

DIOCESE OF PORTLAND

**INFANT BAPTISM**

January 4, 1988  
(Amended February 13, 1995)

“The term ‘children’ or ‘infants’ refers to those who have not yet reached the age of discernment, and therefore cannot profess personal faith. From the earliest times, the Church, to which the mission of preaching the Gospel and of baptizing was entrusted, has baptized not only adults but children as well. 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 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, a faith proclaimed for them by their parents and godparents, who represent both the local church and the whole society of saints and believers...”

(RBaptC, 1-2)

I. **Catechesis for Baptism**

- A. Parents and godparent(s) are to be properly instructed in the meaning of the sacrament and the obligations which are attached to it (cf. c.851). It is the responsibility of the pastor to see to it that catechesis is provided personally or through others. The catechesis is intended to assist parents and godparent(s) in meeting their responsibilities and should be attended to with pastoral sensitivity considering the variety of needs.
- B. “Parents are obliged to see to it that infants are baptized within the first weeks after birth; as soon as possible after the birth, or even before it, parents are to go to the pastor to request the sacrament for their child and to be properly prepared for it” (c.867.1).

II. **Place**

- A. The sacrament of baptism is a sign of entrance into the Christian community. The proper place for baptism is a church (cf. c.857), which is the “cultic center” for the Christian faithful. The sacrament may not be administered elsewhere except in cases of grave necessity (cf. c.860), e.g. danger or death.
- B. Good Order and good pastoral care demand that the proper pastor baptize his parishioners. Infants are generally baptized in the parish church proper to their parents (cf. c.857).
- C. In this diocese, ordinarily the proper pastor is to grant permission for another priest to celebrate a baptism of his subject in another parish. When a baptism is requested by someone from another parish, the pastor

should insure that the permission of the pastor is secured and that there is adequate preparation.

III. **Time**

- A. “Although baptism may be celebrated on any day, it is recommended that ordinarily it be celebrated on a Sunday or if possible at the Easter Vigil” (c.856).
- B. “...Except for a good reason baptism should not be celebrated more than once on the same day in the same church” (CI, 27).
- C. Baptism may appropriately take place at Sunday Eucharist so that entire community may be present but it is not desirable as a weekly practice (cf. RBaptC, 9).
- D. In this diocese, the celebration of baptism for infants is to be available at least monthly in each parish.
- E. The “Rite of Bringing a Baptized Child to the Church” should be celebrated whenever a child was baptized in danger of death and then recovers (cf. RBaptC, 31).

IV. **Godparent(s)**

- A. In order to be a godparent the following qualifications specified in the law (cf. c.874) are to be observed:
  - 1. be chosen for the role by the parents and have the ability and intention of carrying out the responsibility;
  - 2. be 16 years old, although the priest or deacon may make an exception for a just cause;
  - 3. be a fully initiated Catholic, that is, one who has been baptized, confirmed and received the Eucharist, and be living in harmony with the faith and the role of a godparent;
  - 4. be someone other than a parent of the one being baptized;
  - 5. be one who has not been publicly reprimanded by the Church by means of a penalty. This is a very rare occurrence.
  - 6. “Only on male or one Female godparent or one of each sex is to be employed” (c.873).
- B. A member of a separated faith community may not act as a godparent at a Catholic baptism. However, a baptized member of such a community may

serve as a “Christian Witness” to baptism together with a Catholic godparent (cf. c.874 and ED, 57), All parties should understand that the role is not that of a godparent.

- C. A member of the Orthodox Church may be invited to act as a godparent together with a Catholic godparent for a Catholic. A Catholic may similarly act as a godparent for an Orthodox, if he or she is so invited (cf. ED, 48)
- D. A Catholic may not act as a godparent for a member of a separated community; but a Catholic may act as a “Christian witness”, if he or she is so invited (cf. Ed, 57).
- E. One who administers baptism in cases of necessity, is to see to it that unless a godparent is present, there be at least one witness by whom the conferral of baptism can be proved (cf. c.875)
- F. With regard to the choice of godparents, it should be kept in mind that when possible, the baptismal godparents are later to be preferred when choosing a confirmation sponsor (cf. c.893)

V. **Minister of Baptism** (cf. c.861)

- A. The ordinary minister of baptism is a bishop, priest or deacon.
- B. In Case of necessity (such as danger of death) any person with the right intention may licitly confer baptism. Pastors are to be concerned that the faithful be instructed in the correct manner of baptizing.

