

## I. GUIDELINES FOR THE SACRAMENT OF BAPTISM

### A. ADULTS

1. For individuals seeking conversion to Christ in the Church, the *Rite(Order) of Christian Initiation of Adults* is the process to be followed, that prepares one for the sacraments of Christian initiation: Baptism, Confirmation, and Eucharist, laying the foundation of living a Christian life.
2. “Persons with disabilities are called to the fullness of sacramental life, even in the presence of severe disorders. The sacraments are gifts from God, and the liturgy, even before being rationally understood, needs to be lived: therefore no one can refuse the sacraments to persons with disabilities” (DC, 272). As the Catholic community embraces people with disabilities and their families, involving everyone in the liturgical actions of *sacramental life, prayer, and the proclamation of the Word*, all grow in evangelization” (DC, 269-272).
3. The catechumenate is to be “a training period in the whole Christian life” (Ad gentes 14), where disciples are joined with Christ (DC, 63).
4. The Christian initiation of adults includes not only a period of well-suited instruction and a time sanctified by liturgical rites to be celebrated at successive intervals, but also a gradual integration into the full, conscious and active life of the Catholic community. “One can speak of three catechumenal initiatives: a *catechumenate in the strict sense* for the unbaptized, whether young people and adults or school-age children and adolescents; a *catechumenate in an analogous sense* for the baptized who have not completed the sacraments of Christian initiation; a *catechesis of catechumenal inspiration* for those who have received the sacraments of initiation but are not yet sufficiently evangelized or catechized, or for those who desire to resume the journey of faith” (DC, 62).
5. All Catechumens and Candidates in the Diocese of Bridgeport are urged to attend the Rite of Election and the Call to Continuing Conversion. This is the liturgical rite, usually celebrated on the First Sunday of Lent, by which the Church formally ratifies the catechumens’ readiness for the sacraments of initiation and the catechumens, now the elect, express the will to receive the sacraments.
6. The period of Catechumenate should extend for at least one year of formation, ideally the period from at least one Easter season to the next, though the duration is to correspond to the progress of the individual, consisting of the catechumens’ faith and conversion to God.
7. “This journey includes not only the periods for making inquiry and for maturing, but also marking the catechumen’s progress, as they pass, so to speak through another doorway or ascend to the next level...”(RCIA, 6). The third period, following the Rite of Election, ordinarily coincides with the Lenten preparation for the Easter celebration and the sacraments of initiation. It is a time of purification and enlightenment and includes the celebration of the rites belonging to this period. (RCIA, 7)

8. “In order to signify clearly the interrelation or coalescence of the three sacraments which are required for full Christian initiation, (C.I.C. 842.2), adult candidates, including children of catechetical age, are to receive Baptism, Confirmation and Eucharist in a single Eucharistic celebration, whether at the Easter Vigil or, if necessary, at some other time.” (RCIA, National Statutes for the Catechumenate, Appendix III, 14)
9. “Because of unusual circumstances and pastoral needs, however, the Rite of Election and the rites belonging to the period of purification and enlightenment may be held outside of Lent and the sacraments of initiation may be celebrated at a time other than the Easter Vigil or Easter Sunday. Even when the usual time has otherwise been observed, it is permissible, but only for serious pastoral needs, to choose a day other than the Easter Vigil or Easter Sunday, but preferably one (Sunday) during the Easter season, to celebrate the sacraments of initiation; the program of initiation during Lent, however, must be maintained.” (RCIA, 26)
10. The Rite of Christian Initiation of Adults must be implemented fully (RCIA 75) through: Celebration of the principal preparatory rites (i.e., Rite of Acceptance into the Order of Catechumens; Rite of Sending the Catechumens for Election; First, Second, and Third Scrutinies; or the corresponding Rites for Baptized but uncatechized Adults or Combined Rites [see RCIA Part II, 4,5 and Appendix I]); the Rites of the Easter Vigil; and The Rite of Reception of Baptized Christians into the full Communion of the Catholic Church.
11. While current practice, both worldwide and locally, remains varied, the trend is moving away from a school year model of implementation to an approach that is more flexible. Such flexibility is better suited to the individual needs of those seeking full communion with the Church and to the process of conversion which is continually turning one’s life toward the Gospel.
12. “When the time is changed in either way, even though the rite of Christian initiation occurs at a different point in the liturgical year, the structure of the entire rite, with its properly spaced intervals, remains the same.” (RCIA, 26)
13. The on-going education of the parish community about the meaning of the various elements of the RCIA is an integral part of implementing the rite. (See, e.g., RCIA, General Instruction, 7; RCIA 4, 9, 80, 506.)

