

Diocese of Lafayette-in-Indiana
Guidelines for the Reception of the Sacrament of Baptism (Infants)

Preamble

“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.” (*Matthew 28:19, NABRE*)

“I have prayed for this child, and the Lord granted my request. Now I, in turn, give him to the Lord; as long as he lives, he shall be dedicated to the Lord. Then they worshipped there before the Lord.” (*1Samuel 1:27-28, NABRE*)

These guidelines in the Diocese of Lafayette-in-Indiana are not a program in itself, but a framework for parishes to develop their own preparation for infant Baptism. A parish may choose to go beyond the recommended guidelines, but it is not an expectation. One should bear in mind that Baptism is the gateway to other sacraments and the beginning of a life in Christ.

Introduction

“Holy Baptism is the basis of the whole Christian life, the gateway to life in the Spirit (*vitae spiritulais ianua*), and the door which gives access to the other sacraments. Through Baptism we are freed from sin and reborn as sons of God; we become members of Christ, are incorporated into the Church and made sharers in her mission: Baptism is the sacrament of regeneration through water and in the word.” (*CCC 1213*)

Since the earliest times, Baptism has been administered to children, for it is a grace and a gift of God that does not presuppose any human merit; children are baptized in the faith of the Church. Entry into Christian life gives access to true freedom. (*CCC 1282*)

The practice of infant Baptism is an immemorial tradition of the Church. There is explicit testimony to this practice from the second century on...when whole “households” received baptism, infants may also have been baptized. (*CCC 1252*)

The purpose of these guidelines is to assist clergy and those responsible for infant baptism preparation in the Diocese of Lafayette-in-Indiana to fulfill their role as pastoral and catechetical leaders in a more conscientious and Christ-like manner. These guidelines are for the Sacrament of Infant Baptism outside the scope of the *Rite of Christian Initiation of Adults*.

Norms

Infant

“Before the completion of the seventh year a minor is called an infant and is held to be incompetent (*non sui compos*); with the completion of the seventh year one is presumed to have the use of reason.” (*CIC 97.2*)

“One who is not of sound mind (*non sui compos*) is equated with an infant so far as baptism is concerned.” (CIC 852.2)

“An infant in danger of death is to be baptized without any delay.” (CIC 867.2)

1. Adults and children who have attained the use of reason are not covered in these guidelines and should be prepared using the Rite of Christian Initiation of Adults.
2. Infants are baptized on the faith of the parents, sponsors, and the community, not on their own recognition of the sacrament they are receiving.

Parents

“...the parents of an infant who is to be baptized and likewise those who are to undertake the office of sponsor are to be properly instructed in the meaning of this sacrament and the obligations which are attached to it; ...” (CIC 851.2)

“Parents, sponsors and the pastor are to see that a name foreign to Christian mentality is not given.” (CIC 855)

“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 prepared for it properly.” (CIC 867.1)

“For the licit baptism of an infant it is necessary that: 1 the parents or at least one of them or the person who lawfully takes their place gives consent; 2 there be a founded hope that the infant will be brought up in the Catholic religion; if such a hope is altogether lacking, the baptism is to be put off according to the prescriptions of a particular law and the parents are to be informed of the reason.” (CIC 868.1)

“As a rule adults are to be baptized in their own parish church and infants in the parish church proper to their parents, unless a just cause suggests otherwise.” (CIC 857.2)

“... then he and all his family were baptized at once.” (*Acts 16:33, NABRE*)

1. Parents you have asked to have your child baptized. In doing so you are accepting the responsibility of training them in the practice of the faith. Do you understand what you are undertaking? (*Rite 39*)
2. “In order to understand what they are undertaking parents must participate in appropriate catechesis before their infant may be baptized. The content of this catechesis should include:
 - a. Baptism is the foundation of the Christian life..., gives sanctifying grace..., gives them a new birth..., cleanses people from original sin and from all personal sins..., incorporates them into the life, practices, and mission of the Church..., and imprints on their soul an indelible character on their soul....;
 - b. Teaches that through Baptism we receive a share in the mission of Christ as king, priest, and prophet;

- c. Teaches that Baptism “symbolizes the catechumen’s burial into Christ’s death, from which he rises up by resurrection with him, as a ‘a new creature;’”
 - d. Teaches that Baptism is “the basis of the whole Christian life, the gateway to life in the Spirit...and the door which gives access to the other sacraments;”
 - e. Teaches that through Baptism the faithful “share in the priesthood of Christ, in his prophetic and royal mission;”
 - f. Teaches that “the Most Holy Trinity gives the baptized sanctifying grace, the grace of *justification*” (thus “the whole organism of the Christian's supernatural life has its root in baptism”)...;
 - g. Teaches that “having become a member of the Church, the person baptized belongs no longer to himself, but of him who died and rose for us...;
 - h. Includes a thorough explanation of the Rite of Baptism together with the fundamental signs and symbols that it employs: immersion in or the pouring of water, the words of the Trinitarian formula, and the anointing with oil; and
 - i. Teaches that the ordinary minister for the Sacrament of Baptism is a priest or deacon.....” (*NDC 36,A,2*)
3. Parent formation will include at least one catechetical session and a commitment to continue to participate in the faith life of the Church.
 4. It is preferred that both parents participate in the catechetical process.
 5. Grandparents or other relatives do not have the authority to make the request to baptize an infant, nor should be Baptism be conferred unless both parents want it to happen.
 6. Both pastors must give permission if the infant is to be baptized at a parish other than the parents’ parish of record.

