



Essential Quick Guide for Catechists to

Baptismal Preparation

Brief introduction to Baptism:

The sacrament in which, by pouring water upon a person or immersing them in water, and using the words, "I baptise you in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit," the one baptised is cleansed of original sin and (in the case of one who has reached the age of reason) of particular sin; he is incorporated into Christ and made a member of His Body the Church; he is infused with sanctifying grace and receives the theological virtues of faith, hope and charity, and the gifts of the Holy Spirit; and this enables him to receive the other sacraments effectively. The minister of Baptism is ordinarily a bishop, priest or deacon, but in an emergency anyone can baptise validly.

If it is impossible for an individual to receive the baptism of water, the same benefits can be supplied by "baptism of blood" (whereby martyrdom is suffered for the Catholic Faith or for some virtue) or by "baptism of desire" (whereby a person has perfect contrition and at least the implicit intention of fulfilling God's will for man's salvation).

Baptism in Scripture:

Matt. 28:19-20 - Jesus commands the apostles to baptise all people "in the name of the Father, Son and Holy Spirit."

Acts 2:38 - Peter commands people to repent and be baptised in the name of Jesus Christ

Acts 22:16 - Ananias tells Saul, "arise and be baptised, and wash away your sins."

Ezek. 36:25-27 - the Lord promises He will sprinkle us with water to cleanse us from sin and give us a new heart and spirit. Paul refers to this verse in **Heb. 10:22**, where the author writes, "with our hearts sprinkled clean" - purifying the conscience (the interior disposition of a person).

Gal. 3:27 - whoever is baptised in Christ puts on Christ.

Rom. 6:4 - in baptism, we actually die with Christ so that we, like Him, might be raised to newness of life.

Titus 3:5-7 - "He saved us by the washing of regeneration and renewal in the Holy Spirit, which He poured out on us richly through Jesus Christ, so that we might be justified by His grace and become heirs of eternal life."

Matt. 9:2; Mark 2:3-5 - the faith of those who brought in the paralytic cured the paralytic's sins. This is an example of the forgiveness of sins based on another's faith, just like infant baptism. The infant child is forgiven of sin based on the parents' faith.

Baptism in the Catechism:

CCC 1213 Holy Baptism is the basis of the whole Christian life, the gateway to life in the Spirit, and the door which gives access to the other sacraments. Through Baptism we are freed from sin and reborn as children of God; we become members of Christ, are incorporated into the Church and made sharers in her mission: "Baptism is the sacrament of regeneration through water and in the word.

1214 This sacrament is called *Baptism*, after the central rite by which it is carried out: to baptise (Greek *baptizein*) means to "plunge" or "immerse"; the "plunge" into the water symbolizes the

catechumen's burial into Christ's death, from which he rises up by resurrection with him, as "a new creature."

1215 This sacrament is also called "*the washing of regeneration and renewal by the Holy Spirit*," for it signifies and actually brings about the birth of water and the Spirit without which no one "can enter the kingdom of God."

1216 "This bath is called *enlightenment*, because those who receive this [catechetical] instruction are enlightened in their understanding . . ." Having received in Baptism the Word, "the true light that enlightens every man," the person baptised has been "enlightened," he becomes a "son of light," indeed, he becomes "light" himself:

1234 The meaning and grace of the sacrament of Baptism are clearly seen in the rites of its celebration. By following the gestures and words of this celebration with attentive participation, the faithful are initiated into the riches this sacrament signifies and actually brings about in each newly baptised person.

1235 The *sign of the cross*, on the threshold of the celebration, marks with the imprint of Christ the one who is going to belong to him and signifies the grace of the redemption Christ won for us by his cross.

1236 The proclamation of the Word of God enlightens the candidates and the assembly with the revealed truth and elicits the response of faith, which is inseparable from Baptism. Indeed Baptism is "the sacrament of faith" in a particular way, since it is the sacramental entry into the life of faith.

1237 Since Baptism signifies liberation from sin and from its instigator the devil, one or more *exorcisms* are pronounced over the candidate. The celebrant then anoints him with the oil of catechumens, or lays his hands on him, and he explicitly renounces Satan. Thus prepared, he is able to *confess the faith of the Church*, to which he will be "entrusted" by Baptism.

