Principles of Christian Initiation

a. The renewal of baptismal practice is an integral part of mission and evangelism. Liturgical texts must point beyond the life of the church to God’s mission in the world.
b. Baptism is for people of all ages, both adults and infants. Baptism is administered after preparation and instruction of the candidates, or where they are unable to answer questions for themselves, of their parent(s) or guardian(s).
c. Baptism is complete sacramental initiation and leads to participation in the eucharist. Confirmation and other rites of affirmation have a continuing pastoral role in the renewal of faith among the baptized but are in no way to be seen as a completion of baptism or as necessary for admission to communion.
d. The catechumenate is a model for preparation and formation for baptism. We recognize that its constituent liturgical rites may vary in different cultural contexts.
e. Whatever language is used in the rest of the baptismal rite, both the profession of faith and the baptismal formula should continue to name God as Father, Son and Holy Spirit.
f. Baptism once received is unrepeatable and any rites of renewal must avoid being misconstrued as rebaptism.
g. The pastoral rite of confirmation may be delegated by the bishop to a presbyter.

Walk in Newness of Life

Section 1: Renewal of the Theology of Initiation

Introduction

1. Through baptism with water in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit, Christ unites us with himself in his death and resurrection, seals us with the Holy Spirit, and incorporates us into his body the church. Baptism does not happen in a vacuum, and its administration inevitably reflects the culture of particular faith communities. Baptism is the sacrament of once-for-all admission into membership in the catholic church, a particular expression of which is the local eucharist.

Grace, faith, and sacramental efficacy in relation to baptism
2. All that is involved in becoming Christian is signified in baptism. This has both individual and corporate implications. Baptism springs from God’s covenant of love and is thus the sacrament of justification through faith; baptism may be invoked interchangeably with faith in the New Testament. (e.g. Galatians 3.26f)

3. The inward part of baptism, including the promise of forgiveness of sins, rebirth to new life in Christ, and the gift of the Holy Spirit, is not only signified by the rite, but is also promised to all who receive it ‘rightly’ (Art. XXVII). Where baptism accompanies or even conveys a personal experience of conversion to Christ, then that promised gift of God is received along with the outward sign. Yet clearly baptism is sometimes ministered where there is no active faith on the part of the recipient (just as faith can exist where baptism has not yet been given). Even in such a case baptism is still true baptism with an objective validity. If one baptized in this way later comes to the active faith, any liturgical celebration of that faith must be based upon the original baptism, once given and still valid. The supposed ‘baptism’ of one already baptized contravenes this basic principle and is deplorable.

4. Children of believers are baptized into God’s people in the same manner as their parents and upon the same understanding of baptism. They thus participate in the one baptism common to all members of Christ.

5. The candidate’s response of faith to the grace of God is not always simultaneous with the administration of the sacrament. In the case of infants the response will be gradual, related to the stages of the child’s growth. There may be no apparent response in some cases, but even if the baptized person shows no signs of faith, yet she or he does belong by baptism to the community of the church – a God-given privilege which is to be respected.

6. There is need for the Anglican churches to relate the administration of baptism to the reality of the reception of the gospel. The sacrament must portray God’s grace as both given and received, so that a realistic visible boundary to the church on earth is established. Thus baptism, in its frontier role, should both convey good news to the world and model with it conversion and commitment to Christ.

Baptism of infants

7. The context of the baptism of infants is the faith of the church as mediated by believing parents, other sponsors, and other Christians. This faith is extended in love and responsibility to the child and in this way the child is nurtured in the faith into which he or she has been baptized. Hence it is appropriate to baptize infants when there is a reasonable expectation that the child will in fact be nurtured within the community of faith. Ordinarily, therefore, the baptism of infants requires the support of a believing parent.

8. This principle stands over against the practice of apparently indiscriminate baptism of all infants soon after birth. We regret that in the past the church has contributed to various popular
misunderstandings of baptism, e.g., as a form of ‘insurance’ for infants in case they die. This has resulted in the baptism of many who otherwise have no association with the church.

9. The current renewal of baptismal theology and consequent efforts to end indiscriminate baptism have significant implications for pastoral practice. Parents who have not participated actively in the eucharistic fellowship should be integrated into the worshipping community prior to the baptism of their children. Efforts to encourage a family’s active participation in the community after the child’s baptism are predictably unsuccessful where a parent has not already been integrated. Without prejudice to exceptional pastoral cases, it may be best for these families to defer the baptism of their children until the children can make their own profession of faith, or until parent(s) and other members of the Christian community are prepared to nurture them in the Christian faith.

**Baptism and Eucharist**

10. Baptism is the sacramental sign of full incorporation into the body of Christ. Thus all who are baptized should be welcomed into the eucharistic fellowship of the church. We affirm the statement, *Children and Communion* of the 1985 Anglican Liturgical Consultation in Boston.¹

11. Communion of all the baptized represents a radical shift in Anglican practice and theology. Over the past two decades there has been an increasing acceptance of this practice in the Anglican Communion, although some Provinces continue to require confirmation for admission to communion. We encourage Provinces to reflect upon baptismal theology and eucharistic discipline and to implement the recommendations of the Boston Statement.

