

# Baptism Guidelines

For Catholic parents presenting infants  
to age 7



Diocese of Tyler  
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Diocese of Tyler  
Pastoral Manual for:

## Sacraments of Initiation

### Introduction

The process of Christian Initiation in the Diocese of Tyler focuses on initiation into divine life of God through the Sacraments and integration into the community of faith. This process is one of the three major processes in our diocese. Central to this process is the celebration of the proper formation for and celebration of the Sacraments of Initiation, which is to be supported by Christian Initiation Teams in every parish and mission.

It is essential that the Church always be mindful to be available to the entire household of faith. Often when one member of a family is moving toward a Sacrament of Initiation, it serves as an event of evangelization and opens others to the grace of deeper conversion. Being mindful of parents, siblings, spouses, or close friends who are part of their household of faith and who might be open to help in their personal journey of faith and so benefit from participation in the Christian Initiation process. Whenever possible the Church desires to help families and extended families journey together toward a deeper communion in the Sacraments.

#### Overview of the Sacraments of Initiation:

The Sacraments of Baptism, Confirmation, and the Most Holy Eucharist are interrelated in such a way that they are required for full Christian Initiation. (Canon 842 §2)

Through the sacraments of Christian initiation, men and women are freed from the power of darkness and share through grace in the divine nature of God. With Christ they die, are buried and rise again. They receive the Spirit of adoption which makes them God's sons and daughters and, with the entire people of God, they celebrate the memorial of the Lord's death and resurrection.

Through Baptism men and women are incorporated into Christ. They are formed into God's people and they obtain forgiveness of all their sins. They are raised from their natural human condition to the dignity of adopted children. They become a new creation through water and the Holy Spirit. Hence they are called, and are indeed, the children of God.

Signed with the gift of the Spirit in Confirmation, Christians more perfectly become the image of their Lord and are filled with the Holy Spirit to help overcome the tendency to sin (concupiscence) that remains after Baptism. They bear witness to him before all the world and eagerly work for the building up of the body of Christ. This is living out the mission entrusted to us by Christ and expressed preeminently in the Eucharistic liturgy.

Finally, they come to the table of the Eucharist, to eat the flesh and drink the blood of the Son of Man so that they may have eternal life and show forth the unity of God's people. By offering

themselves with Christ, they share in his universal sacrifice: The entire community of the redeemed is offered to God by their high priest. They pray for a greater outpouring of the Holy Spirit so that the whole human race may be brought into the unity of God's family.

Thus, the three Sacraments of Christian initiation closely combine to bring the faithful to the full stature of Christ and to enable them to carry out the mission of the entire people of God in the Church and in the world. (see Christian Initiation General Introduction, nn. 1 and 2)

The Sacraments of Initiation are foundational for the Christian life. Through these Sacraments, a person is brought into an ongoing, living relationship with God who is Father, Son and Holy Spirit. The font and summit of Christian life is the Eucharist, for it is from the Paschal Mystery that we draw life and our lives lead us back toward the Heavenly Banquet. Through Baptism, a person enters into new life through the Paschal Mystery of Christ and comes to call God, Father, through water and the Holy Spirit. The Sacrament of Confirmation strengthens the person in the living of their Baptismal faith. For the Christian, the great witnessing of their faith is in full, conscious, and active participation in the Eucharist. As a Christian, we live in the world as living members of the body of Christ; that is to say, we live in communion with His Church, the People of God. Our participation in the celebration of the Eucharist is an expression of our communion, and our reception of Holy Communion is an expression of the *communio* of the family of God.

The Sacraments of Initiation are not "things" we receive. They are rather a living encounter with God and man. Baptism effects us every moment of our lives. It isn't something that changed us long ago, the new life in Christ plants within us the Call to Holiness. In Confirmation, we are strengthened in our capacity to love God and neighbor in a more Christlike manner. The celebration of the Mass is about our response to God's call to holiness by choosing to participate as a living member of the Body of Christ. Giving praise and worship to God is our participation in the Liturgy which is the great work of Christ done on our behalf (CCC 1069). Receiving Holy Communion is the richest expression of this offering of ourselves through the entire Eucharistic celebration.

