

Changes in Marriage Registration

As many of you will know, the Civil Partnerships, Marriages and Deaths (Registration etc) Act 2019 came into force earlier this year. It has three main provisions: first, the extension of civil partnerships to couples not of the same sex; second, to allow for the mother's name to be entered on marriage certificates and registers; and third, to provide for electronic registration of all marriages in England and Wales.

The element that most concerns clergy and others responsible for arranging weddings, is the marriage registration changes. It was originally intended that these should come into effect at the beginning of December 2019, however, the necessary Marriage Regulations have yet to be laid before Parliament and we now understand that the earliest the changes are likely to come into force is April 2020. Weddings should therefore continue to be registered in the same way as previously until further information and instructions are issued.

In due course, the existing marriage register books in the churches will be closed and withdrawn and the officiating priest and couple etc will complete a "marriage document" which will then be the responsibility of the couple to lodge at the civil Registry within 21 days of the wedding for registration to be carried out and a marriage certificate issued. There will be a central digital marriage register for all marriages which will replace the present register books.

It is likely that a new (church) weddings register will be created for churches so that a record can be maintained in the parishes in the same way that baptisms, confirmations and burials are recorded at present. However, this will not be the legal record of the marriage and certificates may not be issued from it in the future.

It should be stressed that there is no change to marriage preliminaries – ie. banns, Common Licences, Special Licences and Superintendent's Registrar's Certificates – all of which remain unchanged.

Further information will be issued as soon as it is available and information on training and resources which will be provided by the General Register Office as well as the Diocesan Registry.

New Church Representation Rules

The new Rules come into force on 1st January 2020. They are available in hard copy from Church House Publishing and there is to be an on-line version available in due course.

The new Rules are easier to understand and navigate. The main changes are as follows:

1. Church electoral roll preparation and revision has been simplified and may be published electronically instead of in paper form. The roll as published should include every name but no other personal details.
2. APCMs must now be held between 1st January and 31st May – rather than 30th April. The APCM no longer appoints sidesmen as these are now appointed by the PCC. From 2020 those elected to serve as representatives on the Deanery Synod, are limited to two successive terms of office unless the APCM resolves to disapply this limit.
3. There is no longer a requirement to hold a minimum number of PCC meetings each year and the PCC is simply required to hold sufficient meetings to transact efficiently its business. Some business may now take place by correspondence (email or letter) at the discretion of the Chair.
4. Joint Councils for parishes that are in the same benefice, or in a plurality, or in a group ministry can now be established. It is possible for all the responsibilities of the PCC to be transferred to the Joint Council so that the individual PCCs go into abeyance. However, PCCs can resolve to retain certain functions and delegate only some to the Joint Council. Any PCC seeking to set up a Joint Council should speak to the Diocesan Registry at an early stage.
5. There is now mandatory provision for representation of mission initiatives (BMOs) where the Bishop directs and there is now full provision for use of email communication.

Assistance can be obtained from the Diocesan Registry but parishes are urged to obtain copies of the new Rules.