

The Extraordinary Ministry of Baptism

PASTORAL ORIENTATIONS AND GUIDELINES

Every year, thousands of children receive Baptism in one of our ninety-one parishes, and thus become sons and daughters of God and members of the Catholic Church. Therefore, many people are called upon to cooperate in the preparation and celebration of these Baptisms as well as in the follow-up after Baptism. These people (priests, pastoral agents and volunteers) perform this essential ministry with great generosity. I take this opportunity to thank them and to emphasize the quality of their contribution to the Christian life of their communities.

In our Church, which has not ceased to increase in population since its foundation, the ministry surrounding Baptism is now even more important if we consider that it has become an opportunity for evangelization, targeting not only the infants, but also and increasingly the school age children and the adults.

On the one hand, the condition and the number of available priests in our Church have led the Bishop, in the last 15 years, to call on extraordinary ministers of baptism in order to provide a baptismal ministry that is accessible to all and to make it possible for this sacrament to be prepared, celebrated and explained in the best possible way. Now, far from being lessened, the need to entrust this ministry to more people is becoming obvious in other parishes.

The ecclesiology of Vatican II taught us, once again, the primacy of the community in the service of evangelization, education and celebration of the faith. *Sacramenta propter homines*, the sacraments exist for the people... This is the perspective in which the internal requirements of the sacrament of Baptism and the conditions surrounding its celebration must be understood. In order to avoid any arbitrary conduct in the choice and deputation of the ministers of Baptism, as well as in the practice of this ministry, it is therefore important to reflect on the general guidelines applicable to the entire Church and on the situations that are specific to our own Church.

For this reason, in response to the questions that have been asked for some time of the Conseil épiscopal de direction de la pastorale (CEDP), and to follow up a variety of information received from the parishes in which the extraordinary ministry of Baptism is exercised, after the discussions held within the Presbyteral Council and the CEDP, I gave a team made up of members of the diocesan pastoral services the task to elaborate possible pastoral orientations and guidelines for the implementation of the extraordinary ministry of Baptism.

This orientation project was submitted to a consultation with the parishes concerned and with those that anticipate asking for an extraordinary minister of Baptism. Having received the favourable opinion of the CEDP, I am now issuing the Communique that makes these orientations official.

✍ Jacques Berthelet, C.S.V.
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INTRODUCTION

Christ himself gave the apostles the mission to sanctify, through Baptism, those who would accept the message of the Good News (cf. Mt 8:19-20; Mk 16:15-16). The Church believes in *one Baptism for the remission of sins* (Nicene Creed) and teaches that *Baptism regenerates us in the life of the Son of God; unites us to Christ and to his Body, the Church; anoints us in the Holy Spirit, making us spiritual temples+ (*Christifideles Laici*, no. 10).

Faithful to Christ's command, the Church wants to make sure that anyone who asks for Baptism **S** either for oneself or for one's child **S** Can be received and led under the best possible conditions to the celebration of the sacrament.

The Bishop, as successor of the apostles, must regulate what pertains to the celebration of Baptism in his diocese (*Lumen Gentium*, no. 26). Under his leadership, the priests and the deacons, who also received the sacrament of Holy Orders, are the ordinary ministers of Baptism (cf. *Lumen Gentium*, nos. 28 and 29; *Presbyterorum Ordinis*, no. 5; *Pastores Dabo Vobis*, no. 14). However, *Where the needs of the Church require and ministers are not available, lay people (...) can supply certain of their functions, that is (...) confer Baptism (...) in accordance with the provisions of the law+ (*C.J.C.*, no. 230,3). The needs of the faithful and of the communities come first, and the Church must use every means available to prevent anyone from being deprived of the new life given in Baptism.

PASTORAL ORIENTATIONS

We need to assess under what conditions the necessity of Baptism in view of salvation implies the recourse to extraordinary ministers, not to respond to punctual emergency situations, but to make sure that the Church's mission of sanctification is adequately fulfilled. While the priests and pastoral agents serving the Christian communities of our Diocese are decreasing in number and getting older, we see an ever greater need to accompany the families of those to be baptized to help them to fulfill their special responsibility as educators of faith. In short, the task of the baptismal ministry has become a lot more complex than it used to be, while the number of ministers in charge of it is decreasing.

