



Fonts



This advice is intended to help dioceses and parishes by explaining the options available to them.

Provision of a font

The provision of a place of baptism in every church or chapel where baptism is to be administered is a requirement clearly stated in Canon F1 of the Church of England. This requires that there will be:

- A decent font, with a cover for keeping it clean
- That it shall stand as near as convenient to the principal entrance (unless there is a custom to the contrary or the chancellor directs otherwise) and in as spacious and well-ordered surroundings as possible
- The font bowl shall only be used for water for baptism and no other purpose

The House of Bishops has issued guidance to help understand this Canon in the contemporary church where it is increasingly usual for baptism to be administered in a variety of forms. There is a strong custom of each church having only one place of baptism. The granting of permissions for a place for baptism by immersion in a church that already had a font effectively undermined this view.

The House of Bishops felt strongly that one place of baptism remains the ideal, although that one place could accommodate more than one mode of baptism. Its guidance concedes that there are some circumstances where it is almost unavoidable to install an additional font.

Petitions for faculties for the use of portable fonts or that would result in a church having more than one font should be carefully scrutinised ([St Mary, Lenham](#)).

Disposal of fonts

A font can be removed from a church only if permission is granted in the form of a faculty.

The Wording of the canon that a font is used for water for baptism and for no other purpose has encouraged a widely-held view that a font not required for baptism must, as a matter of law, put beyond use – either by burial or by breaking it up.

The Court of the Arches, in its ruling over Draycott, made clear that this is not the meaning of the Canon. What is meant is that while the font is present in the church it will only be used for water for baptism. It is not intended to be used as a restriction on what might happen to a font that is no longer required.

Nevertheless, in determining petitions concerning fonts the court will have particular regard to their sacramental significance and take particular care as to their disposal. (The same principles apply to the disposal of altars and communion plate but not to other items of church furniture such as pulpits and lecterns.) (St Philip, Scholes) This may involve a font being transferred to another church, relocated within the same church, placed in a museum, or as a last resort broken up and buried.

A redundant font should not be put to an unseemly use – for example as a planter in the churchyard or as an outdoor ornament ([St Bartholomew, Kirkby](#)). If a font is to be sold, care will be taken that it does not end up in ‘unsuitable hands’ ([St Michael and All Angels, Blackheath Park](#)).

In a case where a font is of high artistic or historical significance it may be appropriate to treat it as a treasure. If this applies the guidelines for disposal of articles from churches in the Wootton St Lawrence Judgement, reflected in the Church Building Council’s [Treasures policy](#), will apply.

If the font is not a treasure but is part of the fabric of a listed building the [Duffield guidelines](#) for making changes to a listed church will apply, as for any other alteration to the fabric.

Further reading

House of Bishops Guidance

<http://www.ecclesiasticallawassociation.org.uk/images/fonts1992.pdf>

