



January 31, 2013

Mr. Ian Bushfield, President
BC Humanist Association
PO Box 400 – 3495 Cambie St
Vancouver BC V5Z 4R3

Dear Mr. Bushfield:

This will acknowledge receipt of an application from the **BC Humanist Association** for recognition as a religious body under the *Marriage Act* of British Columbia for the purpose of seeking the registration of religious representatives for solemnizing marriage.

The discretion to register religious representatives as authorized to solemnize marriage is conferred upon me by section 2 of the *Marriage Act*, and constrained by section 3, both of which provide, in part, as follows:

- 2(1) On application, in the form required by the chief executive officer, the chief executive officer may register any religious representative as authorized to solemnize marriage.
- (2) The application on behalf of a religious representative must be made by the governing authority with jurisdiction in British Columbia over the religious body to which the religious representative belongs.
- 3(1) A person must not be registered as a religious representative unless the chief executive officer is satisfied as follows:
 - (d) that the religious body to which the person belongs is sufficiently well established, both as to continuity of existence and as to **recognized rites usages** respecting the solemnization of marriage, to warrant, in the opinion of the chief executive officer, the registration of its religious representatives as authorized to solemnize marriage.

After reviewing your application and supporting materials as well as the *Marriage Act*, I have concluded that I must deny the application of the BC Humanist Association for the registration of religious representatives to solemnize marriage.

The term “religious body” is defined in section 1 of the *Marriage Act* as follows:

“religious body” means any church, or any religious denomination, sect, congregation or society...

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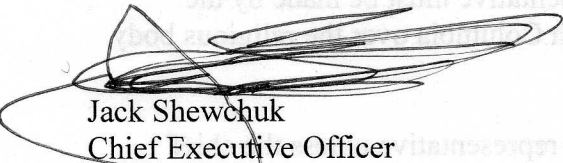
The constitution of the BC Humanist Association (the Association) explicitly states that the purpose of secular humanism is to provide a valid alternative to existing religions and that humanism has no official dogma. This statement is further supported in the constitution, by an acknowledgment that the Association is an educational institution involved with ethics and morals. Accordingly, the Association is not a religious body for the purposes of the *Marriage Act*. Therefore I cannot accept applications from the Association for the registration of religious representatives to solemnize marriage.

Upon further examination of the enclosed sample wedding ceremony, I have determined that for all intents and purposes the humanist wedding ceremony is a civil ceremony rather than a religious ceremony. I therefore recommend that members of your association make application under the *Marriage Act* to become marriage commissioners in the communities in which they reside. Vacancies are posted in local newspapers and on the Vital Statistics Agency website at www.vs.gov.bc.ca.

Section 5(1) of the *Marriage Act* provides for an appeal from my decision, on a question of law, to the Supreme Court of British Columbia within 3 months of the date on which this decision was issued.

Please feel free to contact me in Victoria at 250-952-9039 should you have any additional questions regarding this matter.

Sincerely,



Jack Shewchuk
Chief Executive Officer
Vital Statistics Agency