



NORMS FOR INFANT BAPTISM

I. REQUIREMENTS FOR BAPTISM

A. Infants are those who have not yet reached the age of discretion and therefore cannot have or profess personal faith. The age of discretion is ordinarily seven years.

B. One who is incapable of personal responsibility is to be regarded as an infant (Canon 852). The faith of the Church is proclaimed for them by their parents and godparents who represent both the local and universal Church.

C. If the child to be baptized is old enough to be catechized (over the age of seven), he/she should be accepted into the Order of Catechumens and prepared for the sacraments of Baptism, Confirmation and First Holy Communion. Normally the celebration of these sacraments takes place at The Easter Vigil or during the Easter season. Refer to Part II, Chapter 1 of the *Rite of Christian Initiation of Adults: Christian Initiation of Children Who Have Reached Catechetical Age*.

D. Parents should normally seek baptism for their children in the home parish in which they are *practicing members* **or** *in which they are registered*. If, for good pastoral reasons, Baptism and/or catechesis for Baptism takes place outside of the parish in which the parents are registered, written notification from the home parish, of the intent and pastoral reasons for such actions should be provided to the pastor before the Baptism takes place. This requirement is waived in any emergency, though in such a circumstance the pastor of the home parish must be notified afterward. (Canon 862)

E. The pastor has the responsibility to ascertain, to the best of his ability, the faith of the parents, their living expression of the faith and their serious intention to raise the child as a Roman Catholic. If there is a real question as to the intent of the parents, the baptism should be delayed until further pastoral approaches can remedy the situation. ***Under no circumstances should the priest simply refuse to baptize the child because the faith of the parents is less than ideal.*** (Canon 851.2 and 828.1#2).

No one should ever deny the sacrament. Delays should be demanded for only the most extraordinary of reasons (e.g. Lack of registration is not an extraordinary reason to postpone or deny baptism).

F. Children born to single parents or to those in irregular marriages (not sanctioned by the Catholic Church) enjoy the same access to baptism as any other children. Single Catholic mothers as well as single Catholic fathers enjoy the same rights to present their children for baptism.

G. Children baptized in another Christian tradition are not baptized again in the Catholic Church. (Canon 869.2 and 3, also Appendix III Diocesan Norms for the Rite of Christian Initiation for Adults for list of non-catholic churches with valid baptisms)

If the child is over the age of discretion (seven years of age) they should make a Profession of Faith and receive the sacraments of Confirmation and Holy Communion at the time of reception into full communion. This would be recorded in the Parish Baptismal Register as a Profession of Faith and properly noted with Confirmation and First Holy Communion.

If the parents of the child under the age of seven are candidates for full initiation the parents will make a Profession of Faith. Record of the child's reception into the Church must be made in the Parish Baptismal Register as a Profession of Faith (for both parent and child).

H. Requirements for Godparents (Canons 873 and 874)

- Godparents must be fully initiated and practicing Catholics.
- Godparents are to be over the age of sixteen.
- There may be either one or two godparents.
- If there are two godparents, there is one from each gender.
- If there is only one godparent, it may be from either gender.
- Members of other Christian churches may not be godparents but may serve as Christian witnesses as long as there is also one eligible godparent.

II. PREPARATION AND CATECHESIS

A. Since children are baptized by virtue of the faith of their parents, it is crucial that pre-baptismal catechesis be provided by each parish for parents and that it underscore both their responsibility and that of the godparents. (Canon 851 #1 and Introduction to the *Rite of Christian Initiation* no. 7)

B. Scheduling of pre-baptismal catechesis should be so arranged that baptism not be unduly delayed. Expectant parents should be encouraged to attend this catechesis. (Canon 867)

C. In addition, post-baptismal reflection and catechesis for parents and godparents are strongly recommended.

D. It is important that the whole community be involved in this catechesis. Catechists and other laypeople should work with priests and deacons in the preparation for baptism. (Introduction to the *Rite of Christian Initiation* no. 7)

E. Baptismal catechesis should focus on the following topics:

- The theology of the sacrament of baptism;
- The meaning of sacramental celebration and belonging to a worshipping community;

- The meaning of the ritual and the component parts of the ritual;
- The role of the parents and godparents in the faith development of their child.

