

*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.*

MATTHEW 28:19



# INFANT BAPTISM

- I. INTRODUCTION
- II. REQUIREMENTS AND RESPONSIBILITIES OF PARENTS/LEGAL GUARDIANS
- III. CATECHETICAL PREPARATION
- IV. TIME OF CELEBRATION
- V. SPONSORS (GODPARENTS)/WITNESSES
- VI. NAME
- VII. MINISTERS OF BAPTISM
- VIII. PLACE OF CELEBRATION
- IX. LITURGICAL RITES
- X. DOCUMENTATION AND PARISH REGISTERS



# INFANT BAPTISM

For children under the age of reason (7 years of age)

## I. INTRODUCTION

There is an intimate connection between baptism—the first sign of faith—and Eucharist—the Church’s central sign of faith where we are all incorporated into the living Body of Christ. That living Body across the Seattle Archdiocese draws from a number of ethnic and cultural traditions. Parents (guardians) presenting their children for baptism often come from across the country or even overseas to settle in Western Washington. They may be disconnected from family, friends, and even the Church facing for the first time some level of desire to become better connected with their faith. These pastoral circumstances provide parish leaders with a unique opportunity for welcoming parents (guardians) and children into a deeper faith experience. The participation of family with the parish in their child’s Baptism—the first in the seven sacraments—will provide a foundation for subsequent participation in their local parish as a member of the Body of Christ. That sacramental action is at work in the Church uniting the child and its family more deeply into the bonds of faith through baptism.

The chief aim of the infant baptism policies is to see that young children—and the parents (guardians) who hold primary responsibility for their faith development—are effectively drawn into the beauty of our faith for this life and the next by participation in the sacramental life of the Church. The policies are not a substitute for a thorough study of the Rite of Baptism, the larger Rite of Christian Initiation, their *praenotanda*, the canonical requirements of the Church or the wider study of Church liturgy. Rather, developed for pastors, catechists, parents (guardians), and sponsors, these policies are meant to provide a quick point of reference leading us to further study of the sacrament of baptism as the foundation sign of our faith.

## II. REQUIREMENTS AND RESPONSIBILITIES OF PARENTS/LEGAL GUARDIANS

**IB 1. Parents (guardians) are responsible for requesting the sacrament of baptism for their infant/child. A period of catechetical preparation is required for the parents (guardians) and godparents of those preparing for the baptism of infants and children. Every parish and faith community in the Archdiocese of Seattle is to make provisions that**

preparation for the sacrament of baptism take place (see *CIC*, c. 867).

- IB 2. All parishes of the Archdiocese shall integrate appropriate options into their sacramental preparation process that account for the age and/or condition of the individual requesting baptism. In cases of *non sui compos*, the parent or legal guardian may request baptism. All policies relating to parents (guardians) of infants and children shall be applicable to parents and guardians of *non sui compos* individuals.**

*Non sui compos* is a term that refers to individuals who are deemed not fully capable of informed consent.

- IB 3. Consent by at least one biological parent or legal guardian is the minimum requirement for baptism to occur (see *CIC*, c. 868 §1, 1°).**

In cases where the parents (guardians) of a child being presented for baptism are separated or divorced, it may be prudent to delay baptism when one parent (guardian) requests baptism and the other is opposed, especially if to baptize violates a provision of a divorce settlement in civil law.

- IB 4. For an infant/child to be baptized at least one practicing Catholic shall agree to raise the child in the practice of the faith.**

The readiness of the parents or legal guardians is considered, in part, through their participation in and completion of a parish baptism preparation program of a recommended duration in which a life of faith, the family life as domestic church, and the ritual itself are emphasized. While participation in a parish preparation process is normative, pastors may on occasion use other means of determining the readiness of parents or legal guardians. It is recommended that preparation begin during pregnancy whenever possible (see *CIC*, c. 867 §1).

