

# Guidelines for Celebration of Holy Baptism in a Correctional Setting

## **GUIDELINES FOR VOLUNTEER CHAPLAINS (LCMS ORDAINED CLERGY)**

Celebrating Baptisms in the correctional setting is an opportunity for Word and Sacrament ministry that may be a blessing in your role as a volunteer chaplain. It is suggested that when approached with this request from an inmate who is involved in your ministry, you notify your institutional supervisor (the staff chaplain or staff person to whom you report). Do this especially if you are unaware of what the policy is and what procedures may be in place at your facility to ensure this Sacrament is offered in a God-pleasing manner. While making arrangements for the Baptism, check with the staff chaplain as to whether it may be conducted during a Divine Service you are officiating. If there are security issues, then arrange for a private Baptism.

If allowed at the facility, usually the staff chaplain will assist you in arranging for the instruction of the inmate(s) according to the LCMS doctrine of Holy Baptism. There needs to be a discussion with the prospective Baptism candidate to confirm that he or she is sincere in his/her desire to be baptized and has not already been baptized. If the inmate has already been baptized, sensitive and tactful instruction and pastoral care will hopefully be sufficient to confirm the person in his/her previous Baptism.

Once the Baptism has been approved, instruction given and arrangements made, it is expected that you will have already taken appropriate steps to have this newly baptized person become a member of either the congregation you are serving or a congregation in the area to which the inmate might be returning when released. Whether the inmate becomes a baptized member of your congregation or a different church, request permission for the inmate to start receiving through the mail appropriate items, such as a devotional booklet. A word of caution here: Make sure the materials are “sanitized” so that the congregation involved is not sending the inmate personal information about you, other volunteers or members. Congregational newsletters or bulletins should not be sent due to the personal information they often contain.

Once the inmate moves, if he or she is being released and is moving out of the area or is transferred to another institution, a reasonable effort needs to be made to make sure his/her membership is properly transferred. This will involve conversations with the inmate, the releasing congregation and the receiving congregation so that all is done in good order.

## **GUIDELINES FOR STAFF CHAPLAINS (LCMS ORDAINED CLERGY)**

Assuming all is in order with the institution regarding the practice of Baptism, before instruction in Holy Baptism begins, the chaplain is encouraged to see if there is a congregation that will accept the inmate as a baptized member and provide pastoral care through you — the staff chaplain — and/or directly by the pastor. If there is a congregation who will receive the baptized inmate as a member, determine with the pastor how to proceed with instruction (through you, with you or on his own, if the institution permits). When it is time for the Baptism, if security issues prevent officiating the Baptism in a Divine Service and a private Baptism needs to be solemnized, consider (if possible) including a witness from the local congregation as well as encouraging prayers by the receiving congregation during their worship.

If a congregation cannot be enlisted to serve as the home church for the inmate, the chaplain is encouraged to proceed with the Baptism, following appropriate instruction and pastoral care. As noted above, when a congregation is involved, follow the guidelines for providing the now-baptized inmate appropriate, sanitized materials from his or her congregation. If the inmate has become a member of a local congregation, encourage the pastor to offer pastoral care to the inmate, according to your institution's guidelines for clergy visits. This will also have been discussed with the local pastor when he was making this consideration with his congregation. This same consideration may be made for non-local pastors as well, if the pastor wants to come and visit his new parishioner.

## **GUIDELINES FOR COMMISSIONED MINISTERS OF THE GOSPEL AND LAY VOLUNTEERS**

Lay volunteers and non-ordained professional church workers who are providing prison and/or jail ministry as volunteers or staff chaplains are asked to work with their own pastor or another local pastor using the guidelines provided above. When instructing the inmate — assuming time permits — the use of Luther's Small Catechism is encouraged. In addition, a confession of faith (public, if possible) by the inmate would be an expected result of instruction, if it is appropriate for the institution.

In an emergency, when an inmate is near death and asks to be baptized, the inmate's request should not be denied. If possible, an LCMS pastor should be asked to baptize the inmate. But if that cannot be arranged in time, another Christian prison chaplain

should be asked. If that is not possible, the commissioned minister or lay volunteer should baptize the inmate. If someone other than an LCMS chaplain or pastor baptizes the inmate, care should be taken so that the Baptism is an application of water in the triune name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit so that the Baptism is a valid and certain assurance of God's forgiving grace. (See "A Short Form for Holy Baptism in Cases of Emergency" in *Luther's Small Catechism with Explanation*, at Question 260, as well as the additional resources mentioned below.)

There may also be the rare occasion in non-emergency contexts when a pastor is unwilling to provide this Sacrament. (For instance, he may have a pastoral relationship with the inmate that makes him privy to knowledge that prevents the Baptism. In such cases, the pastor may be unable to share any aspect of what he knows because of the confessional seal.) In the unusual circumstance when a local pastor is unwilling to provide the Baptism, the lay volunteer or commissioned minister would be wise to discuss the pastor's reluctance to baptize with the pastor himself and then, if needed, with the circuit visitor or district president. If the circuit visitor or district president supports the decision not to baptize the inmate, the commissioned minister or lay volunteer should respect that decision, since it is likely based on legitimate pastoral considerations.

However, it could be that in such circumstances, the circuit visitor or pastoral designee would support the request for Baptism and assume the responsibility of baptizing and possibly also arranging for follow-up pastoral care. (In addition, the district prison ministry coordinator should be informed on these rare occasions.) If the volunteer lay person or commissioned minister has the approval of the circuit visitor or district president to proceed in non-emergency situations, an adaptation of the Holy Baptism liturgy found in one of the LCMS hymnals is the preferred order to use if time permits.

The *Lutheran Service Book* (Page 1023) and the *LSB Pastoral Care Companion* provide a format for "Holy Baptism — In Cases of Emergency" that may be used. In addition, *Lutheran Worship* and *The Lutheran Hymnal* provide forms for emergency Baptism, as do the *Lutheran Worship Agenda* and the *Lutheran Worship Little Agenda*. Then again, when there is limited time for instruction, all that is necessary is water and the spoken Word: "Name, I baptize you in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit. Amen." The Apostles' Creed and Lord's Prayer can also be spoken when only minutes are available. Resources for emergency Baptism should be reviewed at the time of orientation to chaplaincy in an institution.

The Baptism also needs to be officially recorded in the chaplain's records as well as with a congregation — if possible — whose pastor will hopefully announce the Sacrament of God's grace to his congregation.

Finally, if the institution's policy permits and the chaplain's supervisor thinks it is wise, a certificate of Baptism is given to the inmate as a constant reminder that he/she has been marked as a child of God, a new creation in Christ. If the institution does not allow the giving of a Baptism certificate to the inmate, perhaps his/her certificate could be sent to the inmate's requested next of kin/family member.

## CONCLUSION

We pray that these guidelines regarding Holy Baptism will serve as a God-pleasing guide for the mission and ministry that the Lord has called you to serve in your correctional setting. If you have questions or concerns, please contact the prison ministry contract coordinator or SPM director at [spm@lcms.org](mailto:spm@lcms.org) or 888-THE LCMS.

