

It's a Christening: Discussion pack

This pack contains:

- 1. Background reading for PCC members for distribution before the meeting (4 sides of A4)**
- 2. Facilitator notes (1 side of A4)**
- 3. Notes for use with or without PowerPoint (6 sides of A4)**
- 4. Optional hand out for reflection after the meeting (1 side of A4)**

It's a Christening! Background reading for PCC members

'Investing in our engagement with baptism families to spark an amazing adventure with Jesus Christ' is one of the LIFE priorities that we have discerned together as a diocese, so it is good to take some time to consider the God-given possibilities around families and baptism where new paths to faith may be opened.

imagination

This material is to help us reflect on our engagement with baptism families in order to celebrate what we already do and consider what we could do in the future to develop this ministry.

Why do families choose to have their children Christened?

The Archbishops' Council (ABC) commissioned extensive research to help find out why families choose to have their children baptised, and why they might choose not to. It focused on baptisms of children under 12. The research offered a basis on which new resources for churches could be developed to help them:

- Attract more people to come to the church for baptism.
- Build understanding of what the Church of England provides, and build understanding within the church about what families think about baptism in today's culture.
- Care so much that when people do come, they want to come back.

We will look further at the results of the research in our discussion.

Why use the word Christening?

Baptism is one of the treasures of the Church, a simple yet beautiful practice which brings new birth. The Baptism service speaks of deep water; the water of creation, of flood, of freedom, the water in which Jesus was himself baptised. At the end of a baptism, candidates are welcomed into the family of the Church; they begin a new life in the light of Christ.

Christians may find the word 'christening' does not reflect this theological and spiritual meaning.

It sounds like shallow water and is associated with cakes, dresses, presents, parties, these are good things good ways to celebrate, but they are not what really matters to us in baptism.

Christen is an old English word (Bede 890) its origins predate the use of the word baptism and it was synonymous with being a Christian as well as being used to refer to the sacrament making someone a Christian. The term christening is thought to refer to the conversion of adults from other faiths.

Slowly over time and in Bible translations in the 16th and 17th centuries the word baptism replaced christening and became the language of clergy and scholars.

Slowly, but surely, in the 20th century it became the term used by church-going Christians.¹

While we think of baptism as the 'proper' term, the ABC research found that christening is the word which is familiar and understood by the majority of people: it is the word people look for. Both words are right but, if we are serious about 'sparking an amazing adventure with Jesus Christ', we need to talk the same language

while introducing people to the full joy and significance of baptism and offering a real welcome into the church.

The ABC research confirmed that by 'christening', families mean the service which includes water being poured on their child's head.

The water is very important to them. Without the water, the service is not seen as 'proper'.



Exercise: What is our current practice?

Record your thoughts in the box overleaf.

Before our meeting find out what our current practice is. Imagine you are unfamiliar with church and trying to arrange a Christening.

- How understandable is our process?
- Where is the information people need?
- How/where do we advertise Christenings?
- Who is involved with the service?
- What preparation do we offer?
- How do we continue to include christening families in the life of our church?

Next time you go in to church imagine how the building looks and feels to someone, perhaps a child, who has rarely, if ever, been into a church building.

- How do they know they are welcome?
- How would they know where to go?
- How would they know what to do?

¹Based on an [article](https://churchsupporthub.org/wp-content/uploads/2016/12/The-history-of-baptism-and-christening.pdf) by the Revd Sarah Lawrence, PhD Student, University of Birmingham.
<https://churchsupporthub.org/wp-content/uploads/2016/12/The-history-of-baptism-and-christening.pdf>

What do you remember about christening services in our church/es?

Hospitality

Providing hospitality takes energy. It may require resources and even some degree of risk, especially where it means we open up to a culture other than our own.

Receiving hospitality lets us know that we matter. It affects our minds, hearts and souls.

Take some time to reflect on this quote:

‘The spiritual power of hospitality lies in the sacrifice made by the (church) family. Space is made for the outsider (visitor, guest) at a cost of the host’s self-sacrifice and servant’s heart ...

... there is also the cost of the disruption of the routine for each family member.²

How does it make you think and feel about welcoming Christening families?

²For the whole quote go to <http://imitatingjesus.org/tag/hospitality/>

What Jesus has to say about hospitality

How does it compare to Jesus' hospitality which: accepts people where they are, cares for physical needs, honours people's choice / their response to God, heals restores forgives, travels with them, is known in the breaking of bread.

