

CUSTOMARY

Baptism, Confirmation, Reception & Reaffirmation of Baptismal Vows

OCCASIONS AND CEREMONIES

"Baptism is the full initiation by water and the Holy Spirit into Christ's Body the Church." (BCP p.298)

Baptism is the action of the whole Christian community. It is the sacrament by which God adopts us as his children and makes us members of Christ's body, the Church, and inheritors of the kingdom of God. Water is the outward and visible sign of Baptism and should be used as generously as possible both in the pouring from the ewer and in the actual baptismal action. The water of Baptism links us to the waters of creation, the Flood, the Exodus, and Jesus' baptism and anointing by the Holy Spirit. Baptism by immersion makes a clear connection between Christ's death and burial and our burial with Christ in baptism.

The baptismal font should occupy a prominent and, if possible, permanent place in the church. It is desirable that its placement in the body of the church allows maximum participation by the congregation and should be easily seen. The font should be filled with clean water immediately before the Thanksgiving of the Water. (BCP p. 313).

Baptism is most appropriately celebrated at the parish's main Sunday Eucharist or other feast (BCP p. 298). It is especially appropriate at the Easter Vigil. The celebration of Holy Baptism at the Great Vigil of Easter creates rich connections between Christ's death and resurrection and the dying and rising to life in Christ of the initiate.

Baptism is also appropriate on the Day of Pentecost, on All Saints' Day or the Sunday after All Saints' Day, and on the Feast of the Baptism of our Lord (the First Sunday after the Epiphany). It is common practice also to baptize on the Sunday celebration of the patronal feast of the individual parish. The Day of Pentecost emphasizes the Holy Spirit's empowerment of the Church; All Saints' Day underscores baptism as entrance into the communion of Saints; a baptism on the Feast of the Baptism of Our Lord unites our baptisms with that of Jesus himself. Baptism should always be done in the presence of the congregation which promises to nurture the candidates as they continue their Christian life and it is not appropriate at a private service.

"It is recommended that, as far as possible, baptisms be reserved- for these occasions or when a bishop is present" (BCP p.312). The bishop as the symbol of the unity of the Church is appropriately the chief celebrant of Baptism. The bishop, when present, "is expected to preach the Word and preside at Baptism and the Eucharist" (BCP p.298). On such occasions a priest or deacon may baptize the candidates, and the bishop seals each candidate, using Chrism if desired. When adults are baptized by the bishop the prayer for the strengthening gifts of the Holy Spirit will follow immediately, with the laying on of hands. Such persons will be considered to be both baptized and confirmed. They are not to be presented for confirmation at a subsequent time. In the absence of a bishop, a priest presides at the service. If the priest uses chrism, it must have been previously consecrated by the bishop.

A deacon may administer the water of baptism if requested by the bishop presiding. If for good and sufficient reason the ministry of a bishop or priest cannot be obtained on the specified baptismal days, the bishop may specially authorize a deacon to preside (BCP p. 312). This is to be done only by exception and is not the normal practice of the Church.

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The deacon omits the prayer immediately following the water baptism ("Heavenly Father, we thank you that by water...", page 308) and the hand laying with sign of the cross and its accompanying formula.

In case of emergency, any baptized person may administer baptism, using the form for Emergency Baptism on page 313-314. This is the only appropriate circumstance for baptism apart from the presence of the worshipping community. Such baptisms should be reported promptly to the parish so that the baptism can be registered. "If the baptized person recovers, the Baptism should be recognized at public celebration of the Sacrament," in accord with the rubric on p. 314 in the prayer book.

The rite of Baptism cannot be repeated for a person from any Christian tradition who has been baptized with water and Using the words "in the Name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit", regardless of his/her age, or method or circumstances of baptism. When there is doubt as to whether a person has been so baptized, Conditional Baptism may be used (BCP p.313).

Anointing with the oil of Chrism is an ancient tradition rich with Biblical symbolism: the anointing of priests and kings; Jesus as the Anointed One, the Messiah, the Christ; Jesus' anointing just prior to his death; the sealing of the elect in the heavenly vision in Revelation. The sealing of the newly baptized symbolizes their participation in Christ's royal priesthood and their anointing with the Holy Spirit.

