

**SECOND DRAFT  
INFANT BAPTISM POLICY AND GUIDELINES  
SACBC**

**UNDERSTANDING THE SACRAMENT OF BAPTISM**

The term "Baptism" means "immersion" and so this sacrament "immerses" us into the Death and Resurrection of Christ (cf Rom 6:3-4; Col 2<sup>o</sup>12). Consequently, we receive the forgiveness of sins (cf. Acts 2:38 and are incorporated into the Church (cf. 1 Cor 12:13).

"Jesus spoke to them saying, All power is given unto me in heaven and in earth. Go therefore, and teach all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost: Teaching them to observe all things whatsoever I have commanded you: and, lo, I am with you always, even to the end of the world. Amen." - *Matthew 28:18-20*

"And he said to them, Go into all the world, and preach the gospel to every creature. He who is baptized shall be saved; but he who does not believe shall be condemned". - *Mark 16:15-16*

"Jesus answered and said to him: Truly, truly I say to you, unless a man be born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God. Nicodemus answered: How can a man be born when he is old? Can he enter into his mother's womb a second time, and be born? Jesus answered: Truly, truly I say to you, unless a man be born of water and of the Spirit, he cannot enter into the kingdom of God." - *John 3:3-5*

"Can any man forbid water, that these should not be baptized, which have received the Holy Spirit as well as we? And he commanded them to be baptized in the name of the Lord. Then prayed they him to tarry certain days." - *Acts 10:47-48*

"And when she was baptized, and her household, she besought us, saying, If you have judged me to be faithful to the Lord, come into my house, and abide [there]. And she constrained us." - *Acts 16:15*

As a child of God, in virtue of the gift of Baptism, the child is proclaimed by Christ to be a privileged member of the Kingdom of God. Christian initiation is accomplished by three sacraments together: Baptism which is the beginning of new life; Confirmation which is its strengthening; and the Eucharist which nourishes the disciples with Christ's Body and Blood for his transformation in Christ." (CCC 1275)

The Sacrament of Baptism is the initial Sacrament of Faith and through the waters of Baptism we enter a new kind of life, the life of the Spirit.

The documents of the Second Vatican Council offer the RCIA (Rite of Christian Initiation of Adults) as the normative experience for baptism.

*This has many implications for Baptismal Catechesis:*

1. Faith is a journey
2. Baptism demands a level of faith / conversion / commitment,
3. Baptism initiates the individual into a permanent relationship with Christ and his disciples.

Parents and community are to *clearly understand the Christian meaning of baptism and freely choose to celebrate the sacrament* as a time of growth in their own relationship with God.

For Christians:

Baptism is the door to life and to the kingdom of God.  
It is the beginning of the initiation into a life committed to Christ.

Baptism is without fruit if not lived out in daily life.  
The Baptised person is called to actively engage in Christ's mission.

"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 Christ life gives access to true freedom." (CCC 1282)

## THE INITIAL CONVERSATION

“What must I do to inherit eternal life?” (Mt 19:16)

### **POLICY 1:**

Arrangements for infant Baptism are to be made through a personal conversation with the parish priest or designated minister – prior to the Baptism

*For an infant to be baptized lawfully it is required:*

- 1. That the parents, or at least one of them, or the person who lawfully holds their place gives their consent;*
- 2. That there be a well-founded hope that the child will be brought up in the Catholic Faith. If such hope is truly lacking, baptism is to be deferred and the parents advised of the reason for this. Canon 868*

### **PASTORAL GUIDELINES:**

- The purpose of this personal encounter is for the Church to:
  - Express her joy at the birth of a child
  - Help the parents/guardians to understanding the meaning of infant Baptism in the faith life of their family.
  - Extend an invitation to parents and families to enter more fully into the life of the church and to discern their openness to do so.
- Parents may arrange for this conversation prior to the birth of their child.
- This dialogue should help to discern, in the Catholic parent(s), a reasonable hope that the child will be raised in the Catholic faith.

## PROVIDING SACRAMENTAL FORMATION

“Now, you too, in Him, have heard the message of truth and the good news of your salvation, and have believed it.” Ephesians 1:13

*“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.” (CCC 1255)*

### **POLICY 2:**

Parents/guardians are expected to participate in a preparation process for the baptism of their child.

### **POLICY 2.1:**

If parents/guardians are in need of formation in the Christian faith, it is the responsibility of the parish to provide adequate opportunities to develop their faith.

### **POLICY 3:**

Every parish or group of parishes shall ensure sacramental preparation for parents prior to the baptism. Catechesis and preparation that is appropriate for the needs of the family with additional children should be should also be provided.

### **POLICY 4:**

Parents and guardians who have special needs, particular to their circumstances, whether they are migrants; families under stress; single parents or guardians, should expect and receive community pastoral care from their parish. Baptism of children should not be refused to those without permanent domicile. Special care should be taken to consider such cases on an individual basis.

