



INFANT BAPTISM POLICY

Revised March 2012

ROMAN CATHOLIC PARISHES OF LABRADOR WEST

This policy was adopted with input from our Pastors, Baptism Preparation Team and Pastoral Team members, adhering to the guidelines established by Canon Law of the Roman Catholic Church.

A new baby in the family! How exciting! There are many things to consider at this joyous time in your family's life. Baptism is the primary spiritual consideration for Christians of the Roman Catholic faith. We hope that this brochure will be helpful in your decision making.

Q. I want to have my baby baptized in the Roman Catholic Church. What is the first step?

A. The first step is to call the parish office at 709-944-2289 or fill out an online form to register for Baptism Preparation. Our parish website is www.labcitybasilica.catholicweb.com We encourage you to have your child baptized within the first few weeks after birth.

Q. What is involved in Baptism Preparation?

A. When families desire to have their child welcomed into the faith community through the sacrament of Baptism, a period of preparation is required to familiarize them with the ceremony of Baptism as well as the commitment they are undertaking to raise their child in the Roman Catholic faith. Parents and godparents are required to attend Baptism Preparation. Call the parish office to find out the next scheduled date. (Our sessions begin with Mass at 10:00 a.m. on Sunday and continue after Mass.)

As a follow-up to Baptism Preparation, one of our priests or a member of the Pastoral Team will meet with both parents for an informal interview and discussion prior to the Baptism.

*The whole process takes a minimum of four weeks so it would be a good idea to start it before the baby is born. Baptism preparation is offered approximately once per month from September to June. **Please note: there are no summer sessions***

Q. When does Baptism take place?

A. Baptisms are scheduled within Mass usually once per month. (This is subject to change depending on parish activities or the availability of a priest.) In the case of emergency, the

baptism should not be delayed. Please contact the priest or parish office (944-2289) if your child is gravely ill.

Q. Can we have a private Baptism?

A. The norm is to have a communal Baptism celebration. The sacrament of Baptism is the first of the sacraments of initiation into the Roman Catholic faith. This community would like to welcome you and to share in the privilege of raising your child in the faith. As such, the community is very much a part of this celebration.

Q. Can our baby have more than two godparents? Can we have two godfathers or godmothers instead of a godmother and a godfather?

*A. The role of the godparents is purely a religious one. They are to accompany the child in the development of his/her faith. Canon 873 of the Code of Canon Law states that there will be **only one godfather or only one godmother; or a godfather and a godmother.** By specifying this, the analogy is made between natural parenthood and spiritual parenthood.*

Q. Who can be godparents?

A. Since the godparents' role is to assist the parents in raising the child as a Catholic, their selection is a very important decision. Canon

874 states that to serve as a godfather or a godmother, the following conditions **must** be met:

- To have been chosen and to have the aptitudes and the intention to serve in the function of godparent
- To be at least 16 years of age
- To be a **Catholic who has completed the Christian initiation (Baptism, Confirmation and Eucharist)** and who lives a life coherent with the faith.
- To be free from any canonical penalty imposed or declared
- To be neither the father nor the mother of the baptized

A **baptized** non-Catholic could serve with a Catholic godparent but will act as a * Christian witness to the baptism

*(meaning there would be one sponsor listed in the parish register and on the Baptism certificate; the other person would be listed as Christian witness)

Q. Can members of all Christian denominations serve as a Christian witness along with a Catholic godparent (sponsor)?

A. No. Only members of certain denominations may serve as Christian witnesses to a Catholic baptism – eg. Anglican, United, and others.

*These denominations believe in baptism conferred with flowing water accompanied by the Trinitarian formula – in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit. **If you are unsure about your desired sponsors' religious eligibility please contact the parish office.***

Q. Is there anything else required of godparents prior to the Baptism?

A. Yes. By accepting the honour of being a godparent, they are consciously making a commitment to help you raise your child as a Catholic, so it is only fitting that we should help prepare them for this role. At least one godparent must attend a Baptism Preparation Session – either with you or at another time before the Baptism takes place. If they are from another parish, we would require a letter from their pastor stating that they have fulfilled this requirement. Also, Catholic godparents should provide a recent copy of their own Baptismal certificate indicating a notation of Confirmation. A Christian witness should provide a copy of his/her Baptism certificate.

