

DIOCESE OF **Hexham & Newcastle**



GUIDELINES FOR INFANT BAPTISM



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Contents

Introduction by Bishop Séamus Cunningham.....	5
Overview of the diocesan consultation.....	6
Reflections.....	11
Liturgical reflection.....	12
Spiritual reflection.....	15
Theological reflection.....	17
Pastoral reflection.....	20
Formation of catechists and recommended resources.....	23
Guidance for the preparation and celebration of infant baptism.....	25
Letter to parents from Bishop Séamus Cunningham.....	27

Introduction by Bishop Séamus Cunningham

Dear Parent, Catechist, Priest and Deacon

Welcome to these guidelines for Infant Baptism. Their purpose is to provide a greater consistency of approach and practice across the diocese for parents, catechists and clergy as they prepare for, celebrate and live the truth of the baptism of children. I am grateful to all those who participated in the diocesan consultation, and to those who contributed to the writing of these guidelines.

The *Catechism of the Catholic Church* teaches that Baptism is ‘the gateway of life in the Spirit, and the door which gives access to the other sacraments’ (*Catechism*, 1213). The parents who bring their children for Baptism sometimes stand uneasily at the door of our parish communities, uncertain about what they seek, and what is expected of them. It is our baptismal responsibility to support them as God reveals his love and purpose to them and their children, through Jesus.

It is essential that all those involved in the preparation and celebration of Infant Baptism and especially clergy and catechists, understand and apply the Church’s teaching regarding the canonical, liturgical, spiritual, theological, catechetical and pastoral aspects of this first sacrament. These guidelines provide a clear overview of each, as well as a useful list of resources for local use.

Pope Francis, in his homily preached to the parents and families present at the baptism of infants on 8 January 2017 said:

‘You have asked for faith: the Church gives faith to your children with Baptism, and you have the task of making it grow, safeguarding it, so that it may become testimony for all others.’

Parish partnerships provide us with the challenge to develop more collaborative ways of working and to share both strengths and weaknesses, so that those who seek Infant Baptism will be more readily received and supported, and all may become ‘testimony for all others’.

I thank all who have been involved in the preparation of these guidelines, and I commend them to all who are involved in Infant Baptism.

With best wishes

Yours sincerely in Christ

A handwritten signature in grey ink that reads "+ Séamus". The plus sign is a simple cross, and the name is written in a cursive, flowing script.

Right Reverend Séamus Cunningham
Bishop of Hexham and Newcastle

Overview of the diocesan consultation

Deborah Fox, Department for Education

At the beginning of 2015, Bishop Séamus Cunningham commissioned a consultation process across the diocese on infant baptism, so that these diocesan guidelines could be produced. His expectation was that there should be a greater consistency of approach and practice across the diocese for priests, catechists and those seeking baptism for their children.

The consultation process was led by Fr Michael McCoy, Head of Adult Formation and Evangelisation and Deborah Fox, Deputy Director of the Department for Education together with a working party of clergy and lay people.

It was agreed that the consultation process should:

- Be open and accessible to all
- Capture the views of as many people as possible across the diocese
- Target different geographical areas, parishes and groups of people
- Have different foci for different groups.

The consultation included:

- Five episcopal area consultation events
- 15 parish focused consultation meetings
- Questionnaires for catechists, parents of recently baptised children and parishioners
- Clergy and lay council consultation
- Headteacher questionnaire
- Youth council consultation.

Summary of findings

What does baptism mean to you, how are parents welcomed and prepared for baptism, how is the sacrament celebrated and what works well and what could be improved?

Baptism was seen very much as belonging to the local family and to God's family. The sense of community and support that baptism enables was strongly felt. It was seen as the start of a life of faith with God and that being part of the Catholic tradition shapes the way a person lives their life and uses their talents. It forms their identity and affects the way in which they regard and interact with others. Baptism was seen as life-changing in that it was the start of the journey in receiving the other sacraments, with baptism specifically being the door to salvation.

The context of parishes was found to have an influence on the welcome, preparation and celebration of infant baptism. In some parishes there were multiple baptisms, often weekly. In others there were few baptisms. The size of parish, the number of baptisms and whether parishes are working singly or

in a cluster, all had an impact on how the welcome, preparation and celebration are approached and organised. Parishes or clusters with greater numbers of baptism were found to have a more structured approach, whereas the approach of smaller parishes with fewer baptisms was usually less structured.

The term 'welcome' was interpreted in two ways by those taking part in the consultation, firstly as the informal initial contact when parents approach the priest for baptism and secondly as a formal welcome by the parish of the child and family. In all cases, the priest provided the welcome. A formal welcome by the parish was not as widespread.

The majority of responses talked about the parish priest being the initial contact. The welcome the priest gave was seen as crucial. In some parishes the priest had an initial meeting or session with the parents. Following that, parents were then usually introduced to an individual or team of catechists who prepared the family. It was acknowledged that parents and families have a range of views on the meaning of faith and baptism. The role of catechists was seen to be very important as a point of contact and to enable preparation sessions to take place. In a number of parishes, catechists visited family homes. The formation of catechists was seen as being of great importance because they related to families whatever their understanding of faith or commitment. Ensuring that literature was available in different languages was also seen as a necessary way of including parents.

There was a large variation in the preparation of resources or programmes used by parishes. In some cases there was no formal or structured programme. In others, examples of the resources being used included the Archdiocese of Birmingham videos, CAFÉ resources, Redemptorist Publications, the Middlesbrough Diocesan Programme, and aspects of a number of other programmes developed by parishes.

