

'God-Parents' and the Uniting Church

God-parents may not be an issue which arises at the first contact between the parents and the minister regarding a baptism. But clearly it comes up quite often, and not only from those parents whose connection with the church is peripheral. Quite likely it appears in a statement like:

"And we've invited our best friends, Tom and Sally, to be god-parents, and they are very pleased to do this. They were best man and chief bridesmaid at our wedding, and we are very close to them."

Now this is hardly the appropriate time for a declaration that the Uniting Church makes no specific provision for 'god-parents'. In the Uniting Church it is the congregation, which is seen as having 'god-parental' responsibility. Equally it is true that this is the situation outlined in paragraph seven of the **Basis of Union** and that the baptismal service in **Uniting in Worship** makes no mention of 'god-parents'.

However, such truths are unlikely to be welcomed by the parents on such an occasion. They have come with their request as an expression of faith and of joy at both the birth and the baptism, and at the readiness of their friends to share in this significant act. What is needed is a careful pastoral approach, which takes seriously both the emphasis of the **Basis of Union**, and the willingness of the nominated 'god-parents' to stand with the parents in the responsibilities they undertake.

If the minister is using the service in **Uniting in Worship**, or the off-print of this, with the parents, it can be pointed out that 'god-parents' do not rate a mention - to be followed immediately with an explanation of why this is so - in the light of para. 7 of the **Basis**.

They can be reminded that it is the Church Council who approves of the baptism, just as it can be shown that the congregation undertakes responsibility in the service, following the promises made by the parents (see pp.44 and 45 of the **Leader's Book, Uniting in Worship**). So it may be suggested that it is in the context of congregational responsibility that 'god-parents' may have a role in the service - and thereafter. Indeed the role of the 'god-parents' may be seen to being parallel with those of the Church Council and the congregation. (Further, in this light, one may understand that it has been argued that 'god-parents' must be firmly church-related if not confirmed members themselves — not that this can be insisted upon today).

And, if 'god-parents' are to be involved in the service and in the responsibilities which ensue, then their place in the baptismal service should be a significant one. Their presence should be acknowledged under 2.

PRESENTATION on p.35 of the Leader's Book, **Uniting in Worship**.

A question along the lines of the last one directed to the parents on p.44 should be addressed to the 'god-parents'. The wording could be:

Will you, N and N, stand alongside (parents' names) to encourage (child's name) to grown within the fellowship of the church, so that he/she may come to faith in Christ?

It is assumed that the 'god-parents' will share with the parents and congregation in the declaration of faith on pp.38 and 39.

For this to be effective the minister should meet with the 'god-parents', perhaps at one of the counseling sessions with the parents, rather than meet them for the first time on the day of the baptism.

Unlike services in the Anglican Prayer Books the 'god-parents' do not answer questions in place of, or together

with the parents. They answer on their own behalf following the answers of the parents.

Ministers may find the following guidelines helpful:

- If parents do not raise the question of 'god-parents', do not introduce the issue.
- If parents ask about the need for 'god-parents', indicate the position of our church as it appears in para.7 of the Basis of Union, but indicate what may be done to include 'god-parents'. Throughout it should be clear that with us the congregation has a necessary role, and that 'god-parents' have an optional place only.
- If parents indicate that they have made binding arrangements for 'god-parents', again outline our church's understanding of their role, and inquire if the responses they would be asked to make would pose any problems. Arrange a time to meet with the nominated 'god-parents' to discuss their roles, in the service and thereafter.
- Ensure that the roles of 'god-parents' in the service and thereafter are recognised significantly in the service itself.
- Take up with the Church Council effective and practicable means by which the church can fulfil its obligations to those children for whom it takes responsibility in baptism. Such care needs to be exercised throughout all the years of growth to maturity of those baptised. It should be remembered that such responsibility may be passed on to another parish should the family move from that in which the baptism occurred. Not to adopt such measures is to make a nonsense of what we claim to believe and practise.