Q. I am currently residing in another parish, but would like to have my baby baptized at Basilica of Our Lady of Perpetual Help, Labrador City or Our Lady of the Assumption, Wabush. What is required to make this happen?

A. *We require a letter from your parish of residence stating: (a) you have attended a Baptism Preparation session (b) your pastor grants permission for your child to be baptized in this parish. The requirements for godparents as previously indicated also apply.*

Q. Can we have proxies for our godparents?

A. *Yes; however, it is advisable that only one actual godparent be replaced at the ceremony by a proxy. If the godparent cannot be present for the Baptism, he or she may appoint another person to serve as proxy. It is not the parents who appoint a stand-in for their chosen godparent. The real godparent must give consent to the proxy; as proxies are merely stand-ins for the godparent they are listed as such in the parish register but the actual godparent will be identified as the sponsor.*

Q. Are we allowed to take pictures during the Baptism?

A. *Yes, but they should be limited to one designated photographer per family during the celebration of the sacrament of Baptism and should also be taken from a discreet distance. Following the ceremony, you may take other pictures with the priest, family members, etc. for a period of approximately 15 minutes. **Due to the sanctity of the altar and its immediate surroundings, we ask that you respect***

and reverence this area by not going beyond the sanctuary steps to take pictures. Videos of the ceremony should also be limited and discreet.

Our aim is to provide the best possible understanding of the sacrament of Baptism for families and godparents, and to help you make this a truly spiritual experience of God's love. We wish you joy and blessings as you assume your new role as Christian guardians of the faith for your child.

“Let the little children come to me; do not stop them.” Mark 10:14

GODPARENTS AND SPONSORS

What is expected of them today?

By Fr. William F. Wegher

Have you ever wondered why some people have very involved godparents..., while others don't even know theirs? Perhaps part of the problem is that many godparents... were chosen for the wrong reasons, or because those same people don't really know what they're supposed to do! Do you? This update will help us to better understand these roles.

Most of us at some point have to choose a godparent for our children, but how do we choose these people? Or you yourself might someday be asked to be a godparent. What is expected of a godparent today?

Take for example, Julie and John, a couple who have just had their first child. They're really into their Roman Catholic faith, so they're excited to have their baby baptized. A big family celebration is planned, but John and Julie are wondering about godparents. What about John's sister and her husband who helped Julie out so much during her pregnancy? It would be a great way to thank them – but they don't practice their faith. Or how about Julie's best friend, Mary, who is actively involved in the Church, even though Mary's husband is a devout practising Protestant? Will this be all right with the Church?

FOR PARENTS

How to choose godparents

This is a big day for your family, and you want to do the right thing. Choosing godparents is a decision not to be taken lightly. Too often parents want to honor a special friend, repay a favour, or encourage a non-relative to have a closer relationship with their child. While all of these motives are well intentioned, they are not ideal. If you want to be happy about your decision, consider the following:

- *Above all, a godparent serves a special role for the child about to be baptized. Godparents are to represent the Christian Catholic community, the Church. They are to assist in the preparation for Baptism and to be supportive afterwards. Godparents are to assist the child's parents in raising their child in our Roman Catholic faith, so*

that the child may profess and live it as an adult.

Thus, if we remember a few basic things about Baptism – it gives a person a new and special status as a child of God and it makes a person a member of the Body of Christ, the Church – then what you are looking for are godparents who can truly represent that Christian community. Basically this means you want at least one active and committed Roman Catholic. The *Catechism of the Catholic Church* states “...the godfather and godmother... must be firm believers, able and ready to help the newly baptized ... on the road of Christian life” (#1255). This is the Church’s way of saying that being a godparent is truly a ministry in the Church, not simply an honor. In fact, the whole Church community or parish bears some responsibility for the development and nurturing of the grace given your child at Baptism.

