

GUIDELINES
for the
CELEBRATION OF
CHRISTIAN BAPTISM
(of Infants and children under six)

In the Parish of Saint Eugene
Asheville, North Carolina
Revised June 30, 2002

General Considerations:

1. The celebration of Baptism in the Catholic Church is not merely a cultural response or duty that is entered without preparation or reflection. Baptism is rather a radical moment that “frees us from darkness (RCIA n. 1)” and washes us into the life of the Kingdom of God. It is meant to introduce us to a process that will welcome us to a community that lives a life differently than the life of the world.
2. Baptism uses the rich symbol of water as a starting point. It challenges the new Christian and his or her family to see that the life that begins at the font unfolds as a “gateway” to life in the rest of the Church (CIC, 1983).
3. Because the promises made at Baptism point to the reality of its on-going role in the life of the believer, parents are expected to form children in the faith as soon as they can through faith sharing and faith development done in the family home and in the varied catechetical programs of the parish community.

Who Can Celebrate Baptism?

Because Baptism is such an important reality in the life of the Church, The Parish of Saint Eugene responds to the Church’s theology and practice with these guidelines for children and children below age six (with appropriate modifications for dress, etc).

- a) Since Baptism also reflects a relationship with the Church, those who bring a child for Baptism are expected themselves to have a relationship with the parish community. This relationship is articulated in three ways:
 - membership in the parish community (by registration)
 - active participation in the life of the community through regular practice in worship as well as the tithing of your talent and treasure.
 - an openness to participate in the preparation program before celebrating Baptism in the parish.
- b) Sometimes people wish to return to Saint Eugene to celebrate Baptism with other family members who live here. We are happy to accommodate them but require that their current pastor forward a letter here that gives his permission for the Baptism to be celebrated here and that affirms the family has completed the preparation program required in their church community. Such celebrations will not be scheduled until this paperwork is received by the parish.
- c) Occasionally a family has a relative who is a priest or deacon and they may wish that this individual preside at a particular Baptism. Please make the parish aware of this possibility and ask the cleric to make a request for such a celebration in writing. Permission will be granted by the pastor in writing as well. It is assumed that parish custom and the ritual of the Church will be part of any such celebration.

Where and How Do We Celebrate Baptism?

1. Because Baptism is an action of the entire community and because we believe that no one is ever saved alone (L.G. n. 32), it is always celebrated in the parish church and when the community gathers at the Eucharist. At Saint Eugene parents who have completed the preparation program can arrange to present their child(ren) for Baptism at any of the weekend masses.

2. In special circumstances, it may be possible to celebrate Baptism at the weekday Masses in the parish as well. This procedure is explained in full during the preparation program.
3. There are only rare exceptions to the celebration of Baptism at the Eucharist. Generally these include emergency situation or other “extreme circumstances” in the pastor’s judgment.
4. In accord with the teaching of the Catholic Church since the restoration of the Rites of Initiation (1973), the preferred method of Baptism is by immersion. The current structure of our Baptismal pool accommodates the partial immersion of both infants and adults.

When Do We Celebrate Baptism?

1. While most weekends afford an opportunity for the celebration of the sacrament, there are certain times of the year when it is best celebrated. While the schedule of family visits will often be a factor in planning Baptism, we suggest these *optimal* times as well:
 - Epiphany (the Sunday after New Years)
 - Feast of the Lord’s Baptism (the following Sunday)
 - Easter Day
 - All the Sundays of the Easter Season (7 weeks)
 - The Feast of All Saints (November 1)
 - Feast of Christ the King (last Sunday of November)
2. Except in an emergency, Baptism is never celebrated during the Season of Lent (from Ash Wednesday until the Easter Vigil).

Sponsors and Godparents?

One of the most commonly held assumptions about godparents is that they will be responsible for the care of your child should something happen to you. The church does not define *godparenting* that way. Godparents represent the whole Catholic community and pledge their support as the child grows in faith.

