

A response to God's love

HOLY BAPTISM

“Go and make disciples of all nations, baptising them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything that I have commanded you”.

Matthew 28: 19-20

The Church of England in its official formularies affirms the authority of holy Scripture as containing “all things necessary to salvation” [Article 6]. The Incumbent of the Parish of St James St Basil Fenham supported by the PCC, is committed to a policy and practice of Baptism that is consistent with the teachings of the church and God’s revealed will in Scripture. There is no fee for a baptism/Christening or Thanksgiving service.

- 1.0 In accordance with the words of Jesus as recorded in Matthew 28: 19-20 (and received by the Church), this Policy understands Baptism to be a Sacrament of Trinitarian mission – an essential part of the event and/or process by which people become disciples of Jesus Christ, children of his heavenly Father and receivers of the gift of the Holy Spirit.
- 1.1 The PCC and the Incumbent should regularly review the parish provision for preparation of the family prior to the baptism, and the means of integrating them into the worshipping life of the church.
- 1.2 We understand the scriptural meaning of baptism in terms of the following:
 - (a) Forgiveness and cleansing from sin (Acts 22:16)
 - (b) Belonging to and being identified with Jesus Christ (Rom 6:3)
 - (c) Sharing in the death and resurrection of Christ (Rom 6: 3-5; Col 2:12)
 - (d) The gift of the Holy Spirit (Acts 2:38)
 - (e) New birth to adoption and sonship (Gal 3:26)
 - (f) Membership of the body of Christ (1 Cor 12:13)

- 1.3 baptism is Covenant Theology". That is "*the faith of the Church as mediated by believing parents, and other Christians.*" It is understood that one is not baptised due to the merit of their knowledge but by belonging to the community of faith. For Infants and young children, the parents and Godparents take the lead role in bringing the child up in the community of faith (see point 1.8.) In the case of adults and older children, an understanding of the faith and a desire to follow it is needed but belonging to the covenantal and sacramental family of the church is of key importance.
- 1.4 We baptise during our main Sunday services because the point is to welcome the person being baptised into the family of the church. Occasionally there might be a good reason for a baptism outside of a Sunday service, this is to be discussed by the lead clergy, the family, and the ministry team. Note that any baptism will have to be accommodated within the service and clergy rota depending upon availability.
- 1.5 Except in emergency, those concerned should be carefully prepared before the day of the service.
- 1.6 Initial enquiries may come through, coming along to our Sunday Service and speaking to a member of the clergy after the service, by telephone, email, social media, or by personal contact.
- 1.7 If the family or person who wish to be baptised are not part of the worshipping community start at point 2.4.
- 1.8 In the case of baptism for Infants whose family are part of the worshipping community the clergy should still visit the family (following points 2.4, 2.8 to 3.0 of this policy.) In such cases these meetings may be less about discerning the faith of the parents (as that is assumed due to them being part of the worshipping community, see point 2.6 for details) and instead explain the theology of baptism, undergoing a period catechisms and teaching (if needed,) and dealing with the practicalities of the service. In this case move onto point 1.9 of this policy.

OUR PRACTICE IN RESPECT INFANT BAPTISM

- 1.9 In accordance with canon B22/B23, the practice of Baptism of "young children" is to be retained where parents (and godparents or sponsors) are willing and able, in all conscience, to affirm and profess the Trinitarian faith of the Church and undertake their responsibility to bring up their baptised children within the fellowship of the Church. In the meetings leading up to the baptism if appropriate the minister should advise on how to do that.

- 2.0 We affirm and respect the preference of some parents who wish to leave the baptism of their children until later years.
- 2.1 A Service of Thanksgiving for the Gift of a Child should be available for all who desire it.
- 2.2 When the child lives in another parish and the parents or guardians are not on the Electoral Roll or are not regular attenders at services, the Baptism should not take place without consultation between the clergy of the two parishes. The incumbent intending to baptise should seek the goodwill of the clergy of the parish (or non-parochial church) where the family live.
- 2.3 For a Baptism to proceed the requirements of Canon B23 must be observed. That is that for each infant to be baptised there should be at least **three godparents, all of whom should be baptised.**

OUR PRACTICE IN RESPECT BAPTISM FROM OUTSIDE THE WORSHIPING COMMUNITY

- 2.4 At least one of the parish clergy will arrange to meet with the Baptism family or the person to be baptised in the case of an adult. This first meeting usually takes place after the Sunday service. But in difficult pastoral situation can happen on other days.
- 2.5 This preliminary meeting will be to assess the desires, hopes and expectations of the baptism family or person. Part of this should involve an invitation to attend and experience church if they do not already do so. This is to allow the family of, or the person being baptised to see what the community of faith that they are being baptised into looks like; and to help them become integrated and welcomed into that community, which is the worshiping community of the church. At this meeting no dates for the baptism will be put in the diary, we recognise (in line with point 1.2, 1.3) that baptism involves being a part of the family of the church, it cannot simply be 'booked in' disconnected from that fact.
- 2.6 In line with this; baptism cannot be arranged until the person, or parents of the child in question have been attending the church's acts of worship and engaging with the community of faith for a substantial length of time. We define this as a minimum two times a month for at least three months.
- 2.7 Once a regular pattern (as defined in point 2.6) of attending worship has been established the person or family in question can begin the process discussing their desire for baptism.