- IB 5. When parents (guardians) are not in a valid Catholic marriage, particularly those who are attempting to observe their faith (e.g., through Mass attendance, participation in parish and school life) baptismal preparation is to include a process by which couples are encouraged to regularize their marital status within the Church in order to live out their Catholic faith more fully in the presence of their children.**

- IB 6. Parents or legal guardians should be registered members of the parish in which initiation occurs or reside within the canonical boundaries of that parish when it is territorial. However, registration alone cannot be used as a means for refusing the sacraments.**

### III. CATECHETICAL PREPARATION

- IB 7. Parishes are to provide at least four hours of sacramental catechesis for parents/legal guardians and godparents prior to the baptism of their child.**
- IB 8. All baptismal programs shall include post-baptismal catechesis.**
- IB 9. Catechetical programs for baptism shall use one of the programs approved and recommended by the Archdiocese. (For information, contact the Office of Catholic Faith Formation)**
- IB 10. Appropriate catechesis will be provided as subsequent children enter the family. The pastor is to make this determination to avoid unnecessary repetition for parents/legal guardians and/or godparents.**

### IV. TIME OF CELEBRATION

- IB 11. Infants and children under the age of seven are to be baptized as soon as possible after the parents/legal guardians have been prepared and catechized regarding the Sacrament of Baptism, taking into account cultural sensitivity. The sacrament of baptism is to be celebrated in the “first few weeks after birth.” (CIC, c. 867 §1) However, the length of time between the birth of the child and the celebration of the sacrament may vary, dependent upon the health of the mother and the welfare or health of the child. Infant baptism is to occur soon after the completion of the parish or faith community baptism preparation program.**
- IB 12. When the child has a developmental disability, parents/legal guardians are to be consulted regarding the personal and individual development and the sacramental readiness of the child.**
- IB 13. As long as there is a well-founded hope that the child will be raised Catholic, baptism may not be delayed (see CIC, c. 868 §1, 2°). However, a pastor may determine that baptism is to be delayed for serious reason, such as a lack of intent on the part of the parents/legal guardians to raise the child Catholic. The pastor is to work with the parents/legal guardians until such a time that at least one of the parents/legal guardians (or godparents) is ready and able to assume their responsibilities and the delay is lifted.**

- IB 14.** When a child is in danger of death, baptism is to take place immediately (see *CIC*, c. 867 §2). At a later date, ceremonies are to be offered according to the rites.
- IB 15.** Except in cases of necessity, baptisms should not be celebrated during Lent and Advent, except for specific pastoral reasons.

#### V. SPONSORS (GODPARENTS)/WITNESSES

- IB 16.** Sponsors (godparents) are to be sixteen years of age, practicing Catholics who have already been confirmed, received the most holy sacrament of the Eucharist, and are not bound by any canonical penalty legitimately imposed or declared. The reception of the sacraments of initiation of the sponsors (godparents) is to be verified (see *CIC*, c. 874 §1, 2<sup>o</sup>-4<sup>o</sup>).
- IB 17.** Although one sponsor (godparent) is sufficient, when there are two sponsors (godparents), one must be male and one female (see *CIC*, c. 873).
- IB 18.** Sponsors (godparents) are chosen by the parents/legal guardians of the infant or child to be baptized and are willing to accept the responsibility of presenting the infant or child for baptism, assisting the parents/legal guardians, and witnessing the public event of the sacrament. A sponsor (godparent) is also responsible for assisting the baptized in fulfilling the obligations acquired by the sacrament (see *CIC*, c. 872).
- IB 19.** Sponsors (godparents) may not be the parents/legal guardians of the individual being baptized (see *CIC*, c. 874 §1, 5<sup>o</sup>).
- IB 20.** One of the two sponsors (godparents) must be Catholic; the other may be a baptized non-Catholic. The Catholic party is to be a practicing member of his/her Catholic faith community.  
The non-Catholic party is called a Christian witness and not a sponsor (godparent) (see *CIC*, c. 874 §2). The ability or willingness of the non-Catholic to support the parents/legal guardians in their intention to raise their child in the Catholic faith is to be considered.
- IB 21.** Should a proxy sponsor (godparent) be used, the name of the sponsor (godparent) is recorded, and not the name of the proxy (see *CIC*, c. 872 “Commentary” p. 1061).
- IB 22.** A sponsor (godparent) at baptism is the recommended person to serve as a sponsor for the same child at confirmation. (see *CIC*, c. 893 §2 )



## VI. NAME

- IB 23.** The preferred name of the baptized should manifest a Christian sensibility, taking care that cultural differences are accommodated (see *CIC*, c. 855; *CCC*, 2156).

