



**DIOCESAN
GUIDELINES
ON
BAPTISMAL
MINISTRY**

MARCH 2011

1. The Church's Code of Canon Law has several canons regarding baptism. The *Canonical and Pastoral Guide for Parishes* contains specific measures on the topic. However, the diocesan bishop must determine for his diocese specific norms regarding the pastoral administration of sacraments, especially baptism, so that in each parish there be not only understanding and communion among all, but also appropriate pastoral responses to the needs expressed. The present document makes our diocesan guidelines on baptismal ministry official.
2. In December 2006, the document "Diocesan Guidelines on Baptismal Ministry" was published. Lately, modifications to these guidelines have been made. So here is the new document which is to be implemented in our diocese regarding the preparation and celebration of Baptism as well as the needed follow-up.
3. "UNLESS YOU BE BORN OF WATER AND THE SPIRIT"

Baptism is truly a point of departure: it is the sacrament of beginnings, of the beginning of Christian living. It is a new birth, a new way of coming into the world. The mysterious words of Jesus are an opportunity for evangelisation. Baptism is the sacrament of faith, it gives one access to the possibility of believing in Jesus Christ and of following

him, of walking in his footsteps. It gives us entry into the Church, the Body of Christ and Temple of the Holy Spirit. The Spirit will gradually give to the baptised an ever greater understanding of Christ, and a greater openness to welcoming his Gospel. Baptism introduces to a permanent covenant with Jesus. It is a matter of a whole life: one is baptised once, but one remains baptised always. We must never trivialise this sacrament. There is no end to our deepening its understanding.

4. By taking the importance of baptism into consideration, I am asking every parish or pastoral unit to have their own baptism preparation team, composed of people who have been well trained in this, in order to respond to the Christian formation needs of the parents. The passage from a faith undertaking on behalf of children to a faith undertaking for adults is the most important and demanding of pastoral challenges today. We have been accustomed in our Church to work with children and to consider religious education as generally addressed only to children. Baptismal ministry is first and foremost a ministry to adults, a ministry of walking in the faith, a ministry of openness and of welcome. It is a ministry within a project of formation in the Christian life, whose objective is to bring forth disciples of Jesus Christ.

5. SOWING IN THE DESERT

An important turn-around must be made. Experience has taught us that giving religious education to children without parental support is like sowing in the desert. We must therefore be careful to truly reach the parents whenever they approach the Church on behalf of their children. As a matter of fact, the parents' request to have their child baptised can mean that they are ready to do so in truth, faith, and hope.

6. PREPARATION REQUIRED

Time with the parents – and, if possible, with the godparents – must be taken to help them deepen their understanding of the undertaking they are about, kindle their faith, and prepare the celebration. A visit to the parents is recommended, to mark the birth of their child and to invite them to the baptism preparation. I strongly insist on this home visit by a member of the baptismal team: such a visit shows the community's interest in the parents, and the importance of their undertaking. It is also a time for getting to know one another, for giving information and, for some, a time of initial contact with the parish.

7. GOOD CATECHESIS

Besides the home visit, a sound baptismal catechesis requires a minimum of two meetings. If circumstances allow or where there is need, time necessary will have to be taken, so that the sacrament does not remain dormant. If, for valid reasons, only one meeting can be organised, time must be taken to have a good dialogue between the parents and the baptism preparation team person. These meetings with parents are an occasion for evangelization which should not be missed. Certain persons will probably need a longer preparation. Before having a baptism, the one in charge of the parish will ensure that the parents have been prepared. There shall be no baptism without adequate preparation.

8. TOPICS TO BE COVERED

In order to realise the greatness of baptism, it would be important to address the essentials of the Christian faith with the parents, their experience as parents, the meaning of their lives, the values they hold dear, their experience of God, their experience of Jesus Christ, of his life and message, the action of the Holy Spirit in the Church and in the world, the mystery of the Church, the sacraments, original sin, Christian behaviour, the Christian call, and Christian witness. This can be a very important opportunity for a new evangelisation focussed on love, faith, and hope.

9. GODFATHER AND GODMOTHER

The Church law requires, as much as possible, a godfather or a godmother. From this can be understood that either one godfather or one godmother is sufficient.

To be a godfather or a godmother, it is required that:

- "One must be 16 years old, unless an exemption can be obtained for a just reason by the priest;"

- "One must be of catholic faith, have completed Christian initiation, that is, having been Confirmed, have had first Communion and lead a life in conformity with one's faith and responsibility. Therefore, a Baptism and Confirmation certificate is required. In the case where a godfather or godmother is proposed, and of the two, only one is catholic, the catholic takes the role of godfather or godmother. The other is admitted as a witness. "

(Canonical and Pastoral Guide p. 1-14; 1-15)

10. PLACE OF BAPTISM

As a general rule, children are baptised in their parents' parish church. If parents decide for another church, they must advise their community, and be given the necessary preparation. The priest or the person responsible for baptism ministry shall advise the priest of the other parish, confirming his permission and guaranteeing that the people involved have been adequately prepared and are ready to take on their obligations.

11. CELEBRATION OF BAPTISM

I ask that the rites used at baptism be performed in a dignified manner so that they will be understood by all present, and that short explanations be given, without burdening the celebration. If possible, the celebration should be festive, with song and music. Such celebrations could be held at the Sunday Mass, especially on the feast of the Lord's Baptism and at Easter.

12. FORMATION IN CHRISTIAN LIVING

I recommend that with support from the diocesan pastoral office, adequate ongoing formation be offered to baptism ministry teams, to help them carry out as well as possible this major ministry in the Church. I also recommend that in homilies or at parents' meetings for religious education and sacramental preparation, the parents' awareness be raised regarding their children's religious education, and the commitment they as parents made when they asked for their children to be baptised.

13. RELIGIOUS AWAKENING, AND CULTURE OF THE CALL

Through the agency of the Diocesan Committee for Family- and Parish- Based Catechesis, may parishes and pastoral units invent ways of promoting the development of religious awakening in our children, as a follow-up to their baptism. I recommend that we develop in our parishes and pastoral units a “culture of the call,” by calling upon people to commit themselves in their church communities in the name of their responsibilities as baptised, and in the name of their own vocation.

14. BAPTISMAL RENEWAL

I am reassured that this baptismal renewal will help make our Christian communities even more vibrant, fraternal, and missionary. Baptismal Ministry is one of the main factor for a New Evangelization.

SIGNED AT

Edmundston, New Brunswick

March 1st, 2011



+ Claude Champagne, C.J.M.
Bishop of Edmundston



Ronilla Sirois, R.H.S.J.
Chancellor

