

BAPTISM: BACK TO THE BEGINNING

When we are baptized as infants, the priest or deacon takes a moment at the end of the Rite to bless the parents of the newly baptized.

He first blesses the mother, who holds the child in her arms, then the father, and, lastly, the entire assembly with these words:

To the mother, he prays: "God the Father, through his Son, the Virgin Mary's child, has brought joy to all Christian mothers, as they see the hope of eternal life shine on their children. May he bless the mother of this child. She now thanks God for the gift of her child. May she be one with him (her) in thanking him forever in heaven, in Christ Jesus our Lord."

He then turns to the father: "God is the giver of all life, human and divine. May he bless the father of this child. He and his wife will be the first teachers of their child in the ways of faith. May they be also the best of teachers, bearing witness to the faith by what they say and do, in Christ Jesus our Lord."

First Teachers

Parents are the *first teachers* of the faith. As we reimagine faith formation, we must ask ourselves if we are giving these parents the tools necessary for being *first teachers*.

If the answer is no, let us begin by reimagining this important touchstone with families.



Indicators for Effective Baptismal Preparation (for infant baptism)

(National Directory for Catechesis (NDC), 36.A.1)

- We provide catechesis to both the parents and godparents preparing for the Baptism of infants.
- We teach parents and godparents that baptism is the basis for the whole Christian life.
- We provide parents and godparents with resources for helping raise their children in the Catholic Church.
- We welcome the newly baptized and their families into the parish community.
- We involve parents and children in the parish life after their baptism by connecting them with other members of the community.
- We help godparents understand their role in the life of the baptized.
- We recognize the need for support before, during, and after the Sacrament of Baptism within the larger community and we work intentionally to make sure this happens.

The Godparent Question

The following is taken from the General Introduction of the Rite of Christian Initiation, paragraphs 8-10

It is a very ancient custom of the Church that an adult is not admitted to baptism without a godparent, a member of the Christian community who will assist him at least in the final preparation for baptism and after baptism will help him persevere in the faith and in his or her life as a Christian.

In the baptism of children too, the godparent should be present to be added spiritually to the immediate family of the one to be baptized and to represent Mother Church. As occasion offers, he or she will be ready to help the parents bring up their child to profess the faith and to show this by living it.

At least in the final rites of the catechumenate and in the actual celebration of baptism, the godparent is present to testify to the faith of the adult candidate or, together with the parents, to profess the Church's faith, in which the child is being baptized.

Pastors of souls should therefore see to it that the godparent, chosen by the catechumen or by the family, is qualified to carry out his proper liturgical functions as specified above. The godparent should:

- be mature enough to undertake this responsibility,
- have received the three sacraments of initiation, baptism, confirmation, and the Eucharist;
- be a member of the Catholic Church, canonically free to carry out this office. A baptized and believing Christian from a separated church or community may act as a godparent or Christian witness along with a Catholic godparent, at the request of the parents and in accordance with the norms for various ecumenical cases.

Recommendations for Effective Baptismal Preparation (for infant baptism)

Invite couples into the greater parish community

- Announce the names of the newly baptized in the bulletin and on the parish website
- Baptize within Mass, whenever possible, to engage the wider community and introduce new families
- Activities tailored to families with young children (parish social events, Children's liturgies, spiritual events with babysitting, etc.)
- Prayer partners for families of newly baptized child
- Encourage parish staff to display their baptismal certificates as a sign of that event which empowers and calls them into ministry

Help families to connect with other families in parish

- Invite families of those newly baptized to gather once or twice each year
- Find or form opportunities for young families to meet and interact with couples who are at same stage in their life
- Family coffee hour or brunch
- Holy hour in evening with babysitting
- Mom and Dad night out (parish event with babysitting) to let parents socialize

Partner parents of newly baptized with mentor families

- Various stages of family life and number of children
- Dialogue regarding common family problems, how they overcame struggles, real life problems, etc.

Spiritually renew each individual of the couple as well as the couple together

- Provide opportunities for spiritual renewal for the couple individually such as a men's group or women's group
- Re-invigorating their relationship as husband and wife – revisiting marriage preparation now that their family dynamic has changed

Support for families before baptism of their child

- Material and spiritual support for parents after birth of a child
- Prepare and deliver meals
- Offer to help with children at Mass
- Investigate ways to help with transportation to Mass
- Assisting with mother's and baby's needs at Mass (seating to nurse a baby, changing area, toddler friendly books, etc.)

Support for families after baptism of their child

- Activities, resources, prayer opportunities for couple prayer as well as activities to enrich the husband's and wife's personal spirituality
- Establish a team of volunteers to follow up at three-, six-, nine-, and twelve-month intervals to offer prayerful support to the parents of newly baptized
- Marriage enrichment activities (date nights, retreats, service work, etc.) – ideally affordable and with childcare factored in
- Provide each family of newly baptized a symbol of our faith to serve as a silent homily in the home
- Revisiting the topic of natural family planning

Use media and technology to keep them informed and connected

- Provide electronic resources about parenting, sharing faith, and developing a language of faithfulness in the home
- Text alerts with prayers, articles, or short reflections
- Periodic surveys to see their current needs
- Ability to opt into other groups (working parents, stay at home parents, parents of a child with special needs, parents of a school-aged child, etc.) as they move into those phases

Effectively communicate with couples on a regular basis

- Social media
- Website
- Email/text blasts

“It can be said that children at birth are like a mass of flesh. Their mind does not emerge from the matter in them except with time and becomes refined only little by little. As an unavoidable consequence, (they) ... are not yet able by themselves to understand easily the Christian truths and maxims. They need good guides and visible angels to help them learn these things. (St. John Baptist de La Salle, Meditations For The Time Of Retreat, 197.1)

Catechesis in Special Situations

(National Directory for Catechesis (NDC), 50)

The community of the baptized comprises many different groups of believers, each of whom have the right to a sound and adequate catechesis. Some of the groups in special situations for whom catechetical programs might be developed in certain circumstances include (but are not limited to) the marginalized (e.g., immigrants, refugees, the chronically ill, prisoners), college students, young adults, military personnel, unwed parents, married couples (with or without children), couples in mixed marriages, the divorced, the divorced and remarried, the widowed, same-sex partners, and so forth. Catechetical programs for these groups can be adapted to the specific needs of those being catechized.