Any ministry in the Church has its place as the continuation of the ministry of Christ, who, having been sent by the Father, in turn sends his apostles on a mission (cf. Jn 20:21). Thus, from the beginning until our times, the Church chooses and mandates those who are to perform a service among their brothers and sisters.

The extraordinary minister of Baptism must therefore be mandated by the Bishop. This mandate is to be carried out in the service of a particular community, for a determined period of time, according to the needs of that particular milieu. The Christian community concerned should be duly informed of the appointment of an extraordinary minister of Baptism in the manner deemed the most appropriate.

It is essential, especially during a first mandate, that in addition to the support found in the pastoral team of the parish, the extraordinary minister be supported by the diocesan Director of Christian initiation, who, along with the other diocesan services (liturgy, chancery, school of formation) will offer spiritual renewal, ongoing formation and a sharing of experiences.

Finally, although there is no essential connection between preparing for Baptism and presiding over the celebration, it is important that the minister **S** whether ordinary or extraordinary **S** who presides over the celebration of Baptism be present in an active and meaningful way in the preparation of the parents before the celebration, so as to ensure unity of meaning and a better intelligence of faith and sacrament.

PRACTICAL DISPOSITIONS

1. Circumstances that justify the appointment of an Extraordinary Minister

Pastoral and parish conditions :

- S** the increase of the number of sacramental celebrations and of the different pastoral services, especially of the requests for Baptism due to an increasing demographic expansion of the parish or pastoral unit;
- S** the decrease of the number of priests and the fact that they are getting older.

Personal conditions of the priests :

- S** the absence and/or inability of the priest due to a loss or decrease of his capacity to adequately assume the ministry and pastoral services to which a Christian community is entitled;
- S** the choice to organize the pastoral tasks within the parish team in such a way that the priest doesn't have to discharge only liturgical functions.

2. The Person to be chosen as Extraordinary Ministry

A mandated pastoral agent¹ is the preferred choice as extraordinary minister of Baptism. On the other hand, certain circumstances² may lead to the appointment of a baptized person already involved in the Christian community³.

The choice of an extraordinary minister is made according to certain criteria. The person appointed for this ministry must :

- « have a proven sense of the Church and of Christian commitment;
- « be connected to the parish community
 - S** by a mandated pastoral service or volunteer cooperation, especially in the baptismal ministry;
 - S** by an awareness of and an interest in the realization of the pastoral plan and of the evangelization project;
- « be a member of the mandated pastoral team or of the parish pastoral team, or be connected to it, so that this person may take part in the joint consultations and planning of those teams and work closely with those in charge of the parish community and with the agent(s) responsible for the other journeys of Christian initiation;
- « possess sufficient knowledge through studies and a relevant experience of the sacrament to be celebrated;
- « be open to completing his or her formation;
- « have the required aptitudes to preside over the celebration;
- « possess certain human qualities : congeniality, etc.

3. Procedure to be followed

After studying and reflecting on the pastoral situation and special needs of the parish community, and after consulting the members of the pastoral team or parish pastoral council, the Episcopal Vicar or Regional Animator, or the Pastor or priest moderator addresses a request to the Bishop through the intermediary of the Director of Human Resources.

¹ For easier reading, the masculine includes both genders.

² Examples of circumstances indicating a choice other than a mandated pastoral agent : work overload, absence of the required aptitudes or charism for this ministry among the current mandated pastoral agents.

³ The phrases *Christian community+ or *parish+ includes other models in our Diocese : pastoral unit, cluster of communities within a parish.

