

INFANT BAPTISM

Preamble

Soon after he became the Bishop of Rome, Pope Francis touched on the necessity and beauty of baptism when, at a general audience in St. Peter's Square, he said, "It is an act that touches the depths of our existence. A baptized child and an unbaptized child are not the same. A person who is baptized and a person who is not baptized are not the same. We, by baptism, are immersed in that inexhaustible source of life which is the death of Jesus, the greatest act of love in all of history; and thanks to this love we can live a new life, no longer at the mercy of evil, of sin and of death, but in communion with God and with our brothers and sisters... We are called to live out our baptism every day as the present reality of our lives. If we manage to follow Jesus and to remain in the Church, despite our limitations and with our weaknesses and our sins, it is precisely in the sacrament whereby we have become new creatures and have been clothed in Christ. It is by the power of baptism, in fact, that, freed of original sin, we are inserted into Jesus' relation to God the Father; that we are bearers of a new hope, for baptism gives us this new hope: the hope of going on the path of salvation our whole life long. And this hope nothing and no one can extinguish, for it is a hope that does not disappoint. Remember, hope in the Lord never disappoints. Thanks to baptism, we are capable of forgiving and of loving even those who offend us and do evil to us. By our baptism, we recognize in the least and in the poor the face of the Lord who visits us and makes himself close. Baptism helps us to recognize in the face of the needy, the suffering, and also of our neighbor, the face of Jesus. All this is possible thanks to the power of baptism!"

(Pope Francis, General Audience, Wednesday, January 8, 2014)

Necessary Requirements

1. Follow the canons relative to baptism. (Please reference the addendum, "Canon Law on Infant Baptism," at the end of this document.)
2. A child who has not completed his/her sixth year (i.e., has not celebrated a seventh birthday) is a candidate for infant baptism. When a person is over this age, he/she is to be initiated in accordance with the norms of the Rite of Christian Initiation of Adults (RCIA). (Canons 852 and 97 §2)
3. The parent(s)/guardian(s) are to attend at least one baptismal, parish-level catechetical session prior to the celebration of the sacrament.
4. Sponsors (godparents) are to participate with the parents/guardians in this catechesis, insofar as possible, or they must participate in baptismal catechesis at their local parish, if distance is a factor.
5. Parents/guardians who have been successfully catechized in preparation for the baptism of a previous child may, at the discretion of the pastor, be excused from the formal session(s) of baptismal classes. However, they should still be encouraged to participate as an opportunity to deepen their own faith and/or help to catechize other parents.

Recommended Catechesis

1. The pastor has discretion as to what catechetical materials are used for baptismal catechesis. Texts and programs listed in the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops' (USCCB) document "Conformity Listing of Catechetical Texts and Series" can be used but are not required. That listing can be found on the USCCB website.
2. Baptismal catechesis should be comprehensive. The diocese has available a suggested, but not required, curriculum for parish use upon request. Our curriculum can be modified to fit the needs of your parents/guardians, but the core concepts of baptism should be discussed.
3. While it is reasonable and expected that each parish establish a regular program for baptismal classes according to its resources, it is to be remembered that the primary element in determining the appropriate amount of catechesis is the concrete need of the parents/guardians 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, in conjunction with his staff, volunteers, and resources.
4. Parents/guardians should be informed about post-baptismal catechesis opportunities for them, the sponsor(s), and the child.

Sponsors (Godparents)

1. The role of a sponsor is described in Canons 872 and 873. (see addendum)
2. To be admitted to the role of a sponsor, Canon 874 (see addendum) must be adhered to.
3. If married, the person must have been validly married in the Catholic Church.
4. Parents/guardians are encouraged, in so far as possible, to choose one male sponsor, or one female sponsor, or one of each sex if choosing two persons as sponsors for the baptism of their infant child.
5. In the event that no sponsors are designated, or sponsors are unable to physically attend, the baptism can and should take place. In such a situation, the minister must ensure that there is at least one witness present who can attest to the actual conferral of the sacrament; the name of this witness is to be recorded in the baptismal register. (Canon 875, see addendum)
6. The "Godparent (Sponsor) Form for Baptism and Confirmation" provided by the diocese can be a helpful aid as it reflects the minimum necessary requirements for the role. This form can be expanded upon at the discretion of the pastor.

Discernment of Readiness

To proceed with the baptism, there must be a founded hope that the infant will be brought up in the Catholic religion. If assurances concerning this founded hope are altogether lacking, the baptism is never to be denied outright, but rather delayed with further catechesis and evangelization carried out, even if indefinitely. (Canon 868 §1 2°, see addendum)

Recording of the Sacrament

After conferral of the sacrament (including emergency baptisms), all pertinent information must be recorded, without delay, in the baptismal register of the parish in whose boundaries the baptism took place, as indicated by the “Handbook on Sacramental Records and Reports for Parish Personnel.” (Canons 877, 878)

Frequently Asked Questions

1. Does an “infant” need any catechetical training?

No, even if they are as old as six years old.

