Baptism - Christening: A Mission Opportunity

“We believe that Baptism is really important.” Bishop Paul Butler

Baptism is at the heart of our life as a church. It is the sacrament that begins our life in Christ: ‘an outward sign of an inward and spiritual grace given to us, ordained by Christ himself, as a means whereby we receive the same and pledge to assure us thereof.’ (Book of Common Prayer)

Baptism is also called Christening, but for some the word ‘Christening’ is reserved for the Baptism of infants.

Many parents have had Christian involvement during their lives and look for the best start for their children, to support them as they grow and make life choices.

Baptism is about people and offers us an amazing opportunity, if we are as welcoming and supportive as we can be. We have a chance to be with them at the beginning of their family lives together, preparing them well, accompanying them, and supporting them ongoing, so that they can know the love of God and grow to love and serve his Son, Jesus Christ.

Considerations for parishes when planning for ministry with Baptism families:

**Preparation**

This is a first opportunity to welcome and nurture some families so we need to be sure it receives our best prayers, preparation and delivery. We need to have:

- Suitable people to meet and befriend families and be involved/share in the preparation.
- Good resources appropriate for supporting preparation time with couples and families.
- A place for the preparation times that suits and is appropriate for all involved.
- The length and timings of preparation times should be the best for families so they can be comfortable and appreciate the content of the course or sessions.
- Confidence that they can understand the input and may need to tailor it to suit individual need.
- Opportunities available for involvement and future fellowship and growth.
- Welcome and familiarisation with church and worship and other activities to be included in preparation, without prior assumptions.
- Inclusion of Godparents in preparation (as they are increasingly seen as vital by families).
The Baptism Service

Families want to be at a service that welcomes them and their child into church and feels like a special occasion. Consider:

- The number of families to include: best for them, best for the congregation etc.
- The location and time of service. Is this the best for the mission and welcome of the church?

The content of the service:

- Families who are unfamiliar with Church services can be anxious about ‘getting it right’. When they have an understanding of the service format they are reassured and this leads to a more relaxed atmosphere and better participation (rehearsal can help).
- Within the liturgy ensure that the families feel welcomed and involved. Value the promises.
- Using visual/tactile symbols e.g. Candles, torches, oil, map, handwashing, passport etc.
- The inclusion of the Godparents in the service. (Can they lead prayers or something else – perhaps a poem, or their own written ‘wishes/hopes’ for the child?).
- How to make the service a really significant and memorable experience.
- Symbols with meaning: The water…the cross…The candle… the font. Making the best of what is included. (People appreciate and remember visuals).
- How the whole church can be involved in the mission of welcoming new families.

Follow-up

Baptism is so important to us that fully committed follow-up is part of what we do. So we:

- Maintain contact with families. Groups and individuals can be involved. Use social media.
- Identify appropriate dates in the church calendar when families are to be invited.
- Remembering that families consider themselves linked to church for at least 7yrs!
- Find the niche areas of church life that appeal most to new individuals and help them join in.
- Offer discipleship ideas and courses/homegroups/other places/groups - that suit individuals.
- Create toddler support for the family. A toddler group can be ‘Church’ for the child’s carers.
- Offer support for families to incorporate the Christian life within their home and family life.
- Help families to pray.
- Church provision for small children. Create suitable and welcoming Sunday/weekday learning and fellowship opportunities for young families.
- Social occasions for families to ‘make friends’
Baptism - Christening: A Mission Opportunity

CE Resources supporting Christenings and Baptism.

- Church Support Hub:
  https://churchsupporthub.org/baptisms/

- CE Christenings website:
  https://churchofenglandchristenings.org/

- Leeds Diocese website:
  http://www.leeds.anglican.org/children-youth-baptism-christening

- ‘We Welcome You – Baptism preparation with families’
  by Jacqui Hyde with Sandra Millar & Paul Butler
  https://www.chpublishing.co.uk/books/9780715147221/we-welcome-you

- ‘Getting Ready for Baptism’ Course Book
  & ‘My Baptism Journey’ Activity Book (for children)
  by Richard Burge, Penny Fuller & Mary Hawes (BRF)
  https://chbookshop.hymnsam.co.uk/books/9780857460196/getting-ready-for-baptism-course-book

- ‘Making the Most of your Child’s Baptism’ by Ali Barrett
  https://chbookshop.hymnsam.co.uk/books/9780281075485/making-the-most-of-yourchilds-baptism

- ‘My Baptism Book’ by Diana Murray (Church House publishing)
  https://chbookshop.hymnsam.co.uk/books/9780715143032/my-baptism-book-hardback

- ‘Your Baby's Baptism in the Anglican Church’ by Stuart Thomas
  https://chbookshop.hymnsam.co.uk/books/9780862098018/your-babys-baptism-in-the-anglican-church

- Mothers Union support:
  http://www.mothersunion.org/our-focus/supporting-families-faith
  http://www.mothersunion.org/content/hand-hand-resources