

Diocese of Virginia

Guidelines for the Rites of Initiation

I. Sequence and Interrelationship

Since "Holy Baptism is full initiation by water and the Holy Spirit into Christ's , the Church (Book of Common Prayer, p. 298)," every baptized person is welcome to receive Holy Communion. The normal sequence, therefore, in the administration of the Initiatory Rites is Holy Baptism, Holy Communion, and Confirmation.

While Baptism is the rite that welcomes the initiate into Communion with God in Christ, Confirmation is the means whereby the mature Christian reaffirms his/her Baptismal Vows, makes a personal commitment to Jesus Christ as Lord and Saviour and covenants to share actively in the Church's mission. This mission is clearly defined in the biblical imperative, "Go into all the world and preach the Gospel to the whole creation (Mark 16:15 RSV)."

II. Holy Baptism

A. The prerequisites for Holy Baptism are as follows:

1. For an infant: the expressed desire of the parent(s) or guardian(s).
2. For a pre-adolescent child: his/her own expressed desire, along with the consent of the parent(s) or guardian(s).
3. For an adolescent young person or adult: his/her own expressed desire.

In all three of these situations for the person(s) expressing the desire for Holy Baptism there should be an appropriate program of catechetical instruction before the administration of this Sacrament, and there should be participation in the regular Christian education program of the Church, following the Baptism.

B. Discipline for the Administration of Holy Baptism

The Episcopal Church recognizes the universality of Christian baptism regardless of the method of administration, the age of the recipient or the denomination of the officiant, provided that it be administered with water in the Name of the Trinity. If these basic requirements have been met, the rite may not be repeated since rebaptism calls into question the certainty of God's promise and indicates as well a lack of respect for other denominations within the Body of Christ.

Since advance preparation is of primary importance, clergy, as a matter of pastoral judgement, may deny or defer the Sacrament of Holy Baptism in the case of any who will not consent to counseling and instruction or who have no intent of entering into the full life of the worshipping community or who for valid reasons have previously been refused the rite by another member of the clergy.

Since the baptismal rite is intended to be administered during a principal service of worship in the presence of the congregation where the candidate will become a participating member, private Baptism, whether at church or at home, is discouraged except where there are extenuating circumstances. We encourage Baptism in the congregation where the person and/or family will be active. Sensitive pastoral insight will be required in circumstances where, for legitimate reason, the Baptism may take place in a congregation other than the local community, and the clergy involved should not overlook this opportunity to convey the true meaning of Baptism as initiation not only into the universal church, but also into a local community of worshipping and witnessing Christians.

As indicated in the Book of Common Prayer (p. 312), it is appropriate that whenever possible Holy Baptism be administered at the Bishop's visitation, on the Day of Pentecost, All Saints' Day or the Sunday after All Saints' Day, on the Feast of the Baptism of our Lord (the first Sunday after Epiphany) and at the Easter Vigil, an occasion especially suited for the baptism of adults.

While it is recommended that a priest of the parish perform the actual Baptism, the Bishop, when present, will offer the prayer for the sustaining gifts of the Holy Spirit (p. 308) on behalf of the candidates and also seal them individually in accordance with the action specified in the following rubric. When those baptized are adults or young persons who can speak for themselves, and are sealed by the Bishop, those persons are not subsequently confirmed, received, or presented for reaffirmation. They are to be listed as communicants in the Register.

All uses involving Chrism must be determined in advance by the Priest in consultation with the Bishop.

It is very appropriate on the occasion of the Bishop's visitation that the Baptism, Laying on of Hands and the Eucharist be combined.

III. Reception of Holy Communion

Baptized children may receive Holy Communion when accompanied by a parent or sponsor able to assist the child in discernment of the Lord's presence in a manner appropriate to the child. Before reception of the Sacrament, a concurrent program of instruction should be provided for families with young children. This instruction should include appropriate factual information, but more importantly the meaning of the Sacrament presented in a manner so that children may grasp the meaning.

Since there is no determinant age for admission to the Holy Communion, the decision in each situation must best be reached by parents and child(ren) in consultation with the parish clergy. Care should be taken not to establish a set or minimum age, however, lest admission to the Lord's Table become merely "the thing to do," as the rite of Confirmation was in the past to the sixth and seventh grader.

It is, moreover, the policy of the Diocese of Virginia to permit the admission of young people to the Holy Communion for the following reasons:

1. The Holy Communion is God's "free gift" whose reception is not dependent upon one's intellectual understanding, but rather on the discernment of faith within the community of faith. That discernment takes different forms appropriate to a person's age.
2. Some parents are desirous that their children at an early age share fully in the Eucharistic fellowship.
3. Regular reception of the Holy Communion will enhance the younger child's growing awareness of his or her participation in the Christian community and of the abundance of God's nourishing love.

Indiscriminate reception of the Sacrament by very young children, with no preparation, however, should be avoided. Parents and clergy together should determine the appropriate preparation and oversee the child's participation in the liturgy.

Letters of transfer should clearly indicate when baptized persons, not confirmed, have been accustomed to receiving the Holy Communion. By the same token, children who have been properly admitted to the Holy Communion elsewhere are entitled to receive the sacrament in any Episcopal Church in the Diocese of Virginia.

IV. Confirmation, Reception and Reaffirmation of Baptismal Vows

In accordance with the Book of Common Prayer, there are three episcopal rites which are properly designated as the "Laying on of Hands."

In the Bishop, by virtue of his office, resides the fullness of ministry, responsibility and authority committed by Christ to his Church. The Bishop, is, therefore, the guardian of truth, custodian of the sacraments and symbol of unity. Since the Bishop acts for the one, holy, catholic and apostolic Church, it is proper that candidates presented for confirmation, reception and reaffirmation receive the episcopal laying on of hands.