2. What if a child is either going to be seven years-old very soon or has just turned seven? Should he/she be catechized, or should we still treat him/her as an “infant” and not catechize him/her?

That would be up to the pastor’s discretion and should be handled on a case-by-case basis.

3. How many baptism classes should there be for the parents and sponsors (godparents)?

At least one, but it is up to the pastor to determine the number and duration. Two hours of training is typical and should be considered a minimum.

4. What if the parents or sponsors (godparents) have recently gone through a baptism class and are now presenting another child for baptism or have been asked to be a sponsor again. Do they have to take the class again?

At some point, the parents or sponsors who have already taken classes should not be expected to attend them again. Where that point is should be determined by the pastor.

5. What if a grandparent is the one requesting baptism. Do we need the parents’ permission?

Yes. At least one parent must consent to having the child baptized. (Canon 868 §1 1°, see addendum) Consideration must be given to the current Colorado custodial family law. Grandparents, and others who are not legal guardians, are not to clandestinely baptize an infant.

6. Can infants be baptized on weekdays, or only on Sundays?

Canon 856 states, “Although baptism can be celebrated on any day, it is nevertheless recommended that it be celebrated ordinarily on Sunday or, if possible, at the Easter Vigil.”

7. Does there have to be a sponsor (godparent) for a valid and licit baptism?

No. However, his and/or her presence is desired and preferred. (Canon 872, see addendum)

8. Can a baptized person from a non-Catholic Christian church be a sponsor?

No, but he/she can be a Christian witness to the baptism. (Canon 874 §2, see addendum)

9. What about a person from an Eastern church which is separated from the Catholic Church? Can he/she be a sponsor?

Yes, but in those situations, there must always be a second sponsor who is Catholic.

10. Can a proxy be used if a sponsor cannot be present at the baptism?

Yes. Canon law does not specifically mention a sponsor's presence through a proxy. This silence, however, should not be understood as barring the use of a proxy to stand in for an absent sponsor. Proxy sponsors are allowed. The official sponsor is, however, still the sponsor who could not be present at the baptism, not the proxy. Both should be recorded in the baptismal register. Just after (or below) the absent sponsor's name, place in parentheses the proxy's name with the notation "by proxy." Example: (by proxy John Smith)

11. At least one of the parents must be Catholic to have their infant baptized in the Church, correct?

No. It is not required by law, or The Order of Baptism of Children, that a parent/guardian be Catholic, or even Christian. Good pastoral practice presumes that parents who petition for the sacrament of baptism for their child are persons of good will who ask in faith and have a basic understanding of the associated obligations.

Addendum: Canon Law on Infant Baptism

Canon 849 – Baptism, the gateway to the sacraments and necessary for salvation by actual reception or at least by desire, 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, are reborn as children of God, and, configured to Christ by an indelible character, are incorporated into the Church.

Canon 851 – The celebration of baptism must be prepared properly; consequently:

1° (*does not pertain to infant baptism*)

2° the parents of an infant to be baptized and those who are to undertake the function of sponsor are to be instructed properly on the meaning of this sacrament and the obligations attached to it. The pastor personally, or through others, is to take care that the parents are properly instructed through both pastoral advice and common prayer, bringing several families together and, where possible, visiting them.

Canon 867 – §1. Parents are obliged to take care that infants are baptized in the first few weeks; as soon as possible after the birth or even before it, they are to go to the pastor to request the sacrament for their child and to be prepared properly for it.

§2. An infant in danger of death is to be baptized without delay.

Canon 868 – §1. For an infant to be baptized licitly:

1° the parents, or at least one of them, or the person who legitimately takes their place, must consent;

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 precepts of particular law after the parents have been advised about the reason.

§2. An infant of Catholic parents, or even of non-Catholic parents, is baptized licitly in danger of death even against the will of the parents.

Canon 872 – Insofar as possible, a person to be baptized is to be given a sponsor who assists an adult in Christian initiation, or together with the parents, presents an infant for baptism. A sponsor also helps the baptized person to lead a Christian life in keeping with baptism and to fulfill faithfully the obligations inherent in it.

Canon 873 – There is to be only one male sponsor, or one female sponsor, or one of each.

Canon 874 – §1. To be permitted to take on the function of sponsor, a person must:

- 1° be designated by the one to be baptized, by the parents or the person who takes their place, or in their absence by the pastor or minister and have the aptitude and intention of fulfilling this function;
- 2° have completed the sixteenth year of age, unless the diocesan bishop has established another age, or the pastor or minister has granted an exception for a just cause;
- 3° be a Catholic who has been confirmed and has already received the most holy sacrament of the Eucharist and who leads a life of faith in keeping with the function to be taken on;
- 4° not be bound by any canonical penalty legitimately imposed or declared;
- 5° not be the father or mother of the one to be baptized.

§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.

Canon 875 – A person who administers baptism is to take care that, unless a sponsor is present, there is at least a witness who can attest to the conferral of the baptism.

(all canons related to baptism: 849 – 878)

Other References on Infant Baptism:

- *Catechism of the Catholic Church: 1213-1284*
- *The Order of Baptism of Children*