

Anglicans offer baptism-wedding combination for unwed parents: A two-for-one service

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The Church of England, bidding to keep pace with the changing times, has begun promoting a “2-for-1” service that allows couples to combine a marriage ceremony with the baptism of their children born out of wedlock.

Guidelines for the controversial “hatch and match” liturgy went out to the church’s 16,000 parishes this summer.

The church’s move is seen as an attempt to deal with the growing trend of couples having children out of wedlock. In Britain, new government figures show that about 44 percent of children are born to unmarried mothers.

The Anglican Church said its own research had found that “one in five couples who come to church for a wedding already have children, together or from a previous relationship.”

In a statement issued online, Bishop Stephen Platten of Wakefield welcomed the new initiative, under which “the church can respond pastorally to our changing world if a priest feels it would be advisable to offer this option.”

Tim Sledge, vicar of Romsey in the Diocese of Winchester, added that now that the guidelines are available online, “the church can say yes and offer an even warmer wedding welcome to couples with children.”

But in a report in the *Times* newspaper in London, Bishop John Broadhurst of Fulham appeared considerably less pleased, commenting sarcastically, “It is a pity they have not put in a funeral for grandma as well.”

Stephen Parkinson, a spokesperson for the conservative Anglo-Catholic group Forward in Faith, added that “it is a shame that what should be a bride’s day now stands to be hijacked by screaming kids.” –*Religion News Service*