

# Recognition Of Ministers As Marriage Celebrants Policy

of Churches of Christ in Victoria and Tasmania Inc

Version 1

Approved 28.06.2018

### Evaluation, Review and Update

CCVT is open to receiving feedback on this policy. Any future revision will consider feedback from Affiliates and their Leaders, and any developments in regulation and best practice. The CCVT *Recognition of ministers as Marriage Celebrants Policy* will otherwise be reviewed regularly by the Accreditation and Endorsement Taskforce.

This document is clearly marked with the date of adoption by the Churches of Christ in Victoria and Tasmania Inc Board. The Board will provide opportunity for Affiliates and their Leaders to contribute to the review of this policy.

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## Introduction

Churches of Christ in Victoria and Tasmania (CCVT) is a movement of more than 130 Communities of Hope and Compassion (or, churches and agencies of all different shapes and sizes) spread across Victoria and Tasmania, each embedded in their neighbourhoods as a sign, witness, and foretaste of the Kingdom of God.

The Australian Government Attorney-General's Department is responsible for the [Marriage Act 1961](#) and [Marriage Regulations 1963](#), which set out the requirements for getting married in Australia. Churches of Christ in Australia has been listed by the Attorney-General as a recognised denomination under Section 26 of the *Marriage Act 1961*. The Attorney-General's Department appoints the person within CCVT (known as the nominating authority) who can nominate ministers for registration as authorised celebrants through the relevant state Registry of Births, Deaths, and Marriages.

There are certain requirements set out in the *Marriage Act 1961* for the registration of ministers of religion as authorised celebrants. 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. 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 accredited or endorsed.

Since 2010 all civil marriage celebrants have had to complete a Certificate IV in Celebrancy, which consists of 13 units, an equivalent of 550 hours of work, and generally takes 9 to 12 months to complete. In recognition of the higher level of competency expected of civil marriage celebrants, CCVT is ensuring that its ministers have an appropriate level of training, formation, and support to fulfil the role of a marriage celebrant.

The purpose of this document is to set out CCVT's policy to equip and train ministers as marriage celebrants who can deliver high quality pre-marriage support, meaningful weddings and ongoing relationship support for married couples in their communities.

This policy applies to CCVT Inc and its subsidiary entities; all Affiliates in Victoria and Tasmania, and CCVT's national partner Stirling Theological College.

## Definitions

**Accredited** is used to indicate a person who has been recognised as fulfilling the accreditation process in the CCVT's *Accreditation and Endorsement of People in Ministry Policy*.

**Accreditation and Endorsement Taskforce** is a group established by the CCVT Board to manage and monitor the processes and requirements for accreditation, endorsement, and marriage licences.

**Affiliate** is a church or agency affiliated with CCVT.

**Churches of Christ in Victoria and Tasmania (CCVT)** is a movement of more than 130 Communities of Hope and Compassion (Affiliates) spread across Victoria and Tasmania.

**Council of Churches of Christ in Australia (CCCA)** is the national body for Churches of Christ, made up of representatives from each of the states.

**Endorsement** is used to refer to the process contained in the CCVT's *Accreditation and Endorsement of People in Ministry* policy to further equip and form people for professional ministry in CCVT once they have been accredited.

**Endorsement Status** refers to the category of ministry endorsement a person has achieved:

**Endorsed (E)** is used to indicate the status of a person who has completed all the requirements of this policy for endorsement and who is therefore eligible for ordination with Churches of Christ in Australia.

**Endorsed for Specific Ministry (SM)** is used to indicate the status of a person whose training and formation has been undertaken with a particular ministry context in mind and meets all the requirements of this policy for endorsement for specific ministry. Examples have included Urban Neighbours of Hope (UNOH) and various chaplaincy roles, although people undertaking these ministries can also seek endorsement. Endorsement for Specific Ministry is not generally transferable to another distinct area of ministry or mission without a reassessment of knowledge.

**Ministers** refers to people appointed to formal ministry roles, paid or unpaid, for example: senior pastors, associate pastors, families/children's pastors, youth ministers, chaplains, church planters, and student ministers. Ministers will be listed in the "People in Ministry" section in the CCVT directory.

**Prepare** refers to the 'Prepare' component of the *Prepare-Enrich* pre-marriage education material.

**Professional Standards Committee (PSC) (or its equivalent)** is a committee of the CCVT Board that oversees compliance with the CCVT *Code of Ethics for Ministers* (or equivalent replacement policy) and investigation of breaches of that Code.

