

Baptismal Discipline

A. Principles

1. Baptism is initiation into responsible membership in the Christian community.
2. Adult baptism is recognized as a normal feature of the church's teaching and practice, and should thus become a regular event in the worship of the church.
3. In the case of infant baptism, greater emphasis is to be placed on pastoral discipline, with a view to the nurture of baptized children into responsible membership of the church.
4. Baptism should invariably be administered in the context of a catechesis* that makes clear the meaning of responsible membership; and in the case of child candidates, those who answer for them should also enroll in the catechesis with them, for the purpose of clarifying their own part in the children's growth in faith.
5. This catechesis is properly the concern of the whole community of faith, and should engage some at least of the congregation and not only the clergy.
6. Baptism, in the case of both adults and children, is recognized as the one sacramental qualification for admission to communion.

B. Guidelines

1. Baptism should be administered within the context of a principal celebration of the eucharist, in view of the responsibility being undertaken by the community for the support and nurture of the newly baptized, and the nature of baptism as entrance to the communicant life. NO exceptions should be permitted which tend in any way to undermine this relationship between the community and the newly baptized.
2. Appropriate occasions for celebrating baptism are:
 - i) Easter, especially within the Easter Vigil
 - ii) The day of Pentecost
 - iii) The festival of the baptism of the Lord
 - iv) All Saints' day, or the Sunday following
 - v) Any occasion when the bishop is present

Parishes ought to seek ways of highlighting and celebrating the regular baptismal occasions, rather than making confirmation the one annual initiation festival.

* The word 'catechesis' as used here, refers to the pastoral and educational ministry offered along with the sacrament of baptism. Catechesis is important for guiding and initiating people into the church's living faith, and into a community of faith.



3. The bishop, when present, presides at the service. This should include: officiating at the presentation and questioning of the candidates, offering the prayer of blessing over the water, and receiving and welcoming the newly baptized. It is not necessary for the bishop to administer the water; this act may appropriately be done by the priest of the parish, or by an assisting priest or deacon (although a deacon does not normally baptize in the presence of a priest or bishop).
4. Parishes should appoint one or more parish sponsors for baptismal candidates. A 'parish sponsor' is someone chosen for a candidate who represents the congregation to the candidate, vouches for the candidate to the congregation, and takes personal responsibility for maintaining and developing the relationship between the community and the newly baptized (and the latter's parents, in the case of infants).
5. Any agreement to baptize may be reached only from within the catechesis which normally precedes baptism. In this way the church can make clear the meaning of baptism and the nature of the new life to which it gives entrance. This will allow candidates (or their parents) to weigh the responsibilities being undertaken, and decide for baptism in good faith. This catechesis will also normally include instruction regarding the candidates' participation in holy communion.
6. A person is eligible to be admitted to holy communion from the day of his/her baptism, regardless of age. The parish priest should encourage a family to bring baptized children to share regularly in communion. Before the practice of admitting all baptized children to communion is begun, the congregation must be consulted and given opportunity for discussion.
7. Notwithstanding the procedure required in #6, no child, who has already begun to share in communion in another parish, shall be refused communion simply on the grounds that the parish in which he/she now seeks admission to communion, has not yet begun to admit its own young children to communion. Nor shall any child who is a communicant be prevented from sharing in communion at any parish celebration.
8. The baptism of those not old enough to profess the faith is to be encouraged, provided only that each is sponsored by at least one parent who is baptized and professes the Christian faith, and will undertake the following responsibilities:
 - i) to provide leadership in the child's development of responsible membership in the church, by helping him/her to be regular and frequent in public worship and in private prayer, not only by teaching, but also by example and by praying for him/her, and by bringing him/her to share in holy communion.
 - ii) to co-operate with the community as it attempts to fulfill its responsibilities of Christian nurture and support.



Where neither parent is able to fulfill these responsibilities, it is conceivable that someone else might be chosen, either by the parents or by the church, but it would clearly need to be a person close enough to the family to provide leadership and to exert the necessary influence on the child's life. The more likely alternative is a deferral of baptism; and parents in these circumstances ought to be informed of this, and have explained to them the desirability of receiving baptism in a way that more closely conforms to the individual's spiritual history.

