



## **Registration of United Reformed Church buildings for the marriages of same sex couples**

### **The changes in the law and the scope of this guide:**

- The Marriage (Same Sex Couples) Act 2013 provides that a building that has been certified in England and Wales as a place of religious worship may be registered for the solemnisation of marriages between couples of the same sex. The relevant provisions of the statute came into force on 13 March 2014 and significantly amended the provisions of the Marriage Act 1949.
- On Saturday 9 July 2016 the General Assembly of the United Reformed Church declared that the Church Meeting of each local United Reformed church in England and Wales is the relevant governing authority for the purpose of giving consent of the trustees of its building to seek the registration of that building for religious marriage ceremonies of couples of the same sex.
- It is therefore for the Church Meeting of each local United Reformed church to decide whether to have its building registered for the solemnisation of marriages between couples of the same sex.
- Before a marriage between two people of the same sex can be solemnised (conducted) in a United Reformed Church building, the building first needs to be registered for the solemnisation of marriages between couples of the same sex.
- This guide is limited to the registration of United Reformed church buildings in England and Wales for marriages of same sex couples.
- Marriage of same sex couples is lawful in Scotland but because Scottish marriage law is different to the law governing England and Wales, separate guidance will be issued under the authority of the United Reformed Church National Synod of Scotland. Likewise, legislation has been passed to enable couples of the same sex to marry on the Isle of Man, Guernsey and Jersey but this guide will not apply to United Reformed churches on the Isle of Man or on Guernsey or Jersey.

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## Chapter one

**General matters applicable to all church buildings used for worship by the United Reformed Church, whether solely in United Reformed Church use or whether in shared use with other denominations.**

### **How much does it cost to register a church building for the solemnisation of marriages between couples of the same sex?**

The cost at the time of publication (December 2018) – to register a church building that is already registered for the solemnisation of marriages of couples of the opposite sex – is £64.

Here is [the link](#) to the statutory instrument which stipulates the fee.

### **For how long does the registration of the building for the solemnisation of marriages between couples of the same sex last?**

The registration of the building for the solemnisation of marriages between couples of the same sex lasts until the registration is revoked for any reason. The payment of £64 for the registration of the building is a one-off payment.

### **The Marriage Register**

Marriages between couples of the same sex are recorded in the same marriage register books as the ones that have been used in the past and continue to be used for marriages between couples of the opposite sex.

### **The building**

A 'building' may be registered for marriages between couples of the same sex whether it is a separate building or whether it forms part of another building.

If you only want to register part of a building for the solemnisation of marriages between same sex couples, the 'building' to which the Church Meeting resolution and for which the application is made will relate only to those rooms.

### **What if we do not want marriages of same sex couples to take place in the church building?**

Local churches within the United Reformed Church that do not want to have marriages of same sex couples solemnised in their own church building are not compelled to do so.

Local United Reformed churches that do not want to address the question of whether to register a church building for the solemnisation of same sex marriages are not compelled to address the issue.

### **What if I (as minister) do not want to participate in marriages of same sex couples even when the building has been registered for the solemnisation of such marriages?**

Section 2 of the Marriage (Same Sex Couples) Act 2013 provides that in respect of same sex marriage a person may not be compelled by any means to:

- (i) Conduct a same sex marriage;
- (ii) Be present at, carry out, or otherwise participate in a same sex marriage; or
- (iii) Consent to a same sex marriage being conducted.

## Chapter two

**A step-by-step guide to addressing the question of whether to have your local church building registered for the solemnisation of marriages of same sex couples. The information is applicable to all church buildings used for worship by the United Reformed Church, whether solely in use by the United Reformed Church or whether in shared use with other religious denominations**

### Step 1: Proposing the question

- Any member of the local church can propose that the Church Meeting consent to the registration of the building for the solemnisation of the marriages of same sex couples.
- If the issue of marriage of same sex couples is a controversial question locally, the church should approach the issue gradually and prayerfully – making use of the many resources available on the matter. The relevant information on the URC’s own website – [found here](#) – is a good starting point. Preliminary study and discussion are likely to assist. Should several church members raise the question at a Church Meeting before the congregation is ready, it is possible for the majority to resolve ‘that the question be not put’ until a more opportune time for its discussion.
- The advice of the Elders Meeting should be sought and obtained before the issue is decided at a Church Meeting. Should it appear that the issue is going to be raised by one or more members of the Church Meeting, it is advised that the Elders Meeting first consider it in order to be able to better offer advice to the wider church membership.
- It is unnecessary for any resolutions to be proposed or supported by the Elders collectively, or by the minister, in order for the question to be considered.

### Step 2: The Church Meeting

- When the time is right, it is advised that the following two resolutions are moved together:
  - a) As the governing authority of the United Reformed Church in relation to consent to marriages of same sex couples in [Anytown United Reformed Church, High Street, Anytown], the Church Meeting resolves to give such consent.

- b) The Church Meeting requests the trustee or trustees of the church building at [Anytown United Reformed Church, High Street, Anytown] to apply for the [church building] [principal worship area of the church building] to be registered for the marriage of same sex couples.
- Where a single local church meets for worship in two buildings, but only wants one building to be registered for the marriages of same sex couples, the resolutions should be worded as follows:
  - a) As the governing authority of the United Reformed Church in relation to consent to marriages of same sex couples in (Anytown Central United Reformed Church, High Street, Anytown and St. Andrew’s United Reformed Church, Grange Street, Anytown), the Church Meeting resolves to give such consent.
  - b) The Church Meeting requests the trustee or trustees of the church building at (Anytown Central United Reformed Church, High Street, Anytown) to apply for the (church building) (principal worship area of the church building) to be registered for the marriage of same sex couples.
- If there are two buildings and both are to be registered for the solemnisation of marriage of same sex couples, the wording can be amended accordingly.
- If only part of the physical structure is to be registered, such as the principal worship area or sanctuary, a side chapel, or a hall, that should be made clear in the request to the trustees.
- Except for those matters, it is recommended not to deviate from the wording above when writing the ‘consenting resolution’ and the ‘request to trustees’.
- The resolutions should be passed in accordance with the local church’s usual practice or its constitution if a written local constitution exists. This will determine whether a special majority, secret ballot, consensus decision-making or other procedure is appropriate.
- It is not in order for any Church Meeting decision to be taken by counting postal or proxy votes, nor for votes to be cast by persons not on the membership roll.
- An extract minute of each resolution (separately) should be prepared after the meeting as follows:

Sat a duly convened meeting of the members of (Anytown United Reformed Church) held on *(date)* the following resolution was passed:

*(Text of the resolution to be inserted here.)*

Signed ..... Minister/Interim Moderator presiding at the meeting

Signed ..... Church secretary

- It is unnecessary to state voting figures. If the person presiding at the Church Meeting, or the church secretary, objects to signing the extract minutes the meeting can authorise one or two other members who were present to do so instead.

#### **Joint Pastorates**

If there are separate Church Meetings for different buildings, such as in a group of churches or a joint pastorate, each Church Meeting must decide separately for its own building and pass separate resolutions.

### **Step 3: Certification as a place of worship**

- Almost all buildings used regularly for the worship of the United Reformed Church in England and Wales are already certified as ‘places of public religious worship’ under the Places of Worship Registration Act 1855.
- If your church building is already registered under the Marriage Act 1949 for the marriage of opposite sex couples, it is highly likely that it has also been certified under the 1855 Act. If in doubt, your local registration authority (that is, the Register Office in the area in which the church building is situated) should be able to tell you.
- In the unlikely event that the church building is not certified as a place of worship under the 1855 Act, the next step after the Church Meeting resolutions is to certify it. This is done on General Register Office Form 76 and at the time of publication in December 2018 the application fee is £29. The payment is made to the Registrar General through the local Superintendent Registrar. Churches should enquire as to acceptable methods of payment and either make the payment directly, or put the Trust Company in funds if Form 76 is being submitted simultaneously with an application made by the company on Forms 78 and 78A. (See chapters three and four for instruction on how to complete Forms 78 and 78A).
- The fee on an application to register a building for the solemnisation of marriages between couples of the same sex is £64 if the building is already registered for opposite sex marriage. Here is [the link](#) to the statutory instrument which stipulates the fee.

