



DIOCESE OF SALFORD

Forming young people for life-long discipleship
in the Diocese of Salford

A DIOCESAN POLICY

FOR BAPTISM AND CONFIRMATION

1. 'The Joy of Love experienced by families is also the joy of the Church¹.' With these words Pope Francis begins his Apostolic Exhortation on Family Life. As a Diocese we share in the joy of families when new life enters their lives. We wish to welcome families into the Family of God in Salford Diocese² and to accompany parents, children and young people in their own journey in faith. The aim of this Policy on Baptism and Confirmation is to set out a way that we can demonstrate a warm welcome, a clear explanation of what is asked of parents, children and young people and a genuine sensitivity to the challenges that face families particularly in their earliest years.

Baptism

2. Good preparation for Baptism is essential and can also have very positive benefits for the parents of the child being baptised, often being the opportunity to bring them back to a committed practice of their faith. We must seek to provide for the best catechesis and preparation for this sacrament, in all our parishes. There are a variety of resources available from the Department of Formation. I would like to stress the following points:
3. The General Directory on Catechesis (90) reminds us that the process of preparing adults for initiation is the model for all of the Church's catechising activity. Therefore, baptism preparation, its celebration and its follow-up are marked by clear stages, as in the Rite of Christian Initiation of Adults (RCIA). For example, the quality of the welcome parents receive when they make their first enquiry is vital. It cannot simply be a question of completing a form, collecting details, telling them of a meeting and booking a date. It is often an opportunity to begin to get to know the family. It can also be an opportunity to invite families to reflect on their own faith and to offer suggestions as to how they might deepen that faith. Can they understand that Baptism is a new beginning for the child in a life-long commitment in which they, as parents, are "the first and best teachers in the ways of faith"?
4. This initial warm welcome can be followed up in a variety of ways. For example, some parishes have parish visitors who meet with families in their own homes. It can also be an opportunity for a pastoral visit from the priest. Although the time for making home visits is more limited these days, St John Paul II, on his visit to Manchester in 1982, said that pastoral visiting was 'a strength of the Church in England' and 'a pastoral practice that should not be neglected³.'
5. It is important to share with the family the importance of their commitment to bringing their child up 'in the practice of the faith.' This might well include the

¹ Pope Francis, Apostolic Exhortation on Love in the Family, *Amoris Laetitia* 1,

² 'The Church is a family of families, constantly enriched by the lives of all those domestic churches.' *Amoris Laetitia* 87

³ St John Paul II, Homily, Heaton Park, Manchester, 31st May 1982. See also *Amoris Laetitia* 227.

suggestion that they should be attending Sunday Mass or beginning to do so. Catholics are obliged to attend Mass every Sunday, except when prevented by a grave reason. This obligation has not changed. Where parents do not yet live this aspect of a Catholic life, gentle but clear encouragement needs to be shown, in order to lead them to their own recognition of the place of Sunday Eucharist in their spiritual lives. For some parents who sincerely desire baptism for their children, the reality of their own formation in faith and religious upbringing may sometimes be such that to move from knocking on the presbytery door to regular long-term attendance is a leap for which they are not prepared. Such a journey might take years! Their willingness and sincerity in wanting to grow in faith themselves can only be discovered by speaking with them in a spirit of discernment⁴.

6. As an indication, though, of the parents' willingness to embrace the call to live as part of the Church, it should be required that they, or at least the Catholic parent, attend Mass for at least six Sundays in preparation for baptism⁵. However, when there is a willingness to do so but genuine serious difficulties⁶, baptism should not be refused or delayed. We must recognise the difficulties that some families with young children can have in attending Mass every week, such as changing work shift patterns, being single parents or families where one non-Catholic parent is unwilling to attend Mass. Good prayerful liturgy and a welcoming congregation will do more to encourage families to carry on coming to Sunday Mass than any number of rules laid down by the priest!⁷
7. The guiding principle for the lawful baptism of infants is 'the well-founded hope that the child will be brought up in the Catholic religion.'⁸ 'If such hope is truly lacking, the baptism is...to be deferred and the parents informed of the reason for this.'⁹ The word 'truly' (Latin *prorsus*) carries the sense of 'completely' or 'entirely'. There need

⁴ Cf *Amoris Laetitia* 230 on opportunities to foster the faith of those who 'drop out of the Christian community.'