Chrism (olive oil mixed with oil of balsam or other fragrant oil) must be consecrated by the bishop. The oil connects each baptism with the bishop even when the bishop is not present. It is preferable that Chrism be consecrated when the bishop presides at Baptism in the parish; when there is no baptism on the occasion of the bishop's visitation, Chrism may be consecrated immediately following the post communion prayer, according to the Book of Occasional Services, pp. 209-210.

The Paschal Candle is normally burning beside the font during the Holy Baptism, reminding the congregation that each baptism is a participation in Christ's death and resurrection. "After the Baptism, a candle (which may be lighted from the Paschal Candle) may be given to each of the newly baptized or to a godparent" (BCP p.313).

1 There is some confusion regarding this matter. Certain denominations, *i.e.*, United Pentecostal who are generally regarded as Christians, baptize only in the name of Jesus and not the Father and the Holy Spirit. There are also some denominations who baptize in the Name of the Trinity or perhaps "Creator, Redeemer, Sanctifier" and do not use the words "Father, Son and Holy Spirit". Also, Mormons, who are not generally regarded as Christians, use the words "Father, Son and Holy Spirit". When in doubt clergy should investigate the tradition and the baptismal practices of the various denominations of people who wish to be incorporated into the church and make an appropriate decision.

CANDIDATES

Holy Baptism may be administered to persons of any age. Adult candidates are baptized after an extended period of inquiry, self-examination, preparation and prayer, supported by the parish community. This time of preparation is often termed the catechumenate and rites for the catechumenate are found in the Book of Occasional Services, pp. 112-126. Infant candidates for baptism should be the children of participating members of the parish, who will be nurtured within this community of faith. Adults who are not active members of the congregation, and who seek baptism for infants or children, should be invited to share in the life and worship of the congregation and in a process of instruction and formation, which will culminate in the baptism of the child or children.

It may also be appropriate for active worshipping members of a congregation to present for baptism the child of a family not otherwise actively connected with the church, provided that such will be nurtured in the community of Christian faith and that the parents actively support their intention to bring the child regularly for worship, instruction and fellowship.

Baptism is not appropriate apart from life within the community of the faithful. Baptism lays responsibilities not only on the candidates and sponsors, but also on the parish community, which must be given reasonable opportunity to fulfill the obligation it undertakes to "support these persons in their life in Christ."

All requests for baptism made to a priest by anyone should be taken seriously and treated in a pastoral manner. A refusal to accede to a particular request for baptism, or an insistence that the family wait for a later time, are legitimate pastoral responses when they are made with clear and loving expression of the Church's understanding of Holy Baptism, and with willingness to engage in patient and candid dialogue.

The building up of the parish Community through the careful and faithful administration of Holy Baptism is a pastoral concern of the highest order. The following should be considered:

1. Persons who are not members of the congregation and are seeking baptism for themselves or their children, are encouraged to view baptism as the climax of a process of exploration, renewal and growth, rather than as a sign of enrollment or intention or as a prerequisite for participation in the parish's life or educational program.

2. Use of the office of Thanksgiving for the Birth or Adoption of a Child (Prayer Book, p. 439) is encouraged and may be especially welcome on occasions when baptism is not considered appropriate or will be deferred for some time.

3. Because of the obligation which the worshipping community undertakes to support the candidates in their life as Christians, it is desirable that infants especially be baptized in the parish community where the family are active members as opposed, for example, to a parish to which the parents are attached by family ties or a history of past membership, however meaningful. Baptism looks to the future rather than the past, and "going home" to a former parish to baptize a child is generally inappropriate.

SPONSORS

"Each candidate for Holy Baptism is to be sponsored-by one or more baptized persons." (BCP.298)... "Will you be responsible for seeing that the child you present is brought up in the Christian faith and life?" (BCP p. 302)

Candidates are best sponsored within a community by members of that community. We recommend that at least one sponsor should be a member of the congregation in which the candidate will be baptized, who will take an active part in the pre-baptismal preparation and support the Candidate in his or her growth in faith and service. All sponsors must be Christians who believe Baptism is a sacramental act conveying grace; that infant Baptism as well as "believers" Baptism is a valid act; and that Baptism is an activity that involves the whole Church and is not simply an individual matter. It is particularly appropriate for the sponsors of adults to be chosen from among the people who guided the individual to consider baptism.

Sponsors of children include their parents. The number of sponsors for either adults or children is not limited or prescribed. Sponsors should be chosen with the advice and guidance of the priest.

