

Guidelines

for the

Preparation and Celebration

of the

Sacrament of Baptism
(Rite of Baptism for Children)

for the

Diocese of Fort Worth

The Sacrament of Baptism

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<p style="text-align: center;">GUIDELINES FOR THE PREPARATION AND CELEBRATION OF THE SACRAMENT OF BAPTISM FOR CHILDREN</p>

I. Doctrinal Overview

A. HISTORICAL SUMMARY OF THE SACRAMENT OF BAPTISM

1. To Summarize The Church's Initiation Procedure In The First Century
 - a. It was loosely organized and much like the rites of early Jewish sects
 - b. It included:
 - 1) A period of preparation for instruction and repentance
 - 2) Reception into the community through a bath of water and sometimes a laying on of hands
2. Second Century through Fifth Century
 - a. Candidates for Baptism had a long period of preparation including instruction, prayer, and doing good works.
 - b. When ready for Baptism, the [candidates were vouched for by their sponsors,] and bathed, fasted, and prayed before receiving the sacrament.
 - c. For the ceremony, the candidates were exorcised and anointed. After disrobing, [they] went into the water to profess their faith and be baptized.
 - d. Clothed in white garments, they received a final anointing by the Bishop to confirm their new life in Christ.
 - e. When Bishops found it impossible to attend all Baptisms, the Western Church separated this final anointing from the Baptism itself to be administered later in the ceremony of Confirmation.
3. Sixth Century to the Twentieth Century
 - a. In the Middle Ages, Christianity became the common belief, and infant Baptisms, the general rule.
 - b. The long preparation for Baptism was no longer needed.
 - c. In some areas, a child was confirmed at the time of Baptism; but as time went on, this ceremony was postponed until a later age.
 - d. The Council of Trent in 1565 stated the "age of reason" as right for Confirmation.

- e. Confirmation was no longer seen as simply a sealing of Baptism but rather as a sacrament of growth, confirming the Christian person in his faith.
- f. The Bishop's Kiss of Peace becomes a blow to the cheek to signify that one must be ready to suffer for Christ.

4. Twentieth Century: Vatican Council II

The Constitution on the Sacred Liturgy offered some guidelines for the renewal of both Baptism and Confirmation.

- a. First of all, Baptism, Confirmation, and Eucharist were seen once again as sacraments of initiation, progressively incorporating the Christian into Christ and the believing community.
- b. The Rite of Baptism was to have different ceremonies for adults and for children, with adults again having a period of preparation in order to learn about Christ and to adopt a Christian life style. Stages in this preparation were to be marked off by special rites at different times.

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- c. In 1969 the revised rite of baptism for children, Rite of Christian Initiation of Children (RCIC), was promulgated, which was better adapted to the actual condition of children; the role and responsibilities of parents and godparents was more clearly expressed; stress was placed on educating parents and godparents in how to raise a child as a member of the Christian community. Suitable adaptations were also made for the baptism of a large number of children.
- d. Baptism is now frequently celebrated at the Sunday Eucharist of the community, and where this is not possible, it is still seen now as a communal celebration, not a private ceremony.

B. THEOLOGY OF THE SACRAMENT OF BAPTISM, CORRELATION WITH *THE CATECHISM OF THE CATHOLIC CHURCH*, AND IMPLICATIONS FOR INFANT BAPTISM

1. Faith and Baptism are integrally linked.

- The faith of the individual develops within the community of believers. (CCC 1253)
- An infant's faith is supported by the parents, by the godparents, and the whole Church community. (CCC 1255)

Correlation with *The Catechism of the Catholic Church* (CCC)

1253: Baptism is the sacrament of faith. [Cf. Mk 16:16.] But faith needs the community of believers. It is only within the faith of the Church that each of the

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faithful can believe. The faith required for Baptism is not a perfect and mature faith, but a beginning that is called to develop. The catechumen or the godparent is asked: "What do you ask of God's Church?" The response is: "Faith!"