There was a wide variation in how the sacrament was celebrated, appreciating the parish's context and culture. Generally baptisms were celebrated either during Sunday Mass, directly after Mass, or later in the day. Some parishes gave the option of baptism on a Saturday or during the week. There were some examples of a parish welcome during Mass with the baptism being celebrated after the Mass or after Mass the following week. In a number of parishes there was little community involvement in the welcome or baptism. In some parishes, the priest or deacon gave a commentary explaining actions and symbols, and this was seen as good practice. It was observed that often a baptism is regarded as a public acknowledgement of the relationship of the parents.

In many parishes, there was no support offered post-baptism to families and there was an overwhelming consensus that this was an area for development. The challenge of parishes having the capacity to provide post-baptism support was noted. Often catechists had moved on to preparing the next group for baptism and therefore had limited capacity for follow-up.

What are the barriers/challenges to guidelines being written?

These can be grouped into five main areas:

- **Clergy**

The variation in approaches of clergy to preparation and celebration was seen as a major challenge. It was believed that finding consensus on a common approach across the diocese amongst clergy would be challenging.

- **Understanding and practice of the faith among parents**

The wide variation in the understanding and practice of the faith among parents asking for baptism was seen as having a significant impact on the content of any guidelines. The different ways in which parents regard the sacrament, the level of commitment of parents and the reasons they ask for baptism were seen as major challenges. Many parents seeking baptism were not practising or did not show commitment beyond the preparation period. Whilst this was acknowledged as a barrier, it was also identified as an opportunity for the community to evangelise the family and welcome them into the parish.

- **Differences in family situations and relationships**

It was acknowledged that a significant number of people seeking baptism for their children have family situations or relationships that may be contrary to the teaching of the church. This was seen as a challenge. Some baptisms can appear to be quasi weddings and a public affirmation of the couple's relationship. Overwhelmingly the view was one of welcome to all.

- **Language and cultural barriers**

It was acknowledged that for those parents whose first language is not English there may be language barriers, and that these need to be addressed at a local level. However the practice of the faith by groups such as the Filipino community was seen as an inspiration.

- **Changes in society**

The writing of these guidelines should recognise the current challenges in society including the growth of individualism, the perceived fragmentation of communities, the changing ways of socialising and communicating, the changes in the make-up of families and how they spend time together, and children in families with same-sex parents.

In all five areas of challenge the overwhelming view was that children and families must be welcomed.

Examples of good practice

At every level of the consultation, there was an opportunity for those present to offer examples of good practice in the areas of welcome, preparation, celebration and post baptism support. These are presented below.

Welcome

- Clear signposting of who to approach about baptism (e.g. website, leaflet or display with names and photographs in church, parish bulletin)
- A meeting of welcome with the priest
- A leaflet explaining baptism and a welcome letter to parents
- Catechists and priest to put parents at ease and accompany them on their journey
- A welcome by the parish community at a Mass at the start of the preparation period.

Preparation

- Explanation of the ceremony by the priest in the church as a part of the preparation
- Separate sessions if the child is of school age
- Catechists visiting families at home to establish relationships and to complete forms
- Use of *Your Baby's Baptism* book – Redemptorist Publications

- Catechists or parishioners as 'buddies' to the parents to accompany them in their preparation
- Small groups of parents together for sessions
- Display of photographs of families preparing for baptism and asking for prayers
- Welcomers to look out for families and to welcome them as they enter church
- Copy of the sacramental rite made available
- Share a baptism information leaflet with parents, e.g. Diocesan Evangelisation Team leaflet
- The role and purpose of godparents to be clearly explained to parents and godparents
- Prayer cards to be given to parishioners for them to pray for the child and family
- Families invited individually to parish coffee after Mass
- Topics explored as part of the preparation include what it means to be baptised and to belong to the church, the life of faith and family life, and the sacramental rite
- The family of a recently baptised child to adopt and accompany a family in preparation.

Celebration

- First part of the baptismal rite to be celebrated at Sunday Mass the week before the baptism
- Families to be given the option of being involved in the Mass e.g. reading/offertory
- Families mentioned in the bulletin
- Use of family and child names during Mass to make the family feel welcomed and included
- A baptism card from the catechists/parish to be received after the baptism
- Translation of the rite made available in different languages
- Time given for photographs after the celebration
- Certificate given on the day.

Post-baptism support

- A celebration event every two years for families of recently baptised children
- A certificate presented to parents at Mass the week after the baptism
- A card sent to the child on the anniversary of their baptism
- Families invited back to church for a celebration on the Feast of the Presentation, and their names are read out, they are prayed for, and candles for the children are floated in the baptismal font
- Support from the Legion of Mary
- A card sent to the family one month after the baptism
- A family Mass for families whose children were baptised during the year
- An invitation to families for toddler group and school events
- A book of baptism is displayed permanently listing the names of the baptised
- Bidding prayers at Mass for those recently baptised and for those who are celebrating the anniversary of their baptism.

Main findings

During the consultation, a helpfully wide range of views was expressed with some extremes. However, there was much common ground and consensus regarding what the guidelines should include:

- There is a need for consistency of welcome, preparation and celebration of baptism across the diocese, whilst allowing for flexibility to adapt to local circumstances
- There is a need to develop post-baptism support
- Greater consistency of practice among clergy and catechists should be encouraged
- Society, the make-up of families and the practice of the faith are changing. The reasons why parents ask for baptism must be respected
- Welcoming parents and meeting them where they are on their journey of faith is essential
- Catechists need guidance on how to make their preparation accessible to parents whatever their level of education, language, cultural background, family circumstances, level of practice or understanding of the faith
- Guidelines need to be contemporary and to reflect the reality of today rather than looking back nostalgically to former times
- The guidelines should accommodate parents whatever their circumstances
- There needs to be a theological reflection on baptism, canon law, liturgy and initiation
- The future recruitment and ongoing formation of catechists is crucial
- Parishes with a good number of catechists should be willing to share with those facing difficulty
- There should be more opportunities for preparation to take place at partnership level
- The celebration of baptism is an opportunity for evangelisation.

