

BAPTISM

Baptism, the door to life and to the kingdom of God, is the first sacrament of the New Law, which Christ offered to all, that they might have eternal life... Baptism, therefore, above all, the sacrament of that faith by which, enlightened by the grace of the Holy Spirit, we respond to the Gospel of Christ... Baptism is the sacrament by which its recipients are incorporated into the Church and are built up together in the Spirit into a house where God lives, into a holy nation and a royal priesthood. Baptism is a sacramental bond of unity linking all who have been signed by it. Because of that unchangeable effect... the rite of baptism is held in highest honor by all Christians. Once it has been validly celebrated, even if by Christians with whom we are not in full communion, it may never lawfully be repeated. (Christian Initiation, General Intro. 3, 4)

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Importance of Baptism

1. Baptism is the gateway to the sacraments and necessary for salvation by actual reception or at least by desire. (c. 849)
2. A person who has not received baptism cannot be admitted validly to the other sacraments. (c. 842, §1)

Time and Place

1. To bring out the paschal character of baptism, it is recommended that the sacrament be celebrated during the Easter Vigil or on Sunday, when the Church commemorates the Lord's resurrection. On Sunday, baptism of infants may be celebrated during Mass, so that the entire community may be present and the relationship between baptism and eucharist may be clearly seen. (*Rite of Baptism for Children* 9)
2. So that baptism may clearly appear as the sacrament of the Church's faith and of incorporation into the people of God, it should normally be celebrated in the parish church, which must have a baptismal font. (*ibid.* 10)

Proper Form

1. Baptism is validly conferred only by a washing of true water with the proper form of words. (c. 849)
 - a. The water used in baptism should be true water and, both for the sake of authentic sacramental symbolism and for hygienic reasons, should be pure and clean. (*Christian Initiation*, General Introduction 18)

- b. As for the rite for baptizing, either immersion, which is more suitable as a symbol of participation in the death and resurrection of Christ, or pouring may lawfully be used. (*ibid.* 22)
 - c. The words for conferring baptism in the Latin Church are: “I baptize you in the name of the Father, and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit.” (*ibid.* 23)
2. When an ordinary minister (bishop, priest or deacon) is absent or impeded, a catechist or another person designated for this function by the local ordinary, or in case of necessity any person with the right intention, confers baptism licitly. Pastors of souls, especially the pastor of a parish, are to be concerned that the Christian faithful are taught the correct way to baptize. (c. 861, §2)

Pastor’s Responsibilities for Adult Baptism

1. Priests, in addition to their usual ministry for any celebration of baptism, confirmation, and the eucharist, have the responsibility of attending to the pastoral and personal care of the catechumens, especially those who seem hesitant and discouraged. (*RCIA* Intro. 13)
2. With the help of deacons and catechists, they are to provide instruction for the catechumens. (*ibid.*)
3. Approve the choice of godparents and willingly listen to and help them. (*ibid.*)

Adults to be Baptized

1. For an adult to be baptized, the person must
 - have manifested an intention to receive baptism
 - have been instructed sufficiently about the truths of the faith and Christian obligations
 - have been tested in the Christian life through the catechumenate
 - be urged to have sorrow for personal sins. (c. 865, §1)
2. An adult in danger of death can be baptized if, having some knowledge of the principal truths of the faith, the person has manifested in any way at all the intention to receive baptism and promises to observe the commandments of the Christian religion. (c. 865, §2)

Pastor’s Responsibilities for Infant Baptism

1. Personally or through others take care that the parents are properly instructed through both pastoral advice and common prayer, bringing several families together and, where possible, visiting them. (c. 851, 2°)
2. Prepare families for the baptism of their children and to help them in the task of Christian formation that they have undertaken. (*Rite of Baptism for Children* 7.1)
3. Arrange that the baptism is always celebrated with proper dignity and, as far as possible, adapted to the circumstances and wishes of the families concerned. (*ibid.* 7.2)

Parental Responsibilities for an Infant Baptism

1. Because of the natural relationships, parents have a ministry and responsibility in the baptism of infants more important than those of the godparents. (*ibid.* 5)
 - a. It is of great importance that parents, moved by their own faith or with the help of friends or other members of the community, should prepare to take part in the rite with understanding (*ibid.* 5.1)
 - b. Parents exercise a genuine ministry when they publicly ask that the child be baptized, sign their child with the sign of the cross, renounce Satan and recite the

- profession of faith, carry the child to the font, hold the lighted candle, and blessed with prayers formulated specifically for mothers and fathers. (*ibid.* 5.3)
- c. After baptism it is the responsibility of the parents, in their gratitude to God and in fidelity to the duty they have undertaken, to assist the child to know God, whose adopted child it has become, to prepare the child to receive confirmation and participate in the holy eucharist. (*ibid.* 5.5)
2. Take care that infants are baptized in the first few weeks. Go to the pastor to request the sacrament for their child and be prepared properly for it. (c. 867. §1)
 3. For an infant to be baptized licitly:
 - a. the parents or at least one of them or the person who legitimately takes their place must consent;
 - b. there must be well 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. (c. 868, §1)
 4. An infant in danger of death is to be baptized without delay. (c. 867, §2) An infant of Catholic parents or even of non-Catholic parents is baptized licitly in danger of death even if against the will of the parents. (c. 868, §2)