Matthew 25 35-40

For I was hungry and you gave me food, I was thirsty and you gave me something to drink, I was a stranger and you welcomed me, I was naked and you gave me clothing, I was sick and you took care of me, I was in prison and you visited me.

'Then the righteous will answer him, 'Lord, when was it that we saw you hungry and gave you food, or thirsty and gave you something to drink? And when was it that we saw you a stranger and welcomed you, or naked and gave you clothing? And when was it that we saw you sick or in prison and visited you?' And the king will answer them, 'Truly I tell you, just as you did it to one of the least of these who are members of my family, you did it to me.

Luke 7:44

Then turning towards the woman, he said to Simon, 'Do you see this woman? I entered your house; you gave me no water for my feet, but she has bathed my feet with her tears and dried them with her hair. You gave me no kiss, but from the time I came in she has not stopped kissing my feet. You did not anoint my head with oil, but she has anointed my feet with ointment.

Luke 15:19

But while he was still far off, his father saw him and was filled with compassion; he ran and put his arms around him and kissed him.

Our prayers and promises for christening families

A Post Communion Prayer

Father of all,
we give you thanks and praise,
that when we were still far off
you met us in your Son and brought us home.
Dying and living, he declared your love,
gave us grace, and opened the gate of glory.
May we who share Christ's body live his risen life;
we who drink his cup bring life to others;
we whom the Spirit lights give light to the world.
Keep us firm in the hope you have set before us,
so we and all your children shall be free,
and the whole earth live to praise your name;
through Christ our Lord. Amen

***This prayer typifies prayers
which we pray for ourselves;
do we offer this prayer for
others who are trying to find
their way home?***

How can we live out this promise?

The Commission

Baptism joins us to Christ and to his whole Church, in earth and in heaven.

Here, we shall do all that we can to ensure that there is a welcoming place for you.

We will play our part in helping you guide these children along the way of faith.

It's a Christening! Facilitator notes

The aims of this discussion are:

- To recognise that christenings are deeply significant to families.
- To celebrate what we do well and consider what would enhance our practice.
- To acknowledge that welcoming guests or visitors requires energy, resources and maybe some risk.

The desired outcomes

- To celebrate current practice and good news stories and begin to explore new possibilities.
- For parishes to identify two or more people to attend one of the local training events being held for across the diocese in April and May 2017. These events are for lay or ordained people who want to find out more or be further involved in ministry with christening families.

Before the meeting

- Consider whether you want to open this part of your meeting to others
- Distribute the background reading to everyone you would like to attend in time for them to prepare for the discussion.
- Consider what is specific to your context about christenings. What do you need to draw out from people?
- What are your good news stories?
- Familiarise yourself with the background reading and the PowerPoint slides.
- Notes are included with the PowerPoint as well as with the document.
- Print the PowerPoint presentation as a handout if you want to use it.
- Do some pre thinking about who might attend one of the Diocesan workshops.

Presentation materials

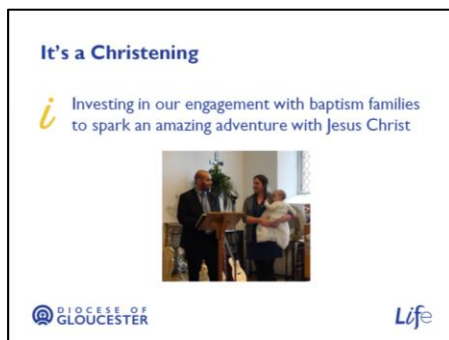
1. There is a PowerPoint presentation to accompany this document. It is designed to be an agenda item lasting 15/20 minutes but you may choose to extend that.
2. Each slide should take about one minute with the exception of the feedback on Hospitality (allow three to five minutes). Do not feel confined by the material if there are specific areas you need to emphasise.
3. Each slide has notes added for the presenter and you can use this document to aid your discussion.
4. Slide 11 of the PowerPoint includes space to add your local baptism statistics if it is helpful. If not, delete the slide.

It's a Christening! Notes for use with or without PowerPoint

Slide 1

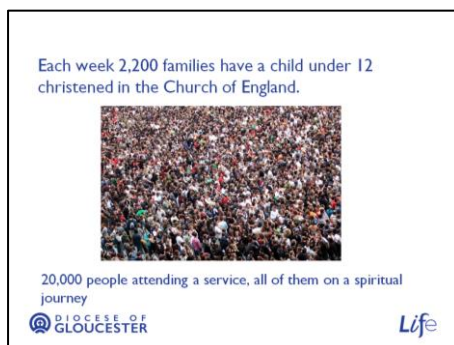


Slide 2



Acknowledge that people have an understanding of christenings from their experience and the preparation reading, this time is to expand on that, share our thinking and a starting point to ask 'what's next?'