1255: For the grace of Baptism to unfold, the parents' help is important. So too is the role of the godfather and godmother, who must be firm believers, able and ready to help the newly baptized – child or adult – on the road of Christian life. [Cf. CIC, cann. 872-874.] Their task is a truly ecclesial function (officium) [Cf. SC 67.] The whole ecclesial community bears some responsibility for the development and safeguarding of the grace given at Baptism.

Implications:

- Faith is conversion to Jesus Christ and the commitment to follow his ways. Faith is a gift of God received through the action of the Holy Spirit. Baptism, as a sacrament of initiation, welcomes the individual into the community of faith. By their own baptism, the community of believers is called to holiness and to spread the good news to all.
- The awakening of faith is a process of formation that is transmitted by and developed within the ecclesial community. The faith of the parents and the act of baptism unite the infant to the community of believers. It is the responsibility of the parents, godparents and the whole church community to hand on their faith in a supportive environment and to offer a living example of faith to the child.

2. Baptism is necessary for salvation.

- The Lord himself affirms that Baptism is necessary for salvation. (*CCC 1257*)
- The Church has always acknowledged various forms of baptism, i.e., baptism of blood, baptism of desire, and baptism of water. (*CCC 1258-60*)
- The Church entrusts to God's mercy children who die without baptism. (*CCC 1261*)

Correlation with *The Catechism of the Catholic Church (CCC)*

CCC 1257: The Lord himself affirms that Baptism is necessary for salvation. [Cf. Jn 3:5.] He also commands his disciples to proclaim the Gospel to all nations and to baptize them. [Cf. Mt 28:19-20; cf. Council of Trent (1547) DS 1618; LG 14; AG 5.] Baptism is necessary for salvation for those to whom the Gospel has been proclaimed and who have had the possibility of asking for this sacrament. [Cf. Mk 16:16.] The Church does not know of any means other than Baptism that assures entry into eternal beatitude; this is why she takes care not to neglect the mission she has received from the Lord to see that all who can be baptized are "reborn of water and the Spirit." God has bound salvation to the sacrament of Baptism, but he himself is not bound by his sacraments.

CCC 1258: The Church has always held the firm conviction that those who suffer death for the sake of the faith without having received Baptism are baptized by

their death for and with Christ. This Baptism of blood, like the desire for Baptism, brings about the fruits of Baptism without being a sacrament.

CCC 1259: *For catechumens who die before their Baptism, their explicit desire to receive it, together with repentance for their sins, and charity, assures them the salvation that they were not able to receive through the sacrament.*

CCC 1260: *“Since Christ died for all, and since all men are in fact called to one and the same destiny, which is divine, we must hold that the Holy Spirit offers to all the possibility of being made partakers in a way known to God, of the Paschal mystery.” [GS 22 § 5; cf. LG 16; AG 7.] Every man who is ignorant of the Gospel of Christ and of his Church, but seeks the truth and does the will of God in accordance with his understanding of it, can be saved. It may be supposed that such persons would have desired Baptism explicitly if they had known its necessity.*

CCC 1261: *As regards children who have died without Baptism, the Church can only entrust them to the mercy of God, as she does in her funeral rites for them. Indeed, the great mercy of God who desires that all men should be saved, and Jesus’ tenderness toward children which caused him to say: “Let the children come to me, do not hinder them,” [Mk 10:14; cf. 1 Tim 2:4.] allow us to hope that there is a way to salvation for children who have died without Baptism. All the more urgent is the church’s call not to prevent little children coming to Christ through the gift of holy Baptism.*

Implications:

- In John’s Gospel Our Lord said, “Unless a man is reborn in water and the Holy Spirit, he cannot enter the kingdom of God.” (John 3:5) The Church understands these words to mean that Baptism is the door to life and to the kingdom of God. Baptism is the normal means by which those who hear the gospel are conformed to Christ and through which they share in the life of grace offered to all through the Paschal mystery. Baptism is necessary for salvation because it was commanded by Christ and because without it one cannot receive the other sacraments.
- The Church understands that, through no fault of their own, there are many who never have the opportunity to hear the gospel or to receive baptism. In addition to Water Baptism, the Church recognizes a Baptism by Blood and a Baptism of Desire. First among these is the Baptism of Blood. Those who suffer and die because of their faith are saved by their death for and with Christ. Catechumens who die before baptism have shown by their words and actions a desire to be baptized and are therefore saved by Christ. Those who have never heard the gospel of Christ or been exposed to His Church, can be saved by sincerely seeking God and striving to live a good life by following the divine law planted within their conscience.
- As regards children who die without Baptism, the Church entrusts them to the mercy of God. Children hold a special place in the heart of Jesus; therefore

we have the hope that He will provide a way of salvation for children who die without Baptism.

