

The Coronavirus and Marriage in the Diocese of York

Currently no weddings can take place in England until further notice; this applies to all venues. Clergy are beginning to be approached by couples who are hoping to be married later this year and the following FAQs are intended as a guide for these conversations.

Couples are keen to know when weddings will be able to take place again so that they can book a new date. How should I advise them?

Currently we have no knowledge of when this will be possible and it is better not to speculate. You are advised not to take any new bookings for 2020 until there is more clarity.

Couples who have a wedding booked for later in the year are asking if they should cancel?

Again, speculation is best avoided – the current position is that weddings cannot occur until the Government advises otherwise. Whilst it is good for clergy to be supportive during this time, the actual decision as to when to cancel a wedding must rest with the couple.

The banns had been partly read before the wedding was postponed; do I need to start again? And if so, do I need to charge couples the banns fee again?

The reading of banns must be completed within 3 months, it does not have to be on successive Sundays. The reading of banns cannot occur via a live-streamed service. Therefore, unless public worship is restored within 3 months of the first reading, banns will need to be published again in their entirety before a certificate can be issued. No new fee should be charged.

A couple had begun to attend church for the six month period to establish a Qualifying Connection but are now unable to continue. How should I respond?

Where the couple had already begun to attend regularly and have been prevented from doing so by the suspension of services, they should be advised to resume attendance when services recommence again. The length of the 'gap' will still count towards their habitual attendance at public worship for the minimum of 6 months which is required; assuming that the clergy are convinced that there was a genuine intention to maintain this pattern of attendance. This does not apply to couples who had expressed such an intention but had not established a regular pattern of attendance.

So what do I say to couples who had hoped to establish a Qualifying Connection through attendance and now cannot do so?

It would be wise to speak with them soon about this. If they have no Qualifying Connection that enables marriage via Banns or a Common Licence then they have two options to marry in their preferred church:

- (i) Common Licence – however, this will require them to have arranged to reside in the parish where the marriage is to take place for at least 15 days immediately preceding the date when the affidavit for the Common Licence is sworn. Common Licences are issued for a three month period.
- (ii) An Archbishop of Canterbury's Special Licence – these enable a person to get married in a particular church where a special connection exists but the couple don't have a Qualifying Connection. Whilst every application will be considered on its merits, the Faculty Office will be particularly sympathetic to couples in these circumstances. Special licences are normally issued with a three month period of validity but this has temporarily been extended a one year validity period. More details can be found at www.facultyoffice.org.uk or by contacting

faculty.office@1thesanctuary.com . The fee for a Special Licence is £325; there is no suggestion that this will be reduced by the Faculty Office in the present circumstances.

Has anything changed about the use of Common Licences?

Everything, except the fee, remains the same. In order to qualify for the issue of a Common Licence one or both of the parties to the proposed marriage must:

- be on the church electoral roll; or
- be able to show a Qualifying Connection with the parish; or
- have resided in the parish where the marriage is to take place for at least 15 days immediately before the date when the affidavit for the Common Licence is sworn.

To apply for a Common Licence, couples apply direct to a Surrogate for Marriages. Clergy can get an up to date list of these from the Registry in York or by searching for 'Surrogates' on the diocesan CMS database. To obtain the Licence couples must meet the Surrogate in person to swear an affidavit that the couple's details are correct; it is not possible to do this by video or telephone conferencing.

Given the current closure of our buildings and the requirement for minimising social contact couples should not approach Surrogates at this point in time. However, in recognition of the current pressures upon couples organising weddings this year, the fee has temporarily been halved so that it is currently £100, made payable to York Diocesan Registry. The fee reduction applies for a period of 12 weeks from 23 March, or until the resumption of public worship, whichever occurs first.

I have a couple who were getting married by Common Licence but the wedding has been postponed, will the Licence still be valid?

Common Licences are only valid for 3 months from the date of swearing the affidavit and so would need to be re-applied for and the affidavit would need to be re-sworn if the wedding is postponed and occurs more than 3 months later. In these cases, I'm afraid that the applicable fee will need to be paid.

What happens if a couple were getting married with a Superintendent Registrar's Certificate?

These Certificates are normally only used when one of the parties to the marriage is a non-UK/EEA foreign national and are issued by the Civil Register Office. The validity period is twelve months but couples should be advised to consult the Civil Registrar over any questions that they have.

Can an emergency wedding in a hospital, hospice or home still occur?

Yes, a Special Licence will still be able to be obtained from the Faculty Office in the way it always has been. Where clergy think this might be needed, they are advised to contact the York Registry who are best placed to advise on the process.

This has been helpful but I need further advice – who should I approach?

It may depend on the question you wish to ask. The staff at York Registry remain available to all clergy, their contact details are registry@lf-dt.com or ring 01904 623487. Your Archdeacons and the Marriage Surrogates are also available to you.

16 April 2020