

RELIGIOUS
REPRESENTATIVES'
GUIDE TO



MARRIAGE IN
BRITISH COLUMBIA

RESPONSIBILITIES OF A RELIGIOUS BODY

Overview

Once a denomination or religious body is formally recognized, a considerable degree of confidence is placed in the "Governing Authority" with respect to the registration of new religious representatives. It is understood that new registrations will be recommended only to meet the real needs of the congregation for marriage services, and not as a form of personal accreditation. Registrations which are proposed in excess of the apparent need may be rejected or subsequently cancelled.

Note: Only individuals possessing religious authority vested in them in accordance with the rites and usages of the religious body may be submitted for registration. Individuals who simply hold an administrative position within a religious body do not meet the provisions of the *Marriage Act* for registration to solemnize marriage.

The Religious Representative Registry depends upon the governing authority through their signing authority to keep the Vital Statistics Agency informed of changes affecting religious representatives registered under their jurisdiction, as well as to ensure these religious representatives are informed of the requirements of the *Marriage Act*.

The Vital Statistics Agency routinely circulates administrative and statutory updates to the religious community via religious body governing authorities. The prompt dissemination of this information to the religious representatives under their jurisdiction is a vital and important role of all governing authorities.

Policy

THE SIGNING AUTHORITY

Overview

Once a religious body has been recognized it is necessary to document the appointment of one individual to act as the "Signing Authority". This individual will be designated by the "Governing Authority" at the time of application for recognition.

The Religious Representative Registry must be notified of changes in "Signing Authority". Notification must be in writing and should be accompanied by:

- an extract of the minutes of the meeting at which the transfer of office was made in accordance with the bylaws and customs of the religious body, or
- if the position was not an elected one, a letter of appointment from the "Governing Authority" of the religious body utilizing official letterhead.

A "Signing Authority" is responsible for processing the following forms:

- Application for Registration of Religious Representative (VSA 701) utilized to request the registration of a religious representative.
 - Notification of Changes Affecting Religious Representative (VSA 705) utilized to request cancellation of a religious representative following retirement or death, or to advise the Registry of a change in address and/or jurisdiction.
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REGISTRATION OF A RELIGIOUS REPRESENTATIVE

Summary

A “religious representative” is defined within Section 1 of the *Marriage Act* as follows:

“religious representative” means a person duly authorized to solemnize marriage according to the rites and usages of the religious body to which the person belongs...

If you are an individual who has been vested or ordained with religious authority to solemnize marriage in accordance with the “rites and usages” of your religious body then you meet the definition of a “religious representative” under the *Marriage Act*.

Policy

In order to qualify for registration as authorized to solemnize marriage you must meet the provisions of Section 3 of the *Marriage Act* (see Appendix A).

Religious representatives may not be registered independently of the recognition of their denomination or religious body. An application must be made on behalf of a religious representative by a recognized religious body and the application must attest to the qualifications of any religious representative in accordance with Section 3 of the *Marriage Act*.

The basic qualifications for registration require that an applicant be:

- ordained or appointed according to the rites and usages of the religious body,
- in charge of or officiating in connection with a congregation, branch or local unit of the Province in the religious body,
- recognized by the religious body to which he or she belongs as authorized to solemnize marriage according to its rites and usages,
- that the religious body to which the person belongs is sufficiently well established.

Applications for registration on behalf of individual religious representatives are made utilizing an “**Application for Registration of Religious Representative**” form (VSA 701). A sample of a properly completed application is shown on page 12.

Upon registration, a religious representative will receive from the Religious Representative Registry a letter certifying their registration and an information package describing their legal responsibilities and providing instructions for the proper processing of all necessary forms and documents.

TEMPORARY REGISTRATION

Under the provisions of the *Marriage Act*, temporary registration is restricted to religious representatives who are **non**-residents of British Columbia, and is designed to facilitate and expedite the registration of out-of-province religious representatives for solemnization of a specific marriage or a few marriages. The date or period of registration is to be specified on the application, and no cancellation document is required.

In the case of short-term registration of British Columbia resident religious representatives to fill a temporary need, as in summer, a form (VSA 705) must also be completed to terminate the registration, a requirement which is easily overlooked. In submitting applications of this category, it will serve as a reminder to the Registry, as well as to the signing authority, if the approximate intended duration of the short-term registration is indicated on the application.

A sample of a properly completed temporary application is shown on page 14.

NOTIFICATION OF CHANGES

In order to ensure that the Registry does not maintain unnecessary or incorrect records, signing authorities are required to submit notification of cancellations and changes by completing a **“Notification of Changes Affecting Religious Representatives”** form (VSA 705).

The following changes should always be recorded and submitted to the Registry as early as possible to ensure the records are kept up to date:

- changes of residence
- changes of pastoral charge or jurisdiction
- retirement, where registration is **not** to be cancelled and
- cancellations of registrations following retirement, change of denomination/religious body or for any other cause.

For any religious representative for whom cancellation has been requested, it is necessary for the signing authority to return any registration certificate issued prior to May 9, 2003.

A sample of a properly completed notification form is shown on page 16.

The Religious Representative Registry will provide each signing authority with an annual listing of all religious representatives registered under the authority of their religious body. Signing authorities will review these listings and return them with any changes necessary to ensure that the Registry files are current and reflect correct and up to date information for every religious representative.
