

Baptism

Infant Baptism

According to the law of the land (canon B22) clergy may not refuse to baptise the child of a parishioner, nor delay such a baptism except for the purpose of instruction of parents (and godparents). As far as possible the parish priest should see the parents (and godparents) in order to explain to them their part in the service, the obligations which they assume and their responsibilities in the after-care of the child. The sacrament of baptism should be administered publicly wherever possible, and in the presence of a congregation.

Baptism should not normally be administered for children not resident in the parish, unless the parents are on the church Electoral Roll. Where no such connection exists, the parish priest should baptise a child from another parish only with the knowledge (and if possible the approval) of its incumbent, who must be notified when the baptism has taken place.

Emergency Baptism

In an emergency anyone may lawfully baptise (Common Worship Initiation Services page 94 note 1). Any rite of emergency baptism must use water and the Trinitarian formula, baptising the person “in the name of the Father, and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit”. Emergency baptisms by lay persons should be reported to the relevant hospital Chaplain or parish priest as soon as possible. All emergency baptisms should be recorded in a Baptism Register (see below). Children baptised in emergency should be received into the church when convenient, preferably at the time of public baptisms.

Baptism Registers

All emergency baptisms should be recorded in a Baptism Register. Those conducted in hospitals should be recorded in the hospital Baptism Register (or if the hospital does not have one, in the Baptism Register in the parish in which the hospital is situated) – there is no need to make an entry in the Register of the home parish as well.

For those baptised after adoption: the same procedure should be followed as for a natural child (i.e. the adoptive parents should be entered as the child’s parents).

Requests for 're-baptism'

From time to time clergy may be approached with a request for re-baptism. There are two main reasons for such requests;

- the desire to express a commitment to Christ and His church and to acknowledge an experience of the Holy Spirit in a manner which appears to be the New Testament norm, and
- a questioning of the validity of the first baptism (usually as an infant) because it is seen to lack a genuine response to faith.

Such requests should always be refused. To baptise a second time is an expression of the invalidity of the first baptism. It is also contrary to the theology of the New Testament and to the main 'catholic' tradition in which the Church of England stands. However, any refusal should be accompanied by a sensitive explanation of theology, tradition and practice of the Church on this matter.

Those who wish to express a new found faith and commitment should be encouraged to do so by the renewal of baptismal vows at Easter Eve or some other suitable time. Within the Initiation services of Common Worship there is provision for such renewal either through sprinkling or by signing themselves with baptismal water (see 'Common Worship Initiation Services' page 168 and Explanatory notes page 202). Should a situation arise where a rite of renewal of baptismal vows in water is pastorally appropriate, every effort by word and deed should be undertaken to make it abundantly clear that the rite is not baptism and reference should be made to the lasting significance of the baptism already received.