

## **The Episcopal Church's Canonical Requirements for the Administration of the Sacrament of Baptism**

1. The "Pastoral Offices" are the sacraments and other rites which the Church administers to persons at the important turning-points in their lives. The Pastoral Offices are regular liturgies of the holy Catholic Church and are celebrated within the total life of the Christian Community. They are not "private" services which the Church does for individuals apart from any commitment to the Christian Faith and active, responsible church membership.
2. All the Pastoral Offices, therefore, are subject to the same standards as are all the liturgies of the Church:
  - The liturgical forms set forth in the Book of Common Prayer must be used.
  - Any choral or instrumental music used must be appropriate and liturgical.
  - Any ceremonial, flowers, candles, etc. used must be liturgical and in conformity with the recognized liturgical standards of the Church.
3. The Rector of the parish (under the Bishop of the diocese) is the final authority in all liturgical matters.
4. Holy Baptism is entrance into Christ's Body, the Church and is indissoluble. It therefore requires a definite commitment to Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior and to active, responsible church membership.
5. This sacrament is administered in the church, except in case of emergency. Holy Baptism is normally administered in the context of the Eucharist on a Sunday or major Holy Day, preferably the Easter Vigil, Pentecost, All Saints' Day, Feast of the Baptism of Our Lord, or at the Bishop's Visitation.
6. Each candidate for Holy Baptism must be sponsored by persons who themselves are Baptised. The parents may be among the sponsors. All sponsors must be responsible, practicing Christians.
7. Sponsors must receive instruction in the meaning of Holy Baptism and the responsibilities of being a sponsor from the priest.
8. The godparents or parents of infants, or the person him/herself in the case of adults, should be oblation bearers at the Baptismal Eucharist.

**Diocesan Guidelines for  
the Administration of the Sacrament of Baptism  
in the Diocese of Chicago**

**Candidates for Baptism**

1. All requests for Baptism put to a priest by anyone are to be taken seriously and treated pastorally.

With children and infants, in general the requests of grandparents or others must give way to the wishes of the parents or guardians. If children seek the sacrament on their own behalf, their request is to be treated with respect as well.

2. For Baptism to take on its full meaning, enough time should elapse for initial formation of those seeking the sacrament to take place, specifically:
  - a. for the candidate to become known to the congregation;
  - b. for the candidate to demonstrate readiness to participate regularly in the life of the congregation and in worship;
  - c. for there to be observable signs of the reality of the new life in Christ which will be celebrated in the baptismal rites.

Although there is no set length of time for required preparation, it is difficult to imagine how this could take place in less than several months.

3. In the case of infants and younger children, what has been said above applies to the parents and sponsors. Enough time must pass for them to demonstrate a commitment to raise the child they present in the community of faith.
4. Thus, if those seeking Baptism, either for themselves or for others, are not already active members of the congregation, it is most proper to invite them into this shared journey, deferring application until the above goals have been attained.
5. It must be clearly understood by all that Baptism is inappropriate apart from life within the community of faith; it is the formative rite of the community and has serious implications for the community's ongoing life. Therefore, in no case, but especially that of infants and children, should Baptism be treated as a mere social formality such as naming of a child or joining the local congregation.
6. Priests of neighboring congregations should treat the process and guidelines as outlined for the diocese as a whole with respect. They should avoid being drawn into "fixing" things for those applicants who do not understand or like the diocesan standards. Rather, they should try to help candidates understand that these guidelines are neither punitive nor idiosyncratic, but are an opportunity for deepening spiritual commitment.

