



**SACRAMENTS OF INITIATION
BAPTISM OF INFANTS AND
VERY YOUNG CHILDREN**
Diocese of Great Falls-Billings

I. General background:

In this day and age we are most familiar with the practice of baptizing infants and/or very young children. However, apart from cases of danger of death, a child is not admitted to baptism without the parent's (or legal guardian's) consent and a serious assurance that after baptism the child will be given a Catholic upbringing. In the absence of reasonable hope that the child will be raised in the Catholic faith, the priest/pastoral administrator not only may, but should, postpone the baptism until such time as there is some evidence of living faith on the part of the parents/guardian. If there is a disagreement with the parents about the postponement of baptism, recourse may be made to the bishop according to the process outlined in the introduction to the guidelines 3.1 ff.

Except when there is danger of death, priests are not permitted to baptize infants and young children who are outside of their own local community unless they have the permission of the family's pastor indicating that the family has been prepared and there is a serious assurance of a Catholic upbringing.

Sponsors:

One Catholic sponsor is required. Two may be used, in which case they must be of opposite sex. A baptized non-Catholic may act as a witness together with a Catholic sponsor. (cf. Canons 873 and 874.2)

Records:

Record of the baptism is to be entered carefully and without delay in the baptismal register by the pastor or his delegate.

II. Canonical Requirements:

Canon 868

§ 1. *For the licit baptism of an infant it is necessary that:*

1° *the parents or at least one of them or the person who lawfully takes their place gives consent;*

2° *there be a founded hope that the infant will be brought up in the Catholic religion; if such a hope is altogether lacking, the baptism is to be put off according to the particular law and the parents are to be informed of the reason.*

Canon 856

Although baptism may be celebrated on any day, it is recommended that ordinarily it be celebrated on a Sunday or if possible at the Easter Vigil.



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Canon 857

- §1. *Outside a case of necessity, the proper place for baptism is a church or an oratory.*
- §2. *As a rule adults are to be baptized in their own parish church and infants in the parish church proper to the parents, unless a just cause suggests otherwise.*

Canon 860

- §1. *Outside the case of necessity, baptism is not to be conferred in private homes, unless the local ordinary has permitted this for a grave cause.*
- §2. *Baptism is not to be celebrated in hospitals unless the diocesan bishop has decreed otherwise, except in case of necessity or some other compelling pastoral reason.*

Canon 862

Outside the case of necessity, it is not lawful for anyone without the required permission, to confer baptism in the territory of another, not even upon his own subjects.

Canon 873

There is to be only one male sponsor or one female sponsor or one of each.

Canon 874

- §1. *To be admitted to the role of sponsor, a person must:*
 - 1° *be designated by the one to be baptized, by the parents or the one who takes their place, or in their absence, by the pastor or minister and is to have the qualifications and intention of performing this role;*
 - 2° *have completed the sixteenth year, unless a different age has been established by the diocesan bishop or it seems to the pastor or minister that an exception is to be made for just cause;*
 - 3° *be a Catholic who has been confirmed and has already received the sacrament of the Most Holy Eucharist and leads a life in harmony with the faith and the role to be undertaken;*
 - 4° *not be bound by any canonical penalty legitimately imposed or declared;*
 - 5° *not be the father or mother of the one to be baptized.*
- §2. *A baptized person who belongs to a non-Catholic ecclesial community may not be admitted except as a witness to baptism and together with a Catholic sponsor.*



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Canon 878

If baptism was administered neither by the pastor nor in his presence, the minister of baptism, whoever it is, must inform the pastor of the parish in which the baptism was administered, so that they may record it in accord with canon 877§1.

Canon 877§1

The pastor of the place where the baptism is celebrated must carefully and without delay record in the baptismal book the names of those baptized making mention of the minister, parents, sponsors, witnesses if any and the place and date of the conferred baptism, together with an indication of the date and place of birth.

