

**ENTERING
NEW WATERS
OF BAPTISM**

**DIOCESE OF PHOENIX
INFANT BAPTISM POLICY AND GUIDELINES 2005**

INFANT BAPTISM POLICY & GUIDELINES

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"Frequently, many who present themselves for catechesis truly require genuine conversion. Because of this the Church usually desires that the first stage in the catechetical process be dedicated to ensuring conversion. . . The peculiar nature of this situation is found in the fact that missionary activity is directed towards the baptized of all ages. . . ." (GDC #62, 58c)

UNDERSTANDING BAPTISM

"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 disciple 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 teaching has many implications. Among these are: that faith is a journey, that baptism demands a level of faith/conversion/commitment, and that (Baptism) faith initiates the individual into a (permanent living) relationship with the Christ and his disciples.

"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

Infant baptism is to celebrate faith already transforming the lives of the parents and of the community – a faith that will be shared, by word and example, with the newly baptized infants as they grow into responsible young adulthood. Parents and community must 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, Christ is the “sacrament,” the effective sign of God’s love and mercy and power in our lives. Since Christ acts through His Church – the Christian community – the sacraments need to be understood and seen in the context of the saving actions of the community of believers. 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 and calls the person in this life to actively engage in Christ’s mission and to become like Christ-- the revelation of God’s love.

Parents and the community, in choosing baptism for an infant, accept the responsibility to continue the initiation of the baptized through the Eucharist and Confirmation--growth towards Christian maturity.

WELCOMING CONVERSATION

*“ What must I do
to inherit eternal life?”*

Matthew 19:16



Policy 1

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

Pastoral Guidelines

1. The purpose of this is for the Church to:
 - Express our joy at the birth of their child
 - Help the parents come to the awareness of the significance of this event 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.
2. Parents may arrange for this conversation prior to the birth of their child.
3. The conversation should be in a setting conducive to discussion and dialogue.
4. This dialogue should discern in the Catholic parent(s) at least a sincere effort to live the Christian life and clearly establish a reasonable hope that the child will be raised in the Catholic faith.

§1 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, give their consent;
2. that there be a well-founded hope that the child will be brought up in the catholic religion. If such hope is truly lacking, the baptism is, in accordance with the provisions of particular law, to be deferred and the parents advised of the reason for this.

Canon 868

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."

1255 CCC

"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 2

Parents are expected to participate in a preparation process for the baptism of their children.

Policy 2.1

When parents are in need of formation in the Christian faith, it is the responsibility of the parish to provide opportunities for adequate development of their faith.

Pastoral Guidelines:

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. Families in whom a readiness for baptism is not discerned, and in cases where parents have not been fully initiated in the celebration of baptism, confirmation and Eucharist, a ministry to parents will be an opportunity to deepen their understanding and grow in the practice of the faith.
3. Priests and Deacons should not baptize children registered in other parishes without consultation with the proper pastor. When that proper pastor has determined Baptism should be delayed or indefinitely postponed, that judgment should be respected *unless it is in clear and substantial violation of diocesan guidelines.*

SACRAMENTAL FORMATION FOR PARENT(S)

“That your eyes may be open night and day toward this house, the place of which you said, ‘My name shall be there.’” 1Kings 8:29

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 provided.

Pastoral Guidelines:

1. Religious and lay people should work with priests and deacons in the necessary preparations for baptism. The preparation process should be one of evangelization and catechesis based on adult learning principles and help the parent(s) to grow in the spiritual life.
2. The number and content of the preparation sessions should be determined on the basis of the need of the parent(s) involved and the resources available.
3. While it is expected that each parish establish appropriate processes for baptismal catechesis, it is important to remember the *primary element* in determining the appropriate amount of catechesis is the *need of the parent(s)* not the fulfillment of a set program per se. The number of sessions for this catechesis is left to the discretion of each pastor and his available staff and resources.
4. Parents who have participated in baptismal preparation for their first child, should be *encouraged* to prepare for the baptisms of additional children. They need not be *required* to repeat the same procedure, but alternative options for additional family baptisms should be considered i.e.:
 - Family Retreat
 - Community Pot Luck Dinner with Prayer Service
 - Small Christian Community Invitation

(A parish Infant Baptism Resource Manual with models and recommended content is available through the Diocesan Office of Catechetical Ministry.)

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 226.