Sponsors of adults and older children present their candidates, thereby expressing their intention to support them by prayer and example in their life in Christ. Sponsors of infants and young children, Commonly Called "godparents," have an additional role: they take vows on behalf of the candidate and also promise in their own right to see that the child is brought up in the Christian faith, and to help the child grow into the full stature of Christ (BCP p.302). Sponsors who are relatives and intimate friends have a distinctive role to play in the nurture of the child; sponsors who share daily parish life with the newly-baptized have a different and equally important role.

"Adults and Older Children" are defined in the rubrics on p.301 as "Candidates who are able to answer for themselves," while "Infants and Younger Children" are those who are "unable to answer for themselves." Pastoral discernment may suggest that in some instances sponsors might appropriately answer along with the child or children.

PREPARATION FOR HOLY BAPTISM

Baptism is such an important sacrament that instruction and spiritual preparation for this event is essential for adult candidates, parents and godparents of infants and children. For adults, there should be an extended period of instruction. This should find its foundation and source in the words of the service of Holy Baptism (BCP pp. 299-311), and in the Catechism (pp. 845-862).

In the course of instruction special emphasis should be placed on:

1. Renunciations: turning against evil which separates us from God.
2. The Promises: turning to Jesus Christ, accepting, trusting, following and obeying Him. (BCP pp. 302-3)

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3. The Covenant: Christian beliefs as stated in the Apostles Creed. (BCP p. 304)
4. The Responses to the Covenant, i.e., life in the Church. "continuing in the apostles' teaching and fellowship, in the breaking of bread, and the prayers." (BCP pp. 304-305)
5. Salvation History as expressed in the Thanksgiving over the Water, with reference to the Biblical sources (BCP p. 306-7). See also: Eucharistic prayers A-D (BCP pp. 361 ff).
6. The Baptism - the Sacrament. (BCP pp. 857-9, & 307-8)

It is important that ample time be allotted for instruction by qualified persons and this be done over an extended period of time. There should be an opportunity to "support each person in finding his/her gifts in the Christian Community and beyond it" (BCP p. 303). A commitment to continue to learn through the educational program provided by the parish should be encouraged, so that the process of growth and formation may continue.

THE COMMUNION OF THE BAPTIZED

"Holy Baptism is full initiation by water and the Holy Spirit into Christ's Body the Church. The bond which God establishes in Baptism is indissoluble. " (BCP p.298)

Those who are baptized are fully incorporated into the life of the Church, entering into all privileges and responsibilities of discipleship. No other rite or ceremony is necessary for initiation into this Church. The fundamental expression of the Church's life is the celebration of the eucharist, and participation in the eucharist is the sacramental Completion of Christian initiation. The newly baptized of any age are entitled to participate fully in the sacramental life of the Church and may receive Holy Communion on the occasion of their baptism and Continuing regularly thereafter. Children and adults apprehend the meaning and mystery of the eucharist in unarticulated ways, and their appreciation of the sacrament grows as they grow in faith within the eucharistic Community

Since the 1970 General Convention permitted persons to be admitted to Communion prior to confirmation, a variety of practices have evolved particularly involving communion of children. It is desirable that "First Communion" instruction should be given to all children beginning at kindergarten age, even to those children who previously have participated in the eucharist. Such instruction should include the parents and sponsors who have the primary role in helping their children grow into conscious participation in the eucharistic liturgy. Instruction should provide opportunities for both the children and adults to reflect on their experience of the Eucharist and its scriptural and theological foundations. In addition, parish education programs and the faithful celebration of the Liturgy of the Word should help persons of all ages participate fully in the parish's worship and approach the table with love and awe.

Baptized persons, including children, who have been receiving Communion in one Congregation ought never to be denied communion in another parish on the grounds of different local customs regarding admission to Communion. Excommunication of baptized

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persons is limited strictly to the situations described in the disciplinary rubrics (BCP p. 409).