⁵ Obviously if a parent is already attending Sunday Mass and has been for a period of time, there is no need to wait for six further attendances before arranging the baptism. However the other elements of the programme of preparation should still be followed. Sometimes 'practising families' with a second or third child for baptism might ask whether they should still attend the parish baptism preparation meeting. It can be good to remind them that their presence at the meeting is a positive example to other families and a support to those leading the meeting. Indeed, it can be from such families that future catechists can emerge..

⁶ Examples of genuine difficulties are such that the obligation to attend Mass is no longer present, for example illness, travel, work commitments. Sometimes the parish community might be able to help families work through such difficulties through, for example, offering support to a single parent with several lively young children in church. Obviously all necessary safeguarding practices must be followed. The tone is to be one of welcome and sensitivity while leading parents towards regular attendance. Pope Francis, in *Amoris Laetitia* 49, warns us that, 'in such difficult situations of need, the Church must be particularly concerned to offer understanding, comfort and acceptance rather than imposing straightaway a set of rules that only lead people to feel judged and abandoned by the very Mother called to show them God's mercy.'

⁷ 'The Church assumes a valuable role in supporting families, starting with Christian initiation, through welcoming communities' *Amoris Laetitia* 84

⁸ Canon 868, 1

⁹ Canon 868, 2

to be clear and solid grounds to defer baptism. Where parents are willing to commit to the requirements outlined here, or have genuinely severe difficulties whereby they can only fulfil them in part, then baptism should not be deferred. The marital status of the parents cannot be used as a reason to refuse or to defer baptism.

8. At least one of the parents must be Catholic, unless exceptional circumstances suggest otherwise¹⁰. In cases where (with neither parent being already Catholic) one or both parents and child are preparing for initiation, the parent(s) should be initiated into the Church according to the rites of the RCIA. The baptism of the child can then be arranged to take place at their reception or at a suitable time thereafter.
9. The Code of Canon Law requires that the baptism of infants should take place in the proper parish church of the parents, except for a just reason. It further defines one's proper parish as that parish in which one has domicile. Therefore, priests should not baptise children resident in another parish without a just reason. One example of a just reason is where one or both parents are REGULAR attenders at Sunday Mass in another parish, such that they consider that parish to be the parish to which they "belong". In such situations, the parish priest of the parish in which they live should still, in conformity with Canon Law, be contacted before the baptism for his permission, which should be recorded in the Baptismal Register. I would expect parish priests to grant such permission.
10. In other situations, where a family request baptism in a parish in which they do not live, where there is a just reason¹¹ the family should obtain the permission in writing of the parish priest of the parish in which they live. I would expect parish priests to be similarly generous in granting such permission. Where this happens, the parish priest of the parish in which the parents live might wish to include the family in whatever post-baptism care his parish offers.

(For advice/clarification on this or other related matters, please contact the Episcopal Vicar for Formation)

11. Following their initial enquiry and welcome, parents should be provided with some form of preparation which might take the form of a meeting or series of meetings.

¹⁰ Exceptional circumstances are, by their nature, hard to define. They might include situations where, for example, a child is in foster care or being brought up by his grandparents. For clarification, contact the Episcopal Vicar for Formation. A child of non-Catholic parents can be baptised in danger of death (even without the consent of its parents), (Canon 868, 2)

¹¹ Examples of a just reason might include where parents live in another part of the country, or overseas, but all their family live in a parish in this Diocese. In such a case care must be taken to ensure that the parents have undertaken some form of baptismal preparation and received the permission of the parish priest where they live. Such permission should be given in writing. It is to be hoped that, as long as proper preparation is received and enduring pastoral contact established, requests for baptism in a parish other than that where the parents reside should be generously granted. Adopting a consistency across parishes in offering welcome, baptismal preparation, a requirement to attend Sunday Mass on six occasions coupled with a recognition that this might take longer or be more difficult for some families, will remove any idea of parents approaching priests who are seen to be 'less demanding.'

These sessions may well be conducted by catechists and provide an opportunity for prayer with the families. An important objective should be the discussion about how Baptism may be the foundation of a daily life of Faith and not just a single occasion. For many parents there might usefully be a focus on their own faith development, ways of praying, an introduction to the parish, its mission and its activities. It should be a priority for every parish to identify catechists to be trained to help in the preparation of parents for the baptism of their child. The Department for Formation will offer resources for any necessary training.