Canon 851

*It is necessary that the celebration of baptism be properly prepare; thus:
2° the parents of an infant who is to be baptized and likewise those who are to undertake the office of sponsor are to be properly instructed in the meaning of this sacrament and the obligations which are attached to it; personally or through others the pastor is to see to it that the parents are properly formed in pastoral directions and by common prayer, gathering several families together and where possible visiting them.*

III. Catechetical Guidelines:

It is the serious duty, as well as great pastoral opportunity, of priests, deacons, and pastoral teams to prepare parents and sponsors with appropriate instruction and guidance before the baptism of infants. The expectation for the diocese is an extended program of preparation with parents and sponsors for a minimum of two sessions. The preparation of these adults is to help them understand their essential contribution to the development of their child's growth in faith.

Where two sessions are held (in addition to the preliminary interview when coming to schedule a baptism) the following may be considered for inclusion:

A. Session one: Faith: Our response to God's call

Include an informal discussion of faith; its meaning in our lives. The role of the church and community in a life of faith. The role of parent as witness, teacher, pray/er. Perhaps the following can stimulate a dialogue.

What does the sacrament of Baptism mean to you?
What do you hope to gain for your child from this sacrament?

Why do you seek baptism for your child?
Is our Sunday Eucharist truly reflective of the lives of our people?



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Does the community pray together easily and joyfully?
What is the role of personal prayer in your life?

B. Session two: The Sacraments: their role in the life of a Catholic

Discuss the meaning of sacrament, being a sacramental church, the role of initiation in a person's life – in the life of a church community. Study the *Rite of Infant Baptism* and give time to prepare for the celebration at Sunday Mass.

What are sacraments? What is their role in our lives of faith?
What do we mean by sacraments of initiation?
What do we mean by the sacrament of baptism?
Why do we celebrate baptism at the Sunday Eucharist?
Why is the choice of sponsor important? What are the considerations for sponsor? What is the role of a sponsor?
What are the symbols used in the rite of baptism?
What do the symbols say to us?
How will we prepare ourselves and our family (if we have other children) for the celebration?

Each session should have at least a short time of prayer – it need not be lengthy or complex. Perhaps it could include one of the symbols/prayers used at baptism.

Accommodation needs to be made for parents who have multiple children over a short period of years that they not be overburdened by requirements which are duplicative. There is no need to retake a session within three years.

IV. Liturgical Guidelines:

The *Rite of Infant Baptism* is used for all children having not yet reached the use of reason (around seven years of age).

The active participation by the Christian people, which has already come into use in the case of adults, is also required for the baptism of infants and children, in which the "people of God," that is the church made present in the local community, has an important part to play. In addition, the community itself will draw great spiritual and apostolic benefit from the baptism ceremony. Thus baptism is encouraged as a part of the community's Sunday Eucharist.

Canon 837

§1. *Liturgical actions are not private actions but celebrations of the Church itself, which is "the sacrament of unity," namely, a holy people assembled and ordered under the bishops; therefore liturgical actions pertain to the whole body of the Church*



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and manifest and affect it, but they affect the individual members of the Church in different ways according to the diversity of orders, functions and actual participation.

§2. *Liturgical actions, to the extent that by their proper nature they involve a common celebration, are to be celebrated where possible with the presence and active participation of the Christian faithful.*

Baptisms at Sunday liturgy are highly encouraged and it is recommended to make the baptism of infants during Sunday liturgy the normal policy for the parish. If, for pastoral reasons, baptism during the Sunday liturgy is not possible, baptism should be celebrated at a time when at least a portion of the community can be present.

Preparation may take place at the final session of catechesis as noted above. The parents and sponsors need to have at least a minimal understanding of the rite, its symbols and where the different sections are celebrated within the Mass. The logistical considerations are very important. If people know where to stand, sit, process, and when to do so, the flow of the liturgy is smooth and prayerful. Giving directions unnecessarily during the celebration is disruptive to the entire assembly and embarrassing to the parents and sponsors.