Reflections

Liturgical reflection

Rev Adrian Dixon, Department for Liturgy

The Order of Baptism of Infants is the fruit of the renewal of the Liturgy introduced by the Second Vatican Council. It is a masterpiece in which the ancient traditions of the adult Rite of Baptism are preserved and reworked into a ceremony that is specifically designed for making children members of the church.

Reception of the Child

The instruction that this should take place at the door is a simple and effective way of expressing the idea that baptism is the way into the church and the door to life in Christ. Christ, himself, is the Door who opens the way to everlasting life. 'Welcome' is key to our preparation and celebration of this sacrament. On the threshold of the House of God we express the desire of the Christian community to welcome children just as Jesus did.

The giving of a name is a significant choice made by parents at the beginning of their child's life. It is an affirmation that this little one belongs and is cherished. The child is now to be given a privileged identity of one whom God calls by name in the family of the church.

The Sign of the Cross on the forehead shows that this new disciple is claimed by Christ and will follow in his footsteps.

Celebration of God's Word

Reintroduced in the ceremony, the Word of God takes a prominent place in the rite. The Scriptures provide a rich understanding of baptism. The minister speaks briefly of the importance of the Sacrament and the profound reasons why we baptise children.

The living Word of God always stirs within us a response, and in this liturgy prompts the church to pray. Firstly, members of the assembly speak in the Intercessions especially for the child, for the parents and godparents and then they call on the prayers of the saints.

Preparatory Rites

Two further prayers are offered for the child who is to be baptised. They focus on the struggles of life and remind us of the world as it really is.

The Prayer of Exorcism

The Scriptures tell us that we are made in the image and likeness of God. At the same time, we recognise that we are not completely one with God and we can go astray. Each person is a mixture of strengths and weaknesses. We pray that the child may have the help to grow in love and faith and to resist temptation.

The church instructed when the new ceremony was published that although the ancient word 'exorcism' had been retained, it must not be interpreted as meaning 'being possessed'.

The word 'sin' is used in the singular. We do not say that a child must be freed from individual sins – a child cannot commit any. Original Sin is mentioned in the prayer to remind us of our absolute need for the help of God.

Anointing before Baptism

The anointing with the Oil of Catechumens is accompanied by a prayer for strength. This anointing highlights how God helps us in our struggles. Oils are used for all kinds of soothing ointments and medicines. We pray for that inner healing and strength which everyone needs.

Celebration of the Sacrament

Blessing and Invocation of God over the Baptismal Water

If the baptism takes place in the Easter season, the water blessed at the Easter Vigil may be used. Otherwise, fresh water may be blessed. Three prayers of blessing are available, and two have congregational responses to encourage participation. We give thanks for the gift of water to cleanse and give life and we reflect on how in the scriptures it foreshadows baptism.

Renunciation of Sin and Profession of Faith

A child is not able to make the promises to lead a good life and to affirm faith. The parents and godparents are asked to make these promises on their own behalf so that they may raise the child in the ways of faith.

Baptism

The words used for baptism are drawn from St Matthew's Gospel, Chapter 28. The formula is in the name of the Trinity and the church sees this as essential for a baptism to be valid. Anyone can baptise in an emergency, as long as these words are said.

Baptising in the name of the Trinity shows that the membership to which we are admitted is nothing less than the family of God. The Trinity, having drawn humanity into existence, makes us sharers in the eternal love of the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit. Participation in God's love is the promise held out to all people. Baptism expresses and implants this reality within us.

Water is used as a symbol of life, cleansing, quenching thirst, and death. It reminds us that we are perfected with new life in Christ who satisfies our every need and who helps us die to sin and selfishness. The blessed water is poured over the head of the child as the words are said. The child may be immersed in the water of the font, in keeping with local custom.

The church teaches that 'to baptize (Greek baptizein) means to "plunge" or "immerse"; the "plunge" into the water symbolizes the catechumen's burial into Christ's death, from which he rises up by resurrection with him, as "a new creature." (Catechism of the Catholic Church, 1214)

It is interesting to note that the formula does not end with 'Amen.'. This word, which means 'so be it', is omitted because it is appropriate that the child will be a living 'Amen' as a Christian.

Explanatory Rites

Anointing with Chrism

This anointing reminds us that we are to be like Christ, the anointed one of God. The prayer draws attention to three kinds of anointed people found in the Old Testament: priest - prophet - king. Baptism makes us priests, prophets and kings; the anointing sums up the dignity and duty that is conferred upon us all. A priest offers sacrifice and intercedes with God for others. The baptised pray, make personal sacrifices in everyday life and share in the sacrifice of the Mass. A prophet proclaims God's message to others. The baptised are called to share in the mission of the church. A king shares

in the kingdom of God. The baptised share a special dignity and are called to disclose the presence of the kingdom.

Clothing with the White Garment

As the words accompanying this ceremony explain, the white garment expresses the dignity of the newly baptised child. The prayer also draws out the part played by family and friends. In this way we reflect on the effect the whole family and the wider circle of friends has on child as they grow.

