

St Matthew's Church, St Leonards on Sea

Baptism Policy

Baptism is one of the two sacraments given by the Lord Jesus. We baptise both children and adults. We believe that baptism is a sign and seal of God's gracious work in Christ. Baptism signifies both cleansing from sin and our union with Christ in his death and resurrection.

We believe that baptism is not simply a naming ceremony or a public expression of family identity. It is an act of Christian discipleship and carries with it a commitment to follow Christ and to live within the fellowship of his Church.

We recognise the biblical and historic Reformed understanding that the children of Christian believers may appropriately receive baptism based on the faith of their parents and the promises made on their behalf. The baptism of a young child therefore looks forward to the child growing in the Christian faith and, in due course, personally embracing Christ and the faith into which they have been baptised. Baptism does not remove the need for personal repentance and faith. Those baptised as children will need, as they mature, to make the Christian faith their own.

Baptism and the Church of England

As a parish church of the Church of England, we baptise in accordance with the Canons of the Church of England.

Canon B21 states that it is desirable that baptism should normally take place at a public Sunday service so that the congregation may witness those being received into Christ's Church and be reminded of their own baptismal profession.

Canon B22 makes provision for the baptism of infants. It requires the minister to instruct parents or guardians concerning the responsibilities they undertake and provides that baptism should not be refused or delayed except for the purposes of preparation and instruction, subject to the requirements concerning godparents and the other provisions of the Canons.

Canon B24 provides for the baptism of those who are able to answer for themselves. Such candidates are to receive instruction in the Christian faith and are to prepare themselves with repentance and faith.

Baptism Principles

For everyone who is baptised, baptism should be understood as the beginning of a life of Christian discipleship rather than its conclusion.

For a young child, this means that parents and godparents undertake to help the child grow in the Christian faith. For an older child, young person or adult, it means that the candidate can understand and personally embrace the faith being professed.

We encourage every person baptised to be part of the ongoing life of the Christian community through:

- regular participation in Sunday worship;
- commitment to personal prayer and reading the Bible; and
- participation in the life of the church through the use of their gifts.

All baptisms at St Matthews will take place in our main Sunday service. We will give adults and young people the option of either a full immersion baptism or a baptism by sprinkling.

Guidelines at St Matthews

To help us be obedient to scripture and to enable us to love people, the PCC has adopted the following guidelines when people seek a baptism at St Matthews.

Adults aged 18 and over

Adults wanting to be baptised will need to be ready to make a personal and public profession of faith in Jesus Christ. They should demonstrate that they understand:

- the gospel of Jesus Christ;
- repentance and faith;
- the meaning of baptism;
- the Christian life;
- membership of the Church; and
- the commitment to follow Jesus Christ.

Adult baptism will follow a period of preparation. This will include:

- meeting with a member of clergy;
- completing a course exploring the basics of the Christian faith¹;
- discussion of the candidate's testimony;
- exploration of the Apostles' Creed and the meaning of baptism; and
- discussion of Christian discipleship.

All adult baptisms will be at our main Sunday Service and the candidate will be expected to give a short testimony at the service.²

Those baptised as adults will be offered the opportunity to be confirmed as soon as conveniently possible, in accordance with Canon B24.

We anticipate this process taking 3-6 months.

Young people aged 12-17³

For young people in this age group, we normally expect baptism to be based upon the young person's own profession of Christian faith. They should also demonstrate for their age a credible understanding of:

- the gospel of Jesus Christ;
- repentance and faith;
- the meaning of baptism;
- the Christian life;
- membership of the Church; and
- the commitment to follow Christ.

As part of this process we will seek evidence of genuine personal faith rather than simply a desire to participate in a ceremony because friends or family are doing so.

At this age, we strongly encourage the involvement and support of parents or guardians. Where possible, the minister should meet with the young person and their parent(s)/guardian(s) as part of the preparation. Parental involvement is understood as supportive rather than as a substitute for the young person's own faith.

¹ For example, the 321 Course.

² This could be read by the member of clergy.

³ The age of 12 has been chosen as this is consistent with the Diocese of Chichester Policy that children should only be confirmed from the age of 12.

A young person baptised based on their own profession of faith will be offered the opportunity to be confirmed as soon as conveniently possible, in accordance with Canon B24.

Where a young person was baptised as an infant, confirmation provides an appropriate opportunity for them to make their own public profession of the Christian faith.

Any baptism or presentation for confirmation will follow a period of preparation. This will include:

- meeting with a member of clergy/youth worker;
- discussion of the candidate's testimony;
- exploration of the Apostles' Creed and the meaning of baptism/confirmation; and
- discussion of Christian discipleship.