12. There is a general tendency to require instruction prior to admission to communion. We must recognize that none of us ever fully comprehends the eucharist and that each of us is welcomed to the Lord’s table by the grace of God and not by our own merit.

13. Some provinces have considered it helpful to set a minimum age for admission to communion, but this should be only an interim step in transition to the norm of communion of all the baptized.

14. Unbaptized persons who through faith in Christ desire participation in the eucharistic fellowship should be encouraged to make their commitment to Christ in baptism, and so be incorporated within the one body which breaks the one bread.

**Baptism and Confirmation**

¹ See paragraph 6 in Section 3 on Confirmation. *Children and Communion* is appended to this collection of texts (see p. 25 below).
15. As part of the Prayer Book tradition, Anglican Churches have inherited the post-baptismal rite of confirmation. Until the last two decades the rite combined ratification of baptismal vows, the bishop’s laying on of hands in prayer and blessing, and admission to communion. Preparation of candidates has taken various forms.

16. Whatever its pastoral strengths, this discipline has lent itself to theological overvaluation and misinterpretation. There is little warrant in Scripture, the Reformers, or in the Prayer Book tradition itself, to support the notion that the imposition of hands somehow completes baptism and concludes the process of Christian initiation. This widespread notion has resulted in the exclusion of baptized children from full participation in the eucharist, with the further effect of forcing the age of confirmation downward, thus diminishing the possibility of a mature response on the part of the candidate.

17. In recent years various provinces of our Communion have recognized that baptism, of itself, admits to communion, as surely as it admits to the body of Christ. With this renewed understanding of baptism, the pressure for early confirmation is relieved so that the rite may actually express a mature ratification of baptismal faith.

18. Confirmation affords those baptized as infants an opportunity to affirm, as adults, the faith of the Christian communion into which they have been baptized. Given this understanding of the rite, the administration of confirmation at or following adult baptism is unnecessary and misleading, and should be discontinued. This does not, however, preclude the bishop from administering baptism.

19. Confirmation therefore stands as a pastoral office in its own right, and not as a part of the initiatory process. If the title ‘confirmation’ is retained, the status of the rite as a pastoral office must nevertheless be clearly understood.

Section 2: Baptism, Mission and Ministry

God’s Mission

1. Mission is first and foremost God’s mission to God’s world. ‘As the Father has sent me, even so I sent you’ (John 20:21). This mission is made visible in the person and work of Jesus and is entrusted by him to the church.

2. ‘When the Advocate comes, whom I will send to you from the Father, the Spirit of truth, who comes from the Father, he will testify on my behalf (John 15.26). The primary agent of mission is God the Holy Spirit, who brings into existence a community of faith to embody this mission and to make God’s new order manifest in a broken world. ‘You will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you; and you will be my witnesses’ (Acts 1.8; cf. John 15.27). The church needs the empowering of the Spirit to play its part in God’s mission; it is called to proclaim the
gospel, nurture people in the faith, care for the needy, and seek to transform the unjust structures of society.²

3. All the church does is expressive of this mission, when it is true to its nature. This must be so of its worship. As the church remembers its calling and waits on God in prayer, it is empowered for mission. Baptism in particular declares the gospel of God’s saving love in Christ, establishes the church as Christ’s body, and marks the individual believers as those called to participate in the work of the kingdom.

Baptism and evangelism

4. We welcome the developing awareness of the dignity and significance of baptism in the church, and believe that this needs to be consolidated by emphasizing the integral relation of evangelism and baptism. The journey into faith involves a process that includes awareness of God, recognition of God’s work in Christ, entering into the Christian story through the scriptures, turning to Christ as Lord, incorporation into the body of Christ, nurture within the worshipping community, and being equipped and commissioned for ministry and mission within God’s world. An adequate practice of baptism will recognize all these dimensions and will enable the church to play its full part in accompanying people on this journey. We therefore welcome the rediscovery of a pastoral and liturgical pattern which marks and celebrates these stages.

Come and see: a bridge to the life of faith

5. Evangelism in our Communion often involves groups for enquirers and new believers which also include mature believers who accompany and nurture them. Many provinces recognize the status of catechumen in preparation for baptism, have a rite for admission to the catechumenate, and have rich community-based patterns of Christian formation. Patterns of formation vary greatly, taking different forms in isolated rural communities, societies where natural community is important, and atomized urban society. The strength and vitality of a culture’s commitment to Christianity also affects patterns of personal formation. We recognize a debt to the Roman Catholic Church in making liturgical provision for marking the catechumen’s journey into faith, through the Rite of Christian Initiation of Adults (RCIA). We welcome also the initiative in the Episcopal Church (USA) in making available in its Book of Occasional Services (second edition, 1988) rites for the catechumenate for the unbaptized and similar rites for baptized persons who seek a renewal of faith.