### **POLICY 5:**

Children aged seven or older ought be initiated through the Rite of Christian Initiation of Adults,

adapted for children. (see RCIA Nos. 306—313).  
rite (cf. *Rite of Baptism for Children*, Introduction, 1).

*“Christ’s faithful have the right to be assisted by their Pastors from the spiritual riches of the Church, especially by the Word of God and the Sacraments.” (Canon 213)*

**POLICY 5.1:**

Pastoral discretion should be used in adapting the Rite of Baptism for those persons with various mental and physical challenges.

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**PASTORAL GUIDELINES:**

*The witness of Christian life given by parents in the family comes to children with tenderness and parental respect. Children thus perceive and joyously live the closeness of God and of Jesus made manifest by their parents in such a way that this first Christian experience frequently leaves decisive traces throughout life. This childhood religious awakening is irreplaceable.... indeed, family catechesis precedes... accompanies and enriches all forms of catechesis.” (GDC ---)*

1. Pastoral Challenge: Families should never sense rejection from the Church. Rather, they should be helped to see the Church’s care for them, especially in situations in which baptism needs to be delayed.
2. In cases where parents/guardians have not yet completed their own Christian Initiation, opportunities should be provided for them to do so.
3. Priests and Deacons are advised not to baptize children registered in another parish without the knowledge of that pastor.
4. Religious and lay catechists should work with priests and deacons in the necessary preparation of parents/guardians for the baptism of their child. The preparation process should be one of evangelization and catechesis based on adult learning principles and help parents/guardians to grow in the spiritual life.
5. The number and content of the preparation sessions should be determined on the basis of the needs of the parents/guardians.
6. It is important to keep in mind that the primary element in determining the appropriate amount of catechesis is the need of the parents/guardians and not the fulfilment of a set programme. The number of sessions is left to the discretion of each pastor.
7. Parents who have participated in baptismal preparation for their first child, should be *encouraged* to prepare for the baptism of additional children. They need not be *required* to repeat the same procedure, but alternative options for additional family members should be considered.

**COMMITMENT to a JOURNEY of FAITH**  
*“Jesus came and walked along with them.” (Luke 24)*

“Attention to the diverse life situations of people moves catechesis to employ many different approaches to meet them and to adapt the Christian message and the pedagogy of the faith to different needs.... Attention to the development in faith of the baptized gives rise to catechesis designed to deepen faith or indeed to recover faith, for those who need to discover that essential orientation again.” (GDC 165)

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**POLICY 6:**

Extreme, serious lack of the elements below would constitute legitimate reason for delaying the baptism of a child. The purpose of delay is to allow time for the parents/guardians to come to a fuller understanding of their own faith life and their relationship and responsibility to the parish community.

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**PASTORAL GUIDELINES**

1. The basis for judging a Catholic Christian includes:
  - Acceptance of the doctrine of the Creed
  - Regular sharing in the worship of the Church; personal prayer life; concern to show charity to others;
  - A lifestyle influenced by the life of Christ and a commitment to the way of life to which he invites us.
2. Particular sensitivity should be shown towards Catholics whose culture has implicitly taught the value of having children baptized but who do not necessarily attend

Mass with any regularity. In some cases, these persons are doing what their cultural tradition asked of them. In such instances a pastoral approach may be to baptize the child with their participation in a pre-baptismal process. This may be a first stage in renewing and reconnecting with a larger faith community.

3. However, it should be kept in mind that a lack of active involvement in parish life, does not establish the “absence of real hope” that their child will be raised in the practise of the Catholic Faith.  
Whether the parents/guardians attend Mass every Sunday is not a criterion in and of itself to delay Baptism.
4. Whether the parents/guardians marriage is valid does not constitute the key to the “reasonable hope” required by Church law. This concern may be pastorally addressed during the conversation with the parents.

*In so far as possible, a person being baptized is to be assigned a sponsor..... In the case of an infant baptism, the role is together with the parents to present the child for baptism, and to help it to live a Christian life befitting the baptized and faithfully to fulfil the duties inherent in baptism. (Canon 872)*

*One sponsor, male or female, is sufficient; but there may be two, one of each sex. (Canon 873)*

*To be admitted to undertake the office of sponsor, a person must:*

1. *Be appointed...by the parents or whoever stands in their place.  
...the person must be suitable for this role and have the intention of fulfilling it;*
2. *Be not less than sixteen years of age.....;*
3. *Be a Catholic who has been confirmed and has received the blessed Eucharist, and who lives a life of faith which befits the role to be undertaken,*
4. *Not labour under a canonical penalty, whether imposed or declared;*
5. *Not be either the father or the mother of the person to be baptized.*

*A baptized person who belongs to a non-Catholic ecclesial community may be admitted only in company with a catholic sponsor, and then simply as a witness to the baptism. (Canon 874)*

## GODPARENTS AND SPONSORS

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### **POLICY 7:**

In the baptism of infants' parents take responsibility for choosing a godparent(s) who will serve as good examples for living the Catholic way of life. A godparent can later serve as a sponsor of the child when he/she is confirmed.

