

BAPTISM

*Go, therefore, and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you.
(Matthew 28:19-20a)*

- 1 The right to baptize belongs to the pastor of the home parish in which the adult to be baptized, or in which the parent(s) of the child to be baptized, are registered or belong.
- 2 Baptism is to be celebrated either in the parish church or its missions according to the discretion of the pastor. Baptism is not to be celebrated in private homes. Outside the case of danger of death, baptism is not to be celebrated in a hospital or other place. (CIC 857, 860)
- 3 Outside the case of necessity, it is not lawful for anyone, without the required permission, to confer baptism in the territory of another, not even upon his own subjects. (CIC 862)
- 4 Outside of the case of necessity, it is not lawful for anyone, without the required permission from the proper pastor, to confer baptism in their territory upon those who are not his subjects. In those instances when permission has been obtained to have someone baptized in another parish, the responsibility for the paper work, catechesis, and the judgement as to whether the baptism should proceed, still remain with the proper pastor unless other arrangements have been explicitly made.
- 5 Whenever reasonably possible the sacrament of baptism is to be celebrated on Sundays in the presence of the Christian Community, not necessarily in the context of the Sunday Eucharist. Private ceremonies are strongly discouraged unless there is a reasonable cause in the judgment of the pastor of the place of baptism.¹
- 6 Every parish church shall have a baptistry or at least a prominently located baptismal font, properly equipped for the conferring of baptism. (CIC 858) The font shall be treated with reverence, neatly maintained, and thoroughly cleaned at frequent intervals.
- 7 As the rite for baptizing, either immersion, which is more suitable as a symbol of participation in the death and resurrection of Christ, or pouring may lawfully be used. (Sacred Congregation for Divine Worship, Christian Initiation, General Instruction, 2nd editio tipica: 1973. n. 22)
- 8 The ordinary minister of the sacrament is one who has received Sacred Orders. For parishes or communities without an ordained minister, a non-ordained Christian faithful can licitly administer the sacrament by written permission of the Archbishop. (CIC 861, §2)
- 9 The faithful shall be instructed on the meaning and necessity of baptism, especially when the Sunday's scripture readings lend themselves to the theme, e.g., during Lent, Solemnity of the Baptism of the Lord.
- 10 Periodically an instruction shall be given in every parish explaining the requirements for the valid administration of baptism and the obligation of a lay person to confer the sacrament in case of emergency.(CIC 861, §2) The faithful shall be instructed to report an emergency baptism immediately to the pastor of the person baptized. The pastor will decide if prudent grounds exist for repeating the baptism conditionally.

¹ Children of unwed parents or of parents who are in a marriage that cannot be officially recognized by the Church, ordinarily are not to be baptized within the celebration of the Eucharist.

- 11 Priests and deacons shall acquaint those who may be concerned, especially doctors, nurses and parents, including non-catholics if necessary, with the Church's practice in regard to baptism. This obligation devolves particularly upon hospital chaplains and pastors having hospitals within their parishes. The matter should also be clearly explained to those about to enter into marriage.
- 12 After an emergency baptism, the proper pastor shall arrange to supply the ceremonies using the proper rite in the approved liturgical books. [cf. #21.4]
- 13 Only persons not yet baptized may be baptized. (CIC 864)
- 14 Whenever an adult is seeking baptism, he/she ordinarily is to be prepared through the RCIA process (see the *Rite of Christian Initiation of Adults* (1988)). Children of catechetical age are to be prepared through the RCIA process adapted for children.² See Archdiocese of Santa Fe, Infant Baptism Policy, for the preparation required when an infant is being baptized. When the baptism is to take place in a prison, see Archdiocese of Santa Fe, Sacramental Policies in a Prison Setting
- 15 If there is a doubt whether one has been baptized or whether baptism was validly conferred and the doubt remains after serious investigation, baptism is to be conferred conditionally. (CIC 889, §1).
 - 15.1 If it is not prejudicial to anyone, to prove conferral of baptism, the declaration of a single witness who is above suspicion suffices or the oath of the baptized person, if the baptism was received at an adult age.³ (CIC 876)

If there is a question of whether baptism was conferred validly by a non-Catholic community, the rites of the non-Catholic community as well as the intention of an adult baptized person and the ministers of the baptism need to be investigated. As a rule of thumb, if water and the Trinitarian formula is used the baptism is conferred validly.⁴
 - 15.2 If, after a serious investigation, it seems necessary to confer baptism again conditionally, the minister should explain beforehand the reasons why baptism is conferred conditionally in this instance.
 - 15.3 The celebration of conditional baptism is done privately rather than in a public liturgical assembly of the community.
 - 15.4 In conferring conditional baptism the *Christian Initiation of Adults in Exceptional Circumstances (Abbreviated Form)* is to be used, omitting the anointing with the Oil of Catechumens. When administering the sacrament, the following formula is used: "N., if you are not baptized, I baptize you in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit." The celebration of the sacrament of confirmation is deferred until the reception into full communion with the Church.

