



From a Bishop's Journal (714)

Diocesan Guidelines on Baptismal Ministry (1)

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. At the close of my June pastoral letter on *The Baptismal Call*, from the recommendations of the March 2006 Pastoral Orientation Congress I listed several norms regarding baptismal ministry. Following consultations with local pastoral animation teams and baptism preparation teams, I give you the guidelines that shall henceforth be followed regarding baptismal preparation, celebration, and 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 ask every parish and 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 used 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.

+ François Thibodeau

+ François Thibodeau, C.J.M.
Bishop of Edmundston

09-12-07