

The Celebration of Infant Baptism

Introduction

The Sacrament of Baptism is the gateway to all the Sacraments and is necessary for salvation, either by actual reception or at least by desire. It is validly conferred only by a washing of true water with the proper form of words. Through Baptism men and women are freed from sin, reborn as children of God, configured to Christ by an indelible character, and are incorporated into the Church¹.

Infant Baptism celebrates the saving faith already transforming the lives of the parents and of the community – a faith that will be shared, by word and example, with the newly baptized infants as they grow into responsible young adulthood. This ancient practice of Infant Baptism continues in the Church today, but parents and community must clearly understand the meaning of Christian Baptism and parent/guardian must freely choose this Sacrament for their child.

1. The Sacrament of Baptism is the first stage in an extended process of growth towards Christian maturity. In choosing Baptism for an infant, parents and the community accept the responsibility to continue the initiation of the baptized through the Eucharist and Confirmation.
2. To emphasize the communal aspect and paschal character of Baptism, it should be celebrated on Sunday. The entire community should be invited to witness and celebrate this sacred event.
3. As the primary educators of their child, parent/guardian has the first and most important influence on the faith development of their children. Parishes must provide catechesis for parent/guardian regarding Baptism before their child is baptized. This catechesis must include the Church's rich teachings of the sacrament and the obligations attached to it. It should be designed to deepen the parent/guardian personal faith so that they can accept the responsibility to see that the fruits of the sacrament come to realization as their child matures.

¹ Canon #849

Policies

I. Prerequisites for Candidacy

- A. A child who has not completed their sixth year (have not celebrated their seventh birthday) are candidates for infant baptism.²
- B. Parent/guardian are obliged to seek Baptism for their child within the first few weeks after birth.³
- C. At least one parent should be a practicing, active member of their Parish Faith Community.
- D. Membership in a Parish is determined by domicile unless the family has chosen to register and participate in another Parish.⁴

II. Baptismal Preparation

- A. The Pastor, Parish Director, Parochial Vicar, Pastoral Associate or other designated individual must meet with the parent/guardian after they have contacted the parish for the baptism of their infant child. Special care should be taken to be welcoming at this meeting, and the minister and parent/guardian should discuss:
 - the reasons for requesting baptism for their child;
 - their faith and their relationship with the Church;
 - their understanding of the sacrament;
 - their role and responsibility in raising their child in the faith of the Church;
 - the role and requirements for godparents;
 - the parish policy regarding baptismal catechesis.
- B. When parent/guardian speak no English, provisions should be made for the initial meeting and for the catechesis and the celebration of the rite to be in their own language whenever possible.

² *Canon #97.2*: Before the completion of the seventh year, a minor is called...an infant...with the completion of the seventh year one is presumed to have the use of reason.

³ *Canon #867.1*: Parents are obliged to see to it that infants are baptized within the first few weeks after birth; as soon as possible after birth or even before it, parents are to go to the pastor to request the sacrament for their child and to be properly prepared for it.

⁴ *Canon #102*: Domicile is acquired by that residence within the territory of a certain parish or at least of a diocese, which either is joined with the intention of remaining there permanently unless called away or has been protracted for five complete years.

- C. The minister of baptism or his delegate should obtain the information for entry into the parish records and make specific arrangements for the celebration of the sacrament.
- D. Parent/Guardian responsibilities:
1. Parent/guardian should be encouraged to give the infant a Christian name.
 2. Parent/guardian are expected to participate in the Sunday mass every week.
 3. Parent/guardian have the privilege and responsibility and are encouraged to choose two persons (one of each sex) as godparents (for the purpose of this policy, the terms godparents and sponsors are equivalent) for the Baptism of their infant child. Godparents are expected to:
 - accompany the parent/guardian during the time of baptismal catechesis;
 - present the infant child for baptism;
 - be stewards regarding the continuing faith journey of the child;
 - assist in guiding the child.⁵
- a. To be admitted to the role of godparent, a person must:
- be designated by the parent/guardian, or in their absence, by the pastor or minister and is to have the qualifications and intention of performing this role;
 - be sixteen years old unless the pastor or minister has granted an exception for just cause;
 - be a fully initiated Catholic (has been baptized, confirmed and has received the sacrament of Holy Communion) and who leads a life of faith in keeping with the function to be taken on;
 - not be bound by any canonical penalty legitimately imposed or declared;
 - not be the father or mother of the one to be baptized;⁶
 - present a letter from their pastor attesting that they are a practicing Catholic.
 - be present for the Baptism. If it is impossible to be in attendance, proxy is acceptable.

