

CoronaVirus Emergency
Guidelines from the Bishops of the Church of Ireland
relating to
Holy Baptism

HoB Protocol 2020/002

Introduction

Holy Baptism is central to the practice of our faith (Articles 25 and 27) and being ‘generally necessary to salvation’ (Catechism) it is proper that, with the reopening of church buildings, the Bishops should offer guidance.

Since the start of the restrictions placed by the onset of the CoronaVirus, and with the closure of church buildings, Holy Baptism, other than in the customary emergency situations, has been curtailed.

The reopening of church buildings gives rise to the need for additional guidance about the special precautions that will be required relating to the celebration of Holy Baptism.

This document was agreed on 9th June 2020 and may be revised further in the light of any changes in public health advice. In the meantime, all are expected to keep abreast of government and public health information.

The Reopening of Church Buildings - Public Health Advice

The guidance in this document supplements that provided in the general information and provisions that must be put in place in reopening a church building: *Church of Ireland Return to In-Church Worship Protocols for ROI and NI* (the reopening protocol).

Before opening a church building to celebrate Holy Baptism all of the provisions governing the reopening of those buildings must be put in place first. The fundamental principles of good communication with parishioners, understanding and collaboration in the local community, hand hygiene, social distancing and respiratory hygiene as laid down (and revised from time to time) by public health authorities must be followed.

Preparation for Holy Baptism

In the current circumstances, each member of the clergy and local community should reflect locally on how best to prepare people including, in the case of infant baptism, parents and godparents/sponsors for Holy Baptism, as required by the *Book of Common Prayer* (‘Notes’ to *Holy Baptism One*).

Where a church building is used for Holy Baptism other than at a public Service, and if another use of the building is to follow within 72 hours, thorough cleaning of the church building in accordance with the reopening protocol will be required.

Holy Baptism - The Occasion

As set out in the *Pastoral Introduction to Holy Baptism Two* in the *Book of Common Prayer* the celebration of this sacrament is one of immense significance and special joy for individuals, their families and the local community.

It is recognised that the current public health restrictions, in curtailing numbers and requiring very practical, necessarily sterile, arrangements to be put in place may affect, to some extent, the spirit of joy and, in particular, the numbers attending such occasions for the time being.

Any specific public health advice concerning the numbers attending such occasions must be followed. As is stated in the *Book of Common Prayer* ('Notes' Holy Baptism One) it '... is desirable that members of the parish be present to support, by their faith and prayer, those who are to be baptized and receive into the fellowship of the Church ...' However, the public health guidance on social/physical distancing and the consequent capacity of a church building must be taken into account.

Holy Baptism - Specific Guidelines

- Only one candidate should be baptized at each Service.
- The font should be emptied and cleaned before any subsequent Service of Holy Baptism. If another Service of Holy Baptism is to follow within 72 hours, the font should be disinfected.
- The presiding minister, in considering whether or not to wear a mask, should follow the current public health advice in relation to face masks or face-coverings.
- In making the sign of the cross (whether before or after the Baptism) the presiding minister should not make direct physical contact with the candidate. Use of a disposable cotton swab (or some such) for this purpose is recommended.
- An infant should be held by his or her parents. The presiding minister should not take the infant into his or her own arms.
- In blessing the water the presiding minister should not touch the water.
- Throughout this period of restrictions, Holy Baptism by dipping or total immersion is not advised.
- Throughout this period of restrictions it is advised that Baptism should be by the pouring of water over the head of the candidate, using a baptismal shell or other such vessel with a handle and no physical contact should be made between the presiding minister and the candidate.
- In places where it is a local custom to anoint pre- or post-Baptism, this ought also to be done with a disposable cotton swab, again avoiding physical contact between the presiding minister and the candidate.

- If the option of giving a lighted candle to the newly baptised is to happen, some thought needs to be given locally to ensure that the candle is only handled by one person. For example, the presiding minister may place the candle nearby and disinfect it before the Service and not touch it when lighting it. The adult candidate or a sponsor (in the case of an infant) might then directly take it rather than being handed it.

Emergency Baptism

As set out in the notes to *Holy Baptism Two* in the *Book of Common Prayer* :

In a case of urgent necessity it is sufficient to name the candidate and pour water on the person's head, saying ... 'I baptize you in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.' Suitable prayers and the Lord's Prayer should be said.