If the application is to register the building for the solemnisation of both same sex and opposite sex marriages, as will be the case for a new building, at the time of publication the fee is £123. (This represents a discount of £5 on registering the building separately for



opposite sex marriages and same sex marriages). Here is [the link](#) to the statutory instrument which stipulates the fee.

#### **Step 4: Completion of the two required forms**

After the Church Meeting resolutions have been passed and confirmation has been obtained that the building has been certified as a place of worship under the 1855 Act, the General Register Office Forms 78 and 78A should be completed.

#### **What if a Local Church is in a shared building and another denomination wishes to register the building for the solemnisation of marriages of same sex couples?**

If a Local church of the United Reformed Church, which has no plans to host marriage ceremonies for same sex couples, allows a congregation of another denomination to use its building regularly for worship, the Local Church may be approached by that congregation with a view to having the building registered. The Church Meeting is free to agree or not. If the Church Meeting is minded to agree, the following two resolutions on the issue should be moved:

- (a) 'As governing authority of the United Reformed Church in relation to consent to marriages of same-sex couples in (Anytown Central United Reformed Church, High Street, Anytown and St Andrew's United Reformed Church, Grange Street, Anytown), the Church Meeting resolves to consent to the use of (the Andrew Melville Hall at St Andrew's United Reformed Church, Grange Street) for the marriage of same sex couples under the auspices of (Anytown Metropolitan Community Church).'

2. The Church Meeting requests the trustee or trustees of (St Andrew's United Reformed Church, Grange Street, Anytown) to apply for (the Andrew Melville Hall at St Andrew's United Reformed Church) to be registered for the marriage of same sex couples.'

- It is always the 'host church's' trustee(s) who apply for registration, even if the 'guest church' is the only church planning to take advantage of it. Forms 78 and 78A should be completed accordingly and be forwarded, with the guest church's governing authority consent to marriages of same-sex marriages, extract minutes of the resolutions above and other papers as set out on pages 15-16. (The liturgy supplied should be that of the guest church).

## Chapter three

**Completing the application forms to register for the solemnisation of marriages of same sex couples for a building that is solely in use by the United Reformed Church**

### **Form 78: Application for the Registration of a Place of Religious Worship for the Solemnisation of Marriages for opposite sex couples and/or same sex couples**

- It is necessary to complete a Form 78 to register a church building for the solemnisation of marriages of same sex couples even if the building has previously been registered for opposite sex couples. A blank copy of Form 78 can be [downloaded here](#).
- Alternatively, a blank Form 78 can be obtained at the local register office for the district in which the church building is located or from the General Register Office, PO Box 2, Southport, Merseyside PR8 2JD. The 'phone number is 0300 123 1837 and the email address is [grocasework@gro.gsi.gov.uk](mailto:grocasework@gro.gsi.gov.uk)
- The householders' signatures referred to on page one of Form 78 are only required when the building is being registered for the first time for the solemnisation of marriages of either opposite sex or same sex couples.
- If your church building has previously been registered for opposite sex marriages, there is no need to obtain the signatures of householders.
- Form 78 is the application by the trustee(s) of the building. (The Form 78 requires the trustee or proprietor to sign the application. The word 'proprietor' is going to be irrelevant in most applications because it reflects the time when some Nonconformist churches met on private property.)
- Complete the Form 78 locally before passing it to the trustee(s) for signature.

### **Who is the trustee of the church building?**

- In most areas the Local Church building is vested in the trust company serving the province or nation on whose synod the local church is represented. At most local churches therefore, the trust company is the sole trustee and the Form 78 must be signed on its behalf.
- It is the trustees of the building who have to sign the Form 78 and not the Elders.

- The members of the Elders Meeting are not trustees of the building (although usually they are trustees of the Local Church funds).
- When Form 78 has been completed, excluding the signature of the trustees, it should be sent to the Synod Trusts Officer at the synod office with the necessary accompanying documents. (A full list of accompanying documents are detailed on pages 14-15.)
- Ask the Synod Trust Officer if the Local Church building is vested in the trust company serving the province or nation on whose synod the local church is represented.
- Ask the Synod Trusts Officer for advice if the building in which your church worships does not appear to fit squarely within these guidelines.
- Very occasionally, where the trust company has never been appointed to hold the building, there may be local individual trustees elected by the Church Meeting. These are distinct from the Elders, and in this guidance will be called 'local trustees'. Local trustees may make decisions unanimously or by a majority. No trustee can be compelled to do anything to facilitate marriages between couples of the same sex, but if a majority of local trustees are willing to comply with a request from the Church Meeting then they can resolve to do so, and any single willing local trustee can sign the necessary form. In practice these are rare cases because, at most local churches, the trust company is the sole trustee of the building.

## **A step-by-step guide to completing Form 78**

### **Page one**

- The 'building name' to be written in the box at the top of page one on Form 78 should be consistent with the Church Meeting resolution.
- Section 43A(6) of the Marriage Act 1949 provides that a 'building' does not necessarily mean the whole structure. In situations where only part of the building is to be registered for the marriage of same sex couples, then the 'building' on the form should be named accordingly, such as 'the memorial chapel' or 'the sanctuary' of (Anytown) United Reformed Church. If you only want to register for the solemnisation of marriages of same sex couples one or more connected rooms of the whole building, and no other religious body except the United Reformed Church uses those rooms, you may proceed with the application on the basis that the 'building' is solely in United Reformed Church use.
- Form 78 requires the applicant to tick one of three boxes to specify whether the application is to register the building for:
  - a) Marriages between a man and a woman;

- b) Marriages of same sex couples; or
  - c) Both marriages between a man and a woman and marriages of same sex couples.
- Please tick the third box to specify that the application is to register a building for both marriages between a man and a woman and marriages of same sex couples.
  - At the bottom of page one, please leave blank the signature of the trustee/proprietor and the date.
  - Please include with form 78 a covering letter to explain that the church building is already registered for marriages between a man and a woman.

### Page two

- At the top of page two in the box marked 'Application':
  - a) Leave blank the name of the proprietor/trustee
  - b) State the name of the building or part of the building consistent with the way in which the building is named on the Church Meeting resolution
  - c) Write the address of the building for which registration is sought
  - d) State 'United Reformed Church' when asked for the names of all of the denominations that use the building
  - e) State the date on which the building was registered for worship and;
  - f) State the worship number of the building.
- Tick only one box to confirm whether the application is to register the building for:
  - a) Marriages between a man and a woman;
  - b) Marriages of same sex couples or;
  - c) Both marriages between a man and a woman and marriages of same sex couples.
- Tick the third box to specify that the application is to register a building for both marriages between a man and a woman and marriages of same sex couples.
- As mentioned above, include with the Form 78 a covering letter to explain that the church building is already registered for marriages between a man and a woman.
- An example of a completed Form section 78 and an example of a completed Form 78A is available [here](#) on the United Reformed Church website.