#### Christian Initiation of Adults:

The revised ritual for Christian Initiation of Adults (RCIA) was mandated for use in the U.S. beginning September 1, 1988. Rather than compressing the stages of conversion into a single ritual associated with the moment of Baptism, it provides for the ritual celebration of stages at the proper times and for the gradual integration of the person into the Christian Community which is the parish. Recognizing that the rite constitutes a substantial challenge both for clergy and parishioners, serious and consistent effort must continue to be made to implement it fully in all parishes of the diocese. The RCIA is mandatory in all parishes in the United States. (NCCB 3/18/88)

*The pastor and the CI process:* The pastor is the person responsible for the faith formation of the catechumens and candidates for full communion. This serious responsibility cannot be delegated, but to be effective must be carried out in collaboration with a properly formed Christian Initiation Team. While it is good to use the Sunday Lectionary as part of the process in faith formation, separate catechetical instructions on the Creed, the Commandments, the seven sacraments, the moral teachings and

devotion to Mary and the saints are to be presented in conformity with the magisterium of the Church. All should clearly understand the meaning of the Mass, Eucharistic devotion, the forgiveness of sins and the spiritual value in the regular celebration of the Sacrament of Penance. All should have a beginning sense of Catholic identity.

*The Christian Initiation Team:* The Team is to be trained in the Diocesan process of Christian Initiation. They are supported in that by the Diocesan Christian Initiation Team. They are to be collaborators with the pastor. The members of the Team should be grounded in the 15 goals of catechesis for the Diocese of Tyler, the three processes and the New Evangelization. Those involved as catechists on the Team must be properly endorsed as Catechists.

### Structure of this Manual

This Pastoral Manual on Sacraments of Initiation is divided as follows:

Part I: The Sacraments

Section 1: Baptism

Section 2: Confirmation

Section 3: Eucharist

Part II: Celebration of the Sacraments of Initiation

Section 1: Infant Baptism

Section 2: Confirmation and Eucharist for Baptized Catholics

Section 3: RCIA (Sacraments of Initiation for unbaptized or baptized non-Catholics.)

Appendix: RCIA Reverence Booklet for the Diocese of Tyler

Part I: The Sacraments of Initiation  
Section I: Baptism

I. Celebration of Baptism

- A. Both in planning and execution, the Baptism formation program should be integrated into the life of the parish as a whole and into the other programs of sacramental preparation.
- B. The meaning and necessity of Baptism (and the other sacraments) both for the child and for the life of the community, should be the subject of regular preaching.
- C. The celebration and preparation for Baptism must always take into account the religious background and cultural differences among people.

II. The Role of Sponsors (Godparents) At Baptism (C.. 872-874)

- A. The sponsors, together with the parents, are present to profess the Church's faith, in which the child is being baptized. Therefore, in order to take on the role of sponsor, the person must be suitable for this role and have the intention of fulfilling it.
- B. In order to carry out his/her proper liturgical function as specified above, the Rite of Christian Initiation (RCIA n.10; C 874) clearly states that a sponsor should:
  - 1. be appointed by the candidate for Baptism, or in the case of infants by the parents or whoever stands in their place, or failing these, by the pastor or minister
  - 2. be mature enough to undertake this responsibility, having completed the 16th year (C. 874.2)
  - 3. be a Catholic who has received the three sacraments of Initiation: Baptism, Confirmation and the Eucharist; and lives a life of faith which befits the role to be undertaken .
  - 4. not be bound by any canonical penalty
  - 5. not be the father or the mother of the one to be baptized
- C. When, for a just cause, parents wish to have a baptized and believing Christian from a separated Church or community act as a Christian witness, the following guidelines are to be observed:
  - 1. Before extending this invitation to a non-Catholic, parents should consult with their parish priest, who will assist them in evaluating the reason for this choice. Except in cases of Orthodox Christians, it is not permissible for a member of another Christian community to act as a sponsor in the liturgical and canonical sense at a Roman Catholic Baptism. (EGD p.5 amended; C 874.2)
  - 2. Only a baptized member of separated Eastern Churches may act as sponsor, together with a Catholic sponsor, so long as there is provision for

the Catholic education of the person being baptized, and it is clear that the sponsor is a suitable one. In this case, the duty of providing for the Christian education of the baptized person binds in the first place the sponsor who belongs to the Catholic Church.

