*The following is a proposal for a process whereby parents are able to celebrate new life through either a Service of Thanksgiving or a Service of Baptism. It covers some of the administration logistics from initial enquiry to the service as well what is required by means of preparation. Church Law requires that parents are sufficiently prepared for baptism. In putting together this proposal, the Baptism Working Party and the Ministry Team have sought to increases the amount and quality of preparation for baptism and for it to involve more interaction with church members. The proposal also highlights Services of Thanksgivings as a credible option, not a slight second to baptism.*

*This document is a draft proposal and is to be prayerfully reflected on, critiqued and refined through the PCCs.*

**Celebrating New Life**

**First Contact**

Parents make contact with the (church name) in person, by e-mail or phone. Details are taken and filled into the Pastoral Services Diary website. The parents are informed that one of the **New Life Team** will be in touch within the next week to arrange a visit to meet with them and talk about the church and the services on offer to help celebrate new life. (Note: This is not called a Baptism or Thanksgiving Team nor is it called a Welcome Team to distinguish between Welcome Teams whose role is to meet and greet at services.)

It will be the Parishes Administrator’s responsibility to promptly notify the relevant New Life Team from the churches that there has been a new enquiry. The New Life Team member will have their own username to the Pastoral Services Diary and can access the contact details.

**The Visit (Local)**

The visit is done by 2 lay members of the church for which the parents have expressed interest. Each church New Life Team can have more than 2 members but it is best if the visit is done in pairs. Once notified by the Administrator it is the responsibility of the team member(s) to contact the parents within a week of the initial enquiry and to arrange a visit at the parents home. (It is best if one member for each church team has the responsibility for checking the details and ensuring a visit is arranged, even if they are not doing the visit every time.)

Training will be given to those who are part of the New Life Teams.

The purpose of the visit is for the New Life Team to get to know the family and for the family to find out more about the church by:

* showing them the *Chapter One* DVD which gives a brief gospel overview and highlights the two different services on offer: A Service of Thanksgiving or a Service of Baptism.
* explaining what the local church offers, particularly highlighting relevant groups and activities and encouraging them to get involved regardless of whether it’s Thanksgiving or Baptism that they would like. A Welcome Pack could be given out.
* inviting them to come to church on Sunday and being willing to: meet them outside, sit with them during the service, introduce them to people after the service.
* giving the family an attractive booklet (effectively the policy) that clearly explains what a Service of Thanksgiving is and what a Service of Baptism is, walking them through it and helping them discern what is the next best step.

If at the visit, it is discerned that the family would like a Thanksgiving, then the New Life Team can look at dates, provisionally booking a Thanksgiving subject to approval from one of the clergy. It will be explained and expected that the family needs to attend the main service twice prior to the Thanksgiving as this gives the family the opportunity to become familiar with the building, the service style and the church family. The family are also informed that they will be invited to a Welcome Lunch, where they can find out more about the church and the minister will go through the service. (If the service is to occur before the next Welcome Lunch, the minister will arrange a time to see the family to go through the service, but they will still be invited to the next lunch.)

Thanksgivings work well in All Age services. They can take place on Baptism Sundays providing that there are no baptisms booked for that Sunday. With the exception of All Age Communion, it is best not to offer Communion Sundays as possible dates for a Thanksgiving. Non-family friendly services such as BCP should be avoided for Thanksgivings.

Once a date (or better still a selection of dates) have been settled on, the New Life Team need to notify the Parishes Administrator so a date can be confirmed and can update the information on the Service/Master Plan and in the Pastoral Services Diary. The relevant service leader/minister is also informed at this juncture.

If the family want a baptism, they can be invited to consider having a Thanksgiving as a first step (particularly if they can’t wait the duration of the baptism prep before having a service and celebration). However, a Thanksgiving is not a prerequisite for a Baptism and should not be insisted on, just suggested, or, if appropriate, encouraged.

The leaflet will explain what is required for baptism preparation – attending at least 4 sessions of a 6 week preparation course and regularly attending services, events and/or activities that will help them to belong to the church and grow in faith. The godparents, if local, will also be invited to attend the course (though they will not be required to but must by Church Law be baptised themselves). At present we are considering using the new START course (available Easter 2016) as preparation because it is interactive and engaging.