**NB: At the middle box on page two labelled 'Additional information to support the application', the following applies:**

- The 'full name of the applicant' and 'home address' should be the registered name and registered office address of the trust company, except in the rare cases where there are local trustees for the building, in which case the details of one willing local trustee should be written.
- At question three tick the 'yes' box to confirm that the building's doors are open to the public.
- At question four the box should be ticked and a copy of the marriage service you intend to use should be enclosed with the application. There are three choices:
  - a) The recommended liturgy at pages 33 to 39 of this guide. A further copy can be [downloaded](#) from the United Reformed Church website. This is the recommended liturgy that has been drafted by the General Secretary of the United Reformed Church, the Revd John Proctor, to assist in ensuring the marriage service complies with the requirements of the law and accords with the liturgy used by the United Reformed Church for marriage services. The legally required sections of the wedding service are marked in the boxed sections on the recommended liturgy;
  - b) The local church has devised a liturgy which will normally be used in the marriage of same sex couples (or all couples);
  - c) Adapt to the context of the marriage of same sex couples a copy of the marriage service from the United Reformed Church's Service Book. The General Register Office will be concerned to ensure that the 'declaration of no impediment' and the 'words of contract' are included.
- At question five the box should be ticked and the completed Form 78A should be enclosed with the application.
- Please leave blank the two boxes at the bottom of page two which are marked respectively, 'To be completed by the Superintendent Registrar' and 'To the Superintendent Registrar'.

**Completion of the Form 78A: the ‘Certificate that Consent has been given by the relevant governing authority (or authorities) for a building to be registered for the solemnisation of marriages of same sex couples’.**

**Completion of the Form 78A where the church building is solely in use by the United Reformed Church**

- It is necessary to complete a Form 78A to register a church building for the solemnisation of marriages of same sex couples even if the building has previously been registered for opposite sex couples.
- A blank copy of the Form 78A can be downloaded [here](#).
- Alternatively, a blank Form 78A can be obtained at the local register office for the district in which the church building is located or from the General Register Office, PO Box 2, Southport, Merseyside PR8 2JD. The ‘phone number is 0300 123 1837 and the email address [grocasework@gro.gsi.gov.uk](mailto:grocasework@gro.gsi.gov.uk)

**Page one**

Provided no other religious body except the United Reformed Church uses the ‘building’, Form 78A can be completed as follows:

- a) Tick the ‘no’ boxes in answer to questions one and two.
- b) On the first line of section three, the registered name of the trust company is to be written, or, in rare cases, the name of the same local trustee as was entered on Form 78. This can be left blank for the name of the trust company or in rare cases the name of the same local trustee to be completed by the synod trust office.
- c) On the third line of section three, enter the building name and the registration district. NB: the building name must accord with the Church Meeting resolutions.
- d) On the last line of section three, please leave blank the signature and date at which the proprietor or trustee is asked to sign.

**Page two**

- Ignore page two which is entitled, ‘Shared buildings only’.
- Page two of Form 78A will need to be sent blank because the box at the bottom of page two is for the Superintendent Registrar to complete upon receipt of the form and supporting documents.

- An example of a completed Form section 78 and an example of a completed Form 78A is available [here](#).

### **How to obtain the relevant signature on Forms 78 and 78A**

When Form 78 or Form 78A have been completed as above, they should be sent together to the trust company, care of the synod office. Neither form should be signed before it is sent to the trust company, care of the synod Office, or (where appropriate in rare cases) to the local trustee named on the forms.

### **The items to be sent to the synod office when Forms 78 and 78A have been completed by the local church seeking registration for the marriage of same sex couples**

When the Form 78 and Form 78A have been completed by the local church seeking registration for marriages of same sex couples, both forms should be sent to the synod office with:

- a) A covering letter. (A sample letter from a church secretary to the Synod Trust Company, asking the Trust to apply for registration of the building is at page 29 of this guide and a copy of the sample letter is also on the United Reformed Church website [here](#). You are also advised to include within your covering letter an explanation that the church building is already registered for marriages between a man and a woman and the application is to additionally register the building for marriages of same sex couples.
- b) A stamped addressed envelope addressed to the local Register Office in the area in which the church seeking registration is located;
- c) An excerpt minute of the United Reformed Church's General Assembly stating that on 9 July 2016 General Assembly declared that the Church Meeting of each Local Church of the United Reformed Church in England and Wales is the relevant governing authority for the purpose of giving consent for the trustees of its building to seek the registration of that building for religious marriage ceremonies of same sex couples, in accordance with section 26A(1) of the Marriage Act 1949 as amended by the Marriage (Same Sex Couples) Act 2013. (There is a copy of the declaration by General Assembly on 9 July 2016 at page 28 of this guide. A copy of the declaration is also available [for download](#) on the United Reformed Church website.
- d) An excerpt minute of the Church Meeting of the local United Reformed Church stating that on (a date that must be after 9 July 2016) the Church Meeting gave consent for the trustees of its building to seek the registration of the building for religious marriage ceremonies of same sex couples. (There is a recommended wording for the resolution at page six of this guide and a

recommended wording of the extract minute of the resolution is at page seven of this guide.)

- e) A copy of the marriage service that the local church intends to use. A copy of the recommended same sex wedding service liturgy is at pages 33-39 of this guide. A further copy can be [downloaded here](#) from the United Reformed Church website.
- f) A statement of the date the local church building was registered for worship and the worship number. Both of those should be stated on the marriage register but if they are not, they can be obtained from the local Register Office.
- g) A cheque made out to the local council or the local Register Office in the sum of £64. (Please check with the local Register Office the name to which the cheque should be made out).
- h) In the unlikely event that the building was not previously registered for worship, a signed Form 76 applying for the building to be registered for worship, together with a separate fee of £29. (Please check with the local Register Office the name to which the cheque should be made out).

#### **What does the Trust Company do with the documents it receives?**

- The trustee concerned will check the application(s) and enclosures, sign Forms 78 and 78A and countersign any householders' certificate.
- The 'request to trustee' extract minute will be kept in the Trust Company's records, and all of the other documents forwarded to the local registration authority.
- In the relatively rare cases where there are individual local trustees who have resolved unanimously or by a majority to act upon Church Meeting requests of this nature, the local trustee named on the forms will check the application(s) and enclosures, sign Form 78 and 78A and countersign any householders' certificate. The 'request to trustee' extract minute will be kept in the local trustees' records, and everything else forwarded to the local registration authority.

#### **How long will it take after submission of the application form before the building is registered for marriages of same sex couples?**

- Assuming there are no problems with the application for the church building to be registered for the marriage of same sex couples, the General Register Office will register the building and supply certificates of registration to the local superintendent registrar within 20 working days. Should the General Register Office



ask the applicant for more information, or the applicant is required to send additional papers, each further reply may take up to 20 working days.

- Please be aware that 20 working days is a target and it may not be possible for the General Register Office to meet that target. The issue of a certificate of registration may take approximately three months from the date of the application being submitted.
- You are strongly advised not to book any marriages of couples of the same sex until you have received formal notification that the church building has been registered for the solemnisation of such marriages.
- The certificate at the foot of Form 78 will be returned to the Trust Company or signatory local trustee. The original should be kept either by the trustee(s) or in the church safe, at the trustees' discretion. A copy should always be supplied to the Local Church and kept with its records. Once this is received, marriages of same sex couples can take place in the building which is registered.

## Chapter four

### **Completing the application forms to register for the solemnisation of marriages of same sex marriages in a building that is in shared use between the United Reformed Church and a church or churches of another denomination**

- A shared church may only be registered for the solemnisation of marriages of same sex couples if:
  - a) At least one of the qualifying churches provides written consent to the marriage of same sex couples; **and**
  - b) Each of the other qualifying sharing churches provides separate written consent to the use of the shared building for the solemnisation of marriages of same sex couples (known as a 'consent to use').
- In other words, if one or more of the denominations that share the buildings does not consent to the particular building being used for the solemnisation of marriage of same sex couples, that building will not be registered for such marriages to take place.
- There are two forms of consent that may be given by a church:
  - a) 'Consent to marriages of same sex couples', which would normally be given if the church intended to solemnise marriages of same sex couples under their own auspices; or
  - b) 'Consent to use', which may be given if the church does not intend to solemnise marriages of same sex couples under their own auspices, but does not wish to prevent their fellow-users of jointly-used buildings from doing so.
- A sharing agreement can be formed between two or more denominations which use the same building.
- Church buildings can be subject to a 'sharing agreement' under the Sharing of Church Buildings Act 1969 and/or a Shared Building Local Ecumenical Partnership. Alternatively, church buildings can be shared on an informal basis. Should there be doubt whether a joint user is a 'sharing church', local churches are advised to contact the General Secretary of the United Reformed Church at Church House, Tavistock Place, London WC1H 9RT and advice will be given tailored to the particular situation at the Local Church.
- Only one set of marriage registers is issued to the building – for all the Nonconformist denominations sharing the building – and that register is to be used at all the marriage ceremonies that take place in that building.