### **Occasions and Ministers for Baptism**

7. Baptisms normally should be performed in the local congregation during the principal Sunday Eucharist on one of the five suggested days: the Baptism of Our Lord, the Easter Vigil, Pentecost, All Saints' Day, the Bishop's Visitation. Too frequent celebration of Baptism may have a trivializing effect upon the congregation's renewal of their own Baptismal Covenant which is an inherent part of the rite.
8. For adults, it is especially appropriate that Baptisms be held in the context of the Easter Vigil. It is hoped that this rich and powerful liturgy will become a part of every congregation's worship life.
9. The Bishop is the chief liturgical officer of the Diocese, as well as the sign of unity of the Church Universal, and as such properly presides over the sacrament of Baptism. In the absence of the Bishop, the deacon or priest of the local congregation presides. In such cases Chrism consecrated by the Bishop is used at the signing of the cross on the candidate's forehead.
10. When the Bishop does preside, it is preferred that the deacon or priest of the local congregation do the actual baptizing, and the Bishop perform the signing.
11. Private Baptism is always to be discouraged, and should only take place in cases of acute and proven pastoral emergency. In the event of emergency and of conditional Baptism, the prayer book guidelines on pp. 313-314 should be observed so that the congregation may indeed be included in its proper role.

### **Sponsors for Baptism**

12. Every candidate for Baptism, regardless of age, should have sponsors.
13. It is unnecessary for sponsors to have been long-time friends of or related to the candidate. Relative and friends from other parishes have their own distinctive roles to play in the nurture of the newly baptized. With children and infants, the traditional understanding and number of "God-parents" is not to be emphasized at the expense of the role of sponsor. Sponsorship is not just an honor, but an on-going responsibility.
14. One can appropriately sponsor a candidate for Christian initiation which is to take place in a local congregation only if one is a member of that community of faith. Thus in addition to family members or relatives, there should be at least one sponsor who represents the community. In the case of adults, it is particularly appropriate if the sponsors can be selected from among those who guided the candidate to consider Baptism and those who participated in their period of formation. Parents serve as obvious sponsors for their own children.

15. The role of sponsors is extremely important and must not be under-emphasized. They represent and interpret the community to the candidate and, in turn, vouch for and interpret the candidate to the congregation. In the case of infants and children too young to speak for themselves, the sponsors pledge their continuing support to help bring the vows they make on the children's behalf to full fruition.
16. In all cases, final approval of the sponsors is at the discretion of the local priest.

### **Instruction before Baptism**

17. Instruction and spiritual preparation precedes every Baptism, regardless of age or number of previously baptized in the family.
18. Because there are wide ranges of existing commitment – from marginal activity to full involvement – a wide range of formation options will exist. Therefore the pastoral skill and guidance of the priest and the sponsors is assumed in determining the length and nature of preparation.
19. It is hoped that the instruction of adults and older children will take place within the context of a revitalized Catechumenate.
20. In order for parents of infants and small children to fulfill the role of sponsors, they are expected to participate in the catechumenal instruction. All other sponsors, both of children and adults, are expected to participate as fully as possible in the formation and preparation of their candidates.

## **St Paul's Parish Implementation of the Episcopal Church's Canonical Requirements and the Diocese of Chicago's Guidelines for the Administration of the Sacrament of Baptism**

1. The candidate in the case of adults or the presenting parent/parents with the child in the case of infants or younger children must have been active in the life of St Paul's Parish for at least the six months preceding Baptism, including attendance at Mass each Sunday, each weekday Holy Day of Obligation (Epiphany, Ascension Day, All Saints' Day, and Christmas), and the Triduum (Maundy Thursday, Good Friday, and Holy Saturday) "except for good cause prevented" (i.e. illness or physical inability).
2. Because Baptism at St Paul's is not only entrance into the Body of Christ, the holy Catholic

Church, but also entrance into membership in a specific religious community the candidate in the case of adults or the presenting parent/parents with the child in the case of infants and younger children must make a definite commitment to on-going full participation in the life of St Paul's Parish.

3. In preparation for Baptism the candidate in the case of adults or the presenting parent/parents in the case of infants or younger children must attend the six-week "Canterbury Pilgrimage" program. In the case of adults, this is followed by a four-week Baptismal preparation program. In the case of infants and younger children, this is followed by a four-week Parents' Baptismal Program.
4. Except in the case of emergencies or other similar extraordinary pastoral situations, all Baptisms at St Paul's are administered at the Easter Vigil.