

Foreword

The Cathedrals' Liturgy Group was formed early in 1994 at the initiative of the Church of England Liturgical Commission to promote good liturgical practice in cathedrals and to enhance the contribution that cathedrals might make to the worship of the wider Church.

Its members, who include deans and provosts, precentors, organists and architects, meet regularly to address a number of issues. These issues are discussed in a series of occasional papers.

The approach has been the same for each paper. Individual members of the group have written the paper, but successive drafts have been amended in the light of discussions in the Group. In each case, what we offer is the work of one or two individuals, modified by the Group as a whole, and issued with the general approval (and indeed, enthusiasm) of the Group.

We hope that the series may prove helpful to those who order Cathedral worship at a time of significant liturgical change and renewal.

Michael Perham

Other Papers in the Series

1. Ordination Liturgy
2. Ministries in the Cathedral Eucharist
3. Towards the Ideal Psalm Cycle
4. Celebrating New Ministries
5. Music at Ordinations
6. The Easter Vigil

INITIATION RITES IN CATHEDRALS

1. Baptism, the Bishop and the Cathedral

Just as the first half of the twentieth century witnessed a movement towards the recovery of the centrality of the eucharist, so the second half of the century was marked by an increasing rediscovery in many churches of the importance and meaning of baptism. There has been both a new appreciation of the ancient practice of the Church and also fresh thinking about the nature of baptism in relation to the Christian community, expressed for example in the report to the House of Bishops, *On The Way: Towards an Integrated Approach to Christian Initiation* (1995). The consequent influence on the Church of England's revised liturgy is summarized in the Introduction to *Common Worship: Initiation Services* (1998) pp.8-12.

On p.16 of that same volume, Note 1 concerning the Minister of Baptism affirms that *When the Bishop is present he normally presides over the whole service*. For the Bishop is the chief minister in all sacramental acts, the focus of the unity and common identity of those who are baptized into one communion and fellowship. The administration of Holy Baptism is a fundamental feature of the Bishop's ministry - much more so historically and theologically than the rite known as Confirmation - and perhaps there would be less of a perceived difficulty in delegating confirmation to the presbyterate if the bishops were more usually the ministers of baptism. Nevertheless, as with the eucharist, when in the absence of the Bishop other ministers preside at rites of initiation, they do so by virtue of their share in his *episcopate*.

It would be a clear affirmation both of the primary nature of the sacrament and of the Bishop's ministry of baptism if the Bishop were not only seen to be exercising that ministry but also baptizing

especially in his cathedral church. The new Cathedrals' Measure places great emphasis on the relationship between the Bishop and his cathedral; and the subject of Christian Initiation offers an opportunity for discussion between the Chapter and the Bishop and his Staff (and possibly the Bishop's Council) in order to formulate policy and determine practice. Obviously it is not practically possible or pastorally desirable for all acts of Christian Initiation to be administered by the Bishop in his cathedral (though it has been the practice in the comparatively compact diocese of Portsmouth for all confirmations to take place in the Cathedral); and it is even less realistic to expect the Bishop to charge around the parishes in order to baptize every candidate. Even so, it is a good general principle that when the Bishop is making a visitation to a parish or deanery there should be space in the programme for him not only to preside at the eucharist but also to baptize any new Christians who happen to be prepared and ready. Equally, there are days in the calendar of the whole Church, which historically and theologically are natural occasions for initiating new Christians, when it would be appropriate for the Bishop to affirm the centrality of baptism by baptizing "centrally" in his cathedral: namely Easter; the Feast of the Baptism of the Lord (first Sunday of Epiphany); Pentecost; Trinity Sunday; and All Saints. By the same token, such celebrations of Christian Initiation should be avoided during the preparatory periods of Lent and Advent.

Again it may not be practical to expect the Bishop to be in his cathedral on each of these baptismal feast days every year. But it should be possible to find up to four dates a year from amongst the Sundays (or Saturday evenings) of Eastertide including the period between Ascension and Pentecost, the Sundays during Epiphany, Trinity Sunday and the Sunday between 30th October and 5th November ("All Saints' Sunday").

There is a question as to where the community and congregation of a cathedral itself fits into all this. With perhaps the exception of the parish church cathedrals, there was a time when virtually the only

cathedral candidates for confirmation were from amongst the choristers and the children of the less geriatric minor canons; in which case they may have been confirmed at a “private” service in a side chapel. The sense of any relevance to the wider Church was hardly overwhelming; but thirty years ago, that may well have been true for much of cathedral life. In recent years, however, many cathedrals have experienced tremendous change and growth in their mission and ministry, not least in the development of their congregational and community life.

Much of this has, of course, been reflected in the recent Cathedrals’ Measure and the consequent revision of cathedrals’ constitutions and statutes - a process which is also intended to affirm and strengthen the link between a cathedral and its bishop and diocese. So while in one sense cathedral communities may be becoming more “parochial” and congregational in their atmosphere and involvement, they are at the same time reminded that the cathedral exists as the seat of the bishop and a centre of worship and mission for the whole diocese. Where space and numbers allow, it is good if a cathedral does not retreat into an exclusive, “private” community but that cathedral candidates for baptism and confirmation be presented to the Bishop at a diocesan initiation service. The one exception to this may be as and when the Bishop makes a Visitation, perhaps spending some days worshipping, praying, talking with and directing the cathedral community, during which it could be highly appropriate for him to baptize and confirm.