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### **POLICY 7.1:**

It is customary to have two godparents, however only one is required for baptism. A godparent may be either male or female. If two godparents are chosen, one must be male and one female.

A godparent must be a fully initiated Roman Catholic, (baptized, confirmed and receiving the Eucharist), at least sixteen years of age.

A baptized non-Catholic may be chosen as a Christian witness provided that there is at least one Catholic godparent.

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### **PASTORAL GUIDELINES:**

1. Godparents should be ready to commit the time and personal care to nurture and support the child and the parents/guardians. This support should be seen as ongoing through this family's journey of faith.
2. One's godparents can never be changed since they are historical witnesses to the baptism.
3. The Church asks that there be one or two godparents. Due to cultural traditions there is no reason why others may not serve as honorary godparents to be part of the ceremony and an important part of the child's life. It is important to inform the ministers of baptism which godparent/s will be officially recorded in the baptismal register.
4. While it is not a requirement that godparent/s participate in the preparation process, their participation may benefit them as a faith growth experience.

## **SUGGESTED CATECHESIS IN PREPARATION FOR INFANT BAPTISM**

### **THE ROLE OF THE FAITH COMMUNITY**

The people of God, that is the Church, made present in the local community, has an important part to play in conjunction with the parents/guardians in the baptism and faith life of a child.

*For discussion:*

- a) The importance of the practice of the faith of parents and godparents.
- b) The importance of the parish community in fostering faith
- c) The importance of home worship, prayers, family customs, religious education and Christian parenting

### **UNDERSTANDING THE RITE OF CATHOLIC BAPTISM**

The Sacrament of Baptism, the first of the seven sacraments, is full of the history, traditions, and rituals of the Catholic church. Baptism removes original sin and symbolizes a rebirth in Christ, recalling his baptism by John the Baptist. The ceremony initiates a child (or adult) into the Catholic faith and membership into the church, the holy body of the people of Christ.

#### **The Rite of Baptism**

The Rite is divided into five main parts:

1. Reception of the Child
2. Celebration of God's Word
3. Celebration of the Sacrament
4. Explanatory Rites
5. Conclusion of the Rite

Each part of this Rite has special significance and meaning.

#### **PART ONE: RECEPTION OF THE CHILD**

The Sacrament of Baptism for a child begins with the reception of the child into the church, during which the congregation may sing a psalm or hymn. The celebrant goes to the front or other part of the church where the parents, the child and the godparents are waiting.

The celebrant:

- Greets them, reminding them that this child is a gift to them from God, then asks the parents/guardian the child's name and why they are seeking Baptism.
- The celebrant asks the godparents if they are ready to help the parents/guardian in their Christian duty to the child.
- The parents/guardian and the godparents are asked if they accept responsibility for training and raising the child in the practice of the faith.
- The celebrant then welcomes and claims the child "for Christ our Savior by the sign of the cross," making a sign of the cross on the child's forehead and invites the parents and godparents to do the same.

- Finally, the celebrant asks everyone to participate in the liturgy of the baptism. They then proceed to the place of the baptism (the Baptistry or the Sanctuary) while the congregation might sing a song.

## **PART TWO: CELEBRATION OF GOD'S WORD**

The Celebration of God's Word has five parts.

### **1. Scriptural Readings and Homily**

- The celebrant reads one or more selections from the gospels, such as John 3:1 - 6 "... unless a man is born of water and of the Spirit, he cannot enter into the kingdom of God..."
- The celebrant gives a brief homily explaining the meaning of the readings and the mystery of baptism and the acceptance of responsibilities by the parents and godparents. The homily might be followed by a period of silent prayer and a hymn.

### **2. Intercessions (Prayer of the Faithful)**

- First, there is prayer for the child, that the Lord Jesus Christ looks on him/her lovingly and mercifully, bathes him in His light, gives him "the new life of baptism and welcomes him into His holy church," and that the child be a faithful witness to Jesus Christ.
- Next, the celebrant prays for the parents and godparents to be examples of love and inspiration for the child.
- He then prays for the family and for all the congregation that the Lord will keep them in love and renew the grace of each one's baptism.

### **3. Invocation of the Saints**

The celebrant invites the congregation to invoke the saints in succession to, "Pray for us". Other saints may be invoked, especially the patron saint of the child.

### **4. Prayer of exorcism**

The celebrant then asks God to free the child from original sin; for the Holy Spirit to dwell in the child, and to strengthen and watch over the child.