⁵ *Canon #972*: Insofar as possible one to be baptized is to be given a sponsor who is to assist ...the parents to present an infant at baptism and who will help the baptized lead a Christian life in harmony with baptism and to fulfill faithfully the obligations connected with it.

⁶ *Canon #874.1*

- b. A baptized person who belongs to a non-Catholic church may be a witness to baptism. One Catholic godparent is required.⁷
- c. When there is a cultural practice of multiple godparents, the pastor or minister may allow the family to involve a number of persons to assist them in raising the child in the Catholic faith, however, only two godparents need be recorded.⁸

III. Baptismal Catechesis for Parents/Guardians and Godparents of Infants

- A. After the initial meeting and before the celebration of the sacrament, parent/guardian are to participate in baptismal catechesis. Godparents should participate with parent/guardian in the catechesis, if possible, or participate in baptismal catechesis at their local parish, if distance is a factor.⁹
- B. Parent/guardian who has been catechized within the last two years in preparation for the Baptism of a previous child may, at the discretion of the pastor/parish director, be excused from the formal sessions of baptismal catechesis. However, they should be encouraged to participate as an opportunity to deepen their own faith.
- C. While it is reasonable and expected that each parish establish a regular program for baptismal catechesis according to its resources, it is to be remembered that the primary element in determining the appropriate amount of catechesis is the need of the parent/guardian and not the fulfillment of a set program *per se*. The number of sessions for this catechesis is left to the discretion of each pastor/parish director and his available staff and resources.
- D. Baptismal catechesis should include:
 - The Church's teaching on Infant Baptism
 1. Baptism as entrance into the family of God
 2. Baptism and salvation
 3. Baptism, Grace and Original Sin
 - The Role of the Faith Community

⁷ *Canon #874.2*: A baptized person who belongs to a non-catholic ecclesial community is not to participate except together with a catholic sponsor and then only as a witness of the baptism.

⁸ *Canon #873*: There is to be only one male sponsor or one female sponsor or one of each.

⁹ *Canon #851.2*: The parents of the infant to be baptized and likewise those who are to undertake the office of sponsor are to be properly instructed in the meaning of this sacrament and the obligations which are attached to it; personally or through others the pastor is to see to it that the parents are properly formed by pastoral directions and by common prayer, gathering several families together and where possible visiting them.

1. The importance of the faith practice of parent/guardian godparents
 2. The importance of the parish community in fostering faith
 3. The importance of family prayer, religious education and Christian parenting
- The Liturgy of Baptism
 1. The Rite of Baptism
 2. The symbols of Baptism
 3. Planning the ceremony of Baptism

IV. Discernment of Readiness for Parents of Infants

- A. The parents or at least one of the parents or the person who lawfully takes their place must give consent for the lawful baptism of an infant.¹⁰ Consideration must be given to the current Colorado custodial family law and language situations.
- B. Good pastoral practice presumes that parents who petition the Sacrament for their child are persons of good will who ask in faith and have a basic understanding of their obligations.¹¹
- C. It is ultimately the responsibility of the pastor/parish director, in collaboration with the catechist entrusted with the task of preparation, to ensure that the parents and godparents presenting an infant for the sacrament of Baptism are properly disposed and prepared to celebrate the sacrament.¹²
- D. There must be a well-founded hope that the infant will be brought up in the Catholic religion; if such a hope is altogether lacking, the baptism should be delayed according to the prescriptions of particular law and the parents are to be informed of the reasons.¹³

¹⁰ *Canon #868.1*: For an infant to be baptized licitly the parents or at least one of them or the person who legitimately takes their place must consent.

