

## **Welcome!**

**You have been given a very important task. You are preparing parents (and hopefully godparents!) for the vows they will make on behalf of their child but – more importantly – you have a REAL OPPORTUNITY to develop an understanding of Baptism, which few of us have an opportunity to review. Whether you are a member of the ordained ministry or a lay person, this workbook is for you!**

**Why do we say that? Realistically, most of us have little time to research the areas of ministry we are called to undertake. This manual has taken that into account. It provides a strong foundation for teaching about Baptism. If you follow it section by section, it will provide all you need for each session of Baptism preparation. If you are experienced in this ministry, it will provide more than the basics and will allow you to build on the material presented and be creative in terms of the way you present it.**

**It is ESSENTIAL that parents who are bringing their child for Baptism should have an interview with the Incumbent, or a senior person designated with this responsibility. This interview may be the beginning of pastoral care for the family, and ensures the realistic hopes and expectations of the family are taken into account. Issues such as the choice of godparents should be covered at this interview.**

**Thereafter, the Baptism preparation course commences! This is an exciting journey and research has shown that families are keen to participate.**

**The initial session should include the showing of the DVD “First Steps” (produced by the Church Pastoral Aid Society – CPAS – in the UK, and modified with permission), as well as the audio recording of the couple who are discussing the visit by the Rector of the church at which they have applied for Baptism of their child. Usually this is met with humour!**

**The course is designed to be presented in six sessions but this can be adapted as necessary. Much will depend on the people involved and their understanding, and acceptance, of the issues raised. In the pilot project we found some who understood the material easily and others who did not even have a Bible in their home!**

**Similarly, we found that it was better with some groups to ask them to read the Scriptures and prepare in advance, and then use the session to recap – in others it was important to work through the material carefully in the session and then suggest they use the time before the next session to recap on what was presented.**

**It is important to be prepared for how much – or how little – people know. Questions raised should be taken seriously – even if it means the presenters saying they do not know the answer to a question but will find out before the next session.**

**At the end of the course the parents (at least one) and the godparents will be asked to sign the declaration form. If the parent cannot in all good conscience do this, it needs sensitive handling but it would be better to offer a service of Thanksgiving for the Birth of a Child and re-visit the subject of Baptism at a later date. If a godparent is unwilling to sign the form, s/he cannot be the child's godparent.**

**Please remember to cover the whole journey in prayer.**

# GODPARENTS

**Godparents (Sponsors)** are those people entrusted with a share in the spiritual growth of a child until that child is able to accept the responsibility personally. When the child to be baptised is older, the term usually used is **Sponsor** rather than **Godparent**. Where the term **Godparent** is used, sponsor may be inferred if applicable.

Before discussing the question of godparents, ask the group what they believe the two most important tasks of a godparent are. Allow about 5–8 minutes for this discussion.

We strongly recommend that parents be interviewed when applying for Baptism either by the lay person in charge of Baptism Preparation in the Parish or by a member of the Clergy. The question of **godparents** needs to be dealt with at the beginning and, if possible before that, when parents first enquire about Baptism (maybe in the parish handout on Baptism?), so that families do not make plans that may contradict the Church's understanding of the roles and duties of godparents. It is requirement of the Anglican Church of Southern Africa (**ACSA**) that all godparents must be baptised Christians who are personally and actively involved in the life of their own church, so that they model a life of Christian commitment for their godchild. As the child to be baptised is being brought up in the Anglican Church, it makes sense that at least one of the godparents should be a practising Anglican Christian.

These requirements are of the essence of the “job” of being a godparent, and are not optional! People who undertake the role of godparent must be fully aware of the fact that this is what they are committing themselves to in making their public vows in the church service at which the child is baptised.

Godparents are usually most effective when they are local – this means they are able to see the godchild regularly and frequently; attend the Baptism Preparation Course; and, attend the Baptism itself. It would be preferable if the godparents were active, practising Anglicans.

Historically, godparents were needed because life expectancy was short and godparents were a means by which the baptised children could be assured of material as well as spiritual support until they could look after themselves. In the world in which we live, we generally have longer life expectancies, though with chronic and terminal diseases this is changing. Our society is also less Christian and certainly less well-disposed to people who seek to follow Jesus than it used to be. So the role of a godparent is no less important today than it

was in the past. It is usual to have three godparents; two of the same gender as the child and one of the opposite.