What does this mean for our friends John and Julie that we mentioned above? As much as Julie and John appreciate all the help that John’s sister and brother-in-law have given them, this is not a good motive for having them be godparents. Rather, John and Julie should choose a firm believer, someone who is truly committed to the Roman Catholic faith in which their new baby will be baptized. Thus, Julie’s best friend, Mary, so active in her faith, is a perfect choice. But what about Mary’s husband who is not Catholic, since John and Julie want a couple to be godparents? The Church has a solution for this, too.

Since Mary is a practicing Catholic, and a perfect choice as a godmother, she will be the officially designated *godparent*, while her husband – a great Christian and committed to his own faith – can serve as an official Christian witness. This is fully in line with Canon Law (see # 874). Only one *godparent* is necessary, although both a godfather and a godmother are preferred. So while Mary’s husband – a *witness* – will set an example, it will be Mary’s duty as *godmother* to share specifics of the Catholic faith with her godchild.

To ensure that a godparent is capable of this, Church law also insists that *this person be at least 16 years old* (for maturity’s sake), *fully initiated* (having received Confirmation and Eucharist), *be someone other than the legal parents and one who leads a life in harmony with the Church.*

All this may seem like quite a bit, but the purpose is to ensure that the rich and beautiful faith of the Church is passed on to your child in the most loving and authentic way possible. Hopefully you know by now that the task of choosing godparents is one which should be performed with much prayer, careful thought and with greatest concern for the precious spiritual life of your child.

FOR GODPARENTS

Be at your best

If you think that the role of parents in *choosing* godparents is a serious one, so is the role of *being* a godparent. Being chosen is an honor, and says a lot about the parents' perception of you. Consider the investment of time and energy it ..require(s)...so remember not to rush into anything too quickly here! Make sure that you have the *time*, the *willingness*, and the *faith* to live out this *sacred* vocation.

A vocation is a calling, an appeal to live something out in your life. These parents are calling you to be something special for their child: to set an example, help teach their child about the Catholic faith, have a lifelong relationship with prayer, faith sharing and love. Before accepting this invitation, take some time to pray and reflect on your ability to do this.

Prepare with the parents. In most parishes, the parents will be required to attend a Baptism preparation class to reflect on many of the things mentioned in this article. If you're able, you should be there, too. Your willingness to be with the parents now says a lot about your willingness to be present to your godchild in the future.

Be there on the “big day”. Be available for the Baptism ceremony. This may even mean missing less important events. Besides saying, “Yes” or “We are” when the priest asks if you are ready to assist the parents in raising the child in the practice of the faith, you will have the opportunity to (help) clothe the child in the white garment, and to light

the baptismal candle. Take seriously the profound yet beautiful words: “Parents and godparents, this light has been entrusted to you to be kept burning brightly.”

Don’t forget the “big day”. Hopefully, you will always remember your godchild’s biological birthday, but don’t forget this “birthday” into the Body of Christ. Make a phone call or send a card. Better yet, suggest having a get-together to honor this day each year. Bring out and light the baptismal candle, recalling the Light of Christ burning in the heart and soul of your godchild. Or, create a photo album to be shared with your godchild when he or she gets older.

Pray for your godchild. Keep your godchild in your daily prayers. The constant prayer of godparents never hurt anyone! On occasion, take time to celebrate Eucharist together, for it is, after all, the source and summit of our faith lives.

Share the faith that’s been shared with you. When your godchild is young, introduce him or her to a children’s edition of the Bible. Teach about his or her patron or name saint. Attend and offer encouragement at the child’s first Communion or share your own faith story as our godchild approaches Confirmation..... Remember, being a godparent is about more than an infant Baptism ceremony!

