

THE CELEBRATION OF BAPTISM FOR INFANTS AND CHILDREN TO AGE SIX



PARISH GUIDELINES

**The Parish of Mary,
Queen of the Apostles
Belmont, North Carolina**

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Queen of the Apostles
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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 (OCIA/B-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 Baptismal pool 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 a lived Baptismal reality, 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, at the Eucharistic table and in the varied catechetical programs of the parish community.

Because Baptism is such an important reality in the life of the Church, the parish in Belmont responds to the Church's theology and practice with these guidelines for infants and children under the age of six years (with appropriate modification of dress, etc. depending on age).

WHO CAN CELEBRATE BAPTISM?

a) Since baptism 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 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.

A family that has not met these basic criteria will be asked to work with the pastor for a period of about six months before planning the baptism of their child.

b) Sometimes people wish to return to the parish 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 permission for the Baptism and affirms the family has completed the preparation program required in their church community.

c) You are welcome to take photographs and videos at the Baptism. Please, however, keep the sacred nature of the occasion in mind. No one should ever distract the community while we are at prayer together. You can also stage photography after the Baptism. We are happy to assist in this.

d) Arrive at church at least 15 minutes early for seating and final instructions. Take seats in the reserved section. We will always reserve two pews. If you have a large family group attending, let us know ahead of time and we will arrange appropriate numbers of pews.

e) Remember your child should not be dressed in their baptismal garments. A diaper and blanket will suffice. The Baptismal garments will be presented during the ceremony and then, the child can be taken to the changing table and dressed. You have ample time for this. The child will not be presented to the community again until after Communion.

f) If you have an active child waiting for Baptism, feel free to walk around or use the Gathering Space or nursery area if a child is very loud. Just be attentive to the three times you need to be present in the assembly:

- 1) Immediately before Mass for the "naming" of the child.
- 2) After the sermon for the water baptism and the presentations.
- 3) After Communion for the blessing of the parents and the presentation of the child to the assembly.

ARE THERE ANY FEES?

There are no required fees for the celebration of Baptism in the parish of Mary, Queen of the Apostles.

Such celebrations will not be scheduled until the paperwork has been received here in 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 honored in any such celebration.

WHERE AND HOW DO WE CELEBRATE BAPTISM?

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

b) In special circumstances, it may be possible to celebrate Baptism at the weekday Masses in the parish. There are only rare exceptions to the celebration of Baptism at the Eucharist. Generally these include emergency situations or other "extreme circumstances" in the pastor's judgment.

c) In accord with the teaching of the Catholic Church since the restoration of the Order of Christian Initiation (1973), the preferred method of Baptism is by immersion. The current structure of our Baptismal font accommodates only partial immersion.

d) Because of (a) above, permission is rarely given for the celebration of baptism by parish members at the Abbey Church.

WHEN DO WE CELEBRATE BAPTISM?

a) 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 the new year begins)
- Feast of the Lord's Baptism
- Easter Day
- All the Sundays of the Easter season (a period of seven weeks)

- The feast of All Saints (November 1)
- Feast of Christ the King (the last Sunday in November)

b) Except in an emergency, Baptism is **not** celebrated during Lent, Holy Week and the Solemn Triduum (from Ash Wednesday until Easter)

SPONSORS AND GODPARENTS?

a) 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 in that way. Godparents, more properly called Sponsors, represent the whole Catholic community and pledge their support as the child grows in faith. Generally there are two Sponsors. Some cultures include a variety of other sponsors as part of the celebration of Baptism.

b) The church has some *preconditions* about Godparents. These include:

- 1) You must designate them and they must be willing to assist your child in leading a Christian life.
- 2) They must be Catholics who are baptized and who have received the other sacraments of initiation (Confirmation and Eucharist).
- 3) 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.
- 4) If they are not from the Belmont parish, they must present a Sponsor Certificate from their home parish that affirms these above preconditions.
- 5) They must be able to answer "yes" to the Church's question at Baptism that asks them if they are "ready to help the parents of this child in their duty as Christian parents?"

c) While those who are not Catholic cannot serve as Sponsors, they may stand at Baptism (with at least one other Sponsor as described above) as a Christian Witness. While not required to certify so in the same way as noted above, they are to fulfill two basic criteria:

- 1) Be baptized and practicing as a member of their particular Christian church community.
- 2) 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."

d) Catholics who are not practicing the faith and cannot fulfill the criteria listed above in section (b) cannot serve as Christian Witnesses either.

e) Because of the intimate connection of assisting parents in their role as **Christian** parents, non-Christians cannot stand as Sponsors or Witnesses.

f) 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.

g) 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 the 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?

a) Baptismal Preparation Programs are offered on a regular schedule by the parish, usually every other month. Information concerning the next date can be found in the parish bulletin or you can call the church office (825 9600) for details. Both parents should attend this session. If sponsors are close by, then they should attend as well.

b) At the Preparation Program an Information Sheet will be distributed for you to complete. This sheet will also give you the opportunity to select a date and a Mass time for the baptism. It will be confirmed against the parish calendar as quickly as possible. If after completing this form you find yourself in need of making some changes, just ask us. We will always try to accommodate you.

c) 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 poncho-like white garment for the occasion. The parish also will provide the baptismal candle and will issue a certificate to you within two weeks of the celebration of Baptism.

ANY OTHER IMPORTANT INFORMATION?

a) In a situation where spouses might be legally 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 for this or any other sacrament of initiation. If there is not agreement, the church is not free to celebrate the sacrament.

b) For children who are six years old or older, there is a different set of requirements for preparation and celebration of the sacraments. Please refer to the appropriate leaflet that describes the full initiation process for "Children of Catechetical Age."