3. Baptism is a grace and gift of God.

- Baptism forgives all sins. (CCC 1263)
- Baptism makes one a “ ‘new creature’, an adopted son of God”. (CCC 1265)
- Baptism incorporates the infant into the Church. (CCC 1267)
- Baptism makes one a sharer in the priesthood of Christ, in his prophetic and royal mission. (CCC 1268)
- Baptism constitutes the sacramental bond of the unity of Christians. (CCC 1271)
- Baptism imprints an indelible spiritual mark. (CCC 1272)

Correlation with *The Catechism of the Catholic Church* (CCC)

CCC 1262: *The different effects of Baptism are signified by the perceptible elements of the sacramental rite. Immersion in water symbolizes not only death and purification, but also regeneration and renewal. Thus the two principal effects are purification from sins and new birth in the Holy Spirit. [Cf. Acts 2:38; Jn 3:5.]*

CCC 1265: *Baptism not only purifies from all sins, but also makes the neophyte “a new creature,” an adopted son of God, who has become a “partaker of the divine nature,” [2 Cor 5:17; 2 Pet 1:4; cf. Gal 4:5-7.] member of Christ and co-heir with him, [Cf. 1 Cor 6:15; 12:27; Rom 8:17.] and a temple of the Holy Spirit. [Cf. 1 Cor 6:19.]*

CCC 1267: *Baptism makes us members of the Body of Christ: “Therefore...we are members one of another.” [Eph 4:25.] Baptism incorporates us into the Church. From the baptismal fonts is born the one People of God of the New Covenant, which transcends all the natural or human limits of nations, cultures, races, and sexes: “For by one Spirit we were all baptized into one body.” [1 Cor 12:13.]*

CCC 1268: *The baptized have become “living stones” to be “built into a spiritual house, to be a holy priesthood.” [1Pet 2:5.] By Baptism they share in the priesthood of Christ, in his prophetic and royal mission. They are “a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, God’s own people, that [they] may declare the wonderful deeds of him who called [them] out of darkness into his marvelous light.” [1 Pet 2:9.] Baptism gives a share in the common priesthood of all believers.*

CCC 1271: *Baptism constitutes the foundation of communion among all Christians, including those who are not yet in full communion with the Catholic Church: “For men who believe in Christ and have been properly baptized are put in some, though imperfect, communion with the Catholic Church. Justified by faith in Baptism, [they] are incorporated into Christ; they therefore have a right*

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to be called Christians, and with good reason are accepted as brothers by the children of the Catholic Church.” [UR 3.] “Baptism therefore constitutes the sacramental bond of unity existing among all who through it are reborn.” [UR 22 § 2.]

CCC 1272: Incorporated into Christ by Baptism, the person baptized is configured to Christ. Baptism seals the Christian with the indelible spiritual mark (character) of his belonging to Christ. No sin can erase this mark, even if sin prevents Baptism from bearing the fruits of salvation. [Cf. Rom 8:29; Council of Trent (1547); DS 1609-1619.] Given once for all, Baptism cannot be repeated.

Implications:

Spiritual rebirth is a gift from God. Baptism is the sign of a loving Father sharing His endless life, love and happiness with a child. It is the first of the sacraments of initiation into the life of God, welcoming a new member into the church community. The child is cleansed of original sin and is marked as belonging to Christ for all eternity. It is the privilege and responsibility of parents to bring their child as soon as possible to the sacrament. Parents and godparents are called to be Christian role models. The child has a right to the love and help of the community to grow and develop the life of grace and faith. The Catholic Church recognizes the baptism of other Christian denominations; therefore the sacrament is not to be repeated.

