

Instruction for Sacraments

Infant Baptism



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Diocese of Richmond

Office of the Bishop

September 1, 2018

Dear Friends in Christ,

I am pleased to affirm the use of the diocesan *Instruction for Sacraments – Infant Baptism*. This *Instruction* includes three elements: a brief Introduction to the theology of Baptism, Pastoral Directives Regarding the Baptism of Infants, and Frequently Asked Questions. The latter two sections explain how the body of instruction that introduces the *Rite of Baptism for Children* and other Church law pertaining to Baptism are to be implemented within our diocese.

The task of creating the diocesan *Instruction for Sacraments* was undertaken by the Office of Catholic Education in collaboration with the Christian Formation Commission, Office of Hispanic Ministry, and the Office of Persons with Disabilities, to update policies presented in the 1997 *Called to Faith* sacramental guidelines. I am grateful for their dedication and commitment to this project.

Our Catechism states, "...the family home is rightly called 'the domestic church,' a community of grace and prayer, a school of human virtues and of Christian charity" (CCC 1666). With this principle in mind, the *Instruction* directs our parish efforts to the "first teachers" of children in the ways of faith, the parents or guardians (*Rite of Baptism for Children*, no. 70). Recognizing the positive influence of the parish community, the *Instruction* encourages parishes to welcome families seeking Baptism and strengthen their ability to pass on the faith to their children by means of catechesis and ongoing support of Catholic home life. Through genuine hospitality toward all who come seeking Baptism, parishes spread the Good News of God's unconditional love for all of his children.

To assist with the implementation of this *Instruction*, the Office of Christian Formation will provide catechetical models and samples and recommend published resources, making this help available as an online companion to this *Instruction*.

Full implementation of this diocesan *Instruction for Sacraments – Infant Baptism* will enrich parish communities, sacrament formation teams, and families who request Baptism for their children. Therefore, I affirm the continued implementation of this *Instruction* through study of the document, review of the associated online offerings, and thoughtful examination and renewal of existing parish practices.

Sincerely in Christ,

Most Reverend Barry C. Knestout
Bishop of Richmond

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Getting Started

Guiding Principles

Parents are the primary teachers of their children.

Sacraments are gifts of grace.

Sacraments create opportunities for new evangelization.

Sacramental catechesis can help invigorate the faith participation of families.

All catechesis seeks to draw persons into deeper communion with Christ and his Church.

What is a diocesan *Instruction*?

A diocesan *Instruction* is an official document explaining the basic Catholic theology of the sacrament and describing how the body of instruction that introduces the rite for each sacrament and other law pertaining to the sacraments are to be implemented within a particular diocese.

Rev. Msgr. R. Francis Muench J.C.L., Judicial Vicar

What is the intent of the *Instruction*?

The *Instruction* is intended to be a positive, pastoral, helpful tool for shaping effective parish sacramental formation for families and children.

Who should use the *Instruction*?

Pastors, deacons, parish leaders, Baptism teams, and others designated by the pastor

When does the *Instruction* become policy?

January 1, 2013, the Solemnity of the Blessed Virgin Mary, Mother of God

What does the *Instruction* include?

The *Instruction* consists of an Introduction to the theology of the sacrament, Pastoral Directives, Frequently Asked Questions (in English and Spanish), and Pastoral Notes for Persons with Disabilities.



How should implementation proceed?

Implementation should begin on the policy date and proceed step-wise, as follows:

- Study *Instruction* with staff and sacramental team.
- Examine and evaluate existing parish formation for Baptism in light of *Instruction*.
- Develop a plan for renewal of parish practices.
- Provide formation for sacramental team and parish community, as necessary.
- Renew parish practices for full implementation.

Will additional print copies of the *Instruction* be available?

Yes, print copies may be ordered from Christian Formation. Parishes may also view the *Instruction* from the Christian Formation website.

Where can the parish get help implementing this *Instruction*?

For assistance, with implementation or resources, contact the Office of Christian Formation. Specific questions related to persons with disabilities can be addressed by the Center for Marriage, Family & Life; and the Office of Hispanic Ministry website contains resources in Spanish for adults.

Where can the pastor, deacon, and pastoral staff find additional clarification of *Instruction* directives?

Questions related to canon law, interpretation of the *Instruction* directives, and other pastoral questions will be answered by the Judicial Vicar.

Diocesan Assistance

For assistance, contact:

Office of Christian Formation	804-622-5158
Office of Hispanic Ministry	804-622-5241
Center for Marriage, Family & Life	804-622-5109
Office of Tribunal	804-355-9155



Introduction: Understanding Infant 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 2:12). Consequently, we receive the forgiveness of sins (cf. Acts 2:38) and are incorporated into the Church (cf. 1 Cor 12:13).

From the earliest times, the Church has baptized not only adults, but also children,¹ who likewise need the “new birth in Baptism”² to free them from the power of darkness and bring them into the realm of the freedom of God’s children. Infant Baptism particularly manifests the overflowing abundance of God’s grace,³ since children clearly do nothing to seek or earn it.

Mindful of the words of Jesus to Nicodemus, “Amen, amen, I say to you, no one can enter the kingdom of God without being born of water and Spirit” (Jn 3:5), and to the disciples, “Let the children come to me; do not prevent them, for the kingdom of God belongs to such as these” (Mk 10:14), the Church insists that children “not be deprived of the benefit of the sacrament,”⁴ that baptismal grace not be withheld from them, but that they be allowed to come to Christ through the gift of Baptism.⁵ This spirit underlies the Church law obliging parents to “take care that infants are baptized in the first few weeks.”⁶

“To fulfill the true meaning of the sacrament,” baptized children must be formed in the Christian faith.⁷ In the case of infants (those younger than age seven), the period of instruction takes place after Baptism and thus constitutes a *post-baptismal catechumenate*.⁸ Indeed, the Christian initiation begun in Baptism is to be completed by Confirmation and the Eucharist.



Key Documents for Further Reading

1. *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, 2nd ed. (Washington, D.C.: United States Conference of Catholic Bishops, 2000), nos. 1212–1284. The *Catechism* is also available in online format at the Vatican website:
in English (http://www.vatican.va/archive/ENG0015/_INDEX.HTM)
and in Spanish (http://www.vatican.va/archive/catechism_sp/index_sp.html).
2. Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, Instruction on Infant Baptism, *Pastoralis actio* (1980). The document is available in online format at the Vatican website:
in English
(http://www.vatican.va/roman_curia/congregations/cfaith/documents/rc_con_cfaith_doc_19801020_pastoralis_actio_en.html).
and in Spanish
(http://www.vatican.va/roman_curia/congregations/cfaith/documents/rc_con_cfaith_doc_19801020_pastoralis_actio_sp.html).
3. *Codex Iuris Canonici* (Code of Canon Law) (Washington, D.C.: Canon Law Society of America, 1999), canons 849–878. The *Code* is also available in online format at the Vatican website:
in English (http://www.vatican.va/archive/ENGLI04/_INDEX.HTM)
and in Spanish (http://www.vatican.va/archive/ESL0020/_INDEX.HTM).
4. For a helpful summary of canonical aspects of Baptism, consult John Huels, *Pastoral Companion: A Canon Law Handbook for Pastoral Ministry* (Quincy: Franciscan Press, 1992), pp. 37–60.
5. *Rite of Baptism for Children* (1973) (Collegeville: Liturgical Press, 2002), Introduction, nos. 1–29. The *Rite of Baptism for Children*, along with other ritual books, can also be found in *The Rites*, vol. 1 (Collegeville: Liturgical Press, 1990). The introductions to the ritual books are available in online format at the Catholic Liturgical Library website (www.catholicliturgy.com).

