

PREPARATION FOR INFANT BAPTISM

When an infant is baptized, it is an occasion for all parish members to recognize the giftedness and call of their own Baptism. This time provides an opportunity to catechize parents and parishioners about their responsibility as a living, worshipping community into which the child is being initiated. The People of God, the Church made present in the local community, has an important role to play in the baptism of children. The Church has the opportunity "to encourage the parents and godparents of infants to reexamine the meaning of the Christian message in their own lives." (National Directory for Catechesis p. 120) Parishes should present catechesis for the Sacrament of Baptism that "is the foundation of the Christian life because it is the journey into Christ's death and Resurrection, which is the foundation of our hope." (NDC p.121) Catechesis should "include a thorough explanation of the Rite of Baptism together with the fundamental signs and symbols that it employs: immersion in or the pouring of water, the words of the Trinitarian formula, and the anointing with oil." (NDC p. 122) For comprehensive information on catechesis for the Sacrament of Baptism please refer to the *National Directory for Catechesis* pp. 120-122.

Before and after the celebration of the sacrament, the child has a right to the love and help of the community. During the rite, in addition to the ways of congregational participation mentioned in the general introduction, the community exercises its duty when it expresses its assent together with the celebrant after the profession of faith by the parents and godparents. In this way it is clear that the faith in which the children are baptized is not the private possession of the individual family, but it is the common treasure of the whole Church of Christ. (*Rite of Baptism for Children*, Introduction, #4)

Parents have primary responsibility for the faith life of their children. We read in the Preface of the Second Vatican Council's *Declaration on Christian Education*:

"As it is the parents who have given life to their children, on them lies the gravest obligation of educating their family. They must therefore be recognized as being primarily and principally responsible for their education. The role of parents in education is of such importance that it is almost impossible to provide an adequate substitute. It is therefore the duty of parents to create a family atmosphere inspired by love and devotion to God and their fellow-men which will promote an integrated, personal and social education of their children. The family is the principal school of the social virtues which are necessary to every society. It is therefore above all in the Christian family, inspired by the grace and the responsibility of the Sacrament of Matrimony, that children should be taught to know and worship God and to love their neighbor, in accordance with the faith which they have received in earliest infancy in the Sacrament of Baptism. (#3)

It is essential that parents and sponsors be supported in their efforts by being adequately informed about their responsibilities. Whatever form the education takes, (instruction, video, printed material, etc.) it should be theologically sound and adapted to the intellectual and cultural needs of the parents or those bringing a child for Baptism and to living the faith. Such materials may be obtained through the Office of Evangelization and Catechesis.

Godparents are to be chosen carefully. They are to be firm believers ready, willing and able to assist the newly baptized on the journey of Christian faith. They are to be suitably instructed on the meaning of this sacrament and the obligations attached to it.

In keeping with Canon 873:

- Only one godparent or sponsor is needed.
- The sponsor can be a man or woman.
- If two sponsors are desired one must be a man (godfather) and the other a woman (godmother).

According to Canon 874, the sponsor:

- Must have completed the sixteenth year. Exceptions can be made for a just cause determined by the pastor.
- Is a Catholic who is confirmed, has received Eucharist and is living a life in harmony with the faith. The person may not be bound by any canonical penalty legitimately imposed or declared.
- May not be the mother or father of the one to be baptized.

A baptized person who belongs to a non-Catholic ecclesial community may be admitted as a witness to Baptism together with a Catholic who would be the sponsor.

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