St. John Baptist de La Salle, Delmont

and St. Mary, Our Lady of Lourdes, Export

GUIDELINES FOR INFANT BAPTISM

WHAT IS BAPTISM?

Baptism is a beginning.
Baptism is the first of three sacraments of initiation in which a child is incorporated into Christ, becoming a new creation through water and the Holy Spirit. It is just the beginning of the lifelong journey of faith. Baptism is sealed by confirmation and completed in eucharist.

> *After baptism it is the responsibility of the parents, in their gratitude to God and in fidelity to the duty they have undertaken, to enable the child to know God, whose adopted child it has become, to receive confirmation, and to participate in the holy eucharist. In this duty they are again to be helped by the parish priest by suitable means.*
>
> *Introduction to the Rite of Baptism for Children*

Infant baptism is an act of worship.
Like all sacraments, baptism is an act of worship in which the whole church turns their hearts and minds and bodies toward God. Through the Rite of Baptism parents present their child for initiation into the Church. Together with the parish community, they offer praise and thanksgiving to God for the gift of salvation. They ask God to raise their child from the natural human condition to the dignity of an adopted son or daughter of God. By becoming one with Christ in baptism, the child is freed from original sin and united with the Christian community.

Baptism is a communal event.
Like all sacraments, baptism belongs to the entire church. It is celebrated in the midst of the community as a sign that baptism calls all of us to nurture and care for the child and to support the parents in their crucial task of handing on the faith.

> *Before and after the celebration of the sacrament, the child has a right to the love and help of the community. .... It is clear that the faith in which the children are baptized is not the private possession of the individual family, but is the common treasure of the whole Church of Christ.*
>
> *Introduction to the Rite of Baptism for Children*

Baptism requires the faith of parents, godparents and the entire church.
For an infant to be baptized, it is necessary that:

- at least one of the parents consents to it, or the person who lawfully takes their place
- there is a well-founded hope that the child will be brought up in the Catholic religion

When and Where is Baptism Celebrated?

An infant should normally be baptized in the first weeks following birth. Contact the parish office prior to the birth of your child to schedule the baptism and complete the necessary preparation.

In the past, there was a popular belief that unbaptized children who died would spend eternity in limbo, a place of unending happiness, but not in heaven. Although this was never a doctrine of the church, in many places infants were baptized almost immediately following birth, often before the mother's health permitted her to attend. There is no such urgency in the church today.

Children should be presented for baptism as soon as is practically possible after birth taking into consideration the health of both mother and child and the readiness of the parents and godparents to accept the demands that baptism places on them. Parents and godparents must ask themselves if they are ready to accept the responsibility of handing on the gift of faith to their child, since this task is primarily theirs. (**In the case of adoption**, regardless of the age of the child, a certificate issued by a court in the United States must be presented to verify that the adoption is formal, final and irrevocable.)

Baptisms should normally be celebrated in the parish of the infant's parents by the parish priest.

Because baptism binds a child to the universal Church through a local community, **at least one parent should be an active member of our partner parishes.** For those who are not members of the parish, a letter of permission is required from the pastor of the Church where the parents are currently registered. For those who are new members of the parish, a three month period of participation is required before the baptism may be scheduled. Three months after a registration is received in the parish office, and after active participation in the parish is evident, parents may schedule a baptism for their child. An exception to this may be made if the family has recently moved and can demonstrate active participation in the parish to which they formerly belonged. *Active participation means, at a minimum, weekly participation in the Sunday Eucharist, support of the Church according to one's abilities and active participation in the ministries of the Church.*

Baptisms are <u>generally</u> scheduled on a case-by case basis, but are typically celebrated at our Parishes on weekends as follows, except during Lent:

- During any of the weekend liturgies (4, 6, 9, 11) for children of parents in a valid sacramental marriage.
- After the 6PM Mass on Saturday (St. Mary)
- After the 11AM Mass on Sunday (St. John)

In some cases, special events may necessitate changes to the schedule. Before making plans for the celebration, it is advisable to check with the parish office to verify the availability of a specific date or time.

How is Baptism Celebrated?

Contacting the parish

Because sufficient time is needed to prepare parents to undertake the duties of raising a child in the faith, parents should contact Joann Giuffre at 724-327-0647, ext. 2504 or e-mail jgiuffre@dioceseofgreesnsburg.org, approximately four months prior to their baby's due date. Although families do not need to set the date of baptism this early, the parish staff will begin to assist with necessary preparations before the birth of the child. The date of baptism should be fixed at least one month in advance of the desired date.