## Purpose

This policy aims to ensure that CCVT marriage celebrants provide:

- high quality pre-marriage support;
- pastorally relevant and personally meaningful wedding ceremonies;
- where appropriate, ongoing relationship support for married couples;
- a ceremony and experience of becoming married that reflects and embodies practical compassion and realistic hope;
- a service that demonstrates representatively CCVT's commitment to marriages and families within their communities and beyond.

This is a ministry for both those in our Affiliates and in the broader community on behalf of the Church. Our overall goal is to build strong relationships and families and we believe that an effective marriage celebrant enhances this.

## General Principles

The relationship between CCVT and Affiliated Communities and their Leaders is a covenant partnership, expressed in a document called Affinity:2. This covenant (like a marriage covenant) seeks to describe a living and dynamic partnership, where more is implied than stated, and where much of the future is yet to be lived out. CCVT values this covenant partnership with each Affiliate. Affinity:2 commits CCVT to provide marriage celebrant training to accredited ministers.

The affiliate will apply on behalf of an accredited minister for that person to be recognised as a marriage celebrant where the minister's role requires them to provide marriage and relationship support. The affiliate will be keen to ensure that this representative ministry is performed with the pastoral skills and competencies required for this important moment in the life of family and society. The minister will therefore need to meet the minimum requirements in this policy to be eligible to be recognised as a marriage celebrant.

**Note:** Not all ministers in CCVT will need to be recognised as marriage celebrants.

To maintain their marriage licence the minister:

- must maintain their accreditation;
- under the *Marriage Act 1961*, must not use the marriage licence for profit or gain;
- is advised that eligibility to continue to hold a marriage licence will be reviewed on an annual basis. Marriage licences will be cancelled when a minister's accreditation is cancelled. Marriage licences may also be cancelled for reasons listed in this policy.

## Marriage Licence Process

There are four steps to being recognised as a marriage celebrant through CCVT:

1. The Affiliate contacts CCVT and indicates the reasons for recommending that their minister become a Marriage Celebrant. CCVT will send the Affiliate and minister the list of the minimum requirements and dates of training seminars.
2. The minister needs to meet the minimum requirements.
3. Once the minimum requirements have been met, the person who is the Nominating Authority in CCVT will sign the nomination form and send it to the relevant Registry of Births, Deaths, and Marriages.
4. Once a minister has their marriage licence they need to receive supervision or mentoring for their first two weddings from an experienced religious marriage celebrant. The minister can use any pre-marriage education material they feel is most appropriate. They are not restricted to using *Prepare*, but CCVT recommends and endorses this program.

### Transferring a Marriage Licence

Where a minister has a marriage licence from another denomination, they need to request the cancellation of their previous marriage licence before they can request a new marriage licence with CCVT. The minister then needs to follow the steps above.

Where a minister already has a marriage licence from Churches of Christ in another State or Territory in Australia, they may transfer their marriage licence. Their affiliate must contact CCVT and indicate the reasons they want the minister to retain their marriage licence. In addition, the minister must:

- be accredited;
- be ordinarily resident in Victoria or Tasmania;
- commit to performing a marriage according to the 'Marriage Rites of Churches of Christ in Australia' (in Appendix 1);
- complete the CCVT Marriage Celebrant Training (both the initial training seminar and the follow-up reflection and learning day); and
- complete the Prepare Facilitator Training.

When these requirements have been met CCVT will send a letter to the Registry of Births, Deaths, and Marriages to request the transfer of the previous marriage licence to Victoria.

### Maintaining the Marriage Licence

The minister must maintain their accreditation.

A minister who has a marriage licence must keep themselves informed about changes to the *Marriage Act 1961* and *Marriage Regulations 1963*. At a minimum, the minister must complete a Marriage Celebrant Training Seminar as a refresher every five years. This is part of their professional development requirements for maintaining accreditation.

The minister must promptly inform CCVT of any changes to their place of ministry or address. CCVT will inform the appropriate Registry of Births, Deaths, and Marriages of any address changes. Where there is a change to the place of ministry, CCVT may choose to review with the minister whether they still require a marriage licence. This review may lead to a cancellation of the marriage licence even if the minister is still accredited.

### **Cancellation of Marriage Licence**

Each year there will be an annual review of ministers with marriage licences. If a minister no longer meets the minimum requirements for accreditation or to be a marriage celebrant, CCVT will contact that minister and/or their Affiliate in relation to cancelling their marriage licence.

If a minister loses their accreditation through the annual review or triennial renewal of accreditation as set out in CCVT's *Accreditation and Endorsement of People in Ministry Policy*, their marriage licence will be cancelled. If the minister re-applies for accreditation, once they are accredited they can re-apply to become a marriage celebrant. They will need to meet the minimum requirements listed below.

