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QUESTIONS ABOUT BAPTISM

*A resource booklet provided by
The Diocese of Moosonee*



Questions About Baptism

A Discussion Paper for the Diocese of Moosonee

Jesus commanded, "*Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit....*" (Matthew 28:19 RSV)

Since receiving this command from Jesus, Christians have had difficulty agreeing on the details of baptism.

1. **What is baptism?**
 - It is a time of entrance into the Christian family.
 - It is a time of receiving God's Holy Spirit.
 - It is the beginning of the Christian life.
 - It is a time of reception into a local fellowship.
2. **Who participates in the baptism?**
 - God works through his Holy Spirit changing the baptized person.
 - Parents and god-parents and/or the baptized person enter into an agreement with God.
 - The minister leads the service and baptizes, but does not make the baptism valid.
 - The congregation receives the baptized person into the fellowship of Christ.
3. **Why is water used?**
 - Water has represented repentance or a changed life since before Christ.
 - Jesus gave an example of baptism in the water of the Jordan.
 - Water is a good reminder of God washing us clean from sin.
 - No proper amount of water is defined by scripture. (read also Section 10, Page 2)

4. **Who is worthy to be baptized?**
 - No one is worthy because everyone falls short of God's expectations.
 - Everyone is worthy because God, in his merciful love, accepts each person through the death of Christ.
5. **Who can be baptized?**
 - Anyone who can honestly enter into God's agreement through Christ.
 - Anyone who has someone to help them enter the agreement with God and then fulfills the agreement. (read also Sections 11-14, Pages 3-4)



6. Why are babies baptized?

- In the early church, whole families followed the father into the faith.
- Jews brought their boys at eight days old to become Jews. Some Christians down through history have done the same.
- When Christians were persecuted in the early church, infant baptism was widely practiced because of the danger of death. No persecution remains, but the practice lives on.
(read also Section 15, Page 5)

7. What happens at the service?

- Promises are made.
- The sign of *water* is placed over the person baptized.
- Prayers are offered for the baptized person.
- The church receives the baptized person.
- God acts by offering His Grace to the one being baptized.

8. What are some people baptized Anglican and others something else?

- There is only one baptism.
- No one is baptized Anglican. He or she is baptized 'Christian' or 'into Christ' in an Anglican church or another church.

9. What is Confirmation?

- It is a time of affirming a personal faith in Christ or accepting baptismal promises for those baptized as infants.
- It is a time of strengthening in God's Spirit for Christian life and service.
(read also Section 16, Page 5)

10. How should a person be baptized? Should a person be totally immersed, covered with water or can water be poured over a person?

- The Bible does not teach that one method is correct and the other is not. Both methods have been used down through history. Both methods are good and can be used according to the circumstances of each baptism. Both methods can remind us of Christian truth.
 - Immersion: This method can remind the Christian that sins and guilt are washed away. It can also remind the Christian of dying to the old life and rising to a new life in Christ. (Romans 6: 3-4; Colossians 2:12)
 - Pouring: This method can remind the Christian of God's Spirit poured out into the world (Acts 10: 44-48). It can also remind the Christian of the water and blood that poured from Christ's side as he died for sin. Finally, it can be a reminder of the sprinkled sacrificial blood of the Old Testament replaced by the blood of Christ (Hebrews 12:24).
- Both methods are recommended in the Prayer Book (pp. 528-537). Regardless of the amount of water used, it is usually administered in three motions, one for each person of the Trinity as in Christ's command.

11. When should a person be baptized?

Can the children of non-Christian parents be baptized?

What about the children of parents who are baptized but are not active Christians.?

- Since the Sponsors of the children are required by the Prayer Book to be baptized members, and to make promises for the children, several possibilities are open:
 - God-Parents: Responsible, active god-parents could sponsor the children if they are able to fulfill the promises they would be making on the children's behalf. (Prayer Book pp. 526-530)

- Active Sponsorship: The baptized parents could take more seriously their own baptismal promises and those they would be making on behalf of their children by becoming responsible church members. The non-Christian parents could consider becoming a Christian, being baptized, taking on their own responsibilities, and actively sponsoring their children.
- Both routes are open to parents who wish to have their children baptized. The most important consideration here is to have sponsors who are willing to be active and responsible in carrying out their duties.

12. Can the children of unwed natural parents or common-law parents be baptized?

- If these parents are non-Christian and non-active, they should consider number 11 above. If they are baptized and wish to sponsor their own children, then the following is possible:
 - Spiritual amends: Since neither situation is considered to be an ideal Christian lifestyle and therefore strains the relationship of the parents with the Lord, they should take the opportunity to make spiritual amends and restore their relationship with the Lord in order to be better able to fulfill their duties toward their children, with the Lord's help. (Prayer Book, pg. 530)
- With the help of the parish priest, unwed natural parents and common-law parents can work toward a more acceptable Christian style of life in which children can be nurtured and guided within the framework of the promises and duties recorded in the Baptismal Service (Prayer Book pp. 526-530).

