

STORIES

F R O M T H E

LOCAL CONTEXT



There's a preparation and an expectation

After several years of no baptisms, Pollards Hill Baptist Church in south London now intentionally hosts four baptism services a year. Minister Deji Ayorinde shares how, and why

What difference are we making in the Kingdom?

I became the minister at Pollards Hill Baptist Church at the end of 2019, a few months before COVID hit. In this time we explored our identity as church. We asked two questions in particular: What difference are we making in community? What difference are we making in the Kingdom?

Community is easier to see, as it's tangible. How many events, how many adverts, how many activities etc. But for Kingdom, it's less straightforward. As I was thinking about this, I asked about baptisms: when was the last time we had had one in this church? At least five years, it turned out, and I began to wonder why.

I asked the congregation whether anyone had thought about being baptised. A few people hadn't and were interested in finding out more. I like to do things

properly, so I threw myself into creating a three week baptism class curriculum. I took existing material and added some extra bits. It was about helping people, enabling them to understand exactly what they're choosing.

After that first course we had five baptisms, and it was really powerful. The church was full. We had to use the hall for overflow and stream the service there. That was it for me. I thought: "Right - we're doing this!"



Preparation and expectation

We've been continuing ever since. Over time we introduced video and honed the course material. We introduced food into our baptism classes, not just snacks, which has helped that cohort to connect: they're brothers and sisters making a journey together into kingdom, and their bonds are still evident in the church today.

It's related to our church members' meeting, where we officially receive those who've been baptised into membership. These are quarterly, so now we intentionally plan for a baptism service before a members' meeting, so four times a year. We structure the classes around these dates.

We advertise the baptism services in different ways too. One is by using our noticeboard outside the church. Most church noticeboards have general information about services, but I think people can find out that information easily. I believe the noticeboard must tell the community what Jesus is doing. Jesus draws people to himself, not us. So we created a poster that talks about the baptism

classes and service, and it has a QR code linked to a page on our website that says: 'Are you interested in baptism? Fill in this form and someone will contact you.'

In the weeks leading up to the start of the classes we also regularly tell the congregation:

"We're going to welcome people into the kingdom." We encourage them to start praying for those who will be baptised. We say: "You don't need to know them by name. The one you're praying to knows them by name."

So there's a preparation and an expectation.

The baptism service

We see it 100 per cent as an evangelistic event. We ask those being baptised to make a list of whom they're going to invite. This is a public declaration. They are telling people, "My life's going to change."

We've had one family come five or six times as each subsequent member has been baptised. Easter 2023 there were 200 people, standing room only. There was a huge hallelujah about this, because so

many people were greatly impacted by what they saw. To be baptised on Resurrection Sunday, with what that meant for the onlookers, what that meant for us as a church in the light of his Word, was absolutely phenomenal.

We'll have some songs, some prayers and a short message; 10 minutes – more an exhortation than a preach.

When that message is done, we go straight to the baptisms. The individual comes forward, reads their story and is prayed over. As they're going into the water we sing their chosen song of worship. We sing it as they go in the water. After their baptism, they come up. We say, "Hallelujah!" We go back into that song as a resounding chorus of praise as they leave. For each candidate, it's about 10 minutes.

At the end we will have all the candidates at the front. I will typically ask the congregation to stretch out their hands toward them, symbolically, as we bless them, welcome them and send them.



"Hey, the water's still warm..." The 'eunuch' baptism

We also make sure there is a call to anyone else after the scheduled baptisms. From my Pentecostal background we call this a 'eunuch baptism', after the Ethiopian eunuch who was baptised by Philip in Acts 8. We say: "Hey, the water's still warm. You've seen what's happening here. Maybe the Holy Spirit's tugging at your heart? Come, get up, come."

And we make provision for that. We've got jogging bottoms, t-shirts in various sizes, male and female, so they can change. And every baptism service, bar one, we've had a eunuch baptism. Wow.

Support for those baptised

All baptism candidates are buddied up with a mentor. That's one of the things that helps them in their journey and their understanding of the spiritual and lifestyle disciplines they will seek to grow and develop. They're making themselves accountable to someone who's a Christian - someone who's walked that journey, who understands and can help, guide and counsel them, correct

them if need be, but crucially, encourage them.

The mentoring period lasts two months with weekly check-ins. The mentor checks in with me monthly to ensure accountability. The mentor is by their side when they are baptised, and prays over them.

They also go on the prayer list for three months. So on the one hand, yes, they're being prayed over for three months. But also, you always grow closer to the one you're praying for, so that has helped with connection and engagement.

We make sure there is follow-up. Two weeks after baptism it's a communion service and the

members' meeting afterwards. Those who have been baptised are welcomed into membership. We have them sit at the front, where they get served communion first. We big them up.

And the number of people who come to me after a baptism service and say "Can you put me down for the next one?" Baptism has been a trigger for growth – both in terms of our numbers, and the depth of our faith.

**Deji Ayorinde is minister of
Pollards Hill Baptist Church in
London**

Pollards Hill advertises its baptism classes to the wider community on the noticeboard in front of its building