The Lighted Candle

Jesus, the Light of the World, enlightens all those who follow him. This candle, lit from the Paschal Candle, is a powerful symbol of the light Jesus shares with us. The parents and godparents are reminded that the care of this light is given to them. They are to ensure that the flame of faith may burn brightly in the heart of their child. For a flame to stay alight, it must be protected from anything that might put it out and parents and godparents are to reflect on how something said or done may endanger or extinguish faith. They are called to be true guardians of the child's faith. A flame also needs oxygen to burn brightly, which means they are to provide an environment in which faith may flourish and be encouraged.

The Ephphetha Prayer

This ceremony is inspired by Jesus healing a man who could neither hear nor speak. (Mark 7:31-37). Jesus said 'Ephphatha', and St Mark tells us this word means 'be opened'. The minister touches the ears and mouth of the child and the accompanying prayer reminds us that in baptism, we are opened up to God – especially to his Word. We are to hear it and to speak it. To be a disciple of Jesus is to have an open heart and an open mind, showing love and compassion to those in need. This fourth explanatory ceremony is optional in England and Wales.

Conclusion of the Rite

The ceremony moves to the altar continuing the movement that speaks of the journey of faith and life. The people gather near the altar to pray as the children of God where the Holy Communion is received and Confirmation is celebrated.

The introduction to the Lord's Prayer reminds us that baptism is not the end of the sacramental experience but its beginning; so we look towards the future and the reception of other sacraments - in particular the other sacraments of initiation.

Blessings follow for the mother and father of the child, and the whole assembly. These replace the ceremony of the 'churcing' of the mother, which allowed her back into the community. In ancient times, women were considered ritually impure after childbirth and although the church opposed this, found it difficult to change the custom (Pope Gregory the Great's condemnation is described in St Bede's History of the English Church and People, Book 1 Chapter 27). In renewing the rite it was decided once and for all to put an end to the practice.

The Order of Baptism of Infants prompts us to ponder profound questions:

- Who are we and of what are we made?
- What are our hopes and why do we struggle?
- Where are we going and who will help us?

Spiritual reflection

Kathryn Turner, Department for Spirituality

Baptism marks a major turning point in a person's life. We use phrases such as 'being part of the household of God' – 'claimed for Christ' – 'being born again' – 'becoming a new creation' – 'dying with Christ and rising with him' and 'being commissioned to share in Christ's mission of priest, prophet and king'. Many parents bringing their children for baptism are unaware of the fullness of what it means. It is probably also true that clergy, catechists, and parishioners seldom have at the forefront of their minds the awesomeness of what happens when children are brought for baptism. It would be helpful to consider our own baptism and the difference it has made to our lives.

For many, living our baptism means attending Mass, prayer and reflection, being a catechist or liturgical minister, and taking part in charitable activities. But, as we saw above, the words that describe baptism do not focus on what the newly-baptised will do, but on what they are and on what they will become. Religious practice is an outcome of the new way of being and becoming, but baptism goes far beyond that. The Mass and the other sacraments are touching places where the grace of God reaches into our lives. Baptism is the door through which we pass to belong to the community of faith and its celebration. Our personal prayer helps to deepen our relationship with the God who created and loved us into being. And, as we grow in faith, we are invited to take on the liturgical, prayerful, pastoral and charitable work of our parish communities. These all help to nurture our own faith and to help others to grow and develop in theirs. All are vital to our spiritual growth and are the means to completion in God.

How do you feel as you consider the size of God's household, and your unique place in it?

As part of God's household, baptism puts us in relationship with all who are part of that household including Catholics and all Christians worldwide. This also includes all who have been baptised in the two thousand years since the first Pentecost, and all who will be baptised until the end of time. Amazingly, all are our brothers and sisters and known individually by God, through Jesus Christ. Through baptism, each person is claimed by Christ as his disciple, and each is uniquely gifted by the Holy Spirit for the tasks appointed to them.

What does being 'born again' mean for you – especially if you were baptised as a young person or adult?

This may be clearer for those baptised as adults, and especially for those who have undergone a significant conversion experience. For them, the opportunity to make a fresh start, freed from the sins of the past, can be hugely powerful not just for them, but also for those who witness it. Many of us were baptised as infants and so were not privileged to feel that sense of being born again, but we share in it with others as they prepare for and celebrate their baptism.

How do you feel about being anointed to share Christ's mission as priest, prophet and king? How do you live it out – and how might you live it more powerfully?

When we were baptised, we were anointed to share Christ's ministry of priest, prophet and king. This is the clear call to mission that is given to every Christian. It is also one that many Christians are happy to leave to others they think are better qualified, such as those who leave home to preach the good news. But through the power and the grace of baptism, every Christian has it within them to serve the

world and its people. Within baptism lie the seeds of the vocation to ordained ministry, which is essential to the life of the Church. The priesthood of all the baptised means bringing holiness to the world wherever the baptised person happens to be. This is a holiness that brings wholeness and healing and spiritual richness to those around them.

Sharing in Christ's role as prophet, the baptised person sees the world as God sees it. This means knowing the faith and reflecting on God's Word and the church's tradition and applying them to contemporary situations. The anointing received during baptism gives the strength to deal with the challenges of our world and modern life.

Few of us would claim to be kings, but this kingship is about an authority born of baptism. Following Jesus' model, this is a servant authority. It is the authority of a parent over their children, the Christian employer or employee being diligent in their work and attentive to the needs of those with whom they work, the person in public office, and the countless everyday activities in which we take responsibility and are called to act as Christ.