Godparents are there to support the parents (whose primary role it is) in the spiritual nurture of the child. This includes matters such as learning to pray; reading and understanding the Bible as it applies to them; becoming an integral part of the local church and participating fully in its communal life. They need to be there (when needed) for talking about Jesus, the faith, life and its difficulties, and personal issues. A godparent will also remember and celebrate the child's birthday and (as importantly) its Baptismal Day in appropriate ways. If this includes gifts, these should reflect this Christian commitment, e.g. a children's illustrated Bible, or some other suitable gift from your local Christian bookshop. Remember also to include gifts and experiences that expose your godchild to the wonders of God's creation. All of this speaks of building a life-relationship with the godchild. Godparents should be able to talk as easily about Jesus as about cricket, soccer, tennis, or any other interest. Apart from these interactions with the child, the godparents promise God that they will pray daily for him or her; they also see that basic material needs are met so that the child can develop into a healthy, balanced, well-adjusted person.

Some parishes find it helpful to send the parents who are asking for Baptism a letter clearly outlining the duties of godparents and the expectations the Church has of them, so that there is no miscommunication and embarrassment at a later stage. It is also kinder to the godparents to give them a clear idea of what it is they are being asked to commit themselves to before they stand up in church to make public vows.

As Christians who are part of the Anglican Church, our understanding of Baptism (and its implications) is based on the Bible and its account of God's loving dealings with His creation, and not only on those passages that speak directly about Baptism. This includes a life that God longs for His people to know about and to live out in loving relationship with God – a life worth living – a new life that becomes ours by the new birth of Baptism.

There are different ways in which Anglicans celebrate the sacrament of Baptism while all retain the important elements of baptism by water in the name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. There is a range of cultural practices – which is what you would expect from a Church that is found all over the world. We may warm to some as providing helpful insights and find others of no great value to us personally, but as long as they meet the basic scriptural criteria, they are part of God's creative spectrum of ways to interpret His love for people otherwise lost.

# INTRODUCTION

## Remember:

1. Co-lead with another person. You can pray and prepare together; encourage each other; rotate leadership each week so that the other can listen and observe.
2. The presenters are there to facilitate discussion in the group. They are not there to preach, lecture, do all/most of the talking, or to show how much they know.
3. Be well prepared  
*(i.e. know the structure of the session, the order of things you plan to deal with, about how much time you have for each section, what the main points are that the group needs to understand)*  
and know the material well  
*(i.e. make sure you've read the scripture passages a few times each so you have a feel for them, know how the material develops and builds up, and how sections follow on one another).*
4. It is important to know how much time you need for each section and to plan accordingly, so that people know they can trust you to keep to the time allocated for each session!
5. Allow people to respond without debate.
6. If someone dominates the discussion, you can gently counter this by saying something like
  - 🗣️ "Thank you for your thoughts, what do others think?" or
  - 🗣️ "Let's hear from someone who hasn't said anything yet."

Experience has shown that it is most helpful to have two people presenting the Course. This allows for back-up and for mutual support which enhances the value of the Course not only for the participants, but also for the presenters.

Having two presenters promotes another valuable feature and that is much greater discussion within the group (**provided** the presenters do not take over the discussions!). Try to develop as much interaction as possible, draw out quiet people **gently**, calm down the talkative ones. The more people are drawn into discussion, the more seriously they take the Course and so benefit.

Be aware that people may well raise issues and questions about faith in general (not just about Baptism). So be prepared for such questions and work out a friendly way to deal with them without disrupting the flow of the Course or allowing people to hijack the session. You could say something like, *“That’s interesting, but we don’t have the time to look at it right now – would you like to make an appointment so we can look at that in more detail?”* And then be sure that you are well prepared if they take up your offer! **Remember that the point of these sessions is preparation for baptism and nothing should distract from that.** Some questions will represent the thinking of the whole group, some just of those asking – you may need to deal differently with them.

If older children are to be baptised, it is essential to schedule a **separate** session with those children to talk about Baptism, the vows, the actual service and their part in it, how to make the responses (e.g. positively, confidently, and loud enough to be easily heard in the church), and other issues that may be relevant.