Godparents/Sponsors

In common parlance these two terms for this baptismal ministry are often used synonymously. The *Rite of Baptism for Children* uses the term “godparent,” while the Code of Canon Law uses the term “sponsor.” The *Rite of Christian Initiation of Adults* makes a distinction between the roles:

“A sponsor accompanies any candidate seeking admission as a catechumen. Sponsors are persons who have known and assisted the candidates and stand as witnesses to the candidates’ moral character, faith, and intention. It may happen that it is not the sponsor for the rite of acceptance and the period of the catechumenate but another person who serves as godparent for the periods of purification and enlightenment and of mystagogy.” (*RCIA* Intro. 10)

“Their godparents accompany the candidates on the day of election, at the celebration of the sacraments of initiation, and during the period of mystagogy. Godparents are persons chosen by the candidates on the basis of example, good qualities and friendship, delegated by the local Christian community, and approved by the priest. It is the responsibility of godparents to show the candidate how to practice the Gospel in personal and social life, to sustain the candidates in moments of hesitancy and anxiety, to bear witness, and to guide the candidates’ progress in the baptismal life. Chosen before the candidate’s election, godparents fulfill this office publicly from the day of the rite of election, when they give testimony to the community about the candidates. They continue to be important during the time after reception of the sacraments when the neophytes need to be assisted so that they remain true to their baptismal promises.” (*ibid.* 11)

1. To take on the function of godparent/sponsor the person must:
 - 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;

- be a Catholic who has been confirmed and has already received the most holy sacrament of the Eucharist and who leads a life in keeping with the function to be taken on;
 - not be bound by any canonical penalty imposed or declared;
 - not be the father or mother of the one to be baptized. (c. 874, §1)
3. A baptized and believing Christian not belonging to the Catholic Church may act as a Christian witness along with a Catholic godparent. (*Christian Initiation* Intro. 10.4)

Recording the Baptism

1. The pastor of the place where the baptism is celebrated must carefully and without 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. (c. 877, §1)
2. If it concerns a child born to an unmarried mother:
 - a. the name of the mother must be inserted, if her maternity is established publicly or if she seeks willingly in writing or before two witnesses;
 - b. the name of the father must be inscribed if a public document or his own declaration before the pastor and two witnesses prove his paternity;
 - c. in other cases, the name of the baptized is inscribed with no mention of the name of the father or the parents. (c. 877, §2)
3. In the baptism register are also to be noted confirmation and those things which pertain to the canonical status of the Christian faithful by reason of marriage, of adoption (as outlined below), of reception of sacred orders, of perpetual profession made in a religious institute, and of change of rite. These notations are always to be noted on a baptismal certificate (with the exceptions noted below regarding adoption). (c. 535, §2)
4. Once entered into a sacramental register, data is considered official and permanent. It may not be modified except under special conditions. Original data should never be scratched out, erased, “whited out” or otherwise destroyed or obliterated. See the section entitled “Sacramental Records and Registers” for complete details.

Recording Baptism of Adopted Children

The following are the norms for dioceses in the United States regarding recording the baptism of adopted children. These norms became effective 1 December 2000.

1. For children baptized after their adoption is finalized, the following information shall be entered in the baptism register:
 - Christian name(s) of the child as designated by the adoptive parent(s)
 - name(s) of the adoptive parents
 - date and place of birth
 - names of the sponsors selected by the adoptive parent(s)
 - place and date of the baptism
 - name of the minister performing the baptism
 - the fact of the adoption but not the names of the natural parents
 - Baptismal certificates issued by the parish for adopted children will be no different from other baptismal certificates. No mention of the fact of the adoption shall be made on the baptism certificate.
2. For children baptized before their adoption is finalized, the following notations shall be added to the baptismal register, but only after the adoption is finalized and with due regard for the civil law of the jurisdiction:

- parentheses shall be placed around the names of the natural parents
 - the name(s) of the adoptive parent(s) shall then be added
 - the child's former surname shall also be parenthesized and the new surname added
 - the notation shall be made that the child was legally adopted
 - Baptismal certificates issued by the parish for these individuals shall give only:
 - i. the name(s) of the adoptive parents
 - ii. the child's new legal surname
 - iii. the date and place of baptism
 - iv. the name of the minister who conferred the sacrament
 - the name(s) of the sponsor(s) shall not be given
 - no mention of the fact of adoption shall be made on the baptism certificate.
4. Parish personnel having access to parish registers have an obligation not to disclose to any person any information which would identify or reveal, directly or indirectly, the fact that a person was adopted.