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II. Pastoral and Catechetical Principles

A. GENERAL PASTORAL AND CATECHETICAL PRINCIPLES

Effective sacramental preparation:

1. Raises as few obstacles as possible to the reception of the sacraments. It seeks to balance the value of adequate preparation and proper disposition, with the recognition of sacraments as free gifts from God.
2. Includes candidates, their families, and the larger parish community.
3. Adapts to the needs, ages and circumstances of the candidates.
4. Focuses on the meaning of the sacrament, including scripture, historical development, and the sacramental rite itself.
5. Fosters discipleship and mission.
6. Promotes lifelong learning and participation in the sacramental life.

B. PRINCIPLES FOR THE PREPARATION AND CELEBRATION OF THE SACRAMENT OF BAPTISM FOR CHILDREN

1. The act of requesting Baptism for a child is in itself a sign of faith.
2. The preparation for the baptism of an infant is directed to parents and godparents.
3. God's very nature is to share life and love.
4. The Church desires that infants be brought to the sacrament of Baptism in the first few weeks after birth. (*cf. CCC 1250*)
5. "Christian parents will recognize that this practice [bringing their child to Baptism] also accords with their role as nurturers of the life that God has entrusted to them." (*CCC 1251*)
6. Sacramental catechesis for Infant Baptism enables the parents to understand more fully their responsibility to nurture the grace of the sacrament.
7. The role of the godparent(s) is twofold: (a) to be a support to the parents who are the primary influence in the life of the child; (b) to nurture the faith life of the child.
8. The whole ecclesial community bears some responsibility for the development and safeguarding of the grace given at Baptism.

III. Policies

A. THE ONE TO BE BAPTIZED

Children who have not reached the "age of discretion" (7 years old) must be initiated using this rite. Children age seven and older must be initiated through the Rite of Christian Initiation of Adults, adapted for children (cf. *Rite of Baptism for Children*, Introduction, 1; *RCIA*, 252, ff.; National Statutes, 18 - 21)

B. PARENTS

1. Formation is a fundamental element of Christian Initiation. It must be connected with the sacrament of Baptism, "the sacrament of faith." (Cf. *GDC 66*) Sacramental preparation for the sacrament of Baptism for parents is a prerequisite for the baptism of an infant. (Cf. *CIC, can. 867*) Pastoral discretion is required concerning the frequency of such preparation.
2. It is the responsibility of the parents to request baptism as soon as possible after the birth or before the birth of their child. They should go to their pastor or his delegate to request the sacrament for their child. (Cf. *CIC, can. 867*)
3. In an intact marriage, at least one parent/legal guardian should be a baptized Catholic. The non-Catholic parent must be willing to allow his/her child to be baptized in the Catholic Church. The sacrament should not be celebrated if the non-Catholic parent expresses strong opposition because the event of the sacrament should not divide the family. In cases where there is opposition, pastoral counseling should present options for future celebration of the sacrament when conditions are more favorable.
4. In case of divorce, the custodial parent may seek baptism. Civil law defines "custodial parent" as the one who at that moment has physical custody of the child.
5. Although the rite is insistent on the preparation of parents/guardians, none of the following may be made requirements for baptism of a child:
 - a. Convalidation of an invalid marriage
 - b. Any demonstrations of financial support, e.g., envelopes.
 - c. Any other obligation not found in Church law concerning baptism. (*CIC 868 1.1*)
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 the objects of special solicitude and need

to be dealt with in the best pastoral way possible. Special care should be taken in each individual case.

C. 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. (*Cf. CIC, can. 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. (*Cf. CIC, can. 874*)
4. Although people of some cultures sometimes choose multiple godparents, only two names can actually be entered in the Baptismal Register. (*CIC, can. 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. (*Cf. CIC, can. 874.*)
6. Godparents should be invited and encouraged to attend Baptismal Preparation in order to better understand their role as godparents. If they are from another parish, a letter of recommendation from their pastor is required.
7. 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.