Presented in the request are :

- « an overview of the pastoral life of the Christian community and its pastoral needs;
- « the reasons justifying the request : the number of baptisms, the frequency, the preparation, the follow-up
- « the anticipated advantages of the appointment of an extraordinary minister of Baptism;
- « the person being considered for this ministry : his occupation, his involvement in pastoral activity, his experience of Baptism preparation, his pastoral formation, studies, diplomas, aptitudes, family and other responsibilities;
- « the reasons justifying the choice of this person.

After conducting the consultations deemed useful, the Director of Human Resources makes recommendations to the Bishop as to how this request should be answered. If the Bishop decides to give it a positive answer, he then issues the pastoral mandate of the person chosen as extraordinary minister.

4. The mandate of the Extraordinary Minister

The extraordinary minister is appointed by the Bishop for a specific milieu (parish, sector, pastoral unit). Barring an emergency, he does not exercise his function outside this milieu. The object of his ministry is the Baptism of little children. As for the Baptism of adults, i.e. 14 years and over, it must be referred to the Bishop (*C.J.C., no. 863*).

The local and regional pastoral teams must accompany the extraordinary minister of Baptism, help him in the realization of his mandate and facilitate his access to diocesan and other resources apt to be helpful to him in the accomplishment of his task.

The mandate of a new extraordinary minister is for one year. After an evaluation by the priest of the parish and at his request, the mandate may be renewed for a period of up to three (3) years, itself renewable. At the end of a mandate, it would be in order to re-evaluate the needs and the context of the parish (pastoral services essential to the growth of the community and human resources necessary to adequately carry out these services), as well as the conditions in which the extraordinary ministry is exercised.

In the event of a change of pastor or moderator, or of a major reorganization of the pastoral animation of a milieu, an evaluation of the needs of the community will be made. Further to this evaluation, it will be up to the pastor or the new team to request a renewal of the mandate of the extraordinary minister of Baptism if the needs justifying it still exist.

At Mass one weekend, or at some other appropriate time, the congregation can be informed of the reasons that motivated the request, in the perspective of the growth of the community. The meaning and role of the ordinary and extraordinary ministers will then be explained in relation to each other.

5. The celebration

As the celebration of a sacrament is the place par excellence where the meeting of God with the believer through the mediation of the Church can be seen and heard, it is vital that the rites, signs and symbols of the celebration be carefully used. It is fitting, therefore, that the

extraordinary minister learn by the most appropriate means the art of presiding over a liturgical celebration.

The celebrations are distributed among the ordinary and extraordinary ministers according to the needs of the community. Care should always be taken to explain clearly that the priest, by virtue of his ordination and of his service of leadership in the community, remains the ordinary minister of Baptism. However, the needs of local communities and the demands of the priestly ministry may, in some cases, justify a more frequent recourse to the services of an extraordinary minister.

When a priest is present at a community celebration of Baptism, it is normal that he be the one presiding over the celebration, by virtue of his ministry. If a priest from outside the community is invited by a family to preside over a baptism, and that baptism is taking place within a community celebration that would normally have been presided over by an extraordinary minister, then an arrangement must be made that respects both the ordinary ministry of the priest and the importance of the extraordinary minister as representative of the local community. Those concerned must therefore consult with each other in order to find the most appropriate way to proceed. The arrangement must also take into account the particular situation of the priest : his age, his health, his ability to preside over an assembly, etc.

Except in particular circumstances, the services of an extraordinary minister who is well integrated in the community will be called for in preference to those of a priest from the outside who could be present only for the celebration itself.

Conclusion

The mandate of the extraordinary minister does not create a new ministry, but it modifies the features of the face of the Church. On the one hand, it empowers men and women who are not ordained to participate in the exercise of the pastoral ministry, in connection with the priest who remains the ordinary minister, not as the owner, but as the principal servant. On the other hand, the recourse to an extraordinary minister prevents the confinement of the priestly ministry to the single model of sacramental service. It makes room for the Church as a communion always in the process of happening, in faithfulness to its mission, through real coresponsibility on the part of Christian men and women, who are recognized by the Bishop for an essential ministry for the upbuilding of the parish community.

Given in Longueuil on the first day of the month of September of the year nineteen hundred and ninety-nine.

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