F. Cultural Considerations:

Sensitivity to people of diverse cultures and languages is of utmost importance. We need to be sensitive to the culture of the parents and the cultural context of their religious faith and piety. If possible, catechesis in baptismal preparation should be in their native language. Baptism should be celebrated, whenever possible, in the preferred language of the parents.

III. LITURGICAL CELEBRATION

A. Baptism recalls and makes present the paschal mystery itself, because in baptism we pass from the death of sin into life. The celebration of baptism should therefore reflect the joy of the resurrection, especially when the celebration takes place during the Easter Vigil or on a Sunday. (Rite of Baptism 6) Baptism may be celebrated within the context of a Sunday Eucharistic liturgy of the parish. (Rite of Baptism 9)

B. Liturgical guidelines contained in the *Rite of Baptism* must be followed.

C. The proper place for baptism is in a church, and it is recommended that it be celebrated on a Sunday, though the sacrament may be celebrated on other days for legitimate pastoral necessity (Canons 856 and 857).

D. In the actual celebration, the people of God (represented not only by the parents, godparents, and relatives, but also, as far as possible, by friends, neighbors, and some members of the local Church) should take an active part. Thus they will show their common faith and the shared joy with which the newly baptized are received into the community of the Church. (RCIA 7)

E. The frequency and times of baptisms should be arranged to accommodate the pastoral needs of the parish to assure sufficient catechesis prior to the baptism and to allow participation of the parish community in some way.

F. Because Lent is orientated toward the celebration of the sacraments initiation at Easter, care must be taken to maintain this central focus. Honoring the most ancient of customs, the baptism of infants normally should not take place during Lent except in the case of emergency or pastoral necessity. (Diocesan Guidelines 2006)

G. Baptism is to be conferred either by immersion, or by pouring, the prescriptions of the Conference of Bishops being observed. (Canon 854). Either the rite of immersion, which is more suitable as a symbol of participation in the death and resurrection of Christ or the rite of pouring may lawfully be used in the celebration of baptism. (Rite of Baptism 24)

H. Priests are encouraged to celebrate the Sacrament of Baptism regularly. This Sacrament is not to be delegated to deacons as a matter of convenience. Deacons should baptize only as absolutely required, or on an occasional or on a special basis.

IV. SPECIAL CIRCUMSTANCES

A. Baptism in Emergencies

1. When a child is in danger of death, he/she should be baptized even if a priest or deacon is unavailable (Canon 867.2). Catholic health care workers, particularly, should be made aware of IV in the Introduction of the *Rite of Baptism for Children* and the celebration in Chapter V of the *Rite of Baptism for Children*. **The record of an emergency baptism is to be recorded in the parish church.**

2. If baptism occurred outside of a church during a crisis and the child later recovers, the Rite of Bringing a Baptized Child to the Church should be celebrated (Chapter VI of the *Rite of Baptism for Children*). The proper notation is to be made in the Baptismal Register.

B. Relatives Seeking Baptism

1. Family members who have legal custody of the child may seek baptism for the child. In addition, family members who do not have legal custody, may seek baptism of the child providing that they have the consent of the parents/or legal guardians. (Canon 868) Such consent should be contained in a written notarized document.

2. A non-custodial parent may seek baptism for the child and raise the child in the Catholic faith with the consent of the custodial parent. Such consent should be contained in a written notarized document. (Canon 868)

C. Adoptions

1. In a case where an unbaptized child is being adopted, baptism is not to be celebrated until after the adoption has become final.

2. In cases where a baptized child has been adopted, the names of the adopting parents are recorded in the Parish Baptismal Register, along with the names of the natural parents if they are available, with a notation identifying each. The names of the *adopting parents only* are entered on the baptismal certificate (Canon 877.3). A notation is made stating that the names of the biological parents **are not** to be divulged.

3. When a child is adopted *after* baptism, the baptismal register is not changed. A proper notation is made indicating the adoption and the names of the adoptive parents. It is further noted that all future certificates are issued indicating the new status.

REFERENCE ABBREVIATIONS

Canon Code of Canon Law 1985
Ceremonial of Bishops
RB Rite of Baptism (1970 Edition)
RCIA Rite of Christian Initiation of Adults