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## *Baptisms This Sunday*

**An article from the *Cathedral Times*  
by the Very Reverend Samuel G. Candler,  
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Whenever I enter a discussion about the Book of Common Prayer—or, let us say, an argument—I consider who the book's primary revisers and writers have been. I must admit that my "arguments" often have to do with whether we are "following the Prayer Book" correctly. Doesn't the Prayer Book say this? Doesn't the Prayer Book demand that? Yes, it often does. And, perhaps more often, the present 1979 Book of Common Prayer leaves open many possibilities for the same occasion.

Let me consider Holy Baptism, which is certainly one of the most important and most fun of our liturgical events. I love baptisms! And I appreciate and honor the Holy Baptism liturgy that was one of the more striking revisions of 1979. Though some of us quote too naively our commitment to The Baptismal Covenant, those questions (pages 304-305 in the BCP) and answers are highlights of the 1979 Book of Common Prayer.

Furthermore, as I am fond of pointing out, the 1979 BCP implies that immersion—not sprinkling—is the preferred form of baptizing. Yes, I said "immersion," which means that a baptismal candidate gets completely and fully submerged in water—like the Baptists do. Yes, I know that it happens rarely in most Episcopal churches. But check out the rubrics (the italicized instructions) on page 307 of the prayer book!

Fortunately, the other option is perfectly acceptable; and all of us who have had baptismal water poured upon us are fully baptized! Fortunately, the liturgical fundamentalists have not taken control.

But there are liturgical fundamentalists in the church—those Christians who demand that there is only one way to perform certain liturgical actions. I am against fundamentalism in any of its forms (biblical or liturgical) and fundamentalism that is too attached to any century (20th century, 19th century, or 3rd century) as a standard! (More on fundamentalism in another article.) I am especially amused, however, at liturgical fundamentalists who follow certain aspects of the Book of Common Prayer so strictly, when I remember how our present prayer book was revised and who revised it!

So it was, one night, that I entered an argument about what were the proper days on which the Church should observe public baptism. We all agreed that baptism should be celebrated at a primary Sunday service. (There really is no such thing as a "private" baptism, though there are certain conditions that might allow a baptism away from the Sunday services.) What we disagreed on, however, was whether other Sundays might be used by a church to observe baptism, besides the ones on which baptism is especially appropriate (Easter, the Day of Pentecost, All Saints Sunday, the Baptism of our Lord, the bishop's visitation).

As most of you know, we here at the Cathedral also designate three other Sundays during the church year as baptism Sundays. My arguing companion disagreed with this. I pointed out that the Cathedral of St. Philip baptizes so many people (from 100 to 150 a year) that it is impractical to try to contain those baptisms within only four or five services a year! My liturgical fundamentalist friend disagreed with our liberties.

So, in the middle of our dinner, we telephoned another friend, this one an aged seminary professor, who had actually had an important hand in the 1979 prayer book revisions. It was obvious, when I presented our case at the Cathedral, that he

had not anticipated that a typical (small) Episcopal parish would have so many baptisms. "I suppose," he said rather feebly, "that a church with that many baptisms should find other appropriate Sundays on which to observe baptisms."

Hooray! This Sunday, the Last Sunday After the Epiphany, will be an especially appropriate Sunday on which to baptize new Christians. The gospel lesson is always the story of the Transfiguration on this Sunday, a foreshadowing of Easter; and it is especially appropriate for baptism. Join us in supporting 15 new Christians in baptism this Sunday!

Sam Candler signature



The Very Rev. Sam Candler