

Baptisms: COVID-19 Guidance

As of 2 October 2020

The Government has updated its guidance for *Places of Worship*. This is to ensure that social interaction is limited in order to reduce the risk of viral transmission.

What the Government calls 'life-cycle events' now needs to be differentiated.

Guidance for the Celebration of Baptism

This guidance, issued by the Bishops' Conference of England and Wales for the Celebration of Baptism, assumes that the general guidance published by the Conference, based on Government Guidance on the safe opening of Places of Worship for individual prayer is in place.

The wearing of a **face covering** is mandatory for those who attend church unless they have an exemption from this.

If a baptism takes place in a Mass which is part of the normal pattern of parish Masses, the number of people attending will be limited to the secure capacity determined by the COVID-19 risk assessment for the church building.

People attending must remain within their groups of six and observe strict social distancing between each separate group.

Baptisms outside of Mass

There has been a clarification from the Ministry of Housing Communities and Local Government (MHCLG) regarding baptisms outside of Mass.

The minister celebrating the baptism is **NOT** part of the '**Rule of Six**' that is now applied to this situation. However, the one being baptised **IS** counted as part of that group and so it would be a situation of "Five guests plus the candidate" if the celebration takes place outside of Mass. Children present **ARE** counted as part of the '**Rule of Six**' in England.

The Rite of Baptism

At this time, it is advised that the baptisms which take place in our churches should be for single families; multiple family baptisms are not encouraged as the mixing of people from different family groups increases the risk of virus transmission.

The child to be baptised should be held by the parents only. The whole of the Rite should take place around the font to avoid the excess movement of people in the church building. The minister should remain at least 2m away from those congregated unless he has to approach the child to perform part of the Rite. The necessary items for the Baptism should be prepared by the minister (or sacristan) after sanitising their hands and then wearing gloves and placed so that they are easily accessible by him and the family members.

The Greeting and Opening Dialogue and Signing with the Cross

This should take place around the font and, after sanitising their hands, only the parents and godparents should sign the child with the sign of the cross whilst the minister speaks the associated words of the Rite.

The Liturgy of the Word

One short reading should be used and a short explanation of the importance of baptism should be spoken by the minister. If a family member is to read, they should sanitise their hands before and after handling a lectionary or other text, or wear gloves.

Intercessions

These should be brief, and a very short form of the Litany used. This should be prayed by the minister only.

Prayer of Exorcism

The minister should pre-prepare a cotton bud infused with the Oil of Catechumens. He should not touch the child whilst praying the Prayer of Exorcism but should extend his hand towards the child. When it comes to the anointing, the cotton bud should be used this should be done at arm's length to ensure a clear distance between the minister and the child.

Prayer over the Water

The font should be pre-filled with water and covered before the baptism. The prayer of blessing should be prayed by the minister without touching the water or the font. He can make the sign of the cross over it in place of the normal touching with the right hand.

Renunciation of Sin and Profession of Faith

These should be recited with the people in their places in the church.

The Baptism

The parents alone should bring the child to the font. They should place the head of the child over the water. The minister, using a shell or a jug, should pour the water over the child's head whilst reciting the sacramental form. Care should be taken to avoid excess splashing of the water. Immediately afterwards, a clean towel from the credence table should be used by the parents to dry the child's head. This towel should be laundered immediately after the Baptism.

The Anointing with Holy Chrism

The minister should pre-prepare a cotton bud infused with the Sacred Chrism. He should anoint the child at arm's length using this, ensuring a clear distance between the child and himself.

**Clothing with the White Garment – can be omitted at this time*

The parents, if they have brought a white garment for the child, should clothe the child with the white garment whilst the minister says the associated

prayer. Communal white garments should not be used. The white garment should be taken away with the family at the end of the Baptism.

**Lighted Candle – can be omitted at this time*

The candle should be out of its box before the Baptism begins. The Godparent should light the baptismal candle from the Paschal Candle whilst the minister says the associated narrative.

Ephphetha

This should be omitted from the Baptism rite.

Concluding Rites

The congregation should join in with the minister in the Lord's Prayer and the Blessing and Dismissal given without touching the Father and Mother. After the celebration of the Baptism, the minister should give clear instructions regarding social distancing for any photographs that would be taken. There should be an orderly egress from the church avoiding crowding at doors etc.

Any cotton buds, cotton wool or paper towels should be bagged for disposal after the ceremony. If possible, these should be burned safely (as is usual with cotton wool bearing the sacred oils). Any towels or cloths should be laundered according to the manufacturer's guidance and dried completely. The baptismal water should be poured into the earth (or through the sacrarium) and the font dried completely before replacing its cover.

If there is cause for concern regarding the possible contamination of clerical vestments worn during the celebration of Baptism, these should be washed in accordance with the manufacturer's instructions, using the warmest water setting allowed for the fabric and allowing time for them to dry completely.

The church should be closed after the Baptism has finished in order to clean the space around the font according to the Bishops' Conference guidelines on individual prayer. Care should also be given to the touchpoints in the church, especially at points of access and egress.