6. The catechumenal process begins with the welcome of individuals, the valuing of their story, the recognition of the work of God in their lives, the provision of sponsors to accompany their journey, and the engagement of the whole Christian community in both supporting them and learning from them. It seeks to promote personal formation of the new believer in four areas:

formation in the Christian tradition as made available in the scriptures, development in personal prayer, incorporation in the worship of the church, and ministry in society, particularly to the powerless, the sick, and all in need. The catechumenal process commonly includes four distinct stages, with the transition between them liturgically marked within the assembly:

- Enquiry
- Formation, properly called the catechumenate
- Immediate preparation, sometimes known as candidacy
- Post-baptismal reflection, or mystagogy

7. We see this revival of the catechumenate as strengthening the ministry and mission of the church in a number of ways: it offers those seeking faith as way of exploring Christian discipleship and taking their place in the life and mission of the church; it respects the integrity and humanity of those seeking faith and avoids the danger of squeezing them into a pre-arranged and scheduled program; it challenges all the baptized to take evangelism seriously, and to become more effective in it. The catechumenate provides a model for other processes of personal formation. It restores to the community of faith its essential role as the minister of baptism. It challenges the church through the questioning and enthusiasm of new believers. It subverts the dominance of clergy by recognizing the responsibility and ministry of all the baptized.

The Baptizing Community

8. ‘One Lord, one faith, one baptism’ (Eph 4.5). We see the catechumenal process affirming and celebrating the baptismal identity of the whole community. As people participate in the process, whether as enquirers, catechumens, candidates, and initiates, or as sponsors, catechists, and clergy, the one baptism by which all are incorporated in the one body of Christ will be apprehended. In this way the whole church is formed as a participatory community, one whose members share life with one another, while at the same time being conjoined to the missionary purpose of God for which baptism calls the community into existence. Through the lens of baptism the people of God begin to see that lay ministry is important not simply because it allows an interested few to exercise their individual ministries, but because the ministry and mission of God in the church is the responsibility of all the baptized community.

Baptism: fount of justice and ministry

9. ‘For as the body is one and has many members, and all the members of the body, though many, are one body, so it is with Christ. For in the one Spirit we were all baptized into one body – Jews or Greeks, slaves of free – and we were all made to drink of one Spirit’ (1 Cor. 12.12-13). Baptism affirms the royal dignity of every Christian and their call and empowering for active ministry within the mission of the church. The renewal of baptismal practice, with a consequent
awareness of the standing of the baptized in the sight of God, therefore has an important part of play in renewing the church’s respect for all the people of God. A true understanding of baptism will bring with it a new expectancy about the ministry of each Christian. It will also provide an important foundation for allowing different Christians their true and just place within the life of the church. This is of particular significance for categories of Christians who are marginalized by church or society. Baptism gives Christians a vision of God’s just order; it makes the church a sign and instrument of the new world that God is establishing; it empowers Christians to strive for justice and peace within society.

**The Gospel for the Baptized**

10. ‘Do you not know that all of us who have been baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into his death?’ (Rom. 6.3). There are many reasons why the gospel should be preached to those who have been baptized. They may have fallen away from Christian fellowship and discipleship. They may never have had the will or the opportunity to respond to God’s gracious gift offered to them in baptism. They may have continued within the life of the church without a deep personal grasp of the reality signified in baptism. It is important for the integrity of the church’s sacramental practice that such people are not treated as if they have not been baptized. For this reason the baptized are not called catechumens. An opportunity for them to renew their baptismal commitment may be provided through a rite of confirmation or reaffirmation of faith; such a rite should reinforce rather than undermine their awareness of baptism. In many situations it may be helpful to provide personal formation similar to the catechumenate, including the involvement of sponsors as companions on the way. The Episcopal Church (U.S.A.) has made a valuable contribution in creating a series of rites to mark such a journey of renewal. As in the ancient practice of the order of penitents, Ash Wednesday and Maundy Thursday frame the final stage of reaffirmation. In other cultures and contexts other appropriate forms could be created to support people in their return to the dignity and ministry of baptism.

**Baptism of infants: patterns of preparation**

**Parents and sponsors**

11. When infants are to be baptized, parents and sponsors are the main focus of preparation and formation, since parents have an important part to play in the spiritual formation of children. In the past, parents and sponsors have undergone meagre (or no) preparation. Christian formation and the renewal of the baptismal process demand that this change. A few classes which simply instruct in a small amount of theology do not provide the necessary renewal of faith. What is required is a holistic approach in which the goal is formation, not simply the provision of information. The catechumenal model for the renewal of faith is helpful for this. A programme on catechumenal lines, with the involvement of lay persons, will help build bridges between the local community and parents and sponsors as well as encourage and help them to renew their
The catechumenate for infants or children?

12. The formation of a catechumenate for young children has been discussed in a number of places. It might be useful to admit to the catechumenate those young children whose parents/sponsors are going through a renewal process as described above. Until the parents are ready to accept the faith responsibilities in presenting their children for baptism, the children may continue as catechumens. It might also be useful to admit to the catechumenate those children whose parents choose to delay their baptism (for whatever reason). Proposals for adapting and using some of the liturgical rites of the catechumenate merit further investigation and experimentation. Limited experience has shown some initial benefit in doing this. A warning, however, should be sounded in this discussion: some clergy and parishes may be tempted to use the admission of young children to the catechumenate as a roundabout and non-confrontational way of refusing baptism. Therefore, infants should not be admitted as catechumens without an expectation of continuing nurture and formation. The whole area of a catechumenate for children needs to be explored further.