**B. CHILDREN - Who have reached the “age of discretion”**

Children age older 7 years old and enrolled in 1<sup>st</sup> grade must be initiated through the Rite of Christian Initiation of Adults, adapted for children (cf. Rite of Baptism for Children, Introduction, 1; RCIA, 252, ff.; National Statutes, 18 - 21).

1. Unbaptized children who have reached the age of discretion are considered, for purposes of Christian initiation, to be adults, in accordance with the C.I.C., 852,1. Their formation should follow the general pattern outlined above, with the appropriate adaptations permitted by the ritual. (RCIA, 256) They should receive the sacraments of Baptism, Confirmation and Eucharist at the Easter

Vigil, together with the older catechumens. (RCIA, National Statutes for the Catechumenate, Appendix III, #18)

2. Such children...”seek Christian initiation either at the direction of their parents or guardians or, with parental permission, on their own initiative. Such children are capable of receiving and nurturing a personal faith and of recognizing an obligation in conscience. ...but they cannot yet be treated as adults because, at this stage of their lives, they are dependent on their parents or guardians and are still strongly influenced by their companions and their social surroundings.” (RCIA, 252)
3. ~~“...the process of initiation thus must be adapted both to their spiritual progress, that is, to the children’s growth in faith, and to the catechetical instruction they receive. Accordingly, as with adults, their initiation is to be extended over several years, if need be, before they receive the sacraments...corresponding to the periods of adult initiation are the periods of the children’s catechetical formation that lead up to and follow the steps of their initiation.” (RCIA, 253)~~
4. “For the celebrations proper to this form of Christian initiation, it is advantageous, as circumstances allow, to form a group of several children who are in this same situation, (baptized/uncatechized children seeking Eucharist and/or Confirmation outside the general age of reception) in order that by example they may help one another in their progress as catechumens.” (RCIA, 254-255)
5. ~~It is generally preferable to celebrate the rites during the process of initiation with a represented parish community that “consists of a suitable number of the faithful, the parents, family, members of the catechetical group, and a few adult friends.” (RCIA, 257)~~
6. “In regard to the time for the celebration of the steps of initiation, it is preferable that, if possible, the final period of preparation, begun by the second step, the penitential rites coincide with Lent and that the final step, celebration of the sacraments of initiation, take place at the Easter Vigil. Nevertheless before the children are admitted to the sacraments at Easter, it should be established that they are ready for the sacraments. Celebration at this time must also be consistent with the program of catechetical instruction they are receiving, since the candidates should, if possible, come to the sacraments of initiation at the time that their baptized companions are to receive Confirmation or Eucharist. (RCIA, 256)
7. ~~“Because of unusual circumstances and pastoral needs, however, the Rite of Election and the rites belonging to the period of purification and enlightenment may be held outside of Lent and the sacraments of initiation may be celebrated at a time other than the Easter Vigil or Easter Sunday. Even when the usual time has otherwise been observed, it is permissible, but only for serious pastoral needs, to choose a day other than the Easter~~

~~Vigil or Easter Sunday, but preferably one during the Easter season, to celebrate the sacraments of initiation; the program of initiation during Lent, however, must be maintained. (RCIA, 26)~~  
The Rite of Election is not required for children. The Penitential Rites listed above are to take its place.