At the same time, such families need to be reassured that the parish will eagerly support them in their concern for the child's spiritual welfare and that, for its part, the parish will provide Christian education for the child as preparation for his/her possible baptism at a later stage.

9. Baptism should not be administered to a person who neither resides in the parish, nor is a member of the congregation until the incumbent in whose parish the person resides has been consulted well in advance.
10. The baptism of adults and children should be combined whenever possible. When there is an act of reaffirmation of the baptismal covenant, whether as 'confirmation' or otherwise, it should take place in the context of baptism whenever possible. If adults are being baptized, care must be taken not to allow either the liturgy or the accompanying festivities to focus unduly upon the younger candidates.

Similarly, if confirmation is included, care must be taken that the liturgy and the accompanying celebrations have their real focus in baptism.

NOTE: The ancient practice of baptism by immersion is recognized as both lawful and commendable in the Anglican tradition. In light of this, architectural provision for baptism by immersion, of both adults and infants, may be considered in any new church building or major renovation of an existing church building.

C. Commentary

Baptism is the sacrament given to the church for making disciples. Baptismal discipline is the pastoral direction which tries to restore to our practice of baptism this one central purpose. When baptism is allowed to serve other ends, either by misunderstanding or by mere leniency, it is betrayed, and with it the Gospel and the church are betrayed. No imagined gains (such as the demonstration of acceptance and goodwill) can mitigate this betrayal.

1. Baptism and Catechesis

Baptism announces and enacts a life made new in Jesus Christ. An adequate opportunity for the kind of formation and transformation signified in baptism is an essential part of initiation. For too long, people have been encouraged to imagine that liturgy is a disconnected event, unrelated to life in this world. It is apparently not to be taken literally, and therefore not to be taken seriously. Our task then, is not only to ensure that celebrations of the sacrament speak unambiguously, we must also prepare for these celebrations and reflect upon them, through catechesis. If baptism is initiation into a



covenanted life, then there must be opportunity for that life to be seriously considered, and for that covenant to be mutually affirmed. Catechesis must enable the development of faithful friendship between the initiate (or his/her family) and the community of faith. It is not merely a matter of explanations about baptism, offered by the clergy. The aim of initiation is to establish people in responsible relationship within the community of faith.

2. Infant Baptism

There is no 'proper age' for baptism; and we must repudiate the predominant cultural and superstitious reasons for 'getting the baby done'. For one thing, we must restore a sense of true dignity and celebration to the baptism of adults and older children, taking care not to allow these celebrations to be coloured by the conventions that have grown up around infant baptism. For another, we must guard against conventions which suggest that infant baptism is the 'norm', or give to it a sense different from the baptism of anyone else.

The one special concern that attaches to the baptism of a young child is the need to clarify the role of his/her parents. Young children cannot repent and turn to Christ on their own; only their parents (or guardians) can do it for them. And so, if parents are unable to do this for themselves, or unable to take on the unique responsibilities outlined in the guidelines, they should be urged to postpone the baptism of their child, so that the child may some day choose baptism for him/herself, and at a time when it might conform more closely to his/her spiritual experience.

3. Sponsorship

This understanding of the role of parents implies a distinction between two kinds of sponsorship. Whereas an adult candidate would normally be sponsored by another Christian person (normally a member of the congregation into which the initiate is to be received), the young child is also normally sponsored by one or both parents - and they are the primary sponsors. No godparents or other parish sponsors can assume this primary sponsorship in place of the parents (or guardians).

Pastoral history and experience nevertheless confirms the importance of the parish sponsor, in the candidacy of both children and adults. Such a person represents the community to the candidate (or to the family), and befriends him/her/them in faith and kindness, to the end that the sponsor may then represent the candidate (or the family) to the community at the time of the baptism. Such a person can contribute a fruitful ministry within the catechesis connected with baptism.

Providing parish sponsors for all candidates entails quite a mobilization of the membership in a way that can be very valuable for all concerned.

