



Diocese of Colorado Springs

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GENERAL DECREE: REGARDING INFANT BAPTISM

**TO BE OBSERVED BY
ALL MEMBERS OF THE FAITHFUL**

The Sacrament of Baptism is the gateway to the life of the Spirit and to all the Sacraments. Our faith teaches in regard to baptism that, "[i]n accordance with the Lord's will, it is necessary for salvation, as is the Church herself, which we enter by Baptism (*Catechism of the Catholic Church*, 1277)". Our Lord tells us: "Amen, amen, I say to you, no one can enter the kingdom of God without being born of water and Spirit (Jn 3:5)". Following this divine command, and seeing no other means for salvation, the Church exhorts the need for baptism by the pouring of true water and the formula invoking the Persons of the Most Holy Trinity. The Church also recognizes that the fruits of baptism (though not the sacrament itself) are effected by way of baptism by blood (i.e. martyrdom) and baptism by desire. Through Baptism, men and women are freed from sin, reborn as children of God, configured to Christ by an indelible character, and incorporated into the Body of Christ, the Church (cf. can. 849).

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Prerequisites

1.

1§ Pastors are to encourage the baptism of infants within the first few weeks of birth. Likewise, Parents/guardians are to seek baptism for their child within the first few weeks following birth (cf. can. 867 §1: "*intra priores hebdomadas*").

2§ Taking into consideration all the legal aspects of adoption, it is appropriate that only after the adoption is finalized should a legal guardian pursue baptism for their new child.

2.

A child who has not completed his/her sixth year (i.e. has not celebrated a seventh birthday) is a candidate for infant baptism as herein prescribed. When a person is over this age, he/she is to be initiated in accordance with the norms of the Rite of Christian Initiation of Adults (RCIA).

3.

The pastor, or a priest or deacon to whom he delegates, is to meet with the parent(s)/guardian(s) after they have contacted the parish inquiring about the baptism of an infant. At this meeting, the following are to be discussed:

- 1° The reasons for requesting baptism for their child.
- 2° Their faith and their relationship with the Church.
- 3° Their understanding of the Sacrament of Baptism.
- 4° Their role and responsibility in educating their child (or as a minimum, allowing their child to be educated) in the faith of the Church.
- 5° The role of and requirements for godparent(s).
- 6° The parish policy regarding baptismal class(es).

4.

When parents/guardians do not speak English, provisions, in so far as possible, are to be made for the abovementioned initial meeting, for the subsequent catechesis, and the celebration of the rite in their proper language.

5.

Prior to conferring baptism, the pastor, or his delegate, ought to obtain the information needed for entry into the parish records as indicated in the 'Handbook on Sacramental Records and Reports for Parish Personnel' (available through the Office of the Chancellor [www.diocs.org/Offices/Office-of-the-Chancellor]) and make specific arrangements for the celebration of the sacrament.

6.

Parents/guardians are to be encouraged to give their infant a Christian name; the minimum requirement is that the name chosen not be foreign to Christian sentiment (cf. can. 855). If the name is neutral, the minister is able, at his discretion and with the agreement of the parents/guardians, to add to the given name(s) an overtly Christian name; both names are to be said in the rite and recorded in the register.

Catechesis

7.

Catechesis for parents can and ought to take place prior to the birth of the child-to-be-baptized.

8.

After the initial meeting, and before the celebration of the sacrament, parents/guardians are to participate in baptismal catechesis.

9.

Godparents should participate with parents/guardians in the catechesis, in so far as possible, or participate in baptismal catechesis at their local parish, if distance is a factor.

10.

Parents/guardians who have been successfully catechized in preparation for the baptism of a previous child may, at the discretion of the pastor, be excused from the formal sessions of baptismal classes. However, parents/guardians should be encouraged to participate as an opportunity to deepen their own faith and/or help to catechize other parents.

11.