**The Form 78: Application for the Registration of a Place of Religious Worship for the Solemnisation of Marriages for opposite sex couples and/or same sex couples.**

**Completion of the Form 78 where the church building is shared between the United Reformed Church and another denomination.**

- It is necessary to complete a Form 78 to register a church building for the solemnisation of marriages of same sex couples even if the building has previously been registered for opposite sex couples. A blank copy of the Form 78 can be downloaded [here](#).
- Alternatively, a blank Form 78 can be obtained at the local register office for the district in which the church building is located or from the General Register Office, PO Box 2, Southport, Merseyside PR8 2JD. The 'phone number is 0300 123 1837 and the email address [grocasework@gro.gsi.gov.uk](mailto:grocasework@gro.gsi.gov.uk)
- The householders' signatures are only required when the building is being registered for the first time for the solemnisation of either marriages of opposite sex, or same sex couples, or both. If your church building has previously been registered for opposite sex marriages, there is no need to obtain the signatures of householders.
- Form 78 is the application by the trustee(s) of the building. (The form requires the trustee or proprietor to sign the application. The word 'proprietor' is going to be irrelevant in most applications because it reflects the time when some Nonconformist churches met on private property).
- Please complete Form 78 locally before passing it to the trustee(s) for signature.

**Who is the trustee of the church building?**

- In very many areas, the local church building is vested in the Trust Company serving the province or nation on whose synod the Local Church is represented. At most Local Churches therefore, the Trust Company is the sole trustee and Form 78 must be signed on its behalf.
- It is the trustees of the buildings who have to sign Form 78, not the Elders.
- The members of the Elders Meeting are not trustees of the building (although usually they are trustees of the Local Church funds).
- When Form 78 has been completed, excluding the signature of the trustees, Form 78 should be sent to the Synod Trusts Officer at the synod office with the necessary accompanying documents. (The list of required documents is covered at the end of

the instructions at pages 15-16). The Synod Trusts Officer will then arrange for the form to be signed by a person on behalf of the Trust Company.

- Ask the Synod Trust Officer if the local church building is vested in the Trust Company serving the province or nation on whose synod the Local Church is represented.
- Ask the Synod Trusts Officer for advice if the building in which your church worships does not appear to fit squarely within these guidelines.
- Very occasionally, where the trust company has never been appointed to hold the building, there may be local individual trustees elected by the Church Meeting. These are distinct from the Elders, and in this guidance will be called 'local trustees'. Local trustees may make decisions unanimously or by a majority.
- No trustee can be compelled to do anything to facilitate marriage between couples of the same sex, but if a majority of local trustees are willing to comply with a request from the Church Meeting then they can resolve to do so, and any single willing local trustee can sign the necessary form. In practice, these are rare cases because at most Local Churches the Trust Company is the sole trustee of the building.

### **A step-by-step guide to completing Form 78**

#### **Page one**

- The 'building name' to be written in the box at the top of page one on Form 78 should be stated consistently with the Church Meeting resolution.
- Under section 43A(6) of the Marriage Act 1949, a 'building' does not necessarily mean the whole structure. In situations where only part of the building is to be registered for marriages of same sex couples, then the 'building' on the form should be named accordingly, such as 'the memorial chapel' or 'the sanctuary' of [Anytown] United Reformed Church.
- Form 78 requires the applicant to tick one of three boxes to specify whether the application is to register the building for:
  - a) Marriages between a man and a woman;
  - b) Marriages of same opposite sex and same sex couples.
- Please tick the third box to specify that the application is to register a building for both marriages between a man and a woman and marriages of same sex couples.
- At the bottom of page one, leave blank the signature of the trustee/proprietor and the date.

- Include with Form 78 a covering letter to explain that the church building is already registered for marriages between a man and a woman.

## Page two

### At the top of page two in the box marked 'Application':

- a) Leave blank the name of the proprietor/trustee
- b) State the name of the building or part of the building consistent with the way in which the building is named on the Church Meeting resolution
- c) Write the address of the building for which registration is sought
- d) State the names of all of the denominations that use the building
- e) State the date on which the building was registered for worship and;
- f) State the worship number of the building.

- Please tick one box only to confirm whether the application is to register the building for:
  - a) Marriages between a man and a woman;
  - b) Marriages of same sex couples or;
  - c) Both marriages between opposite sex and same sex couples.
- Please tick the third box to specify that the application is to register a building for both marriages between a man and a woman and marriages of same sex couples.
- Please include with Form 78 a covering letter to explain that the church building is already registered for marriages between a man and a woman.

### In the middle box on page two marked, 'Additional information to support the application', the following applies:

- The 'full name of the applicant' and 'home address' should be the registered name and registered office address of the trust company, except in the rare cases where there are local trustees for the building, in which case the details of one willing local trustee should be written.
- At question three the box to answer 'yes' should be ticked to confirm that the building doors are open to the public.
- At question four the box should be ticked and a copy of the marriage service you intend to use should be enclosed with the application. There are three choices:
  - a) The recommended liturgy is printed at pages 33-39 of this guide. It's based on the Marriage Service from *Worship: from the United Reformed Church* and has been adapted for use in marriages of same sex couples by the General Secretary of the United Reformed. The service is also available for download

[here](#). This is the recommended liturgy which has been drafted to assist in ensuring the marriage service complies with the requirements of the law and accords with the liturgy used by the United Reformed Church for marriage services. The legally required sections of the wedding service are marked in the boxed sections on the recommended liturgy;

- b) The Local Church has devised a liturgy which will normally be used in the marriage of same sex (or all) couples;
  - c) Adapt to the context of marriage of same sex couples a copy of the Marriage Service from the *Worship: from the United Reformed Church*. The General Register Office will be concerned to ensure that the 'declaration of no impediment' and the 'words of contract' are included.
- At question five the box should be ticked and the completed Form 78A should be enclosed with the application.
  - Leave blank the two boxes at the bottom of page two which are marked respectively, 'To be completed by the Superintendent Registrar' and 'To the Superintendent Registrar'.
  - An example of a completed Form section 78 and an example of a completed Form 78A is on the United Reformed Church website [here](#).

**Completion of the Form 78A: the 'Certificate that Consent has been given by the relevant governing authority (or authorities) for a building to be registered for the solemnisation of marriages of same sex couples' where the church building is in shared use between the United Reformed Church and another/other Nonconformist denomination(s).**

- It is necessary to complete a Form 78A to register a church building for the solemnisation of marriages of same sex couples even if the building has previously been registered for opposite sex couples.
- A blank copy of the Form 78A can be downloaded [here](#).
- Alternatively, a blank Form 78A can be obtained at the local register office for the district in which the church building is located or from the General Register Office, PO Box 2, Southport, Merseyside PR8 2JD. The 'phone number is 0300 123 1837 and the email address [grocasework@gro.gsi.gov.uk](mailto:grocasework@gro.gsi.gov.uk)

### **Completion of the Form 78A where the building is in shared use with another/other denomination(s)**

- Where other religious denominations share the building the Form 78A can be completed as follows:

#### **Page one**

Tick the 'yes' boxes in answer to questions one and two to confirm that the building is subject to a sharing agreement under the Sharing of Church Buildings Act 1969 and the building is shared by more than one religious organisation. Then move to page two and question four.