Sponsors

“To be permitted to take on the function of sponsor a person must:

1. be designated by the one to be baptized (confirmed), by the parents or the person who takes their place, or in their absence by the pastor or minister and have the aptitude and intention of fulfilling this function;
2. 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;
3. be a Catholic who has been confirmed and has already received the most holy sacrament of the Eucharist and who leads a life of faith in keeping with the function to be taken on;
4. not be bound by any canonical penalty legitimately imposed or declared; and
5. not be the father or mother of the one to be baptized.” (*CIC 874.1*)

“A baptized person who belongs to a non-Catholic ecclesial community is not to participate except together with a Catholic sponsor and then only as a witness.” (*CIC 874-2*)

“Only one male or one female sponsor or one of each sex is to be employed.” (*CIC 873*)

“Are you ready to help the parents of this child in their duty as Christian parents?” (*Rite 78*)

1. Sponsors must have celebrated their 16th birthday.

2. Sponsors should be encouraged to attend the baptismal catechesis provided for the parents.
3. Sponsors are to understand their responsibility to fulfill faithfully the obligations of their role to help the parents of the infant in their duties as Christian parents. (CIC 872)
4. Sponsors or a designated proxy must be present at the Baptism liturgy.
5. Potential sponsors from a parish different from the parish of baptism must provide a certificate of verification from their pastor prior to the baptism. This certificate verifies that the sponsor is a fully initiated Catholic and in good standing with the Church.

Pastor

“...personally or through others the pastor is to see to it that the parents are properly formed by pastoral directions and by common prayer, gathering several families together and where possible visiting them.” (CIC 851.2)

1. Pastors have the responsibility to prepare parents and sponsors for the reception of the sacrament of Baptism.
2. The pastor may delegate the catechesis to a Baptism Coordinator and ensure the development of a comprehensive program for the parish.

Baptism Coordinator

Baptism Coordinators “should have theological formation as well as competence and experience in catechesis.” (NDC 54, B, 6)

1. The role of the Baptism coordinator may be filled by the deacon, pastoral associate, director of religious education, master catechist, or anyone delegated by the pastor.
2. The pastor may delegate the catechesis to a Baptism Coordinator and ensure the development of a comprehensive program for the parish.

Catechists

“Catechists need to be practicing Catholics who participate fully in the communal worship and life of the Church and who have been prepared for their apostolate by appropriate catechetical training. Their commissioning by the Church is a participation in the divine calling to teach as Jesus did. Their personal relationship with Jesus Christ energizes their service to the Church and provides the continuing motivation, vitality, and force of their catechetical activity.” (NDC 54, B, 8).

1. Under the direction of the pastor and / or in cooperation with the baptism coordinator the catechist will follow the parish catechetical program for infant baptism.

Formation

“Baptism is the door to life and to the kingdom of God. ... That is why the Church believes it is her most basic and necessary duty to inspire all, catechumens, parents of children still to be baptized, and godparents, to that true and living faith by which they adhere to Christ and enter into or confirm their commitment to the new covenant. To accomplish this, the Church

prescribes the pastoral instruction of catechumens, the preparation of the children's parents, the celebration of God's word, and the profession of the baptismal faith." (*Rite 3*)

"To fulfill the true meaning of the sacrament, children must later be formed in the faith in which they have been baptized. The foundation of this formation will be the sacrament itself, which they have already received...." (*Rite 3*)

Mystagogy

"After baptism it is the responsibility of the parents, in their gratitude to God and in fidelity to the duty they have undertaken, to enable the child to know God, whose adopted child it has become, to receive confirmation, and to participate in the Holy Eucharist. In this duty they are again to be helped by the parish priest by suitable means." (*Rite 5.5*)

"Before and after the celebration of the sacrament, the child has a right to the love and help of the community." (*Rite 4*)

"... Just as Baptism is a source of responsibilities and duties, the baptized person also enjoys rights within the Church: to receive the sacraments, to be nourished with the Word of God and to be sustained by the other spiritual helps of the Church. (*CCC 1269*)

Record of Baptism

1. "The pastor of the place where the baptism is celebrated must carefully and without delay record in the baptismal book the names of those baptized making mention of the minister, parents, sponsors, witnesses if any and the place and date of the conferred baptism, together with an indication of the date and place of birth." (*CIC 877*)
2. The book used to record parish Baptisms should be of archival quality.

Pastoral Notes

1. The USCCB statement issued in 1995 *Guidelines for the Celebration of the Sacraments with Persons with Disabilities* "stresses the need to include persons with disabilities in the celebration of all sacraments and provides general catechetical guidelines for celebrating the sacraments with persons with a variety of disabilities." (*NDC 35, C*)
2. Disabilities of not only the infant being baptized but also those of the parents and sponsors should be accommodated.
3. At both pastors' discretion, sacramental preparation may occur at another parish.
4. Pastors may consider obtaining written consent from parents and / or legal guardians for the infant to be baptized.
5. Sample forms for Baptism Registration, Sponsor Certificate, and Consent to Baptism are available from the Office for Catechesis.
6. These *Guidelines for the Reception of the Sacrament of Baptism (Infants)* are effective in the Diocese of Lafayette-in-Indiana beginning August 1, 2013.

References Cited

CCC – *Catechism of the Catholic Church*

CIC – Code of Canon Law

NDC – National Directory for Catechesis

NABRE – New American Bible, Revised Edition

Rite – Rite of Baptism for Children