¹¹ *Canon #843.1*: Sacred ministers cannot deny the sacraments to those who seek them at appropriate times, are properly disposed, and are not prohibited by law from receiving them.

¹² *Canon #843.2*: Pastors of souls and other members of the Christian faithful, according to their respective ecclesiastical function, have the duty to take care that those who seek the sacraments are prepared to receive them by proper evangelization and catechetical instruction, attentive to the norms issued by competent authority.

¹³ *Instruction on Infant Baptism by the Sacred Congregation for the Doctrine of Faith, October 20, 1980*, states: “In the first place it must be clear that the refusal of Baptism is not a means of exercising pressure. Nor can one speak of refusal, still less of discrimination, but rather of educational delay, according to individual cases, aimed at helping the family to grow in faith or to become more aware of its responsibilities.”

V. Celebration of the Sacrament with Infants

- A. The sacrament is to be celebrated according to the *Rite of Baptism for Children*.
- B. The sacrament of Baptism is a communal, not a private, celebration. Sunday is the recommended day for celebrating Baptism.¹⁴
- C. The place for the celebration of Baptism is the parish church of the parents.¹⁵ When, for a just cause, an infant is to be baptized in a church other than the parish church of the parents, permission of their parish pastor is required.
- D. The sacrament itself consists of the washing in water by way of immersion or pouring the water over the candidate's head¹⁶ and saying the words, "I baptize you in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit."

VI. Postbaptismal Mystagogy for Parents of Infants

- A. Following the celebration of the sacrament, the parish priest and/or delegate from the parish community is encouraged to:
 - talk with the family and provide support for them to become active members of the parish community;
 - gather small groups of parents of newly baptized infants to deepen their understanding of the baptismal event, their own faith, and their critical role as Christian parents in the faith formation of their children;
 - help the parents to more fully participate in the Sunday celebration of Eucharist and in the life of the parish.
- B. Opportunities for adult catechesis toward lifelong conversion should be provided for the parents.

Canon #868.1 #2: there must be a founded hope that the infant will be brought up in the Catholic religion; if such hope is altogether lacking, the baptism is to be delayed according to the prescripts of particular law after the parents have been advised about the reason.

¹⁴ *Canon #856:* Although baptism may be celebrated on any day, it is recommended that ordinarily it is celebrated on a Sunday or if possible, at the Easter Vigil.

¹⁵ *Canon #857.1:* Outside a case of necessity, the proper place is a church or oratory.

Canon #857.2: As a rule adults are to be baptized in their own parish church and infants in the parish church proper to their parents, unless a just cause suggests otherwise.

Canon #860.1: Outside the case of necessity, baptism is not to be conferred in private homes, unless the local ordinary has permitted this for a grave cause.

¹⁶ *Canon #854:* Baptism is to be conferred either by immersion or by pouring; the prescripts of the conference of bishops are to be observed.

VII. Records

The names of those who are initiated through the sacrament of Baptism, the minister, the godparents and the place and date of the ceremony, are to be written in the baptismal registers of the parish where the baptism takes place.¹⁷

VIII. Pastoral Considerations

Adopted Children

Taking into consideration all the legal aspects of adoption, it is appropriate that only after the adoption is finalized should a family ask to celebrate the sacrament of Baptism with their new child.

Promulgated on September 30, 2004 by

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¹⁷ *Canon #877.1*: The pastor of the place where the baptism is celebrated must carefully and without any delay record in the baptismal register the names of the baptized, with mention made of the minister, parents, sponsors, witnesses, if any, the place and date of the conferral of the baptism, and the date and place of birth.

**Bibliography of References Used
For the Policies for the Celebration of Infant Baptism**

Canon The Code of Canon Law

*Instruction on Infant Baptism By the Sacred Congregation for the
Doctrine of Faith, October 20, 1980*