#### **Page two**

- a) At section four at the top of page two of the Form 78A all of the religious organisations which qualify as sharing churches must be listed and the form must be marked with 'yes/no' stating whether:
    - (ii) The relevant governing authority's consent to the solemnisation of marriages of same sex couples has been given or;
    - (iii) The relevant governing authority's consent has been given for the building to be used for the solemnisation of marriages of same sex couples.
- For the United Reformed Church, assuming that the Church Meeting of the Local Church has requested the trustee or trustees of the church building to be registered for the marriage of same sex couples, please state 'yes' to confirm that the relevant governing authority's consent to the solemnisation of same sex couples has been given.
  - On the second page of the form leave blank the name to be printed, the signature and the date.

### **How to obtain the relevant signature on Forms 78 and 78A**

- When Form 78 and Form 78A have been completed as above, they should be sent to the Trust Company, care of the synod office. Neither form should be signed before it is sent to the trust company, care of the synod office, or (where appropriate in rare cases) to the local trustee named on the forms.
- An example of a completed Form section 78 is on the United Reformed Church website [here](#).
- The other required items to be sent with the Forms 78 and 78A are listed below.

## The items to be sent to the synod office when Forms 78 and 78A have been completed by the local church seeking registration for marriages of same sex couples

When the Form 78 and Form 78A have been completed by the local church seeking registration for the marriage of same sex couples, both forms should be sent to the synod office with:

- i. A covering letter. A sample letter from a Church Secretary to the synod Trust Company, asking the Trust Company to apply for registration of the building is at page 29 of this guide and available to download [here](#). You are also advised to include within your covering letter an explanation that the church building is already registered for marriages between a man and a woman and the application is to additionally register the building for the marriage of same sex couples.
- ii. An excerpt minute of the United Reformed Church's General Assembly stating that, on 9 July 2016 General Assembly declared that the Church Meeting of each Local Church of the United Reformed Church in England and Wales is the relevant governing authority for the purpose of giving consent for the trustees of its building to seek the registration of that building for religious marriage ceremonies of same sex couples, in accordance with section 26A(1) of the Marriage Act 1949 as amended by the Marriage (Same Sex Couples) Act 2013. (A copy of the declaration by General Assembly on 9 July 2016 is on page 28 of this guide and available to download [here](#)).
- iii. An excerpt minute of the Church Meeting of the local United Reformed Church stating that on [a date that must be after 9 July 2016] the Church Meeting gave consent for the trustees of its building to seek the registration of the building for religious marriage ceremonies of same sex couples. (There is a recommended wording for the resolution at page six of this guide and a recommended wording of the extract minute of the resolution is at page seven of this guide).
- iv. A copy of the sharing agreement concerning the sharing of the building between the different denominations.
- v. From each of the other sharing denominations either:
  - i. A copy of the relevant governing authority's consent to the solemnisation of marriages of same sex couples or:
  - ii. A copy of the relevant governing authority's consent for the building to be used for the solemnisation of marriages of same sex couples.
- vi. A stamped addressed envelope addressed to the local Register Office in the area in which the church seeking registration is located;



- vii. A copy of the marriage service for same sex couples that the Local Church intends to use. (A copy of the recommended liturgy is at pages 33-39 of this guide. A further copy is available to download [here](#).)
- viii. A statement of the date the local church building was registered for worship and the worship number. Both of those should be stated on the marriage register but if they are not, they can be obtained from the local Register Office.
- ix. A cheque made out to the local council or the local Register Office in the sum of £64. (Check with the local Register Office the name to which the cheque should be made out).
- x. In the unlikely event that the building was not previously registered for worship, a signed Form 76 applying for the building to be registered for worship, together with a separate fee of £29. (Check with the local Register Office the name to which the cheque should be made out).

#### **What does the Trust Company do with the documents it receives?**

- The trustee concerned will check the application(s) and enclosures, sign Forms 78 and 78A and countersign any householders' certificate.
- The 'request to trustee' extract minute will be kept in the company's records, and all of the other documents forwarded to the local registration authority.
- In the relatively rare cases where there are individual local trustees who have resolved unanimously or by a majority to act upon Church Meeting requests of this nature, the local trustee named on the forms will check the application(s) and enclosures, sign Form 78 and 78A and countersign any householders' certificate. The 'request to trustee' extract minute will be kept in the local trustees' records, and everything else forwarded to the local registration authority.

#### **How long will it take after submission of the application form before the building is registered for marriages of same sex couples?**

- Assuming there are no problems with the application for the church building to be registered for same sex marriage, the General Register Office will register the building and supply certificates of registration to the local superintendent registrar within 20 working days.
- Should the General Register Office ask the applicant for more information, or the applicant is required to send additional papers, each further reply may take up to 20 working days.

- Please be aware that 20 working days is a target and it may not be possible for the General Register Office to meet that target. The issue of a certificate of registration may take approximately three months from the date of the application being submitted.
- You are strongly advised not to book any marriages of couples of the same sex until you have received notification that the church building has been registered for the solemnisation of such marriages.
- The certificate at the foot of Form 78 will be returned to the trust company or signatory local trustee. The original should be kept either by the trustee(s) or in the church safe, at the trustees' discretion. A copy should always be supplied to the Local Church and kept with its records. Once this is received, marriages of same sex couples can take place in the building which is registered.

## Chapter five

### **Sample letters and documents which may be sent to accompany the application to register a building for the solemnisation of marriages of same sex couples**

This chapter contains sample documents which you may wish to print and/or adapt to accompany Forms 78 and 78A when applying to register a building for the solemnisation of marriages for same sex couples. Copies of all of these documents are also available on the United Reformed Church website [here](#).

#### **Sample letters**

Below are three letters, drafted by the Revd John Proctor, General Secretary of the United Reformed Church, which Local Churches and their trustees in England and Wales may want to adapt and use if applying for the registration of a church building for the marriage of same sex couples.

1. A letter from the Revd John Proctor, General Secretary of the United Reformed Church to 'whom it may concern', as a formal record of the General Assembly's decision. (See page 28.)
2. A sample letter from a Church Secretary to the Synod Trust Company, asking the Trust to apply for registration of the building. (See page 29.)
3. A sample letter from the Synod Trust Company to the local Register Office, making the application. (See page 30.)

These three letters address the simplest case, of a United Reformed church rather than a Local Ecumenical Partnership with no other congregation using the building, and the synod Trust Company as trustee of the premises. Should your situation be more complex or unusual, you may wish to seek other advice before applying.

The fourth and final letter is a letter from the General Register Office at Southport, confirming that the text of these three letters meets their requirements and concerns. (Pages 31-32).

The next section of chapter five is a draft order of service for the marriage of a same sex couple written by the Revd John Proctor, General Secretary of the United Reformed Church. (Pages 33-39.)

The final section of this chapter 5 is a list of website links to other useful resources. (Page 40.)



## General Secretariat

86 Tavistock Place, London WC1H 9RT

From the General Secretary,  
The Revd John Proctor

14<sup>th</sup> July 2016

To whom it may concern

I hereby certify, on the authority of the General Assembly of the United Reformed Church that on 9<sup>th</sup> July 2016 at Southport the General Assembly passed Resolution 7, printed on pages 32-33 of the Assembly Reports, on the matter of same-sex marriage. The relevant parts of the resolution as follows:

...

**B. General Assembly declares that the Church Meeting of each Local Church of the United Reformed Church in England and Wales is the relevant governing authority for the purpose of giving consent for the trustees of its building to seek the registration of that building for religious marriage ceremonies of same sex couples, in accordance with the provisions of Section 26A(1) of the Marriage Act 1949 as amended by the Marriage (Same Sex Couples) Act 2013.**

...