Slide 3



National statistics are not the only consideration but they give us significant information.

Each week 2,200 families have a child under 12 christened in the Church of England.

This means approximately 20,000 people attend a church service all of them on a spiritual journey.

Slide 4

Why do parents bring their children to be christened?

- Choosing Godparents
- Values and morals
- Family christening gown
- To celebrate and say 'thank you' for the life of their child
- Belonging to something bigger
- Protection for their child
- Choosing light rather than dark
- Expressing life and hope



DIOCESE OF GLOUCESTER *Life*

Why do families have their children Christened?

These are statements are predominantly the feedback from the Archbishop's Council research which asked families why they have their children christened. The majority expressed a need to say thank you for their child.

These are not shallow reasons. They could be seen as responses to a huge spiritual experience in their lives ie the birth of their child.

They are about relationships with each other, with the world and with God, although God might not always be named.

Slide 5

It's a Christening...

Whatever our theology
Whatever our concerns
A Christening represents something...



It matters!

DIOCESE OF GLOUCESTER *Life*

So, whatever our theology about baptism, Whatever our concerns that people don't understand baptism.

A christening represents something...


Many people don't have the theological language or even emotional language with which to express what this something is.

But it matters to them.

Slide 6

What do families remember about christening services?

- The welcome received
- Who the godparents were
- Giving of the candle and pouring of the water
- Prayers (especially if they have included the child's name)
- Blessing (the sign of the cross)
- The christening gown



DIOCESE OF GLOUCESTER *Life*

The Life Events research revealed that many people are anxious about church, or have a bank of negative memories based on: family stories, news headlines or TV dramas which depict clergy, and church going Christians in general, as remote, impersonal or hapless people. You can probably think of or ask for some examples.

We also know that people make future decisions based on past memories so one of our responsibilities is to give people the most positive memory of church they can have.

All our encounters with people combine to change perceptions, to build a positive encounter with God and God's people.

Each one is an opportunity to act and speak of the good news of Jesus, and to leave people with something to draw on the next time they are given an opportunity to encounter Church or the Gospel in spite of these preconceptions ...


In other words they remember the symbols, which speak where language can't.

They remember the relationships which are affirmed or established.

Slide 7

So...

Every friendly phone call
 Every welcoming smile
 Every touch of hospitality
 Every personal invitation
 ...matters




DIOCESE OF GLOUCESTER Life

Slide 8 Hospitality

Hospitality

The spiritual power of hospitality lies in the sacrifice made by the (church) family.

Space is made for the outsider (guest, visitor) at a cost of the host's self-sacrifice and servant's heart.



DIOCESE OF GLOUCESTER Life

Providing hospitality takes energy. It may require resources and even some degree of risk it especially where it means we open up to a culture other than our own.

Receiving hospitality lets us know that we matter: it affects our minds, hearts and souls.

The welcome they receive is one of the things families remember.

'The spiritual power of hospitality lies in the sacrifice made by the (church) family. Space is made for the outsider (guest, visitor) at a cost of the host's self-sacrifice and servant's heart.

Questions

1. What were people's reflections on this quote? And the energy resources required to provide hospitality?
2. How did it make them think and feel about their own hospitality towards christening families?
3. How did it make them think and feel about welcoming christening families in the future?

These thoughts about Jesus' hospitality and bible readings and prayers reflecting them were in the background reading.

- Accepts people where they are
- Honours their choice/response to God
- Invites people into the life of God
- Cares for physical needs
- Heals restores forgives
- Travels with them
- Known in the breaking of bread.

Slides 9 and 10

These are all ideas which have worked well for other congregations and received really positive responses from Families. **They don't do them all.** It also gently grows a christenings team.

Quick wins

- Contacting the family about flowers for the church.
- Is there music they would like to play or songs to sing?
- Is the space for children clean, tidy, and well lit? Are there colouring sheets or toys which relate to baptism?
- Prepare PowerPoint, if you use it, with photos of the christening family.
- Rota for welcoming, reading and praying if outside of regular worship



Life

DIOCESE OF GLOUCESTER

Quick wins are things we think about for regular services, festivals and other life events but not always for christenings.

