

Roman Catholic
Infant Baptism
Guidelines
And
Customs



St. Cecilia Catholic Church
2159 Highway 195
Jasper, AL 35503

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INFANT BAPTISM

Baptism incorporates us into Christ and forms us into God's people. This first sacrament pardons all our sins, rescues us from the power of darkness, and brings us to the dignity of adopted children, a new creation through water and the Holy Spirit. Hence we are called and are indeed the children of God.

Christian Initiation: General Introduction, n. 2

This booklet has been prepared by parishioners of St. Cecilia Catholic Church to help our parish community review the Church's vision, understanding, teaching, and discipline of the Sacrament of Infant Baptism and the local Customs for celebrating the Sacrament at St. Cecilia Church.

Order of Infant Baptism

INTRODUCTION

These guidelines are only intended for infant baptisms. The *Rite of Christian Initiation of Adults* (RCIA) is the norm for the preparation of adults for Baptism. There are provisions in the RCIA for the RCIC (*Rite of Christian Initiation of Children*). Preparation and celebration of Baptism with children of catechetical age (the age of reason) usually follow the RCIC program. The age of reason as stated in the *Revised Code of Canon Law* is seven years.

THEOLOGICAL BACKGROUND

Infant Baptism celebrates the saving faith already transforming the lives of parents and of the community, a faith that will be shared by word and example with the newly baptized infants as they grow on their spiritual journey.

The ancient practice of infant Baptism continues in the Church today. But parents, sponsors, and the community must clearly understand the Christian meaning of Baptism and must freely choose to celebrate the sacrament as a time of growth in their own relationship with God.

The goal of Christian Initiation is the formation of a spirit-filled adult community of deeply committed Christians who, in bearing

witness to their faith in Christ, glorify their Father in heaven. So Baptism must be understood as a new birth into a new way of life. It is the first stage in an extended process of spiritual growth towards Christian maturity.

In choosing Baptism for a child, parents and the community accept the responsibility to continue the initiation of the baptized through Eucharist and Confirmation.

For Christians, Christ is the sacrament, the effective sign of God's love, mercy, and power in our lives. Since Christ acts through his Church, the Christian community, the sacraments need to be understood and seen in the context of the saving actions of the community of believers. At Baptism, marked with the sign of faith, the baptized enter into the Christian community. Now as members of this Christian community, they gather in his name to pray with and for each other; they encourage one another by word and example, exhorting each other in faith. They bear one another's burdens and so fulfill the law of Christ.

The sacramental celebrations within the community joyfully express this reality for the believer, thereby deepening faith and strengthening the bonds of the Christian community.

Baptism is the door to life with God and His Kingdom. It is the beginning of the initiation into a life committed to Christ. Baptism is without fruit if not lived out. The sacrament invites the baptized on a pilgrimage with the whole Church as they seek the fullness of faith — eternal life in Christ. Baptism calls the person in this life to actively engage in Christ's mission of love and to become like Christ, the revelation of God's love.

PLACE OF BAPTISM

The child should be baptized in the parish proper to the parents and can only be baptized outside of the parish with the expressed written permission of the proper parish pastor. This permission is given when a just cause is present. (Canon 857.2)

The parents should have established membership within the parish of Baptism. Change of parish membership should not occur from one local parish to another because of differing parish baptismal customs.

Baptisms must be recorded in the church where the Baptism is celebrated (Canon 877). Parents are to be given certificates recording the date, place, and minister of Baptism.

ARRANGEMENTS FOR BAPTISM

Arrangements for baptism are to be made by at least one of the parents through an interview with the parish priest or designated minister. It is

recommended that parents begin this process prior to the birth of their child to provide sufficient time.

The interview should discern if the parents are making a sincere effort to live the Christian life and to establish a well-founded and reasonable hope that the child will be raised in the Catholic faith (Canon 868.2).

Serious lack of a well-founded and reasonable hope would constitute legitimate reasons for the delaying of the Baptism (Canon 868.2). The purpose of the delay would be to allow time for parents to come to a fuller understanding of their faith and their relationship to the parish community.

While the following in and of themselves do not form the criteria, they may be indications that there is a well-founded and reasonable hope that the child will be raised in the Catholic faith:

- > parish registration
- > parents' attendance at Sunday mass
- > parents' active involvement in parish life, activities, and service
- > regular support of the parish
- > the validity of the parents' marriage

These and other attributes may contribute to the discernment process.