**E. The General Assembly recalls that the trusts on which Local Church buildings are commonly held empower the Church Meeting to direct in what ways such a building is or is not to be used for public worship and ancillary purposes.**

**F. The General Assembly authorises the General Secretary, the Clerk, or any Deputy General Secretary to sign and furnish a copy of this resolution (or a relevant extract) in the name of the Assembly, whenever such a copy may be required by law.**

Yours sincerely,

020 7916 2020

[www.urc.org.uk](http://www.urc.org.uk)

A link to a copy of the letter is [here](#).

**LETTERHEAD OF ST AGATHA'S UNITED REFORMED CHURCH  
99 High St, Anytown.**

From the Church Secretary,  
(Secretary's name ...)

Date

To the Secretary of [Name] Synod Trust Company

Dear Sir or Madam,

I hereby certify, on the authority of the Church Meeting of St Agatha's United Reformed Church that on [date, not before 9 July 2016] at Anytown the Church Meeting passed the following resolution on the matter of marriages of same sex couples. The Meeting expressly authorised me to write to the Synod Trust Company in these terms.

**1. As the governing authority of the United Reformed Church in relation to consent to marriages of same sex couples in St Agatha's United Reformed Church, 99 High Street, Anytown, the Church Meeting resolves to give such consent.**

**2. The Church Meeting requests the trustee or trustees of the church building at St Agatha's United Reformed Church, 99 High Street, Anytown to apply for the [church building] [principal worship area of the church building] to be registered for the marriage of same sex couples.**

I enclose:

- two copies of Form 78
- one copy of Form 78A
- a copy of the marriage service that we intend to use
- a cheque for £64.

[Optional: The Church Meeting further resolved on [date] to nominate [insert name] for appointment as Authorised Person for the marriage of same sex couples at St Agatha's United Reformed Church and I enclose the appropriate application paper for this purpose.]

Signature of Church Secretary

A link to a copy of the sample letter is [here](#).

## TRUST LETTERHEAD

From the Secretary of the Trust

Date

Addressed to the local Register Office  
in whose area St Agatha's church building is situated

Dear Registrar,

### **St Agatha's United Reformed Church, Anytown: the marriage of same sex couples**

I write as Secretary of the [Name] Synod Trust Company. The Company is Trustee of the buildings of St Agatha's United Reformed Church, 99 High Street, Anytown. In the name and with the authority of the Trustees, I hereby apply for this church building [or for the principal worship area of this church building] to be registered for same-sex marriage services.

I attach documents as follows:

- An excerpt minute of the United Reformed Church's General Assembly, indicating that on 9 July 2016 the Assembly declared that the relevant governing authority to give consent in this matter is the local Church Meeting.
- An excerpt minute of the Church Meeting of St Agatha's United Reformed Church, indicating that on [date, which must be after 9 July 2016] the Church Meeting gave appropriate consent.
- Two copies of Form 78, and one copy of Form 78A.
- A copy of the marriage service that the local church intends to use.
- A cheque for £64.

[Optional: I further enclose an application for the appointment of an Authorised Person for the marriage of same-sex couples at this church.]

Signature of Trust Secretary

A link to a copy of this letter is [here](#).

The General Registry Office  
PO Box 476  
Southport  
PR8 2WJ

The Reverend John Proctor  
The General Secretary  
The United Reformed Church  
86 Tavistock Place  
LONDON  
W1CH 9RT

T: 0300 123 1837  
Fax: 0151 471 4406  
Text relay: 18001 0300 123 1837  
E: [GROcasework@gro.gsi.gov.uk](mailto:GROcasework@gro.gsi.gov.uk)  
Web: [www.gov.uk](http://www.gov.uk)

22 August 2016

Dear Reverend Proctor,

Further to The General Assembly of the United Reformed Church that took place on the 9th July 2016 at Southport the General Assembly in which a resolution was passed on the matter of same-sex marriage at URC churches.

Following on from your General Assembly we have been in correspondence to outline the requirements for individual URC church congregations, in order to outline the requirements that they need to adhere to if they choose to make an application to register for same sex marriage at their church.

To clarify we would require the following:

**\*\* A letter of consent from the someone in authority at the church who is acting on behalf of the congregation which sufficiently identifies whether the author is recognised by their religious organisation as competent to give consent on their behalf.**

2 x Original Forms 78

1 x Original Form 78A (please note this must be completed, signed & dated either on the same day but no later than 1 month from the completion of the Forms 78)

Forms are available here: <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/certificate-and-application-for-the-registration-of-a-place-of-religious-worship-for-the-solemnisation-of-marriages-form-78>

Full copy of intended Marriage Service which is intended to be used for the purpose of Same Sex Marriage. \* Assurance would be needed to confirm that during any Same Sex Marriage that females are referred to as 'wife/wife' & males as 'husband/husband'.

Payment of the statutory £64.00 application fee to the register office

Please note where building's already have persons appointed as Authorised Persons, they are currently only appointed to register Opposite Sex Marriages only, they will need to be reappointed if they also wish to register Marriages of Same Sex Couples, so if possible, these too should be handed to the register office at the time of application.

However, if required they can be submitted at a later date, however until Authorised Persons are formally reappointed by this office, any Same Sex Marriage would then have to be attended by staff from the local register office. (for your perusal I have attached a copy of the Authorised Person Form and you will see Section C, is the area to be ticked)

On the rare occasion when it is a new application to register a new build for both worship and marriage for both Opposite Sex & Same Sex Marriage Forms 76 and accompanying paperwork to support a new application will also need to be supplied.

\*\* All the 3 sample letters you have produced for review by this office are acceptable:

A letter from yourself, confirming that the relevant governing authority of the United Reformed Church in this matter is the local Church Meeting.

A sample letter from the Church Meeting to the Trustees, indicating that the Church Meeting has given consent, and asking the Trustees to apply for registration.

A sample letter from the Trustees to the local Register Office, applying for the building to be registered for this purpose.

Please ensure you quote our reference above in any further correspondence with this office.

Yours sincerely

Paul Jackson  
Casework Team  
General Register Office

A further copy of this letter from the General Register Office is [here](#).



## **A wedding Service, which may be used for the marriage of same sex couples**

When Local Churches in England and Wales apply to register their buildings for the marriage of same sex couples, they are required to send in a sample order of service. The pages below give such a sample, which is informed by the traditions and order of the United Reformed Church, and meets the requirements of the law in England and Wales.

It is, of course, part of our tradition that ministers may depart from a printed order, for example in the wording of prayers, the choice of readings, or the ordering of items within the service. But **there is prescribed wording to follow** at two key points in the service – when the couple declare themselves free to marry, and when they take one another as husband or wife. Attention is drawn to this legal requirement in the order below; it is essential to observe it.

**The law also requires** that if two men are being married, they be referred to in the service as ‘husband’ and ‘husband’; similarly, two women must be referred to as ‘wife’ and ‘wife’.

The recommended marriage liturgy included here was written in August 2016 by the General Secretary of the United Reformed Church, the Revd John Proctor. The recommended liturgy was adapted for use in marriage services for same sex couples from *Worship: from the United Reformed Church*. The text is also available for download [here](#).

**Wedding Service Liturgy, which may be used for the marriage of same sex couples.**

The words in ***bold italic script***, with an asterisk, **are required by law in England and Wales**. Other parts of the service are largely based on the Wedding Service in *Worship from the United Reformed Church (2003)*.