Using our gifts for hospitality

- Calligraphy to complete certificates
- Prepare prayer cards for guests
- Pray for the families before and after the christening
- Knit a christening blanket for the child
- Welcoming sign with balloons
- Make a baptism symbol from art, wood or needlework as a gift from the congregation
- Bake a celebration cake or cookies



Life

DIOCESE OF GLOUCESTER

Slide 11

In 2016/17 our church/benefice held ?? Christenings



Under 1s =
1- 4yrs =
5-12yrs =

This equals contact with ?? people





You might want to compare these numbers to numbers who attend at festivals.

Our focus is the christening family and Godparents, but christenings are a God-given opportunity to positively affect the spiritual journey of all these people.

Slide 12

The Commission





Baptism joins us to Christ and to his whole Church, in earth and in heaven.

Here, we shall do all that we can to ensure that there is a welcoming place for you.

We will play our part in helping you guide these children along the way of faith.

Alternative texts for Holy Baptism ABC

The Commission. We pray this prayer or one with very similar words every time someone is baptised in our church how can we use our skills live out this promise?

“Baptism joins us to Christ and to his whole Church, in earth and in heaven. Here, we shall do all that we can to ensure that there is a welcoming place for you.

We will play our part in helping you guide these children along the way of faith’.

Alternative texts for Holy Baptism ABC

Slide 13

Free diocesan-wide christenings workshops

For anyone who wants to learn more about ...

- The national resources (free sample pack per parish).
- Good news stories from across the across the diocese.
- What it's like to be a family in 2018.
- How we can develop our relationships with christening families.






Your support is essential and there is support inspiration and training available nationally and locally beginning with

Free christenings workshops

Slide 14

Christenings workshops

- Church Rooms, Chipping Camden
Tues 24 April 2pm -4pm
- St Andrew's, Churchdown
Sat 28 April 10am – 12pm
- St Margaret Mary Church Hall, Coleford
Tues 8 May 2pm – 4pm
- St James Parish Centre, Dursley
Fri 11 May 10am -12pm
- Watermoor Hall Cirencester
Thurs 17 May 7.30pm - 9.30pm

To book contact Natasha Kent nkent@glosdioc.org.uk
Telephone 01452 835544


 



Highlight workshops close to you

Slide 15

I Corinthians 3:6-7

I planted, Apollos watered,
but God gave the growth.
So neither the one who plants
nor the one who waters is
anything,
but only God who gives the
growth.



We are the planters and waterers. We will not always see the results of our work, but if we give people a really positive joyful experience every time they encounter church or the Gospel we create a memory of a place they may well want to find their way back to in the future.

You may want to give out the handouts now, following the conclusion of any discussion.

It's a Christening! Hand out for reflection after the meeting

What now?

Your support is essential and there is inspiration and training available nationally and locally.

Christenings workshops, dates and venues

Learn more about the national resources, with a free sample pack per parish.

Hear good news stories about initiatives in parishes across the diocese

Discover new ways to maintain relationships with christening families.

- Church Rooms, Chipping Camden, Tuesday 24 April, 2pm to 4pm
- St Andrew's, Churchdown, Saturday 28 April, 10am to 12 noon.
- St Margaret Mary Church Hall, Coleford Tuesday 8 May, 2pm to 4pm
- St James Parish Centre, Dursley, Friday 11 May, 10am to 12 noon
- Watermoor Hall, Cirencester, Thursday 17 May, 7.30pm to 9.30pm

To book contact nkent@glosdioc.org.uk, 01252 835544.

Using our gifts for hospitality

Many parishes have found that where people get involved and use their creativity it has had a really positive effect on their ministry with christening families and their guests. These are some of the things which have worked. Each church does between two and four of them.

Contact the family about flowers and music in the church. Is there music they would like played or songs to sing?

Check that the space for children is clean, tidy and well-lit? Are there toys and colouring sheets which relate to baptism?

Prepare PPT if you use it, with pictures of the family / child.

Use calligraphy to complete the certificates.

Have a rota for welcoming, reading and praying at the service if the christening is outside regular worship times.

Prepare prayer cards for the guests to write their names or a short prayer for the child.

Pray for the families before and after the christening.

Knit a christening blanket for the child.

Welcome with balloons and a sign saying "Welcome to the family and friends of..."

Make symbols, crosses / doves from wood, art, needlework to be a gift from the congregation.

Bake a celebration cake or cookies—they don't have to be elaborate.

What else..?