The *Rite of Baptism for Children* is available in Spanish. The ritual book, *Ritual para el Bautismo de los Niños* (Conferencia de Obispos Catolicos de los Estados Unidos, 2009), has been published through the collaborative effort of four publishers (USCCB, Liturgical Press, LTP and Magnificat).

6. *Guidelines for the Celebration of the Sacraments with Persons with Disabilities*, USCCB, 1995 (<http://www.ncpd.org/views-news-policy/policy/church/bishops/sacraments>).
7. *Pastoral Statement of U.S. Catholic Bishops on Persons with Disabilities*, USCCB, 1978, 1988, 2001 (<http://www.ncpd.org/views-news-policy/policy/church/bishops/pastoral>).



Pastoral Directives Regarding the Baptism of Infants

Role of Parents, Guardians

In the *Rite of Baptism for Children*, the priest or deacon addresses parents in the following words:

“You have asked to have your children baptized. In doing so you are accepting the responsibility of training them in the practice of the faith. It will be your duty to bring them up to keep God’s commandments as Christ taught us, by loving God and our neighbor. Do you clearly understand what you are undertaking?”⁹

With these words, the Church entrusts parents with the responsibility of raising their children in the Catholic faith. It is critical, therefore, that parents prepare for their vital role by deepening their own faith life, both before the Baptism of their children and long after it, so that their response to this challenge may be wholehearted, during the celebration of Baptism, and through all the years of their children’s growth and spiritual development.

Parents engaged in adult faith formation and active in the life and mission of their parish provide a compelling witness to their children. Parents’ “full, conscious and active participation” in the Sunday Mass¹⁰ and their commitment to service within and beyond the parish community demonstrate their enthusiasm for the Catholic faith in ways that their children will seek to imitate.

Daily life in a Catholic home can enrich the faith of all members of the family. Thus, parents are encouraged to establish family faith practices that cultivate the seeds of faith sown in the hearts of their children at Baptism. Scripture readings, prayers, blessings, devotions, and stories of the saints, shared in the home, instill in children and in the adults who care for them a love for Christ and his Church that will bear fruit in the family and in the parish community.



Role of Godparents

Godparents join the parents in presenting the child for Baptism and help the child to lead a Christian life in harmony with the sacrament.¹¹ The *Rite of Baptism for Children* asks them, “Are you ready to help the parents of this child in their duty as Christian parents?”¹² In helping the baptized child to lead a Christian life through word and example, godparents assist the parents “in their duty.” The *Catechism of the Catholic Church* explains further that godparents “must be firm believers, able and ready to help the newly baptized child...on the road of Christian life.”¹³ In choosing a person to serve as a godparent, parents should consider carefully his (her) capacity to provide this help.

There is no requirement in Church law that godparents raise the baptized child in the event that both parents die. If parents choose to make such an arrangement, they do so privately, with appropriate legal counsel.

Church law requires that godparents be:

- At least 16 years old
- Fully-initiated Catholics (having received the sacraments of Baptism, Confirmation, and Eucharist)
- Not bound by any canonical penalty
- Leading lives of faith befitting the role to be undertaken
- Not parents of the child¹⁴

These criteria reflect the Church’s view that faith is taught best by example. Parishes may not add to this list of requirements.

Strictly speaking, a child needs only one godparent for Baptism (male or female), but may have two godparents (one male and one female).¹⁵ As long as there is one (Catholic) godparent, a baptized person belonging to a non-Catholic Christian community may serve as a witness to the Baptism. This Christian witness does not assume the obligations of a godparent and therefore should not respond to questions directed to the godparents during the celebration of Baptism.¹⁶ A person who was baptized Catholic but has abandoned the practice of the Catholic faith would not be a suitable choice as an official Christian witness to a Catholic Baptism.

Parents are free to invite others to witness the Baptism, in accord with family or cultural traditions, but only two persons (either two godparents, or one godparent and one Christian witness) are entered, by name, into the official record.



Role of the Community (Parish and Catholic School)

Before his Ascension, Christ said to his apostles: “All power in heaven and on earth has been given to me. 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, teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you” (Mt 28:18-20a). In this command of the Lord, baptizing and handing on the faith are closely linked; they form an integral part of the Church's mission.¹⁷

With the Baptism of infants (children younger than seven years), there exists a natural and necessary partnership between the Church and the family for the spiritual development of children. As the first sacrament that a person receives, Baptism begins the process of initiation into the Church. The parish community assists parents in their duty as “first teachers of their children in the ways of faith”¹⁸ by modeling that faith for the newly baptized. “The people of God, that is, the Church, made present by the local community, has an important part to play in the Baptism of both children and adults. Before and after the celebration of the sacrament, the child has a right to the love and help of the community. ...it is clear that the faith in which the children are baptized is not the private possession of the individual family, but the common treasure of the whole Church of Christ.”¹⁹

A homily delivered by Pope Benedict XVI at Mass on the Feast of the Baptism of the Lord affirms that the Church plays a crucial role: “The Church, who welcomes these little ones among her children, is responsible, together with the parents and godparents, for accompanying them on this path of growth. ...The collaboration between the Christian community and the family is much needed in the current social context in which the institution of the family is threatened from many sides and finds itself faced with many difficulties in its mission to teach the faith. ...It is necessary that parishes increasingly strive to support families, the little domestic churches, in their work of passing on the faith.”

In addition to parishes, Catholic schools can support families in this work. As caring Christian communities that provide systematic formation in the faith and promote family faith practices in the home, Catholic schools can assist parents in handing on the faith to their children.



Role of Pastor, Deacons, and Lay Catechists

When contacted by parents seeking the Baptism of their child, “The pastor will endeavor, by means of a clear-sighted and understanding dialogue, to arouse the parents’ interest in the sacrament they are requesting and make them aware of the responsibility that they are assuming.”²⁰ The pastor will see to it that parents receive proper instruction that includes sound pastoral guidance and communal prayer.²¹ While he remains ultimately responsible for this pre-baptismal instruction, the pastor may delegate to deacons and/or trained lay persons the task of designing and executing catechetical sessions to teach the parents and godparents. Catechists who are themselves parents, grandparents, and/or godparents bring a wealth of real-life experience to this ministry.

Ordinary ministers of the sacrament of Baptism include bishops, priests, and deacons. Lay persons may baptize only in the case of an emergency.²²

Eligibility and Readiness for Baptism

Under ordinary circumstances, for an infant Baptism to be licit, “the parents or at least one of them or the person who legitimately takes their place must consent.”²³ (“An infant...is baptized licitly in danger of death even against the will of the parents.”²⁴) In addition to this consent, there must exist a “founded hope that the infant will be brought up in the Catholic religion.”²⁵ This hope is grounded in the lives of the parents, the godparents, and the parish community. Parents who recognize that their own faith lacks the necessary depth and commitment to bear this responsibility can choose godparents who are strong in faith and willing to take on a greater share of the duty of training the baptized child.²⁶ Sometimes, grandparents who are committed to bringing their grandchildren to Mass and to religious education can make the difference between situations of “founded hope” and those in which “such hope is altogether lacking.”²⁷ Nevertheless, even in circumstances bereft of “founded hope,” Baptism is not denied but delayed, thereby providing an opportunity for the parents to be formed more fully in their faith.²⁸ Additionally, such a delay allows for others to be found who can serve as the foundation for hope.