- 2.8 These discussions will seek to articulate why they wish to be or have their child baptised. A provisional date can be booked, (which can be removed or postponed if needed) and catechisms and teaching can begin in line with point 3.0.
- 2.9 Any number of follow up conversations and meetings may be needed depending on the personal faith of the family or the person being baptised. Catechisms and teaching will take place as part of this preparation. The Length or number of sessions of catechism and teaching is not defined.
- 3.0 The family of the infant or child should be able to articulate the faith which they are promising to share as part of the community of faith. This is to be in line with canon B22.3, see point 1.3 and 1.9 of this policy for further details. (In the case of adults and older children, see points 3.9 and 3.5 of this policy respectively)
- 3.1 Where there is doubt about the attitude of parents towards baptism, the clergy may urge the parents or guardians to postpone the baptism for the purpose of preparation. The Church does not and will never reject anyone who in goodwill asks for baptism. The service "Thanksgiving for the Gift of a Child" might prove suitable for use in preparation for baptism, which might then take place at a later stage.
- 3.2 A Service of Thanksgiving for the Gift of a Child should be available for all who desire it.
- 3.3 Once the person or family is ready for baptism, begin the process following the guidelines laid out in this policy;
- in the case of infant start at point 1.9
 - in the case of an older child start at point 3.4
 - in the case of an adult start at point 3.9
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OUR PRACTICE IN RESPECT OF OLDER CHILDREN

- 3.4 By "older children" we mean those able to understand what it means to be a disciple of Jesus (in ways appropriate to their age) and able to make the promises in the Baptism service for themselves. They may or may not be attending services with their parents.
- 3.5 Candidates for baptism should be able to articulate their personal faith in Jesus Christ for salvation, including a belief in the triune God who is Father, Son, and holy Spirit. They should understand the importance of the

Sacraments and sacred scripture. This understanding can be age specific. A period catechisms and teaching is expected. Noting that Baptism is covenant theology. (In line with point 1.3.) Baptism therefore is open to all who are a part of the worshipping community. See point 2.6.

- 3.6 If and when the possibility of confirmation is discussed, this is to be in accordance with Canon B27.
- 3.7 Baptism can be performed by immersion at the main service, or a specially arranged service. But is normally done at the Font.
- 3.8 In the case of child or teenage candidates whose parents do not worship with us, we would only baptise with their consent and good will.

OUR PRACTICE IN RESPECT OF ADULT CANDIDATES

- 3.9 Candidates for “adult” baptism should be able to articulate their personal faith in Jesus Christ for salvation, including a belief in the triune God who is Father, Son, and holy Spirit. They should understand the importance of the Sacraments and sacred scripture. They should be part of the worshipping community of the church and or be on the electoral role. A period catechisms and teaching are expected. Noting that Baptism is covenant theology (see point 1.3.) Baptism therefore is open to all who are a part of the worshipping community. See point 2.6.
- 4.0 If and when the possibility of confirmation is discussed, this is to be in accordance with Canon B27.
- 4.1 Clergy (or others) will be available to provide preparation and teaching. This is especially important for new Christians.
- 4.2 Baptism can be performed by immersion at the main service, or a specially arranged service. But is normally done at the Font.

OUR PRACTICE IN RESPECT OF PERSONS ALREADY BAPTISED REQUESTING “RE-BAPTISM”

- 4.3 When checking on the validity of baptism in another church or denomination it should be ascertained that the phrase ‘In the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit’ or ‘In the name of the Holy Trinity’ was used. If there is doubt a person should be conditionally baptised.

- 4.4 Theologically there is only one Baptism whether administered in infancy or later years.
- 4.5 That said, we recognise that there is sometimes a real pastoral issue here to which we have responsibility to minister. Theologically and pastorally the church should where possible seek to help the person see that they are fully baptised and do not need to recreate the event of Baptism. If helpful pastorally however, the church can offer forms of reaffirmation.
- 4.6 There are two options. (a) For some, the renewal of baptismal vows will suffice. (this may or may not involve water. If water is involved the church must be clear that the water is purely there for sensory experience and does not sacramentally confer baptism.) (b) For others Confirmation service will be more appropriate; this is undertaken if the person is believed to be of good Christian understanding in line with Canon B27.
- 4.7 Where the latter option is chosen it is to be administered following the rubrics of the church of England and must be performed by the diocesan Bishop or one of their suffragan or assistant bishops.