

INFANT BAPTISM

From the earliest time, the Church, to which the mission of preaching the gospel and of baptizing was entrusted, has baptized children as well as adults. Our Lord said: "Unless a man is reborn of water and the Holy Spirit, he cannot enter the kingdom of God." (John 3:5) The Church has always understood these words to mean that children should not be deprived of baptism, because they are baptized in the faith of the Church. This faith is proclaimed for them by their parents and godparents, who represent both the local Church and the whole society of saints and believers: "The Church is at once the mother of all and the mother of each." (Saint Augustine, Epistle 98, 5: PL 33, 362.)

Introduction to the Rite of Baptism of Children, No. 2

- 1 By definition infants are those who have not yet reached the age of reason (7 years old) and cannot have or profess their own faith. (c. 97, §2; c. 852, §1; Rite of Baptism of Children, No. 1). All others are to be considered minors or adults, and the rites and policies of the RCIA must be followed.
- 2 The current liturgical rites approved for the baptism of infants are to be used.
- 3 Parents are to be encouraged to have their children baptized within the first weeks after birth, following the prescriptions of universal law. (c. 867, §1)
- 4 A child of parents who belongs to the Latin church is ascribed to it by reception of baptism, or, if one of the parents does not belong to the Latin church and both parents agree in choosing that the child be baptized in the Latin Church, the child is ascribed to it by reception of baptism; but if the agreement is lacking, the child is ascribed to the ritual church to which the father belongs (c. 111, Oriental Code canon 29). Notification of the proper rite of the child in inter-ritual baptism is to be made in the baptismal register.
- 5 In the Archdiocese of Santa Fe, at least one of the names given to the baptized must be a saint's name. (c.855)
- 6 For the licit celebration of infant baptism it is necessary that there be:
 - 6.1 Consent of at least one of the parents, or the person who lawfully takes their place. (c. 868. §1, 1°)
 - 6.2 Founded hope that the infant would be brought up in the Catholic religion. If the hope does not exist, the baptism is to be delayed following the prescriptions found below (c. 868, §1, 2°).

- 6.2.1 Baptism is not to be delayed because the parents are not married in the Church.¹ Each case must be examined individually. The ordained ministers and those assisting are not to give any indication of forcing the couple to be married before the baptism is celebrated.² However, some efforts should be made to catechize the parents who are presenting a second, or third, child for baptism and have not done anything to rectify their marital situation.
- 6.2.2 Baptism is not to be delayed because only one of the parents is a practicing Catholic.
- 6.2.3 Registration or monetary contributions to the parish community by envelopes or other means are not to be used as the only factors to determine the parents' practice of the faith.
- 6.2.4 Baptism may be delayed for a period of time so that the practice of the faith may be encouraged, ordinarily not beyond three months.
- 6.2.5 The proper persons to present an infant for baptism are the parents. However, the founded hope of raising the infant in the faith could be given by another member of the family as long as the parents allow it and promise not to interfere with the person making the promise in his/her efforts to raise the child in the faith.³
- 6.3 Proper instruction of parents and godparents in the meaning of the sacrament and the obligations which are attached to it. The instructions are to include the scriptural foundation for the sacrament, the sacramental life of the Church, the rite of Baptism.
- 6.3.1 The requirement of instruction may be fulfilled anywhere in the Archdiocese for those who have a domicile in its jurisdiction. Proof of instructions must be shown.
- 6.3.2 At the end of the instructions a certificate is to be issued by the parish to those who attended the classes. The certificate is to be signed by the one authorized to

¹ E.g., those who are living together, or were married in a civil ceremony or in the presence of a non-Catholic minister without proper permissions having been obtained.

² This may constitute enough grounds for a nullity of marriage under force and fear, and/or simulation of consent.

³ Sacred Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, Pastoralis Actio, Oct. 20th, 1980, No. 28.2: Assurances must be given that this gift will be able so to grow through a genuine education in faith and in Christian living, that the sacrament may attain its full "truth." As a rule, these assurances are to be given by the parents or relatives, although they can be supplied in various ways within the Christian community. If, on the other hand, these assurances are not in reality serious, that fact can be reason for postponing the sacrament. Finally, if it is certain that there are no assurances, the sacrament must be denied.

give the instructions, dated, and the seal of the parish is to appear on it. This certificate may be lawfully used for a period of two years.

- 6.3.3 Parents are to be encouraged to prepare for the baptism of the child during pregnancy.

