



# SACRAMENT OF BAPTISM GUIDELINES



## **PREPARING FOR YOUR CHILD'S BAPTISM**

The parish family of Our Lady of Lourdes is looking forward to the celebration of your child's baptism and entrance into the worldwide community that is the Catholic Church. Baptism is called the "gateway to life in the Spirit and the door, which gives access to the other sacraments." As with every major event in your child's life – school, sports, music – we want you to know what you are getting ready to do. Baptism is more than a splash of water, cards and cakes. It is a first encounter with the Spirit of God, the washing away of original sin, dying and rising to new life, entrance into the Community of God, and more. We want you, the godparents you have selected, and your child to be prepared in the best way possible so that this sacrament can be celebrated and appreciated.

If you or your spouse have been away from the Church, we hope that this time of preparation will serve as a warm "welcome home." Also, that you will be open to the grace to return to an active Catholic faith, we hope that this time will be an opportunity to renew and deepen the grace which you received in your baptism.

The following are the diocesan and parish policies and guidelines, which govern the Sacrament of Baptism. For your convenience, we have put these guidelines in a question and answer format.

### **When should we begin to prepare for baptism?**

By the fifth month of pregnancy, you should contact the church office and register for baptism classes. It is preferable to baptize the child within several weeks of birth. By beginning preparations early, a family can meet this expectation for an early and unhurried baptism. However, there are situations that may necessitate a delay. These situations should be discussed with the catechist, priest or deacon.

## **Does our child have to have the name of a saint?**

While saint's names are not required, care should be taken that a child not receive a name which is contrary to Christian faith or values (i.e. Lucifer, Hitler, etc.) In speaking of our baptismal names, the Catechism of the Catholic Church says, "God calls each one by name. Everyone's name is sacred. The name is the icon of the person. It demands respect as a sign of the dignity of the one who bears it. The name one receives is a name for eternity." (Catechism of the Catholic Church # 2158 – 2159)

## **What is the process of preparing for baptism?**

The first step is to complete the Baptism Registration Form. Then, prior to the first class, the parents of the child should meet with one of the priests, or deacon to discuss their child's circumstances. Following the introductory meeting parents and godparents should attend baptism preparation classes. These class dates are given to you with your discussion with the minister.

## **How soon after birth can my child be baptized?**

Immediately, if the parents and godparents have made proper preparations, including registration and attendance at classes and all necessary documents have been obtained, the baptism can be celebrated as soon as it is scheduled.

## **What happens if we wait several weeks/months for baptism?**

"The Church and the parents would deny a child the priceless grace of becoming a child of God were they not to confer baptism shortly after birth." (Catechism of the Catholic Church #1250)

“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... allow us to hope that there is a way of salvation for children who have died without Baptism. All the more urgent is the Churches call not to prevent little children coming to Christ through the gift of holy Baptism.” (Catechism of the Catholic Church #1261)

This is a pastoral decision that must be made within your family and with the churches ministers.

### **I have heard of six-year-olds being baptized. What age is too old for infant baptism?**

According to Church law (canon law), adulthood corresponds to the “age of reason” which is fixed at seven years of age. Children until their seventh birthday can be baptized according to the Rite of Infant Baptism. On or after their seventh birthday, a child must participate in the Rite of Christian Initiation of Adults, which involves a minimum of one year of formal preparation including special liturgical rites and educational sessions. Your particular situation (danger of death, Significant mental or physical disabilities, etc.) may necessitate a pastoral decision other than that stated above. If you have questions about this, please speak to the priest or deacon.

### **Do both parents have to be Catholic to have a child baptized?**

No, at least one parent should be baptized and a practicing Catholic.

Please remember, if married Catholic – the Catholic party promises to do all in their power to share the faith they have received with their children by having them baptized and reared as Catholics (Canon 1125, par. 1)

## **What does it mean to be a practicing Catholic?**

A practicing Catholic is one who takes his or her faith seriously and evidences their faith through a regular attendance at Sunday Mass, the ability to receive communion, participation in parish life and financial support of the Church.

## **What if I haven't been practicing but have made a commitment to change?**

The Church understands that lives are journeys that are made of numerous twists and turns. The Church welcomes those who have turned anew to the straight path and who seek to renew their faith and share this living faith with their children. A major concern is that often families intend to return to the Church only for the period of baptismal preparation and leave as soon as their child is baptized. Your child's baptism should be seen as an opportunity to return to a fuller and more active membership in the Church, rather as something you are supposed to-do when you have a newborn child.

## **What if we, as parents are not married, can the child be baptized?**

Nothing prevents a child born to parents who are not married from being baptized within the Catholic church provided that the parent(s) of that child is/are properly disposed, has/have been appropriately prepared, understand(s) the responsibilities that come with having the child baptized and is/are willing to fulfill the commitment undertaken to raise the child in the rich principles of the Catholic faith. Also, at any time, if you would like to discuss preparing for marriage, please contact the Director of Faith Formation.