**Explanatory statement**

We recommend that the following statement be printed on the inside cover of the order of service:

*The law of England and Wales now allows civil marriages to take place between two persons of the same sex. The General Assembly of the United Reformed Church has declared that the local Church Meeting may decide to host such marriages, provided that the due registration procedures have been satisfied. The Church Meeting of this congregation has so decided, and the congregation warmly welcomes AB and CD [with their friends and family] to their marriage service.*

-----

**Open doors**

The doors of the church building must be left open for the duration of the service.

-----

**Order of Service**

**Welcome**

Welcome to ... church, for the celebration of the marriage between AB and CD.

Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.

Let us worship God.

This is the day that the Lord has made;

**Let us rejoice and be glad in it.**

-----

**Statement of purpose**

We have come together in the presence of God to witness the marriage of AB and CD, to rejoice with them and to ask God to bless them in their life together.

Marriage is an act of commitment between two people before witnesses.

In marriage AB and CD make a solemn covenant before God to live out their lives in faithfulness and loyalty to each other.

In their new life together, they are called to enrich society, to strengthen community, and share their worldly goods with each other and with those in need.

Marriage is not to be entered into lightly or thoughtlessly but reverently and responsibly.

This is the way of life that A and C have chosen. They come to accept each other freely, to give their consent to each other in solemn promises, and to ask for God's blessing.

-----

**Prayer**

Eternal God, you are with us this day in the fullness of your love.  
Your love fills our hearts and draws us to one another with holy desire.  
Your love in us offers forgiveness and sets us free to be together in peace.  
Your love creates community and heals our deepest loneliness.  
This love you renew continually in A and C and in all your people.  
Make them today a sign to us of your love in all creation,  
of your enduring affection and faithfulness, and of your joy in all that you have made.  
May we see this day, before our eyes, the joy of love and the hope of faith.  
Bless our celebration with your presence and touch us with your Spirit,  
in Christ's name we pray, Amen.

-----

**Readings and Sermon**

*Some suggested readings:*

Old Testament (Hebrew Scriptures): Song of Songs 2:10-13  
New Testament: Matthew 5:1-9; John 2:1-11; 1 Corinthians 13:1-8a,13; 1 John 4:7-19

*Alternatively, the readings and sermon may come later in the service, after the marriage ceremony.*

-----

*The minister says to the couple:*

Before God and before this congregation,  
I will ask you to declare your freedom and readiness to enter into the covenant of marriage.  
I will also ask your families and this congregation  
to affirm their willingness to support you today and in the years to come.

Due notice of the intention of AB and CD to be married has been given and no objection has been made.

-----

*Or*

I ask the congregation:  
if you know of any reason in law why AB and CD may not be joined in marriage, please  
declare it now.

-----

*To the couple:*

I ask you, A and C, to declare that you know of no reason in law that you may not be married.

**Legal declarations:**

***As required by law in England and Wales each one declares in the presence of the Authorised Person, or the Registrar, and two witnesses:***

***I declare that I know of no legal reason why I, AB, may not be joined in marriage to CD. \****

***I declare that I know of no legal reason why I, CD, may not be joined in marriage to AB. \****

*Or*

***I do solemnly declare that I know not of any lawful impediment why I, AB, may not be joined in matrimony to CD.\****

***I do solemnly declare that I know not of any lawful impediment why I, CD, may not be joined in matrimony to AB.\****

*Or*

Are you, AB, free lawfully to marry CD? ***I am. \****

Are you, CD, free lawfully to marry AB? ***I am. \****

-----

O God of all faithfulness, we pray for those who will make promises today: bless them with sincerity and give them your grace.

May A and C know that their love is both your will and your delight.

May the promises they make govern the life they will lead.

May your presence surround them, your faithfulness encourage them, your Spirit strengthen and guide them. **Amen.**

-----

*The couple are asked:*

AB and CD, will you take one another, to share in the bond of marriage?

Will you love, comfort, honour and protect one another,

in times of prosperity and health and in times of trouble and suffering?

And will you be faithful to one another as long as you both shall live?

**We will.**

*If either, or both, has children:*

Will you promise to be faithful, loving and caring parents to N (and N)?

**We will.**

*The immediate family is asked:*

Will you, the families of A and C, give your blessing to their marriage

and will you always support and encourage them?

**We will.**

*The congregation is asked:*

Will you, the friends of A and C, support and encourage them in their marriage?  
**We will.**

-----

*The couple turn to face each other and join right hands.*

**As required by law in England and Wales** each one declares  
*in the presence of the Authorized Person, or the Registrar, and two witnesses:*

**One** of the following, made by each partner:

***I call upon these persons, here present, to witness that I, AB,  
do take thee, CD, to be my lawful wedded wife/husband. \****

*Or I, AB, take you, CD, to be my wedded wife/husband. \**

*Or I, AB, take thee, CD, to be my wedded wife/husband. \**

-----

*NB If two men are being married, they **must be referred to** in the above as **'husband' and 'husband'\***; similarly, two women being married **must be referred to** as **'wife' and 'wife' \***.*

*Whatever other words may be added to these declarations and contracting words, one each of those given above **must** be included for the marriage to be valid. Otherwise the authorised person may ask for them to be repeated before the registers are signed.*

The contracting words may be expanded to include traditional liturgical promises, *provided that the marriage is taking place in a registered church building.* For example,

***I, AB, take you (thee), CD, to be my wedded wife (or husband): \****

**in accordance with God's holy will,  
to have and to hold from this day forward,  
for better, for worse, for richer, for poorer,  
in sickness and in health, to love and to cherish  
till death us do part. This is my solemn vow.**

***I, CD, take you (thee), AB, to be my wedded husband (or wife): \****

**in accordance with God's holy will,  
to have and to hold from this day forward,  
for better, for worse, for richer, for poorer,  
in sickness and in health, to love and to cherish  
till death us do part. This is my solemn vow.**

-----

### **Exchange of Rings**

*The rings are given to the minister who prays:*

Eternal God, whose love encircles us all, bless the giving and receiving of these rings.

May they be signs of a love which never ends, beautiful, holy and strong.

May they be tokens of commitment and faithfulness  
and reminders of the promises and vows made today.

In the name of God, Father, Son and Holy Spirit. (*Creator, Christ and Spirit.*) **Amen.**

*Each says in turn:*

**I give you this ring as a sign of our marriage.**

**With my body I honour you, all that I am I give to you,  
all that I have I share with you, within the holy love of God.**

*Or*

**I give you this ring in God's name as a sign of all that we have promised and all that we  
shall share.**

-----

### **Prayer**

Most gracious God, source of all true love,  
we give you thanks that A and C have answered your call  
and given themselves to one another in the covenant of marriage.

Pour out the fullness of your blessing on them.

Lead them into that love which never comes to an end.

Give them grace to forgive when words or actions hurt.

Give them strength to persevere through times of testing  
and to support each other through darkness and distress.

May they be thankful for all that has brought them to this moment.

May they joyfully embrace this new beginning, and journey on with ever new delight.

Bless their families and friends, that they may be a constant source of strength.

Bless their home, that it may be a place of welcome.

*(Bless them in the gift of children, that they may be wise and loving parents).*

Bless all who celebrate with A and C, that love may flourish and friendship touch the lonely.

And grant that we, who today have witnessed the sharing and exchange of words and signs  
of love,

may find our faith renewed and our hope restored.

May love, the greatest of all your gifts, stronger than death, gentle as a touch,

bring us through every passing moment closer to Jesus Christ, our lover and our Lord.

**Amen.**

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**Blessing the couple:**

The LORD bless you and keep you; the LORD make his face to shine upon you, and be gracious to you;  
the LORD lift up his countenance upon you, and give you peace. **Amen.**

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**Declaration of Marriage**

A and C have declared before God and before you that they will live together in the bond of marriage.

They have made promises to one another, exchanged solemn vows and symbolised their marriage today by joining hands and by giving and receiving rings.