13. Why is baptismal instruction necessary, and when should it take place?

- This area of preparation is one of the most important parts of the process. Without diminishing the Sacrament itself, it is safe to say that with good discussion and instruction, the parents and god-parents can effectively fulfill their baptismal promises. This discussion and instruction can take place throughout a person's life or just before the baptism of their children is to take place.
 - Throughout: If a person has spent time during his/her growing-up years learning about baptism, he/she will be well prepared to take on the baptismal promises for a child. This person would have built up a relationship with the Lord and an understanding of baptism which would make the fulfillment of the promises come almost naturally.
 - Just before: People who have not had previous baptismal instruction might find it very difficult to understand exactly what the Prayer Book promises mean in their daily lives. For them it would be very beneficial to ask the parish priest for help in these areas before they take on such a serious responsibility.
- It is possible for parents to responsibly fulfill their baptismal promises with the help of the Lord and His church. The responsibility rests with the congregation to see that good quality approaches to baptism, the Christian education of children of the parish, and support for their parents is provided.

14. Who should sponsor the children, the parents or god-parents?

- In the modern day and age, this is very often an important consideration. Both parents and god-parents can play a very important part in the raising and training of the children for the Lord.

- God-parents: The position of god-parents is very often considered to be an honorary position, and with families constantly on the move, this is often all that is possible. However, where god-parents can be in close contact with the children, they can be very beneficial in their training. With baptismal instruction they can fulfill their promises and so be of tremendous help to both the parents and the children.
- Parents: Since families move around so much today, the parents are the ones best able to fulfill the baptismal promises, since they are in constant company with their children. Children naturally follow the example of their parents, so an active Christian life on their part has a very strong influence on their lives. Parents who involve their children in their Christian activities find the role of sponsor to be a relatively simple duty.

- Both god-parents and parents have important positions to play in the Christian upbringing of the children.

15. Should people be baptized only when have a belief in Christ or can they be baptized as infants, having no beliefs, and be guided into their belief as they grow?

- Both views have support in the Bible, although no one verse is used to prove infant baptism. Both views emphasize different things in the Christian life.
 - Believer: This view stresses that faith must come before baptism, based on Mark 16:16, Jesus' baptism, and examples from the book of Acts. It sees baptism as a time of public confession of faith. The Christian life of the individual is stressed in this view.
 - Infant: This view stresses salvation as an agreement with God having two requirements; belief and baptism. This new agreement can

be entered into at an early age as was the old agreement for the Jews (Genesis 17: 9-14). Many New Testament examples are given of whole families being baptized. This view teaches that parents and god-parents have a great responsibility to help a child grow in faith.

- Both views stress Matthews 28: 20a.

16. How does Confirmation relate to Baptism?

- In the case of infants, there is a separation of time between the events of baptism and confirmation. This time span in no way affects the benefits of baptism, but it enhances the importance of confirmation.
 - Baptism: The child is brought into the covenant relationship with God that his parents and god-parents enjoy. The child, by baptism has been admitted into the visible church, baptism being a pledge of their incorporation into Christ's mystical Body which is partly on earth and partly in Heaven. It has to do with membership as well as the forgiveness of sins. It is a service filled with hope and promise. It is a new birth filled with these qualities.
 - Confirmation: As in any development of a child, there are various stages. One of these stages in the life of a Christian child is Confirmation. The Prayer Book calls it the "years of discretion". It is at this point, usually 12 years and upwards, depending on the child's capacity to understand, *that he or she realizes that every spiritual blessing that is theirs was "estated" and assured to them by the solemn seal of Christ's sacrament of baptism, and that what is now become an actual experience was sacramentally theirs from the beginning.* They come before the Bishop and the congregation to attest to this

fact in their lives and the Bishop receives and confirms this testimony and commissions them in the laying on of hands. They then take a more responsible part in the life of their local church.

- Confirmation, then is a natural step taken along the way of the child's normal Christian growth toward maturity.
- Infant baptism stands in a context. He/she is baptized "into" Christ and "into" His church. Anything short of this context is to leave the child "spiritually" orphaned. That is the purpose for having the parents and god-parents speak on the child's behalf. Christ has promised to honour our honest efforts on behalf of the child.

If Hope and Love in action lie at the foundation of baptism, then we can look forward with glowing anticipation to a bright Christian future for each child and adult baptized.

