# Approval of Church of the Flying Spaghetti Monster marriage celebrant

## Approval of celebrant

On 9 February 2016, the Registrar-General of Births, Marriages and deaths approved a member of the Church of the Flying Spaghetti Monster (CFSM) – Dr Karen Martyn – to solemnise marriages. This appointment commenced immediately.

* Recent changes to the celebrant appointment process have strengthened testing of good character and ability to meet the requirements of the role. The Registrar-General was satisfied that Dr Martyn was "of good character and otherwise qualified to act as a marriage celebrant, and that the provisions of this Act … have been complied with."
* The CFSM nomination included all required documents, completed correctly.

## Approval of organisation

The CFSM applied in November 2015 for “Approval of organisation for the purposes of later nominating persons to solemnise marriages”.

* The Registrar-General's decision was based on whether the CFSM *upholds or promotes* *philosophical or humanitarian convictions*. The Registrar-General passed no judgement on validity of beliefs or convictions and does not grant any status to the Church, other than the ability to later nominate marriage celebrants.
* The application included a declaration from the Chief Office Bearer and ten members plus a proper statutory declaration. The Objects of the CFSM were attached.
* The Registrar-General referred to the Objects of the CFSM, reviewed material available online and considered other organisations already able to nominate marriage celebrants. A review of media and the CFSM's international website shows a consistent presentation of their philosophies.
  + **Principles** cover philosophical and humanitarian issues such as human rights, cultural and spiritual diversity, ethics, relieving poverty and advancing education and their religion.
  + **Purposes** include raising awareness, educating and training people, particularly atheists and superstitious people, about the Churches principles and practices.
  + **Activities** listed to support this Purpose include services and celebrations, performing marriages and other sacred ceremonies.
  + While some regard the CFSM as a ‘parody organisation’, its members have rebutted this on a number of occasions.
* The decision was published in the [*New Zealand Gazette* on 10 December](https://gazette.govt.nz/notice/id/2015-go7246). The CFSM was able to seek approval for members to be recognised as marriage celebrants.

## Legislation

Part 2 of the Marriages Act 1955 outlines the process:

* [**Section 9**](http://legislation.govt.nz/act/public/1955/0092/latest/DLM292066.html) **Approval of organisations**: The criteria are that: “the Registrar-General is satisfied that the principal object or one of the principal objects of the organisation is to uphold or promote religious beliefs or philosophical or humanitarian convictions”
  + The Act does not define the organisations that can be approved. Most approved organisations happen to be faith-based and cluster around well-known religious views. Others have what may be considered an ‘alternative philosophy’ – eg: Wicca, Scientology, Heathen, Druid, Humanist, Reiki.
* [**Section 10**](http://legislation.govt.nz/act/public/1955/0092/latest/DLM292079.html) **Approval of celebrants**: an approved organisation's nominated person shall be include in the list of celebrants if the Registrar-General is satisfied that that they are "of good character and otherwise qualified to act as a marriage celebrant, and that the provisions of this Act … have been complied with."

## Celebrants and marriages in general

**The celebrant cohort:** There are 9,665 registered marriage and/or civil union celebrants in New Zealand.

* 41% are attached to [Specified Religious Organisations](http://www.legislation.govt.nz/act/public/1955/0092/latest/DLM292637.html?search=ts_act%40bill%40regulation%40deemedreg_Marriage+Act+1955_resel_25_a&p=1#DLM292637)
* 35% belong to [Approved Organisations](http://www.legislation.govt.nz/act/public/1955/0092/latest/DLM292066.html)
* 24% are independent

**Annual registration activity:** in recent years, over 800 new people have registered annually with Births, Deaths and Marriages to become marriage and civil union celebrants

* 54% were organisational celebrants; 46% were independent celebrants.
* A total of just over 500 left the register in the year to 31 October 2015.

**Marriages:** 23,000 registered marriages and civil unions occurred in the year to 31 October 2015

* 27% conducted by organisational celebrants
* 50% were conducted by independent celebrants,
* 22% conducted by Registrars in Registry Offices.