1238 The *baptismal water* is consecrated by a prayer of epiclesis (either at this moment or at the Easter Vigil). The Church asks God that through his Son the power of the Holy Spirit may be sent upon the water, so that those who will be baptised in it may be "born of water and the Spirit."

1239 The *essential rite* of the sacrament follows: *Baptism* properly speaking. It signifies and actually brings about death to sin and entry into the life of the Most Holy Trinity through configuration to the Paschal mystery of Christ. Baptism is performed in the most expressive way by triple immersion in the baptismal water. However, from ancient times it has also been able to be conferred by pouring the water three times over the candidate's head.

1240 In the Latin Church this triple infusion is accompanied by the minister's words: "N., I baptise you in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit." In the Eastern liturgies the catechumen turns toward the East and the priest says: "The servant of God, N., is baptised in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit." At the invocation of each person of the Most Holy Trinity, the priest immerses the candidate in the water and raises him up again.

1241 The *anointing with sacred chrism*, perfumed oil consecrated by the bishop, signifies the gift of the Holy Spirit to the newly baptised, who has become a Christian, that is, one "anointed" by the Holy Spirit, incorporated into Christ who is anointed priest, prophet, and king.

1242 In the liturgy of the Eastern Churches, the post-baptismal anointing is the sacrament of Chrismation (Confirmation). In the Roman liturgy the post-baptismal anointing announces a second anointing with sacred chrism to be conferred later by the bishop Confirmation, which will as it were "confirm" and complete the baptismal anointing.

1243 The white garment symbolizes that the person baptised has "put on Christ," has risen with Christ. The *candle*, lit from the Easter candle, signifies that Christ has enlightened the neophyte. In him the baptised are "the light of the world."

The newly baptised is now, in the only Son, a child of God entitled to say the prayer of the children of God: "Our Father."

1245 The *solemn blessing* concludes the celebration of Baptism. At the Baptism of newborns the blessing of the mother occupies a special place.

IN BRIEF

1275 Christian initiation is accomplished by three sacraments together: Baptism which is the beginning of new life; Confirmation which is its strengthening; and the Eucharist which nourishes the disciple with Christ's Body and Blood for his transformation in Christ.

1276 "Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you" (Mt 28:19-20).

1277 Baptism is birth into the new life in Christ. In accordance with the Lord's will, it is necessary for salvation, as is the Church herself, which we enter by Baptism.

1278 The essential rite of Baptism consists in immersing the candidate in water or pouring water on his head, while pronouncing the invocation of the Most Holy Trinity: the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit.

1279 The fruit of Baptism, or baptismal grace, is a rich reality that includes forgiveness of original sin and all personal sins, birth into the new life by which man becomes an adoptive son of the Father, a member of Christ and a temple of the Holy Spirit. By this very fact the person baptised is incorporated into the Church, the Body of Christ, and made a sharer in the priesthood of Christ.

1280 Baptism imprints on the soul an indelible spiritual sign, the character, which consecrates the baptised person for Christian worship. Because of the character Baptism cannot be repeated

1281 Those who die for the faith, those who are catechumens, and all those who, without knowing of the Church but acting under the inspiration of grace, seek God sincerely and strive to fulfill his will, can be saved even if they have not been baptised.

1282 Since the earliest times, Baptism has been administered to children, for it is a grace and a gift of God that does not presuppose any human merit; children are baptised in the faith of the Church. Entry into Christian life gives access to true freedom.

Baptism in Canon Law:

Canon Law is the body of laws and regulations that government the Catholic Church and all its members.

Can. 849 Baptism, the gateway to the Sacraments, is necessary for salvation, either by actual reception or at least by desire. By it people are freed from sins, are born again as children of God and, made like to Christ by an indelible character, are incorporated into the Church. It is validly conferred only by a washing in real water with the proper form of words.

Can. 850 Baptism is administered according to the rite prescribed in the approved liturgical books, except in a case of urgent necessity when only those elements which are required for the validity of the Sacrament must be observed.