If the minister performing the Baptism has not met the parents and the children, think of inviting the minister to the rehearsal to explain the service – this will give the minister a chance to get to know people before the service.

#### **Before the first session:**

Make sure that everyone has filled in a baptism application form.

#### **For the session:**

Make sure that you have:

1. enough seats for everyone;
2. enough Bibles for everybody;
3. enough Parents’ Booklets for everyone;
4. enough spare pens/pencils in case people forget to bring these;
5. spare baptism application forms (!);
6. TV and DVD player or computer that can play DVDs – and test them before the session so you can sort out any problems;
7. the DVD;
8. name tags with a koki pen;
9. a list (to be distributed to all) for people to fill in (names, child’s name, cell ‘phone number), so they can pray for one another.

#### **In the first session:**

Confirm with the members of the group:

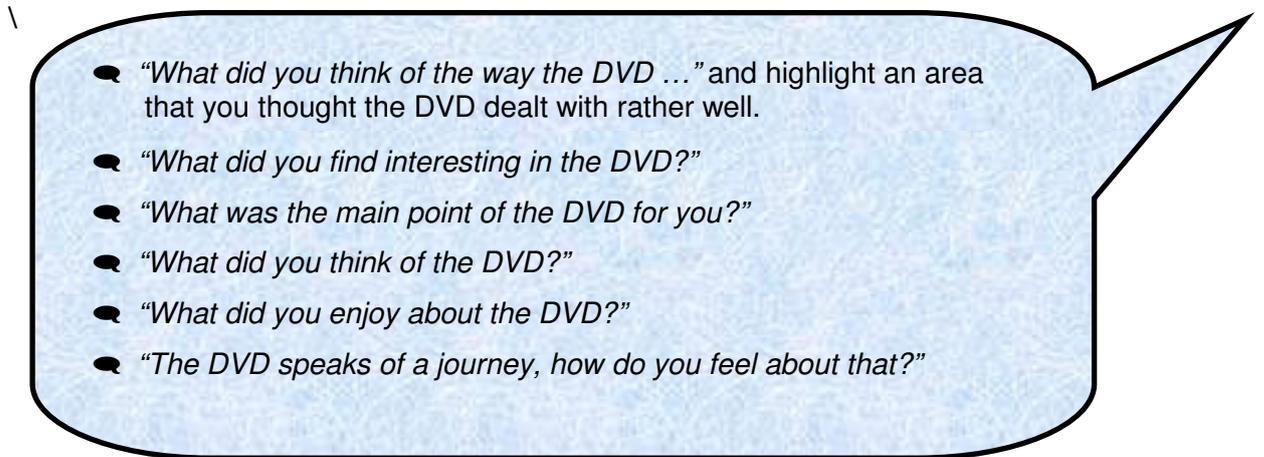
1. the length of the course and the dates/time of each session  
(e.g. *“This course runs over 6 weeks and we will be meeting every [give*

the day of the week on which you're meeting] *until the* [date of last session]" or "*This course consists of 6 sessions which we will run over two Saturday afternoons with 3 sessions per afternoon*" or whatever arrangement you've made for the course);

2. the length of each session (about 1¼ hours);
3. that latecomers will **not** be allowed to ask questions to catch up as this disrupts the session – they can catch up later with the presenters.

Welcome the members of the group, godparents (especially), make everyone feel accepted, and put them at their ease. Ask everyone to introduce themselves to the group and to say something about their family, and to share what their expectations of the course are. [It will be helpful to write down what the expectations are for your evaluation afterwards.] See if people know one another, and make any necessary introductions. This is to remove as many of the barriers, which make people feel uncomfortable, as you can.