Clarifications on the ‘Catechumenate’

13. It may be helpful to identify three areas of possible confusion or difficulty:

14.1 Terminology: The word ‘catechumenate’ is often used as a shorthand term for the whole journey of faith leading to baptism and the emerging ministry of the baptized. In contemporary rites, ‘catechumenate’ describes only one of four periods of the journey into faith.

14.2 The term is often used as a synonym for a similar process provided for those already baptized. We would urge that the term ‘catechumen’ and ‘catechumenate’ should only be used for the unbaptized, while the term ‘catechumenal process’ may be used for any pattern of Christian formation.

14.3 The term ‘catechumen’ is regarded by some as antiquarian. However, there are advantages to using a word that resonates with the historic practice of the church. At the same time, simple terms may need to be found for liturgical rites that mark the stages of the journey in faith. ‘Baptism,’ ‘baptismal process’ and ‘reaffirmation of baptism’ may be better general terms than ‘catechumenate’. ‘Initiation’ also has wide currency although it may give rise to difficulties in cultures with developed rituals to mark birth or puberty.

15. Some believe that the catechumenal approach to baptism is in conflict with the New Testament practice of baptism on profession of faith. They think it may undermine the priority of grace made
explicit by placing baptism firmly at the start of a person’s public discipleship. Three points diminish this difficulty:

15.1 The period between welcoming enquirers as catechumens and the acknowledgement of their call as candidates for baptism must not be seen as a period of probation to see whether their discipleship matches up to certain criteria. All practices that appear to apply this sort of probation must be carefully avoided. This period should rather be seen as a period of growth and discernment in which both individuals and church are involved.

15.2 The practice of baptism in the New Testament cannot be separated from the process of entry into the gospel, nor from the Christian community’s welcome and reception of the candidate. Baptism was not simply a formal, official act devoid of profound personal encounter and communication. If baptism is properly to effect what it represents, the church as well as the candidate must be full and meaningfully present for the sacramental act. In most social contexts this will imply something like the sort of extended process to be found in the ancient and modern phased rites of initiation. ‘Catechumenate’ and ‘candidacy’ should not be seen as stages of preparation for an eventual baptism, but as part of the extended process of baptism: conversion and baptism unfolding together.

15.3 It may be helpful to make a clear distinction between the stages of ‘enquirer’ and ‘catechumen’ on the one hand, in which the decision for Christ and baptism is being made, and the stages of ‘candidate’ and ‘neophyte’ in which the candidate and church are involved together in an extended and full celebration of the baptismal reality.

16. Another concern raised by the catechumenal approach to baptism is a fear that it will raise barriers between the church and the surrounding culture. Some are anxious not to alienate those who are associated with the church as God-fearers. Where the church is a culturally distinct community in the context of a plurality of religious faiths, some are concerned that baptism may wrongly be seen as involving the denial of one’s cultural heritage. Properly practiced, the catechumenal approach to baptism can lower the barriers between church and society in two ways: first, it creates a bridge to enable people outside the church to find their way in; second, it encourages the church to value and respect the cultural heritage of those coming to faith.

Section 3: Renewal of Baptismal Faith

1. Many Anglicans assume that their current confirmation practice (or something like it) is of great antiquity, going back perhaps even to New Testament times. History will not support this point of view.
2. There is no proved link between, (i) the events described in Acts 8 and (ii) the imposition of the bishop’s hand and the second anointing after baptism which we find in baptism as described in the Apostolic Tradition attributed to Hippolytus of Rome (third century). There is very good reason to believe that the second anointing by the bishop was a local Roman practice which was only extended to the rest of the western church as the influence of Rome expanded. There is no good reason to conclude that chrismation in the east is the oriental counterpart of western confirmation; it is more likely to be the counterpart of the first, not the second, anointing. Some believe that confirmation has never existed in the eastern churches.

3. Nor is the medieval picture less clouded. Confirmation (in those days, of infants) was included among the sacraments only in the twelfth century and was required in England by Archbishop Peckham as a prelude to communion only in the thirteenth century by a regulation whose very existence implies that another practice was normal. It was a regulation much disobeyed, where the vast size of dioceses, the non-residency of many bishops, and the difficulties of travel prevented the access of many Christians to the rite.

4. The Reformation emphasis on conscious and intelligent faith raised the age of candidates. However, practical problems continued in post-Reformation England, and were magnified in those colonies where bishops were not provided. Confirmation was unknown in the American colonies and during the early years of the new republic because there were no bishops. American clergy were regularly confirmed just prior to their ordination in England. In Australia the problem was solved by a more imaginative exercise of economy: archdeacons presided at confirmations prior to the availability of episcopal ministry, even after the first bishop had arrived.

5. None of this obviates the value that the laying on of hands with prayer has had in the lives of so many people, whether it occurred before or at puberty or at some later turning point in their pilgrimage. What it does mean is that no single model may be claimed as absolute and inviolable, a completion of baptism and a necessary rite of passage to the eucharist.