PARENT(S) COMMITMENT to 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

Pastoral Consideration

Negative criteria are opportunities for the "new evangelization" mentioned in the General Directory— a time to embrace our own who might have lost a "living sense of the faith".

Policy 4

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

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 exercised toward 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 the Church of their youth or 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 their first stage in renewing and reconnecting with a larger faith community.



Negative criteria do not establish the “absence of real hope”.

Examples:

- One’s non use of offertory envelopes or lack of active involvement in parish life, does not establish the “absence of real hope” that their child will be raised Catholic.
- Whether the parent(s) go to Mass every Sunday is no criterion in and of itself for delaying Baptism.
- Whether the parent’s 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.

GODPARENTS and SPONSORS

Policy 5:

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.

Policy 5.1:

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 there is at least one Catholic godparent.

Pastoral Guidelines:

1. Godparents should be ready to commit the time and personal care to nurture and support the child and the parent(s). 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 two godparents will be officially recorded in the baptismal record.

For pastoral sensitivity, you might recommend honorary godparents sign their names to the back of the Baptism Certificate.
4. It is not a diocesan requirement that godparents/sponsors participate in the preparation process asked of the parent(s). However, their participation may be a benefit to them as a faith growth experience.

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 fulfill 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.

§1 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.*

§2 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

CHARGES for INFANT BAPTISM

For the administration of the sacraments the minister may not ask for anything beyond the offerings which are determined by the competent authority, and he must always ensure that the needy are not deprived of the help of the sacraments by reason of poverty. Canon 848

The process of evangelization, consequently, is structured in stages or “essential moments”: missionary activity directed toward nonbelievers and those who live in religious indifference; initial catechetical activity for those who choose the Gospel and for those who need to complete or modify their initiation; pastoral activity directed toward the Christian faithful of mature faith in the bosom of the Christian community. GDC 49

Policy 6:

No fees are to be charged for the preparation of parents for the Sacrament of infant Baptism or for the administration of the Sacrament of Baptism. This also applies to materials or textbooks. A suggested donation can be recommended.

Pastoral Guidelines:

1. Parishes are encouraged to present a new dynamic that is supported by not charging a fee to those we evangelize. This ministry is to be seen as *Mission ad gentes*—coexisting with a changing baptism ministry that now requires “new evangelization.”
2. Parishes may not charge for the preparation of parents for the baptism of their infants, however parishes may inform parent(s) of any expense incurred in the printing of handouts, or purchasing of specific materials or certificates provided them. While not asking for a fee, it is acceptable to ask participants to assist with a donation to help defray these parish expenses.

RECOMMENDED FORMATION CONTENT

Topic 1: Theology of Baptism

In each of the seven sacraments the faithful enter into a vital relationship with Christ and His people. Baptism is the sacrament by which men and women are incorporated into the Church, into a holy nation and a royal priesthood. The cleansing water of Baptism makes us sharers in God's own life and His adopted children.

For discussion:

- a) Baptism: Entrance into the family of God/human family
- b) Baptism and Salvation
- c) Baptism/ Grace/Original Sin

Topic 2: 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 in the baptism and faith life of a child.

For discussion:

- a) Importance of the faith practice 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

The ongoing development of a living, explicit, and fruitful Christian faith in adulthood requires growth in all six dimensions-

- Knowledge of the faith
- Liturgical Life
- Moral Formation
- Prayer
- Communal Life
- Missionary Spirit

Were Not Our Hearts Burning: A Pastoral Plan for Adult Faith Formation 990- 968

Topic 3: Liturgy of Baptism

Every liturgical celebration, because it is an action of Christ the priest and of His Body of the Church, is a sacred action surpassing all others. The full, conscious and active participation of the faithful demands careful instruction in the ritual and its symbols.

For discussion:

- a) Rite of Baptism
- b) Symbols of Baptism
- c) Parish procedures with the ceremony of Baptism

In general, these aspects of Catholic doctrine and faith-life should be able to be completed within the 30-60 day period following the *welcoming conversation*. Potential models are included in a resource manual developed by the Office of Catechetical Ministry. Formation may occur within a variety of frameworks including group meetings, individual instructions, or even self-instruction utilizing deacons, and/or lay ministers.

Remember, the appropriate baptismal catechesis should be determined by the needs of the parent(s) and the available parish resources. The diocesan Office of Catechetical Ministry is available to aid you in selecting materials for your parish processes.