

Policies of the Diocese of Kansas City ~ St. Joseph

Policy # 120.10

Infant Baptism

Approved By: Most Reverend James V. Johnston, Jr.
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BAPTISM OF CHILDREN

I. Initial considerations

A. Introduction

“Baptism, the door to life and to the Kingdom, is the first Sacrament of the New Law, which Christ offered to all that they might have eternal life” (Christian Initiation: General introduction 3).

In the Diocese of Kansas City-St. Joseph, all in parish leadership are to convey to parents the joy of the Church especially upon hearing the news of a pregnancy, a newborn child, or a request for arranging a baptism.

Reminder: The baptizing minister is to make sure that the water touches the head and that the proper formula is used with the three persons of the Holy Trinity, no other words are to be used. Correct matter and form are to be followed.

B. Candidates for infant baptism

The *Order of Baptism of Children* (OBC) pertains to children from the moment of birth until catechetical age, or about the age of preparation for first communion. Generally, but not exclusively, this age has been seen as seven years. The *Rite of Christian Initiation of Adults* pertains to unbaptized children of catechetical age, who celebrate its rituals beginning with Acceptance into the Order of Catechumens and ending with all three initiation sacraments of baptism, confirmation and first communion, usually at the Easter Vigil.

In the Diocese of Kansas City-St. Joseph, the pastor is responsible for the baptism of all children whose Catholic parents live within the canonical boundaries of his parish, even if the parents have not registered. If parents outside the boundaries have registered, the pastor is responsible for their children as well.

In the Diocese of Kansas City-St. Joseph, children of adoption are eligible for baptism once the proceedings are complete.

C. Parents

Parishes are especially ready to assist Catholic parents in a valid marriage who are requesting the baptism of their children. Having prayed for a fruitful marriage at the wedding, they now share the faith with their children.

When only one parent is Catholic, the baptism may take place as long as the second parent does not object. “The only requirement is that [the non-Catholic parent] provide for or at least permit the instruction of the child in the baptismal faith” (OBC 5 §4). If the second parent objects to the baptism, a priest or deacon visits with the parents, if possible, to learn more and provide guidance.

If the parents of the child are not married at all, or not in a canonically valid marriage, a priest or deacon should meet with them before baptism preparation begins to offer assistance. He ascertains whether they would like to pursue a valid sacramental marriage, and he offers help through whatever means pertain—opening process exploring an annulment, or beginning marriage preparation, for example. If they have no desire for marriage in the Catholic Church the minister attempts to learn further why they are requesting baptism for the child, and how they plan to provide the necessary example for “raising the child in the faith” (OBC 39).

If only one parent is presenting the child, the minister requests time to learn more of the situation. Sometimes the father is not known. Sometimes the mother has died in childbirth. A single parent may need assistance.

If those presenting the child are in a same-sex relationship, a minister visits with them to learn more. He may ask how they plan to raise the child in the faith in light of the home situation. In the Diocese of Kansas City-St. Joseph, the relationship of the parents alone does not suffice as a reason to deny the baptism of the child. However, the minister must ensure those responsible will raise the child in the faith.

D. Godparents

The qualifications to serve as a godparent are found in canon 874 §1. In the Diocese of Kansas City-St. Joseph, these are the only qualifications required to serve as a godparent.

“To be permitted to take on the function of sponsor a person must:

“1) be designated by the one to be baptized, by the parents or the person who takes their place, or in their absence by the pastor or minister and have the aptitude and intention of fulfilling this function;

“2) have completed the sixteenth year of age, unless the diocesan bishop has established another age, or the pastor or minister has granted an exception for a just cause;

“3) be a Catholic who has been confirmed and has already received the most holy sacrament of the Eucharist and who leads a life of faith in keeping with the function to be taken on;

“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.”

A Catholic in an invalid marriage is not absolutely excluded from serving as a godparent, but the pastor will judge case by case whether the person is leading “a life of faith in keeping with the function to be taken on” (cf., canon 874 §1, 3).

Note that a Catholic who has never been confirmed is ineligible to serve as a godparent.

Only one godparent is required, and the person may be male or female, no matter the sex of the child. If there are two godparents, one must be male, the other female (canon 873 §3).

A person baptized validly in a non-Catholic ecclesial community may serve “as a witness of the baptism” together with a Catholic godparent (canon 874 §2). That person may be male or female, no matter the sex of the godparent.

Godparents may be represented by proxies. The proxy participates in the baptismal ceremony, and the godparents' names are entered in the register.

The Rite of Confirmation encourages the baptismal godparent to serve later as the confirmation sponsor for the same child (5).

Parents are encouraged to discuss with the godparents their future expectations of the relationship.

E. Postponing baptism

“Sacred ministers cannot deny the sacraments to those who seek them at appropriate times, are properly disposed, and are not prohibited by law from receiving them” (canon 843 §1).

If the minister judges that there is no founded hope that the infant will be brought up in the Catholic religion, “the baptism is to be put off” (canon 868 §2).

In such an instance, the pastor best visits with the parents to review the reasons for the judgment and to lay out a plan toward the baptism of the child in the future.

II. Catechetical formation

A. Purpose

As with all the sacraments, pastors are to prepare their people for baptism “by the necessary evangelization and catechetical formation” (canon 843 §2). They are to welcome the goodwill of parents seeking the baptism of their children, even those who do not regularly participate in Sunday Mass, for this is a time to share the good news of life in Christ in all the sacraments of the Church.