Reflecting on our own baptism from time to time invites us not just to a deeper understanding for ourselves, but enriches the way in which we share this great gift with others. Knowing that God has called us into a closer relationship with him helps us to delight in sharing this with others. We sense also that becoming a new creation does not happen all at once - even the great work of Creation has taken billions of years and is still unfolding! This new creation is something which happens every day, and is the opportunity to be renewed and refreshed and to live more fully in Christ. Baptism opens up a whole way of life, taking our unique place in the great unfolding of salvation and, as we grow and mature into adult Christians, accepting and living out the great mission that God has entrusted to us.

Theological reflection

Rev Sean Hall, Department for Adult Formation and Evangelisation

In his Gospel, St Luke recounts for us a very touching human scene that accompanies the birth of John the Baptist. He tells us how Elizabeth's and Zechariah's relations and friends come to share with them the joy of the birth of their son:

All their neighbours were filled with awe and the whole affair was talked about throughout the hill country of Judaea. All those who heard of it treasured it in their hearts. 'What will this child turn out to be?' they wondered. And indeed the hand of the Lord was with him. (Lk. 1:65-6)

At every birth there is that feeling of joy and wonder for the parents and their family and close friends. Everyone is thankful for the safe delivery of new life into the world and, especially for the parents, there are hopes and anxieties about how things will turn out for the new born. Within this very human scene people of faith have a further dimension in which these events take place. For people of faith we believe that God is at the heart of all life – for its origin, its continuing existence, and its ultimate destiny. The person of faith responds to the gift of new life with a spirit of thankfulness and a wish to enlist God's help in the nurturing of this life. These are the origins of infant baptism.

We know that from the first moments of its existence, every child is created 'in the image and likeness of God.' (Gen. 1:27) We are already 'God-like' when we are born. In itself this is sufficient reason to give God thanks. This tiny, vulnerable being – completely beautiful, perfect and gorgeous to the parents – will before too long, however, have to face up to the realities and shortcomings of the way we human persons are not so perfect in the way we live out our lives. They will have to face the reality of our common sinfulness, and they will need all the help they can get to grow up under the influence of the good rather than of the temptation to evil that pervades our world. In and through baptism, God promises to stay with, and within, the person who is baptised, no matter what might happen, no matter how much a person might stray from the ways of God.

A famous African saying reminds us that 'it takes a whole village to raise a child'. Baptism is a sacrament of the whole community. A child, already formed in the image and likeness of God, is now brought into the 'village', the community of the Church, where (ideally) parents and the family, parishioners, and the Catholic school all work together to help bring up the child to become all that God wants that child to be.

At the beginning of the baptismal celebration, the parents and child are welcomed by the minister (usually the priest or deacon) on behalf of the whole community. The parents are asked what it is they are seeking for their child. Although this may seem obvious, it is still important for them to articulate their desire for their child to be a member of the family of God in the Church, and so they state their wish for 'baptism' and accept responsibility for their role in the continuing process of bringing the child up in the ways of God. Then the godparents are asked if they will accept their part in the process of nurturing faith. Sometimes this question is put to the whole community during a Sunday Mass when every member of the 'village' can accept their particular role in the child's faith upbringing.

Once the child has been welcomed, and the roles of the various participants in the nurturing of this precious life have been acknowledged, we move on to the main celebration of the sacrament. We now need to look at the perennially awkward question of the role of 'original sin' in the quest for God's help for the child in baptism.

Until various modern sciences helped us to better determine how human life came about in an evolutionary process, Christians had accepted quite literally the opening chapters of the Book of Genesis where humankind is described as descending from a single couple – Adam and Eve. These early chapters also record an event in which the pair ate of the forbidden fruit of a tree, how they were then banished from an original ‘Paradise’ as a punishment for this act, and how this ‘original’ act had consequences for all subsequent human beings, bearing the guilt of those first ancestors.

It is vital to remember, as we come to look at these events in our own time that, until the evolutionary process was uncovered, no one before that could have imagined anything other than the way in which those early chapters of Genesis explained things. With our knowledge, we are able both to understand the underlying message of these chapters and how they fit in with our own current scientific knowledge.

The first thing we can note is that in those early chapters of Genesis (Ch.1-11) there follows a number of other stories of ‘fall’: Cain kills his brother Abel (Ch.4); the whole of humankind goes astray again in Noah’s time (Ch.6); then, finally the people now populating the world after the Flood try to build a tower (of Babel) so that they could climb up into the heavens and take over from God (Ch.11). At each of these incidents the perpetrators incur some punishment: banishment from the Garden of Eden; difficulties in settling anywhere on earth; a flood; and finally the curse of a confusion of languages that prevents human beings from understanding one another.

However, it is also the case that at each incident God offers a helping hand: God sews clothes for the couple now aware and ashamed of their nakedness; the mark of Cain which prevented others from taking revenge on him; a renewed earth after the Flood; and the coming of the Patriarchs beginning the long story of God’s ultimate plan for the salvation of humankind that begins with Abraham in Chapter 12. The lesson is clear: God always wants the human race to move on, and helps us achieve this, to save us from ourselves.

Once ultimate salvation is achieved in the life, death and resurrection of Jesus, Christian writers soon began to reflect on the relationship between human sinfulness and God’s saving (helping) grace that overcomes this sinfulness. St Paul writes about this in the fifth chapter of his Letter to the Romans. It is from this, and the reflections on what Paul writes by St Augustine in the Fifth Century, that most of our thinking about ‘Original Sin’ developed. Because the act of Adam in eating the forbidden fruit had such grave consequences for himself and his wife, it was thought that all subsequent generations, through no fault of their own, suffered a similar fate. Only baptism could remedy this dire situation. Hence the urgent need, especially in times of high infant mortality, for baptism to be celebrated at the earliest opportunity. Without baptism a person, even a little baby, was damned for all eternity.