12. The General Directory on Catechesis reminds us that initiation is the responsibility of the whole community. This can be demonstrated by a regular welcome at Sunday Mass for children and parents preparing for baptism. This might use the opening questions from the Rite of Baptism, questions to the parishioners asking them to welcome and encourage the families, and the anointing with the Oil of Catechumens. The texts are provided in an appendix to this document. This can all be repeated at the baptism ceremony if it takes place outside Sunday Mass. Prompted by the RCIA's emphasis on "mystagogia", some parishes follow up baptisms either by a visit from priest or parish team or by a card delivered on the first anniversary of baptism. Once again any ideas in this important but neglected area are worth considering.

The opportunities for evangelisation provided by a request for Baptism of a child are not to be underestimated. Pope Francis (speaking then as Cardinal Bergoglio) in 2009 said: "The baptism of children often becomes a new beginning for parents. Usually there is a little catechesis before baptism then a mystagogic catechesis during liturgy. Then, the priests and laity go to visit these families to continue with their post-baptismal pastoral activity."¹²

13. Godparents: for the baptism of infants only one godparent is required but two may be chosen. Their role is 'together with the parents to present the child for baptism, and to help the child live a Christian life befitting the baptised and faithfully to fulfil the duties inherent in baptism'. (Canon 872) The Code of Canon Law makes no mention of having more than two godparents. However, baptised non-Catholics may be admitted as 'Christian witnesses.' There is a balance to be struck in addressing with parents the question of godparents. It is not necessary to be too insistent on limiting the number of godparents, as long as it is restricted to a reasonable number. It would be better to look at ways of ensuring that the godparents, as far as possible, understand their role and are willing to carry it out. Please do ensure that each child has at least one godparent who fulfils the canonical requirements¹³. Please also, either in the preparation or during the ceremony,

¹² Cardinal Jorge Maria Bergoglio, Interview 'we are not owners of the sacraments', Buenos Aires, 2009

¹³ Canon 874 §1, §1 To be admitted to undertake the office of sponsor, a person must:

1° be appointed by the candidate for baptism, or by the parents or whoever stands in their place, or failing these, by the parish priest or the minister; to be appointed the person must be suitable for this role and have the intention of fulfilling it;

remind the godparents of their responsibility to be people of living Christian faith to be an example *of* faith and an encouragement *in* faith to the child and its parents.

(Reconciliation and Holy Communion)

14. A group of priests, parents, catechists and teachers are beginning the process of considering our approach to the Sacrament of Reconciliation and First Holy Communion. For the moment parishes are welcome to use either the diocesan materials produced by Gemini or any other suitable programme of preparation for First Confession and First Holy Communion. Of course, a key element in such preparation is the formation of the parents. Whatever programme is used, please take every opportunity to encourage the parents to think about their own faith and how they might grow in faith themselves. Most parishes use an approach which allows the parish and school to work together. It is not unreasonable to expect the children, except in very particular circumstances, to be coming to Sunday Mass regularly with their families as they prepare for First Communion.

15. Sometimes non-Catholic children in our parish primary schools express the desire to make their First Holy Communion. If at least one of the parents is Catholic, then the child can be prepared for baptism (if non-baptised) according to the Rite of Christian Initiation of Children of Catechetical Age. Unlike adults, who should usually be baptised at the Easter Vigil ¹⁴, children of catechetical age can be baptised during the year. In the Diocese of Salford they should make their First Confession and First Holy Communion with their peers at the parish celebration. The Sacrament of Confirmation should also be celebrated when the children reach the proper age for the Diocese, which will now be 13 years of age. (Please see paragraph 20 below). Where a child has been baptised in another Christian denomination and proof of baptism has been obtained, the child can be formally received into full communion with the Catholic Church. The age for First Communion and Confirmation mentioned above still apply.

16. If neither parent is a Catholic and neither wish to become Catholics, the essential criterion is how the child can be encouraged in living a catholic life. If the parents can demonstrate a willingness to assist their child by, for example, bringing them to

2° be not less than sixteen years of age, unless a different age has been stipulated by the diocesan Bishop, or unless the parish priest or the minister considers that there is a just reason for an exception to be made;

3° be a catholic who has been confirmed and has received the blessed Eucharist, and who lives a life of faith which befits the role to be undertaken;

4° not labour under a canonical penalty, whether imposed or declared;

5° not be either the father or the mother of the person to be baptised.

There will be situations in which the parish priest will know the suggested godparent(s) and whether they fulfil the requirements. If in doubt, parish priests may wish to seek confirmation of baptism. Care should be taken, however, to ensure that this does not become overly bureaucratic or unwelcoming.