Catechesis Prior to Baptism

Parents who seek Baptism for their children come from different situations, and so their connections to the parish community vary accordingly. A few come to the sacrament from the heart of parish life; more from the less active margins; still others from beyond those margins, either on their own or compelled by family members. Regardless of their circumstances, they come hoping for an experience of hospitality, kindness, and love. Their encounter with the Church will surely affect any future involvement with the parish community. The parish, then, must respond to parents' hopes, even as it seeks to prepare them for the sacrament.

As will be indicated below, the catechesis of baptized children and their parents should continue after the celebration of the sacrament. However, well-designed formation sessions prior to the Baptism can help parents to discern God's presence in their lives, to better appreciate their own Baptism, and to develop a strong Catholic home life—the “domestic church”²⁹—within their own family. By gathering with the godparents, other families seeking Baptism, and supportive parishioners, the parents can forge connections with the parish community that may lead to greater involvement. Since the timing of birth may not fit precisely within the parish schedule for baptismal instruction, such gatherings may include expectant parents as well as those with newborn infants or young children. The frequency and availability of baptismal instruction offered by the parish must give serious consideration to the Church's teaching that infants be baptized “in the first few weeks.”³⁰ Parishes are encouraged to cooperate with one another to provide timely instruction for Baptism.

The parish should consider the following strategies in providing instruction to parents (and godparents) who seek to have their children baptized.

1. Respect adults as persons of Catholic faith. Accordingly, invite them to reflect on:
 - The people and events that have brought them to this stage in their Catholic faith
 - How they experience God's presence in the persons, places, and events of daily life
 - Why they wish to have their children baptized in the Catholic Church
 - What responsibilities flow from their decision to baptize their children

2. Explore the parents' role as primary educators of their children in the faith.³¹ Present possibilities and invite dialogue about:
 - Practical ways to pray with children and introduce them to Jesus Christ
 - Family faith practices, customs, and rituals from Catholic tradition
 - Opportunities and challenges of raising children in a mixed or interfaith marriage



3. Allow the liturgical rite to shape the instruction.

- Provide a brief introduction to the theology of Baptism, using the texts and symbols from the *Rite of Baptism for Children*.
- Lead adults to some sense of the symbolic depth and power of the baptismal rite.
- Help parents and godparents to become familiar with the rite and their role in it (i.e., what they will say and do).

The baptismal rite, carefully planned, well prepared, and beautifully celebrated, can be a powerful experience of the love of God!

4. Strengthen the connection between the family and the parish community. Present possibilities and invite dialogue about:

- How the parish community can help parents to raise their children in the faith
- How the family can contribute to the life of the parish

It should be noted that while baptismal instruction ought to be thorough, it need not be exhaustive. After all, the Church expects that religious education—for children as well as for adults—will take place after the Baptism.³²



Celebration of the Baptism of Infants

According to the *Rite of Baptism for Children*, “To bring out the paschal character of Baptism, it is recommended that the sacrament be celebrated during the Easter Vigil or on Sunday, when the Church commemorates the Lord’s resurrection. On Sunday, Baptism may be celebrated even during Mass, so that the entire community may be present and the relationship between Baptism and Eucharist may be clearly seen; but this should not be done too often.”³³ Here the Church presents the *ideal*—a celebration of infant Baptism that reveals its clear connection to the dying and rising of Christ (Paschal Mystery), and to the Church’s most profound ritual expression of it (the Eucharist) in the midst of the community of believers. The priorities implicit in this statement (paschal character, presence of community) can guide decisions regarding the liturgical context for infant Baptism, even as pastoral realities necessitate alternative settings.

While echoing the recommendation of Sunday, Church law permits the Baptism of infants on any day.³⁴ The Introduction to the *Rite of Baptism for Children* describes the baptismal rite in its entirety, making clear its integrity and completeness as a free-standing liturgy, suitable for celebration on any day of the week.³⁵ It then spells out adaptations for incorporating the rite in the Easter Vigil, Sunday Mass, and weekday Mass.³⁶

A fully-scripted version of the baptismal rite follows, under the title, “Rite of Baptism for Several Children.” In introducing it, the ritual book echoes the *ideal* presented earlier: “If possible, Baptism should take place on Sunday, the day on which the Church celebrates the Paschal Mystery. It should be conferred in a communal celebration for all the recently born children, and in the presence of the faithful, or at least of relatives, friends, and neighbors, who are all to take an active part in the rite.”³⁷ The phrases, “if possible,” and “or at least,” hint at pastoral realities like those mentioned below and reinforce the call for pastoral discretion. The “Rite of Baptism for One Child” follows, as do other rites for specific circumstances.

Let the following examples serve to illustrate the need for pastoral discretion in planning for the celebration of infant Baptism: Asking parents to wait for their children to be baptized at the Easter Vigil would deprive some children of the benefit of the sacrament for months.³⁸ Asking assemblies in large and busy parishes to witness every parish Baptism at Mass, might, over time, result in a kind of ritual fatigue. Asking every family with a child to be baptized to stand before the entire community at Sunday Mass might drive some families away, due to shyness or embarrassment. Asking the pastors of large and busy parishes to celebrate all Baptisms on Sunday (especially on Sunday afternoon, after preaching and presiding at multiple Masses) might affect their pastoral presence, and, over time, their health and well-being.



Clearly, the Church provides a variety of options for the setting and timing of Baptism. Parishes must not limit the celebration of Baptism to *only* within the Sunday Mass, nor should they impose restrictions that exceed Church law. The timing and setting of Baptism is a matter of pastoral discretion, wherein the desires of the family and their particular relationship to the community should be respectfully considered, within the pastoral reality of the parish schedule and the availability of clergy. A similar consideration of the family's wishes applies to the decision of which ritual sign to use, either immersion or pouring.³⁹ For example, parents know best how their children are likely to react to being undressed and immersed in an unfamiliar setting.

Once Baptism has been celebrated, the sacrament must be recorded without delay in the register of the parish where it took place. The following information should be entered in the baptismal register: the name of the baptized, the date and place of Baptism, the date and place of birth, the name of the minister and the names of parents, godparent(s), and Christian witness, if any.⁴⁰ In the case of adopted children, the directives of the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops should be followed.⁴¹

Catechesis after Baptism

According to the *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, “By its very nature infant Baptism requires a *post-baptismal catechumenate*. Not only is there a need for instruction after Baptism, but also for the necessary flowering of baptismal grace in personal growth.”⁴² Here, the use of the term “catechumenate” implies a gradual process of learning and growing in the faith.

The Church also explains that, “Those who have given life to children and have enriched them with the gift of Baptism have the duty continually to nourish it.”⁴³ Furthermore, “After Baptism, it is the responsibility of the parents...to assist the child to know God, whose adopted child it has become, to prepare the child to receive confirmation and participate in the holy Eucharist.”⁴⁴ Thus, the Church relies on parents to persevere in their duty of raising their children in the Catholic faith, with the help of the godparents and the parish community.

Though the parish may offer excellent pre-baptismal instruction and celebrate the baptismal rite beautifully, it does parents a grave disservice if it does not continue to support them in their role as “first teachers of their children in the ways of faith.”⁴⁵ Mothers and fathers, already facing the daily challenges of parenting, must also be “first teachers” at a time when participation in Sunday Mass and adult faith formation is made difficult by having to care for infants and toddlers.

