

**These norms are intended to supplement
the Diocese of Austin Pastoral Manual,
which remains authoritative
for the Diocese.**

SUPPLEMENTARY NORMS

Infant Baptism

1. Through the sacrament of Baptism, we are washed clean of sin, born again as sons and daughters of God, configured to Christ the Savior and incorporated in his body, the Church. Because of this, Baptism is not only necessary for salvation but it stands as the gateway to the reception of the other sacraments (see c. 849).
2. Baptism is validly conferred only by a washing in real water with the proper form of words (c. 849). No innovations may take place with regard to the form and matter of the sacrament. Baptism is always to be administered according to the rite contained in the approved liturgical texts. In urgent necessity, only those elements of the rite required for the valid conferral of the sacrament may be used (c. 850). In all cases, for the sake of validity the same minister who pours the water must also speak the words of the formula of Baptism.
3. Given the fundamental importance of Baptism for salvation, the Church obliges parents to seek the Baptism of their child within the first few weeks after the birth of the child (c. 867 §1).

For their part, pastors of souls are to welcome parents with open arms. In cases where the parents are not 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.

The mere fact that parents do not regularly practice their faith is not in itself a certain indication that the child will not be brought up in the Catholic faith. Rather, in such cases the necessary period of preparation for Baptism should include pastoral advice, instruction, and communal prayer (c. 851 §2) that encourage the parents in a special way to a stronger witness of their faith to the newly baptized child.

4. In the rare instance when Baptism must truly be deferred, the reason for the deferral must be explained to the parents in a pastorally sensitive way that does not deter them from seeking to remove the obstacles that stand in the way of the immediate Baptism of their child. Means must then be made available to the parents to assist them with addressing any concerns. No one should refrain from seeking Baptism due to negligence or neglect on the part of the Church's ministers.

5. Baptisms are to be celebrated in the parish church and not in private homes (c. 860 §1) or hospitals (c.860 §2) unless permission to the contrary has been given by the bishop or a case of urgent necessity presents itself. Such permission will be given only when serious cause justifies it.
6. All Christ's faithful who reside within the territorial boundaries of a parish are parishioners of that parish with all rights and obligations that flow from that (c. 518). Formal registration as a parishioner is encouraged as a means of accounting for the presence of the faithful in a parish. However, formal registration may never be required as a prerequisite for the faithful to share in the sacramental life of the Church in their local parish. Parishioners of a parish also include those members of Christ's faithful who reside outside the territorial boundaries but have formally registered as parishioners. The fact that members of the faithful belong to a certain parish by reason of territorial parish boundaries does not place an obstacle to their choosing to enroll as a parishioner in another parish as well.

On a regular, periodic basis the Diocese will coordinate a diocesan census and will work with parishes to update this list of active parishioners.

In the case of the Baptism of a child from within the territory of the parish, Baptism is not to be denied or even postponed because the parents are "not registered" in the parish or because they have not met other standards established by the parish, such as attendance at Mass in the parish for a certain number of weeks.

7. Except in cases of necessity, it is not lawful for anyone to confer Baptism outside of his own territory, not even on his own subjects, without due permission first having been received from the pastor of the parish where the Baptism will take place or of the bishop of that diocese (see c. 862). Moreover, if a Baptism is to take place in a pastor's own territory, but of those who are not parishioners, written permission of the pastor of the parish in which they reside or in which they are formally registered is required as a sign of courtesy to their proper pastor.
8. The sacraments of the Church were instituted by Christ the Lord as signs and means by which God is worshipped, our faith is expressed and strengthened, and the salvation of the faithful is brought about (c. 840). In light of this, the Church insists most strongly that financial obstacles must never be placed in the way of the faithful receiving the sacraments. Indeed, for a priest or deacon to confer a sacrament only in return for financial gain is a grave offense (c. 1380). Thus, ecclesiastical law stipulates that, "The minister is to seek nothing for the administration of the sacraments beyond the offerings defined by competent authority, always taking care that the needy are not deprived of the assistance of the sacraments because of poverty (c.848)."

In the Diocese of Austin, no fee may be required of the faithful for the administration of the sacrament of Baptism. The faithful are free to offer a donation to the Church and/or a personal gift to the minister of the sacrament. If it is not clearly indicated that the gift is meant for the personal use of the

minister, it should be given to the parish fund instead (c. 1267 §1). Parents can be asked to contribute to the costs of books or materials used in the course of preparation for reception of the sacrament if those materials then belong to them. However, no registration fee may be charged for the class.

The poor among Christ's faithful must never feel reluctant or ashamed to approach the Church for sacramental grace because of a difficulty with paying fees. Nor should excessive or overly intrusive means be established to determine whether or not the faithful are able to pay fees.

9. Parents are to participate in a program preparing them for the sacrament of Baptism which must include the following: Theology of Baptism/Sacraments of Initiation, Role of parents and godparents in the faith formation of the child, the responsibility of the baptized person in living a life of faith, explanation of the Rite of Baptism (see pastoral manual).

Unless urgent necessity required otherwise, the preparation sessions should be no less than a single instruction for 3 hours and no more than 4 sessions of reasonable length. Consideration for providing an abbreviated program should be given to parents who are requesting Baptisms for their second and subsequent children and who have already attended a preparation program. Godparents may be required to participate in a seminar which will explain their duties as godparents.

10. Only one godparent (sponsor) is required for Baptism (c. 873). If two sponsors are chosen, one of each gender must be selected. To be qualified to serve as a sponsor, a person must (c. 874):

- Be appointed as such by the appropriate person or minister;
- As a rule, be not less than sixteen years of age;
- Be a Catholic who has received First Communion and the Sacrament of Confirmation, and who lives a life of faith befitting the role of sponsor;
- Not labor under any canonical penalties;
- Not be the mother or father of the one to be baptized.

It should also be noted that, "A baptized person who belongs to a non-Catholic ecclesial community is not to participate except together with a Catholic sponsor and then only as a witness of the Baptism." (c. 874 §2). In this case, their role as "witness" should be specified in the baptismal record.

In the Diocese of Austin, moreover, a Catholic who are to serve as baptismal sponsors are to sign the "Covenant Form" testifying that they are Catholics in good standing with the Church, fully initiated into the Church, and if applicable, in a marriage recognized by the Church.

11. Care should be given that the information on the baptismal certificate (names, date of birth, etc.) accurately reflects the birth certificate.