“Before the celebration of the sacrament, it is very helpful for the parents, either led by their own faith, or aided by the support of their friends or of other members of the community, to prepare themselves for an informed participation in the celebration by suitable means, such as books, articles, and catechisms aimed at the family. Furthermore, the pastor of the parish should take care to meet with them himself or through others, or even to bring together several families, to prepare them for the coming celebration by pastoral instructions and prayer in common” (OBC 5 §1).

B. The Place of preparation

In the Diocese of Kansas City-St. Joseph, it is preferable that sacramental catechesis take place on the parish property. This helps to acquaint the parents with the parish facility and to ensure proper safety protocols.

Circumstances may permit, however, that the catechetical preparation of parents take place in the home of the catechists or even electronically.

C. Documents

In the Diocese of Kansas City-St. Joseph, it is recommended that parents provide the parish a copy of the birth certificate of their child. This will ensure the correct entry of data in the baptismal record, including the names of the parents and of the child, as well as the date and the place of birth.

Parents are not required to provide certificates verifying their own baptism, confirmation, first communion or marriage in the Church. In normal circumstances, their

word is enough. Similarly, parents are not required to provide documentation pertaining to immigration status.

It is recommended that godparents provide proof of their confirmation.

D. Parents' preparations

Catechists are encouraged to learn about the plans that parents have already made.

The name of the child should be harmonious with Christianity. "Parents, sponsors, and the pastor are to take care that a name foreign to Christian sensibility is not given" (canon 855). The child need not receive the name of a saint; however, that custom is praiseworthy, for it provides appropriate role models to children.

If parents have expectations of godparents beyond the canonical requirements, it would be prudent for all of them to learn of these.

Parents may be encouraged to provide a social celebration after the baptism for the family and friends who participate. In some cases the parish may provide space for the gathering.

Catechists should be ready to answer practical questions about the baptismal day.

It is advisable to invite parents into other aspects of parish life. Catechists may provide information about times for Mass and confessions, adult faith formation, social activities, opportunities for service, and the USCCB's *Catholic Household Blessings and Prayers*.

E. Liturgical preparation

Catechists may encourage parents to arrange to celebrate baptism within Mass (OBC 9). That will connect the parish community with the newest members and provide a fruitful liturgical environment that includes music and ministers.

Catechists help parents prepare for the liturgy by reviewing the words and actions that will be expected of them.

Non-Christian parents married to Catholics are not required to say anything contrary to their beliefs at the baptism. "If one of [the parents] is not able to make the profession of faith... that parent may remain silent" (OBC 5 §4).

It is recommended that the parents, not the godparents, hold the child for the baptism. The parents are the ones primarily responsible for the formation of the child.

Catechists may inform parents that baptism may be administered either by immersion or by pouring, and that the Catechism of the Catholic Church calls baptism by immersion the "most expressive way" (1239).

Photographers are welcome to document the event, but not in a distracting or obtrusive way. Catechists may encourage parents to have all to participate fully, consciously and actively in the liturgy, rather than in their cellular devices. Livestreaming the baptism may be a good way for people who cannot be present to join the spirit of celebration.

F. Donation to church

It is praiseworthy for parents to make a donation to the Church on the occasion of the baptism; however, payment is not required. Pope Francis has discouraged assigning “a price list for the sacraments” (Homily, November 24, 2017), however, if parents ask about an appropriate offering that can be helpful.

III. Preparation for the rite

A. Setting the date

It is recommended that a child be baptized within the first few weeks after birth (canon 867 §1). The Easter Vigil or any Sunday make the best choice for the date (OBC 9), but baptisms are permitted on any day.

B. Setting the place

The preferred location for baptisms is in the parish church. In the Diocese of Kansas City-St. Joseph, if the parents request a baptism in a parish church different from their own, the pastor receiving the request best contacts the family’s pastor as a courtesy, to inform him of the request and to receive any pertinent information.

C. The Minister

In the Diocese of Kansas City-St. Joseph, all priests and deacons with faculties may baptize.

“It is for pastors also to make every effort that each Baptism be celebrated with due dignity and that it be accommodated, as far as possible, to the circumstances and wishes of the families. Whoever is conferring Baptism should carry out the rite carefully and reverently; he should strive above all to be courteous and affable to everyone. (OBC 7).

D. Emergency baptisms

Anyone may administer baptism in case of an emergency. A child in danger of death may be baptized “even against the will of the parents, even if the parents of the infant are non-Catholics” (OBC 8 §1), but it is best to receive the approval of the parents, especially in the event that the child should survive. If possible, the minister uses Chapter V, the Order of Baptism of Children in Danger of Death, or at the Point of Death, To Be Used in the Absence of a Priest or Deacon (OBC 157-164).

Parental delay in arranging the baptism of a child is insufficient reason for concerned parties to take it upon themselves to baptize.

Any child who recovers after the administration of an emergency baptism is brought to church for the ritual in Chapter VI, the Order of Bringing a Baptized Child to the Church (OBC 165-185).

If, sadly, the child should die, the parish offers appropriate pastoral care to the family. If the child should die even before baptism, the pastor offers the parents the appropriate rites from the Order of Christian Funerals.

E. Baptismal certificates

The parish baptismal record must be kept up to date. Baptisms are to be recorded promptly and accurately after the celebration.

In the case of baptism after adoption, no reference of the adoption or of the natural parents is made in the baptismal record. (See *Sacramental Records Handbook*, Diocese of Kansas City-St. Joseph, Office of Diocesan Archives, 2018, pp. 28-33, 40-41.)