

PREFACE:

The unfolding of Christian Life begins with the reception of Baptism when a person enters into the death of Jesus Christ, and is united with Him in His Resurrection. The seed then planted must continue to grow. For those baptized as infants it is parents who are the first teachers of their children in the faith, and their homes the child's first and best classroom. The wider church family is charged with helping the parents in this role for we are baptized, all of us, into the Christian community where we share responsibility for the growth in faith of the whole family.

PRINCIPLES:

1. The church baptizes infants¹ because she is convinced that the self-giving of God towards us is for everyone, independent of their age. Because the love of God anticipates all human effort, the Church cannot deny infants the gift of Baptism. As with adults, so for the infants: Baptism washes away Original Sin, grace comes to them, and they are initiated into the Church.
2. Canon Law states parents are 'obliged to see to it that their infants are baptized within the first few weeks'.²
3. It is primarily the task of the parents within the family to ensure the ongoing unfolding of the life of faith of their children. This education is to be supported by the wider faith community. This can only happen when the parents play an active and involved part in the liturgical and faith life of that community. They are called to first live what they are to teach. This should ensure there is a well founded hope that the child will in fact be brought up to grow in the knowledge and practice of the faith.
4. Many parents, who bring their children forward for Baptism in good faith, struggle to give shape to their life of faith and to bring it to expression in the gathered community. All the more is the parish community called upon to take responsibility for the care of the baptised children and their families.
5. Parents and Godparents should be asked to reflect on the nature of the *initiation* that they seek for their children. Baptism is not to be seen as an end in itself, but rather the beginning of a life long journey in the family and in the community seeking an ever closer relationship with God. This journey leads the children to the completion of their initiation when they receive the sacraments of Confirmation and Eucharist. After this, as full members of the community, their journey in faith continues and deepens.

¹ 'infants' means those less than seven years of age who cannot make conscious decisions about faith for themselves.

² CIC 867.1

PASTORAL CONCERNS:

6. Faith and Baptism are inseparably connected with one another, so it is important that the parents prepare themselves for the Baptism of their children. The goal is that they make the connection between their lives and the Gospel of Jesus. Meeting with actively engaged families and groups in the community of faith can be helpful in this respect.
7. Parents should meet first with the Pastoral Minister when they register their child for Baptism. This may well be an opportunity to clarify the motivation for their child's Baptism as well as learning of the usual preparation requirements of the Parish before the celebration of the Sacrament.
8. The parents' preparation for Baptism of a child should be shaped to enable the parents to renew their faith and to deepen their communion with the church. Meeting the parish community and participation in the liturgy belong to this process.
9. When parents are not in a position to provide a Christian education for their child, the role of the godparent (and possibly significant others in the extended family of the child) becomes particularly important. It seems right that they too should be part of the preparation process for the celebration, and that they give their support to the parents as well to the child.³
10. Parents will come to the Baptism of their children from a wide spectrum of life and faith situations. The real circumstances in which they find themselves, and their relationship to God and to the Church, will present challenges to those charged with preparing them for the Baptism of their children. It might well be that contact with the community, sharing experiences with other families preparing with them, and encouraged by the team, they might come to want themselves to renew their faith and to deepen their communion in the Church. When parents come in good faith, even when their own circumstances are difficult, every effort should be made to welcome them. Members of preparation teams, parents who know the reality and the difficulties that some others face, may well be the ones to best show the compassionate face of Christ to those in difficulties.⁴

PRACTICAL ISSUES:

11. Parents and Godparents should attend preparation programmes together. These may well start at some stage during the pregnancy, and need not wait until after the child is born.
12. The number of sessions, and the length of the preparation, will be determined by the type of programme offered. The preparation needs to be significant if it is to reinforce the importance of initiation into the church community. The parents need time to come to understand the nature of the sacrament they are seeking for their children, the requirements for the ceremony itself, and their responsibilities to the children for the rest of their journey.

³ This in no way relieves the parents of the responsibility to ultimately grown into the task themselves.

⁴ Even when circumstances might not look all that promising as regards a well founded hope for continued faith commitment, God knows what might happen when parents are welcomed.... and that should be good enough for anyone.

13. Baptism is essentially a sacrament of the Church and an initiation into the community. It is fitting that the sacrament be celebrated in the heart of the community. This may be at a Parish Mass or at a ceremony at another time when families seeking baptism for their children gather together in church for the celebration. There should be only one celebration of Baptism on any given day. Multiple individual Baptism ceremonies fail to give witness to the communitarian aspect of the sacrament.

To further celebrate the communal aspect of baptism some of the ritual of the infant's liturgy e.g. naming, signing with the cross, anointing with the oil of Catechumens could be celebrated at Sunday Masses prior to baptism. This will also serve to ensure that the infant and family have experience of the Sunday assembly.

The baptism certificate could be presented at a Sunday Mass after baptism.

14. When Baptisms take place outside of Mass, it may be appropriate that at a given Mass each month parents be invited to bring their newly baptised to Mass so that they can be presented to the community to which they now belong.⁵
15. At least one of the God Parents must be a confirmed practicing Catholic "normally 16 years or older"⁶ able to help the parents in their duties of both teaching the faith and giving witness to it by their lives.
16. If a priest or deacon from outside the family's parish is invited to celebrate a baptism, he should refer the family to their parish – even if he agrees to be the celebrant. If a visiting priest is invited to celebrate a particular baptism, it is desirable that he participates in a community, not a private, celebration.
17. Baptism request should be referred to the family's parish that is where the parents generally worship. It is within this parish Church that the Baptism will usually take place.
18. Parents have a right to express their preference for the language in which the preparation and the ceremony will take place. The parish should willingly arrange for a chaplain to minister in the language preferred. Even given this favour, it is appropriate that the Baptism take place in the home parish of the parents. Dialogue between families and the parish community are encouraged to incorporate any appropriate cultural considerations within the Baptism rite.
19. Both pouring of the Baptismal water and immersion of the one to be baptised are approved methods of Baptism in the Diocese. The Trinitarian formula is to be used.

⁵ Depending on the number of Baptisms in a parish this may happen more or less often.

⁶ cf can 874 § 1.2