For people of today, all of this sounds quite offensive. Firstly there is the inherent injustice of punishing others for someone else’s wrongdoing. Then there is the whole business of how a bundle of such innocence like a little baby could be damned. The idea is abhorrent to us. Over the centuries various theologians tried to mitigate the idea of punishment for the innocent. Sometimes, however well-meaning these theologians might have been, ultimately we have to leave it all in the hands of an all-loving God to sort out, in the firm belief that the God revealed in the Bible does not condemn the innocent for all eternity. It goes against our very understanding of a loving God to believe such a thing possible.

The problem of punishing the innocent of future generations has, however, some merit to it as we well know today. The whole issue of the degradation of the environment has come to the fore in recent years. We are now well aware of how the over-consumption and pollution of the resources of the earth of the current generation will have dire consequences for future generations. In fact,

decisions about land borders, ownership of territory and things like that have always had consequences on subsequent generations. These are not guilty for what has happened, but they do have to suffer the effects brought on them by their ancestors. So also, generation upon generation of humankind inherits the consequences of the sinfulness of previous generations. In tackling this we need all the help we can get. We need God's help.

Our modern scientific knowledge of the evolutionary process and a better insight into the meaning of the Scriptures help us to see baptism in a different light. Although both St Paul and St Augustine wrote about human sinfulness coming from Adam, they are writing about the overwhelming power of Christ's Death and Resurrection in overcoming Adam's sin. This is the focus of their thought. For both of them ultimately there is no contest: Jesus Christ completely overcomes any deeds of a mere mortal like Adam, and of that there is no doubt. What is in doubt, however, is how each individual in each subsequent generation will fare faced the consequences of human sinfulness. As St Paul and St Augustine note: only God can help us overcome such adversity.

In baptism, God comes to dwell permanently with the one who is baptised, to be with them, to offer them strength and support to face life and all it has to visit on them. In the 'village' of the Church, we walk together on a journey of faith in mutual solidarity, helping, encouraging and supporting one another as we go along. At the baptism of a young child, the parents as people who have demonstrated some sign of faith, even if it is as little as requesting baptism for their child, are enlisting that same help.

Pastoral reflection

Rev Ian Grieves and the Darlington Ordinariate

The beginning of a wonderful journey

Baptism is an encounter, a meeting, a joining together. It is right that it starts with a visit or a meeting. In our tradition, when we hear of parents seeking for their child to be baptized, we love to visit them in their own home, to meet them, to meet their child, perhaps to share a cup of tea and a biscuit, to make friends. This is the beginning of a wonderful journey, a journey into the friendship and community of the Church, and it is fitting that it begins with a friendly visit.

We would not dream of not looking after our child's bodily needs: feeding, clothing and warmth. We would not dream of not looking after our child's mental needs: love, encouragement, education. So, in the same way, in baptism parents reach out to the Church to help them look after their child's spiritual needs. We all have a need for guidance in the right path, and for growth in all the deeper and more meaningful things in life, and indeed for God himself. St Augustine says: You have made us for yourself, and our heart is restless until it rests in you.¹

Through his Church, Jesus Christ, 'who is risen from the dead and alive for evermore',² welcomes us into the friendship of his Church. For this reason, a friendly meeting at Church, or sometimes in someone's home, is usually the next step on the journey. If something wonderful is about to happen, then it is right that we consider it carefully, so the parents of the child attend a friendly meeting, perhaps along with other parents at a similar stage. We now consider the meaning of baptism through some of its beautiful symbols.

Water and the Spirit

Why do we pour water on the child's head, or in some churches with large fonts, even immerse them in water? The New Testament tells us it is because we need to be born of water and the Spirit if we are to enter the kingdom of God.³ This is not because God has made it difficult for us to enter his friendship! By his death and resurrection Jesus has opened the door wide.⁴ 'This is my friend, my friend indeed, who at my need his life did spend.'⁵

In fact, God has made the door to eternal life very simple. Simple water, the essence of life for every living person, is poured. Water is a wonderful symbol of life, regeneration and renewal. Without water on our planet, we would have no life. Then, as we grow in the life of the Spirit, and most importantly as our faith grows, that gift of eternal life in baptism begins to flower in us.⁶

In the Old Testament, we hear of the Spirit hovering over the waters at the beginning of creation and all life.⁷ The beautiful symbols and stories there speak of the deeper meaning behind nature and reality. We are reminded that all life needs water, but also that all the living need the outpouring of God's life-giving Spirit to live life to the full. Baptism is the sacrament of this gift of life's fullness from God.

¹ St Augustine, *Confessions*, 1,1,1.

² Revelation 1:18

³ John 3:5

⁴ Catechism of the Catholic Church 1213; John 10:7

⁵ The hymn *My Song is Love Unknown*, Samuel Crossman, 1664

⁶ Catechism of the Catholic Church 1231.

⁷ Genesis 1:2

From death to life

In the celebration of baptism, reference is often made to death and resurrection, a passing over from death to life. Christians believe that Jesus came into the world to bring God's life to us, and by dying on the Cross he brought God's undying life into the deepest, darkest places of human existence. By rising again, he gave new and eternal life and love that is stronger than death to all who wished to pass over with him from death to life. Just as the Jewish Passover symbolised their passing over from slavery through the Red Sea to freedom in the Promised Land, so baptism celebrates our passing over into the new gift of eternal life that God offers us through Jesus Christ. In this way, we talk of being reborn, of having a new life which is Christ's own life in us from that moment on. Of course, it must grow and develop as we grow in the life of faith, but it begins that day.