Affirmation of the relationship between baptism and eucharist

Relation of baptism and eucharist

6. Baptism is the public act which marks the beginning of the Christian life. Its meaning, however, stretches both backward and forward beyond the rite itself into a wide range of experiences and events which create the larger context of Christian initiation. For many people, baptism is the natural consequence of having been born into a Christian family and indicates incorporation into the faith of the parents. For others, the path to Christian membership has been influenced by

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some person, perhaps a friend or even a stranger, whose own faith has been a witness to the presence and love of God. Whatever the particular factors, which can be infinitely varied, baptism is a sign of a person’s entrance into the visible community of the church as a participant in the common life of the body of Christ. The fundamental expression of that life is found in the gathering of all the baptized around the word and table of the Lord. Eucharist is the on-going sign of the identity which is established through baptism, and fulfils the intention of Christian membership by the nurture of all God’s people in the eucharistic gifts as the instruments of grace and the expression of the common faith into which all have been baptized. Although this essential link between baptism and eucharist came to be obscured through the infrequency of the communion of the laity, recent decades have seen a recovery of the earlier tradition of the church that eucharist is in fact the fulfilment and sacramental completion of the initiatory process, and also the continuing expression in the Christian life of our shared baptismal identity.

Types of belonging

7. The church’s fellowship is participation or communion in the life of the Holy Trinity, as revealed in the life, death and living again of Jesus Christ. Those who are baptized with water in the Name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit, are fully received into the church’s fellowship as members of the body of Christ.

8. An active member of the church of Christ is one who has been baptized and who shares regularly in the life of the eucharistic community and in its service in the wider world.

9. Baptism admits to full membership of a eucharistic community which, because of its missionary character, is open and inclusive rather than closed and exclusive. Within its fellowship, those who have been baptized may find the freedom to come to faith and express their faith in their own way and at their own pace, and to feel always that they have access to all that the worshipping community is able to provide for them and to offer all that it is able to receive from them.

10. Baptism admits to full membership of the universal church of God, even though that church is divided. A person who has been baptized within another part of the church, and who wishes to be received into the Anglican Communion, should be required only to produce evidence of baptism and to be welcomed and received through the laying on of hands. Rites of reception should respect the prior church allegiance of those received.

11. Full membership of the church is conferred through baptism. The right to hold particular offices in the church or to exercise a vote at church meetings may be governed by regulations specifically drawn up for the purpose.

12. Those who have been baptized in infancy are to be nurtured and formed in the faith as people who already are in full membership of the body of Christ, and who at some later stage may choose to make public professions of their faith.
Celebrations of significant moments/awakenings in the Christian life

Affirmation/commitment

Understandings of confirmation

14. Anglicans have assumed that confirmation includes the laying on of hands with prayer, at some time after baptism. A distinct Anglican custom is that the hands are those of a bishop (though there have been exceptions to this). Further, the rite has generally been used to admit baptized Christians to the holy communion. Among Anglicans, at least five notions of confirming (not necessarily exclusive of each other) have been identified.

15.1 Confirmation is a person’s ‘confirming’ the baptismal covenant after preparation and reflection. This is the major understanding in the 1662 BCP. It assumes that the candidates were baptized as infants, and must respond in a life of active faith to God’s grace given them.

15.2 Confirmation is the ratifying of a Christian’s belonging to the church of God. Such an act takes place in the presence of the bishop, who represents the wider household of faith. Anglicans who hold this view look to the phrase ‘to be confirmed by the bishop’ in the 1662 BCP as pointing to a wider view than the candidates confirming their covenant.

15.3 Confirmation is the last act in a sequence of rites of entry to the church. Those holding this view trace the separate laying on of hands back to the third century rites of initiation. While other actions came to be delegated by the bishop, hand-laying to complete initiation continued to be the bishop’s role.

15.4 Confirmation is sealing by the Holy Spirit. This view gained popularity in the late nineteenth century, and was understood in various ways. Some saw the bishop as the only minister who could impart the Spirit in continuity with Christ’s gift to the church. Some used confirmation as a means of relating ‘conversion’ experiences to the church’s rites. Some wanted to move beyond a ‘civil religion’ view of baptism by stressing the Spirit’s role in confirmation. Some used confirmation as a denominational marker, excluding any not episcopally ‘sealed’ from holy communion, since they did not have the Spirit.

15.5 Confirmation is a form of ‘commissioning’ by the bishop for the ministry of Christian life. This has mistakenly been called ‘ordination of the laity’, a notion which diminishes baptism.

\footnote{The term ‘baptismal covenant’ is used in this document as having scriptural and Anglican heritage. Other terms which are used in our tradition are ‘baptismal vows’ and ‘baptismal promises’.
15.6 In addition, it has been argued in recent liturgical work that the laying on of hands as a dismissal blessing is the origin of what came to be known as confirmation.\textsuperscript{5} Such a view may be helpful in endeavouring to renew the meaning of confirmation as commissioning.

16. The fourth view has been firmly set aside in the past two decades in New Testament and liturgical scholarship, where it has been made clear that sacramental initiation is complete in baptism. Therefore the role of confirmation as necessary for admission to communion is undermined. An increasing number of Anglican provinces have moved to admit children to communion before confirmation, and to receive communicant members of other churches at the Lord’s table and also as regular communicants.

