

Chichester Diocesan Registry



Winckworth
Sherwood

Banns and Marriages: Coronavirus (Covid 19) – 20 March 2020

Marriages

As at 20 March, the [guidance from the Church of England](#) states that weddings can still take place in church “with minimal numbers in attendance”. Numbers of those attending any wedding which does take place will need to be “strictly curtailed to the legal minimum, which is the priest, bride, groom and two witnesses”. Couples should also be made aware of possible cancellation if Government advice changes.

However, many couples might decide not to proceed with their wedding at this time due to the risks involved and the much reduced numbers of guests able to attend. If a wedding does take place on this basis, a service of Thanksgiving for Marriage might be arranged at a later date so that the marriage can be celebrated with others attending.

Banns

If public worship does not take place then banns cannot be published at the required ‘principal service’ on a Sunday in accordance with the Marriage Act 1949. Banns **cannot** be published by posting a note on a noticeboard outside of the church or by distributing a Notice Sheet by email and **cannot** be published during live streaming of a service.

In the absence of public worship, those who still wish to be married in a very small scale service and whose banns have not yet been called three times will need to obtain a Common Licence.

Establishing Worshipping Qualifying Connections

Many couples will have been in the process of establishing worshipping qualifying connections with particular churches to enable them to get married there. As public worship has been suspended they can no longer continue to do so. This means that they do not yet have a qualifying connection and cannot, therefore, apply for a Common Licence.

Common Licence

Those seeking a Common Licence will need to meet with a person appointed to facilitate the application process (known as a surrogate). That will involve the production of documentation, a physical meeting with a surrogate, the swearing of an oath and payment of a fee.

Given the high demand, appointments will only be made if a wedding is due to take place within the following seven days. If a wedding is due to take place on a Saturday, for example, then couples should seek to make an appointment no earlier than the Monday preceding it. This is to manage expectations (given the possibility of a change in the Government’s advice), reduce costs to applicants and to enable all applications to be processed in a prioritised way.

In the first instance contact should be made with the Diocesan Registry (ChichesterRegistry@wslaw.co.uk) to discuss whether a Common Licence is likely to be possible, to agree potential timetable for appointments, and so that the Registry can advise what documentation will be necessary as and when an appointment with a surrogate is made.

Darren Oliver | Deputy Diocesan Registrar