VI. **Postponement of Baptism** (cf. c.868)

- A. In this diocese, before postponement the procedures are:
  - 1. to meet with the parents to discuss their faith commitment and responsibilities.
  - 2. to examine if the Catholic upbringing can be ensured by someone other than the parents.
  - 3. If there is sufficient reason to believe the child will have a faith education, he/she can be baptized.
  - 4. If there is no real hope, the sacrament is to be deferred while reaching out to the parents in a pastoral manner
- B. Baptism must be deferred when there is a complete absence of any well founded hope that the child will be raised catholic. Except in danger of

death, the permission of at least one parent is required to licitly baptized an infant.

VII. **Validity of Baptism in Other Churches**

- A. “There can be no doubt about the validity of baptism among separated Eastern Christians...” (ED, 12).
- B. Occasionally, with regard to other Christian bodies, a doubt concerning baptism may occur. Such doubt may arise from one of the following sources:
1. Matter and form: baptism with real water either by immersion, infusion, or sprinkling, applied together with the Trinitarian formula must be used to the baptism to be valid.
  2. Faith and intention: insufficient faith on the part of the minister never of itself renders a baptism invalid. Proper intention is to be presumed unless there exists a serious reason to doubt his intention “to do what Christians do” when they confer this sacrament. (cf. ED, 31).

C. The baptism of the following churches are generally recognized as valid:

Adventists	Anglican
Assembly of God	Baptists
Congregational	Episcopalians
Evangelical Churches	Lutheran Churches
Methodist	Nazarene
Old Catholics	Polish National
Presbyterian	Reformed Churches
United Church of Christ	

D. Churches who do not believe in baptism or whose baptisms are generally considered invalid include

Christian Scientists	Church of Divine Science
Quakers	Unitarian-Universalists
Salvation Army	Jehovah’s Witnesses
Pentecostal Churches	Christian Community of Rudolph Steiner
The new Church of Emmanuel Swedenborg	

E. The baptisms of the Church of Latter Day Saints (Mormons) are generally regarded as doubtful. As such, it is recommended that someone previously “baptized” as a Mormon be conditionally baptized.

- F. The above listing is not intended to be exhaustive and there can be exceptions even in these cases. If there are any questions please contact the Chancery.
- G. Many Christian churches have a practice of dedicating youngsters which is not a baptism. Efforts need to be made to determine if the person was baptized or dedicated.
- H. When there is doubt as to whether the baptism of a particular ecclesial community is considered valid, consult the chancery.

VIII. **Inter-Ritual Baptism** (cf. c.111)

- A. A child born of two Latin Rite Catholics is baptized into the Latin Rite even if the minister is of another Rite.
- B. A child born of a Latin Rite father and a mother of another Rite, the parents can decide into which Rite the child will be baptized.
- C. If the father is the non-Latin Rite Catholic or if the parents cannot agree in which Rite to baptize the child, the child is baptized in the Rite of the father even if the minister is not the same rite as the father.

IX. **Records** (cf. cc.877, 878)

A. Records

1. Immediately after the baptism is celebrated, the names of the baptized, the minister, parents, godparent(s), Christian witness if any, the place and date of baptism, and the date and place of birth are to be recorded in the baptismal book of the parish where the baptism took place.
2. In the case of a child born outside of wedlock, the name(s) of the mother and/or father is to be inserted in the baptismal register, if known. Caution is urged in this matter.
3. When an adopted child is baptized, the names of the adopting parents are to be recorded with the notation that the child is adopted.
4. In this diocese, when a child is adopted after baptism, the names of the adopting parents are to be added to the baptismal register with the date of adoption.
5. In the case of adults who change their names, the baptismal record may be changed to conform to the new name when

documentary proof of the legal name change is provided. A baptismal certificate can be issued in the new name. Nevertheless, when such a certificate is given out, the previous name should be noted and the date of the legal change of name indicated.

- B. It is the responsibility of the person who baptizes in cases of necessity to inform the pastor of the place where the baptism took place
- C. In this diocese, the record of baptisms celebrated in a hospital is to be recorded in the book of the parish where the hospital is located.
- D. In this diocese, the record of baptism celebrated in a Newman Chapel on a college campus are to be recorded in the baptismal book of the Campus Parish at Orono.

X. **Access to Records**

- A. In this diocese, the baptismal record books are not considered public records. Baptismal certificates can be given to the baptized person, the parents or to other persons, who have a legitimate reason for requesting the record.
- B. In this diocese, when the baptismal record of a person who has been adopted is requested, the names of the adoptive parents are given and no mention of adoption is placed on the certificate.