REGISTRY GUIDANCE NOTE HARRIS & HARRIS

**MARRIAGE OVERVIEW**

The Church’s teaching on marriage is summarised in Canon B 30 as follows: “…*according to our Lord’s teaching, marriage is in its nature a union permanent and lifelong, for better or worse, till death do us part, of one man with one woman, to the exclusion of all others on either side, for the procreation and nurture of children, for the hallowing and right direction of the natural instincts and affections, and for the natural society, help and comfort which one ought to have of the other, both in prosperity and adversity”*

Church of England clergy are licensed to carry out marriages within Anglican parish churches and a civil registrar is not required.

For a church wedding to take place, one of the couple needs to either live in the parish, be on the electoral roll of the parish or have a qualifying connection with it. This connection can only be one of the following:

* The person was baptised in the parish
* The person has been confirmed in the parish
* The person has at any time had his or her usual place of residence in the parish for at least 6 months;
* The person has at any time habitually attended public worship in the parish for at least 6 months
* The person’s parent has at any time during the person’s lifetime: had his or her usual place of residence in the parish for at least 6 months; or habitually attended public worship in the parish for at least 6 months
* The person’s parent or grandparent was married in the parish.

Anyone who lives in the parish is entitled to be married at the parish church but may be asked to complete a marriage preparation course. If one or both of the parties has previously been divorced, they should talk to the minister – the Church of England accepts that it is possible for a divorced person may marry again in church during the lifetime of a former spouse. Some priests may be willing to take such a marriage, others may not be prepared to do so, on grounds of conscience, and may not allow the use of their church either. The law of the land permits them this choice.

**Legal Preliminaries**

Before a church wedding can take place, the ecclesiastical preliminaries must be completed – either the calling of the banns, obtaining a common or special marriage licence or a Superintendent Registrar’s Certificate from the Register office.

**Banns**

Notice of the intended marriage must be read out three times in the church where the wedding is to take place and in the parish churches where the couple reside. Once the banns have been completed in all the necessary places, the wedding must take place within three months or they elapse. Banns fees are payable wherever they are called.

**Common Marriage Licence**

If banns are not possible for whatever reason, either not enough time or if one or both the bride and groom live outside of England and Wales, the Bishop can issue a common marriage licence, dispensing with the need to call the banns. Sometimes this is necessary if it is realised at the last minute that the banns have been forgotten or not completed and it can be arranged through the Diocesan Registry within a matter of days. A fee is payable.

**Special Marriage Licence**

If the couple does not have the necessary qualifying connection but has a strong reason why they wish to marry in a particular place or if there are important reasons why a wedding might need to take place somewhere that is not usually licensed for marriage, the Faculty Office of the Archbishop of Canterbury can advise on obtaining a special licence. https://www.facultyoffice.org.uk/special-marriage-licences/This might be appropriate if a marriage is planned within a hospital setting if someone is extremely ill. A fee is payable.

**Superintendent Registrar’s Certificate**

Banns or marriage licences are only possible if both the bride and groom can show that they are UK nationals or have settled status to remain in the UK. Until July 1st 2021, parties who are nationals of European Economic Area countries or Switzerland, can also marry through the ecclesiastical preliminaries, but following Brexit this will change and, along with all other nationals, the preliminary to the church wedding will need to be done through a Superintendent Registrar’s Certificate. Applications for this are made through the civil Register Office and a fee is payable.

**Form of wedding service**

There are fixed forms of service for a marriage within the Church of England fulfilling the requirements for a legal marriage. There is only a limited amount of flexibility and any particular requests should be discussed but may not be possible within the marriage service itself.

Church weddings can only take place between the hours of 8 a.m. and 6 p.m. and must take place inside the church building.

**Wedding Certificates**

At the present time, the minister who takes the wedding service will issue the wedding certificate to the couple. The Government has plans to introduce a new system whereby the marriage will need to be registered with the Register Office after the date of the wedding but no details of that scheme are yet available. A fee is payable for the wedding certificate and any copies.

For further information about any of these points, contact the Registry [bristolregistry@harris-harris.co.uk](mailto:bristolregistry@harris-harris.co.uk) or 01749 674747.