

THE REPRESENTATIVE BODY OF THE CHURCH IN WALES

CORONAVIRUS – COVID19

GUIDANCE ON CONDUCTING BAPTISMS

During move from alert level 4 to alert level 3

As the foundation of Christian life, baptism is a time of joy and celebration for candidates, parents, godparents and the whole church family. While it may be some time before this celebration can be enjoyed as before, there are steps which can be taken to make it as memorable as possible while still adhering to government guidance on physical distancing, public health hygiene and protection of those particularly vulnerable to COVID-19.

The following advice is intended to assist clergy as they think through the best way of celebrating baptisms. It is not exhaustive but addresses essential issues that should be considered.

This advice should be read alongside the guidance 'Covid 19 Opening Churches Guidance' available on the Church in Wales Website.

General questions

Q. What should I do before the baptism?

A. It is important that interaction with the candidate/families must be done as safely as possible. This might mean meeting, at least initially, via video link or talking on the telephone. If face to face meetings are held, please follow the government guidance on working in other people's homes and ensure that everyone adheres to physical distancing requirements and that numbers are limited, preferably to a minimum. Such meetings should not be held in the house of anyone who is self-isolating or who is in a vulnerable group.

It is important to be careful to avoid sharing documents, books, photos etc and to remember to wash hands thoroughly before and after the meeting.

The health implications for those in a vulnerable group should be discussed and if some people in these groups intend to be present at the baptism, their welfare should be kept to the fore. These will include advising other attendees that there is a vulnerable person attending, reminding them to take particular care in observing physical distancing and refraining from attending themselves if they feel unwell.

If someone from a vulnerable group intends to be present, they should be advised to travel to the church in the safest way possible, preferably in a car by themselves or with someone from their household

Q. How many people can attend the baptism?

A. The numbers of people attending any service will depend on the capacity of your building to accommodate people whilst maintaining two-metre distancing. There is no legal limit on numbers, but numbers must be controlled to ensure two-metre distancing is maintained.

If the Baptism is to take place during 'routine communal worship' (e.g. a Sunday morning service), careful planning will be needed to ensure numbers do not exceed the building's capacity. The candidate, his/her parents, godparents and the minister are all that are required to be present for baptism and parents might wish to keep to this number. You may find that parents/candidates ask to postpone the baptism in light of the restrictions in numbers. This is a decision for them. However, you will want to think about how to follow up these individuals/families so that the baptism can be rearranged when it is appropriate to do so.

Q. What special steps should I take during the baptism?

Given the restrictions on numbers attending, clergy might wish to consider ways in which others may be able to join the service, perhaps through an audio or video link. If this is not possible, a recording of the service might be appropriate.

Please ensure that everyone adheres to the Government guidance on physical distancing. Only clergy and parents should be at the font while godparents should maintain physical distance.

It is important for clergy to be mindful of their own personal hygiene – please wash your hands before and after, and avoid using communal Bibles etc.

Where an infant is involved, a parent/guardian or members of the infant's regular or extended household should hold the infant including during the baptism itself.

The minister should sanitize their hands before and after the Signing with the Cross on the candidate. In some churches, candidates are anointed with oil at the Signing with the Cross. This is an optional component of the service. If oil is used, it should be applied with an implement which can be thoroughly cleaned or disposed of.

Water should be poured over the candidate's forehead using an appropriate implement to pour the water such as a shell. Unfortunately, baptisms by immersion cannot be safely conducted at present. The baptized person, or their parents, may wipe the forehead with paper towels which should be immediately disposed of.

No one should sign themselves with the baptismal water or be sprinkled with the water after the baptism.

If a lighted candle is given, the presenting person should sanitize their hands before and after doing so.

Q. What about face coverings?

A. All persons aged over 11 gathering indoors should wear a face covering. This applies to all activities and services within the church or church hall.

There are exceptions to the requirement to wear a face covering for medical reasons, and it is permitted to remove the covering “to communicate with another person who has difficulty communicating (in relation to speech, language or otherwise)”.

Further guidance for the public is available at:

<https://gov.wales/face-coverings-guidance-public>

and for premises managers at:

<https://gov.wales/face-coverings-guidance-measures-be-taken-employers-and-managers-premises>

Worship leaders need not wear a face covering where it is impractical to do so but they should consider a range of other mitigations to provide a barrier to transmission including increasing distancing, screens, visors and additional hygiene measures.

The public should be reminded of the requirement to wear a face covering and a standard sign/poster can be found on the Church in Wales website

Q. Test Trace and Protect?

A. The Welsh Government Test, Trace, Protect strategy sets out the approach to tackling coronavirus, testing people with symptoms in the community, tracing those who have come into close contact with people who have tested positive for coronavirus and protecting family, friends and our community by self-isolating.

All persons entering places of worship should be asked to complete a record of attendance which records their name, contact telephone number and date and time of visit but people cannot be required to do so. In the case of access to church halls or churches for permitted community activity and by general visitors, it is a requirement that attendees are recorded before being admitted. These records must be handled in accordance with GDPR to protect the individuals' privacy. These records should be kept for 21 days after the event and then destroyed.

A consent form can be found at [Test, Trace and Protect - The Church in Wales](#)

You should also provide a revised privacy notice and templates can be found at the same link. There is a version if you collect this information in advance online rather than 'at the door'. The 'online' privacy notice should be made available on your website, and the 'at the door' privacy notice should be available for inspection (perhaps on the table where people are completing forms and on the church noticeboard)

The new NHS COVID-19 app is intended to help in this process but is not mandatory. The system involves the creation of a site specific QR code which allows people visiting to use the App. See <https://gov.wales/nhs-covid-19-app-guidance-businesses-and-organisations> This system does not replace the physical recording of attendance set out above.

It is recommended that all public church premises (including churches, halls, offices etc) should display such a QR code.

Further Welsh Government guidance [can be found here](#) on how to maintain records and on compliance with GDPR.

Further information [about Test, Trace, Protect](#) is available here.

26th April 2021