



ST PATRICK'S

EPISCOPAL CHURCH

Baptismal Customary

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I. Introduction

Baptism is a public rite of initiation. By its placement within the Eucharist, which is the principal service of the worshipping community, the Baptismal rite reflects the corporate nature of the liturgy (BCP¹, 13, 312). The Prayer Book includes responses by the entire congregation and lay participation in readings and prayers, all of which further emphasize the importance of the congregation's active involvement in the initiation of new members (BCP, 298-314). Following ancient tradition, baptisms at St. Patrick's shall be performed on the Great Vigil of Easter, Pentecost, All Saints' Day, and the Feast of the Baptism of our Lord (BCP, 312). Baptisms may also occur on the second Sundays of each month. Private baptisms shall be performed only under extraordinary circumstances.

II. Prior To the Day of Baptism

As a part of pre-Baptismal instruction, the Celebrant (or, if the Celebrant is not available, other clergy or a lay person who has been trained) shall review the Baptismal liturgy with each "Baptismal party" (i.e., candidates who are able to answer for themselves, and their sponsors; or parents and godparents of infants or younger children). This customary, together with the article entitled *Baptismal Ecclesiology In the Episcopal Church* shall be shared with the Baptismal party prior to this meeting. This meeting typically will occur on the Saturday preceding the Baptism. The flow of the liturgy and speaking roles shall be explained, and decisions concerning whether anyone in a Baptismal party shall read a lesson or the Prayers for the Candidates shall be confirmed at

¹ "BCP" used herein refers to the 1979 Book of Common Prayer.

this time (BCP, 312). Each member of every Baptismal party shall be given a copy of the Baptismal liturgy at this meeting and be encouraged to review it prior to the service. Agreement shall be reached as to a time on the day of the Baptism (at least one hour before the service) to reconvene in the nave for a brief rehearsal.

The Celebrant shall select hymns relating to the propers for the entrance and before the Gospel (BCP, 300).

Baptismal certificates and cards for godparents shall be prepared in advance of this meeting and signed on the day of the Baptism.

III. Prior to the Service on the Day of Baptism

As a public rite of initiation, Baptism should be conducted in the nave in a manner that makes it optimally visible to the majority of the congregation (BCP, 312). The interior design of the nave of St. Patrick's compels the conclusion that baptisms are most visible when conducted at the front of the nave. Accordingly, the Altar Guild shall move the font to a position in the middle of the center aisle, three feet outside the altar rail. From this position, the Celebrant may face the entire congregation from behind the font (the "Celebrant's position") (BCP, 313).

A ewer of warm water (i.e., warm enough to approximate body temperature at the time of the Baptism), consecrated chrism, a small towel for each candidate (for drying their heads and the Celebrant's hands), and a Baptismal candle for each candidate shall be placed on a small table to the right of the font. A step stool shall be placed to the left of the font for the Baptism of children who are too large to be lifted (if any). The Paschal candle shall be positioned to the right of the Altar.

The Baptismal party and the Celebrant shall rehearse the service, from the presentation of the candidates through the peace (BCP, 301-308). Specifically, the rehearsal shall be a “dry-run” of all speaking parts, standing positions, movements and, especially, hand-offs of infant candidates. The Celebrant shall reconfirm any assignments of the reading of Lessons or Prayers for the Candidates.

The Baptismal parties and family and friends shall be seated in the front pews of the nave. An adequate number of pews shall be reserved for this purpose prior to the service.

Clergy participating in the Baptism shall wear white stoles. The Celebrant will not wear a chasuble during the Baptism. The Celebrant’s chasuble shall be draped over the altar rail, ready to be put on during the offertory.

IV. The Service of Holy Baptism

A. The Liturgy of the Word

The Liturgy of the Word follows the form in the Prayer Book (BCP 299-300; or for the Great Vigil of Easter, BCP, 285-292). All stand for the entrance hymn. After the entrance hymn, all remaining standing, the Celebrant shall move to a point in front of the center of the altar, and announce that the liturgy for Holy Baptism is contained in the Prayer Book.

In the orans position, the Celebrant leads the appointed Acclamation and Versicles for the liturgical season, holding their hands together, chest level, during the congregational responses (BCP, 299). Then, making a “gesture of greeting” (arms extended at the sides, palms open and facing up), the Celebrant says, “The Lord be with

you.” The Celebrant then holds their hands together during the congregation’s response, “And also with you” (BCP, 299). Then, assuming the orans position, the Celebrant prays the appointed collect (BCP, 300). The congregation sits for two lessons and the Psalm (read from the lectern), stands for the sequence hymn and Gospel², and sits for the sermon,³ all as set forth in the Prayer Book (BCP, 299-300).

B. The Baptismal Liturgy

The congregation is still seated at the commencement of the Baptismal liturgy (after the sermon). The Celebrant proceeds to the Celebrant’s position and announces the presentation of the candidates as set forth in the Prayer Book (BCP, 301). The Celebrant first identifies the Baptismal parties for adults and older children (if any) by surname as follows: “Would the [surname] Baptismal party please stand?” The identified Baptismal party stands⁴ and presents its candidate. The Celebrant examines each adult and older child individually for their consent to Baptism immediately after they are identified (BCP, 301). Other Baptismal parties for adults and older children (if any) are identified and candidates examined seriatim in like fashion.

