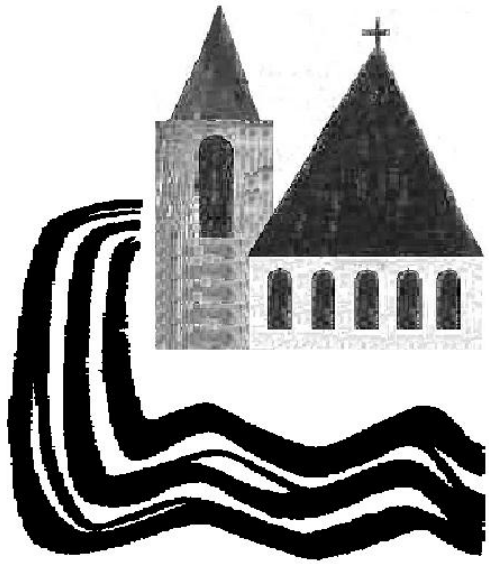


Thinking about the Baptism of your child ...



*and you and your partner
belong to different
churches – perhaps one
Roman Catholic,
and the other
from another
Christian tradition?*

**I want our child baptised in my church,
and my partner wants the baptism in
his/hers.**

We all want the best for our children, so it is natural and good that we each want to share the best of our particular Christian tradition with them.

**But don't Roman Catholics have to
promise to have their children baptised in
their church?**

When interchurch couples are preparing for marriage, the Roman Catholic partner is required to make the following promise: "...I sincerely undertake that I will do all that I can within the unity of our partnership to have all the children of our marriage baptised and brought up in the Catholic Church." It is important that you both recognise the seriousness of this promise, but also that it is not absolute and should not threaten the unity of your marriage. The partner who is not Roman Catholic is not asked to make this promise. Indeed, the 1993 Roman Catholic *Ecumenical Directory* states: "At the same time, it should be recognised that the non-Catholic partner may feel a like obligation because of his or her own Christian commitment." It is important that you make decisions about the baptism and Christian upbringing of your children together. It is wise to discuss this before marriage, but not to make a final decision until a child is born, as your attitudes may well develop after marriage.

**How then should we approach the
baptism?**

Baptism unites us with Christ and makes us a member of his Church. You should therefore consider how you intend to bring your child up in the church before you make arrangements for the baptism. If you do not intend to take your child to church, you should think carefully about whether you really want to ask for baptism. You may prefer a service of thanksgiving for the gift of a child, which some churches offer.

If only one of you goes to church regularly, it may be appropriate for the baby to be baptised and brought up in that church.

If both of you go to church, and each of you wants to share the riches of your tradition with your child, you may want to try to bring up your child in the life of both your churches.

Is a two-church upbringing possible?

It is a big undertaking to decide to bring up your child within both churches. Some clergy say that it is not possible. But many interchurch couples have found it an enrichment for themselves and for their child. For it to work, you will need to develop a deep understanding of each other's churches, and this will require at least attending both churches with some regularity, and taking your child too.

What form might the baptism take?

If you decide to try to bring up your child in both your churches, it is likely that you will want both ministers and both congregations to share in the celebration of baptism. It is important not to ask for a 'joint baptism'. To many clergy, a joint baptism means that both ministers share in the pouring of the water or immersion of the child and/or the saying of the baptismal words. Many ministers will not regard that as a valid baptism. However, if one minister performs the actual baptism, the other minister may also take a significant part in the service, for example by saying the prayers, reading a lesson, or giving a homily. Some ministers may be willing to allow you some flexibility in the form of the service, drawing on parts from both traditions.

You should realise, however, that no priest or minister is obliged to do this, and some will find the very idea strange or even wrong.

If you do not have a shared celebration, this need not stop you from trying to bring up your child within the life of both your churches.

Your extended families will probably belong to different Christian traditions, so you may not want to have the baptism, whether it is shared or not, during a mass or communion service in which only half of those present will be permitted to receive communion.

Will both churches recognise the baptism in whichever church it takes place?

The Church of England, the Methodist Church, the Roman Catholic Church, the United Reformed Church and many others recognise one another's baptisms (but see below for believer-baptist churches). This recognition means that a child will not have to be baptised again if he or she decides later on to move from one church/denomination to another of these churches. A common certificate of baptism, listing these churches, is available from the Association of Interchurch Families.

Does this mean that your child can be a member of both your churches?

Most churches have other requirements for church membership (e.g. Confirmation). And there are differing understandings of church membership. Some churches, including the Roman Catholic Church, do not accept that you can fully be a member of another church or denomination as well as of their own church. However, many children in interchurch families have grown up with a sense of belonging and loyalty to the churches of both their parents.

Can the baptism be registered in both churches?

For some interchurch couples this dual registration is important as a sign that they want to bring up their child as far as possible to share in the life of both churches, and that both their churches support them in this. For others, this is not so important. Registration of the baptism in both churches has been possible for some couples, but will depend on the attitudes of the churches concerned. For example, it has sometimes been possible when a Roman Catholic priest has performed the actual baptism assisted by an Anglican priest in an Anglican church building.

What if one parent belongs to a church that does not practise infant baptism?

This raises quite different questions, which can be addressed only briefly here. You could delay baptism until your child is old enough to make a personal decision; and you could ask your two ministers to share in a service of thanksgiving and dedication for your child. Or you could invite your priest to baptise your child on the understanding that you will so encourage and educate him/her that s/he can make a personal commitment at confirmation later; on that understanding some believer-baptist ministers might be willing to take some part in the service. However, whichever option you choose, you should not take it for granted that both the priest and the minister will be willing to share together in the service.

For further information about these or any other issues that concern two-church families, contact the Association of Interchurch Families at the address below:

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