I therefore declare them to be married,  
in the name of God, Father, Son and Holy Spirit. (*Creator, Christ and Spirit.*)

Those whom God has joined together, let no one separate.

*The service may continue with readings and a sermon (if these have not been included earlier), with prayers and with singing. It should end with a closing blessing of the whole congregation.*

***The Marriage Register must be signed, either within the service or directly afterwards.***

***Service ends***

### **Further resources**

Some of our ministers will be interested in other resources that are particularly designed for the marriage of same-sex couples. Some web links are mentioned below, but without the express endorsement of the URC. They are simply noted here, so that those who wish to look at them or learn from them may do so.

Please recall that, whatever variations you include in a service, **in England and Wales there may be *no variation at all* to the legally required portions of the service (see the boxed sections above).**

[Blessing resources from The Episcopal Church](#)

[An order for marriage \(inclusive version\) from The United Church of Christ](#)

[A Marriage Liturgy from the Church of Scotland](#)

[Liturgies and other resources for wedding services from the Iona Community](#)

[Wedding ceremony scripts from theknot.com](#)

[A marriage service from The Episcopal Diocese of Olympia](#)

[A wedding ceremony from the Revd Fiona Bennett](#)



## Chapter six

### Extending to other premises registration of a church building for the marriage of same sex couples

- The General Register Office in Southport may ask whether a Local Church wishes to extend registration of its church building to allow for marriages of same sex couples in other places, such as, but not exclusively, hospitals and prisons.
- Trustees of church buildings should ask for extended registration if the Local Church desires it.
- The Church Meeting of the Local Church should be asked whether it wishes to extend registration of its church building to allow for marriages of same sex couples in other places.
- The General Assembly resolution does not expressly cover this issue, but it is the opinion of the law and polity advisory group that the issue is within the ambit of the resolution of General Assembly on 9 July 2016 because extended registration of this type is a question for the local Church Meeting as it is within the competence of a Local Church as governing authority.

### Religious marriage outside registered premises

- The law of England and Wales provides that people who cannot go to a place of worship may marry elsewhere. Such people are those who cannot be moved to a building which is registered for the solemnisation of marriage who are terminally ill, seriously ill to the extent they are not expected to recover, completely housebound or detained. Religious marriage outside a place of worship is an issue of need not choice.
- When a couple have a religious marriage service outside a registered building, the Superintendent Registrar for the local district in which the marriage is taking place will complete the marriage register and the marriage certificate. The Superintendent Registrar will bring the marriage register from the local register office and after the marriage service he or she will take the marriage register back to the local register office. The Authorised Person from the Local Church will not be required to attend. No entry will be made in the local church marriage registers.
- Before conducting a religious marriage service of a same sex couple at premises outside the registered church building the minister must be sure that the Local Church has received permission to extend registration for same sex marriages outside the Local Church building. It is advised that the minister checks with the

Superintendent Registrar for the district in which the Local Church building is situated before agreeing to undertake the marriage service.

- Medical evidence of the ill person's condition and his or her capacity to understand the meaning of the marriage ceremony will be required by the Superintendent Registrar.
- Both parties to the marriage must be legally free to marry and the normal evidence of age and marital status will be required from the couple.

### **Hospital Chaplains**

- If a URC hospital chaplain is approached by a couple of the same sex who request a marriage to one another, the chaplain may proceed according to his or her conscience.
- The marriage may take place if:
  - a) The Superintendent Registrar is willing to register their marriage on the hospital site;
  - b) The Superintendent Registrar is able and willing to attend the marriage at the hospital;
  - c) One or both of the parties to the marriage cannot be moved to a building which is registered for the solemnisation of marriage as a result of being terminally ill or seriously ill to the extent they are not expected to recover;
  - d) The marriage could be conducted in the place requested in accordance with the law (the Superintendent Registrar will advise accordingly in respect of the particular circumstances) and;
  - e) There is meaningful pastoral contact with the parties to the marriage in the conduct of the minister's regular ministry, or there would be such contact but for the shortness of time.

## Chapter seven

### The registration of Mission Project Buildings for marriages of same sex couples

- For a designated Mission Project that is under the control and oversight of the synod and which includes a space (a building, or part of a building) that is held under United Reformed Church trusts and is registered for worship, the following procedure should be followed:
  - a) It is for the synod to decide whether or not it wishes to register the worship space for the registration of marriages of same sex couples.
  - b) If the building is held under United Reformed Church trusts, the decision belongs with a council of the URC – and that is the synod.
  - c) Should the synod decide to apply for the registration of the building or part of the building for the solemnisation of marriages of same sex couples, the Synod Clerk should then ask the trustees of the building (possibly the Synod Trust Company) to apply to the local Register Office to have the building or part of the building registered for the solemnisation of marriages of same sex couples.
  - d) The procedure to be followed is then the same as for applying to register a church building for the solemnisation of marriages of same sex couples.
- It is worth noting that the synod should be interested in the thoughts of the management committee about the application to register the building or part of a building for the solemnisation of marriages of same sex couples.
- You are strongly advised to seek advice from the local Register Office about the necessary arrangements for registration of marriages in any Mission Project building.

## Chapter eight

### Blessings of marriages of same sex couples

- Services of blessing of the marriages of same sex couples do not have any legal status.
- As a result, URC ministers may still be able in conscience to conduct such services either:
  - a) Where a Church Meeting has not considered the question of registering its building for the solemnisation of marriages of same sex couples, in which case the minister should exercise discretion having regard to the advice of the Elders and/or the Church Meeting or;
  - b) Where a Church Meeting, even if it voted against allowing marriages of same sex couples to be solemnised in its building, is willing for their minister to conduct such services of blessing within or outside the church building.
- An informal service of blessing – of any marriage – should never precede the legal marriage. An informal service of blessing should always be conducted after the legal marriage to avoid misrepresenting what is taking place.

## Chapter nine

### **Converting a civil partnership into a marriage in a building registered for religious worship**

- A conversion of a civil partnership into a marriage may only be made in a building registered for worship if the building has been registered for the solemnisation of marriages of same sex couples under section 43A of the Marriage Act 1949.
- The signing of the conversion declaration must be attended by the superintendent registrar and, like the civil partnership proceedings, must not contain any religious elements. The conversion declaration should be signed in a separate room to the Church sanctuary or in a 'separate space' within the Church sanctuary if a separate space is not available. Religious music must not be played and the congregation must not be asked to pray at the time at which the conversion declaration is being signed.
- If (in the unlikely event) the local church has an Authorised Person who is also authorised to conduct the legal proceedings in civil partnerships, permission should be sought from the local register office for that Authorised Person to undertake the conversion declaration.
- The religious element of the service should follow the signing of the conversion declaration.

## Chapter ten

### The history of the declaration by the General Assembly of the United Reformed Church on 9 July 2016

- On 27 June 2015 General Assembly of the United Reformed Church first approved the resolution that the Church Meeting of each Local Church of the United Reformed Church of England and Wales is the relevant governing authority for the purpose of giving consent for the trustees of its building to seek the registration of that building for religious marriage ceremonies of couples of the same sex.
- The issue was then referred to the synods before it was returned to General Assembly, which, on 9 July 2016, ratified this declaration.
- The declaration by General Assembly on 9 July 2016 was an authoritative ruling as to where in the United Reformed Church's polity competence lies for the purpose of giving the consent required by law if a URC building is to be registered for this purpose.
- The General Assembly of the United Reformed Church can speak for the members of the URC on such a matter because one of its functions is 'to interpret all forms and expressions of the polity ... of the United Reformed Church'. General Assembly's interpretation is that this competence lies not with itself but with individual Church Meetings. Every Church Meeting can therefore give or withhold consent to the registration of its building for marriages of couples of the same sex.

This guidance booklet was written by the United Reformed Church law and polity advisory group, July 2018. © 2018, The United Reformed Church.

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