While it is reasonable and expected that each parish establish a regular program for baptismal classes according to its resources, it is to be remembered that the primary element in determining the appropriate amount of catechesis is the concrete need of the parents/guardians and not the fulfillment of a set program *per se*. The number of sessions for this catechesis is left to the discretion of each pastor, in conjunction with his available staff, volunteers, and resources.

12.

Baptismal preparation classes and catechesis should include:

1§ The Church's teaching on Baptism (cf. *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, 1213-1284)

- 1° The significance of 'Baptism'.
- 2° Baptism in the Economy of Salvation (Old Testament, life of Christ, in the Church).
- 3° Who can receive baptism, esp. addressing the Church's teaching on infant baptism.
- 4° Who can administer baptism; address emergency baptism (the 'how' and 'when').
- 5° The necessity of baptism for salvation; baptism by blood and by desire.
- 6° The effects of baptism (sanctifying grace, indelible mark, infused virtues, gifts).

2§ The Liturgy of Baptism

- 1° Walk through 'The Order of Baptism'.
- 2° The symbols and sacramentals of baptism (viz. washing with water, exorcism, anointing, white garment, lighted candle, '*Ephphatha*').
- 3° Planning the ceremony of baptism (good opportunity to speak about a Christian name).
- 4° The role of Godparent; the importance and duties.

Godparents

13.

1§ Parents/guardians are encouraged, in so far as possible, to choose two persons (one of each sex) as godparents for the Baptism of their infant child. The role of a godparent, sacramental in nature, is twofold:

- 1° The godparent(s) is (are) obliged to assist the parent(s)/guardian(s) to initiate the child into the faith by marking the child's forehead with the sign of the cross and participating in the other sacramentals that take place within the Order of Baptism and to raise the newly baptized in the faith; this includes, in so far as possible, accompanying the parent(s)/guardian(s) during the baptismal preparation classes.
- 2° A godparent is to bear witness to the fact of the baptism's conferral; the former practice of proxy godparents, explicitly left out of the 1983 Code of Canon Law¹, is not permitted.

2§ In the event that no godparents are designated or unable to physically attend, the baptism can and should take place. In such a situation, the minister must ensure that there is at least one witness present who can attest to the actual conferral of the sacrament (cf. can. 875); the name of this witness is to be recorded in the baptismal register.

14.

To be admitted to the role of godparent, a person must:

- 1° Be designated by the parent/guardian, or in their absence, by the pastor or minister and must have the qualifications and intention of performing this role.
- 2° Be sixteen years old unless the pastor or minister has granted an exception for a just cause.
- 3° Be a fully initiated Catholic (i.e. has been baptized, confirmed, and has received first Holy Communion) and who leads a life of faith in keeping with the function to be undertaken; Eastern non-Catholic Christians are not excluded (cf. statue 15, 2§ below).
- 4° Not be in any irregular marriage situation(s).
- 5° Not be bound by any canonical penalty, legitimately imposed or declared.
- 6° Not be the father or mother of the one to be baptized.
- 7° Present a letter from their pastor attesting that they are a practicing Catholic.
- 8° Be physically present for the baptism.

(n.b. The 'Godparent/Sponsor Form: Baptism and Confirmation' provided by the Office of the Chancellor [www.diocs.org/Offices/Office-of-the-Chancellor], though not obligatory, clearly delineates these requirements.)

15.

1§ A baptized person who belongs to a non-Catholic ecclesial community may only be a witness to the baptism (cf. can. 874 §2); they can never serve in the official role of a godparent.

¹ Cf. Can. 765, 5°, of the Pio-Benedictine *Codex Iuris Canonici* (1917) and PONTIFICIUM CONSILIUM DE LEGEM TEXTIBUS INTERPRETANDIS, *Communicationes* (1998) 30, 309 and (1999) 31, 107.

2§ If one of the designated godparents is an Eastern non-Catholic Christian, there must always be a second godparent who is Catholic (cf. can. 685 §3 of the *Codex Canonum Ecclesiarum Orientalium* [1990]).