D. PARISH

1. The priest or deacon is the ordinary minister of Baptism. If Baptism is celebrated during Mass, the presider ordinarily would also confer the baptism.
2. 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 people. (*Cf. CIC, can. 862*)
3. Because we view Lent as a season of preparation for the Easter sacraments of Initiation, it seems more appropriate not to schedule baptisms during this time.
4. The baptismal rite should be celebrated, if possible, in the context of a Sunday liturgy before the entire community. When baptism is celebrated apart from Sunday liturgy, proper liturgical principles should be followed. The use of music and the various

liturgical ministries is encouraged.

5. For the integrity of the sacrament, the celebrant must always perform action (matter: pouring or immersing in water) and the formula (form: “I baptize you...”).
6. The parish is responsible for maintaining a preparation process for those who seek Baptism for an infant.
7. An effective catechesis for Baptism preparation would be based on the Rite of Baptism for Children. Topics to be covered and other suggestions for this catechesis may be found in the Resources section.
8. The pastor/pastoral administrator is personally responsible to ensure all baptisms are properly recorded. Proxies are not recorded.

IV. Norms for Readiness

1. If parents request baptism for their child and there is even minimal hope that the child will be raised Catholic, baptism cannot be denied. (*CCC* 1253)
2. Parents must participate in a parish-provided program that leads them to understand their role as “first teachers of their child in the ways of faith”. (*Rite of Baptism for Children, Final Blessing* 105)
3. If there is well founded concern that the child will not be raised Catholic, baptism will be delayed.

V. The Rite of Baptism

A. GENERAL LITURGICAL PRINCIPLES

1. Liturgical celebrations, especially those involving first reception of sacraments, should be undertaken with special care and preparation:
 - a. All the sacraments engage the whole community of faith, even though particular sacraments may be celebrated individually.
 - b. The symbols—words, gestures, objects, movements, etc.—of the sacraments should always be lavish.
 - c. Candidates should be involved in the celebration as actively as possible.
2. Liturgical celebrations catechize through the experience.
3. The way sacraments are celebrated should offer welcome and hospitality to all, including those who are not members of the faith community.

B. LITURGICAL PRINCIPLES FOR CELEBRATING THE RITE OF BAPTISM FOR CHILDREN

Reception of the Children

Liturgy of the Word

Scripture Readings and Homily

Intercessions (Prayer of the Faithful)

Prayer of Exorcism and Anointing before Baptism (optional in United States)

Celebration of the Sacrament

Blessing and Invocation of God over Baptismal Water

Renunciation of Sin and Profession of Faith

Baptism

Explanatory Rites

Anointing after Baptism

Clothing with White Garment

Lighted Candle

Ephphetha or Prayer over Ears and Mouth (optional in United States)

Conclusion of the Rite

Lord's Prayer (If Baptism takes place outside Mass; otherwise continue with Mass.)

Blessing and Dismissal

C. COMMENTARY ON IMPORTANT LITURGICAL ELEMENTS

At the Sunday Eucharist, this can be a time of introducing families to the community which will be their support through shared worship and the witness of Christian living.

1. Greeting and opening rites

These rites take place at the door of the church before the entrance procession as a sign of baptism as entrance into the Church. (*Rite of Baptism for Children 35*)

2. Rite of Baptism

- a. Water –
 - 1) The water should be clean and warm.
 - 2) The method for baptism of infants is immersion or the pouring of water. (*Rite of Baptism for Children 60*)
 - 3) In the case of pouring, water should be used lavishly.
- b. Oil of Chrism – Holy Chrism should be applied generously, not to be removed afterwards but to be rubbed into the skin.
- c. White garment—As an explanatory rite, the child may be dressed (after baptism) in an actual white gown or a simple white cape may be placed over the child. A godparent might be given this task.
- d. Lighting of candle—The lighting of the baptismal candle from the paschal candle may be the responsibility of a godparent.

3. Concluding Rite

If the baptism takes place during Sunday Eucharist, the Concluding Rite will be the special blessing for mothers, fathers, and the community at the end of Mass. If the baptism takes place outside Mass, for the concluding rite all gather around the altar for the Lord's Prayer and the special final blessing.

Additional information and models regarding the rite of baptism may be found in the resource packet.