8. ~~“When the time is changed in either way, even though the rite of Christian initiation occurs at a different point in the liturgical year, the structure of the entire rite, with its properly spaced intervals, remains the same.” (RCIA, # 26)~~

C. **INFANTS and YOUNGER CHILDREN - Who have not reached the “age of discretion”**

1. Children younger than 7 years old or before 1<sup>st</sup> grade must be initiated using The Rite of Baptism for Children.
2. Catechesis for infant Baptism is directed primarily to the parents or guardians and sponsors (godparents) of those who are to be baptized (C.I.C., 851,2). “The family is a proclamation of faith in that it is the natural place in which faith can be lived in a simple and spontaneous manner” as the parents bear witness to the Gospel (DC, 227, 231). The godparents are to support the catechetical efforts of the parents by demonstrating how to practice the Gospel and how to grow in faith, personally and socially (DC, 125).
3. Parents or guardians and godparents of an infant are to be properly instructed on the meaning of the sacrament and the obligations attached to it (C.I.C., 851,2).
  - a. Faith and Baptism are integrally linked; and an infant’s faith is supported by the parents, by the godparents, and the whole Church community (CCC, 1255).
  - b. Baptism is necessary for salvation (CCC, 1257).
  - c. Baptism is a grace and gift of God and forgives all sins (CCC, 1263).
4. Sacramental preparation for the sacrament of Baptism for parents is a prerequisite for the baptism of an infant (C.I.C., 867). Parents or guardians have a critically important role in preparing for Baptism and are to be assisted through a minimum of three formational sessions: one on the sacraments in general, and two on the sacrament of Baptism in particular. The parents should attend one class refresher for each additional child that is to be baptized. “As a domestic church founded on the sacrament of marriage that also has a missionary dimension, the Christian family takes part in the Church’s mission of evangelization and is therefore an agent of catechesis” (DC, 231).
5. Parishes are to provide immediate preparation programs for the sacrament of Baptism in which parents or guardians and sponsors are expected to participate.
6. It is the responsibility of the parents or guardian to request baptism before the birth of their child or as soon as possible after the birth.

They should go to their pastor or his delegate to request the sacrament for their child (C.I.C., 867).

7. In an intact marriage, at least one parent/legal guardian should be a baptized Catholic. If there is a non-Catholic parent, it is highly preferable for such parent to be willing to allow his/her child to be baptized in the Catholic Church.
8. In case of divorce, the custodial parent may seek baptism. Civil law defines “custodial parent” as the one who at that moment has physical custody of the child.
9. Although the rite is insistent on the preparation of parents/guardians, none of the following may be made requirements for baptism of a child:
  - a. Convalidation of an invalid marriage;
  - b. Any demonstrations of financial support, e.g., envelopes;
  - c. Any other obligation not found in Church law concerning baptism (CIC 868 1.1).
10. For an infant to be baptized licitly:
  - a. At least one parent or guardian must consent
  - b. There must be a founded hope that the child will be brought up in the Catholic religion, and if such hope is lacking, the Baptism is to be delayed according to the precepts of particular law after the parents or guardians have been advised about the reason. (C.I.C., 868.2; NDC, 121)
11. According to the precepts of Canon Law (C.I.C., 857.2), parents requesting Baptism of their child should ordinarily be members of the parish. With special permission of their pastor they may request Baptism in another parish.
12. Baptism shall not be refused to parents who have no permanent domicile. People without a parish, e.g. migrants and transients, are to be the objects of special solicitude and need to be dealt with in the best pastoral way possible. Special care should be taken in each individual case.
- ~~13. The baptismal rite should be celebrated, if possible, in the context of a Sunday liturgy before the entire community. When baptism is celebrated apart from Sunday liturgy, proper liturgical principles should be followed. The use of music and the various liturgical ministries is encouraged. “The Christian community is a family of families and is itself the family of God. Community and family are, each for the other, a constant and reciprocal point of reference” (DC, 229).—~~
14. The pastor/pastoral administrator is personally responsible to ensure all baptisms are properly recorded. Proxies are not recorded.
15. Post baptismal catechesis:
  - a. “Believing parents, with their daily example of life, have the most effective capacity to transmit the beauty of the Christian faith to their children. ‘Enabling families to take up their role as active agents of the family apostolate calls for ‘an effort at evangelization and catechesis inside the family’” (Amoris Laetitia, 200). “Family centered catechesis which starts from the families themselves. ‘The Church is called to cooperate with parents through suitable pastoral initiatives, assisting them in the fulfillment of their educational

mission,' (Amoris Laetitia, 85) to become above all the first catechists of their own children.” (DC, 124)

