

ASCENSION OF OUR LORD CATHOLIC CHURCH
Donaldsonville, Louisiana

POLICY FOR THE SACRAMENT OF BAPTISM OF INFANTS

BAPTISM is the sacrament of faith by which men and women accept Christ's call to salvation and to the Kingdom of God. They are formed into God's people, obtain forgiveness of all their sins, and are raised from their natural human condition to the dignity of God's adopted children. Becoming a new creation through water and the Holy Spirit, they are incorporated into the Church, the Body of Christ: hence, they are called, and are indeed, children of God. Baptism of infants marks the beginning of the process of initiation into the life of Christ and into the Catholic Christian community. The reasons for the policy statements below are explained with the same statements, and in the footnoted references to universal Church law and the sacramental guidelines of the Diocese of Baton Rouge.

1. Participation of parents and godparents in a pre-baptismal interview and instructional seminar is necessary.¹ The interview/seminar may be conducted by trained lay volunteers or by the pastor, and it may be conducted at the home of the parents or at the church office. An appointment for this interview/seminar will be made at a time mutually convenient for parents, godparents, and the trained lay volunteers or pastor. If a parent or godparent has participated in such an interview and seminar within the past three years for the baptism of another child, and can document this fact with a letter from the pastor of the parish in which the interview/seminar was conducted, the requirement can be waived for the individual parent or prospective godparent.²

2. Baptism must take place in the parish in which the parents are registered, practicing, and contributing parishioners. Rare exceptions are made for pastoral reasons, and only when all other elements of the policy stated herein are followed.³ The active participation of parents and godparents in the life of

¹ Universal Catholic Church law states that "the parents of a child who is to be baptized, and those who are to undertake the office of sponsors (godparents), are to be suitably instructed on the meaning of this sacrament and the obligations attaching to it." The policy of the Diocese of Baton Rouge states "that each parish is to provide pre-baptismal catechesis for parents of infants presented for baptism," and that "sponsors are to be included in this catechesis."

² This waiver is the pastoral prerogative of the pastor of Ascension of Our Lord parish, and will be granted only for the reason stated in the above policy. The documentation of prior instruction by means of a letter from a pastor should be presented with the completed pre-baptismal information form in advance of the baptism.

³ Universal Church law states that "an infant (is to be baptized) in the proper parish church of the parents." Policy of the Diocese of Baton Rouge reads the same as universal Church law, adding that the baptism can take place in a church other than that of the parents only if "the proper pastor of the parents of the child to be baptized has given his permission beforehand." The request must include the pastoral reasons for making the request. Universal Catholic Church law also states that "for an infant to be baptized lawfully it is required...that there be well-founded hope that the child will be brought up in the Catholic religion. If such hope is truly lacking, the Baptism...is to be postponed and the parents advised of the reason for this." According to policy of the Diocese of Baton Rouge, the lack of the following elements reasonably suggests a postponement: (a) regular participation by the Catholic parent(s) at Mass on Sundays and holy days of obligation; (b) if married, the sacramental validity of the parents' marriage, or in its absence, some evidence of desire for or work toward this is appropriate; (c) a spirit of cooperation with the Church, especially evidenced at least by participation in the pre-baptismal preparation and identifiable membership in the parish. Accordingly, a family

the Church is required for infant baptism because to fulfill the true meaning of the sacrament, children must be formed in the faith so that they may ultimately accept for themselves the faith in which they have been baptized. The child is baptized based on the strength of the faith of the parents, godparents, and the entire Catholic Christian community. The Church (represented by the pastor) has a serious moral obligation to discern that a child will be brought up in the Catholic religion before baptism is administered to an infant. The active involvement of parents and godparents in the life and ministry and support of their parish gives the Church a concrete sign and assurance that this will be the case. It is active involvement we mean when we say that parents & godparents must be registered, practicing, and contributing members of a Church parish. In the renewal of baptismal promises, which is part of the Rite of Baptism, parents and godparents especially are promising to **God**, to the **Church** and to their **Child** that they will continue to live their own lives as Catholic Christian witnesses to the attitudes, values, teachings, practices, and traditions of the Catholic Christian Church of Jesus Christ! The celebration of the Sacrament of Baptism of infants is a very sacred action of Jesus in His Church. This is the action by which God gives a totally new status to the human child, namely, that of son or daughter of God, redeemed by His Son, Jesus Christ, and made holy by the power of His Holy Spirit in the family of the Catholic Christian Church. Our faithfulness to our own baptismal promises is extremely important if a person is to be a faithful Catholic Christian.