## **What if we are married outside the Church?**

There is nothing that prevents a child born to parents who are not validly married in the Catholic Church from being baptized. Our Lady of Lourdes Church welcomes with open arms your decision to baptize your child in the Catholic faith. As such, you may wish to discuss having your marriage convalidated (recognized) by the Catholic Church.

## **How many godparents do you need?**

A minimum of one godparent is required for baptism. At most, there may be two godparents of whom one must be male and one female.

## **What are the requirements of being a godparent?**

Godparents must be at least sixteen years old. They must have received the three sacraments of initiation (Baptism, Confirmation and Eucharist). They must be practicing Catholics and if married, they must be married according to the laws of the Church. A parent of the child to be baptized CANNOT be a godparent.

## **Can a non-Catholic Christian be a godparent / sponsor?**

No. Only a practicing Catholic who meets the qualifications can be a godparent or sponsor. However, a non-Catholic, baptized Christian who participates in the Baptism and accepts responsibility for helping raise the child to live a Christian life can participate in the Rite of Baptism as a "Christian Witness" (and so reflected on the baptismal certificate) if a Catholic godparent is also present. Likewise, a Christian, who was baptized and confirmed Catholic, and now practices in another Christian tradition, cannot be either a godparent / sponsor or a Christian Witness.

The church requires at least one godparent who is a practicing,

confirmed Catholic age 16 or older. That godparent's name is entered into the Parish Record Book as the "official" godparent or sponsor for baptism. Thus, if you wish to have additional persons bear witness at Baptism as Christian Witnesses and be listed as such, then you must also have one fully initiated (meaning that they have celebrated Confirmation) Catholic godparent who is not impeded from being a godparent / sponsor as well.

A Christian witness is a baptized person belonging to a non-Catholic community. They may be used only with a Catholic Godparent. They are only a witness to the baptism, they are not to be Godparents.

### **Do godparents have to be Catholic?**

Yes. A baptized, believing, non-Catholic cannot be a godparent, but could under special circumstances stand as a "Christian witness." In the cases where there is a Catholic godparent and a non-Catholic "Christian witness," the Catholic godparent is the sole godparent of the child. A person who is not baptized cannot serve under any circumstances as a godparent, sponsor or Christian witness. The role of the godparent is to be an example of faith. Therefore, only one who is a practicing Catholic will be able to fulfill the role of god-parent.

### **Can we have a baptism in our home? Can we have a "private" baptism?**

Baptism is a public liturgical rite of the Church and should be celebrated in the Church not a private home. Further, it should be celebrated in the midst of an assembly that is representative of the larger Church community. Arrangements are made with the celebrant.

## **Why is the presentation of a birth certificate important for the issuing of a Baptism Certificate?**

It is important that the parish be able to properly identify and verify the child's birth information (i.e. parent's names, legal name of child, etc.) when preparing the Baptism Certificate.

Prior to the baptism, a copy of your child's birth certificate **should** be given to the church office or the person in charge of the baptismal preparation sessions. The birth certificate should be obtained from the state and not the hospital in which the child was born.

## **What if I don't have a birth certificate yet?**

It can take up to 3 months after the child is born to receive the state birth certificate. If you do not yet have a birth certificate, please provide us with the Birth Verification Facts that you received at the hospital. Upon obtaining the birth certificate, please provide a copy to our Sacramental records department.

## **Can the baptism of a child be delayed? For what reasons?**

Yes, a priest or deacon can determine to delay baptism for a serious reason;

- parents who show no history of practice of the faith and are unlikely to continue the practice of the faith; or no well founded hope that the child will be brought up Catholic
- or, wholly insufficient knowledge of the faith.

In the event that a decision to delay the baptism is made, the priest or deacon should begin to work immediately with the family to remedy the situation and thus lead as quickly as possible to the celebration of baptism.

**We are not parishioners of Our Lady of Lourdes Church; can we have our child baptized at Our Lady of Lourdes Church?**

Yes, while we encourage you to have your child baptized in your home parish – the faith community with whom you normally celebrate – children can be baptized in other churches. **The two required conditions are:**

- 1. the preparation of the parents and godparents according to the program of the home parish**
- 2. and secondly, the permission of the home pastor.**

**I have taken Baptism Preparation Classes in the past. Do I have to take them again?**

Normally, we say that if parents (and godparents) have attended Baptism Preparation Sessions within the past three years there is no need to attend again. After **three** years, we require attendance. If the family has not been active in a parish community, it may be suggested by the catechist, priest or deacon to attend the sessions for the same reason.

**Again, we welcome you and your child to this exciting time of preparation for the great Sacrament of Baptism. If you should have any questions, please contact the church office. Our Lady of Lourdes, 10114 Highway 6, Hitchcock TX – 409-925-3579 fax:409-925-5094**