

## **Christian Initiation: Holy Baptism**

### **Theology – in brief**

Baptism is the primary rite of Christian initiation. It is at the command of Christ that we baptise. Christian baptism is rooted in the ministry of Jesus. It "signs and seals" our incorporation into Christ, who is the crucified and risen Lord. Baptism is a gift from God and is ministered in the name of the Father, Son and Holy Spirit (Mtt 28.18-20).

It has long been the tradition of our Church that we baptise adults, children and infants. The New Testament is inconclusive as to whether children were baptised in the first century Church. However, it is clear that towards the end of the second century the custom was widespread so we can reasonably conclude that the passing fragments of evidence in the New Testament suggest that the early Church not only thought was it right and appropriate to baptise infants and children but did so.

A priest licensed in this diocese should not refuse or discourage infant baptism and our whole approach to the ministry of baptism should be marked by a sense of celebration, welcome and inclusiveness.

### **Preparation**

It is essential that candidates for baptism be appropriately prepared. In the case of those old enough to answer for themselves the preparation should be designed in such a way that it feeds the candidate's journey of discovery.

Where infants are brought for baptism, there has been a growing tendency to put parents through a rigorous preparation course. Preparation does need to be done well, but it should not have the character of a "mini examination" in the Christian Faith.

Rather, it should focus on the relationships between the family of the infant and the community of faith. The atmosphere created for the preparation process should be more that of the hospitality of a meal than the study of a classroom. Baptism is an expression of the overwhelming generosity of God who in Jesus described the Kingdom of God as a feast to which all were invited. May all the people who approach us for Baptism find in our response the same generosity, welcome and acceptance.

### **Summary of guidelines**

- Baptism is an unrepeatable act celebrated within the corporate life of the congregation. It is good, where it is possible and appropriate, for baptism to be within a public act of worship. However, for often different reasons, it may not always be appropriate for either infant or adult baptism to occur in this setting and clergy should then provide a worship setting which is corporate and still involves members of the parish family.
- Preparation should be offered to those seeking the sacrament of baptism. The preparation should be welcoming and relational, while at the same time making clear the biblical and theological meaning of baptism. People should not feel that baptism is inaccessible because the preparation course is too demanding, inconvenient or uncomfortable. The details of the service need to be made clear so that people do not feel awkward or find themselves embarrassed.

- Where possible a member or members of the congregation as well as the priest should share in the preparation and be present at the time and place of baptism as a sign of the congregational part in the baptism.
- Sponsors or Godparents need to be provided in the case of an infant and should themselves be baptised.
- There should be pastoral and congregational follow-up following the baptism.

### **The Service**

The service shall be from an authorised rite.

### **Cards and registration**

An appropriate Baptismal Register is to be kept within the Parish and a Baptismal Card recording the date, time and place of the baptism, signed by the officiating Priest is to be provided to every baptised person. A Sponsors' Card recording the name of the baptised, the time, date and place of the baptism, the name of the sponsor, signed by the officiating Priest, should be provided for each sponsor.