### **5. Anointing with the Oil of Catechumens before baptism**

- Next the celebrant anoints the child on the breast, tracing a cross with the Oil of Catechumens.
- He prays for strength for the child "in the power of Christ our Savior," and lays hands on the child in brief silence.
- The group next proceeds to the baptismal font where the Sacrament of Baptism will take place.

## **PART THREE: CELEBRATION OF THE SACRAMENT**

At the baptismal font, either parent may hold the child or, if by tradition there are godparents, one holds the child while the other places her right hand on the child's shoulder during the baptism. The celebration of the sacrament has three parts, including the baptism.

### **1. Blessing and Invocation of God Over the Baptismal Water**

The celebrant prays solemn prayers invoking God and recalling His plan of salvation and the power of water:

- First, there is a reminder, in prayer, that God uses the sacrament of the water to "pour divine life," and asking God to pour His gift from the baptismal font to the child.
- The celebrant then recalls the instances of God's grace through water:
  - At the dawn of creation
  - At the great flood

- At the parting of the Red Sea
- At the baptism of Jesus in the river of Jordan by John the Baptist
- At the flowing of water and blood from Jesus' side as he hung on the cross
- At the call of Jesus to His disciples at His resurrection to go out and teach and baptize all the nations of the world

The celebrant next asks God's blessing on the water of the font, to make it holy so that the baptized may be cleansed of sin and made holy. Next he touches the water with his right hand and completes a prayer over it.

## **2. Renunciation of Sin and Profession of Faith**

- The parents and godparents are asked to renew their baptism promises and to reject Satan and sin and profess faith so they can bring up the child in faith.
- Then comes the profession of faith in God, the Father Almighty; Jesus Christ, His only the Son; the Holy Spirit; and "the holy catholic church, the communion of saints, the forgiveness of sins, the resurrection of the body, and the life everlasting."

## **3. The Baptism**

- The celebrant immerses the child in the font or pours water over the head of the child three times, saying, "I baptize you in the name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit," invoking the name of the Holy Trinity in turn before each immersion or pouring of water.
- The congregation may sing a short song after the baptism.

Note: If the baptism is done by pouring of water, the mother or father usually holds the child; or the godparent may hold the child if it is the tradition.

If the baptism is by immersion, either godparent or parent/guardian can lift the child out of the font.

### ***Following the Baptism:***

#### **1. Anointing with the Oil of Chrism**

- Before anointing the child with the sacred chrism (consecrated oil), the celebrant welcomes the child into God's family.
- The celebrant explains that as Christ, the Son of God, was anointed priest, prophet, and king so too the child is anointed and welcomed into Christ's holy body, the Church.
- In silence the celebrant then anoints the child with the oil of chrism on the crown of its head, signifying enrollment into the royal priesthood and the company of God.

#### **2. Clothing with the White Garment**

- The family provides the white garment that is now put on the child which may have been passed down through generations. The white clothing is a baptismal symbol representing a new creation. The child is now clothed in Christ and the white garment is an outward sign of the Christian mantle.

#### **3. Lighted Candle**

- The celebrant brings forward the Easter (paschal) candle and says, "Receive the light of Christ."
- A family member or the godparent lights the child's candle from the Easter candle. The lighting of the child's candle is a symbol of its enlightenment by Christ.

#### **4. The Ephphatha or Prayers Over the Ears and Mouth**

- The Ephphatha (be opened) ritual is optional in modern baptisms. If done, the celebrant touches the child's ears and mouth with his thumb: ears to receive Christ's word, and mouth to proclaim his or her faith "to the praise and glory of God."

## **PART FOUR CONCLUSION OF THE RITE OF BAPTISM**

The child's lit candle is carried in a procession to the altar, while a baptismal song may be sung.

### **1. The Lord's Prayer**

- The celebrant reminds all that the child "has been reborn in baptism" and is now a child of God.
- He then invites the congregation to pray together in the words Jesus gave us.
- The congregation then sings or says The Lord's Prayer:

### **2. The Blessing**

Finally, a blessing is given to conclude the baptismal rite, at the end of which the congregation may sing a hymn of thanksgiving. The celebrant first says a prayer of blessing over the mother (who holds the child), then the father, then everyone else present. He concludes the Sacrament of the Baptism with the blessing: "May almighty God, the Father, and the Son, and the Holy Spirit bless you." The people reply, "Amen".

## **POST-BAPTISMAL FOLLOW-UP AND CONTACT**

The following are suggestions on ways to continue extending an invitation to families after the baptism of an infant or young child:

- 1 • Send a follow-up letter on the one-year anniversary of the Baptism, commemorating the date and reminding the parents of the parish's continued interest.
- 2 • Hold a special ceremony during Sunday Mass on the Feast of the Baptism of the Lord (or on closest Sunday), to bless parents/guardians and the children who were baptized during the previous year. Refreshments for those families and other parishioners can follow.