17. Many agree on the first view of confirmation but whether this rite should be required of candidates for baptism making the baptismal promises for themselves is a moot point. Many Anglicans consider a separate act of commitment to be necessary for those baptized as infants, but not as an essential prerequisite to participation in the eucharist. Some prefer a single rite of baptism in water, with provision that illustrative ceremonies such as anointing and imposition of hands may be separated from it in point of time to mark stages in the Christian’s growing life. Any or all of these stages could be delegated by the bishop to a presbyter.

18. The laying on of hands, with prayer for further strengthening by the Spirit, is open to many uses. Such a ‘stretched’ rite, perhaps termed ‘commissioning’ or ‘affirmation’, able to be repeated as different pastoral needs arise, and creatively adapted to various times and places, may bring new life to this distinctive Anglican heritage. To such a broadening view we now turn.

Renewal of faith

19. Baptism is the unrepeatable sign of initiation into Christ and his church, the validity of which does not depend on the age of the candidate, the amount of water used, or the manner of baptizing. But the church long ago recognized that the journey of the baptized in their exploration of the life of faith is a process punctuated by failure and forgiveness, repentance and renewal. These experiences are sometimes marked by signs recalling baptism – sprinkly with water, making the sign of the cross with ashes on Ash Wednesday or with water on entering church, laying on of hands in reconciliation, and affirming of baptismal promises.

20. Many provinces in the Communion now make provision for the affirmation of baptismal promises, some of them including the explicit use of water. The assumption is that there is no limit to the number of times baptismal promises may be affirmed. This is an assumption with which we would agree. We would want to distinguish:

20.1 a simple remembering of baptism, for instance in the course of witnessing someone else’s baptism;

20.2 a serious affirmation of the baptismal covenant by all or most of the congregation on a special occasion, such as at Easter or New Year. However, since the regular renewal of the life of the baptized is in the eucharist (with confession and absolution), the solemn affirmation of the baptismal covenant – a comparative innovation in Anglican liturgy in any case – should be infrequent and preceded by due notice and preparation;

20.3 a celebration of the renewed faith of an individual or group. When someone baptized as an infant – and sometimes never nurtured in the faith – has a ‘conversion experience’ or finds new faith in Christ, there is often a need for a dramatic celebration of this in the local Christian community. The same is sometimes true when someone has an experience of the Spirit so overwhelming (and marked by an initial speaking in tongues) that some are tempted to call it a ‘baptism in the Spirit’. For some, one of the corporate affirmations described above will be sufficient. But the requests of those looking both for immersion in water and for the laying on of hands to mark a significant experience of the Spirit must be taken seriously. For them, a lesser ceremony will not do, and a more specific rite, which may include both the laying on of hands and the use of water, as well as provision for public catechesis or testimony, should be provided. We believe that care should be taken not to deny the baptism that has already taken place in the person’s life or the mode of that baptism by affusion. No province should adopt a form of this kind until it is satisfied that neither those involved nor others who are aware of it will confuse it with baptism.

21. To avoid confusion with baptism we urge that the following be noted in the preparation of any rite for local use:

21.1 Words which define what is happening should be said by the whole congregation;

21.2 Words should be used to affirm clearly the baptism which has already taken place in the person’s life;

21.3 Water may be used by a minister in a manner which is not suggestive of baptism, e.g., sprinkling a number of people at once, but not individually;

21.4 The sign of the cross in water or oil may be made by the persons themselves or by sponsors.

Reception from other churches or communions

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Methods of baptism vary from submersion (the water completely covering the candidate), through immersion (the candidate kneels or stands in water which is also poured over the head), to affusion (water poured over the head).
22. Reception of a baptized Christian from another communion is a significant moment in that person’s life which calls for public affirmation. At least since the nineteenth century Anglicanism has distinguished between those already confirmed or sealed in a Christian tradition which has retained the historic episcopate, and members of other communions. If confirmation is not regarded as an essential part of full initiation, this distinction is no longer appropriate. Nevertheless reception should be made available as a public act at which the bishop usually presides. A rite for this should include:

22.1 Affirmation of Christian faith;

22.2 Expression of a willingness to live within Anglican life and order;

22.3 Laying on of hands with prayer for perseverance in the faith;

22.4 Welcome into the fellowship both by the bishop (or bishop’s delegate) and congregation.

Reconciliation of the lapsed

23. Reconciliation of the lapsed concerns those who after baptism ceased for a period to take any active part in church life. This should be an optional rite for use when a public affirmation is needed, but an unobtrusive return will often be the appropriate way back.

24. If present the bishop should preside. The elements in any public rite should be:

24.1 Affirmation of Christian faith;

24.2 Prayer for perseverance in the resolve to return to practice of the faith;

24.3 The welcome, appropriately expressed in the context of the Peace.

Restoration of the penitent

25. Restoration of a penitent concerns restoration of those who have repented of sin, even when there has been no lapse of participation in church life.

26. The rite will usually be celebrated by minister and penitent alone, but its corporate dimension should always be clear.

27. There will be contexts where a public celebration is appropriate after grace and notorious sin. In such circumstances the rite should take place in conjunction with the act of penitence in a public liturgy.

28. The elements should include:

28.1 Expression of penitence (including appropriate confession of sin);

28.2 Absolution and prayer for perseverance,
28.3 Restoration to fellowship. In a public context this would appropriately be expressed in the Peace, leading to shared communion.