If the minister no longer needs a marriage licence because they have moved to a different ministry position they must inform CCVT, who will cancel their marriage licence. Otherwise it is assumed that while the minister is in ministry with an affiliate of CCVT, once they have a marriage licence they will retain that marriage licence if they continue to meet the minimum requirements for accreditation and becoming a marriage celebrant.

If a minister has been found to be in breach of the CCVT *Code of Ethics for Ministers*, the Professional Standards Committee (PSC) (or its equivalent), will normally recommend to the CCVT Board that their marriage licence be cancelled. The PSC (or its equivalent) determination should indicate whether the person can re-apply for a marriage licence after certain requirements have been met.

Under the *Marriage Act 1961*, ministers must not use the marriage licence for profit or gain. If they do so, their marriage licence may be cancelled.

### **Accreditation for Retired Ministers**

Generally retired ministers will have their marriage licence, accreditation, and endorsement status cancelled after six months. The exception is where a retired minister has active membership with an Affiliate, and they are available for casual, interim, or itinerant ministry. These retired ministers who are still involved in ministry can retain their accreditation, endorsement status, and marriage licence as long as they continue to meet the requirements of accreditation.

### **Appeal Process**

A minister who disagrees with the cancellation of their marriage licence may write to the CCVT Executive Officer and ask for a review of that decision. If the decision was made on the recommendation of the PSC (or its equivalent), the appeal process in CCVT's *The Practice of Ministry - Procedure for Investigating Complaints Relating to Breaches of the Code of Ethics* (or equivalent replacement policy) must be followed.



## Minimum Requirements

To be eligible for recognition as a marriage celebrant, the Affiliate must contact CCVT and indicate the reasons for their recommendation that their minister become a Marriage Celebrant. Then, the minister must:

- have attained the age of 21 years;
- be ordinarily resident in Victoria or Tasmania;
- be accredited with CCVT in accordance with CCVT's *Accreditation and Endorsement of People in Ministry* policy;
- commit to performing a marriage according to the 'Marriage Rites of Churches of Christ in Australia' (in Appendix 1);
- complete the Prepare Facilitator Training;
- complete the CCVT Marriage Celebrant Training (both the initial training seminar and the follow-up reflection and learning day);
- shadow an experienced minister for two weddings;
- receive supervision or mentoring for their first two weddings from an experienced religious marriage celebrant; and
- complete the nomination of minister of religion form.

### Transition Process

Following the commencement of this policy, all ministers with an existing marriage licence must become accredited by October 2019. If the minister is not accredited by then, their marriage licence will be cancelled. All ministers with an existing marriage licence must complete the CCVT Marriage Celebrant Training Seminar reflection and learning day and the Prepare Facilitator Training within three years. If they do not, their marriage licence will normally be cancelled.


## Authorisation

Responsible person	Rob Nyhuis, EO
Version	1
Approved by the Boards of:	
CCVT Inc	28.06.2018
Scheduled review date	2023

## Related Policies

 [Affinity:2](#)

 [Accreditation and Endorsement of People in Ministry Policy](#)

 [Code of Ethics for Ministers - Professional and Ethical Standards Applicable to People in Ministry in Churches of Christ](#)



### **Marriage Rites of Churches of Christ in Australia**

Churches of Christ in Australia defines marriage as being the union between a man and a woman to the exclusion of all others, voluntarily entered into for life. Authorised celebrants with Churches of Christ in Australia are only able to solemnise marriages according to Churches of Christ Rites that conform to this definition. <sup>1</sup>

**Marriage Ceremonies according to Rites of Churches of Christ in Australia are to include the following:**

- A statement of the Christian nature and purpose of marriage and the intent of the marriage ceremony;
- An acknowledgement that this is a Christian celebration of marriage being conducted before God and those people who have gathered;
- Declarations or Statements of Intent;
- Personal Vows which are to be clear promises of commitment for life in which each takes the other to be their wife or husband; and
- Pronouncement of marriage.

**Normal additional inclusions are:**

- Prayer(s)
- The reading of Scripture
- An occasional address
- Exchange of rings
- Blessings or Affirmations by the parent or Parents and/or Giving of the Bride and or Groom
- Benediction and/or blessing.

*Approved at the April 2016 meeting of the Council of Churches of Christ in Australia*

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<sup>1</sup> Churches of Christ affirms that each minister of religion in possession of a marriage celebrant license has the discretionary right to perform a marriage ceremony or not.