Naming the child

Traditionally, Catholic children are given a saint's name. This is an outward sign that links the child to the communion of saints. Church law does not require that a child be given a saint's name. It does, however, forbid a name that is offensive to Christians, our beliefs or way of life.

Parent preparation

In order that parents and the parish community might celebrate fully, careful planning and thoughtful preparation is needed. **First-time parents and those who last had a child baptized three or more years ago, are expected to participate in the Infant Baptism Preparation process**. Baptism Preparation is scheduled with each couple, or possibly with a group of couples. The session includes discussion about the meaning of baptism, the signs and symbols used in the Rite of Baptism, and conversation about the responsibilities of parents and godparents in teaching the faith. Both parents should plan to attend and godparents, when possible.

Godparents

Parents are assisted in their preparation and in raising their child in the faith by godparents. During the Rite of Baptism, godparents promise to help the parents in their duty as Christian parents. Because of this special relationship, parents should consider seriously the persons they ask to be godparents, remembering that their primary role is in relationship to the parents. **Godparents should be chosen because they are willing and able to assist in the faith formation of the child, not simply because of familial or social relationship.**

Church law requires that there be one godparent. **The following are requirements for this important role.** The individual **must** be:

- an active, regularly participating member of a Catholic parish
- a fully initiated Roman Catholic (having received Baptism, Confirmation and Eucharist)
- at least 16 years of age
- in good standing with the Church and, if married, having done so in the Catholic Church

There may be one additional godparent, but it is not necessary. If there are two godparents, one must be male, the other female, and both must meet the requirements listed above. All godparents, *even those who belong to our Parishes,* are required to provide a sponsor form of eligibility from the parish in which they are registered and participate. This form is due to the parish office *no less than* 10 days before the baptism.

Christian witness

The Church also provides for an active member of another Christian church to stand as witness to the baptism when only one godparent is chosen. Christian witnesses can play an active role in supporting the parents as they teach their child the Christian way of life. Christian witnesses should understand the role of godparent and be able to fill a similar role in their church. Thus, they need a letter from their pastor saying that they are members and active in their church as well as a copy of their own baptismal certificate demonstrating their initiation into the Christian church. *Catholics who have left the practice of the Catholic faith and have joined another Christian church are NOT eligible to serve as Christian witnesses.*

The parish community

Because baptisms are normally celebrated during regularly scheduled Sunday Masses, the parish community is well represented by the gathered assembly. This is an important sign that baptism, like all sacraments, belongs to the whole church and that the parents and child can expect the support and care of the parish community. A *priest of the parish will normally preside* at the liturgy and baptize those children who will become members of the parish at their baptism.

The Liturgical Celebration

Before the Liturgy

On the day of baptism, parents and godparents need to arrive 30 minutes before Mass begins. If the baptism is outside of Mass, they should arrive 15 minutes early. The infant does not need to be in church until just before the beginning of the liturgy, and it is often helpful to feed and change the infant after Mass and before the baptism begins.

Opening Rites

Liturgical Procession

In order to emphasize their important role in the Rite of Baptism, parents and siblings, baby and godparents will all join in the Entrance Procession. Family members and friends may be seated in specially reserved seats at the front of the Church.

Greeting

Reception of the Child

Here the presider questions the parents and godparents about what they seek for their child and about their readiness to accept the responsibility of raising the child in the practice of the faith. He then welcomes the child on behalf of the Christian community and claims him or her for Christ by tracing the cross on the baby's forehead. Parents and godparents do the same.

Liturgy of the Word

Scripture Readings and Homily
Prayer of the Faithful (Intercessions)
Prayer of Exorcism

Celebration of the Sacrament

Blessing and Invocation of God over Baptismal Water
Renunciation of Sin and Profession of Faith

Parents, godparents and all present renew their baptismal promises.

Baptism
Anointing with Chrism
Clothing with the White Garment (*omitted when the infant is already wearing a white garment*)
Presentation of the Lighted Candle
Ephphetha (Prayer over Ears and Mouth)

Liturgy of the Eucharist*

Preparation of the Altar and Gifts
Eucharistic Prayer
Communion Rite

Concluding Rites

Blessing and Dismissal
Recessional

Parents, godparents and the newly baptized infant recess with the ministers and presider to the vestibule.

**When Mass is not celebrated, the Liturgy of the Eucharist is omitted.*

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