3. With the exception already dealt with above, it is not permissible for a member of any other separated Christian community to act as a sponsor at Baptism in the liturgical and canonical sense. A Christian of another communion can be admitted, with a Catholic sponsor, as a Christian witness of the Baptism. In these cases the responsibility for the Christian education of the candidate belongs of itself to the sponsor who is a member of the Catholic Church.
  4. It follows from the above that an unbaptized person cannot act as a sponsor or Christian witness in a Catholic Baptism.
  5. An indication ought to be made in the register as well as when issuing future certificates in cases in which a member of a separated community has acted as a Christian witness.
- D. At least one sponsor is required for the celebration of Baptism. At most two are permitted, in which case one must be male and the other female (C. 872-873).
- E. When sponsors are represented by proxies, the latter should be Catholic and the sponsors must give explicit indication of their desire to assume the role and responsibilities of sponsors. Sponsors and proxies should be noted in the Baptismal Register. (C 877)
- F. A Catholic cannot fulfill the function of sponsor for a member of another Christian community. However, because of the ties of blood or friendship, a Christian of another communion can be admitted as a Christian witness of the Baptism with a Catholic sponsor. In comparable circumstances, a Catholic may be a Christian witness for a member of another Christian community. Their names of such a witness should be recorded in the Baptismal book. (Directory on Ecumenism, 1993, #98)

### III. Place and Day of Baptism

- A. To reflect the communal nature of faith, the ecclesial aspect of Baptism and its relationship to Confirmation and the Eucharist, Baptism should take place in the parish church and not in a private home (C. 857, 860).
- B. For this same reason, Sunday should be the normal day for the celebration of the Sacrament of Baptism (C 856).
- C. It is appropriate to celebrate Baptism in the context of the regular parish Mass. Due to large numbers of Baptisms or other circumstances Baptism may be appropriately celebrated outside of Mass at a convenient time.
- D. Baptism is not normally celebrated during the Lenten season.

- IV. Ritual Church: Persons who are 14 years of age can select their ritual affiliation at the time of Baptism. An infant is baptized into the rite which is chosen by the parents. If common consent is lacking, the child follows the rite of the father. (C. 111)
- V. Names: The practice of having a Saint's name is encouraged. Care must be taken that the candidate receive a name not foreign to Christian mentality.
- VI. Baptism outside a parish
- A. Prison Baptisms should be recorded in the Baptismal register of the parish within which the prison is located. Special attention should be paid to preparing the incarcerated for full initiation (Baptism, Confirmation, Eucharist) and not solely Baptism.
  - B. Emergency Baptism at hospitals within the Diocese should be recorded in the parish register within which the hospital is located. Parents should be reminded that at the earliest convenience they should contact their parish priest to arrange for the supplying of the rite.

Part II - Celebration of the Sacraments  
Section 1: Infant Baptism

I. RITE FOR BAPTISM OF INFANTS

A. Catechesis before infant Baptism

1. Concretely, pastoral practice regarding infant Baptism must be governed by two great principles, the second of which is subordinate to the first.
  - a. Baptism which is necessary for salvation is the sign and the means of God's prevenient love, which frees us from original sin and communicates to us a share in divine life. Considered in itself, the gift of these blessings to infants must not be delayed.
  - b. Assurances must be given that the gift thus granted can grow by an authentic education in the faith and Christian life, in order to fulfill the true meaning of the sacrament. As a rule, these assurances are to be given by the parents or close relatives, although various substitutions are possible within the Christian community. But if these assurances are not really serious, there can be grounds for delaying the sacrament; and if they are certainly nonexistent, the sacrament should even be refused. (Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith Instruction on Infant Baptism, n.28)
2. Baptismal preparation for parents of an infant should follow the Diocesan Sacramental Guidelines and Resources for Catechesis developed by the Office of Faith Formation.
3. The parents and Baptismal teams need ample time to prepare for the Baptismal celebration. Therefore, parents seeking Baptism for their child should be encouraged to contact the office of the parish community in which they are a member during the fourth or fifth month of pregnancy. An infant should be baptized within the first weeks after birth, unless there is a serious reason for delay.
4. When parents request Baptism for their child, the pastor or trained person(s) appointed by the pastor should meet the parents to:
  - a. establish a beginning relationship with the family
  - b. share thoughts about themselves and their faith life
  - c. begin to spiritually prepare for the birth of the child
  - d. afford a time to answer any questions
  - e. explain the program and the responsibilities of the parents as well as of the Church
  - f. understand the sacramental and liturgical significance of Baptism.



