

Policy on Infant Baptism

Archdiocese of New Orleans

"From the earliest times, the Church, to which the mission of preaching the Gospel and of baptizing was entrusted, has baptized not only adults but children as well. Our Lord said, 'Unless a man is reborn in water and the Holy Spirit, he cannot enter the kingdom of God.' The Church has always understood these words to mean that children should not be deprived of baptism, because they are baptized in the faith of the Church, a faith proclaimed for them by their parents and godparents, who represent both the local Church and the whole society of saints and believers: 'The whole Church is the mother of all and the mother of each.'" (Rite of Baptism of Children, no. 2)

The birth or adoption of a child is a sacred time to celebrate both earthly life and God's promise of eternal life to those who are born of water and the Holy Spirit. Just as the living God grants us earthly life, God also calls the Church to celebrate with the family of a newborn or newly adopted child the new life that God offers in the Sacrament of Baptism.

In order to assist parents and parishes in making the Baptism of Children a time to celebrate faith and rejoice in the gift of new life, the Archdiocese of New Orleans has adopted the following as particular law in the archdiocese regarding the Sacrament of Baptism.

Regarding Parents who Present Children for Baptism

1. All parishes undertake Baptismal Preparation that at a minimum covers the following:
 - a. Role of Parents
 - b. Role of Godparents
 - c. Importance of Parents as primary educators of their children in the faith
 - d. Importance of a Christian name
 - e. Explanation of the Rite of Baptism which, in addition to other aspects, focuses on the nature of the Sacrament of Baptism, especially as entrance into a community of faith

2. With regard to Parents who present children for the Sacrament of Baptism, first time Parents shall attend Baptism Preparation. However, if the Parents have attended Baptism Preparation previously in the parish where the Baptism is to take place, then no further preparation should be required regardless of the number of children of these Parents that are presented for Baptism in that particular church parish.

3. Since the most common reason for delaying Baptism is a concern regarding the 'founded hope' that the child would be brought up in the Catholic faith, there is a *Baptism Testimonial Form* compiled for use in all parishes in the Archdiocese of New Orleans that asks

Parents to swear to tell the truth about their intentions to raise the child in the Catholic faith and requires Parents to sign the form. This allows priests and deacons to take the Parents *'at the word of their sworn statements'* and fulfills the requirement for a 'founded hope' that the child will be raised in the Catholic faith.

4. That with the regard that is due for 'Baptism in danger of death' (canon 866 §2), there be acceptance and continuance of the current practice of NOT baptizing a child presented by anyone who is not at least a legal guardian of the child.

5. That parish registration prior to Baptism only be strongly encouraged so that the needs of any future pastoral care required by the family can be given attention.

6. That as long as all other requirements are met, children of unwed parents should be baptized without the added requirement of marriage, or even of promised marriage, on the part of the parents.

7. Regarding children born to unwed parents, a certificate of birth from the State that declares paternity on the part of the mother and father shall be sufficient to enter the name of both parents into the baptismal record.

Regarding Proposed Godparents

1. First time Godparents shall attend Baptism preparation prior to serving in this role.

2. Catholics who are not yet confirmed cannot serve as either a Godparent or as a Christian Witness.

3. Catholics who are not practicing their faith in any manner or who are not in 'good standing' cannot serve as Godparents or as Christian Witnesses.

4. Catholics who have rejected the faith cannot serve as Godparents or as Christian Witnesses.

5. There is a *Baptism Testimonial Form* compiled for use in all parishes in the Archdiocese of New Orleans that asks the Godparents to swear to tell the truth about the information they provide, and then requires Godparents to sign the form. This allows priests and deacons to take the Godparents *'at the word of their sworn statements'* and eliminates the need for any other attestations regarding their 'good standing' in the Church, reception of the Sacrament of Confirmation, etc.

Other Concerns

1. For emergency Baptisms that may take place in hospitals, etc. the canonical requirement that the baptism be recorded in the territorial parish in which it was celebrated must be respected.
2. With regard to 'supplying ceremony' for a child who was baptized in an emergency, a notation may also be made in the index of the baptismal register of the church parish where the ceremony is supplied indicating that only ceremony was supplied, and also stating in which church parish the baptismal record is inscribed. Only the church parish in which the baptism was actually celebrated may issue a baptismal certificate for any such baptism.
3. While Baptisms during Lent should be discouraged in normative circumstances, it nonetheless remains the prerogative of the pastor after consultation with the parents to decide on celebrating a private baptism during Lent.
4. With regard to the Celebration of Baptism during Mass, and the Celebration of Baptism for One Child and the Celebration of Baptism for a Number of Children, these remain pastoral decisions made solely by the pastor after consultation with the parents of the child(ren) to be baptized.

The Sacrament of Baptism is the basis of the whole of Christian life, the gateway to life in the Spirit, and the door which gives access to the other Sacraments. (*Catechism of the Catholic Church, #1213*) It is hoped that the above guidelines will enhance the joy of the celebration of the baptism of a child, bestowing God's grace upon the child baptized as well as enriching the lives of parents, godparents, and all others who gather to celebrate the gift of new life offered in baptism.