



**uniting
church**
in Australia,
Synod of NSW & ACT

Guidelines for Proposing Lay Marriage Celebrants

Title	Guidelines for Proposing Lay Marriage Celebrants
Creation Date	06/05/2016
Version	V. 1.0
Last Revised	
Approved by	General Secretary
Approval date	30 June 2016

RATIONALE

The Uniting Church in Australia needs to be able to propose the names of suitably equipped lay people to be authorised to celebrate marriages according to the rites of the Uniting Church in communities where an ordained Minister is not normally available.

While it is normal for an ordained Minister to preside at marriage services, this is not part of the UCA's understanding of ordination. There is no theological objection to any Christian of good standing in the church conducting a service of Christian marriage, in the same way that any Christian can conduct a Christian funeral. The conduct of marriages and funerals belongs to the pastoral ministry of the church and does not form part of the sacramental ministry of the church (unlike Lay Presidency).

Communities have always celebrated marriage, and will continue to do so with or without Church. A Christian marriage service is one in which the couple, with their families and their community, celebrate their marriage and make their marriage vows within the context of the Christian tradition.

Legal Context

The Nominating Authority in each state (the General Secretary in the Synod of NSW and the ACT) proposes people to be registered as Lay Marriage Celebrants. There are no guarantees that the person proposed will be accepted by the Federal Attorney-General.

GUIDELINES FOR PRESBYTERY

The Nomination Process

Before requesting that the General Secretary propose a person to be authorised as a Lay Marriage Celebrant, the Presbytery needs to satisfy itself that:

1. There is a clear need for the UCA to authorise someone to celebrate marriages in the local congregation or setting;
2. There is no ordained Minister readily available to provide this ministry in that community, or there is a special case to justify the nomination of an additional person;
3. The person proposed is a member in good standing in the UCA;
4. The person proposed offers respected Christian leadership in that congregation and community which is acceptable to the congregation and the presbytery; and
5. The person has satisfactorily completed the Synod of NSWACT training for Lay Marriage Celebrants which includes consideration of marriage preparation, legal requirements and the meaning and conduct of the liturgy.

The Presbytery then proposes the person to the Placements Committee which determines whether to seek registration as a Lay Marriage Celebrant. The Placements Committee forwards the name to the General Secretary who lodges the application.

If accepted, the Presbytery ensures that processes are in place to ensure that intentional and appropriate oversight is provided for the exercise of this ministry.

The Presbytery will review **annually** whether this authorisation is still required and inform the Secretariat that the requirement is still current.

GUIDELINES FOR CELEBRANTS

The Rites of the Uniting Church in Australia

The conduct of marriage services in the UCA is made explicit in the Notes to The Marriage Service in *Uniting in Worship II* (pp. 352) and all UCA celebrants should familiarise themselves with those requirements. In particular,

- The Declaration of Purpose, the Vows, and the Proclamation of the Marriage are integral to 'the rites of the UCA' and should not be altered or amended. In some cases, alternative wordings are offered in *Uniting in Worship II*; and
- The reading of Scripture and the Proclamation of the Word are not optional.

Couples may wish to include a meaningful poem or reading in the service. In such cases care should be taken to ensure that the Scripture reading has precedence.

Weddings in Other Places

While the person is proposed for this ministry because of the needs of a particular place and community, authorisation by the Federal Attorney-General enables the celebrant to celebrate marriages on behalf of the UCA anywhere in Australia. However, it is important to respect the church's ministry in other places.

If a Marriage Celebrant (Lay or ordained) is asked to conduct a marriage service elsewhere, s/he will

1. refer the couple to the local Minister or Lay Celebrant;
2. obtain permission from their home congregation/church Council and Presbytery before agreeing to conduct a wedding in another place;
3. only agree to conduct the wedding if invited to do so by the local Minister or Lay Celebrant.

It is unethical to agree to conduct a marriage without an explicit invitation from those in ministry in that place.