The occasion of parents coming to inquire about Baptism of a child is an opportunity for those in pastoral ministry to show the Church's loving concern for the child and its family. A warm

and understanding welcome may encourage the parents to a fuller life of faith and participation in the parish.

DELAYING BAPTISM

The key issue in making the difficult and exceptional decision to defer Baptism of an infant, is whether or not there is a well-founded and reasonable hope that the child will be raised in the Catholic faith.

If there is a convergence of circumstances, all of which tend to indicate that the child will not be raised in the Catholic faith in any realistic sense, then there may well be grounds to postpone baptism until the situation changes. For example: If the parents do not attend mass, have no personal and family-centered faith-life, express no great interest in seeing that their child go to mass and attend some form of religious instruction, and are not willing to participate in some basic catechesis on the meaning of Baptism and their responsibilities as parents, then such a convergence of circumstances might indicate that Baptism should be delayed.

Parents most always have the primary influences and responsibility of the child's faith. In some cases, when the parents may be weak in their faith, sponsors, grandparents, or other relatives may be able to supply the support a child needs for growth in the faith. Although this situation may

be rare, sponsors, grandparents, or other relatives may be able to give the support necessary to see that the child is raised in the Catholic faith.

After the circumstances are assessed and parents give their permission the baptismal preparation may proceed if this should be the case. The entire procedure should take place openly and without any attempt to shelter the parents from the difficulties of the situation.

When a child's Baptism has been delayed, it is important that every effort be expended to keep in contact with the parents by inviting them to parish events, by stopping to see them and their child from time to time, and by encouraging them back to an active and living faith.

SPONSORS

Baptismal sponsors serve as official witnesses to the Sacrament of Baptism.

Requirements for the sponsors are listed in Canons 872, 873, and 874 of the *Revised Code of Canon Law*. Among these are noted:

- › Sponsors must be prepared and willing and able to fulfill the role
- › Only one sponsor is required although two are usually chosen
- › There is a maximum of two official sponsors; other honorary sponsors may serve in the baptismal liturgy and listed on the program but cannot be listed on the baptismal registry

- › Sponsors must be at least 16 years of age and have been confirmed, received First Communion, and lead a life in harmony with the faith and the role to be undertaken
- › Sponsors must not be bound by canonical penalties
- › Ordinarily, if married, sponsors should be in a valid marriage
- › Sponsors cannot be the parents of the child
- › Together with a Catholic sponsor a baptized person of a non-Catholic ecclesial community can serve as a sponsor
- › There should be some indication that the sponsor will be instrumental in the faith development of the child

CATECHETICAL PREPARATION OF PARENTS/SPONSORS

Parents and sponsors should be properly prepared for the Sacrament of Baptism (Canon 867).

A suitable time for catechetical preparation should be arranged.

Parents and sponsors who have previously attended Baptismal preparation sessions should be encouraged to attend again to share their faith and experience with others new to the experience.

Sponsor preparation programs from other parishes and/or dioceses are accepted as equivalent preparation programs.

These programs should utilize the best techniques of adult education including discussion, faith sharing, and support from within the group.

Catechetical preparation cannot attempt to present the entirety of the Church's teaching to parents and sponsors. The preparation programs do not constitute a total religious education program for adults. Rather they serve as an overview of the Catholic faith especially with regards to the Sacrament of Baptism. They may also provide an introduction to other parish adult religious education programs.

The catechetical preparation program may include the following:

- › The meaning of salvation in Jesus Christ
- › The meaning of Church and one's responsibility to it
- › An introduction to the parish and community life
- › Faith development, including the cultural influences
- › Good parenting skills:
 - a. nurturing
 - b. emotional, moral and faith development
- › Sharing in the sacramental life of the Church
- › The meaning of the Sacrament of Baptism
- › Explanation of the baptismal ritual
- › The role of the sponsor

LITURGICAL CELEBRATION

The celebration of the sacrament should be administered according to the *Order of Baptism of Children* (2020). It is strongly encouraged that this be a community celebration, and when possible, conducted within the Sunday Eucharistic Liturgy or the Easter Vigil (Canon 856).

Good liturgy is more than just knowing and performing the ritual. Good liturgy understands the importance of sign and symbol and understands that the primary focus is always on the assembly as people gathered in his name. This is especially true in the Sacraments of Initiation.