4. Confirmation

If baptism is recognized as the one sacramental qualification for admission to communion, then confirmation as we have known it cannot remain unchanged. There are still many major questions which the church must answer:



- i) What is the real purpose of confirmation of young adolescents?
- ii) Why must the bishop be the sole minister of confirmation?
- iii) How does confirmation differ in purpose or value from any solemn reaffirmation of the baptismal covenant?

Because the very word ‘confirmation’ is so ambiguous, and means so many irreconcilable things to so many different people, the comments that follow shall avoid using this word; instead an attempt will be made to describe the appropriate use of a “reaffirmation of the baptismal covenant with the laying-on-of-hands in prayer for the Spirit's strengthening”. That after all is the essence and core of the Prayer Book rite; that is the rite we must use wisely for building up God's people in their most holy faith.

Clearly, such a rite derives its meaning from baptism, and hence it should never be allowed to overshadow baptism. It should, therefore, normally take place in the context of baptism so that its relation to baptism is clear; and, secondly, baptism should be treated as the more fundamental element.

There are different occasions when such a rite will prove desirable, for example, after an experience of personal conversion or significant deepening of faith; upon returning to the faith; or at the beginning of a new work for Christ and his church. In such cases the reaffirmation of one's baptism with the laying-on-of-hands in prayer, in the context of serious catechesis, is most appropriate. However, such acts should not be required of all, nor be regarded as unique and unrepeatable.

What then of the continued requests from young adolescents (or their parents) for this rite? Two things deserve serious attention; the first is the opportunity (such as it is) to offer instruction and pastoral direction at a critical point in a young person's life; the second is the danger of permitting youngsters, who are only beginning to work out their individual identity and convictions, to be pressured into a public reaffirmation that is less than authentic.

One positive approach would be to help young people identify their own true interests (whether it be exploring ethical issues, or becoming communicants, or undertaking some ministry) and to address a programme more directly to these interests; if within these pursuits individuals discover a new sense of conviction and personal allegiance to Christ and His Kingdom, a solemn reaffirmation may be prepared for, as a further step. Because more and more children will begin their communicant life at a younger age, we can begin to recover the freedom to celebrate a rite of reaffirmation at whatever points in people's lives may be most authentic.

However, we must not overlook the new need for instruction and pastoral direction which has been created by the admission of young children to communion. Whatever preparation children may appropriately receive at the time of their admission, it will certainly not be adequate for the rest of their lives. And so we must build into our programmes for ongoing instruction the continued cultivation of a deepening appreciation of the sacramental life. Sunday school curricula, for example, probably need to be scrutinized and amplified with this in mind.

5. Baptismal Festival

How can a parish afford to hold all baptisms publicly? How can the clergy afford the time to meet with every candidate or his/her parent, as the guidelines require? Clearly, parishes will have to set aside specific occasions for baptisms and publicize this schedule. Baptisms ‘on demand’ will no longer be practical in the majority of parishes... and the tyranny of ‘the relatives from out of town’ will need to be met by a clearer appreciation of what is really important in baptism. What dimensions of ‘family’ matter most, when it comes to THIS celebration? “Who are my mother and my brothers?” (Mark 3:33)

As a rough guide, we propose that parishes select (well in advance) the dates for baptismal occasions for the year: a maximum of one a month, a minimum of four a year. There are particular occasions especially appropriate for this, as suggested in guideline #2.

With baptism thus limited to such occasions, the requirement of pre-baptismal instruction can be met in at least two different ways. A priest may still choose to see candidates or families separately; or there could be group sessions for all candidates and sponsors around each baptismal occasion.

At least one of these occasions should be presided over by the bishop. In parishes which continue the annual practice of episcopal laying-on-of-hands, this service would simply be expanded to include baptism, and would be presided over in its entirety by the bishop. The one major difference in this yearly event would be the attempt to ensure that the baptism itself became a major focus in the service.

D. Resources

The Diocesan Doctrine and Worship Committee is able to provide a list of appropriate resources and further information.