



September 3, 2020

Dear Brother Priests and Friends in Christ,

As you may already be aware—possibly as a result of reading my letter of August 27, 2020, “Regarding Baptism”—concerns have surfaced regarding individuals having been baptized using the words “we baptize you” rather than “I baptize you.” The Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith (CDF) has now declared such baptisms invalid and has stated that persons so baptized must be baptized anew using the correct formula in absolute and not conditional terms. This decision has created a pastoral problem which I now wish to address in its historical context.

One important fruit of the Second Vatican Council was a greater understanding of the equal dignity of all the faithful from the most recently baptized to the Holy Father himself. Another was a great re-awakening of the sense—present in the early Church—of the importance of community, and of the Church as a great assembly of the faithful. As a result and in a sincere effort to overcome excessive clericalism, some may have undertaken baptisms in which the word “we” was used.

I have no reason to doubt the sincerity or the good will of those who may have done so without realizing the consequences of such a change in the form of the sacrament. Prior to the recent response of the CDF, which our Holy Father approved, there was no definitive statement that the formula “we baptize you” was invalid. In fact, certain private communications from at least one other Vatican Congregation concluded that baptisms using these words were illicit rather than invalid.

However, since it has been approved by the Pope, the CDF’s declaration takes priority. As the CDF stated, it is not the community that baptizes but the priest, deacon or layperson who administers baptism does so in the person of Christ who baptizes. Notwithstanding the good will of those involved, since any such baptisms have been declared to be invalid, the persons who come forward with established claims must be heard and baptized again.

Whenever we become certain that this occurred, we Church leaders need to make efforts to contact those affected. Our common concern is for the spiritual good of the individuals. For this reason, I hope that any who have performed, been involved in, or received such baptisms will acknowledge having done so. Every effort will be made to handle these cases with great care and, in as much as is possible, with respect for the privacy of all.

To this end, I have asked Father Matthew Furgiuele, to be our point person. In other words, I have appointed him to address these situations and coordinate our diocesan efforts to remedy any situations of deficiency. Father Matthew and I are of the same mind, and so, should you be contacted by him, know that he is concerned for those who may have been invalidly baptized as well as for those who, with the best of intentions, have celebrated baptisms in this way.

I can foresee that there will be cases in which the celebrant of the baptism may have died or may be unreachable and/or unwilling to acknowledge what happened. I can also foresee occasions in which there is no verification by witnesses or by video or audio evidence.

If there is a high probability based on the evidence received that a baptism was celebrated using the “we baptize” formula but it is not possible to conclude with certainty that the celebration was invalid, the possibility of a conditional baptism may be explored for the sake of helping people attain peace of conscience. In these circumstances, I ask that you allow the matter of baptism, whether absolute or conditional, to be coordinated by the Diocese of Gaylord through the good offices of Father Furgiuele.

If you are aware of having celebrated such baptisms using the “we baptize” formula, or if someone in your parish should come to you with concerns about his or her own or a family member’s baptism, please do not undertake the baptism yourself without contacting the diocese through Father Furgiuele. Together we shall arrive at some determination and a path forward. We want to do what will best serve the spiritual needs of our people. We will have protocols and procedures (e.g., a form to fill out) so we can properly record what may have happened and determine a corrective and healing course of action. These protocols will be available next week. Thank you for your kind attention to this matter and God’s blessings on our priestly ministry.

With good wishes,

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Walter A. Hurley". The signature is written in a cursive style with a large, sweeping flourish at the end.

Most Reverend Walter A. Hurley
Apostolic Administrator

(A slightly edited version of this communication will be posted on the website.)