The symbols of Baptism are rich. They should never be minimized. Immersion speaks more clearly of the meaning of Baptism. Oils used should be plentiful and may be poured upon the child just as the love of God is showered upon the one being baptized. The symbols and signs of Baptism should be big enough to create an experience for all those who are present.

At the time of Baptism, everything possible should be done to include community participation. Quality music for that liturgy should be chosen and should invite community participation. Special care should be taken for hospitality, especially for those who might be visiting.

Since Baptism is a community celebration, the place of Baptism should be the parish church. This

gathering at the church gives witness to our commitment to the community of faith (Canon 860).

Great care should be taken in preparing the families, including brothers and sisters of the one to be baptized, to understand the meaning of the baptismal liturgy.

DOCUMENTATION

The sacrament is to be recorded in the permanent parish records. This record will contain the newly baptized future sacramental history including confirmation, marriage, ordination, etc.

Future proof of Baptism may be obtained in the form of a certificate issued by the parish on the basis of this record.



**Customs for
Infant Baptism
At St. Cecilia Catholic Church**

Parents should contact the church office three months prior to scheduling dates for Baptism.

Parents will meet with the pastor or his delegate to discern baptismal process and time.

Ordinarily the parents and godparents will meet with a mentor for catechetical preparation.

Sponsors must be prepared and willing and able to fulfill the role.

Only one sponsor is required although two are usually chosen.

There is a maximum of two official sponsors; other honorary sponsors may serve in the baptismal liturgy and listed on the program but cannot be listed on the baptismal registry.

Sponsors must be at least 16 years of age and have been confirmed, received First Communion, and lead a life in harmony with the faith and the role to be undertaken.

Sponsors must not be bound by canonical penalties.

Ordinarily, if married, sponsors should be in a valid marriage.

Sponsors cannot be the parents of the child.

Together with a Catholic sponsor a baptized person of a non-Catholic ecclesial community can serve as a sponsor.

There should be some indication that the sponsor will be instrumental in the faith development of the child.

The parish celebration shows that Baptism is related to the faith of the Church and admittance into the People of God. Baptisms are ordinarily celebrated in the church during the Church's public worship at a week-end liturgy.

As a sign of the Church's common unity of all members, if there is more than one baptism, they will generally be celebrated together at a common liturgy.

Customary Fees:

The minister should ask nothing for the administration of the sacraments beyond the offerings defined by the competent authority (the bishop) always being careful that the needy are not deprived of the help of the sacraments because of their poverty (Canon 848).

Fees are paid to the parish secretary and should be paid when scheduled.

Fees are waived for parishioners who are registered and active.

The ordinary offering to the parish for Baptism is:

within a weekend mass — \$50
outside of weekend mass — \$100

Policies:

- Catholic parents preparing for the baptism of their infant are expected to participate in a process of sacramental preparation before the baptism of their child. Sponsors are encouraged to also participate.
- In the baptism of infants parents take responsibility for choosing sponsors who will serve as good examples for living the Catholic way of life.
- Although the selection of two godparents is customary, only one godparent is required for baptism. A godparent can be either male or female. If two godparents are chosen, one must be male and one female. A godparent must also be a fully initiated Roman Catholic who is free to celebrate the sacraments. A baptized, non-Catholic Christian can be chosen as a Christian witness provided there is at least one Catholic godparent.
- A godparent must have completed their sixteenth year unless, for just cause, the pastor makes an exception.
- Each godparent must be a confirmed Catholic who has also received First Communion and is leading a life in harmony with the Catholic faith and the role of a sponsor. A godparent cannot be a parent of the one to be baptized and cannot be bound by any canonical penalty.
- Godparents should be ready to commit the time and personal care necessary to nurture and support the infant in their faith journey.

- The sponsors are witnesses of record and as such can never be changed.

- The celebration of Baptism is to take place in the parish church or chapel. Baptisms in private homes are not permitted except in cases of emergency.

- Anyone who baptizes in a case of emergency is obligated to notify the baptized's pastor so that the Baptism may be recorded in the permanent parish records and provisions for later supplying the rites may be made.

- Infants who were baptized in an emergency situation may be brought to the church at a later time to complete the baptismal ceremony, but omitting the pouring of the water.

- Baptism by immersion is the fuller and more expressive sign of the sacrament.

- The celebration of Infant baptism should ordinarily take place on a weekend at a community liturgy.