² The sacramental preparation of children of catechetical age can be done through the regular religious education program offered at the parish; however the rites of the RCIA are to be followed.

³ In this case "adult" is to be interpreted as seven years old or older, unless the person lacks use of reason. (cf. canons 852, 97)

⁴ As a result of the study by the Congregation for the Doctrine of Faith in Rome, Mormon baptism is not considered valid by the Catholic church. Since the church of Jesus Christ of the Latter Day Saints (Mormon) cannot be said to baptize in the name of the Trinity which the Catholic faith professes, converts from the Mormon Church must be rebaptized when they enter the Catholic Church.

- 16 If there is doubt of whether the person or fetus is alive, baptism can be conferred conditionally. If aborted fetuses are alive, they are to be baptized if possible. (CIC 871) If there is no doubt that the person or fetus is dead, the minister may not baptize.
- 17 Whenever possible a sponsor is to be employed in the celebration of the sacrament. (CIC 872)
- 17.1 Only one male or one female sponsor, or one of each sex is to be employed. (CIC 837)
The law does not allow for two males or two females to be sponsors at baptism.
- 17.2 To be admitted as a sponsor the following prescriptions must be met (CIC 874, § 1):
- 17.2.1 be designated by the one to be baptized, by the parents or the one who takes their place or, in their absence, by the pastor or minister and have the qualifications and intention of performing this role;
- 17.2.2 be at least 16 years of age, unless the pastor or minister judges that an exception is to be made for a just cause;
- 17.2.3 be a Catholic who has been confirmed and has already received the sacrament of the Most Holy Eucharist and leads a life in harmony with the faith and the role to be undertaken;⁵
- 17.2.4 not be bound by any canonical penalty legitimately imposed or declared;⁶
- 17.2.5 not be the father or the mother of the one to be baptized.
- 17.3 The prohibition for clergy and religious to be sponsors no longer exists. Those asked to be sponsors are to defer from being the minister of baptism so that the roles are not confused.
- 18 At the request of the parents and in accordance with the ecumenical guidelines, a baptized Christian not in full communion with the Catholic church may act as Christian witness together with a Catholic sponsor. (cf. CIC 874, §2) If a christian witness was used, proper notification of that fact should be made in the baptismal register.⁷
- 19 A baptismal sponsor may act through a proxy.
- 19.1 In order for a proxy to act validly, he or she must have been appointed by the sponsor, not the parents or minister. Proof of appointment must be obtained in writing.

⁵ The phrase “leads a life in harmony with the faith and the role to be undertaken.” should not be interpreted too strictly. Under no circumstances are the ministers to use the celebration of the sacrament of baptism as a means to force the godparents to enter into a sacramental marriage. However, in those cases where their marital status can be rectified, they should be encouraged to do so. Married sponsors should be in a valid marriage. Rare exceptions may be made by a pastor. Use of the form “Affidavit of Eligibility for the Ministry of Baptism or Confirmation Sponsor” and the document Godparent-Sponsor Agreement assists pastors with their responsibility in this regard.

⁶ Penalties in the church must be imposed or declared by a judicial process (e.g. excommunications, suspensions, interdicts). These are legitimately imposed penalties by a Tribunal of the Church. No priest or deacon may impose their own penalties.

⁷ Because of the close communion between the Catholic Church and the separated Eastern church it is permissible for a just reason to accept one of the faithful of an Eastern church as godparent along with a Catholic godparent at the baptism of a Catholic infant or adult, as long as the Catholic upbringing of one being baptized is provided for and there is assurance that the person is fit to be a godparent. (Secretariat for Christian Unity, *Ecumenical Directory*, Part I, May 14, 1967. no. 48)