Parishes that welcome young children into the Sunday assembly will help parents persevere in attending Mass and help children begin to feel at home there. Furthermore, opportunities for participation in the parish that target the needs and interests of these parents will strengthen connections to the parish community forged during the pre-baptismal catechesis. To be accessible for parents of young children, such opportunities ought to be “family friendly” or include child care.



The parish should consider implementing the following strategies to support parents in teaching the faith to their children:

- Organize gatherings where new parents can meet and socialize with one another.
- Provide opportunities for adult faith formation that parents can access conveniently.
- Teach parents about how faith develops within the context of early childhood.
- Offer workshops on how to pray with children and celebrate family rituals.
- Provide parents with print, multi-media, and online resources that can enrich the faith life of their family.
- Supply information on services available to parents whose children have special needs.



FAQ: Sacrament of Baptism of Infants

1. What does the Church ask of parents?

For a child to be baptized, there must exist a “founded hope” that the child will be raised in the Catholic faith.⁴⁶ This “hope” rests primarily on the pledge of the parents or guardians, as articulated in the *Rite of Baptism for Children*: “You have asked to have your child baptized. In doing so you are accepting the responsibility of training him (her) in the practice of the faith.”⁴⁷ The word “practice” indicates that parents ought to be models of the faith in the daily life of their family, teaching the faith to their children by word and example. Godparents and the parish community support parents in their role as “first teachers”⁴⁸ and “primary educators”⁴⁹ of their children.

2. How should parents prepare for the Baptism of their child?

As soon as possible after the birth of a child, or even before the birth, the parents should approach the pastor to request that their child be baptized.⁵⁰ At his direction, they should participate in the program of instruction that the parish provides, inviting the godparents to attend with them.⁵¹ In this way, the parents will deepen their understanding of Baptism and prepare to assume the responsibility of raising their child in the faith.

3. What if parents are not married, or not married in the Church?

The grace of Baptism should not be withheld from the child due to the irregular marital status of his (her) parents. Rather, the sincere desire and request of the parent or parents to baptize the child should be seen as a gesture of good faith, and perhaps, the beginning of a new relationship to the Church. Just as the seeds of grace sown in the life of the child at Baptism may grow and flourish at a later time, so also the kindness and hospitality offered by the parish to the parent(s) may come, in time, to bear good fruit.



Within the context of its pastoral care of the family, the parish may offer assistance with marital issues, inviting parents into deeper relationship with one another and with the Christian community. In the case of a single mother or father bringing a child for Baptism, extra care must be taken to surround the single parent with the love and support of the community, offering parent and child comfortable opportunities to participate in the life of the parish family.

4. Must a child be given a saint's name?

Not necessarily. According to Church law, "Parents, sponsors, and the pastor are to take care that a name foreign to Christian sensibility is not given."⁵² The name that is given in addition to the family name (surname) provides the child with his (her) identity. It has been a venerable custom in the Church to give a child at least one name of a saint or hero from the Bible. A "Christian name" provides the child with a model for Christ-centered living. Although not required, the choice of such a name is commendable.

5. When and where should a child be baptized?

In the timing of Baptism, the welfare of the child receives first consideration, then the mother's health and ability to be present, and then other pastoral considerations.⁵³ Reflecting the desire that children receive the benefit of the sacrament without unnecessary delay, Church law states that "Parents are obliged to take care that infants are baptized in the first few weeks."⁵⁴ Ideally, parents (and godparents) should receive instruction before the birth of the child and schedule the Baptism for soon thereafter.

Sometimes, in spite of the best intentions, exceptional circumstances intervene (e.g., illness of child or mother, military deployment of parent or godparent, family crisis), and as a result, Baptism is delayed. In such cases, parents should contact the pastor, receive instruction, and arrange for their child to receive the sacrament as soon as possible. Until age seven, he (she) is still a candidate for *infant* Baptism. (At age seven, the child is considered to be of "catechetical age," and so the Rite of Christian Initiation of Adults, adapted for children, applies.)

The parish church is the proper place for Baptism, unless "just cause suggests otherwise."⁵⁵ Baptism is not to be celebrated at home or in the hospital unless the child is in danger of death.

6. How should a Baptism be recorded?

Once Baptism has been celebrated, the sacrament must be recorded without delay in the register of the parish where it took place. The following information should be entered in the baptismal register: the name of the baptized, the date and place of Baptism, the date and place of birth, the name of the minister and the names of parents, godparent(s), and Christian witness, if any.⁵⁶ In the case of adopted children, the directives of the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops should be followed.⁵⁷



When recording the Baptism of a Hispanic child, extra care must be taken, because the child's complete last name is composed of the father's family name followed by the mother's family name. For example, Guadalupe Julia Martínez Rojo's last name would be Martínez Rojo (not Rojo alone) and indexed under "M," not "R." Baptismal certificates should likewise include the complete last name, as these may be accepted as legal documents in some Latin American countries.

7. Must the child be immersed in water?

No. According to the *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, "The essential rite of Baptism consists in immersing the candidate in water or pouring water on his head, while pronouncing the invocation of the Most Holy Trinity: the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit."⁵⁸ Thus, either immersion or pouring is legitimate. Regardless of which ritual sign is used, some part of the child's head must get wet.

8. Must the child be baptized during the Sunday Mass?

No. The Church provides a variety of options for the timing and setting of Baptism.

While recommending that infants be baptized on Sunday, Church law permits the sacrament to be celebrated on any day.⁵⁹ The *Rite of Baptism for Children* presents the baptismal rite in its entirety, making clear its integrity and completeness as a free-standing liturgy, suitable for any day of the week. It also spells out adaptations for incorporating the rite into the Easter Vigil, Sunday Mass, and weekday Mass.

The timing and setting of Baptism is a matter of pastoral discretion, wherein the desires of the family and their particular relationship to the community should be respectfully considered, within the pastoral reality of the parish schedule and the availability of clergy.

9. How many godparents can there be?

A child needs only one godparent for Baptism (male or female) but may have two (one male and one female).⁶⁰

10. What is the role of godparents?

Godparents join the parents in presenting the child for Baptism and pledge to help them "carry out their duty as Christian parents."⁶¹ The *Catechism of the Catholic Church* states that godparents "must be firm believers, able and ready to help the newly baptized child...on the road of Christian life."⁶²

As the baptized child grows and develops, he (she) will look to his (her) godparents for guidance on how to live the Catholic faith. The child's parents will look to the godparents for support in their role as "first" and "best of teachers."⁶³ In bearing witness to the faith by what they say and do, godparents will reinforce and strengthen the witness of the parents.



Godparents also represent the larger Christian community, demonstrating the “love and help” that the child can rightfully expect from his (her) parish community.⁶⁴

11. Who should be chosen to serve as a godparent?

Parents should choose a person who lives the Catholic faith and can thereby provide a Christian example for both parents and child.

To serve as a godparent, a person must be: at least 16 years old, a fully-initiated Catholic (having received the sacraments of Baptism, Confirmation and Eucharist), leading a life of faith befitting the role to be undertaken, not bound by a canonical penalty, and not one of the child’s parents.⁶⁵

In later years, a godparent becomes the first choice to serve as sponsor for the sacrament of Confirmation, when the young person completes his (her) initiation into the Church.⁶⁶ Mindful of this, parents might consider choosing a godparent whose age and health do not rule out this future possibility.