No dates for a baptism are discussed at this initial visit, rather it is explained the timeframe for when the next course is running (eg. “the next course will be starting in February”) and that a date for baptism will be looked at the start of the course. If they are unable to attend, the course on the day it is to run, it could be run in the home though this does limit the opportunity to get to know more church family. If the parents are showing signs that they don’t want to engage in preparation, they can be steered towards a thanksgiving as the first step.

If the family are confident they want baptism then they are left with a baptism pack, which explains what happens in the service, how to choose godparents etc as well as a pack for them to give to their choice of godparents.

The family (and godparents) will be invited to the next Welcome Lunch, which will also be Week 1 of the preparation course.

**The Welcome Lunch & start of Baptism Preparation Course**

All the families are invited to attend a Welcome Lunch (Sunday afternoons). The purpose of this is to provide hospitality through food and friendship. It will also be session 1 of the baptism preparation. It will then run for the following 5 weeks at this time (though will perhaps involve coffee and cakes rather than a meal). Here the families will get to meet members of the church family who will be helping on the course and befriending the participants.

At the Welcome Lunch there will be an explanation by a minister of Thanksgiving, Baptism and Confirmation (as for some the course will serve as Confirmation Preparation). A church member will explain what activities and services the churches offer. A church member will also give a testimony of what it means to them to be a follower of Jesus and belong to the church. The content for session 1 of the START course will also be included.

At the end of the session, dates for the baptism can be agreed, leaving time to complete the preparation over the weeks that follow on the understanding that the parents will attend at least 4 of the START sessions (effectively 3 more, though we hope they will enjoy the fellowship and journey that they don’t want to miss a week) and that they will attend at least 3 services. Details for the baptism are confirmed with the Parishes Administrator.

The minister/service leader may take this as an opportunity at the end to go through the Thanksgiving service with any families present who are just going for thanksgiving, thus completing their preparation, though they are welcome to continue attending the course if interested.

**The Thanksgiving (Local)**

This takes place on the agreed Sunday and the family will have completed preparation at the Welcome Lunch or on another occasion and will have attended a morning service twice. There is then no on-going commitment for the family but we pray for further engagement with the church.

**The Baptism Course**

This then runs over the subsequent 5 weeks after the Welcome Lunch It can include participants who are enquirers but not looking to have a child baptised and/or confirmation candidates. It will be held in one of the churches. Questions do consider: Do we insist both parents come? What if one works? Can we provide a crèche facility so childcare is not a barrier to prevent the family attending? How many times should the course run in a year? 2 or 3 times?

Who will facilitate the courses? Those in the New Life Team will not be expected to help with every course, especially if they have no families from their church doing the course. They could alternate attending the sessions if not able to commit to 6 Sunday afternoons in a row. Church members would be needed to serve as helpers on the course, utilising those with evangelistic gifts and those who can befriend people.

At the end of the course, the relevant minister and some of those who have befriended the families meet (perhaps informally over food?) explore how the families can be supported further in growing in their faith and belonging to the church and go through the service. This would be done with families individually rather than as a whole group.

What if the family do not engage in the preparation course? There was a case in recent times where a family showed little interest in neither attending church the required number of times nor seeking to engage in the preparation. This resulted in a minister and a member of the baptism team being emotionally blackmailed into the baptism still going ahead (“But we’ve spent £xxx on a venue and the party”). It did not. Although this is, thankfully, not a usual occurrence it is a possibility that it could happen again. If parents do not want to attend and engage in preparation it right that the baptism is delayed as stated under Church Law. If arrangements have been made for a party, there is no reason why a Thanksgiving could take place at the service instead.

A baptism taking place where the policy is not adhered to will be at the discretion of the Incumbent of the Peel Parishes in consultation with the Ministry Team. This will be in exceptional cases, not common place.

**The Baptism Service (Local)**

The service takes place! A baptism family once integrated into the church family potentially could help with future courses and/or welcome lunches.