

The Sacrament of Baptism (for Infants and Young Children)  
Our Lady of Victory Catholic Church  
St. Catherine of Siena Catholic Church

Policy Notes

The sacrament of Baptism is the first sacrament received and, thus, the gateway to the other sacraments of the Church. In this sacrament, the child is formally brought into the community of faith and begins to be formed into the image of Christ. The baptism ritual itself gives direction on the proper attitude of both parents and sponsor.

***“You have asked to have your child baptized.  
In doing so, you are accepting the responsibility of  
training him (her) in the practice of the faith.”***

A. The Parents

As in other things for a child of young age, the parents are the primary teachers of the faith. Through teaching and example, the parents will be sharing their faith (even unconsciously) with their child even and while their own faith is growing.

Requirements of parents:

- Must be registered members of the parish of baptism
- Must be practicing members of the parish, for a minimum of 3 months prior to the baptism (or can obtain a letter from a previous parish that they were practicing members)
- Must participate in baptismal catechesis (preparation) prior to the baptism of their child.
  - Normally a minimum of 3 hours of catechesis; may be conducted in 2-3 classes
  - The catechesis should include discussion of:
    - The theology of Baptism
    - The role of the parents and sponsor (godparents) in faith formation
    - The responsibilities that come with Baptism (as the child grows)
    - The ritual itself

No date for the baptism should be set until all of the above requirements can be assured.

According to Canon Law, there must be a “founded hope” that the child will be raised in the Catholic faith (*Canon 868*). If such hope is lacking, the baptism may be delayed with an explanation for such a delay communicated to the parents. For example, if the occasion of baptism marks an initial return to the church after a period of absence, the baptism should be delayed at least 3 months while the parents become re-acquainted with the faith that they will be handing on to their child. In cases where the parents have not been practicing their faith regularly, the preparation for the Baptism of their child is to be seen as an opportunity to invite them into greater communion with the Church and to foster their spiritual growth.

***“Are you ready to help the parents of this child  
in their duty as Christian parents  
(in training her/him in the practice of the faith)?”***

## B. The Sponsor

Normally, only one sponsor is required (*Canon 872*). Two sponsors (often called ‘godparents’) may be chosen, however, out of tradition and practice. In such a case, the two should be of different genders. The second person, if not Catholic, is a witness to the baptism and not a sponsor.

Requirements of a baptismal sponsor:

- 16 years of age or older
- Fully-initiated Catholic (Baptism, Eucharist, Confirmation) and is currently practicing their faith
- If married, in a valid marriage that is blessed by the Church
- May not be the father or mother of the child

## C. Additional Policy

Invalid marriages. Ideally, if either of the parents of the child is Catholic, they should be married according to the laws of the Catholic Church. If this is not the case, the child may still be baptized provided that the parents accept their responsibility to assure the faith formation of the child.

- Where possible, parents should be interviewed and invited to take steps toward getting their marriage convalidated in the Catholic Church.
- The process of Baptismal preparation may then become a “teachable moment” about the life of faith and the importance of a stable Catholic home life, the domestic church, in which the child will be raised.

Baptismal ceremony. The ceremony itself may be conducted either in the context of a Mass or outside of Mass. The ordinary minister of the sacrament is a bishop, priest or deacon. The parish will try to meet the requests of the family as much as possible and as reasonable regarding the date of the Baptism.

## References:

Diocese of Austin – Pastoral Manual. “Infant Baptism”. Dated 01.17.14. Version 5.0

McKenna, Kevin E. *A Concise Guide to Canon Law*. Notre Dame, IN: Ave Maria Press, 2000.