## VII. MINISTERS OF BAPTISM

- IB 24.** The ordinary ministers of baptism are bishops, priests, and deacons (see *CIC*, c. 861 §1).
- IB 25.** In an emergency, a lay person may administer baptism. In such cases, the layperson is to report the baptism to the local pastor as soon as possible (see *Health Care Ministry: HC, XIII, "Pastoral Care: Infant Baptism"*).
- IB 26.** Visiting clergy to parishes other than their own are required to obtain the appropriate permission to celebrate the sacrament of baptism within the Archdiocese of Seattle (see *Priestly Ministry: PM, XII, "Extern Priests"*).
- IB 27.** Except in cases of necessity, no one is permitted to confer baptism in the jurisdiction of another without permission (see *CIC*, c. 862).

## VIII. PLACE OF CELEBRATION

- IB 28.** The sacrament of baptism is ordinarily conferred during the Sunday celebration of the Eucharist (see *CIC*, c. 856). Should baptism be celebrated outside of Mass, it is preferred that those celebrations be communal.
- IB 29.** Children are ordinarily baptized in the parish church of their parents/legal guardians (see *CIC*, c. 857 §2).
- IB 30.** "Apart from a case of necessity, baptism is not to be conferred in private houses, unless the local ordinary has permitted it for a grave cause." (*CIC*, c. 860 §1)
- IB 31.** "Except in a case of necessity or for some other compelling pastoral reason, baptism is not to be celebrated in hospitals unless the diocesan bishop has established otherwise." (*CIC*, c. 860 §2) In the Archdiocese this also includes other institutions such as high schools and chapels.

## IX. LITURGICAL RITES

- IB 32.** “Canon 1917 stipulates that the words or form to be used in the sacrament be the proper (*debita*) form, and that they accompany the immersion or pouring.” The proper words in the *CIC* are: “N, I baptize you in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit.” (*CIC, New Commentary, “Essential Theological and Canonical Elements,”* p. 1036)
- IB 33.** Immersion is the preferred manner of baptism for adults, infants, and children, yet partial immersion (water poured over the head) may also be utilized. The fullest sign of the reception of baptism is total immersion (see *CIC*, c. 854).
- IB 34.** *The Rite of Baptism for Children* is normative for all non-baptized person who have not reached the age of discretion (generally, age 7). *The Rite of Christian Initiation of Adults, Part II* (Chapter 1) is normative for all non-baptized persons who have reached the age of discretion (see *CIC*, c. 850).
- IB 35.** The pre-baptismal anointing may be separated in time from the rest of the Rite of Baptism according to the cultural and liturgical custom of the parish.
- IB 36.** Cultural practices are to be taken into consideration when determining the number of sponsors/godparents as well as their liturgical role in the celebration of baptism.

## X. DOCUMENTATION AND PARISH REGISTERS

- IB 37.** Registration of the conferral of baptism is to take place in accord with the requirements of *CIC*, c. 877 and the sacramental records policy of the Archdiocese of Seattle regardless of the immigration or legal standing of the child or the family (see *Sacramental Records Policies: SR, V, “Sacraments: Baptism”*).
- IB 38.** Baptismal records for adopted children will be no different from other baptismal records. No mention of the adoption should appear on the certificate or records, only the name(s) of the adoptive parent(s) (see *Sacramental Records Policies: SR, V, “Sacraments: Baptism, Adoption”*).
- IB 39.** When baptism occurs in an emergency situation, either at home or in an institution, such as a hospital, “and was not administered by the pastor or in his presence, the minister of baptism, whoever it is, must inform the pastor of the parish in which it was administered of the conferral of the baptism, so

**that he records the baptism according to the norm of the *CIC*, c. 877, §1.” (*CIC*, c. 878)**

In such cases where the baptismal certificate cannot be found the birth certificate always lists the name of the hospital from which the geographic parish where the baptism was recorded can be traced.

- IB 40. When a baptism occurs in an emergency situation the parish or faith community where the baptism was recorded should write a letter to the parish of the parents (guardians) informing them of the baptism and requesting that “The Rite of Bringing a Baptized Child to the Church” be celebrated. “The Rite of Bringing a Baptized Child to the Church” celebrates other rites, blessings and anointing that were omitted. No record is kept of this celebration (see *CIC, New Commentary*, Chapter 1 “The Celebration of Baptism,” p. 1039).**