12. What if the chosen godparent cannot attend the Baptism?

If unable to attend the Baptism celebration, the chosen godparent can communicate his (her) intentions to serve, and then chose another person (proxy) to represent them at the Baptism. Because the proxy is not the godparent, but merely their representative, the church imposes no specific requirements. They should have testimonial capacity which is presumed at age 14.⁶⁷

13. Can a non-Catholic be a godparent?

A non-Catholic may not serve as a godparent. However, a baptized person belonging to a non-Catholic Christian community may serve as a witness to the Baptism, but only together with a Catholic godparent.⁶⁸

A non-baptized person may not serve as a Christian witness or stand in as proxy for one.

14. What about an emergency baptism if the child is in danger of death?

Bishops, priests, and deacons are the ordinary ministers of Baptism. In an emergency, any person with the proper intention can baptize, using water and the Trinitarian formula: “I baptize you in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit.” The intention must be to do what the Church does when she baptizes.⁶⁹

If a child is baptized in danger of death and then recovers, the “Rite of Bringing a Baptized Child to the Church”⁷⁰ should be celebrated. By means of this rite, the Christian community recognizes the child’s reception into the Church, the parents and godparents make their commitment to raise the child in the Catholic faith, and the Church imparts all the blessings proper to Baptism.



15. Is Baptism necessary for salvation?

Church law explains that Baptism is “the gateway to the sacraments and necessary for salvation by actual reception or at least by desire.”⁷¹

The Lord Jesus affirms the necessity of Baptism for salvation in his dialogue with Nicodemus: “Amen, amen, I say to you, no one can enter the kingdom of God without being born of water and Spirit” (Jn 3:5). Likewise, Christ commands his disciples: “Go into the whole world and proclaim the gospel to every creature. Whoever believes and is baptized will be saved; whoever does not believe will be condemned” (Mk 16:15–16).

Interpreting these scriptural passages, the *Catechism of the Catholic Church* explains that, “Baptism is necessary for those to whom the gospel has been proclaimed and who have had the possibility of asking for this sacrament.”⁷² It also states that, “God has bound salvation to the sacrament of Baptism, but he himself is not bound by his sacraments.”⁷³

16. What if a baby dies before Baptism—is there a limbo?

The *Catechism of the Catholic Church* states the following: “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 [cf. 1 Tim 2:4], and Jesus' tenderness toward children which caused him to say, ‘Let the children come to me, do not hinder them’ [Mk 10:14], allow us to hope that there is a way of salvation for children who have died without Baptism.”⁷⁴ We hope, then, in the boundless mercy of God.

Limbo was proposed centuries ago as an answer to the question of what happens to babies who die before Baptism. Imagined as a kind of pleasant but neutral residence for souls, with neither the torment of hell nor the joy of heaven, limbo was a theological opinion, not a doctrine. The *Catechism of the Catholic Church* does not mention it.

17. Should parents bring their baby to Mass? What if a child becomes disruptive?

Yes, children should come to Mass each Sunday. Indeed, the obligation to participate in the Sunday Mass begins at Baptism.⁷⁵

Children learn by observing the behavior of adults. Thus, parents set the example of “full, conscious, and active participation”⁷⁶ in the sacred liturgy. For instance, parents who sing (as best they can) the acclamations used each Sunday encourage children to “Shout joyfully to God” (Ps 66:2) at appropriate times.



Ritual gestures practiced at home can become touchstones for the spiritual development of children: e.g., the Sign of the Cross at the beginning and end of Mass; tracing the cross on head, mouth, and heart at the Gospel; bowing during the Creed; shaking hands at the Sign of Peace; walking in the Communion procession. Likewise, a quiet whisper after the consecration—"the Lord Jesus is now present on the altar; one day you will receive Him!"—can heighten a child's awareness of God.

If a child becomes fussy or disruptive, it is helpful to take him (her) out for a few minutes to calm down; but to then bring him (her) back to Mass. The key is to avoid rewarding disruptive behavior with extended absences from the church.



FAQ: Bautismo de Niños

1. ¿Qué pide la iglesia a los padres de familia?

Para que un niño/a sea bautizado/a debe existir una “esperanza fundada” de que él/ella será educado/a en la religión católica.⁴⁶ Esta “esperanza” se basa principalmente en la promesa hecha por los padres o apoderados, tal como está expresado en el *Rito del Bautismo de Niños*: “Ustedes, padres, que piden el Bautismo para su hijo(a), deben darse cuenta de que contraen la obligación de educarlo(a) en la fe.”⁴⁷ La palabra “educarlo en la fe” indica que los padres deben ser los modelos de fe en la vida diaria de sus familias, enseñándoles a sus hijos por medio de obras y palabras. Los padrinos en la comunidad parroquial apoyan a los padres en su rol de “catequistas principales”⁴⁸ y “educadores primordiales”⁴⁹ de sus hijos.

2. ¿Como se deben preparar los padres para el Bautismo de su hijo/a?

Cuanto antes sea posible, después del nacimiento e incluso antes de él, los padres deberán acercarse a su párroco para solicitar el Bautismo de su hijo/a.⁵⁰ Bajo la dirección del párroco, los padres deberán participar del programa de instrucción ofrecida en la parroquia, invitando a los padrinos a que asistan con ellos.⁵¹ De esta forma, los padres podrán profundizar sus conocimientos acerca del Bautismo y prepararse para tomar la responsabilidad de criar a su hijo/a en la fe.

3. ¿Qué tal si los padres no están casados, o no casados en la Iglesia?

La gracia del Bautismo no se debe negar al niño debido al estado marital de sus padres. En cambio el deseo sincero o petición del padre o padres de bautizar al niño debe ser visto como un gesto de buena fe, y quizás el comienzo de una nueva relación con la Iglesia. Solo cuando las semillas de la gracia han sido plantadas en la vida del niño en el Bautismo, pueden crecer y florecer mas tarde. Así mismo la bondad y hospitalidad ofrecida por la parroquia a los padres vendra a tiempo de dar buen fruto.

Dentro del contexto de su cuidado pastoral de la familia, la parroquia puede ofrecer asistencia con problemas maritales invitando a los padres a una relación más profunda del uno con el otro y así con la comunidad cristiana, en el caso de un padre o madre soltero(a) que traen su hijo a bautizar, debe haber un cuidado extra al rodear a ese padre o madre soltera con el amor y apoyo de la comunidad facilitándole a padre e hijo las oportunidades para participar en la vida familiar de la parroquia.



4. ¿Debe el niño/a llevar el nombre de algún santo?

No necesariamente. De acuerdo con las leyes de la iglesia, los “Padres, padrinos y párrocos están encargados de que no se imponga un nombre ajeno al sentir cristiano.”⁵² El nombre que se da además del apellido de la familia, provee al niño/a su propia identidad. Ha sido una costumbre venerable en la Iglesia dar al niño/a al menos un nombre de algún santo o héroe de la Biblia. Un “Nombre Cristiano” le da al niño/a un modelo de vida Cristiana. Sin embargo no es obligatorio, la opción de escoger el nombre de un santo es encomiable.

5. ¿Cuándo y dónde debe un niño/a ser bautizado?