We anticipate this process taking 6-9 months.

Children aged approximately 5-11

This age is a period of transition between baptism based on the faith of parents and baptism following an increasingly personal profession of faith. There is no single age at which a child suddenly becomes capable of answering for themselves. The minister should therefore exercise pastoral judgement according to the maturity and understanding of the individual child.

A child in this age group seeking baptism should normally:

- personally want to be baptised;
- understand, in an age-appropriate way, who Jesus is;
- understand that Christians trust and follow Jesus;
- understand that baptism is connected with becoming a Christian and belonging to Christ and his Church;
- understand that baptism is not simply a family celebration or naming ceremony;
- be able to explain, in their own words, why they want to be baptised; and
- be willing to continue learning and growing as a Christian.

Role of Parents

Parents will be involved in the baptismal preparation and should want to encourage their child's Christian growth. We will ask the parent(s) and Godparents to join the child in making the baptism promises.

Role of Godparents

Godparents have an important role in supporting the person who is baptised in their Christian life. We therefore encourage families to choose godparents who:

- are themselves baptised Christians;
- take the Christian faith seriously;
- will pray for the child or candidate;
- will encourage them in their Christian faith;
- will be willing to maintain an ongoing relationship with them; and
- will seek to provide a positive Christian example.

The canonical requirements concerning godparents will need to be observed. Canon B23 provides that a godparent or sponsor needs to be baptised. At St Matthews we do not require Godparents to be confirmed.

We anticipate this process taking 6-9 months.

Children under Five

For children under five years of age, we normally regard baptism as Christian family baptism. The child is not expected to make a personal profession of faith. Instead, the baptism takes place in the context of the Christian faith of the parents and the wider Christian community.

We normally expect at least one parent or person with parental responsibility to be a committed Christian who is able sincerely to make the Christian promises contained in the baptism service.

The parent should be able to affirm, in substance:

- that they believe in Jesus Christ;
- that they desire their child to be brought up as a Christian;
- that they intend to encourage the child to worship, pray and learn about the Christian faith;
- that they will seek to provide a Christian example in the home; and
- that they intend to support the child in becoming a disciple of Jesus Christ.

The Church of England's Canon B22 specifically requires the minister to instruct parents and godparents. As such, before baptism, the parents will normally be invited to:

1. meet with the minister or another member of the staff team to discuss what baptism means;
2. to agree the format of the preparation⁴;
3. discuss how they intend to bring their child up in the Christian faith;
4. consider how they will continue their child's Christian formation after baptism; and
5. identify appropriate godparents.

The canonical requirements concerning godparents will need to be observed. Canon B23 provides that a godparent or sponsor needs to be baptised. At St Matthews we do not require Godparents to be confirmed.

We anticipate this process taking 3-9 months.

Unmarried Parents

The bible teaches that the best place for children to be brought up is in the context of marriage. If the parents are together and not married, we will discuss this with them. If both parents profess a Christian faith, we expect the parents to get married before the baptism in order to honour the vows they will make at the baptism.

Parents not on the Electoral Roll

If neither of the parents live in the parish, they will need to join the electoral roll before approaching the church about a baptism.

Where the parents live in the parish but do not attend worship regularly, the baptism preparation process will explore how they might become part of the worshipping community.

Thanksgivings

We recognise that some parents will not want to have their child baptised out of theological conviction. In those cases, we are very happy to arrange a thanksgiving instead.

⁴ The format of the preparation will be unique to each family and will be decided by the member of staff in conjunction with the family.

We also recognise that some parents may not feel able to make the baptismal promises. In those circumstances, they may wish to opt for a service of thanksgiving instead. This service does not require the parents to make any formal promises but instead the service simply asks for God's blessing on the child and the family.

Previous Baptisms

We recognise one baptism. A person who has already received a valid baptism with water in the name of the Father, Son and Holy Spirit should not be baptised again. This applies whether the person's first baptism took place as an infant or as an adult. Someone baptised as an infant who later comes to personal faith does not therefore need to be re-baptised.

Instead, they should be encouraged to consider:

- confirmation; or
- reaffirmation of baptismal vows.

Safeguarding

All baptism preparation and services will be undertaken in accordance with the St Matthews safeguarding policy. Where a baptism involves children or young people, appropriate safeguarding procedures must be followed.

Any concerns about the welfare or safety of a child or vulnerable person must be dealt with through the appropriate safeguarding procedures and must not be ignored because they arise in the context of baptism preparation.

**Adopted by St Matthew's Church PCC
14 September 2026**