

Shared Outcomes Framework

Numbers new to faith - Definition guidance

Definition summary

1. As with each of the shared outcome framework indicators, this is seeking to find the best proxy measure of the desired outcome from what is readily available, rather than seeking to give a definition of the outcome itself.
2. For numbers new to faith, there are two indicators – one is baptisms under 11, the other is a sum of baptisms over 11, confirmations, and other first-time confessions of faith.
3. The indicator of children new to faith uses the number of **baptisms in the 0-10 categories in Statistics for Mission**.
4. And the indicator of older young people and adults new to faith is a sum of the following metrics; **the number of baptisms in the 11+ category in Statistics for Mission, confirmations from confirmation returns, and other first-time public confessions of faith**.
5. Baptisms and confirmations will use the indicators already being collected. First-time confessions of faith in a public setting (without baptism or confirmation) can also be counted where baptism or confirmation aren't appropriate.

Why?

6. Baptism and confirmation are part of a person's journey of faith, they are neither the end nor the beginning of that journey. It is important to measure new disciples at some point, and these are moments that resonate across all Anglican traditions.
7. There will be other measures within this outcome framework which measure aspects of people's journeys of faith. This measure should be used alongside those to give a better picture of the whole.
8. Shared measures will give a summary of missionary impact. Comparability will allow projects to understand which approaches have been fruitful in seeing people new to faith. With more data, the more this can be specific to similar contexts.

How?

9. Baptisms of different ages are already counted by parishes and new worshipping communities as part of the Statistics for Mission collection process. We will use these measures for numbers of baptisms.
10. Confirmations are registered separately by dioceses, as they are undertaken by a bishop. Projects should establish methods for these diocesan collection processes to feed into their project monitoring.
11. Local leaders may include other first-time public confessions of faith, where baptism and confirmation aren't appropriate. This could be a locally-developed form of practice for someone to speak of their commitment to Christ. This should be something where the aim is that it happens once in someone's lifetime, to avoid double counting of individuals. Projects can verify this locally and include in their reporting of data for this measure.

Why have you chosen these age boundaries?

12. Any person's baptism, whenever in life it happens, is a sign of their new life in Christ, and Christians can look to their baptism as a marker of this redeemed life. The age boundary between the indicators reflects liturgical practice of when confirmations are likely to start

(around age 10), where people typically make their baptismal declarations for themselves, and existing boundaries in Statistics for Mission.

13. There may be individuals who are younger (e.g. 9 or 10 year olds) who are baptised and speaking for themselves – these can be added to the third category of those who are making first time commitments, at the minister's discretion.

Why this point of a faith journey?

14. This is just one of a number of different measures which will capture different parts of a faith journey or discipleship pathway, such as attendance, taking part in a church's wider activities, being part of a discipleship group, individual discipleship, giving, and leadership.

15. Baptism and confirmation are the rites of initiation to the Church of England and an important part of its ecclesiology.

What about traditions that value confirmation less?

16. Confirmations are part of the Church of England's ecclesiology as a rite of initiation. For some churches, regular confirmation services may not currently be a feature of their church life. Adult baptisms may be more common in these contexts and form part of the measure.

17. The value of the measure is to get a sense of new disciples of Jesus. Some of these churches may have a 'backlog' of people who haven't been confirmed, or a number who have moved from other denominations which don't practice confirmation. It would clearly be unhelpful to confirm all of these people merely to create an artificially high number for this measure – we trust dioceses and churches to act sensibly and in good faith.

18. Some new worshipping communities or Fresh Expressions of Church may be lay led and so find it more of a challenge to find clergy to administer the sacrament of baptism. They should through a local incumbent or their bishop have a connection to clergy who can take this service. These contexts may also have a locally developed form of public declaration of faith which can be included in the measure.

What about cultural baptisms or confirmations which don't represent genuine faith?

19. We will never have a true measure of the genuineness of someone's commitment to faith. In both baptism and confirmation services, the candidates make declarations of their commitment to Christ. We can only take people at their word and cannot make a judgement on whether someone's faith is genuine. In child baptism the parents and godparents make these declarations on the candidate's behalf – this indicator is kept separate so that projects can decide how they wish to use it.

20. There will be other measures as part of the framework, including discipleship measures, which will contribute to a wider picture of commitment.

How much discretion is there for the other first-time public confessions of faith?

21. There is some discretion for churches to count those who are making first-time public confessions of faith. For some churches, there may be a locally designed way that someone can declare publicly their new faith in Christ. This may involve giving a testimony, making declarations akin to those in the baptism service, affirmation of baptismal vows or some other unambiguous way of demonstrating commitment to Jesus.

22. There is a desire to avoid double counting or 'lowering the bar', so this should be something that will only happen to an individual once with some degree of preparation, similarly to baptism or confirmation. This should not be seen as a replacement for baptism and/or confirmation which are encouraged for all God's people.

23. Some example circumstances might include where someone has already been confirmed a long time previously for cultural reasons, and where they can attest they did not have a faith at that time. Another example could be for pastoral accommodation of neurodivergent individuals who commit to Christ in relational conversations but would find a public occasion impossible.

What about returners to church?

24. Returners to church are another important source of growth, and it would be a mistake to think that apart from these people new to faith, all other growth is 'transfer growth'.

25. For this measure we have chosen to use those who can be specifically shown as new to the Church of God, and not sought to define a measure which encompasses those who are de-churched.

26. There is a separate measure of attendance change which will include these people as their church grows. This places no restrictions on what a project puts in its own measurement framework, which could also separately measure de-churched people if this is a focus.