Para saber cuando un niño/a debe ser bautizado/a se debe considerar en primer lugar el bienestar del niño/a, la salud y la capacidad de la madre para estar presente y otras consideraciones pastorales.⁵³ Manifiestar el deseo de que el niño/a reciba el beneficio del sacramento sin retrasos innecesarios, tal como lo establece las leyes de la iglesia, “Los padres tienen obligación de hacer que los hijos sean bautizados en las primeras semanas.”⁵⁴ Idealmente los padres (y padrinos) deben recibir instrucción antes del nacimiento del niño/a y fijar la fecha del Bautismo inmediatamente después de este.

Algunas veces, a pesar de tener las mejores intenciones, pueden suceder circunstancias excepcionales que pueden intervenir (Ej. la enfermedad del niño/a, o de la madre, despliegue militar, crisis familiar) y como resultado el Bautismo queda retrasado. En estos casos, los padres deben contactarse con el párroco, para recibir instrucción y fijar la fecha del Bautismo tan pronto como sea posible. Hasta los siete años él/ella sigue siendo candidato para el Bautismo de Niños. (A partir de los siete años un/a niño/a es considerado tener la “edad catequética,” y en este caso se debe aplicar el Rito de Iniciación Cristiana para Adultos, adaptada para niños.)

La parroquia es el lugar propio para realizar el Bautismo, “a no ser que una causa justa aconseje otra cosa.”⁵⁵ El Bautismo no se debe celebrar en el hogar o en el hospital a no ser que el niño/a se encuentre en peligro de muerte.

6. ¿Cómo debe ser registrado el Bautismo?

Una vez el Bautismo se ha celebrado, el sacramento debe ser anotado sin demora alguna en los registros de la parroquia donde se llevó a cabo. La siguiente información deberá anotarse: el nombre del bautizado, la fecha y lugar del Bautismo, la fecha y lugar de nacimiento, el nombre del ministro y el nombre de los padres, padrino(s) y/o testigos si lo hubo.⁵⁶ Si se trata de un hijo adoptivo, se deben de seguir las directrices de la Conferencia Episcopal de los Estados Unidos.⁵⁷



Cuando se registra el nombre de un niño/a Hispano, se debe tener mucho cuidado, pues el nombre completo del niño/a esta compuesto por el apellido del padre seguido por el de la madre. Por ejemplo, Guadalupe Martínez Rojo, el apellido deberá ser Martínez Rojo (no solo Rojo) y en el índice deberá ir en la letra “M” y no en la “R”. En el certificado de Bautismo deberá incluir el nombre completo con los apellidos, ya que en algunos países de América Latina estos son documentos legalmente aceptados.

7. ¿El niño/a deberá ser inmerso en el agua?

No. De acuerdo con el *Catecismo de la Iglesia Católica*, “Lo esencial del rito del Bautismo es que se debe administrar por inmersión o por infusión sobre la cabeza, mientras se pronuncia la invocación de la Santísima Trinidad: el Padre, el Hijo, y el Espíritu Santo.”⁵⁸ Por lo tanto inmersión o infusión, ambas son legítimas. Sin importar cual forma ritual se administre, alguna parte de la cabeza del niño/a deberá mojarse.

8. ¿El niño/a deberá ser bautizado durante la misa del domingo?

No. La iglesia provee una variedad de opciones para la preparación y el tiempo del Bautismo.

Mientras es recomendable que los niños sean bautizados el domingo, las leyes de la Iglesia permite que el sacramento pueda celebrarse cualquier día.⁵⁹ El *Rito del Bautismo de Niños* presenta el rito en su totalidad, haciendo claro su contenido e integridad como único recurso litúrgico bautismal, apropiado para la celebración entre semana. También presenta adaptaciones para incorporar el rito durante la Vigilia Pascual, Misa Dominical y Misa Ferial.

Para escoger el tiempo y lugar del Bautismo se deberá considerar la discreción pastoral, donde el deseo de la familia y la relación particular de la comunidad se base en la realidad pastoral creada por el programa de la parroquia y la disponibilidad del clero.

9. ¿Cuántos padrinos se puede tener?

El niño/a necesita solo un padrino (hombre o mujer) pero puede llevar dos (un hombre y una mujer).⁶⁰

10. ¿Cuál es el rol de los Padrinos?

Los padrinos se unen a los padres al presentar al niño/a para el Bautismo y prometen “ayudar a los padres de este niño (niña) a cumplir con esa obligacion.”⁶¹ El *Catecismo de la Iglesia Católica* dice que los padrinos deben ser creyentes sólidos, capaces y prestos a ayudar al nuevo bautizado, niño... en su camino de la vida cristiana.”⁶²

Mientras que el bautizado/a crece y se desarrolla, él/ella vera a sus padrinos como modelos de vida cristiana. Los padres del/a bautizado/a verán en sus compadres el apoyo en su rol como “primeros” y “mejores maestros.”⁶³ Los padrinos al ser testigos de la fe a través de sus obras y palabras, apoyarán el testimonio de los padres. Los padrinos también representan a la gran comunidad Cristiana, demostrando el “amor y la ayuda” que el niño justamente espera de su comunidad.⁶⁴



11. ¿Quién debería ser escogido para ser padrino o madrina?

Los padres deben escoger una persona que viva su fe Católica y de ese modo provean un ejemplo Cristiano tanto a los padres como al/los niño/s.

Para servir como padrino la persona debe: al menos haber cumplido 16 años, haber completado los sacramentos de iniciación Cristiana (Bautismo, Confirmación y Eucaristía), llevar una vida congruente con la fe y con la misión que va a asumir, que no esté afectado con una pena canónica y que no sea el padre o la madre de quien se ha de bautizar.⁶⁵

Años más tarde el/la padrino/madrina se convierte en la primera opción de ser nuevamente padrinos del sacramento de Confirmación del/la joven que completará su sacramento de iniciación en la Iglesia.⁶⁶ Obviamente los padres tienen que considerar que cuando escogen a los padrinos de Bautismo deben tener en cuenta la edad y la salud de estos, para así no contradecir la regla poder tener a los mismos padrinos en un futuro.

12. ¿Qué pasa si los padrinos escogidos no pueden estar presente?

Si los padrinos que han sido escogidos no pueden estar presente en la celebración del Bautismo, estos deberán comunicar su intención de servir como tal y así podrán ser representados por otra persona (procurador). Puesto que el procurador no es padrino, sino solamente su representante, la iglesia no impone los mismos requisitos. El procurador debe ser designado por el padrino o la madrina y debe tener capacidad testimonial, la cual la iglesia presume después de los 14 años.⁶⁷

13. ¿Puede un no católico ser padrino?

Un no católico no puede ser padrino. Sin embargo una persona bautizada que pertenece a una comunidad cristiana no católica solo puede ser admitida exclusivamente en calidad de testigo junto con un padrino católico.⁶⁸

Una persona no bautizada no podrá servir ni como testigo ni en representación de otro (Proxy).

14. ¿Que pasa en un Bautismo de emergencia si el niño/a esta en peligro de muerte?

El Obispo, sacerdote, y diáconos son los ministros ordinarios del Bautismo. En una emergencia, cualquier persona que tenga la debida intención puede bautizar, usando la formula trinitaria correcta: “Yo te bautizo en el nombre del Padre, y del Hijo y del Espíritu Santo” La intención debe ser lo que la iglesia pide cuando bautiza.⁶⁹

Si un niño/a es bautizado/a en peligro de muerte y luego se recupera, se deberá celebrar el “Rito de Acogida”.⁶⁹ Por medio de este rito, la comunidad Cristiana reconoce la recepción del niño/a dentro de la iglesia, los padres y padrinos hacen su promesa de criar al niño en la fe católica y la iglesia imparte las bendiciones propias del Bautismo.



