

Diocese of Gloucester

Guidance on applying for a common licence

1 Introduction

- 1.1 Most couples who marry in the Church of England do so by having their "Banns" read on three Sundays in their parish church, provided that both the bride and groom are British citizens, nationals of a country within the European Economic Area (EEA) or nationals of Switzerland.
- 1.2 However, if you fall within either of the following categories you will not be eligible for marriage by Banns and will therefore need to apply for a common licence before you can marry in a Church of England church:
- you or your partner are resident outside of England or Wales; or
 - you plan to marry in less than a month and therefore there is not sufficient time for Banns to be read.
- 1.3 Please note that if you and your partner both live in England or Wales and are both British citizens, or nationals of a member country of the EEA or Switzerland you can usually marry by Banns and may not need a common licence.
- 1.4 The process of applying for a common licence requires either the bride or groom to swear a formal oath before the Registrar or Deputy Registrar of the Diocese of Gloucester. However, before arranging a meeting for the oath to be sworn and the licence to be granted you will need to return some paperwork to us and make sure that you have certain documents available for production at the meeting (see further below).

Citizens of countries outside of the EEA and Switzerland

- 1.5 If either you or your partner are a national of a country outside of the EEA or Switzerland, then you will not be eligible to apply for a common licence, and will instead need to apply to the Superintendent Registrar for a Superintendent Registrar's Certificate (SRC).
- 1.6 Please contact your officiating minister if you require any information regarding applying for an SRC.

2 Eligibility for a common licence

- 2.1 To be eligible for a common licence **either** the bride or groom must be able to show **at least one** of the qualifying connections to the parish where they wish to marry:
- Resident of the parish
 - Previously resided in the parish for at least six months
 - Baptism in the parish
 - Confirmation in the parish
 - Parents or grandparents were married in the parish
 - One of your parents resided in the parish for at least six months during your lifetime
 - Entry on the Church Electoral Roll of the parish or "habitual attendance" at public worship for at least six months

Habitual attendance requires you to have attended public worship in the parish in question over a period of six months, at least once a month or, over a period of several years, at least three times a year on the same festivals, such as Christmas, Easter, Harvest Festival etc. Worship need not be on a Sunday but cannot be in a private place, such as a school or college.

Please bear in mind that this is a minimum level of attendance and your parish priest may set a different requirement for habitual attendance, although this requirement cannot be more onerous than the requirements for entry on the church electoral roll.

- Entry of one of your parents on the Church Electoral Roll or their habitual attendance at public worship in the parish for at least six months during your lifetime

2.2 In exceptional circumstances we will consider applications from couples who cannot meet any of the "qualifying connections" above but can meet the following condition.

- Staying in the parish for at least 15 full consecutive days immediately before meeting with the Registrar to swear the affidavit.

You will meet this condition whether your normal home is in the parish or if you stay with relatives, at a hotel or in a tent within the parish. However, you must personally be staying there. In addition you must ensure that you have arranged to meet with the Registrar to swear the affidavit and receive the licence on the first day immediately following your stay in the parish.

2.3 If you are unsure of whether you meet one of these conditions please contact us at an early stage.

3 Before the meeting

3.1 The attached "Questionnaire for applicants for a common licence" should be completed and returned to the Registrar by post or email **before** the meeting.

3.2 We will need to see proof of both your identity to ensure that you are British citizen, nationals of a member country of the EEA or nationals of Switzerland. If you both have a valid passport showing that you are a British citizen, an EEA or Swiss national or a valid EEA identity card, then please provide us with a copy of this document. If you do not have such a document, then please contact us so that we can discuss alternative acceptable forms of evidence of identity.

3.3 Proof of your eligibility for a common licence must also be sent to us before the meeting. The evidence required for each different "qualifying connection" is set out below:

- Current resident of the parish: driving licence, utility bill or council tax bill
- Residence in parish for six months in the past: utility or council tax bill from this period
- Baptism or confirmation in the parish: certified copy of entry onto a baptismal register or register book of confirmation or certificate of baptism or confirmation or letter from a minister who has seen the original register confirming the baptism or confirmation
- Entry onto Church Electoral Roll of yourself or your parent or six months regular worship in the parish: copy of Church Electoral Roll or confirmation from a minister of the your habitual attendance over a six month period

- Marriage of parents or grandparents in the parish: marriage certificate, certified copy of the entry in the marriage register or confirmation from a minister who has seen the original register confirming the marriage
- 3.4 If exceptional circumstances apply and you need to show eligibility for a common licence by staying in the parish for fifteen days we will need proof of this stay, such as a hotel bill.

4 Documents which you should bring to the meeting

4.1 You must bring the following original documents to your meeting with the Registrar unless otherwise agreed:

- Valid passports or valid EEA identity card
- Proof of both of your current addresses
 - Driving licence;
 - Utility bill which is under three months old;
 - Bank statement or credit card statement which is under three months old;
or
 - Council tax bill which is under three months old

(Please note that we cannot accept mobile phone bills);

- Evidence of your qualifying connection to the parish; and
- Fee of £200. Payment can be made by card or by cheque made payable to Veale Wasbrough Vizards LLP. Please note that a handling fee of 2% will be added to payments made by credit card.

4.2 If you are having problems obtaining the specified documents please contact us. There are often alternatives which we can accept.

4.3 **Applicants who have been married before will also need to provide the following documents:**

- Death Certificate of former spouse if they have died
- Decree Absolute if either of you has been previously divorced (a Decree Nisi is not sufficient)
- "Marriage after Divorce form": if either of you has been previously divorced and your former spouse is still alive, it will be necessary for you to complete this form, which must be signed by the minister who will be officiating at your wedding before a common licence can be issued. Please note that the vicar in question has the right to refuse to marry a couple where one party has been previously divorced, so you should check that the vicar is happy to proceed before making other arrangements.

OR

A letter from the minister who will be officiating at your wedding confirming that he or she is aware of your previous marriage and is happy to proceed on this basis will be sufficient in place of the form.

If the minister officiating at your wedding is not the usual parish priest of the church where you are to be married the minister officiating will also need to confirm that he has notified the usual parish priest of the proposed marriage and he has no objection.

5 Meeting with the Registrar

5.1 The Registrar will need to meet at least one of you in person and will usually ask to meet both of you together. The meeting can take place no more than three months before your wedding and in the normal way should take place no later than two weeks before the wedding.

5.2 This meeting will involve:

- the Registrar checking your documents;
- one of you swearing an affidavit, which is a formal oath in which you swear that there is no obstacle to your marriage and you are eligible for a common licence; and
- the Registrar issuing your marriage licence either at the end of the meeting or later by post.

6 Next Steps

6.1 Please send your completed Questionnaire, proof of identity (and Marriage after Divorce form if applicable) to the Registrar by post or email. Please ensure that all these forms are signed. You should also include your evidence of a connection to the parish.

6.2 Please contact us to arrange a meeting with the Registrar. The Registrar is available for meetings either in Gloucester (usually on Wednesday mornings) or at Bristol office (see below).

7 Contact details

7.1 By post: Jos Moule, Diocesan Registrar, Diocese of Gloucester, Narrow Quay House, Narrow Quay, Bristol, BS1 4QA

7.2 By telephone: 0117 314 5680

7.3 By email: gloucesterregistry@vww.co.uk