



Policy: Recognition of Ministers as Marriage Celebrants

**Adopted by the Vic/Tas Council
September 29, 2010**

Background

The government views all registered ministers as ministers of religion without qualification or category. It does not distinguish between ministers in terms of them being: Endorsed, Provisionally Endorsed, Lay Minister or Specific (or Specialist) Minister.

The expectation of the government is that Churches of Christ will recommend ministers to the government as 'fit and proper persons' to hold a marriage licence. Furthermore, Churches of Christ is responsible to also ensure that they continue to be 'fit and proper persons' to hold a marriage licence.

Accordingly, ministers nominated by Churches of Christ to be issued with a marriage licence shall be those who comply with the following guidelines and have their names tabled at a meeting of the Council of Churches of Christ in Vic/Tas for certification as having complied with the policy.

Nominees shall be:

1. Trained in the legal requirements of conducting marriages at a Marriage Celebrant Training Seminar conducted by Mission and Ministry.
2. An Endorsed Minister of Churches of Christ In Vic/Tas, or a minister who has commenced the Endorsement process; or a minister who is a locally appointed 'lay'-person.
3. A signatory to the Practice of Ministry—Code of Ethics and have attended a Healthy Ministry Seminar.
4. An active member in a local Church of Christ setting, except in special circumstances. (This active membership, or special circumstance, will be endorsed annually, in writing, by that church's minister, or key leader if there is no minister).
5. Declared a minister in good standing if from another church tradition.
6. Able to obtain a satisfactory Police Check (to be obtained by the applicant).
7. Committed to Churches of Christ and aware of what it means to perform a marriage 'according to the rites of Churches of Christ' as described in the Seminar mentioned in point 1. above.
8. An active participant in the Professional Development Process (PDP) of Churches of Christ in Vic/Tas¹. This includes a commitment to personal and ministerial formation, to continuing education for ministry, and to accountability structures like supervision, spiritual direction or peer networks.
9. Where a church calls an un-Endorsed person to serve in a pastoral capacity, that person will be recognised as a Church of Christ Minister eligible to apply for a marriage licence provided they:
 - a. Complete the training and processes outlined in this document; and
 - b. Participate fully in the PDP for the time of their ministry.

It is noted that neither the marriage licence nor recognition of their ministry is automatically transferrable on the conclusion of their term.

¹ *To be phased in over the next four years.*

Issuing of Marriage Licences

Those who qualify for the issuing of a marriage licence are:

1. People exercising pastoral ministry (Endorsed, Provisionally Endorsed, Specialist or Locally Appointed) in local congregations of Churches of Christ in Vic/Tas, and at the written request of the leadership of the local congregation where the person ministers. This includes Churches of Christ ministers previously Endorsed in other state Conferences transferring to a ministry in Vic/Tas.
2. People employed in a ministerial capacity (Endorsed, Provisionally Endorsed, Specialist or Locally Appointed) by State or Federal Conferences of Churches of Christ and their agencies, and at the written request of that Conference or agency.
3. Ministers (Endorsed, Provisionally Endorsed or Lay) who are employed by an interchurch agency (eg ACCESS Ministries) and are exercising ministry in Chaplaincy appointments, whose primary ecclesial loyalty is to Churches of Christ, and who, except in special circumstances, actively participate in and contribute to the life of a local Church of Christ congregation, and who, in writing, seek a marriage licence. Such Ministers will be requested to affirm this each year in an annual database update.
4. Ministers (Endorsed, Provisionally Endorsed or Lay) who are exercising ministry in Ecumenical appointments, whose primary ecclesial loyalty is to Churches of Christ, and who, except in special circumstances, actively participate in and contribute to the life of a local Church of Christ congregation, and who, in writing, seek a marriage licence. Such Ministers will be requested to affirm this each year in an annual database update.
5. In special circumstances, persons in para-church appointments, whose major role is ministerial, whose primary ecclesial loyalty is to Churches of Christ, and who, except in special circumstances, actively participate in and contribute to the life of a local Church of Christ congregation, and who, in writing, seek a marriage licence. Such Ministers will be requested to affirm this each year in an annual database update.
6. Ministers (Endorsed or Provisionally Endorsed) who retire from ministry and continue to be part of a local Church of Christ congregation who wish to register as available for casual, interim or itinerant ministry and who wish to retain a marriage licence. Retired ministers will be requested to affirm this each year in an annual database update.
7. Ministers must not, under the Act, use the marriage licence for profit or gain.
8. In the event of a minister's ministry coming to an end, and that person not continuing onto another ministry in a ministry setting as proscribed above, the Registrar will be notified after six months has elapsed since the minister concluded his/her ministry.
The issuing of a marriage licence is contingent on the nominee being in a ministry setting as proscribed above.