BAPTISM

Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you.

(Matthew 28: 19-20a)

- 1 The right to baptize belongs to the pastor of the home parish in which the adult to be baptized, or in which the parent(s) of the child to be baptized are registered or belong.
- 2 Baptism is to be celebrated either in the parish church or its missions according to the discretion of the pastor. Baptism is not to be celebrated in private homes. Outside the case of danger of death baptism is not to be celebrated in a hospital or other place. (cc. 857, 860)
- 3 Outside the case of necessity, it is not lawful for anyone, without the required permission, to confer baptism in the territory of another, not even upon his own subjects. (c. 862),
- 4 Outside of the case of necessity, it is not lawful for anyone, without the required permission from the proper pastor, to confer baptism in their territory upon those who are not his subjects. In those instances when permission has been obtained to have someone baptized in another parish, the responsibility for the paper work, catechesis, and the judgment as to whether the baptism should proceed, still remain with the proper pastor unless other arrangements have been explicitly made.
- 5 Whenever reasonably possible the sacrament of baptism is to be celebrated on Sundays in the presence of the Christian Community, not necessarily in the context of the Sunday Eucharist. Private ceremonies are strongly discouraged unless there is a reasonable cause in the judgment of the pastor of the place of baptism.¹
- 6 Every parish church shall have a baptistry or at least a prominently located baptismal font, properly equipped for the conferring of baptism (c. 858) The font shall be treated with reverence, neatly maintained, and thoroughly cleaned at frequent intervals.
- 7 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 infusion may be lawfully used in the celebration of baptism. (Sacred Congregation for Divine Worship, *Christian Initiation, General Instruction, 2nd editio typica*: 1973. n. 22)
- 8 The ordinary minister of the sacrament is one who has received Sacred Orders. For parishes or communities without an ordained minister, a non-ordained Christian faithful can licitly administer the sacrament by written permission of the Archbishop (c, 861, §2).

¹ Children of unwed parents or of parents who are in a marriage that cannot be officially recognized by the Church, ordinarily are not to be baptized within the celebration of the Eucharist.

- 9 The faithful shall be instructed on the meaning and necessity of baptism, especially when the Sunday's scripture readings lend themselves to the theme, e.g. during Lent, Solemnity of the Baptism of the Lord.
- 10 Periodically an instruction shall be given in every parish explaining the requirements for the valid administration of baptism and the obligation of a lay person to confer the sacrament in emergency. (c.861, §2). The faithful shall be instructed to report an emergency baptism immediately to the pastor of the person baptized. The pastor will decide if prudent grounds exist for repeating the baptism conditionally.
- 11 Priest and deacons shall acquaint those who may be concerned, especially doctors, nurses, and parents, including non-Catholics if necessary, with the Church's practice in regard to baptism. This obligation devolves particularly upon hospital chaplains and pastors having hospitals within their parishes. The matter should also be clearly explained to those about to enter into marriage.
- 12 After an emergency baptism, the proper pastor shall arrange to supply the ceremonies using the proper rite in the approved liturgical books. [Cf. #22]
- 13 Only persons not yet baptized may be baptized. (c. 864)
- 14 Whenever an adult is seeking baptism, he/she ordinarily is to be prepared through the RCIA process (see the *Rite of Christian Initiation of Adults* (1988) and Tab H of this handbook). Children of catechetical age are to be prepared through the RCIA process adapted for children.² See *Archdiocese of Santa Fe, Infant Baptism Policy*, for the preparation required when an infant is being baptized.
- 15 If there is a doubt whether one has been baptized or whether baptism was validly conferred and the doubt remains after serious investigation, baptism is to be conferred conditionally. (c. 889, §1)
- 15.1 If it is not prejudicial to anyone, to prove conferral of baptism, the declaration of a single witness who is above suspicion suffices or the oath of the baptized person, a the baptism was received at an adult age.³ (c. 876)
- 15.2 If there is a question of whether baptism was conferred validly by a non-Catholic community, the rites of the non-Catholic community as well as the intention of an adult

² The sacramental preparation of children of catechetical age can be done through the regular religious education program offered at the parish; however the rites of the RCIA are to be followed.

