

## BAPTISMAL DISCIPLINE

### A. PRINCIPLES

1. Baptism, at the age of discretion, is initiation into responsible membership in the Christian community.
2. Adult baptism is recognized as the 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 by parents and sponsors, with a view to the nurture of baptized children into responsible membership in the Christian community.
4. Baptism should always be administered in the context of a catechesis (faith formation and instruction) that makes clear the meaning of responsible membership; and in the case of candidates who are children, those who answer for them should also enrol in the catechesis with them, for the purpose of clarifying their own part in the children's growth in faith.
5. This catechesis (preparation) is properly the concern of the whole community of faith, and should engage at least some 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. Children who make Communion should be adequately prepared for that Sacrament (see Directive 3.1.2).

### B. GUIDELINES

1. In the case of the baptism of infants or younger children, the final decision will reside with parents/guardians of the child and as part of the period of catechesis\*. Agreement to baptize should be reached only from within/during the preparation which normally precedes baptism. In this way the Church will 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/guardians) to weigh the responsibilities being undertaken, and decide for baptism in good faith.

\* The word "catechesis" used here refers to the pastoral, formational and educational ministry offered along with the sacrament of baptism. Catechesis is important for guiding and forming God's people into the Church's living faith, and into a community of that faith. Those participating in the preparation before baptism are often referred to as being members of "the Catechumenate." The beginning of preparation might be appropriately marked and recognized on a Sunday with a rite of "Admission to the Catechumenate" (See Appendix 2).

2. Baptism should be administered within the context of a principal celebration of the eucharist of the Book of Alternative Services (or alternatively from the traditional language rite - Appendix 5), 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 the relationship between the community and the newly baptized. Clergy are to be vigilant when requests for baptism are received that another parish has not previously been consulted where standards of baptismal discipline are being upheld but perceived to be outside of the candidate's family understanding, preference or comfort.

3. Appropriate occasions for celebrating baptism are:
  - Easter, especially within the Easter Vigil
  - The Day of Pentecost
  - The festival of the Baptism of the Lord
  - All Saints' Day, or the Sunday following (All Saints' Sunday)
  - Any occasion when the bishop is present

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

4. The bishop, when present, presides at the service. This should include officiating at the presentation and examination of the candidates, offering the thanksgiving 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).
5. Parishes should be encouraged to appoint one or more parish sponsors for baptismal candidates. A 'parish sponsor' is someone chosen for a candidate who represents the congregation, speaks and acts on its behalf, 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).
6. Notwithstanding the procedure outlined in Directive 3.1.2 - Children and Communion, no child, who has already begun to make 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 that practice. No child who is a communicant shall be prevented from making Communion at any parish celebration.
7. 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:
  - a) 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, by praying for him/her, and by bringing him/her when appropriate to make Holy Communion.
  - b) to co-operate with the community of faith 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, who is close enough to the family to provide leadership and to be the necessary influence in the life of the child. The

more likely alternative is a deferral of baptism; and parents in these circumstances ought to be informed of this with pastoral explanation of 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 time.

When a decision to defer or postpone baptism is made, a pastoral response is to offer the rite of Thanksgiving for the Gift of a Child (BAS, page 610 or BCP, page 573). Used publicly in the context of the community of faith, this is a meaningful opportunity to address, in a liturgical way, an expressed pastoral need.

8. 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. A letter from the incumbent of another parish assuring the completion of preparation and requesting that the baptism be administered should be the expected norm when necessary.
9. 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 normally take place in the context of baptism. 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.

NOTE: The ancient practice of baptism by immersion is recognized as both lawful and commendable in the Anglican tradition. Architectural provision for baptism by immersion, of both adults and infants, may be considered in new church buildings or major renovation of existing ones.

## C. COMMENTARY

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

### **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 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. As initiation into a covenanted life, there must be opportunity for that life to be seriously considered, and for that covenant to be mutually affirmed. Catechesis will 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 the establishment of responsible membership within the community of faith.

### **Infant Baptism**

There is no 'proper age' for baptism; and we must repudiate the predominant cultural and superstitious reasons for 'getting the baby done.' We must strive to 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. We must also guard against conventions which suggest that infant baptism is the 'norm,' or give to it a sense different from the baptism of others.

### **Young Children**

A special concern in 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 someday choose baptism for him/herself, and at a time when it might conform more closely to his/her spiritual experience.

### **Sponsorship**

It is necessary that chosen sponsors be themselves baptized with water in the name of the Father, Son and Holy Spirit. Preferably, these individuals will be engaged and active members of a faith community of a Christian denomination.

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 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). Such a person provides a valuable ministry within the catechesis connected with baptism. Providing parish sponsors for all candidates entails a mobilization of the membership of the faith community in a way that can be very valuable for all concerned.

### **Festivals of Baptism**

Congregations will need to set aside specific occasions for baptisms and publicize this schedule if Festivals of Baptism are to be observed. Baptisms 'on demand' are simply not practical when the discipline described here is followed. 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)

It is recommended that parishes select well in advance the dates for baptismal occasions (minimum of four) for the year. Making both printed and/or verbal announcement of upcoming baptismal festivals will begin to establish both a pattern and an expectation within the community of faith. With baptism limited to such occasions, the requirement of pre-baptismal

instruction can practically 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. The ministry of leading sessions of preparation is a unique opportunity for lay members of the community to be in a meaningful leadership role in living out the responsibilities of the congregation. One of the final components of the preparation should be an informal rehearsal for the baptismal liturgy.

When no baptism is scheduled on a normal festival, the liturgy should routinely include the thanksgiving for water and the renewal of the vows of baptism, BAS page 330. (See Appendix 6 for seasonal addresses and Appendix 7 for a traditional language rite). When festivals of baptism become the norm, the importance of baptism is upheld, baptismal discipline is reinforced and the community of faith is regularly and prayerfully strengthened in the "ministry of the baptized."

### **Baptism Request Kit**

The use of a "Baptism Request Kit," might be made available to those who ask. Beginning to share at least some of the information necessary to make a final decision about baptism is an immediate way to address a request and to begin to clarify expectations all around. An ample supply of kits kept in convenient places will serve both pastoral and practical purposes.

## **D. RESOURCES**

- Appendix 1 - Baptism Preparation Process Flowchart
- Appendix 2 - The Rite of Admission to the Catechumenate
- Appendix 3 - Baptism Request Kit
- Appendix 4 - Models of Preparation for Baptism    Model A    Model B
- Appendix 5 - Holy Baptism (Traditional Language Rite)
- Appendix 6 - Seasonal Addresses at the Renewal of Baptismal Vows
- Appendix 7 - The Renewal of the Vows of Baptism (Traditional Language Rite)

### **Other:**

- Into the Household of God (John Hill, ABC)
- Baptism: A Life-long Celebration, DVD (Anglican Book Centre)
- Baptism: Saying Yes to Being a Christian (Herbert O'Driscoll, ABC)
- Baptism: A User's Guide (Martin E. Marty, Augsburg Books)
- North American Association for the Catechumenate (NAAC) - Facebook
- Liturgy Canada    liturgy.ca

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