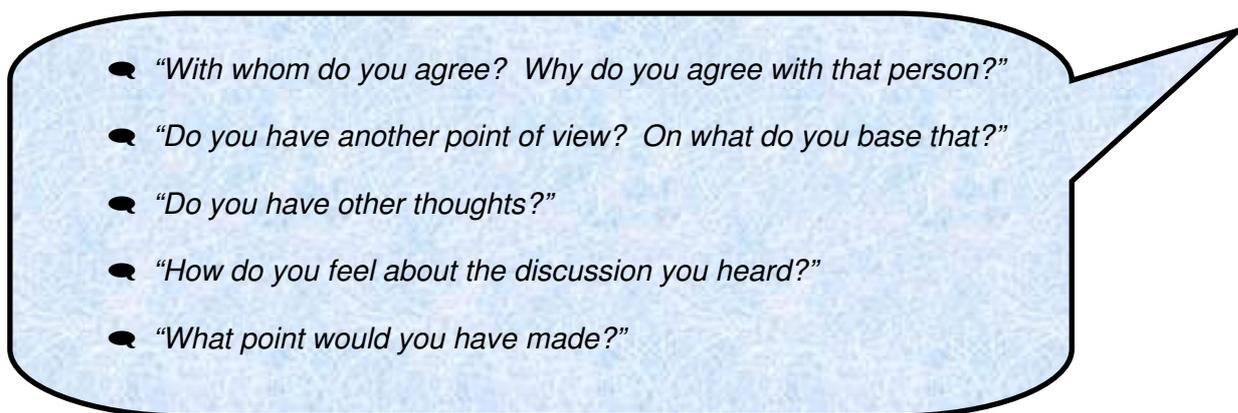
Show the DVD on Baptism and invite/draw out any responses. If there aren't any, you could ask leading questions such as:



and then keep quiet to show people that you are expecting them to respond. **But** do **not** start preaching or making a point. You are trying to create a warm, non-threatening environment and want people to feel comfortable to speak up!

When you have given everyone a chance to be heard (and **do try** to give **everyone** an opportunity) play the audio presentation of George and Joan's discussion. It raises a number of the problems most parents have with a Baptism Preparation Course. You may see some parents smile a little as they listen to it – that's good; it shows that they are being real about where they are in their understanding of Baptism. Invite responses to what they've heard by asking questions like:

The same comments apply as for the DVD.



**At the end of each session:**

Remember to:

1. confirm the date and time of the next session;
2. close in prayer.

**Possible time-lines for the course:**

1. run the course as a 6-session course over 6 weeks with each session lasting about 1¼ hours;
2. run the course as a 6-session course over 3 weeks on Saturday afternoons with 2 sessions each Saturday from 14:00 – 16:30;
3. run the course as a 6-session course over 2 weeks on Saturday afternoons with 3 sessions each Saturday from 14:00 – 18:00 (though this could be very tiring!);
4. run the course over 4 weeks; with sessions 1 and 6 standalone, and sessions 2 & 3, and 4 & 5, presented over a 2½ hour period with a short refreshments break in between (this worked well when tried in one parish).

***Training for course facilitators:***

*St Luke’s Church, Orchards, Diocese of Johannesburg, runs facilitator training courses.*

*St Luke’s Church  
P.O. Box 92351  
Norwood  
2117*

*Tel.: 011 – 728 – 7015  
FAX: 011 – 483 – 2885  
e-mail: office@stluke.co.za  
http://www.stluke.co.za*

## START OF EACH FOLLOWING SESSION

### **Remember:**

1. to start with a short prayer;
2. to confirm the date and time of the next session;
3. to close in prayer;
4. at each session you will need labels (name tags), Bibles, and pens/pencils.

Welcome everyone, ask how they are, and ask about how the week has been.

Start this and each succeeding session bearing in mind the following:

As you work through this session, remember that by the way you respect people and where they are in understanding Baptism, you will be affecting their emotional response to what the Bible says about Baptism. Your integrity and the clarity of your presentation will indicate that the Church's understanding is clear and has integrity – even to people who don't agree with it.

Share your input as if you were sharing it with your best friends informally. Do not lecture (or preach) to them. This will be the best way to communicate the love of God. This is what Jesus and His whole ministry is about, and what the Church and its sacraments are about as well.

Be aware that people are all at different stages in their journey of faith, and that what may be totally new and exciting (or threatening) for some may be well-known to others. God loves them at whatever stage they are and longs to encourage them onwards. You, by your behaviour towards them, should show this. This means being sensitive, sharing simply (it is God's truth and gets its power from that, not from the way you dress it up). Keep the words you use simple and clear. As much as you can, avoid using Christian jargon and technical words. These mean little or nothing to ordinary people. Try to unpack such words for easy understanding. Use clear examples. Don't be simplistic or over-confident.

Tell people what you are going to do in this session, and allow them time to turn to their booklets. Invite people to share their thoughts.