³ In this case "adult" is to be interpreted as seven years old or older, unless the person lacks use of reason. (cf. canons 852, 97)

baptized person and the minister of the baptism need to be investigated. As a rule of thumb, if water and the Trinitarian formula is used the baptism is conferred validly.⁴

- 15.3 If after a serious investigation it seems necessary to confer baptism again conditionally, the minister should explain beforehand the reasons why baptism is conferred conditionally in this instance.
 - 15.4 The celebration of conditional baptism is done privately rather than in a public liturgical assembly of the community. The reception into full communion should take place later at the Sunday Eucharist of the community.
 - 15.5 In conferring conditional baptism the Christian Initiation of Adults on Exceptional Circumstances (Abbreviated form) is to be used, omitting the anointing with the Oil of Catechumens. When administering the sacrament the following formula is used: “N., if you are not baptized, I baptized you in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit.” The celebration of the sacrament of confirmation is deferred until the reception into full communion with the Church.
- 16 If aborted fetuses are alive, they are to be baptized if possible (c. 871). If there is doubt of whether the person or the fetus is alive, baptism can be conferred conditionally. If there is no doubt that the person or fetus is dead, the minister may not baptize.
- 17 Whenever possible a sponsor is to be employed in the celebration of the sacrament (c. 872).
- 17.1 Only one male or one female sponsor, or one of each sex is to be employed (c. 873). The law does not allow for two males or two females to be sponsors at baptism.
 - 17.2 To be admitted as a sponsor the following prescriptions must be met (c. 874, § 1):
 - 17.2.1 be designated by the one to be baptized, by the parents or the one who takes their place or, in their absence, by the pastor or minister and is to have the qualifications and intention of performing this role;
 - 17.2.2 be at least 16 years of age, unless the pastor or minister judges that an exception is to be made for a just cause;

⁴ As a result of the study by the Congregation for the Doctrine of Faith in Rome, Mormon baptism is not considered valid by the Catholic Church. Since the Church of Jesus Christ of the Latter Day Saints (Mormon) cannot be said to be baptized in the name of the Trinity which the Catholic faith professes, converts from the Mormon Church must be rebaptized when they enter the Catholic Church.

- 17.2.3 be a Catholic who has been confirmed and has already received the sacrament of the Most Holy Eucharist and leads a life in harmony with the faith and the role to be undertaken;⁵
- 17.2.4 not be bound by any canonical penalty legitimately imposed or declared;⁶
- 17.2.5 not be the father or the mother of the one to be baptized.
- 17.3 The prohibition for clergy and religious to be sponsors no longer exists. Those asked to be sponsors are to defer from being the minister of baptism so that the roles are not confused.
- 18 At the request of the parents and in accordance with the ecumenical guideline a baptized Christian not in full communion with the Catholic Church may act as Christian witness together with a Catholic sponsor. (Cf. c. 874, §2) If a Christian witness was used, proper notification of that fact should be made in the baptismal register.⁷
- 19 A Catholic, if requested, may act as a Christian witness or sponsor at a Catholic baptism.
- 20 A baptismal sponsor may act through a proxy.
- 20.1 In order for a proxy to act validly, he or she must have been appointed the sponsor, not the parents or minister. Proof of appointment must be obtained in writing.
- 20.2 Proof that the sponsor is qualified and willing to accept the office obligation also must be obtained.
- 20.3 The proxy must have the same qualifications as the sponsor, and the names of both must be recorded.⁸

⁵ Care must be taken in the interpretation of “to live a life in harmony with the faith and the role to be undertaken.” It should not be interpreted too strictly. Under no circumstances are the ministers to use the celebration of the sacrament of baptism as a means to force the godparents to enter into a sacramental marriage. However, in those cases where their marital status can be rectified, they should be encouraged to do so. Married sponsors should be in a valid marriage. Rare exceptions may be made by the pastor. Use of the form “Affidavit of Eligibility for the Ministry of Baptism or Confirmation Sponsor” on Page 37 of this Handbook assists pastors with their responsibility in this regard.

⁶ These are legitimately imposed penalties by a Tribunal of the Church. No priest or deacon may impose their own penalties. Penalties in the Church must be imposed or declared by a judicial process (e.g. excommunications, suspensions, interdicts).

⁷ Because of the close communion between the Catholic Church and the separated Eastern church it is permissible for a just reason to accept one of the faithful of an Eastern Church as godparent along with a Catholic godparent at the baptism of a Catholic infant or adult, as long as the Catholic upbringing of one being baptized is provided for and there is assurance that the person is fit to be a godparent. (Secretariat for Christian Unity, *Ecumenical Directory, Part I*, May 14, 1967. no. 48)

⁸ Instruction of the Sacred Congregation for the Sacraments, Nov. 25, 1925.

