

Registering Local Church Buildings
For the Marriage of Same-Sex Couples

1. The following applies **in England and Wales**, but not in other jurisdictions where the URC serves. Jersey, Guernsey and the Isle of Man do not at present allow the marriage of same-sex couples. Scots law does not require the registration of buildings for marriage services.
2. Some of our congregations are keen to register their buildings for the marriage of same-sex couples as soon as they possibly can. This brief document aims to give guidance on what can and cannot be done at the moment, so that local churches understand the current situation.
3. It is not possible at the moment for a URC congregation to apply to register its building for the marriage of same-sex couples. The earliest this could become possible is July 2016, subject to an appropriate General Assembly decision that month.
4. Nor is it possible at the moment for an LEP with a URC element or a Union Church with a URC element to apply to register its building for this purpose. The earliest this could become possible is July 2016, subject to an appropriate General Assembly decision that month.
5. Even after an appropriate General Assembly decision (which might come in 2016), an LEP or a Union Church would not usually be able to register its building on the basis of a URC decision alone. It would also depend on the consent of other partner denominations. Such consent may not always be available.
6. Similarly, a local congregation that lets another church use its premises as a regular tenant might also need to obtain their consent if the building were to be registered.
7. Any application to register a local church building would eventually need to be made by the Trustees of that building. For many URC churches, the Trustees of the building are the Trust Company within that Synod; this is not the case for all local churches, but it is for most. If a Church Meeting wished to register the building, the Trustees would make the application.
8. I have been asked if a Church Meeting could pass a preparatory resolution now, so as to be ready to get on quickly with the registration process, as and when a General Assembly decision is made. This would be possible, but it need not be done just now. The URC intends to publish guidance early in 2016, offering wording for such a resolution.
9. If in doubt, take advice. You are always welcome to write to Tavistock Place and enquire of a member of the General Secretariat. That may be, in some cases, the best way of making sure that you are handling matters properly.

John Proctor, General Secretary, July 2015