

The Sacrament of Baptism

Holy Baptism is the basis of the whole Christian life, the gateway to life in the Spirit, and the door which gives access to the other sacraments. Through Baptism we are freed from sin and reborn as sons of God; we become members of Christ, are incorporated into the Church and made sharers in her mission: “Baptism is the sacrament of regeneration through water and in the word.” (CCC 1213)

Norms:

THE INFANT TO BE BAPTIZED

“Every person not yet baptized and only such a person is able to be baptized.” (CIC 864)

Parents, whose children have not attained the use of reason and are not of catechetical age (normally seven years old), may request to have the child baptized according to the Rite of Baptism for Children. Children who have attained the use of reason and are of catechetical age must be initiated through the Rite of Christian Initiation of Adults, adapted for children. (Rite of Baptism for Children, Introduction, 1; RCIA, 252)

PARENTS

1. It is the responsibility of the parents to request baptism as soon as possible after the birth or even before the birth of their child. They should go to their pastor or his delegate to request the sacrament for their child. (CIC 867)
2. For the licit baptism of an infant it is necessary that:
 - a. the parents or at least one of them, or the person who lawfully takes their place, gives consent¹³
 - b. there be a founded hope that the infant will be brought up in the Catholic religion; if such a hope is altogether lacking, the baptism is to be put off according to the prescriptions of particular law and the parents are to be informed of the reason (CIC 868)
3. Sacramental preparation of parents/guardians is required in order that they may understand their role as the primary teachers of the faith. Sacramental preparation of godparents is strongly encouraged in order that they may understand their role as godparents.
4. “Sunday Mass attendance and registration in the parish by the parents are not requirements for infant baptism. Nor does either guarantee that the parents will continue to practice the faith once the baby is baptized. The best pastoral approach is to welcome the parents and during the course of preparation help them to realize what baptism means and entails so they become motivated to

¹³ In case of divorce, one parent may seek baptism. It is recommended, though not required, that with “shared custody” both parents consent to the Baptism.

be proper role models in the faith for their child. “Forced conversion” never works. Baptism may be delayed only when there is no “founded hope” that the child will be raised in the Catholic faith. . . . It may happen that the godparents, or a grandparent, or another person will see to the child’s Catholic upbringing, and the parents do not object. In such a case there is a founded hope, a hope based on reason, that the child will be brought up Catholic. For an infant to be baptized licitly, it is necessary that at least one parent (or the person who lawfully takes the place of the parents) consents to it, and there is a well-founded hope that the child will be brought up in the Catholic religion.” (CDF, reply, July 13, 1970, *Notitiae* 7[1971])

5. An Instruction from the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith of October 20, 1980 discusses the historical, theological, and pastoral issues at some length. In speaking of the “well-founded hope,” in the case of parents who are irregular Christians,¹⁴ the instruction states: “if sufficient assurances are given, for example, by the selection of godparents who will sincerely undertake the care of the child, or by the assistance of the faithful of the community, then the priest cannot refuse to celebrate the Baptism without delay, exactly as he would do regarding the children of Christian families.” (CDF, reply, October 20, 1980, AAS 72 [1980] 1137)

6. According to the precepts of Canon Law (CIC 857.2), parents requesting Baptism of their child should ordinarily be members of the parish. With special permission of their pastor they may request Baptism in another parish.

7. Baptism shall not be refused to parents who have no permanent domicile. People without a parish, e.g. migrants and transients, are to be dealt with in the best pastoral way possible.

GODPARENTS

1. “Each child may have a godfather and a godmother; the word ‘godparents’ is used in the rite to describe both.” (Rite of Baptism for Children 6)

2. Only one godparent is necessary. The godparent must be a fully initiated Catholic (baptized, confirmed, received Eucharist), at least 16 years old, and must be leading a sacramental life in harmony with the church. (CIC 874) The godparent should be willing to accept the responsibility of assisting the parents in developing the faith life of the child.

3. The godparent may not be the father or the mother of the one to be baptized. (CIC 874)

4. Although people of some cultures sometimes choose multiple godparents, only two names can actually be entered in the Baptismal Register. (CIC 873)

5. A baptized and believing Christian from a separated church or community may act as a Christian witness at the request of the parents, but there must be a Catholic godparent. (CIC 874)

¹⁴ “By irregular Christians, the congregation means “polygamous Christians, concubinaries, lawful spouses who have abandoned all regular practice of the faith, or who request baptism of the infant for the sole reason of social propriety.” (CDF, reply, July 13, 1970, *Notitiae* 7[1971])

6. Any person may serve as a proxy if the godparent is unable to be physically present at the baptism. The Church requires no specific stipulations regarding who may serve as a proxy.

PARISH

1. A priest or deacon is the ordinary minister of Baptism. If Baptism is celebrated during Mass, the celebrant of the Mass will ordinarily confer the Baptism.
2. Priests and deacons should not baptize children from other parishes without consultation with the proper pastor. If the proper pastor has determined that baptism is to be delayed, that judgment should be respected.
3. It is desirable that the Baptismal Rite should be celebrated, if possible, in the context of a Sunday liturgy before the entire community.
4. The pastor or his delegate is responsible for providing an effective catechesis for Baptism preparation for those who seek Baptism for an infant, consistent with the parents' need for catechesis. When parents are in need of additional faith formation prior to the Baptism, it is the responsibility of the parish to offer opportunities for their faith development.
5. The parish may not charge any fees for baptism preparation or the Rite of Baptism.

Record of Baptism

Can. 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.

§2. If it concerns a child born to an unmarried mother, the name of the mother must be inserted, if her maternity is established publicly or if she seeks it willingly in writing or before two witnesses. Moreover, the name of the father must be inscribed if a public document or his own declaration before the pastor and two witnesses proves his paternity; in other cases, the name of the baptized is inscribed with no mention of the name of the father or the parents.

§3. If it concerns an adopted child, the names of those adopting are to be inscribed and, at least if it is done in the civil records of the region, also the names of the natural parents according to the norm of §§1 and 2, with due regard for the prescripts of the conference of bishops.

Can. 878 If the baptism was not administered by the pastor or in his presence, the minister of baptism, whoever it is, must inform the pastor of the parish in which it was administered of the conferral of the baptism, so that he records the baptism according to the norm of can. 877, §1.