

Ad Clerum 3a.1

The administration of infant baptism

The sacrament of Holy Baptism often provides an opportunity for contact and outreach on the fringes of the church, falling centrally within the 'making new disciples' aim of Living God's Love. However, the approach of a family for infant baptism is sometimes where secular expectations vie with the policy and practice in the local parish.

The clergy are reminded of the need to exercise pastoral discretion in certain circumstances. Canon B21 (quoted below) has the presumption that baptisms are held at 'public worship when the most number of people come together'. Where this proves impractical because of the numbers involved, or where there are extenuating circumstances, the clergy should use their discretion.

B 21 OF HOLY BAPTISM

It is desirable that every minister having a cure of souls shall normally administer the sacrament of Holy Baptism on Sundays at public worship when the most number of people come together, that the congregation there present may witness the receiving of them that be newly baptised into Christ's Church, and be put in remembrance of their own profession made to God in their baptism.

B 22 OF THE BAPTISM OF INFANTS

1. Due notice, normally of at least a week, shall be given before a child is brought to the church to be baptised.
2. If the minister shall refuse or unduly delay to baptise any such infant, the parents or guardians may apply to the bishop of the diocese, who shall, after consultation with the minister, give such directions as he thinks fit.
3. The minister shall instruct the parents or guardians of an infant to be admitted to Holy Baptism that the same responsibilities rest on them as are in the service of Holy Baptism required of the godparents.
4. No minister shall refuse or, save for the purpose of preparing or instructing the parents or guardians or godparents, delay to baptise any infant within his cure that is brought to the church to be baptised, provided that due notice has been given and the provisions relating to godparents in these Canons are observed.
5. A minister who intends to baptise any infant whose parents are residing outside the boundaries of his cure, unless the names of such persons or of one of them be on the church electoral roll of the same, shall not proceed to the baptism without having sought the good will of the minister of the parish in which such parents reside.
6. No minister being informed of the weakness or danger of death of any infant within his cure and therefore desired to go to baptise the same shall either refuse or delay to do so.
7. A minister so baptising a child in a hospital or nursing home, the parents of the child not being resident in his cure, nor their names on the church electoral roll of the same, shall send their names and address to the minister of the parish in which they reside.

8. If any infant which is privately baptised do afterwards live, it shall be brought to the church and there, by the minister, received into the congregation of Christ's flock according to the form and manner prescribed in and by the office for Private Baptism authorised by Canon B 1.
9. The minister of every parish shall warn the people that without grave cause and necessity they should not have their children baptised privately in their houses.

B 23 OF GODPARENTS AND SPONSORS

1. For every child to be baptised there shall be not fewer than three godparents, of whom at least two shall be of the same sex as the child and of whom at least one shall be of the opposite sex; save that, when three cannot be conveniently had, one godfather and godmother shall suffice. Parents may be godparents for their own children provided that the child have at least one other godparent.
2. The godparents shall be persons who will faithfully fulfil their responsibilities both by their care for the children committed to their charge and by the example of their own godly living.
3. When one who is of riper years is to be baptised he shall choose three, or at least two, to be his sponsors, who shall be ready to present him at the font and afterwards put him in mind of his Christian profession and duties.
4. No person shall be admitted to be a sponsor or godparent who has not been baptised and confirmed. Nevertheless the minister shall have power to dispense with the requirement of confirmation in any case in which in his judgment need so requires.

Notes:-

- (i) It is important to note that, provided due notice has been given (Canon B 22.1) and the provisions relating to godparents have been met (Canon B 23), baptism cannot be refused. It may be delayed only for the purpose of preparing or instructing the parents or guardians or godparents (Canon B 22.4). If parents or guardians believe the baptism of their child is being refused or delayed unduly, they must be told that they have the right to appeal to the diocesan bishop (Canon B 22.2).
- (ii) In an episcopally ordered church, the bishop is the chief minister of the process of Christian initiation and, after he has consulted the priest involved in the dispute, the final decision in these cases rests with him. While as bishops in this diocese we would not want to see anyone compelled to administer the sacrament of baptism in a case that was contrary to their own individual conscience, there may be cases where a priest would be required by the bishop to ensure provision for the baptism to be administered by another priest.
- (iii) We would also like to take this opportunity to alert clergy in the matter of making arrangements for the baptism of children whose parents are divorced or separated. In these cases it is important to distinguish between 'care and control' and 'custody' of such children. It may be that one parent has 'care and control' of the children while 'custody' lies with both parents. Decisions of a permanent nature, such as the matter of whether a child should be baptised, relate to the right of custody, not to that of care and control. Therefore where one separated or divorced parent requests baptism for their child, the priest should, before baptising the child, obtain the written consent of the other parent if that parent also has custody. If it is known that the other parent objects to the baptism, the priest should not baptise the child until he/she has been shown a Court Order overruling the objection. Clergy will need to

delicately enquire about familial relationships to ascertain whether this issue might arise in any particular case. If it appears as though there is such a situation, the priest should seek the advice of the relevant Archdeacon and the Diocesan Registrar before taking matters further.

- (iv) There are occasions when parents ask whether friends or family who are not baptised, and have no desire to be baptised, can be godparents. This is neither permissible nor appropriate. However it is possible to include them as a 'Supporting Friend'.

An existing option is to explore the use of the Thanksgiving for the Gift of a Child service which makes provision for Supporting Friends to express their support for the family and the child. An alternative is to recognise this role within the baptism service, although any new material that recognises this role should be separated from the baptism itself. Guidance on how this might be done is provided by the Liturgical Commission in their paper Provision of guidance material for Holy Baptism where supporters are not baptized [LitCom(13)37 which is available on the Transforming Worship website www.transformingworship.org.uk.

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