¹⁴ RCIA 58 (Latin edition), 26 (English edition) also 208 (Latin), 207 (English). 'The usual time for the celebration of the sacraments of initiation is the Easter Vigil..., at least for the initiation of those who are fourteen years of age or older.'

Sunday Mass both before and after their First Communion, then the child can be received into the Church. The role of grandparents or other relatives or family friends who are Catholic can be a great help in this.

Confirmation

17. Several months ago priests and head teachers were asked to suggest members for a Working Party to consider the Sacrament of Confirmation. I am grateful to those who took part. Their recommendations were discussed at the Council of Priests. The different practices in different dioceses reflect different aspects of this sacrament. Confirmation can be seen as the Sacrament which equips our young people with the grace to live with faith as disciples of Jesus within the Body of Christ which is the Church. Thus Confirmation is still concerned with initiation, not simply into being a full member of the Church but towards being an *active member* of the Body of Christ. However, as was seen in the response to the Consultation and in later discussions, there is still a tension between arguments for an earlier age, e.g. 9 or 10 years, and a later age, e.g. 15 or 16 years. Those who prefer an earlier age are concerned lest we 'lose' some of those who make their First Communion. Those who prefer an older age insist on the possibility of the candidates being prepared to respond to the grace of the Sacrament in a more mature way. Pope Francis is concerned that all young people should be invited to receive the Sacraments of Initiation but has not been concerned with the order in which they are received.
18. Having considered all the opinions and arguments, I would like to see the Sacrament of Confirmation celebrated with candidates aged 13 (Year 8) or above¹⁵, which is within the age range agreed by the Bishops' Conference. Normally, I would hope to celebrate the Sacrament myself. The precise logistics still need to be worked out but I would prefer to confirm from Easter to the summer school holidays and, if necessary, into the following school term. We might also consider holding some celebrations at the Cathedral or some of the larger churches of the Diocese (such as St. Alban's, Blackburn) to give the candidates a sense of being part of the larger Church.
19. Other details still need to be finalised¹⁶. The plan is that the invitation to young people to prepare for Confirmation will be addressed by me to them at the end of Year 6 in Primary School with our schools and parishes working together to prepare them for Confirmation over the following two years. Following their confirmation I hope that schools and parishes and the diocesan team will be able to offer our young people ongoing spiritual formation which focuses on: growth in prayer and worship; the call to ministry; the call to serve those in need.

¹⁵ Secondary schools should remove any reference to a child having received Confirmation from their Admissions Policies.

¹⁶ While the main elements in the process of preparation will be parish-based, resources for schools will be produced. Care will be taken also to enable the full preparation of young people not at Catholic High Schools, even though, as Bishop, I would continue to urge parents to support our Catholic schools, secondary as well as primary.

20. In practice, this will mean that the first group of candidates will be invited, before they leave Primary school, in summer 2019, to prepare for Confirmation after Easter 2021. (If you already have any candidates aged 13 or older who have not been confirmed, or some come forward, please let me know and we can make the necessary arrangements.) This lapse in time will allow parishes to prepare catechists for the instruction of this new age group, with new materials being identified by the Department for Formation.
21. I have been asked about the Confirmation of candidates who come into the church as children via Baptism and/or Reception into full communion. If they are younger than 13 then Confirmation should be delayed until they are confirmed with their peer group. I am aware that this is not what is envisaged in the rubrics of the RCIA but the RCIA does not explicitly take into account the more widespread practice of the later confirmation of children baptised as infants. There may, however, be situations where it is appropriate to confirm at reception. Advice should be sought from the Episcopal Vicar for Formation.
22. I am very grateful to those who have given time and brought experience and expertise to compiling what I believe to be a very solid and coherent policy for the reception of the Sacraments of Baptism and Confirmation. It is important that, where a Diocesan Policy exists, we should all comply with it. Individual adaptation only leads to confusion and disunity, which in turn can lead to resentment and isolation. Where genuine exceptions exist, these need to be clearly undertaken with the appropriate permissions. While I feel this policy is complete, I am certainly aware of changing circumstances and the need for adaptation after a period of implementation. I remain open to the comments of all engaged in these sacramental programmes. I ask that this Policy is to be adopted and implemented from the First Sunday of Advent, 27th November 2016.

*Wardley Hall, Salford,
28th of October, Feast of SS Simon and Jude.*

Rt Rev. John Arnold, Bishop of Salford