It is important that parish staff be well prepared to handle questions and to impart in a gentle and hospitable manner the expectations of the parish regarding the celebration of baptism. The size of the worship space and the placement of the font will have a great bearing on the ability of the assembly to participate in seeing, hearing and answering the prayers. Good preparation is essential for a good celebration. Knowledge of the rite is key. A brief outline is given below. Careful preparation of the rite with the inclusion of music is important.

The Rite of Baptism: (within the Celebration of Eucharist)

1. Reception of the child/children at the entrance to the worship space:
 - Presider greets the parents, godparents and all present
 - Presider questions the parents
 - Presider questions the godparents
 - Presider signs the child/children with the sign of the cross and invites the parents and godparents to do the same
 - All process into the worship space.
2. Liturgy of the Word as usual:
3. Homily:
4. General Intercessions: They end with an invocation of the saints. (Ritually these



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may be better done after the baptism.)

5. Exorcism and Prayer of Anointing:
Parents, godparents and child/children come forward for this.
6. Celebration of the sacrament:
 - Process to the baptistery (or remain in place if baptism is to take place up front) Presider reminds assembly of the work of God in baptism
 - Blessing of the water (Not necessary if a baptismal font with water already blessed is used.) Consult Chapter VII, #223 and 224 for prayers of thanksgiving over the water, noting the omission of the three invocations.
 - Renunciation of sin and profession of faith
 - Baptism
 - Presider questions parents and godparents
 - Presider immerses child or pours water over the head, he uses traditional Trinitarian formula of baptism while pouring (immersing) the water (The mother or godmother may assist by holding the child.)

(General Intercessions possibly may be done here.)
7. Explanatory rites:
 - Anointing with Chrism
 - Clothing with a white garment
 - Giving of the lighted candle
 - Ephphetha (Prayers over ears and mouth). In the United States this may be done at the discretion of the minister (Rite of Baptism for Children, #65).
8. Liturgy of the Eucharist proceeds as usual.
The Final Blessing of parents and assembly is taken from the Baptismal Ritual.

When preparing the above with the parents and godparents, please include the minister of music in the discussion. The use of instrumental music for processions and the use of acclamations at appropriate times in the celebration accents the elements of the rite, adds solemnity and enhances the celebration. Consider the assembly and the place where various elements of the rite will occur. Be sure that people can see and/or hear all that is transpiring. (If the font is in the back or in the gathering space invite people to turn and face it. If it is not able to be seen by the assembly be sure that they are able to hear the pouring of the water and the prayers). If a procession to the font occurs, determine whether there is space for all gathered to participate. Consider asking all present to extend their hands in blessing over the children and parents at the final blessing.

The elements used in the celebration must be of good quality and clean, this need not mean expensive. Use of our sacramental symbols is a great opportunity for formation.



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The Chrism should be seen by all, presented in an appropriate glass vessel and poured liberally. It may even be brought in during the entrance procession and taken to the space near the font. The white garment is to be substantial and not a token representation. The candle used and later taken home by the parents for future use needs to be of a size and quality that speaks of its importance in representing the light of faith. All of this needs preparation before the celebration begins so that the ministers and family may be at ease and enter into the prayer and ritual peacefully.

- It is recommended that baptisms not be celebrated during the season of Lent but, if possible, be postponed until Easter.
- It is recommended to celebrate multiple baptisms at one time. The *Rite of Baptism of Several Children* is given as a normal form of celebration.
- Baptism should occur in the parish church. The sacrament of Baptism is not to be conferred in a private house except in danger of death. If so, it is recorded in the parish. If the child survives, the completion of the rituals are to be done according to the *Rite of Bringing A Baptized Child to the Church* (Chapter IV, *Baptism for Children*), #165-185.

Revised & Promulgated
By Bishop Michael W. Warfel
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