16.

When there is a cultural practice of multiple godparents, the pastor or minister may allow the family to involve a number of persons to assist them in raising the child in the Catholic faith, however, only two godparents (one of each sex) are to be officially recognized and recorded in the sacramental register. For more on the role of witness, see statues 13, 2§ and 15, 1§ above.

Discernment of Readiness for Conferring the Sacrament

17.

The parents, or at least one parent/guardian, must give consent for the baptism of an infant². Consideration must be given to the current Colorado custodial family law. Grandparents and others (who are not legal guardians) are not to clandestinely baptize an infant.

18.

Good pastoral practice presumes that parents who petition for the Sacrament of Baptism for their child are persons of good will who ask in faith and have a basic understanding of the associated obligations. It is not required by law or the Order of Baptism that a parent/guardian be Catholic (cf. can. 868 §3, M. P. *De concordia inter codices* [2016]) or even Christian (cf. Rite of Baptism for Children, *Praenotanda*, 4, 4).

19.

It is ultimately the responsibility of the pastor, with the help of his delegate if needed, to ensure:

- 1°** that the parents/guardians are properly prepared.
- 2°** that godparents are both properly prepared and duly disposed to carry out and fulfill their given role. To this end, the ‘Godparent/Sponsor Form: Baptism and Confirmation’ provided by the Office of the Chancellor can be a helpful aid.

20.

To proceed with the baptism, there must be a well-founded hope that the infant will be educated in the Catholic faith; if there is a doubt about this founded hope (*spes fondata*), baptism is to be delayed and further catechesis and evangelization carried out. When this doubt persists, contact the Office of the Chancellor for further guidance. Baptism is never to be denied outright, only delayed, even if indefinitely.

² Unless the child is in the danger of death, then baptism is to be conferred without delay. Cf. can. 867 §2.

Regarding the Extraordinary Form of the Roman Rite

21.

1§ All the faithful have the right to request the conferral of the Sacrament of Baptism according the Extraordinary Form of the Roman Rite. Pastors, in so far as possible and without grave inconvenience, are to graciously facilitate these requests themselves or by way of another cleric who is familiar with that form.

2§ When doing a baptism in the Extraordinary Form, the deacon or priest must follow the rubrics of the liturgical books in force in 1962. According to these rubrics, the following essential parts of the rite must be done in the Latin language: blessing of the salt (*Exorcizo te, creatura salis...*), the exorcisms (*Exorcizo te, immunde spiritus...*; *Exorcizo te, omnis spiritus immunde...*), the prayer accompanying the touching of the nostrils (*In odorem suavitatis...*), anointing with the Oil of Catechumens (*Ego te linio oleo salutis...*), the actual baptism (*N. Ego te baptizo...*), and the anointing with Chrism (*Deus omnipotens, Pater Domini nostri...*). Deacons must have a priest bless the salt prior to conducting the rite of baptism in the Extraordinary Form.

Recording of the Sacrament in the Baptismal Register

22.

After conferral of the sacrament (including emergency baptisms), all pertinent information must be recorded in the baptismal register of the parish in whose boundaries³ the baptism took place as indicated by the 'Handbook on Sacramental Records and Reports for Parish Personnel'.

This General Decree is to be observed by all members of the faithful in the Diocese of Colorado Springs. In accordance with canons 7, 8, and 29 of the Code of Canon Law, the laws set out in this general decree come into force following a one-month *vacatio*; all former particular laws pertaining to infant baptism being abrogated.

Promulgated at the Chancery of Colorado Springs on the 3rd day of June in the year of our Lord Two Thousand Twenty.



Most Reverend Michael J. Sheridan, S.T.D.
Bishop of Colorado Springs



Rev. Msgr. Ricardo Coronado-Arrascue, J.C.D.
Chancellor



³ Cf. <https://www.diocs.org/Parishes/Parish-Overview>