SAMPLE LETTER



(date)

(name)
(address)

Dear

Thank you for your request to be issued with a Marriage Licence through Churches of Christ Vic/Tas. In order for us to proceed with the application, it is important that you read the Churches of Christ Marriage Licence Policy, and that you understand the following points and complete the requirements listed:

1. Though un-Endorsed ministers employed in an approved agency or affiliated church *may* apply for a marriage licence, **we will usually expect the granting of a licence to be contingent on successfully commencing the Churches of Christ Ministry Endorsement process.** This is because we have a commitment to see all who serve as ministers undergo a thorough discernment and development process. This means that though the request to be issued with a Marriage Licence through Churches of Christ Vic/Tas is managed as a distinct process to that of Endorsement it is closely related. We would strongly encourage you to discuss your sense of call to ministry within the Churches of Christ 'family' here in Victoria and Tasmania with your congregational leadership. We would be delighted to guide you through that process and to answer your questions.
2. Not all Endorsed ministers require status as a celebrant; indeed the holding of a Marriage Licence is linked to the existing *role* of the minister rather than their status. A minister called to a role in a non-congregational or chaplaincy setting may no longer be eligible to keep their licence, though a new licence may be issued on their return to an applicable setting. That means **we require written confirmation of your role from the Church of Christ or affiliated entity with which you are employed.** It is Conference Policy that those who conduct marriages are ministers who serve in a congregational, chaplaincy, ecumenical, para-church or inter-church appointment within Victoria and Tasmania. We require that applicants for a licence to conduct marriages as a Churches of Christ religious practitioner can demonstrate that they are engaged by a congregation or affiliated agency within the Churches of Christ (Vic/Tas). A letter from your church Board, or equivalent governance group, minuting your role and endorsing your request for a marriage licence needs to be lodged as part of your application. Retired ministers will no longer 'automatically' retain their celebrant status, unless they so indicate their desire to do so as outlined in the policy.
3. Attendance at a **Marriage Licence Training Seminar** that covers the legal environment in which marriage occurs and the expectations of Churches of Christ in relation to marriages conducted in the name of Churches of Christ. We hold two such seminars each year in conjunction with the Baptist Union of Victoria, usually middle of the year and again nearer December.
4. A current **Police Check** or a copy that you may have already obtained for other reasons. Unfortunately a Working with Children Check is not suitable for this purpose.
5. Attendance at a **Healthy Ministry Seminar**. This will also be planned for next year, and we will let you know when the next Seminar is being held.

6. The signing of a **Statement of Compliance** with our Professional Standards Statement for Ministers, enclosed with this letter.
7. We also enclose the **Marriage Licence Nomination form**. Please fill out the details in the bottom two sections, and upon return of the Nomination Form, Police Check and following your attention to the above, the Conference Executive Officer, Paul Cameron, will complete the top section and it will be sent to the Registrar.

Sometimes a minister comes to serve in Victoria or Tasmania from another State. In this case, the process may be a little quicker, as it has to do with recognising a person already in ministry transferring their current licence to the Victorian or Tasmanian Registry list for Churches of Christ Vic/Tas. If you are a Churches of Christ Minister accredited in another State, but transferring to serve in Victoria, a licence transfer may be the appropriate pathway.

The steps for transferring a Marriage Licence include:

1. A request, with the appropriate information, must be in writing to us, preferably on letterhead, and signed by an appropriate person in authority in the church or affiliated ministry you are serving with in Victoria or Tasmania. This needs to be obtained and forwarded to us as soon as possible.
2. A 'Statement of Compliance' must also be signed and returned to the Churches of Christ office (see attached).
3. When the written request has been approved, a letter is sent to the Registry of Births, Deaths and Marriages requesting the transfer of your Marriage Licence to Churches of Christ Vic/Tas.
4. The Registry will process your application, and, when finalized, will send you a confirmation letter containing your Marriage Licence number for Victoria or Tasmania as appropriate. They will also forward us a similar letter for our records.
5. We would strongly encourage you to enroll in an upcoming Marriage Licence Seminar and orient yourself to the procedures in this State.
6. Note that a minister cannot use their previous Marriage Licence if they accept a call to another State. They need to apply to transfer it to the State in which they reside, or request the Registry of Births, Deaths and Marriages to cancel it.

Let me highlight the value of pursuing Endorsement, (or a transfer of Endorsement) as an important foundation to your vocational ministry within Churches of Christ (Vic/Tas). If you have any questions about the above please do not hesitate to contact me.

I look forward to receiving a letter from you shortly.

Yours sincerely,

D. Martin Boutros
Executive Director, Mission and Ministry