

Guide for clergy conducting **weddings and baptisms** according to the Coronavirus guidance

Correct as of Thursday 19 March 2020, 15.30

Please note:

This guidance is intended for use by Church of England Clergy and parish leadership teams and **should not be shared** more widely.

Information for the general public and the bereaved on how weddings and baptisms are affected by the Coronavirus outbreak can be found at www.churchofengland.org/coronavirus

The Government's guidance on social distancing, self-isolation for those over 70 years of age or with underlying health conditions and the avoidance of unnecessary travel will have implications for the way we conduct baptisms going forward.

The following points are aimed at helping clergy think through how best they may undertake baptisms, whilst adhering to the Government's guidance. They are not an exhaustive list, and the situation is likely to change, but they give some suggestions regarding how we can continue to offer this important service in an appropriate way.

Before the Baptism

- Any interaction with the candidate/families must be done safely – this may mean by telephone, skype etc. If meetings are held face to face, make sure you adhere to social distancing guidance, limit the number of people you are meeting to an absolute minimum, remind anyone self-isolating and/or with symptoms that they should not attend either the meeting or baptism in person, and choose the venue carefully – not in the house of someone who is self-isolating for example. Be careful about sharing documents, books, photos etc. Wash your hands thoroughly before the meeting and after.
- Numbers of those attending the baptism.: numbers attending must be kept to an absolute minimum. The candidate, his/her parents, godparents and the minister are all that are required, and this is the number to keep to. You will need to explain that we are following Government advice on social distancing and meeting in groups, and this is the reason why the number attending must be managed very tightly.
- Those over the age of 70 and those with an underlying health condition should be strongly discouraged from attending.
- You may find that parents/candidates ask to postpone the baptism in light of the restrictions in numbers. This is entirely appropriate and it is their decision. 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.

- Baptisms will need to be “stand alone” rather than part of a Sunday service as there is no longer public worship.
- Hymns and singing are not advised as this may encourage droplet spread.
- No additional people attend the service, such as an organist, vergers, sound system operator etc.

The Baptism

- Given the restrictions on numbers attending, consider ways in which others may be able to join the service – either through an audio link, skype etc.; or recording the service if these are appropriate.
- Make sure everyone adheres to the Government guidance on social distancing. Only clergy and parents should be at the font; godparents should maintain social distance. This will also have implications on how you interact with any infants being baptised. Do not hold the infant, but ask a parent to do so for the duration of the service.
- Be mindful of your own personal hygiene – wash your hands before and after, and avoid using communal Bibles etc.
- Make the sign of the cross using an implement that will allow you to avoid direct physical contact.
- Ask the parent to hold the infant as you pour water over the forehead – use an appropriate implement to pour the water such as a shell etc. Ask the parents to wipe the forehead of the baptised person with paper towels which should be immediately disposed of.
- There should be no baptisms by immersion.
- Communal bibles and other items should not be used and baptismal candles, if used, should be handled by one person only. A parent or Godparent should be asked to light and hold the candle on behalf of the candidate and to remove it safely immediately after the service.
- Discourage shaking hands or kissing etc – this may be hard to manage, but try to remind people of the need for social distancing.
- There should not be a gathering after the Baptism.

If asked about Godparents joining the service by Skype or similar.

- The minimum number of Godparents must be present in person.
- While the normal number of godparents is 3, the minimum number of godparents is 2 of whom 1 can be one of the parents.
- Other Godparents can skype in, providing the minimum number are present.

Capacity and resilience

- Think now about ways to ensure capacity and resilience in terms of lay and ordained minister availability. What capacity do you have in your own team, and how might you support each other across a deanery?
- Also, you may need to prioritise what Life events services you can offer. Legally incumbents are under an obligation to baptise the children of parishioners who are brought to them for

baptism. They may delay doing so only for the purpose of giving instruction. And in the case of a child that is in danger, they must not delay at all.

- If you feel that you are unable to meet these obligations, please consult your area Dean, Archdeacon or Bishop who will be able to provide further guidance.
- As circumstances develop it might be necessary at some point to revise this national guidance. If so, information will be sent to your bishop.

Weddings

Many couples will be worried about weddings they have booked for the months ahead. While wedding service may continue, numbers attending the ceremony in church will be strictly curtailed to the legal minimum: priest, bride, groom and two witnesses.

Apart from the bride and groom social-distance should be observed as far as possible. Please note that the priest does not have to touch the rings to bless them, nor does he or she have to touch the couple's hands as part of a prayer or blessing.

No additional people should attend the service, such as an organist, vergger, sound system operator etc.

- **Practicalities**
- If a couple want to cancel you must refund their fees in full, including any deposit taken.
- Talk to them about postponing and help them find a new date if possible.
- Make sure you know where you stand on the banns being read. A Common Licence or a Special Licence may be appropriate in some cases, or a postponement of the wedding for others. Your Diocesan Registrar will be able to advise you.
- Suggest that if the wedding goes ahead there could be a blessing in the year ahead.
- Drop a card in the post to the couple to show that you care
- If they want to go ahead, suggest that the quiet ceremony can be live-streamed [if that is possible.
- More advice on live streaming can be found here:
<https://www.churchofengland.org/more/church-resources/digital-labs/labs-learning-blog/beginners-guide-going-live-your-service-or>]
- Include prayers for those who can't be present
- Share the resources that are on www.yourChurchWedding.org - which will soon include an on-line light a candle tool

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