15. ¿El Bautismo es necesario para la salvación?

Las leyes de la iglesia explican que el Bautismo es la “puerta de los sacramentos, cuya recepción de hecho o al menos de deseo es necesaria para la salvación.”⁷¹

El Señor Jesús afirma la necesidad del Bautismo para la salvación en su dialogo con Nicodemo: “En verdad te digo: El que no renace del agua y del Espíritu no puede entrar en el Reino de Dios.” (Jn. 3:5). Asimismo, Cristo encomienda a sus discípulos: “Vayan por todo el mundo y anuncien la Buena Nueva a toda la creación. El que crea y se bautice se salvará” (Mc. 16:15–16).

Al interpretar estos pasajes de las escrituras, el *Catecismo de la iglesia Católica* explica que, “El Bautismo es necesario para la salvación en aquellos a los que el Evangelio ha sido anunciado y han tenido la posibilidad de pedir el sacramento.”⁷² También dice que, “Dios ha vinculado la salvación al sacramento del Bautismo, sin embargo, Él no queda sometido a sus sacramentos.”⁷³

16. ¿Qué pasa si un bebe muere antes de ser bautizado? Existe el limbo?

El *Catecismo de la Iglesia Católica* dice lo siguiente: “En cuanto a los niños muertos sin Bautismo, la Iglesia sólo puede confiarlos a la misericordia divina, como hace en el rito de las exequias por ellos. En efecto, la gran misericordia de Dios, que quiere que todos los hombres se salven (Cf. I Tm. 2,4) y la ternura de Jesús con los niños, que le hizo decir: “Dejad que los niños se acerquen a mí, no se lo impidáis” (Mc. 10,14), nos permiten confiar en que haya un camino de salvación para los niños que mueren sin Bautismo.”⁷⁴ Por lo que esperamos la abundante misericordia de Dios.

El Limbo fue propuesto siglos atrás como respuesta a la pregunta de qué pasaba con los niños que morían antes del Bautismo. Era imaginado como una residencia neutral para las almas, donde no existía el tormento del infierno ni la alegría del cielo, limbo era una opinión teológica, no una doctrina. El *Catecismo de la iglesia Católica* actual no lo menciona.

17. ¿Los padres deberían traer a sus niños a misa? Qué pasa si el niño/a no se comporta bien en misa?

Sí, los niños deben ir a Misa cada domingo. En efecto la obligación de participar en Misa los domingos comienza con el Bautismo.⁷⁵

Los niños aprenden observando el comportamiento de los adultos. Por esto, los padres dan el ejemplo de una “participación plena, conciente y activa”⁷⁶ en la sagrada liturgia. Por ejemplo, los padres que cantan (de acuerdo a sus posibilidades) las aclamaciones usadas durante los domingos, motivan a los niños a que “Aclamen a Dios” (Sal. 66:2) en los tiempos apropiados.



Gestos rituales que se practican en casa se convierten en piedra fundamental para el desarrollo espiritual de los niños: Ej.: la Señal de la Cruz al comienzo de la Misa; la señal de la Cruz en la frente, boca y corazón cuando el evangelio es leído; al inclinarse cuando se recita el Credo; el saludo de paz; en la procesión para recibir la Comunión. Del mismo modo el susurro durante la consagración—"el Señor está presente en el Altar; un día tu lo recibirás a Él!"— todo esto puede concientizar a los niños en su conocimiento acerca de Dios.

Si un niño empieza a fastidiar o a ponerse revoltoso, es bueno sacarlo fuera de la misa por unos minutos hasta que se calme; pero luego se debe retornar. Lo que se debe evitar es premiarlo por su comportamiento quedándose afuera durante toda la misa o no asistiendo más a misa.

Los números superíndices remiten a las referencias en página 32.



Pastoral Notes for Persons with Disabilities

“By reason of their Baptism, all Catholics are equal in dignity in the sight of God, and have the same divine calling.”⁷⁷

The following insights augment corresponding sections of the Pastoral Directives found on pp. 8-16 of this Instruction. Please read the Pastoral Directives in their entirety.

Role of Parents, Guardians

Parents of a child with a disability should be encouraged to seek Baptism for him (her), so that the grace of the sacrament may initiate and sustain his (her) growth in faith.

Parents of an unborn child with a genetic abnormality are often discouraged from carrying that child to term and bringing him (her) into the world. Mothers and fathers who chose life under such circumstances offer a profound and prophetic witness to the parish community and to society at large.

Role of Godparents

An adult with a disability may serve as a godparent, provided that he (she) meets the Church’s criteria. Indeed, a faithful Catholic who has faced and overcome the challenges that come with a disability may provide an outstanding Christian example to his (her) godchild.⁷⁸

Role of the Community

The parish community, for its part, must surround the family of a child with a disability with an extra measure of compassion and support, so that the child may grow in faith to his (her) full potential. Truthfully, the relationship between a family facing the challenges of disability and the parish family that surrounds them in love can and should be a mutual exchange of gifts.



Role of Pastor, Deacons, and Lay Catechists

Ministry to families of persons with disabilities begins with awareness. Therefore, pastors and pastoral ministers should endeavor to identify and reach out to all Catholics with disabilities who live within the geographical boundaries of the parish.⁷⁹ In the case of an infant with a disability, pastoral contact initiated by the parish may help overcome hesitation the part of the parents to bring the child into the public setting of the parish community for Baptism.

Eligibility and Readiness for Baptism

The disability of the child, parent or godparent, does not, in itself, constitute grounds for deferring Baptism.⁸⁰

Catechesis prior to Baptism

Parishes must see that parents or godparents with disabilities are able to access the instruction due them.⁸¹ Ideally, the parish program of instruction can be designed with the flexibility to include persons with disabilities, thus bringing them into positive contact with the mainstream of parish life.⁸²

Celebration of the Baptism of Infants

In parish churches where the location of the baptismal font presents an accessibility challenge, the usual parish practice may require adjustment, so that a parent or godparent who has a disability can participate fully in the liturgical celebration of the sacrament.

Due to critical illness in the first weeks of life, children with disabilities are often baptized in emergency situations. If a child is baptized in danger of death and then recovers, the “Rite of Bringing a Baptized Child to the Church”⁸³ should be celebrated. By means of this rite, the Christian community recognizes the child’s reception into the Church, the parents and godparents make their commitment to raise the child in the Catholic faith, and the Church imparts all the blessings proper to Baptism.

Catechesis after Baptism

Families of children with disabilities benefit greatly from the ongoing support of the parish community, as they nurture their children in faith. This support might take two basic forms, both valuable and necessary: First, every effort should be made to include these families in the activities of the parish, drawing them into the mainstream of parish life. Second, pastors and pastoral ministers can use their cultivated awareness of persons with disabilities within the parish boundaries to help these families connect with other families facing similar challenges.

“Persons with disabilities...seek to serve the community and to enjoy their full baptismal rights as members of the Church. Our interaction with them can and should be an affirmation of our faith. There can be no separate Church for persons with disabilities. We are one flock that follows a single shepherd.”⁸⁴

For additional information, contact the Center for Marriage, Family & Life, Catholic Diocese of Richmond, 804-622-5109.