Can. 851 The celebration of baptism should be properly prepared. Accordingly:

1° an adult who intends to receive baptism is to be admitted to the catechumenate and, as far as possible, brought through the various stages to sacramental initiation, in accordance with the rite

of initiation as adapted by the Bishops' Conference and with the particular norms issued by it; and

2° the parents of a child who is to be baptised, and those who are to undertake the office of sponsors, are to be suitably instructed on the meaning of this Sacrament and the obligations attaching to it.

The parish priest is to see to it that either he or others duly prepare the parents, by means of pastoral advice and indeed by prayer together; a number of families might be brought together for this purpose and, where possible, each family visited.

Can. 854 Baptism is to be conferred either by immersion or by pouring, in accordance with the provisions of the Bishops' Conference.

Can. 855 Parents, sponsors and parish priests are to take care that a name is not given which is foreign to Christian sentiment.

Can. 856 Though baptism may be celebrated on any day, it is recommended that normally it be celebrated on a Sunday or, if possible, on the vigil of Easter.

Can 857 §1 Apart from a case of necessity, the proper place for baptism is a church or an oratory.

Can. 868 §1 For an infant to be baptised lawfully, it is required:

1° that the parents, or at least one of them, or the person who lawfully holds their place, give their consent;

2° that there be a well-founded hope that the child will be brought up in the Catholic religion. If such hope is truly lacking, the baptism is, in accordance with the provisions of particular law, to be deferred and the parents advised of the reason for this.

Baptism and Church History:

- The word 'baptism' comes from the Greek word 'baptizein' meaning to dip or immerse.
- In the time of Jesus total immersion was carried out by some Jewish groups as a sign of ritual cleansing. One of these groups was the Essenes, of whom John the Baptist was thought to be a member.
- The last thing Jesus said to his apostles was to "go . . . And make disciples of all the nations baptising them..." **Mt. 18:19**
- The Acts of the Apostles, tells us this is what they did – beginning on the day Pentecost after Peter's address to the crowds. **Acts 2:37-41**
- It was adults who had expressed their faith in "Jesus as the Christ" who were baptised although there were some accounts of entire households such as the gaoler at Philippi **Acts 16:25-33** and the entire household of Lydia. **Acts 16:11-15**
- Baptism was a new beginning and baptism brought about a real change in people's lives. One example is that of Saul – who became Paul.
- As it grew, the Christian Church became a victim of persecution and hostility. A simple profession of faith in Jesus Christ no longer sufficed for those who wanted to become members of a Christian community – which was now keen to test the seriousness of those who were interested.
- First of all, people had to find a sponsor from the community who would present them for baptism after a period of preparation that lasted two to three years. In that time, the sponsor could ascertain whether the candidate was determined to change their way of life – hence their formation was more ethical than doctrinal.
- The third century document, *Apostolic Tradition of Hippolytus*, talks of this three-year period of preparation – but says it is not the time that is judged but the conduct.
- This time became known as the *catechumenate* and those wishing to join the Christian community were known as

catechumens – a Greek word meaning “instruction”.

- Thus, in the first 200 years of Christianity, things had changed. It was no longer baptism immediately after conversion. It took three years of preparation by members of the community.
- Baptism had also become an annual celebration – linked to Easter – thus strengthening the theological link with the idea of death and resurrection to new life through the sacrament.
- By the sixth century, the baptism of infants whose parents were Christians had become the norm. There was a shift, too, in the sacramental emphasis with baptism seen as the washing away of original sin and the promise of eternal life. The emphasis had moved away from the beginning of a new life in Christ.
- At the time, infant mortality was high, and bishops began to encourage parents not to wait for the Easter Vigil but to have their infants baptised very soon after birth to save them from dying still stained with original sin.
- The Second Vatican Council had an important effect on how the sacrament of baptism is viewed returning to St. Paul’s image of dying and rising with Christ through baptism – emphasising that, in baptism, we are implanted in the paschal mystery of Christ; we die with him, are buried with him, and we rise with him.

Essential elements of baptism preparation:

The preparation should include an explanation of the meaning of baptism and the responsibilities we undertake – or, in the case of parents preparing for their infant’s baptism, the responsibilities they undertake. And an explanation of the Rite of Baptism, its signs and symbols.

