



## GUIDANCE FOR THE CELEBRATION OF BAPTISM

IN ACCORDANCE WITH GOVERNMENT REGULATIONS AND THE GUIDANCE ISSUED BY THE  
CATHOLIC BISHOPS' CONFERENCE OF ENGLAND AND WALES  
DURING THE PERIOD OF COVID-19 PANDEMIC

28<sup>TH</sup> SEPTEMBER 2020

### Introduction

This guidance is issued in accordance with that published by the Bishops' Conference of England and Wales; it assumes that the established diocesan requirements for churches to re-open have been authorized by the Dean or his representative and that the Government 'Guidance for the safe use of places of worship and special religious services and gatherings during the pandemic'<sup>1</sup> are in place. In particular, the maximum safe operating capacity of the church, based on social distancing guidelines, should be clearly signposted at the door and the number and position within the church of people attending at any one time should be overseen by volunteer stewards. When the Rite of Baptism takes place within the context of Holy Mass, the latest revision of the diocesan *Guidance*<sup>2</sup> for the celebration of Mass should be observed.

### *Number of People Attending the Celebration*

If the celebration of the Sacrament of Baptism takes place during a parish 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 6 and observe strict social distancing between each separate group.

If the celebration of the Sacrament of Baptism takes place outside of this normal pattern of worship, the numbers attending the Baptism is limited to 6 people, excluding the minister of baptism (priest or deacon).

Only one child (or two in the case of twins or siblings) should be baptised at any individual celebration, whether within Mass outside the celebration of Mass.

### *Face Coverings*

All those who are attending should observe the general requirements for the use of face-coverings during the celebration of Mass, unless they are under 11 years of age or are exempt from doing so.

### **The Rite of Baptism during Mass**

The Rite of Baptism should be conducted in such a way as to avoid the excess movement of people in the church building and social distancing is observed. The child to be baptised should be held by the parents only and should be seated as near as possible to the font.

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<sup>1</sup> <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/covid-19-guidance-for-the-safe-use-of-places-of-worship-during-the-pandemic-from-4-july>

<sup>2</sup> *Guidance for the Celebration of Mass during the Covid-19 Coronavirus Pandemic* (Revised 28th September 2020)

Other members of the family, including godparents and grandparents should be socially distanced in household groups (or social bubbles) in the church.

The necessary items for the Baptism, as detailed below, should be prepared by the priest (or sacristan) after sanitising their hands and then wearing gloves and placed so that they are easily accessible by the priest and the family members near to the font.

### ***The Greeting and Opening Dialogue and Signing with the Cross***

This should take place where the parents are seated in the church. After sanitising his hands, the priest signs the child with the sign of the cross and, when saying the associated words of the Rite, invites only the child's parents to do the same.

### ***The Liturgy of the Word & Homily***

The readings should be proclaimed by a parish reader who is familiar with the requirements for readers in the diocesan 'Guidance for the Celebration of Mass'. A brief homily or a short explanation of the importance of baptism should be given.

### ***Intercessions***

These should be brief, and a very short form of the *Litany* used. This should be prayed by the priest or deacon only.

### ***Prayer of Exorcism***

The priest 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 priest 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 priest 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 priest, 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 priest 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 priest 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 priest says the associated narrative.

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This should be omitted from the Rite of Baptism during the period of pandemic.

*After the Celebration of the Mass*

Any photographs of the event should be taken with care to ensure social distancing between households and those in social bubbles. All should be done so that this does not detract from the happiness of the occasion.

It is strongly advised that there be no receptions or celebratory parties after the sacramental celebration on the church's premises; should families want to gather, they should do so outside of the church environment and must have regard to the Government's 'rule of 6'.

The priest should place the used altar linens into a receptacle for laundry. All sacred vessels should be washed in hot water with a little neutral soap and dried completely before storing. 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. Any discarded printed materials should be removed and bagged for disposal. The church should be closed after the Mass has finished in order to clean the space according to the Bishops' Conference guidelines.

If there is cause for concern regarding the possible contamination of clerical vestments worn during the celebration of these rites, 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 Rite of Baptism outside of Mass**

The minister of the Sacrament may be a priest or a deacon.

All should take place as above with the exception of:

*The Liturgy of the Word*

The readings should be proclaimed by the priest or the deacon. One short scripture reading should be used and a brief explanation of the importance of baptism given by the minister.