



## ARMIDALE DIOCESAN GUIDELINES FOR INFANT BAPTISM- 20<sup>th</sup> August 2021

I trust that the following guidelines for infant baptism will be helpful to you pastorally. If you have any questions with regard to particular cases I am happy to talk them through. Yours in Christ, Rod Chiswell.

1. That enquiries for baptism of infants be welcomed and the parents be seen either by the vicar or trained lay helper. The initial conversation regarding what is required should be in person wherever possible
2. That we expect couples to be involved in preparation over a period of at least 6 weeks. This preparation will include:
  - a. An explanation of the baptism service and parent's responsibilities, together with the place of church attendance in the life of a Christian. I've often found it helpful also to give a brief gospel presentation at that first interview.
  - b. Subsequent meetings may use a basic interactive course explaining the nature of Christian commitment and discipleship.
  - c. An encouragement to parents to attend church services as part of the preparation.
3. Should couples (or at least one parent) feel that they are ready and able to proceed with baptism following the preparation phase we should go ahead with baptism.
4. That congregations develop a welcome strategy that:
  - a. Ideally links the baptism couple with another established Christian couple from church (who may be involved in the preparation).
  - b. Follows up baptism families with visits, invitations to meals and appropriate parish events and
  - c. When the child is old enough a personal invitation (through the parents) to Sunday school.
5. A service for Thanksgiving may be offered to couples who feel they are not ready to make the promises required of them in baptism. This can be offered after the first interview if it becomes clear they are not interested in a further five meetings, or after the course has been completed.
6. Where the couples who present for baptism are not married but are in a de facto relationship they should be generally be encouraged to defer the baptism in the interest of bringing their living arrangements into line with the expectations of Christian marriage.

There are two main reasons for taking this line:

- a. Marriage amongst Christians has always recognised (whether by the family, the State or the church) the place of a public declaration of intent to live together, excluding others, through good and bad, as a life time commitment.
- b. All research shows that living together in an uncommitted relationship is less likely to produce stability for the children, the parents or society.  
If we baptise the children of parents in de facto relationships we are neither being helpful to the child, the couple nor our own congregation members (both young and old) in that we are complicit in the downgrading of what has been a Christian distinctive. This distinctive of Christian marriage being the venue for both godly sexual expression, nurture of children and stability in society has been both a unique salty gift to our community (with many non-Christians enjoying its liberating fruits) and winsome witness to a watching world (itself showing many signs of tiredness from the consequences of non-committed relationships).

However, in the case of a long-term de facto couple where one partner has become Christian and is seeking to marry but the other is initially reluctant, the clergyman may still, if they think it appropriate, baptise the child of the believer.

- 7. Where an unmarried mother comes seeking baptism (who is not in a de facto or series of relationships) she and her child should be warmly welcomed and the normal preparation conditions applied.
- 8. Where a homosexual couple requests baptism, whether they be “married” according to state-law, or in a de-facto relationship, clergy should not agree to baptising either them or their children. According to the Scriptures and our Anglican formularies they are not married in God’s eyes as heterosexual marriage is the only kind intended by God (Genesis 1:27; Genesis 2:20-25; Matthew 19:1-12). According to the Scriptures they are also living in wilful sin (1 Romans 1:18-32; Corinthians 6:9-10). For these reasons they cannot make the promises required of them in baptism and should not be encouraged even to consider it unless they repent of homosexual behaviour and agree to live a chaste life in line with God’s word.
- 9. It is important that as Vicars working in a Diocesan team we recognise, respect and accept the baptismal discipline of a fellow Vicar. A couple seeking baptism outside their parish should be referred back to their home parish. As a matter of solidarity, we should not baptise a child from another parish if they are clearly “shopping around” after having been unhappy with their Vicar who is graciously seeking to apply the above preparation.
- 10. Parish boundaries do not apply where through ongoing membership (indicated by regular attendance) a person/couple have indicated their allegiance.
- 11. When a request is made for baptism in a parish by people who live outside the Diocese the couple/parent should be referred back to the parish minister where they live. Upon receipt of either a phone call or letter from their Vicar/Rector, baptism can be proceeded with, only where, that Vicar/Rector has been satisfied that the

couple has completed their preparation requirements. In this case you are baptising on behalf of the other parish.

12. We should not be intimidated by last minute requests from people whose relatives are returning overseas or interstate. These do not constitute special cases and parents should be required to complete the appropriate preparation.
13. My recommendation is that Baptisms should occur, under normal circumstances, in the context of a regular gathering of the local congregation, since it is also a welcome into the church family and involves a commitment on the part of the congregation to the parents as well as parents to the congregation. I would therefore discourage agreeing to any request for private baptisms at people's homes.
14. When baptising children of current committed parents already in the congregation, the clergyman can use his discretion as to what preparation, if any, is required.