The Celebrant then identifies the Baptismal parties for infants and younger children (if any) by surname as follows: “Would the [surname] Baptismal party please stand.” The identified Baptismal party stands and presents its candidate. The Celebrant then examines

²The Verger shall retrieve the Gospel Book from the altar and process with crucifer and torches to the center of the nave for the reading of the Gospel.

³ Although the sermon may be delivered after the peace, the practice at St. Patrick’s is to deliver it at the normal time, after the Gospel, while the readings are still fresh in the minds of the members of the congregation. (BCP, 301)

⁴ All baptismal parties remain standing after being identified.

the parents and godparents for each such infant and younger child candidate to affirm their commitment to support their candidate (BCP, 301-02). Other Baptismal parties for infants and younger children (if any) are identified and examined seriatim and in like fashion.

The Celebrant then examines the candidates who can speak for themselves and the parents and godparents who speak on behalf of infants and younger children, using the form set forth in the Prayer Book (BCP, 302-03).⁵

The Celebrant then addresses the congregation with the gesture of greeting, and invites the congregation to stand, saying “please stand.” The Celebrant then bids the congregation to affirm their support of the candidates in their new life in Christ (BCP, 303).

Continuing to address the congregation, the Celebrant leads them in the renewal of the Baptismal Covenant (BCP, 304-05).

The appointed person then moves to a position immediately to the left of the Celebrant and leads the congregation in the prayers for the candidates (BCP, 305-06). The Celebrant leads the congregation in the concluding collect (BCP, 306).

At the conclusion of the collect, the Verger and the Baptismal parties move toward the font in orderly fashion. If the leader of the Prayers for the Candidates is not among this group, they will return to their pew at this time. The Baptismal parties gather in groups to the Celebrant’s left, facing the congregation. The Verger moves to a position at

⁵ Instructions related to confirmation, reception and reaffirmation in the baptismal liturgy are not included in this Customary.

the Celebrant's immediate right, both facing the congregation.

At the Thanksgiving over the Water, the Celebrant hands the Prayer Book to the Verger and picks up the ewer of warm water from the small table. The Celebrant grasps the handle of the ewer and begins to pour water into the font, elevating the ewer so that the cascading water may be visible to the congregation. After the pour, the Celebrant returns the empty ewer to the small table.

The Celebrant then turns to the Verger (who is standing at the Celebrant's immediate right) and adjusts the position of the Prayer Book for ease of reading⁶. Making the gesture of greeting, the Celebrant recites the appointed Acclamation, holding their hands together at chest level during the responses (BCP, 306). Assuming the orans position, the Celebrant prays over the water, reciting the first two paragraphs of the appointed prayer (BCP, 306-07).

At the Epiclesis which follows, the Celebrant looks heavenward, deliberately and slowly extends their hands upward simultaneously, over their head, as though reaching, and then commences the Prayer of Epiclesis, bringing both hands down simultaneously toward the water, placing the left hand on the tummy and moving the right hand over the water for a few seconds, and then into the water (BCP, 307). The Celebrant then blesses the water by making the sign of the cross three times in the water. At the Doxology of the Epiclesis, the Celebrant moves their hands to the praying position and bows their head slightly, in reverence. The Celebrant then receives the (first) Baptismal towel from

⁶ The Celebrant and the Verger will agree in advance on whether the Verger is to mark the place in the liturgy or turn pages.

the Verger and dries their hands, and then returns the towel to the Verger.

Baptismal parties approach from the Celebrant's left side, each with a small index card identifying the first name of their candidate. As each candidate approaches for Baptism, the candidate or a representative of their Baptismal party delivers the identifying index card to the Verger, who then places it in the Prayer Book in a manner visible to the Celebrant. Each adult and child who is too large to be lifted approaches the font from the Celebrant's position (using a stepstool if necessary), leaning face down over the surface of the water.

The Celebrant stands to each candidate's right and scoops water by hand onto the candidate's head three times while saying the words of the Baptism in the Prayer Book, allowing the water to flow over the top of the candidate's head toward the forehead (BCP, 307).

The Celebrant next receives infants for Baptism, right arm to Celebrant's left arm, in gurney-like fashion, as rehearsed prior to the service. At the Baptism, the Celebrant leans over the font with the infant face-up over the water, and baptizes the infant as above, being careful not to splash water in the infant's face or eyes (BCP, 307).

The Verger hands the Celebrant a towel after each Baptism, and the Celebrant dries each candidate's head with the towel. The Celebrant then receives the chrism from the Verger and addresses each newly baptized by placing a hand on their head, marking their forehead with the sign of the cross using the chrism applied to the right thumb, and saying the words of chrismation (BCP, 308). The Celebrant returns each candidate to their Baptismal party.

After the chrismation of all candidates, the Celebrant leads the congregation in the prayer appointed (BCP, 308). The Celebrant and Verger then move to a point in front of the font. Facing the congregation, and making the gesture of greeting, the Celebrant says, “Let us welcome the newly baptized,” and leads the congregation in the welcoming sentences (BCP 308). After the welcoming sentences, the Verger steps back behind the font and to its left. The Celebrant again faces the congregation, makes the gesture of greeting, and says “The peace of the Lord be always with you,” to which the congregation responds, “And also with you” (BCP 308). All exchange a gesture of peace with those adjacent to them.

The Verger then lights Baptismal candles for each candidate from the Paschal candle and delivers them to the Celebrant who will then present them to representatives of each Baptismal party.

Revised: March 2012

