licence will not be appropriate. In such cases, the couple will need a special licence from the Archbishop of Canterbury;

- A completed application form for a common licence (attached), signed by both the incumbent and the couple concerned;
- A letter from the priest who is to officiate to request a common licence, as per the suggested template attached.

Please be aware that where either of the couple has previously been married, the House of Bishops guidance concerning marriage in the church after divorce should be considered, details of which can be found using the links below:

<http://www.facultyoffice.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2013/12/Divorce-HoB-Advice.pdf>

<https://www.churchofengland.org/sites/default/files/2017-11/MarriageAFTERdivorceFORM.pdf>

Documentation should be sent to the Registry electronically. It will be necessary for one of the couple to meet with either the Registrar or Deputy Registrar in order to formally swear an affidavit and obtain the common licence.

Contacting the Registry

The Diocesan Registry, based on the 5th floor of Church House, is currently open but we are restricting access. You will need to pre-book any appointments. We are requesting communication by email rather than telephone, so that if the Registry does close there is an electronic record which can be accessed remotely.

The contact details for the Diocesan Registry are as follows:

Telephone No: 0161 839 0092 (office open Monday to Friday 9:30am to 5:15pm)

Registrar - Jane Monks:

Email: jm@mandioreg.co.uk

Deputy Registrar - Donna Myers:

Email: dm@mandioreg.co.uk

NB. Forms being sent as separate documents:

1. Evidence of nationality checklist for the bride and groom;
2. Church of England Marriage Measure Application Form;
3. Application form for a common licence; and
4. Template letter for officiating priest to request a common licence.