



## GUIDELINES ON BAPTISM

*Adopted October 2013*

*Christian baptism is rooted in the ministry of Jesus of Nazareth, in his death and in his resurrection. It is incorporation into Christ, who is the crucified and risen Lord; it is entry into the New Covenant between God and God's people. Baptism is a gift of God, and is administered in the name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. Saint Matthew records that the risen Lord, when sending his disciples into the world, commanded them to baptize (Matt. 28:18–20). The universal practice of baptism by the apostolic Church from its earliest days is attested in letters of the New Testament, the Acts of the Apostles, and the writings of the Fathers. The churches today continue this practice as a rite of commitment to the Lord who bestows his grace upon his people.*

*Baptism, Eucharist, and Ministry*  
World Council of Churches

### **A. Principles**

1. Baptism is a public act of Christian discipleship and initiation into responsible membership in the Christian community that is the Church.
2. Adult baptism is recognized as a normal feature of the church's teaching and practice, and should thus become a regular event in the worship of the Church.
3. In the case of infant baptism, greater emphasis is to be placed on pastoral discipline, with a view to the nurture of baptized children into responsible membership in the church.
4. Baptism should always be administered in the context of a preparation (see below) that makes clear the meaning of responsible membership in the Church. In the case of child candidates, those who answer for them should participate in this preparation for the purpose of clarifying their own part in the children's growth in faith.
5. The preparation is properly the concern of the whole community of faith, and should engage members of the congregation as well as the clergy.
6. Baptism, in the case of both adults and children, is recognized as the one sacramental qualification for admission to communion.
7. Under no circumstances, with the exception of medical emergencies, should baptism be administered without preparation.

## **B. Standards**

1. Baptism should be administered within the context of a principal celebration of the eucharist, in view of the responsibility being undertaken by the community for the support and nurture of the newly baptized, and the nature of baptism as entrance to the communal life. No exceptions should be permitted which in any way undermine this relationship between the community and the newly baptized. Any exemptions must be authorized by the vicar general or the bishop.
2. Preparation for baptism should include a structured teaching program, offered over several sessions, to a group of candidates and sponsors (thus providing an opportunity to build community), led by qualified individuals. A team approach that includes the parish sponsor is recommended. There are many different catechetical and Christian formation programs available from many sources, so there is one suitable for every situation. Where feasible, baptismal preparation can be conducted regionally or deanery wide.
3. Since baptism is understood to be the normative pathway to participation in the eucharist, baptismal preparation should also include teaching about the sacrament of holy communion. Depending on the circumstances, a baptismal candidate may receive their first communion at their baptismal liturgy. Baptized individuals of any age are welcome to fully participate in the eucharist. However, as with baptism, adequate preparation is preferred. In addition to individuals preparing for eucharistic participation, congregations unaccustomed to children receiving communion may also benefit from some teaching about this practice.
4. The baptismal liturgy to be used will be that found in the *Book of Alternative Services*. The use of other baptismal liturgies must be approved by the bishop. (Note that the sixth vow of the Baptismal Covenant, to safeguard the integrity of God's creation and respect the life of the earth, is not included in the current print edition of the *BAS*, but is available in the downloadable version found at [www.anglican.ca](http://www.anglican.ca).)
5. Appropriate occasions in the church year for celebrating baptism are Easter (especially at the Easter Vigil), Pentecost, All Saints, the Baptism of our Lord, and any occasion when the bishop is present. Other dates may be chosen for pastoral reasons, particularly in multi-point rural parishes. Requests for baptism on a date when, for example, family and friends from out of town will be passing through can be accommodated at the discretion of the incumbent/priest-in-charge, so long as the requirements for baptismal preparation outlined here can be fulfilled.
6. Each candidate for baptism must be accompanied by at least one sponsor (still referred to in some contexts as Godparents). At least one of the baptismal candidate's sponsors should be an active, communicant member of the congregation in which the baptism will take place. If the candidate is unable to choose a suitable individual, the incumbent/priest-in-charge may appoint one or more parish sponsors for baptismal candidates. A parish sponsor is someone chosen who represents the congregation to the candidate, vouches for the candidate in the congregation, and takes personal responsibility for maintaining and developing the relationship between the community and the newly baptized (and the latter's parents, in the case of infants).

7. In addition to the parish sponsor, a baptismal candidate's sponsors must themselves be baptized and prepared to undertake with integrity the course of preparation outlined above and the commitments articulated in the baptismal liturgy. They need not necessarily have been baptized in an Anglican church and may be members of other Christian traditions. Individuals belonging to other faith traditions, or no faith tradition, may be invited to stand as witnesses to an individual's baptism, but cannot act as sponsors.
8. Baptism shall not be administered to an individual who neither resides in the parish, nor is a member of the congregation until the incumbent/priest-in-charge is satisfied that there is sufficient reason why the person is not seeking baptism in his/her local parish or does not attend a church in their local area. Individuals should be encouraged to seek baptism in a church located in the community where they normally reside.
9. A person seeking baptism who attends another parish may be baptized provided that the incumbent/priest-in-charge speaks directly with the incumbent/priest-in-charge of that parish and receives written proof of the candidate's membership in that parish and that he/she has been duly prepared for baptism.
10. In the case of infants, the Liturgy of Thanksgiving for the Birth of a Child (as found on page 606 of the *Book of Alternative Services*) may be offered instead of the sacrament of baptism. This may better suit the needs of parents who are unable or do not desire to undertake the commitments required of baptism, but who still wish to ritually give thanks for the arrival of a new child, either through birth or adoption. This non-sacramental rite can appropriately take place as a part of a congregation's principal Sunday liturgy or in a more private venue like a home.
11. In addition to having each baptism promptly recorded in the parish register, each baptized person should receive a suitable certificate indicating the date and venue of their baptism, as well as the celebrant and sponsors. Sponsors may also receive a suitable certificate commemorating the celebration and reminding them of the responsibilities they have undertaken.
12. Emergency baptism (as described on page 164 of the *Book of Alternative Services*) may be administered to anyone in danger of dying, by any baptized person, provided that: a) in the case of an adult, there is evidence to show that the person is desirous of it; or b) in the case of an infant or young child, that the parents request it. If there is reasonable doubt whether the person may already be baptized, conditional baptism (also described on page 164 of the *BAS*) is used. The recognition of an emergency baptism at a public celebration shall be made and the details of the person baptized recorded in the appropriate registers. If the baptized person recovers, their baptism shall be recognized at a subsequent public celebration in the parish.
13. Upcoming baptisms should be announced at public worship, in the parish bulletin, and other communication vehicles, such as newsletters. Notices briefly indicating the process for seeking baptism—and the need to give the incumbent/priest-in-charge sufficient notice—should also be regularly publicized.
14. When in doubt or conflict about the procedures outlined here, consult first with the vicar general.