2. The Unity of the Rite

When candidates for baptism are old enough to be confirmed, or candidates for confirmation have also to be baptized, it is of course the norm that baptism and confirmation are celebrated and administered together in one rite. However, when confirmations are held in a cathedral there can sometimes be pressure for

candidates to be baptized in their parish shortly beforehand. The pressure may come from the candidates themselves, who understandably might feel a little nervous at the prospect of submitting to a soaking in front of a large and possibly unknown congregation; or from the home parish wanting to give the candidates a “send-off”; or from the cathedral and/or bishop keen to streamline and simplify the rite in the face of many candidates. Such pressure should be firmly resisted. Indeed, given what has been said about the primacy of baptism, it would be even more appropriate if the bishop were to baptize not only those to be confirmed, but also any other candidates from the parishes (especially siblings) too young to be confirmed. But even if we are clear about the relationship between baptism and confirmation, there remains a mist surrounding the link between baptism/confirmation and first communion; and the mist becomes a fog when it is thickened by variety of practice in admitting children to communion before confirmation.

There is an argument that, wherever possible, Christian Initiation should be celebrated within the context of Holy Communion so as to affirm the nature of Baptism and Eucharist as primary sacraments integral to each other. However, where confirmation rather than baptism is still regarded as “the ticket to communion”, then the celebration of the eucharist at a confirmation is more likely to be interpreted in terms of the confirmation candidates’ first communion - especially if younger children have been baptized but not confirmed at the same service. On the other hand, in dioceses where admission to communion is permitted before confirmation (but not of course universally imposed) then it may well be the case that candidates at a diocesan service in the Cathedral are presented by parishes with differing practices. Some of those to be confirmed may have been receiving communion for a number of years beforehand, while others will be looking forward to their “first communion” as a result of their confirmation. Until this dichotomy is resolved, there is perhaps something to be said for diocesan

services of initiation (when candidates from several congregations come to be baptized and confirmed together) being non-eucharistic; and those for whom “first communion” is the consequence of confirmation can then go home to celebrate this stage of their faith-journey in the company of their local eucharistic fellowship on the next Sunday.

In short, it would appear that this is a matter for local discussion in the light of local circumstances; and that cathedrals need to be open to celebrating Christian Initiation within both eucharistic and non-eucharistic liturgies. (*cf Appendix for sample structures*)

3. Marking the Journey

Common Worship: Initiation Services are influenced in particular by the theological model of faith as process and the Christian’s spiritual formation as a journey. (*cf. Common Worship: Initiation Services* pp.10 & 11). In the early Church, this sense of movement was reflected in the way that candidates were received into the body of the faithful. They were prepared apart from the congregation; and only when they had been baptized (in “living water”, such as a nearby stream or river) were they led in to the worshipping assembly, where the Bishop publicly acknowledged and ratified (“confirmed”) their initiation with the Laying-on of Hands and Anointing. Then, for the first time, the newly-baptized shared with the faithful in prayer and sacrament.

Many cathedrals were designed and built precisely to enable people to process; and so offer an opportunity to move the candidates and shift the focus as the liturgy progresses. For example at Lichfield Cathedral, a Deanery Baptism and Confirmation within Sunday Choral Evensong begins with the candidates seated at the west end, some way behind and apart from the rest of the congregation. During the opening hymn, the procession of the choir and ministers

sweeps past them en route to seats at the front of the Nave, but the candidates are left, as it were, "outside the camp". The Bishop greets the people and leads the Collect, and the choir sings the opening responses and psalmody. There follows the Old Testament Reading, the Magnificat, the New Testament Reading, the Sermon and the Anthem.

Then, in response to this proclamation of the Word, the candidates are led into the middle of the Nave to be presented to the Bishop and congregation. After the Decision and the Signing with the Cross, a hymn is sung during which the presenting ministers and the Bishop lead the candidates to the Font.

Now at Lichfield, as is no doubt the situation in many other cathedrals, the Font is out of sight of the majority of the congregation - in this case it is in the North Transept. Nevertheless, for the purposes of this rite, it is rather more important that the candidates actually make the journey than that they be seen by all of the people all of the time - provided, of course, that the sound system enables the congregation to hear what is going on in the Baptistry and to respond accordingly. It is better still, where space allows, that the whole congregation moves to the place of baptism - not for the sake of being able to see but, more importantly, to accompany and support the candidates in making their journey.

If, however, the Baptistry is so inaccessible/inaudible as to demand the use of a "portable font" then the vessel used for the water should be:

- positioned so as to allow movement of candidates between the Presentation and the Baptism, and between the Baptism and the Confirmation
- of sufficient capacity to permit the pouring of plenty of water - not a bird bath or, worse, an ash tray on a pedestal!