Only those persons who have been baptized with water in the Name of the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit may be presented for confirmation, reception and reaffirmation. The minister preparing candidates for the laying on of hands is responsible for ascertaining that each of them has been properly baptized.

The minister or catechist in charge of instructing candidates for the Laying on of Hands is expected to clarify the three specific purposes of confirmation, reception and reaffirmation and to determine which of these rites would be most appropriate for each person desiring to be presented to the Bishop.

It is the custom in the Diocese of Virginia to use the episcopal laying on of hands for all three rites of confirmation, reception and reaffirmation.

A. Confirmation

Those who were baptized as infants and who for the *first time* wish as mature adults to commit themselves to Christ and to renew their Baptismal Vows will receive the episcopal laying on of hands for confirmation.

Those confirmed as infants in the Greek or other Eastern Orthodox Churches, who desire as mature persons to assume the obligations of their baptismal vows will be presented for confirmation.

Those persons who have been baptized as adults in the Episcopal Church and who later wish to renew their baptismal vows before the congregation will be presented, not for confirmation, but for *reaffirmation*.

In recent time, it has been customary to present young people for confirmation at an age that has been used historically to mark the division between childhood and the taking on of the increasing responsibilities of adulthood. But our culture no longer recognizes so clear a line of division and instead allows young people to enter into an extended period of "no-longer-a-child/not-yet-an-adult," during which we see young people at different paces becoming clearer on who they are and what they want their values to be. It seems desirable to consider the end of this period in young people's lives, rather than the onset of it, as the appropriate time to offer the opportunity of making the commitment to faith represented by confirmation.

It is, therefore, important to wait until an age when the individual may clearly express his/her *own* desire to affirm faith. It is during the years from twelve to sixteen that individuals work out their identity and it is to be hoped that their life in the community of the church during that time will have prepared them to decide to assume mature responsibility for their faith. It is also at sixteen that young adults are encouraged to take their responsibility in government of the church by voting for vestry members (Canon 11, Section 3).

Individuals do work out their identity at different paces and different ages, however, and in this culture, the beginning of this identity crisis is earlier than twelve years of age. No guidelines will be set by the Diocese of Virginia for fixing an age for confirmation, but clergy, catechists, and parents are urged to consider the rationale of confirmation being normative for those of high school years or older. The entire Christian community needs to be made aware of their responsibility to lead each young person to make an individual and mature decision to present himself/herself to the Bishop for confirmation as directed by the Book of Common Prayer, page 412:

In the course of their Christian development, those baptized at an early age are expected, when they are ready and have been duly prepared, to make a mature public affirmation of their faith and commitment to the responsibilities of their baptism and to receive the laying on of hands by the Bishop.

The primary intent of confirmation is to provide one the occasion in the presence of the Bishop and the gathered community, to profess Jesus Christ as Lord and Saviour and to invoke God's help through the Holy Spirit to live as a witnessing Christian in the world.

The Bishop should be assured that those presented for confirmation have demonstrated a personal understanding of the Christian faith, have been instructed in Christian doctrine and discipline and are able to make a personal confession of their faith. It is expected, too, that candidates for confirmation will be prepared to undertake a disciplined ministry in the mission of the Church.

B. Reception

All Christians of other denominations who have been baptized with water and in the name of the Trinity, who have as adults made a prior affirmation of their baptismal vows and who wish to be received "into the fellowship of this Communion," shall be presented to the Bishop for reception. No longer does reception apply *only* to those persons coming from the Roman Catholic, Swedish Lutheran and Old Catholic Churches or from similar bodies.

The Bishop should be assured that candidates for reception possess a personal understanding of the Christian faith, are able to make a personal confession of their faith, have been instructed in Christian doctrine and discipline, and are acquainted with the ethos, history, and background of the Anglican heritage. Each candidate should also be prepared to undertake a disciplined ministry in the mission of the Church.

Persons desiring to be received into this Church should be informed about the nature of the Bishop's office as chief pastor and as symbol of unity. The catechist should also stress the importance of following the Bishop's godly advice and admonitions when he speaks in accordance with the canons and discipline of the Episcopal Church.

C. Reaffirmation

Baptized persons who have made a mature public affirmation of faith and who later desire for significant reasons to renew their commitment to God before a bishop and in the presence of the congregation, shall be presented for Reaffirmation.

Adults who have been baptized by a priest or deacon at a public celebration of the Sacrament in which a bishop did not preside are expected at some later time, without undue delay, to reaffirm their vows before a bishop and to receive the episcopal laying on of hands.

The Bishop should be assured that all candidates presented for reaffirmation possess a personal understanding of the Christian faith, have been instructed in basic Christian doctrine and discipline and are able to make a personal confession of their faith. Each candidate should also be prepared to undertake a disciplined ministry in the mission of the Church.

The act of reaffirmation implies a decisiveness quite separate from the affirmation of faith one makes during corporate worship or in one's daily resolve to follow Christ.

The candidate for reaffirmation should, therefore, be encouraged to take this step only after serious prayer and self-examination leading to an inner awareness of a renewed commitment to God.

Reaffirmation should not be registered in the Parish Register, except in circumstances where the persons baptized as adults in this Church without the laying on of hands by a bishop are, at a later date, presented to the Bishop for reaffirmation of their vows and for the laying on of hands.

V. Letters of Transfer ("Certificates of Membership" in proposed new Canon)

Letters of transfer ("Certificates of Membership" in Canon), when issued, are to indicate a "confirmed" status for those persons who have been presented for "reception" and have received the laying on of hands.