

D10 HOLY BAPTISM

These guidelines should be read in conjunction with Canons B21-25. Attention is also drawn to the relevant rubrics within the services for initiation contained in the Book of Common Prayer and Common Worship.

Duty to Baptise

A minister may not refuse or, save for the purposes of preparing or instructing the parents or guardians or godparents, delay to baptise any infant within the benefice who is brought to the Church to be baptised, provided due notice of at least one week has been given and the provisions relating to godparents are observed. Any refusal or undue delay may be referred by the parents or guardians to the diocesan bishop who may give such directions as he thinks fit.

Preparation

The sacrament ought not to be administered to the children of parents residing outside the parish (unless on the electoral roll) without the knowledge of the incumbent of the parish on whose electoral roll they are entered. As far as possible the incumbent should see the parents and proposed sponsors in order to explain to them their part in the service, the obligations which they assume and their responsibilities in the after-care of the child. For every child baptised there should, (unless he is of sufficient age to answer for himself), be not fewer than three godparents of whom at least two must be of the same sex as the child and at least one of the opposite sex. However, one godfather and one godmother will suffice if necessary. (Canon B23) Parents may be godparents for their own children provided that the child has at least one other godparent. The godparents shall be persons who will faithfully fulfil their responsibilities both by their care for the children committed to their charge and by the example of their own godly living. The names of the godparents should be recorded in the Baptismal Register and on the Certificate of Baptism wherever possible.

At the Baptism

When the sacrament is not administered during the course of a normal public service it is still important that a congregation representing the Church should be encouraged to attend.

Baptism of a Child when One Parent Objects or Does Not Consent: Guidelines for Clergy

The Canon Law of the Church of England has never required the consent of a parent before a child is baptised or else emergency baptism would often have proved impossible.

In relation to a healthy infant, Canon B22 envisages the involvement of a child's parents or guardians. The word "parent" in Canon B22 must be construed as referring to a person having parental responsibility for the child.

A person having parental responsibility can be:

- a) A child's father and mother if married to each other at the time of the birth.
- b) A natural father but only if parental responsibility has been gained by order of the civil court or by a parental responsibility agreement.
- c) Adopted parents

d) A guardian appointed by the civil courts.

The minister to whom a child has been brought for baptism should make enquiries to discover the identity of those having parental responsibility for the child and must endeavour to instruct all such persons in accordance with the provisions of Canon B22(4).

In order to carry out their responsibilities under the preceding paragraph the minister may postpone the baptism save in an emergency (Canon B22(3)).

If a parent does not agree to baptism or refuses to be prepared or instructed the minister should apply to the diocesan bishop for guidance and directions under Canon C18.

If the minister learns that a court order to prohibit baptism has been made or is being sought, the minister should refuse baptism until the matter has been resolved by the Court: in the meantime the minister should inform the bishop as to the reason for the refusal.

Canon B22(6) provides “no minister being informed of the weakness or danger of death of any infant within his cure and therefore desired to go to baptise the same shall either refuse or delay to do so.” In the event of “weakness or danger of death of any infant within his cure” the obligation upon the minister is to attend without refusal or delay rather than to expressly administer the sacrament. If the child is indeed in danger of death or will remain at risk there is an implied duty to administer the sacrament of baptism unless there is an order in existence from the civil courts forbidding such a baptism. As to weakness or danger of death the minister should be guided by the medical opinion if any is available to him or her. If there is any doubt as to the emergency the child should still be baptised. The duty to attend in emergency is absolute. A duty to baptise in an emergency does not exist in relation to every child irrespective of the views or religions of one or both parents.

If an emergency hospital admission record or other information reveals the parents are not Christian it can no longer be argued baptism ought to be administered against the wishes or beliefs of the child’s parents. Baptism is not a prerequisite of ultimate salvation. For some the statement in Common Worship Initiation Services (page 94 note 2) has been helpful in such situations: *“Parents are responsible for requesting emergency baptism for an infant. They should be assured that questions of ultimate salvation or of the provision of a Christian funeral for an infant who dies does not depend upon whether or not they have been baptised”*.

Although there is no express exception in Canon B22(6) it can be implied that a minister should not baptise a child where there is evidence that if the child lives it is unlikely that he or she will be brought up in the Christian Faith.

If told of the existence of an order of the court forbidding a baptism a minister who nevertheless administers baptism would be in danger of having to answer to the civil court and this applies whether or not there is an emergency.

In an emergency anyone may lawfully baptise (Common Worship Initiation Services page 94 note 1)

Requests for 're-baptism'

From time to time clergy may be approached with a request for re-baptism. There are two main reasons for such requests; the desire to express a commitment to Christ and His church and to acknowledge an experience of the Holy Spirit in a manner which appears to

be the New Testament norm, and a questioning of the validity of the first baptism (usually as an infant) because it is seen to lack a genuine response to faith.

Such requests should always be refused. To baptise a second time is an expression of the invalidity of the first baptism. It is also contrary to the theology of the New Testament and to the main 'catholic' tradition in which the Church of England stands.

"Such a request must be declined, as it suggests that the efficacy of baptism lies in the effects on the individual's feelings, and denies the fact that baptism incorporates the person who receives it into Christ." Lambeth Conference Report 1978 p 73

Baptism is an unrepeatable act. Any practice which might be interpreted as re-baptism must be avoided." Baptism, Eucharist and Ministry, 1982 the Lima document, sect 4 para 13.

However, any refusal should be accompanied by a sensitive explanation of theology, tradition and practice of the Church on this matter.

Those who wish to express a new found faith and commitment should be encouraged to do so by the renewal of baptismal vows at Easter Eve or some other suitable time. Within the Initiation services of Common Worship there is provision for such renewal either through sprinkling or by signing themselves with baptismal water. (See Common Worship Initiation Services page 168 and Explanatory notes page 202)

Should a situation arise where a rite of renewal of baptismal vows in water is pastorally appropriate, every effort by word and deed should be undertaken to make it abundantly clear that the rite is not baptism and reference should be made to the lasting significance of the baptism already received.