Generally there are two Sponsors. Only one is required. Some cultures have more

1. The church has some *preconditions* about Godparents. These include:
 - You must designate them and they must be willing to assist your child in leading a Christian life.
 - They must be Catholics who are baptized and who have been confirmed and have received first Eucharist.
 - They must lead a life in harmony with the faith and be regular in their practice by attending Mass in their parish and receiving the Eucharist.
 - If they are not from the parish of Saint Eugene, they must present a Sponsor Certificate from their home parish that affirms these above preconditions.
 - They must be able to answer “yes” to the church’s question at Baptism which asks them if they “are ready to help the parents of this child in their duty as Christian parents.”
2. While those who are not Catholic cannot serve as Sponsors, they may stand at Baptism (with at least one other Sponsor) as a Christian Witness. While not required to certify so in the same way noted above, they are to fulfill two basic criteria:
 - be Baptized and practicing members of their church community.
 - be able to answer “yes” to the Church’s inquiry concerning their ability to “assist the parents of this child in their duty as Christian parents.”

3. Catholics who are not practicing the faith and cannot fulfill the criteria listed in (n. 1) above for Godparents cannot serve as “Christian Witnesses” either.
4. Because of the intimate connection of assisting parents in their role as Christian parents, non-Christians cannot stand as Sponsors or Witnesses.
5. Sponsors who cannot be present for a celebration can be represented by a Proxy. There are no preconditions for a proxy but the person they represent must fulfill all the criteria listed above.

Choose Godparents carefully. Some ask that if their relationship with their child’s Godparent(s) fades or sours after Baptism can they change Sponsors. The answer is no. The parish record is a record of what has occurred. Those names will appear on the Baptismal certificate every time you need to provide one.

What Do We Do Next?

1. Baptismal Preparation Programs are offered on a regular schedule by the parish. You will find information concerning the next date in your parish bulletin or you can call the church office at 254-5193 for details and for a reservation. Both parents should attend the session. If Sponsors are here in the Asheville area they should attend, if possible, as well.
2. At the preparation program, an Information Sheet will be distributed for you to complete. This sheet also gives you the opportunity to select a date and time for the celebration of Baptism. It will be confirmed against the parish calendar as soon as possible. Please remember that we wish to accommodate your needs and we can be somewhat flexible with schedules and schedule changes. If you find yourself in need to make some changes, just ask.
3. Many families have a traditional white garment that they pass from generation to generation. We welcome you to bring these garments for the celebration of Baptism. If, however, that is not your custom, the parish provides a simple, white garment, *similar to a poncho*, made by some members of the congregation, for the occasion. The parish also provides the Baptismal Candle and will issue a certificate to you within two weeks of the celebration of Baptism.

Other Considerations?

1. In a situation where spouses might be separated or divorced and where custody of a minor child is shared, both parties must agree to the celebration of Baptism. This is an important legal consideration that should never be overlooked when considering the public celebration of this or any Sacrament of Initiation.
2. For children who are six years old and older, there is a different set of requirements for the preparation and the celebration of the Sacraments of Initiation. Please refer to the leaflet entitled “Parish Guidelines for the Celebration of Baptism for Children of Catechetical Age and Adults.”
3. You are welcome to take photographs and arrange for videography at your child’s Baptism. Please keep in mind the sacred nature of the occasion. No one should ever block the view of the assembly or in any way distract the community while we are at prayer together. *It may be better to stage some photography after the Baptism rather than distract people from the celebration of Baptism.*

4. You should arrive at the church at least fifteen (15) minutes before Mass on the day of Baptism. After you are settled in the reserved seats, Father (or the deacon) will generally review things with you and see if you have any last minute questions.
5. Remember that your child should be *undressed* by the time of the water baptism which occurs after the homily. This means no socks or shoes, wrapped in a towel (with maybe a loose diaper for added security!). After the water baptism the child will be wrapped in a towel for the anointing and the presentations. There will be ample time after this to dress the child before he/she is presented to the community after Communion.
6. There are plenty of spaces for an active child while waiting for Baptism. If you find the need to take your child from the church, please feel free to do so. Use the “Cry Room” or the “Quiet Room.” Just be attentive to the three times you need to be present in the assembly:
 - immediately before Mass for the naming of the child.
 - after the sermon for the water baptism and the presentations.
 - after Communion for the blessing of the parents and the presentation of the child to the assembly.

Are There Any Fees?

There are no fees for the celebration of Baptism in the parish of Saint Eugene.