Cultural celebrations

29. The 1988 Lambeth Conference affirmed that the gospel judges every culture on its own criteria of truth, challenging some aspects of the culture while endorsing others for the benefit of the church and society. The Conference urged the church everywhere to work at expressing the unchanging gospel of Christ in words, actions, names, customs, liturgies which communicate relevantly in each society.

30. It should be noted that the historic liturgies we have inherited were influenced by the cultures in which those liturgies developed. The Anglican provinces should therefore be encouraged to develop liturgies which are culturally relevant while remaining faithful to the Christian faith.

31. In the African context, for instance the issue of Christian initiation can find great enrichment when the traditional initiation ceremonies are understood, and the same is true elsewhere. In most African cultures initiation into the life of a community begins with a celebration of the naming of a child. For those who are believers in Christ, the ceremony of naming of a child can now be associated with the initiation of the child into the family of God’s people in baptism. Some of the traditional rites of naming may be included in the baptismal process. Just as women helping the mother burst into allutations of joy at the birth of a child, so allutations may mark the climax of baptism when the child is baptized in the name of the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit. In every culture death is marked by significant rites. For Christians, funeral rites mark the completion of the earthly journey in Christ begun in baptism. Customs marking the end of life should therefore be associated with baptismal symbols. In this way the transition of Christians into the full presence of Christ recalls their initiation into Christ in baptism.

32. The next important ceremony in some societies is the initiation of boys and girls into manhood and womanhood at the time of puberty. The ceremony is preceded by a period of intense instruction in what it means to be a man or a woman. When the rite is performed, those initiated are regarded as no longer children but adults. The service of confirmation by a bishop has been regarded as equivalent to this initiation into manhood or womanhood. In cultures in which initiation into adulthood is a significant event, we encourage churches to develop rites to observe this passage, whether these be services of confirmation, commissioning to Christian witness and service, commitment to Christian life, or other appropriate rites.

The role of the bishop

33. Any contemporary discussion of the theology of Christian initiation in the Anglican Communion must inevitably lead to a discussion of the ministry of the bishop. As admission to communion becomes less dependent upon confirmation and the age and numbers of candidates presenting themselves for confirmation change, questions are being raised as to how bishops will continue
to exercise a visible ministry among the members of the local congregation and what shape that ministry might take.

34. There are some who fear that changes in confirmation practice and renewed emphasis on baptism might deprive episcopal ministry of its primary pastoral contact with the faithful. However, it must be stated that the Anglican tradition has a consistent liturgical tradition which has a broader vision of the scope of episcopal ministry.

35. This vision, contained in the traditional and contemporary ordinals of the Anglican communion, calls the bishop to be first and foremost a pastor. The bishop is ‘to know (the) people and to be known by them’ This pastoral ministry extends to the ordained and to the laity, since by the bishop’s personal care and provision of ministers to share in this ministry of pastoral care, the church is built up in love. It has also been a consistent element of the Anglican vision of the episcopate that bishops are to care for the poor and needy, speak for the voiceless, defend the helpless, and exercise a prophetic role in their society.

36. One expression of this episcopal ministry of pastoral care is found in the bishop as teacher of the faith. This ministry takes place in two arenas. First, within the local church, the bishop is called to preach the word of God, ‘enlightening the minds and stirring up the conscience of (the) people.’ By this and other means, bishops encourage and support the baptized in their gifts and ministries.

37. Second, bishops are responsible for seeing that the good news of God in Jesus Christ is proclaimed to the world. Their life and teaching, as well as the life and teaching of their people, are to be a public witness to God’s saving love. As leaders of a community of faith, bishops are to enable the church to fulfil its mission.

38. Bishops also exercise pastoral care in their role as guardians of the church’s unity. They are the personal signs that the local congregations form a larger and diverse diocesan community that is itself part of a national and international community of dioceses.

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7 See the collect for the consecration of a bishop, BCP, 1662, p. 373.
8 ASB, 1980, p. 388.
9 BCP (USA) 1979, p. 518. See also the examination of the 1662 and parallel liturgical units of contemporary Anglican ordinals.
10 BCP (USA) 1979, p. 518
11 Ibid, p. 518.
39. The bishop expresses the unity of the church by presiding at its liturgical rites. Whenever possible, the bishop presides at baptism, whether of adults or children, and eucharist, leading the people in offering the sacrifice of praise and thanksgiving. Bishops also exercise their authority through delegating or presiding, as we have indicated above, at the church’s other rite of commitment, such as confirmation, affirmation, the reception of Christians from other communions, and celebrations of reconciliation.

40. These other rites of commitment are articulations of the ministry which all Christians enter at their baptism. The bishop’s presidency at these rites derives from the bishop’s role as the chief pastor of the baptizing community.

Section 4: Rites of Initiation

1. Baptism is the rite of admission to the bishop of Christ; but other liturgical rites may be appropriate to mark different stages in a person’s journey to faith. These should involve the local congregation and sponsors with the candidate. Such catechumenal rites have already been adopted and found to be valuable in some provinces of the Anglican Communion, and others may wish to learn from their experiences. In some cultural contexts it may be fitting to include within these rites exorcism and the giving of a Christian name. In the case of those unable to answer for themselves, parallel rites for parents and sponsors may be devised as part of the process of preparation. Care should be taken to distinguish rites which properly belong to the process of becoming a Christian from those which celebrate different stages of human development, such as the birth of a baby and the onset of puberty.