3. One sponsor (godparent), either gender, is required for the Sacrament of Baptism. Two sponsors are customary, one male and one female. Both sponsors (godparents) may, however, be male or female. A sponsor (godparent) must be a Confirmed, church-going, actively practicing Catholic Christian, at least 16 years of age, and a registered member of a Church parish.⁴ A non-Catholic Christian or un-Confirmed Catholic Christian may serve in the role of “Christian Witness” for the Sacrament of Baptism if known by the pastor or, if from another parish or Christian church, if documentation is provided by the individual’s pastor as to the Christian character & witness of the individual. If the “Christian Witness” will be a Catholic who meets all the criteria for being a sponsor except the age requirement or having received the Sacrament of Confirmation, then the person’s name will be entered into the Church records as a godparent after he or she reaches the proper age and/or has received the Sacrament of Confirmation. In selecting individuals for the role of sponsors (godparents), parents should NOT select someone as a way of simply showing him or her esteem or to bond a friendship. A sponsor (godparent) must be someone who will truly help the parents in their duties as Christian parents. He or she is entrusted with the responsibility of participating in the child’s Catholic Christian life and education. He or she will be someone who will remind the parents, if necessary, of their Catholic Christian obligations, and will give exemplary witness to living out the teachings of Christ and the Church in his or her life by practicing the Catholic religion to the fullest degree.

or individual is considered **registered** in the parish if they are on the parish mailing list by having completed a Parish Membership Registration Form for Families & Individuals. A family is considered **practicing** if they regularly attend Mass at least on Sundays and Holy Days of Obligation and regularly receive the sacraments of Reconciliation (Confession) and Holy Communion. A family or individual is considered **contributing** if they can be identified as regular financial supporters of the parish and are willing to share their time and talents by becoming otherwise involved in the parish life and ministries.

⁴ Universal Catholic Church law states that “each person to be baptized is to have at least one sponsor, commonly called a godparent, either male or female; two sponsors...are permitted...The sponsor must have completed his or her sixteenth year...and must be a worthy, practicing Catholic who has been confirmed and admitted to the Eucharist...and (the sponsor) must not be the father or the mother of the candidate.”

4. If prospective sponsors (godparents) are residents in another Church parish in which they are registered, active, practicing parishioners, a letter must be obtained from their pastor in testimony to this fact.⁵

5. The Sacrament of Baptism will be celebrated on a Sunday.⁶ It should properly take place during the 9:00 A.M. or 11:00 A.M. Mass so that the community may be present and the necessary relationship between Baptism and the Eucharist may be clearly seen. If a large enough gathering of family and friends will be present as representative of the community, or there are other pastoral reasons for doing so, the baptism may be scheduled to immediately follow the 11:00 A.M. Mass. Know that there is no such thing as a “private” baptism. Baptism is the action of Jesus through His Mystical Body, the Church, and the more representatives of the community who are present, the better. The Church (the people) is sharing the gift of faith, both personally and collectively, which was shared with us when we were baptized. Baptisms both during the 11:00 A.M. Mass and afterwards cannot be scheduled on the same Sunday.

6. There is no minimum fee for the Church for the Sacrament of Baptism, however, know that the catechetical materials, certificates, church supplies, and clerical tasks involved for the baptism preparations and ceremony cost the Church approximately \$10.00 per child. Parents will receive a baptismal certificate, baptismal candle, and symbolic baptismal garment (cloth). Godparents also each receive a certificate. Any offering to the Church can be given at the time the completed pre-baptismal information form is submitted. A personal offering to the priest is not required or needed, but is a customarily appropriate means of showing appreciation to him, and is left up to the discretion of the parties concerned.

7. Please complete the attached Pre-Baptismal Information Form and return it to the parish office at your earliest convenience. It will be forwarded to the pastor or trained lay volunteers who will contact you about a convenient date and time at which parents, sponsors, and he or they can meet for your pre-baptismal interview and seminar (one 60 - 90 minute session). If the session will be held at the church office, there may be several sets of parents and sponsors at the same session.

8. At the time this form is completed and brought to the parish office, we should also have the following:

- If not already on file, a completed Parish Membership Registration Form for Families and Individuals.
- Any testimonial letters from the pastors of sponsors who are not active, registered members of our Church parish
- If our Church parish is not the church parish in which parents are registered, a letter from the pastor of the parents giving his permission for the baptism to take place at our church
- Any documentation of baptismal preparation classes already attended by sponsors at other church parishes (if they will not be attending the interview/seminar at our church)

⁵ Letter must be presented in advance of the baptism, preferably along with the completed pre-baptismal information form.

⁶ In accord with the guidelines of the Diocese of Baton Rouge for the Sacrament of Baptism.