Symbols of new life: light – white garment – new name

In baptism, we are made children of light. The light of God fills us and we become light.⁸ So a lighted candle is given to the newly baptised child to remind them to 'walk in the light'. A candle will be lit again when they are confirmed, and they can light that candle symbolically every year at the Easter Vigil, as a sign of the faith that is leading them to eternal life. For Christians, therefore, death is not an end. If we walk in faith, in the way of the light, we will one day pass from this world to eternal life, and at our funeral farewell the great Easter Candle is lit as a sign of this passing.

We all know that at baptism, children are often dressed in white. This is a symbol of the dignity and perfection God offers them. Although they do not have to wear all white, we use a white garment such as a shawl or a scarf to show they are being wrapped in Christ, and made part of him. Heaven's door is open for them. And just as the word 'opened' means 'made open', the word 'christened' means 'made Christ' and joined to him, made part of him. All obstacles are removed between us and God in baptism.

At the heart of baptism is the pouring of water in the name of the Holy Trinity and speaking the Christian name the child has been given. 'I baptize you in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit'. In this central moment, the child's name is brought close to the name of God the Holy Trinity who draws close to the child, and pours out all his blessings and love in baptism.

In our tradition we make a great deal of the uniqueness of every child. We might prepare a special leaflet for the baptismal celebration, with the child's name printed on it, and seat the family in places of honour at the front of the church. This emphasises the great dignity, beauty and importance of each human being called into the Church. God 'calls us by our name'.

The Christian community welcomes children from the very start of their lives. But it is only a beginning and they need to be brought regularly to church, hopefully welcomed into the Catholic school, be taught the faith, and grow in faith, so that there is a full flowering of baptismal grace and Christian life.⁹

I will go unto the altar of God¹⁰

On the Cross, blood and water flowed from the side of Christ. This was the birth of the Church, and symbolises not only the water of baptism, but also the Body and Blood of Christ offered at Mass.¹¹ These are the 'sacraments of new life'.¹²

⁸ Catechism of the Catholic Church 1216

⁹ Catechism of the Catholic Church 1231

¹⁰ Psalm 43:4

¹¹ John 19:34

Baptisms may be celebrated during the main Sunday Mass, which stresses that the newly baptized belong to the Risen Christ and to the wider family of the Church. It also stresses that baptism is the beginning of a journey that leads to First Holy Communion, to Confirmation and beyond. In the celebration of baptism during Mass, the child may be brought up to the altar at the praying of the Our Father after the Eucharistic Prayer. This symbolizes making the journey onwards, from baptism as the beginning to the full sharing of Christ's life in the Eucharist.

God wishes not only to pour out his Spirit on us, but to feed us with the life of his Divine Son – 'body, blood, soul and divinity'.¹³ It is the parents' duty, as the child grows, to teach them the Christian faith and set an example of Christian living.

Celebrating and living what has been given

Following the baptism in church, we like to welcome the child and their family into the parish house or hall for refreshments. This emphasises that human celebrations are warm and important signs of the parish and wider Church as a family. The welcome then goes on, as the years pass, and the child grows in faith and takes their place around the altar of the Lord, and in the service of all mankind.

¹² Catechism of the Catholic Church 1225.

¹³ Catechism of the Catholic Church 1374

Formation of catechists and recommended resources

Mgr Andrew Faley and Rev Deacon Rob Wareing

During the Year of Mercy, Pope Francis celebrated the Jubilee of Catechists by encouraging them to keep at the centre of their lives the truth of our faith –that Jesus Christ is Our Divine Lord, and that He died and is risen from the dead, never to die again (Homily, 25 September 2016). Catechists witness always and everywhere to Jesus’ divine Lordship and victory over death. Pope Francis concluded his homily by teaching:

And so, dear catechists, dear brothers and sisters, may the Lord give us the grace to be renewed every day by the joy of the first proclamation to us: Jesus died and is risen, Jesus loves us personally! May he give us the strength to live and proclaim the commandment of love, overcoming blindness of appearances, and worldly sadness. May he make us sensitive to the poor, who are not an afterthought in the Gospel but an important page, always open before all.

The faith and commitment of over 1,000 catechists in the diocese inspires and supports those who come to us in our parishes seeking faith. These catechists take their ministry seriously by deepening their understanding and commitment through on-going formation and mutual support. The diocesan course for catechists, *Catechesis in the Mission of the Church* supports those already involved in catechesis to deepen their faith and understanding, and also offers a programme for those wishing to become catechists. The course offers space for prayer, teaching, reflection and questions.

Catechists are as much formed by the situations and questions of those they work with, as they are by their own search for deeper faith. The ‘unity of faith’ which Pope Benedict XVI taught so much about in the Year of Faith lies at the heart of formation for all catechists. The Church invites us to know, to celebrate, to live and to pray our faith in Jesus. And it is this unity that we invite those who seek faith, to enter.

Bishop Séamus reminds us in these guidelines that in baptism, those who bring their children sometimes stand uneasily at the door of our parish communities, uncertain about what they seek, and what is expected of them. It is our baptismal responsibility to support them as God reveals his love and purpose to them and their children, through Jesus.