- 19.2 Proof that the sponsor is qualified and willing to accept the office obligation also must be obtained.
- 19.3 The proxy must have the same qualifications as the sponsor, and the names of both must be recorded.⁸
- 20 It is the duty of the pastor to see that as soon as possible the celebration of baptism is to be recorded in the proper parish book in accord with canon 877, §1.
- 21 When an emergency baptism has been celebrated in a hospital, or any other place, the following steps are to be followed in order to insure proper recording of the baptism:
 - 21.1 The one who administers baptism (cleric or lay) is to see that, unless a sponsor is present, there be at least a witness by whom the conferral of baptism can be proved. *(CIC 875)*
 - 21.2 If baptism was not administered by the pastor of the territorial parish of the institution, the one who administered the baptism must inform the pastor of the territorial parish in which baptism was administered so that the proper record may be entered into the books in accord with the norms of canon 877 §1. *(CIC 878)* This is to be done within three days after the administration of the sacrament.
 - 21.3 As of September, 2012, the territorial parishes for the following hospitals are:
 - 21.3.1 Lovelace Medical Center: 601 Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. Ave: San Ignacio, Albuquerque
 - 21.3.2 Lovelace Rehabilitation Hospital: 505 Elm St. NE: San Ignacio, Albuquerque
 - 21.3.3 Heart Hospital of New Mexico: 504 Elm St. NE: San Ignacio, Albuquerque
 - 21.3.4 Kindred Hospital: 700 High St. NE: San Ignacio, Albuquerque
 - 21.3.5 Children’s Psychiatry Hospital: 1001 Yale Blvd NE: Our Lady of Fatima, Albuquerque
 - 21.3.6 UNM Carrie Tingley Hospital: 1127 University Blvd NE: Our Lady of Fatima, Albuquerque
 - 21.3.7 University of New Mexico Hospital: 2211 Lomas Blvd NE: St. Charles Borromeo, Albuquerque
 - 21.3.8 Presbyterian Hospital: 1100 Central SE: St. Charles Borromeo, Albuquerque
 - 21.3.9 Kaseman Presbyterian Hospital: 8300 Constitution Ave NE: Assumption, Albuquerque
 - 21.3.10 Lovelace Westside: 10501 Golf Course Rd NW: St. Jude, Albuquerque
 - 21.3.11 Lovelace Women’s Hospital: 4701 Montgomery Blvd NE: Queen of Heaven, Albuquerque
 - 21.3.12 Plains Regional Medical Center, Clovis: Sacred Heart, Clovis
 - 21.3.13 Presbyterian Española Hospital: Sacred Heart, Española
 - 21.3.14 Alta Vista Regional Hospital: Las Vegas: Immaculate Conception, Las Vegas
 - 21.3.15 Christus St. Vincent Regional Medical Center: St. John the Baptist, Santa Fe
 - 21.3.16 Santa Fe PHS Indian Hospital: St. John the Baptist, Santa Fe
 - 21.3.17 Holy Cross Hospital: Taos: Our Lady of Guadalupe, Taos
 - 21.3.18 Miner’s Colfax Medical Center: St. Patrick-St. Joseph, Raton

⁸Instruction of the Sacred Congregation for the Sacraments, Nov. 25, 1925.

- 21.3.19 Presbyterian Rust Medical Center, 2400 Unser Blvd. SE; Rio Rancho: St. Thomas Aquinas, Rio Rancho
 - 21.3.20 UNM Sandoval Regional Medical Center, 3001 Broadmoor Blvd. NE, Rio Rancho: Church of the Incarnation, Rio Rancho
 - 21.3.21 VA Medical Center, 1501 San Pedro Dr. SE, Albuquerque: Military Archdiocese, Washington, DC. (A copy is also placed in the patient's medical records.)
- 21.4 The one who administers the baptism is to encourage the parents, or person baptized, to go to their proper parish to have the ceremonies supplied.⁹ A record of the ceremonies supplied is to be sent to the parish where the baptism is recorded (territorial parish of the institution).
- 21.5 When baptism is conferred by a non-cleric, the recording of the baptism is done in accord with the norms of law. Catholic Chaplains are to see that the proper information is sent to the parish in a timely fashion.
- 22 In recording the baptism of a child 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 two witnesses; likewise the name of the father is to be inserted if his paternity has been proved either by some public document or by his own declaration before the pastor and two witnesses; in other cases, the name of the one to be baptized is recorded without any indication of the name of the father or the parents. (*CIC 877, §2*)
- Rule of thumb: Place the names that appear on the state birth certificate on the baptismal certificate. If the father is willing to sign the document in the presence of the pastor, he should be encouraged to do so in the presence of the civil authorities. The father should be informed that when the proper change is made in the state birth certificate his name will be added to the baptismal certificate. Written proof of the change in the birth certificate must be presented.
- 23 In recording the baptism of an adopted child, the names of the adopting parents are to be recorded. The names of the natural parents are not to be recorded since that is contrary to the norms for the State of New Mexico. (*c. 877, §3*) Please note that, in the case of adoption after baptism, the names of the natural parents should be kept in the baptismal register, and a notation of adoption with the new parents' names should be added to the record. Be aware that in the State of New Mexico the names of the natural parents cannot be given out without a court order, even after the adoptee is eighteen years old.¹⁰
- 24 No changes can be made in the baptismal register, unless there is an authentic document that substantiates the change. The change is to be marked in notations, including the source of the change.

⁹ By proper parish is understood the parish where the parents, or the one baptized, are registered. If they are not registered in any parish, it is understood to be the territorial parish of their home address.

¹⁰ For further information on the State of New Mexico Laws regarding adoption, see New Mexico State Statutes, 1978, 1989 Replacement Pamphlet, Chapter 40, Article 7, with special attention to Section 40-7-52 regarding the name of the adoptee, and 40-7-53 regarding confidentiality of records.