All persons from other denominations are welcome to share the Holy Eucharist who have been baptized with water, in the name of the Father, Son and Holy Spirit, and who have been admitted to communion in their own church. It should be understood that we approach the Holy Communion with repentance and that the consecrated bread and wine are sacramental expressions of the Body and Blood of Christ. (See footnote on page 4)

AFFIRMATION OF BAPTISM: CONFIRMATION, RECEPTION, and REAFFIRMATION

The sacrament of Holy Baptism is a single, unrepeatable act through which a person enters upon a life of faith characterized by Continuing journey and growth. No specific acts or rituals are required at any time to make Baptism Complete, or to activate or validate it; but baptized persons normally need opportunities, at crucial points in their lives, to express a renewed and increasingly mature Commitment to their faith and to the promises of their Baptism, in the presence of the Christian community and the Church's chief pastor and symbol of unity the Bishop. These points occur at unpredictable and highly individualized moments for each person as well as at certain stages in the life cycle. The present practice of the Episcopal Church, and the custom in this Diocese, is to distinguish between different types of such moments, and to express them liturgically in similar but distinct ways, as Confirmation, Reception and Reaffirmation.

CONFIRMATION

Persons presented for the sacrament of Confirmation are those who have been:

- baptized in the Episcopal Church at an early age and now desire to make a mature public affirmation of their faith and Commitment to the responsibilities of their Baptism;
- baptized as an adult in the Episcopal Church but did not receive the laying on of hands by a bishop in apostolic succession, and now desire to make a public affirmation of their faith and commitment to their responsibilities of their Baptism; or,
- baptized and possibly confirmed in a denomination not in apostolic succession as understood by this Church.

While there is no specific minimum age for Confirmation, it is best understood as a rite of maturity, not of puberty. Candidates for Confirmation are expected to be mature in their convictions. It is inappropriate to arbitrarily designate persons of any age or grade level as confirmands. Normally, such maturity is not achieved until high school, and often it may be later. It is also inappropriate to pressure individuals to present themselves for Confirmation in the absence of clear motivation, commitment, or initiative on their part.

When adults are baptized by the Bishop, the prayer for the strengthening gifts of the Holy Spirit will follow immediately, with the laying-on-of-hands. Such persons are considered to be both baptized and confirmed. They are not to be presented for Confirmation at a subsequent time.

RECEPTION

Persons presented for Reception are those who have been baptized in an Orthodox Church or baptized and confirmed in the Roman catholic Church and who are now affiliating with the Episcopal Church. Persons from all other Christian denominations who are baptized are to be confirmed.

REAFFIRMATION

Reaffirmation is a repeatable rite and should- be used with sensitive pastoral discernment and after appropriate preparation. Reaffirmation is suitable in a variety of situations, for persons who have already made a mature public affirmation of faith within this Communion:

- Persons confirmed at an early age, who have lapsed, and then returned.
- Persons who have been regular in church participation and have experienced a significant reawakening or deepening of their faith.
- Persons seeking God's blessings on a particular lay ministry.

It is not appropriate for individuals or Congregations to “reaffirm” in a formal way every time the Bishop visits. Please remember that the entire Congregation present renews/reaffirms its Commitment with- renewal of baptismal vows within the liturgy itself.

PREPARATION

Preparation for Confirmation, Reception, and Reaffirmation should be extensive and thorough.

The needs of candidates will vary according to their individual histories and the type of affirmation they are making. In general, the areas covered would be the same as are recommended for the preparation of candidates for Holy Baptism (see page 10), but with even greater emphasis on deepening our relationship with Christ, our Christian witness in the world, and service to the poor, the suffering, and the outcast. The Catechumenal process is an optimal tool for this preparation.

The expectation of “mature Commitment” in Confirmation, Reception, and Reaffirmation is not to be understood in such a way as to prohibit any element of doubt or questioning about the Christian faith. Searching, or questioning faith, is an integral part of spiritual maturation and is not definitively outgrown or left behind at any single moment or developmental stage.

Continuing opportunities for instruction and spiritual growth should be a regular part of any parish's program of Christian education and formation.

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SOURCES

The Liturgy and Music Commission of the Diocese of Central Florida is indebted to the following publications which were invaluable in assisting the Commission in the preparation of this document:

The Book of Common Prayer

The Book of Occasional Services

Revised Diocesan Guidelines on Christian Initiation, The Diocese of Connecticut

Living Our Baptismal Covenant, The Milwaukee Process

Initiation Rites of the Episcopal Church, The Church Hymnal Corp.

Baptismal Guidelines, All Saints' and St. Richard's Churches in Winter Park, FL

Guidelines for the Celebration of Rites of Christian Initiation and Renewal of Faith, Diocese of Western Michigan and Michigan.