

Baptism is God-given opportunity

LET'S give thanks, firstly, that baptism still occupies such an important place in the lives of many young parents in a so-called 'de-christianised' society.

the big issue



Why is baptism so important to so many families - even if they don't actually believe themselves? Canon Dr Gill Hill, vicar of Catherington and Clanfield, researched the issue for her PhD

Six years of research into why parents ask for baptism prompted more questions than answers, but when asked why they wanted their children baptised, 38 per cent of those surveyed responded: 'We want our child to grow up in the Christian faith.'

For research purposes, it became crucial to explore how parents define the term 'Christian faith.' Hay and Hunt's study in 2000 indicated that the idea of an all-powerful Creator God has shrunk for many into a type of loving 'household god' who exists solely for the protection of the family. One young mother interviewed said: "I didn't go down the line of one religion, I just learnt comparative religions at school; I don't feel as though

I've got a religion."

During interviews, some parents expressed regret at not having a faith; they sought a sense of cultural identity and a moral framework for their children which they themselves had not received. The issue appeared to be about having too many choices but too few tools with which to negotiate the moral maze. The implication of this for the teaching of religion in schools is profound.

In 2003 Hirst demonstrated that those regularly attending church were most likely to be children of church attenders, and network theories confirm that

influences received via home or school will predispose a child towards religious practice in later life; however, in our society, changing patterns of work and family life work against regular Sunday church attendance.

Cultural shifts have also made spirituality (expressed in a variety of ways, not necessarily through church attendance) more acceptable than religion (often viewed as dogmatic or rigid), and each generation appears to be moving further away from what could be regarded as 'conventional' Christian belief.

The end result can be likened to a game of 'Chinese whispers'

where Christian teaching becomes increasingly diluted or distorted as it passes from one generation to another. In terms of Kairos, this presents a challenge as to the value we place on baptism preparation, as it offers a rare opportunity to relate to young parents in our communities, enabling them to see Christianity in a new light. As Hirst says, the future of the Church "may hang on the precarious thread...of these non-church attenders."

It was encouraging during interviews to hear the affection expressed by many parents towards the Church, for example: "When there's nobody to confide in, you know there is somewhere you can go" or "You find you're running to something that all your life you've not paid much attention to."

Many wanted to establish a link with their local church, even if they didn't attend regularly. When asked if there was anything they wanted to add, over half spontaneously cited 'communication with their local church' as

important, through newsletter or e-mail. Parents want to keep in touch and today's emphasis on the world-wide web offers us creative opportunities to maintain those all-important contacts.

Research into baptism posed many challenges, both to me as a minister responsible for conducting the Occasional Offices, and for all of us who call ourselves Christian. First, if parents seeking baptism for their children define Christianity primarily in terms of moral boundaries and cultural identity, there is a challenge as to how we help them make those crucial connections between their understanding and faith in Christ.

Second, the factors which predispose children towards reception of Christianity become our corporate responsibility both through our involvement with schools and the value we place upon young families seeking baptism for their children.

It is a challenge, but also a God-given opportunity which I hope we will continue to explore with enthusiasm and creativity.

BROADCASTING

New Diocesan title for Christian publishers

Plymouth based publishing house, Cornerstone Vision has announced that it will be selling advertising on the Oxford newspaper *The Door* from the November edition.

The Door is the 38,000 circulation newspaper for the Anglican Diocese of Oxford and is published ten times a year. The circulation of the new title stretches from Banbury and Milton Keynes in the north as far as Newbury and Wokingham in the south, taking in the counties of Berkshire, Buckinghamshire and Oxfordshire.

The Door will be joining Cornerstone's portfolio of other Anglican newspapers making a total of six titles in all. These are published alongside the *Portsmouth People*, the Roman Catholic paper for the Diocese of Portsmouth. Together they will have a circulation of around 190,000 and an estimated readership of 400,000 people.

The announcement comes at a time of other expansion for Cornerstone Vision who have also been appointed to handle advertising for the Mothers' Union magazine, *Home and Family*.

Ian Pilkington, one of the directors at Cornerstone Vision and leader of the Diocesan papers team, said: "The addition of these prestigious titles is great news for the team here in Plymouth.

"I believe it is a reflection of respect for our work for our existing titles."

Ian continued: "I trust that we will be in a position to increase the advertising content of *The*



Publisher's announcement
Ensuring its continued viability in the same way that we have worked to ensure the continued viability of titles such as *The Sarum Link*, *The Grapevine*, *The Way and Pompey Chimes*.

"We are also pleased with the way that the Chelmsford Diocesan paper, *The Month* is growing after launching it as a newspaper this time last year."

Cornerstone Vision's sales team can be contacted on 01752 225623.

Advertising feature

Christian Broadcasting

There will be many readers who remember a time when there were about five radio and two television channels. We've all seen the choices grow with many new advances in quality and diversity of subject matter.

Whilst many will cautiously welcome these changes most will want to ensure that the programmes they watch add to the quality of their life and spiritual direction rather than shock them at regular intervals.

Satellite, cable and Freeview have all opened up more opportunities for new broadcasters and the use of digital radio has increased the possibilities even more.

There can be few people unaware that Christian organisations have taken up the challenge and that it is now possible to access specifically Christian

programming in this country both on TV and radio. Major players include GOD TV, Premier Radio, Calvary Chapel Radio and TWR. Not forgetting the musically and community orientated Cross Rhythms Radio with a strong evangelical ethos aimed at the youth culture.

There are programmes from British broadcasters as well as European arms of American organisations.

For those seeking the greatest choice they will probably opt for a Sky dish in order to receive the many radio and television channels on offer. Others will be pleased with the choice available through cable.

It is often overlooked that many broadcasters can be listened to over the Internet.

There has also been an increase in community broadcasting and again Christian organisations have stepped in to take up the challenge for evangelism that it provides. The Stoke on Trent based Cross Rhythms Radio opened a second station in collaboration with a house church in Plymouth and more are planned.

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www.calvarychapelradio.co.uk

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