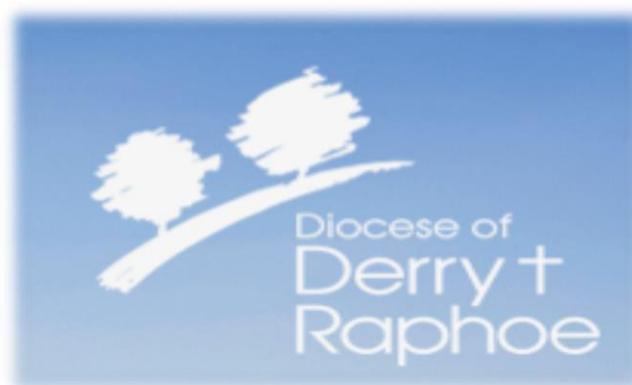


The birth of a child is a cause for joy and celebration to be shared by the whole Church. We long to welcome new children to be part of the regular life and worship of our Christian family. We love to see babes in arms being brought to Church Sunday by Sunday – and they are welcome however much noise they make!



Dungiven & Bovevagh Parishes



The sheer physical effort of getting a family up and out each week is not lost on us. The first couple of years can be extremely trying and we don't under-estimate the stress there can be in making it along to Church on Sunday mornings. We are always looking for practical ways to make this easier for you as parents. In the meantime, we are so glad you have decided to ask for God's blessing on your child and this booklet explains what we can offer you. Your enquiries are always welcome, whatever your personal situation and you are best to start with the minister on your way out of Church on Sunday. Please read on...

Who can be baptised in Dungiven and Bovevagh Churches?

Parishioners or regular worshippers are eligible to have their child(ren) baptised in these parish churches. If you live outside the parish boundary, but have immediate family connections in the parish (eg you grew up there) appropriate consideration will also be given after discussion, and due process followed. Parents who have not been attending church regularly (at least fortnightly) at the point of requesting a baptism of their child will *from the point of request* need to be attending regularly for a period of 3 months, before any discussion of dates for baptism can begin.

What is Baptism - with integrity?

A child is in every sense a miracle of God's creation and it is right that we want to celebrate such a wonderful gift. The mission of the Church in obedience to Christ is and always has been to make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit. For the Baptism of infant children to have any integrity, it is essential that at least one parent be a regular worshipping Churchgoer and able as such to keep their promise to bring their child up in the Christian faith. The onus is very much on Mums and Dads. Obviously where parents have not demonstrated the necessary commitment, in other words where they have made no genuine effort to be faithful in worship, to proceed with Baptism under such circumstances would be meaningless. While most people have their own idea of what they think Let the children come to me presenting their child for Baptism signifies, the Church lays out its understanding in quite specific terms.

Let the children come to me

The word Baptism comes from a Greek word meaning 'dip', 'immerse', 'submerge' or 'wash'. The picture is of someone being made clean or having their sins washed away and receiving God's forgiveness. Whether this is done in a river, in a pool or at the font in a Church makes no difference (font is the Old English word for fountain). The point is, water is used in the name of the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit.

Jesus was brought by his parents to the Temple as a newborn baby. In that spirit, from its earliest post New Testament days the Church has been happy to baptize children on the basis of Christ's command to let the children come to him.

According to the Scriptures whole households were baptized together, and since none of us can ever be 'worthy' of the Sacrament there is little argument, as we see it, to impose any limits in terms of age. The children of believing parents have a special place in the economy of God, it's as simple and beautiful as that. Before the start of his public ministry Jesus Christ was



himself baptized by John in the River Jordan. In receiving Baptism Jesus identified himself as fully human – and as Christ emerged from the water again, the voice of God identified him as fully God. This mystery of humanity and God goes to the heart of who the Church believes Jesus to be. In Baptism, Christ brings us to the Father and does for us what we cannot do for ourselves. Everyone needs forgiveness and the basic teaching of Christianity is that God's love for us led Jesus to the cross to bear our sins. Baptism calls us to admit our need of forgiveness.

Like Holy Communion, Holy Baptism is a Sacrament: an outward and visible sign of an inward and spiritual grace. Throughout the New Testament two things are required of those wishing to be baptized: faith and repentance. Of course a baby cannot show faith and repentance in the way that an adult can. This makes the faith and repentance of the parents and godparents absolutely critical. Children are baptized on the express understanding that their parents – as regular, worshipping Christians – will nurture those in their care in the faith until they come to believe in Jesus Christ for themselves.