2. Since baptism is the full and complete rite of initiation into the church, no further rite of admission to communion is essential. However, until this principle can be fully implemented in the Anglican communion, pastoral need in some places may call for the provision of such a rite for those baptized in infancy. Liturgical opportunities may also be needed for individuals and groups to reaffirm the baptismal profession of faith from time to time. No pre- or post-baptismal rite should overshadow the centrality of the sacrament of baptism itself.

The occasion of baptism

3. Whenever possible, the rite of baptism should take place within the principal eucharistic celebration on a Sunday or holy day, immediately following the ministry of the word. Provinces may wish to designate appropriate seasons for baptism, of which Easter is one. When the bishop is present, it is particularly appropriate that baptism be celebrated, so that the bishop may preside over the rite.


The structure of the baptismal rite

4. The same rite, with only a minimum of adaptation, should be used for both those able and those unable to answer for themselves. The following order is desirable:

4.1 Presentation of the candidate(s). Sponsors should present each candidate by name to the presiding minister and to the congregation. They may also attest to the candidates’ faith and manner of life. The congregation may respond by indicating their support.

4.2 Renunciation of evil. This expression of repentance may also include candidates’ individual testimony to conversion.

4.3 Prayer over the water. This may take place before or after the renunciation of evil, or after the profession of faith. In giving thanks for the gift of water, the prayer should draw upon the wealth of appropriate scriptural imagery, and especially the great themes of Exodus and Covenant. At the very least it must make reference to God’s act of creation, to the redemptive work of Christ, and to the action of the Holy Spirit in baptism.

4.4 Profession of Christian faith. A question and answer form is most effective for the affirmation of Trinitarian faith.

4.5 The administration of water. Whenever possible, candidates should be thoroughly immersed in water, or at least have it generously poured over them, as tradition Anglican rites direct. If appropriate provision for this method of administration cannot be made in the church building, the baptism may take place in another location. The construction or renovation of church buildings should allow for the abundant use of water in baptism. Whatever language may be used in the rest of the rite, both the profession of faith and the baptismal formula should continue to name God as Father, Son and Holy Spirit, to ensure acceptance both within the Anglican Communion and in the wider church.

4.6 Post-baptismal ceremonies. Not only traditional ceremonies, such as anointing and consignation, but also symbolic acts drawn from local culture offer valuable means of explicating the significance of baptism. But, while it is important that these be vivid and expressive, they must not obscure the centrality of the baptismal act itself.

5. It is important to note that effective celebration requires much more than the provision of suitable texts. The setting, choice of music, catechesis of the local congregation and the incorporation of symbols and customs which are appropriate to the candidates and the community also have important contributions to make.

Ministries in relation to baptism

6. The Church is the baptismal community into which new members are incorporated. The congregation should therefore not only witness the rite but also play an active part in the whole
process, from evangelism to nurture of the newly baptized in Christian faith and life. Some expression of this responsibility should find a place within the baptismal rite.

7. The sponsors, in addition to presenting the candidates, may also lead prayer for them during the rite and, together with the newly baptized, perform appropriate ministries within the eucharist. In the case of those unable to answer for themselves, the sponsors make the renunciation and profession of faith. This may be understood as speaking on behalf of the candidate; as expressing future intentions for the candidate; as speaking on their own behalf; or as combination of these. It is also appropriate for them to give public acknowledgement of their continuing responsibility for the Christian formation of those whom they have sponsored. Parent(s) should normally be among the sponsors of infants.

8. The minister presiding at the eucharist also presides over the baptismal rite, and should say the prayer over the water, receive the candidates’ profession of faith, and take some part in the administration of the water. Deacons or other ministers may assist in the administration of the water; and other parts of the rite may be delegated to them.

Appendix

Recommendations attached to the Statement of the First Anglican Liturgical Consultation at Boston 1985 on Children and Communion

i. That since baptism is the sacramental sign of full incorporation into the church, all baptized persons be admitted to communion.

ii. That provincial baptismal rites be reviewed to the end that such texts explicitly affirm the communion of the newly baptized and that only one rite be authorized for the baptism whether of adults or infants so that no essential distinction be made between persons on basis of age.

iii. That in the celebration of baptism the vivid use of liturgical signs, e.g., the practice of immersion and the copious use of water be encouraged.

iv. That the celebration of baptism constitute a normal part of an episcopal visit.

v. That anyone admitted to communion in any part of the Anglican Communion be acknowledged as a communicant in every part of the Anglican Communion and not be denied communion on the basis of age or lack of confirmation.

vi. That the Constitution and Canons of each province be revised in accordance with the above recommendations; and that the Constitution and Canons be amended wherever they imply the necessity of confirmation for full church membership.
vii. That each province clearly affirm that confirmation is not a rite of admission to communion, a principle affirmed by the bishops at Lambeth in 1968.

viii. That the general communion of all the baptized assume a significant place in all ecumenical dialogues in which Anglicans are engaged.