It is essential that catechists understand and apply the Church’s teaching regarding the canonical, liturgical, spiritual, theological, catechetical and pastoral aspects of this first sacrament. The list of resources at the end of these guidelines is provided to support catechists and those whom they serve in witnessing to the Risen Jesus.

Resources

Title	Author
The Rite of Baptism, with commentary	Rev Adrian Dixon Diocese of Hexham & Newcastle, Department for Liturgy
Baptism - helping your child get the most from life	Catholic Faith Exploration (Café) https://faithcafe.org
Baptism Preparation Resource Pack	Liverpool Archdiocese Centre for Evangelisation www.liverpoolcatholic.org.uk/Sacraments-of-Initiation
My Baby's Baptism	Diocese of Middlesbrough www.mybabysbaptism.co.uk
Baptism: God's Magnificent Gift	Joan Brown SND www.kevinmayhew.com
Welcome with Joy: a journal to remember your baby's baptism	Joan Brown SND www.kevinmayhew.com
At Home with the Sacraments - Baptism	Peg Bowman www.pastoral.center
Preparing for Your Child's Baptism	Sr Hyacinthe Defos Du Rau www.ctsbooks.org
Your Baby's Baptism	Fr Jim Deiters www.liguori.org
Your Godchild: How to be a Catholic Godparent	Bairbre Cahill www.rpbooks.co.uk
Why Baptism? (leaflet)	Hexham and Newcastle Evangelisation Team www.rcdhn.org.uk/evangel2/evangel_leaflets.php
Baptism -being a child's Godparent (leaflet)	www.ctsbooks.org
Being a Godparent (leaflet)	www.ctsbooks.org
Archbishop of Birmingham introduces Baptism	www.birminghamdiocese.org.uk/education-and-formation/department-of-parish-and-family-catechesis

Guidance for the preparation and celebration of infant baptism

Rev Michael McCoy, Department for Adult Formation and Evangelisation

Infant Baptism

In referring to Infant Baptism, Canon 97 clearly states:

Can. 97 §1. A person who has completed the eighteenth year of age has reached majority; below this age, a person is a minor.

§2. A minor before the completion of the seventh year is called an infant and is considered not responsible for oneself (non sui compos). With the completion of the seventh year, however, a minor is presumed to have the use of reason.

Infant Baptism therefore refers to children up to and including the age of seven.

Welcome

Parents and carers seeking baptism for their children should be welcomed regardless of their level of commitment to the church and personal circumstances. Family life and relationships are more complex than ever before. The range of beliefs, attitudes and practice among and within Catholic families varies greatly.

Preparation

Following on from the welcome, preparation is an essential element in how the church understands the sacrament to be celebrated. It is integral to the celebration of the sacrament and should be accessible to those seeking baptism for their children. The resources contained in these guidelines offer some good examples of how to achieve this. With the establishment of partnerships within the diocese, a collaborative approach between clergy, catechists and worshipping communities to preparation should become normal practice. This will allow each partnership to share resources and good practice and to offer flexibility in terms of times, venues and opportunities for preparation. Each partnership is to take responsibility for the length, number and frequency of meetings suited to the needs of those seeking the baptism of their children, and the needs of the partnership.

Celebration

Baptisms should be celebrated either during Sunday Mass or at some other time during the day. Some parishes may want to give the option of baptisms on a Saturday or during the week. Baptisms should normally take place in the parish where the family resides or attends Mass regularly.

Post baptism support

A clear need for post baptism support was identified throughout the consultation by many clergy, catechists and parents. Wherever possible, parishes and partnerships should identify and provide opportunities to support this.

Parents

One parent must be a baptised Catholic.

Godparents (sponsors)

The godparent (sponsor) should normally have completed their sixteenth year of age. The godparent 'must be a Catholic who has been confirmed and has already received the most holy sacrament of the Eucharist and who leads a life of faith in keeping with the function to be taken on.' (Canon 874).

The Code of Canon Law requires that there is only one male or one female godparent (sponsor), or one of each. This may call for some pastoral sensitivity in cultures and situations in which it is appropriate for more than two people to be designated as godparents (sponsors). In such a case it would be advisable for the minister to consult with the parents prior to the baptism and determine which two names will be recorded in the baptismal register.

A validly baptised person who belongs to a non-Catholic ecclesial community can participate together with a Catholic sponsor as a witness of the baptism but not as a godparent.

In Summary

- One parent must be baptised Catholic
- One godparent (sponsor) must be baptised Catholic over the age of sixteen
- A baptised Christian of another denomination may be the other godparent
- A baptism will take place in the parish where the family resides or attends Mass regularly
- A baptism should take place during Sunday Mass or at some other time during the day

Letter to parents from Bishop Séamus Cunningham

DIOCESE OF HEXHAM AND NEWCASTLE



*✠ Rt Rev Séamus Cunningham
Bishop of Hexham and Newcastle*



Dear Parent,

I am delighted that you are presenting your child for Baptism.

Pope Francis, in his homily preached to the parents and families present at the baptism of infants on 8 January 2017 said:

You have asked for faith: the Church gives faith to your children with Baptism, and you have the task of making it grow, safeguarding it, so that it may become testimony for all others.

This is a very special moment in your child's life and one where you will be supported in your baptismal responsibility by the parish family. In thanksgiving and joy, bless your child by tracing the Sign of the Cross on their forehead, and pray for your child in the name of the Father, and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit.

Please be assured of my support and prayers and of those of your parish community.

With best wishes

Yours sincerely in Christ

+ Séamus

Right Reverend Séamus Cunningham
Bishop of Hexham and Newcastle

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