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References

- ¹ Cf. *Rite of Baptism for Children*, no. 2.
- ² *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, no. 1250.
- ³ Cf. *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, no. 1250.
- ⁴ *Rite of Baptism for Children*, no. 8.
- ⁵ Cf. *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, no. 1261.
- ⁶ *Code of Canon Law*, can. 867 § 1.
- ⁷ *Rite of Baptism for Children*, no. 3.
- ⁸ Cf. *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, no. 1231.
- ⁹ *Rite of Baptism for Children*, no. 39.
- ¹⁰ Vatican Council II, Constitution on the Sacred Liturgy, *Sacrosanctum Concilium*, no. 14.
- ¹¹ Cf. *Code of Canon Law*, can. 872.
- ¹² *Rite of Baptism for Children*, no. 78.
- ¹³ *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, no. 1255.
- ¹⁴ Cf. *Code of Canon Law*, can. 874 § 1.
- ¹⁵ Cf. *Code of Canon Law*, can. 873.
- ¹⁶ Cf. *Code of Canon Law*, can. 874 § 2.
- ¹⁷ Cf. Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, Instruction on Infant Baptism, *Pastoralis actio* (1980), no. 11.
- ¹⁸ *Rite of Baptism for Children*, no. 70.
- ¹⁹ *Rite of Baptism for Children*, no. 4.
- ²⁰ Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, Instruction on Infant Baptism, *Pastoralis actio*, no. 30.
- ²¹ Cf. *Code of Canon Law*, can. 851.2
- ²² Cf. *Code of Canon Law*, can. 861.
- ²³ *Code of Canon Law*, can. 868 § 1.1.
- ²⁴ *Code of Canon Law*, can. 868 § 2.
- ²⁵ *Code of Canon Law*, can. 868 § 1.2.
- ²⁶ Cf. Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, Instruction on Infant Baptism, *Pastoralis actio*, no. 30.
- ²⁷ *Code of Canon Law*, can. 868 § 1.2.



- ²⁸ Cf. *Code of Canon Law*, can. 868 § 1.2; *Rite of Baptism for Children*, no. 25; Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, *Instruction on Infant Baptism, Pastoralis actio*, no. 31.
- ²⁹ Cf. Vatican Council II, Dogmatic Constitution on the Church, *Lumen Gentium*, no. 11; cited in *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, no. 1656.
- ³⁰ *Code of Canon Law*, can. 867 § 1.
- ³¹ Cf. Congregation for the Clergy, *General Directory for Catechesis* (1997), nos. 226–227.
- ³² Cf. *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, no. 1231.
- ³³ *Rite of Baptism for Children*, no. 9.
- ³⁴ Cf. *Code of Canon Law*, can. 856.
- ³⁵ Cf. *Rite of Baptism for Children*, nos. 16–19.
- ³⁶ Cf. *Rite of Baptism for Children*, nos. 28–30.
- ³⁷ *Rite of Baptism for Children*, no. 32.
- ³⁸ Cf. *Rite of Baptism for Children*, no. 8.
- ³⁹ Cf. *Code of Canon Law*, can. 854; *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, no. 1278.
- ⁴⁰ Cf. *Code of Canon Law*, can. 877 § 1.
- ⁴¹ Cf. Complimentary Norm to canon 877 § 3 (“Recording the Baptism of Adopted Children,” 2000).
- ⁴² *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, no. 1231.
- ⁴³ *General Directory for Catechesis*, no. 177.
- ⁴⁴ *Rite of Baptism for Children*, no. 5.5.
- ⁴⁵ *Rite of Baptism for Children*, no. 70.
- ⁴⁶ Cf. *Code of Canon Law*, can. 868 § 1.2.
- ⁴⁷ *Rite of Baptism for Children, Rito del Bautismo de Niños*; no. 77.
- ⁴⁸ Cf. *Rite of Baptism for Children*, no. 70.
- ⁴⁹ Cf. *General Directory for Catechesis*, no. 226.
- ⁵⁰ Cf. *Code of Canon Law*, can. 867 § 1.
- ⁵¹ Cf. *Code of Canon Law*, can. 851.2.
- ⁵² *Code of Canon Law, Código de Derecho Canónico*; can. 855.
- ⁵³ Cf. *Rite of Baptism for Children*, no. 8.
- ⁵⁴ Cf. *Code of Canon Law*, can. 867 § 1.
- ⁵⁵ *Code of Canon Law, Código de Derecho Canónico*; can. 857 § 2.
- ⁵⁶ Cf. *Code of Canon Law*, can. 877 § 1.
- ⁵⁷ Cf. Complimentary Norm to canon 877 § 3 (“Recording the Baptism of Adopted Children,” 2000).
- ⁵⁸ *Catechism of the Catholic Church, Catecismo de la Iglesia Católica*; no. 1278.
- ⁵⁹ Cf. *Code of Canon Law*, can. 856.
- ⁶⁰ Cf. *Code of Canon Law*, can. 873.
- ⁶¹ *Rite of Baptism for Children, Rito del Bautismo de Niños*; no. 169.
- ⁶² *Catechism of the Catholic Church, Catecismo de la Iglesia Católica*; no. 1255.
- ⁶³ Cf. *Rite of Baptism for Children*, no. 70.
- ⁶⁴ Cf. *Rite of Baptism for Children*, no. 4.
- ⁶⁵ Cf. *Code of Canon Law*, can. 874 § 1.
- ⁶⁶ Cf. *Rite of Confirmation*, no. 5; *Code of Canon Law*, can. 893 § 2.



- ⁶⁷ Cf. *Code of Canon Law*, can. 1550 § 1.
- ⁶⁸ Cf. *Code of Canon Law*, can. 874 § 2.
- ⁶⁹ Cf. *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, no. 1256; *Code of Canon Law*, can. 861 § 2.
- ⁷⁰ Cf. *Rite of Baptism for Children*, nos. 165-185.
- ⁷¹ *Code of Canon Law*, *Codigo de Derecho Canonico*; can. 849.
- ⁷² *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, *Catecismo de la Iglesia Católica*; no. 1257.
- ⁷³ *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, *Catecismo de la Iglesia Católica*; no. 1257.
- ⁷⁴ *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, *Catecismo de la Iglesia Católica*; no. 1261.
- ⁷⁵ Cf. *Code of Canon Law*, can. 1247.
- ⁷⁶ Vatican Council II, Constitution on the Sacred Liturgy, *Sacrosanctum Concilium*, no. 14.
- ⁷⁷ *Guidelines for the Celebration of the Sacraments with Persons with Disabilities*, USCCB, 1995; I. General Principles, no. 1.
- ⁷⁸ Cf. *Guidelines for the Celebration of the Sacraments with Persons with Disabilities*, II. Particular Sacraments, Baptism, no. 13.
- ⁷⁹ Cf. *Guidelines for the Celebration of the Sacraments with Persons with Disabilities*, I. General Principles, no. 4.
- ⁸⁰ Cf. *Guidelines for the Celebration of the Sacraments with Persons with Disabilities*, II. Particular Sacraments, Baptism, no. 9.
- ⁸¹ Cf. *Guidelines for the Celebration of the Sacraments with Persons with Disabilities*, I. General Principles, no. 5.
- ⁸² Cf. *Guidelines for the Celebration of the Sacraments with Persons with Disabilities*, II. Particular Sacraments, Baptism, no. 11.
- ⁸³ Cf. *Rite of Baptism for Children*, nos. 165-185.
- ⁸⁴ Pastoral Statement of U.S. Catholic Bishops on Persons with Disabilities, USCCB (1978, 1988, 2001), no. 33.

