

It's a Christening! Background reading for PCC members

imagination '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.

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.

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.

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?

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.

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

Scripture and prayer

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.

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?***

A final thought

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

How can we live out this promise?