

An Anglican / Catholic Baptism

Here, an Anglican spouse married to a Roman Catholic, tells the story of how they managed to bring together something from both their church traditions at the baptisms of their two daughters.

"I hope you will not ask for an interchurch baptism. I once did one of those. It was the worst experience of my life, and I vowed I would never do another one."

This was how our parish priest opened his meeting with us to discuss Alice's. Alice was then nearly a year old. We had been in the parish about six months and had found the priest very warm towards us, so his words came as a complete shock. As can be imagined, the meetings which followed did not go very well. Our priest had many historical, theological and personal problems and hurts with regard to the Anglican Church, and talked to me as if I was a representative of that Church. I did not feel at all equipped to reply to his questions and problems. At the end of the meeting, we all agreed that it would be best to wait. All was not lost, however, because it was following this meeting that our priest decided to give me communion every week at mass; he also offered communion to another interchurch couple (in the same church).

We have continued to wait for the past five and a half years. In that time our second child, Bernadette, was born. In this time of waiting we have prayed that God might change us and our priest. We realised that it would not be right to try to persuade or force our priest into doing something which he clearly thought would be wrong. But we prayed that God would open his heart towards, and change his understanding of, the Anglican Church enough for him to be able to welcome our vicar to stand alongside him in this baptism.

We also realised that we ourselves were not in agreement in our understanding of baptism and of what the baptismal service would be. In these years of waiting, we have listened carefully to each other. We have asked for God's light and help to come to a place of unity over it, and we have tried to live as a Christian family, bringing our children up in the faith and praying with them. It was a great joy to both of us when Alice, aged four, wanted to make her own commitment and ask Jesus to come into her heart.

We have generally found it to be a blessing and source of enrichment to belong to our two churches, and have tried as far as we can to be a sign of unity in them.

Recently our priest approached Luke, my husband, wanting to reopen the discussion about our children's baptisms. We immediately took him up on this offer, and I wrote to him to explain something of my background and Christian commitment, and something of what I felt God had done in my life through attending the Catholic Church. I tried also to address some of his personal problems with the Anglican Church – but left aside the historical and theological ones! Our priest responded to my letter by asking us to discuss with him what kind of service we would like. Luke then started a process of talks and negotiations with our priest. (Luke took my views to the priest, and brought back his to me.) For each of our suggestions, the priest needed time to think.

After five and a half years of waiting, we were quite clear about what we wanted: a Catholic full-immersion baptism, performed in the Catholic church, by the Catholic priest. But we wanted our vicar to be able to share in the liturgy and to preach. We wanted to have a joint music group, liturgical dance, and some way of allowing Alice to profess her own faith, and we wanted the "feel" of the service to reflect something of the style of our Anglican church. In the end, the priest agreed to everything apart from our vicar preaching, and we set the date and started the preparations.

Over the summer, we were shocked to hear that our priest was leaving *before our baptisms!* We did not understand why this had happened, but trusted that God was in control.

For the baptisms, another priest came from a neighbouring parish. He was really open, and ecumenically minded. He sincerely wanted to do these baptisms, and was completely happy about our vicar doing everything we asked for, including preaching the sermon.

The baptismal service was all we had dreamed of, and more. The ministers worked together very well and made the service a most wonderful celebration of unity. There was a large number of people there from both our church families, and, to our joy, many members of the Association of Interchurch Families who had come to support us. Both our children responded beautifully, and certainly for Alice it was a very important and memorable occasion!