- b. “Early childhood, or pre-school age, is a definitive time for the discovery of religious reality, during which children learn from their parents and from the environment of life an attitude of openness and acceptance or of aversion and exclusion toward God” (DC, 239).  
Over a 5 year campaign, leading up to PreK, the parish can support young families as the parents model and instruct their children in areas such as making the Sign of the Cross, the first steps in daily prayers, teaching right and wrong to foster the early development of moral conscience, the formation of human love modeled by Christ, the love of God the Father for all people, and God as the Creator of the cosmos - of all things (great and small) that is good. (DC, 227)
- c. By PreK/Kindergarten the children and families can catechizes through Bible camp throughout the year, including Vacation Bible School over the summer. When children reach 1<sup>st</sup> grade, they will be ready for face-to-face catechesis with their peers.
- d. "Catechesis, [is] not [to be] fragmentary but organized along an itinerary that presents in their essential form all the mysteries of Christian life” (DC, 240).
- e. Parishes are strongly encouraged to partner with the Diocese and make use of the faith formation resources and provided curriculums.

#### **D. SPONSORS/ GODPARENTS**

1. “In the journey of initiation into the Christian life, the Church calls for a re-evaluation of the identity and mission of the godfather and the godmother, as support for the educational effort of the parents. Their task is ‘to show the candidates how to practice the Gospel in personal and social life, to sustain the candidates in moments of hesitancy and anxiety, to bear witness, and to guide the candidates’ progress in the baptismal life’ RCIA 43 (11). It is known that often the choice of godparents is not motivated by faith but based on family or social customs: this has contributed in no small way to the degradation of these educational figures. In view of the responsibility that this role involves, the Christian community should indicate, with discernment and a creative spirit, pathways of catechesis for godparents, which may help them to rediscover the gift of faith and of belonging to the Church. Those who are selected for this role often feel called upon to reawaken their baptismal faith and to initiate a renewed journey of commitment and witness. The possibility that they might refuse to accept this responsibility may have consequences for them that should be evaluated with great pastoral care. In cases where the objective requirements<sup>21</sup> for a person to be able to carry out this task are absent (requirements that should have been made clear in the discussion that precedes selection) in agreement with the families and according to the discernment of the pastors, godparents can be chosen from among the pastoral workers (catechists, teachers, organizers) who stand as witnesses of faith and of ecclesial presence.” (DC, 125)

2. “Each child may have a godfather and a godmother, the word ‘godparents’ is used in the rite to describe both.” (Rite of Baptism for Children, 6)
3. Only one godparent is necessary. The godparent must be a fully initiated Catholic (baptized, confirmed, received eucharist), at least 16 years old, and must be leading a sacramental life in harmony with the church. (C.I.C., 874) The godparent should be willing to accept the responsibility of assisting the parents in developing the faith life of the child.
4. The godparent may not be the father or the mother of the one to be baptized. (C.I.C., 874)
5. Although people of some cultures sometimes choose multiple godparents, only two names can actually be entered in the Baptismal Register. (C.I.C., 873)
6. A baptized and believing Christian from a separated church or community may act as a Christian witness at the request of the parents, but there must be a Catholic godparent. (C.I.C., 874.)
7. Godparents should be invited and encouraged to attend Baptismal Preparation in order to better understand their role as godparents. If they are from another parish, a letter of recommendation from their pastor is required.
8. Any person may serve as a proxy if the godparent is unable to be physically present at the baptism. The Church requires no specific stipulations regarding who may serve as a proxy.

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