- 21 It is the duty of the pastor to see that as soon as possible the celebration of baptism is to be recorded in the proper parish book in accord with canon 877, §1.
- 22 When an emergency baptism has been celebrated in a hospital, or any other place, the following steps are to be followed in order to insure proper recording of the baptism:
- 22.1 The one who administers baptism (cleric or lay) is to see that, unless a sponsor is present, there be at least a witness by whom the conferral of baptism can be proved. (canon 875)
- 22.2 If baptism was not administered by the pastor of the territorial parish of the institution, the one who administered baptism must inform the pastor of the territorial parish in which baptism was administered so that the proper record may be entered into the books in accord with the norms of canon 877, §1 (canon 878). This is to be done within three days after the administration of the sacrament.
- 22.3 The territorial parishes for the following hospitals are:
- 22.3.1 Lovelace Medical Center, Albuquerque: Holy Ghost Church.
- 22.3.2 University of New Mexico Hospital, Albuquerque: St. Charles Borromeo.
- 22.3.3 Presbyterian Hospital, Albuquerque: St. Charles Borromeo.
- 22.3.4 Kaseman Presbyterian, Albuquerque: Assumption.
- 22.3.5 Northside Presbyterian, Albuquerque: Risen Savior.
- 22.3.6 Albuquerque Regional Center. Albuquerque: San Ignacio.
- 22.3.7 West Mesa, Paradise Hills: St. Jude.
- 22.3.8 Women's Hospital, Albuquerque: Queen of Heaven.
- 22.3.9 Clovis Regional Hospital, Clovis: Sacred Heart, Clovis.
- 22.3.10 Española Hospital, Española: Sacred Heart, Española.
- 22.3.11 Las Vegas Regional Hospital, Las Vegas: Immaculate Conception.
- 22.3.12 St. Vincent, Santa Fe: St. John the Baptist.
- 22.3.13 Public Health Services Indian Hospital, Santa Fe: St John Baptist.
- 22.3.14 Holy Cross Hospital, Taos: Our Lady of Guadalupe, Taos.
- 22.3.15 Raton Medical Center: St. Patrick-St. Joseph, Raton.
- 22.4 The one who administers the baptism is to encourage the parents, or person baptized, to go to their proper parish to have the ceremonies supplied.⁹ A record of the ceremonies supplied is to be sent to the parish where the baptism is recorded (territorial parish of the institution).

⁹ By proper parish is understood the parish where the parents, or the one baptized, are registered. If they are not registered in any parish, it is understood to be the territorial parish of their home address.

- 22.5 When baptism is conferred by a non-cleric, the recording of the baptism is done in accord with the norms of law. Catholic Chaplains are to see that the proper information is sent to the parish.
- 23 In recording the baptism of a child of an unmarried mother, the name of the mother is to be inserted if there is public proof of her maternity or if she asks this willingly, either in writing or before two witnesses; likewise the name of the father is to be inserted if his paternity has been proved either by some public document or by his own declaration before the pastor and two witnesses; in other cases, the name of the one to be baptized is recorded without any indication of the name the father or the parents. (canon 877, 92)
- Rule of thumb: Place the names that appear on the state birth certificate; if the father is willing to sign a document in the presence of the pastor, he should be encouraged to do so in the presence of the civil authorities, and informed that when the proper change is made in the state birth certificate that his name will be added to the baptismal certificate.
- 24 In recording the baptism of an adopted child, the names of the adopting parents are to be recorded. The names of the natural parents are not to be recorded since that is contrary to the norms for the State of New Mexico (c. 877, §3). Please note that, in the case of adoption after baptism, the names of the natural parents should be kept in the baptismal register, and a notation of adoption with the new parents' names should be added to the record. Be aware that in the State of New Mexico the names of the natural parents cannot be given out without a court order, even after the adoptee is eighteen years old.¹⁰
- 25 No changes can be made in the baptismal register, unless there is an authentic document that substantiates the change. The change is to be marked in notations, including the source of the change.

¹⁰ For further information on the State of New Mexico Laws regarding adoption, see New Mexico State Statutes, 1978, 1989 Replacement Pamphlet, Chapter 40, Article 7, with special attention to Section 40-7-52 regarding the name of the adoptee, and 40-7-53 regarding confidentiality of records.