5. Following this initial interview every parish should provide 4 to 6 hours of Baptismal catechesis in a friendly, inviting atmosphere, being aware of the ethnic, economic and social needs of the parents and godparents (sponsors). Catechesis should:
  - a. assist the parents and sponsors in deepening their relationship with Christ and their involvement in the community life of the Church.
  - b. emphasize the importance of the parents in their role as models of the faith and as primary educators of their children.
  - c. bring parents and sponsors to greater understanding of the teachings of the Church and its sacramental and liturgical life, especially within the Sacrament of Baptism.
  - d. make parents aware of suitable resources which will assist them in Christian parenting.
  - e. involve parents and sponsors in the preparation and celebration of the Baptismal liturgy.
6. When one of the parents is not a Catholic, the instruction and discussion should be adapted to that situation.
7. The period of Mystagogy for post baptismal catechesis is important. For infants the focus of this should be on encouraging parents to continued growth in their faith through study and participation in adult faith enrichment programs. This will empower them as the primary educators of the faith for their children.
8. Although sometimes difficult, a method of "follow-up" is vitally necessary after the ceremony. This might be a visit from one of the persons involved in the preparation (priest, religious, or lay person). If this is deemed impossible, at least a letter of congratulations and encouragement, accompanied by the Baptism record, should be sent by the pastor. Some parishes have also found a visit prior to the ceremony and a letter of congratulations on the first anniversary to be a very effective pastoral tool.

B. Pastoral Considerations

1. In many cases it will be evident during the meetings with the parents that they are ready and eager to meet their responsibilities as Christian parents. Unfortunately, however, this is not always the case. At times, longer periods of preparation may be necessary in order to assure both the integrity of the sacraments and the child's future development as a Christian. While consultation among the clergy of the parish is recommended in such matters, the decision regarding the postponement of Baptism belongs to the pastor of the parish. If necessary, the bishop should be consulted when:
  - a. parents request Baptism for merely social reasons.

- b. parents show no intention of raising and educating the child as a Catholic because they have not done so with other children.
- c. parents have little knowledge of Catholic belief and practice and refuse further discussion or instruction.

When a decision is made to delay the Sacrament of Baptism, great pastoral sensitivity is required in explaining the reasons for this delay so as to help allay any negative feelings or disappointment on the part of the family. The goal of the preparation process for Baptism is a growth in the faith life of the child's family. The joyful occasion of the birth of a child should be a time of reconciliation with the Church, not one of further alienation. Parents have the right to appeal the postponement of their child's Baptism. This appeal should be directed to the bishop's office.

2. In the case of a request for Baptism where pastors find irregular marriage unions, insufficient knowledge of the Faith of nonpracticing parents who are unlikely to return to active participation, godparents should be sought among relatives, close friends or interested members of the parish community who would willingly assume the responsibility for the Christian education of the child (DCD Prot. n. 273/89).
3. Baptism is generally celebrated in the parish of the family. Sometimes, parents request that the Baptism of their child be celebrated in a parish other than their proper parish. If this is done to avoid a more demanding formation program, they should be encouraged to return to their own parish. If however there is a valid reason, like the parents have a special relationship with another parish or one of its priest, then the couple should be allowed to "cross" parishes if the following criteria are fulfilled:
  - a. the parents participate fully in the preparation program of the parish where they are registered parishioners.
  - b. permission of the proper pastor is granted. (C. 862)

### C. Baptismal Register

1. General procedure: The minister who celebrates the Baptism must carefully and without delay record the following information: name of the person baptized, parents, place and date of birth, place and date of the celebration of Baptism, sponsors or Christian witness. The record is to be kept at the parish where the Baptism was celebrated.
2. Baptisms done outside of the church building are to be recorded in the Baptismal Registry of the local parish/mission.
3. Child born of an unmarried mother: The name of the mother is to be inserted if there is public proof of her maternity or if she asks this

willingly, either in writing or before the pastor and two witnesses; likewise, the name of the father is to be inserted if his paternity has been proven either by a public document or by his own declaration before the pastor and two witnesses. In other cases, the name of the one baptized is recorded without any indication of the name of the father or parents. (C. 877.2)