In the end, belief is a personal choice. It certainly isn't instilled by coercion or brow-beating. Yet the clear basis of infant Baptism is that believing parents will witness what they believe to their children. It is not enough that parents leave the job of Christian witnessing to what might be picked up in Church or in Creche/Sunday School/Children's Church. While obviously we hope this will be of value in itself, it's what Mum and Dad witness to at home that's the biggest part of your child's life. (this means what you say, how you behave, the faith example you set in prayer, scripture reading and participation in the life of your church).

A Christian upbringing is more than a matter of personal faith or individual believing. Undoubtedly this kind of upbringing will cost you something in effort and energy – especially on Sunday mornings! **Baptism will give your child a good start in life but it's a start which must continue with a Christian upbringing otherwise it is a start of nothing.** Ask yourself which seems more honest: making the promises with no intention of seeing them through or deciding the commitment Baptism involves really isn't what you want to get into?

Please also bear in mind that promising to come to Church will not make doing so easy. It may well involve you re-planning the way you spend your Sunday or indeed your whole weekend. You will have less time to cook the lunch, play football, wash the car and cut the grass – though under God still enough! You will see on a Sunday morning at Dungiven and Bovevagh that many families just like you are choosing to make a real priority of Sunday space for God each week.

That's certainly what you promise to do in the Baptism service: to help your child 'take his or her place within the life and worship of Christ's Church'. By all means bring your children along to one or other of our weekly children's organisations but this is not directly what you are undertaking to do. Parents promise not only to teach their children to go to Church and Children's Church but to set them an example by going to Church themselves. All they can do after that is to pray that the example they set will be followed by their children. At times it will take a real battle to get the family out to Church and there are some weeks when with the best will in the world it just won't happen. But if you have no intention of even trying it is probably better that your child should be allowed to choose for themselves about Baptism later on in their lives. People can be baptized at any age.

What baptism is NOT.

A child who is not baptized is not in any kind of spiritual danger. Most people in most churches don't think like that anymore. Baptism is not 'magic'. It is not a superstitious matter of 'getting the child done', just in case anything terrible should happen to him or her. What sort of God would hold it against a child that it had not some water splashed on its head? Not the sort of God most of us would want to worship, that's for sure.

Baptism is not some kind of spiritual insurance policy or 'a ticket to heaven'. A grounding in faith, worship and prayer in the early years is the best of all starts for children. To do without that, is surely a far greater loss than parents not standing up in church to make empty promises. So, Baptism is a lifestyle choice. It involves parents and godparents making a direct, public promise that they are going to bring their children regularly to Church and Children's Church.

Baptism is not denominational. All the main churches including the Roman Catholic Church now recognise one another's Baptism. It has never been clearer than it is today that a child is baptized into the Church of God, not exclusively the Church of Ireland or any other Church.

Does it have to happen on a Sunday morning? Will our child be baptized 'Church of Ireland'? A 'Christian' upbringing? Must we really go to Church?

Please note that only under very exceptional circumstances, and certainly not for pure convenience, will a baptism be conducted privately. The Rector will use his discretion. Baptisms are expected to take place as part of normal Sunday Worship in the midst of the congregation who share in the story. Baptisms will be conducted on either the 2nd or 4th Sundays of the month except where a pre-existing event is already in place which would make a baptism difficult to arrange or conduct smoothly. No more than 2 baptisms will take place in any one service.



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Choosing Godparents

This is a tough one because they take on a great responsibility. Godparents must be baptised. Please resist the common temptation to ask people to be Godparents *just* because they are friends or relatives. They have a role to fulfil which, like parents, involves making serious vows before Almighty God. Both parents and Godparents promise to see that the child is brought up in the life of the Church, and in their own time commits his or her life to Christ, receives Confirmation (the laying on of hands by the Bishop when they make the Baptism promises their own) and learns to play his or her full part in Christ's family.

**“MAKE THE
RIGHT
CHOICE”**
CHOICE

Is there a fee for baptism?

No. Baptism is a grace of God and we would not set fees. However, you may wish to prayerfully consider making a donation to the church as a token of your appreciation for the ongoing work of God through outreach and service to your community.

For more information please contact
The Minister, Revd Mark Loney



028 777 41226