

COVID-19 Advice for clergy conducting Baptisms

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3 rd June 2020	1	The House of Bishops Recovery Group

The Recovery Group has been set up to support the Church of England as government guidance changes through the COVID-19 pandemic. This document has been prepared with information available by the issue date and is for planning purposes only until present restrictions are lifted. It will be kept under review and updated as the situation develops, with each update issued as a new version. The current version will always be available to download from the Church of England website via the [Coronavirus FAQs page](#).

As the foundation of Christian life, Baptism is a time of joy and celebration for candidates, parents, godparents and the whole church family. While it may be some time before this celebration can be enjoyed as before, there are steps which can be taken to make it as memorable as possible while still adhering to government guidance on physical distancing, public health hygiene and protection of those particularly vulnerable to COVID-19.

The following advice is intended to assist clergy as they think through the best way of celebrating baptisms. It is not exhaustive, but addresses essential issues that should be considered.

General questions

What should I do before the Baptism?

- It is important that interaction with the candidate/families must be done as safely as possible. This might mean meeting, at least initially, via video link or talking on the telephone. If face to face meetings are held, please follow the [government guidance](#) on working in other people's homes and ensure that everyone adheres to physical distancing requirements and that numbers are limited, preferably to a minimum. Such meetings should not be held in the house of anyone who is self-isolating or who is in a vulnerable group.
- It is important to be careful about sharing documents, books, photos etc and to remember to wash hands thoroughly before and after the meeting.
- The health implications for those in a vulnerable group should be discussed and if some people in these groups intend to be present at the baptism, their welfare should be kept to the fore.
- These will include advising other attendees that there is a vulnerable person attending, reminding them to take particular care in observing physical distancing and refraining from attending themselves if they feel unwell.
- If someone from a vulnerable group intends to be present, they should be advised to travel to the church in the safest way possible, preferably in a car by themselves or with someone from their household

How many people can attend the Baptism?

- The government has indicated that **numbers attending services might be restricted**. This should be taken into account when planning the Baptism; in many cases it will mean that the Baptism cannot take place during public worship.
- The candidate, his/her parents, godparents and the minister are all that are required to be present for Baptism and parents might wish to keep to this number. If they wish to have other family members or friends present, it is important to talk with them about the overall government restrictions on numbers.
- You may find that parents/candidates ask to postpone the baptism in light of the restrictions in numbers. This is a decision for them. However you will want to think about how to follow up these individuals/families so that the baptism can be rearranged when it is appropriate to do so.

What special steps should I take during the Baptism?

- Given the restrictions on numbers attending, clergy might wish to consider ways in which others may be able to join the service, perhaps through an audio or video link. If this is not possible a recording of the service might be appropriate.
- Please ensure that everyone adheres to the Government guidance on physical distancing. Only clergy and parents should be at the font while godparents should maintain physical distance.
- Please do not hold the infant, but ask a parent to do so for the duration of the service.
- It is important for clergy to be mindful of their own personal hygiene – please wash your hands before and after, and avoid using communal Bibles etc.
- The sign of the cross should be made using an implement that will avoid direct physical contact.
- Water should be poured over the infant's forehead using an appropriate implement to pour the water such as a shell. Parents should wipe the forehead of the baptised person with paper towels which should be immediately disposed of.
- Hymns and singing are not currently advised.
- If a candle is lit as part of the ceremony, this might be done by one of the Godparents, perhaps being lit from the Paschal Candle if available.
- Unfortunately, Baptisms by immersion cannot be safely conducted at present.

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