4. Proof of child's paternity: Ways to establish paternity child for Baptismal Registry:

- a. Parents are married at the time of conception.
  - b. If not married at the time of conception, but do marry before or after the birth of the child, at the time the couple procures the marriage license, they can complete and file an acknowledgment of paternity form. Once filed, the couple can then request an amended birth certificate from the Department of Health, Bureau of Vital Statistics.
  - c. If the couple is not married and the father wants to confirm his paternity, he can file an acknowledgment of paternity form on his own and file with the Department of Health, Bureau of Vital Statistics. The mother cannot file this form on behalf of the father.
  - d. Court action.
5. Changing Baptismal records:

a. Adoptions:

- (1) Finalized adoption: Only the names of the adopting parents are to be recorded without any notation of the fact of adoption.
- (2) Adoption in process: The minister is to request an official document from the lawyer, or authorized adopting agency, stating that the child is legally free for adoption. (NB this will be 30 days after the natural parent(s) surrender the child for adoption) and that permission for Baptism has been given by the natural parent(s). If this authorization is not available, the Baptism should be postponed until the final order of adoption has been issued. In the case of older adopted children (6 years and older), the Baptism should await the issuance of a final order of adoption. In all cases enter the names of adopting parents without any notation of the fact of adoption.
- (3) Recording adoptions in Baptismal Records: The Chancery assumes the responsibility of adoptions. In this method, no change is made in the baptismal register. Instead, when the adopting parents or adoption agencies request an amended baptismal certificate, three documents should be sent to the Chancery: the Certificate of Baptism containing all the

information in the baptismal register, the adoption decree, and an amended birth certificate if such is provided. The adopting parents should also be allowed to submit different godparents. The Chancery will then issue an amended baptismal certificate. It will also notify the adopting parents that all future requests for certificates should be made to the Chancery where the confidential information is filed under the adopted name. In order to preserve the presumed legitimacy of the child, the Certificate of Baptism should be styled that it does not automatically identify the subject as adopted. Hence, the Chancery certificate looks exactly like any other certificate. The fact that it is issued by the Chancery is not a mark of adoption since the Chancery also issues many certificates from suppressed parishes whose records are kept in its vault. Ordinarily, adoption occurs in infancy and the adopted person never knows where he or she was originally baptized. In such cases, there is no necessity of any special remarks in the annotation column of the baptismal register. In the instances where a child is adopted when he/she is older and is aware of his/her original name and place of baptism, an annotation should be made in the Baptismal register to the effect that no certificate should be issued and all requests referred to the Chancery. The purpose of this is to prevent the slight possibility that a person will have access to two Baptismal certificates: one under the adopted name and one under the original Baptismal name.

- b. Correction of spelling/date error: If a spelling or date error is discovered in a baptismal entry, before an alteration is made, the parish first must have legal proof of the correct information (birth certificate). Once having proof, a line is drawn through the incorrect information in the baptism register (not erased or covered) and the correct information is written above the incorrect. A notation is made in the remarks column: "information changed to agree with birth certificate # \_\_\_\_\_ (county) \_\_\_\_\_, \_\_\_\_\_ (state) \_\_\_\_\_." After this correction is made, a note must be sent to the archivist at the chancery so that the diocesan records can be noted.
- c. Immigration: At times priests have been asked to change Baptismal records to completely falsify a record. The U.S. Immigration Service has informed the Chancery that such action on behalf of aliens violates several federal statutes and felony crimes. The U.S. government does accept Church records as authentic documents. To falsify such records threatens those who depend on their Baptismal record as their claim to U.S. citizenship.

- d. Transsexual operation: After a sex change operation, the person may obtain a court order changing his/her name. The person may then request that the Baptismal information conform to this change. It seems best that the priest does NOT alter the record but notes in the column that the Baptismal certificate should be sought from the Chancery. The priest should submit to the Chancery the Baptismal record information and a copy of the court order legally changing the name. The Chancery will then issue an amended Baptismal certificate but with the notation on the certificate: "Not valid for marriage purposes".