Baptism as the first of the three Sacraments of Initiation (Baptism, Confirmation, Eucharist)

Baptism as the beginning of initiation into individual faith and the faith of the community

Explanation of the Rite of Baptism

A. Reception and Name of the Child

Reason for choosing a Christian name

The Sign of the Cross, marking the child with the “imprint of Christ”

B. Request for Baptism and Promise of Parents

The faith of child depends on the faith and responsibility of parents and godparents, and also of the community

C. Celebration of God’s Word

The Word of God enlightens us, reveals the truth, is the source of faith

D. Exorcism & Anointing

The Church asks that the child be freed from the power of evil and filled with new life.

The anointing with the oil of catechumens on the breast is a sign of being strengthened by Christ’s power.

E. Blessing of Water

Water, often taken for granted is blessed and made holy. It washes clean, purifies from sin, is life-giving.

Water also can cause death by drowning, thus is symbolic of dying and rising in Christ

F. Renunciation of Sin & Profession of Faith by Parents & Godparents

They will profess what they believe as a reminder that they have been called to follow and give witness to Christ, particularly in the life of the child.

G. Baptism

Water is poured over the head three times to signify the Trinity, ‘I baptise you in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit.’

H. Anointing with Chrism

The child is anointed on the crown of the head with the oil of chrism, as specially chosen by God to be as Christ was anointed ‘Priest, Prophet and King.’

I. Clothing with White Garment

The white garment symbolises that the child has ‘put on Christ’. It is symbolic of new life in Christ, to be worn throughout our lives.

J. Presentation of the Lighted Candle

The candle is lit from the Paschal (Easter) candle, symbolic of the light of Christ, to shine forth in the life of the baptised.

K. Ephphetha – Prayer over Ears and Mouth

The senses are blessed so that the newly baptised might hear the word of God and speak it.

L. The Lord’s Prayer

The newly baptised now has the right to take part in the Eucharist and when old enough will receive Holy Communion from the altar. As a sign of this future event all say the Lord’s Prayer on behalf of the child.

M. The Blessing of the Parents

Blessings for the mother, then the father, then the whole assembly, reminding the parents that they are the ‘first and best teachers’ of the child. The prayers invite us to reflect on the importance of prayer – our conversation with God and a bond that unites us as one.

Learning from the Rite of Infant Baptism:

At the reception of the child:

- the responsibility the parents take at baptism for handing on faith to their child
- why the child is marked with the sign of the cross
- the importance of a Christian name
- the importance of choosing suitable godparents
- how the atmosphere in the home sets the foundations for faith
- *In the celebration of God’s Word and Preparatory Rites:*
- the significance of listening to Scripture, and about how we hear God speak to us
- the significance of exorcism and anointing
- the importance of the parents’ example in handing on faith
- *In the celebration of Baptism,*
- making the profession of faith on behalf of the child
- the symbolism of water, new life
- anointing to be priest, prophet and king
- the white garment - wearing the dignity of Christ
- receiving the light of Christ
- the significance of ephphetha
- parents’ responsibility to give an example of religious practice
- *In the Concluding Rite,*
- the prayer of the Christian family *The Lord’s Prayer* and
- the blessing, - the parents are the first and best teachers of the child

Training for the Preparation Team:

Formation and preparation on the meaning and Rite of Baptism will initially be given by the Parish Priest, who will give guidance on how he wants the sessions with parents to be organised and structured

For further formation contact your diocesan Catechetical Adviser or check the diocesan website: www.rcdow.org.uk, to ask what training opportunities there are in the diocese.

- Check the diocesan website for information, articles and resources.

Resources for Baptismal Preparation:

Published resources:

Welcome New Life: a Leader's Guide, Sr. Mary Bernard Potter, S.P. and Nigel Bavidge, Leeds Diocese, Geoffrey Chapman, 1994

Handing on our Faith – the Veritas Pre-Baptism Programme: Mickey and Terri Quinn, Veritas Family Resources, , 1985

Your baby's baptism: Rosemary Gallagher, Redemptorist Publications,

New Life: Rosemary Gallagher, Redemptorist Publications, (Leaflets for parents)

Your Child's Baptism – handing on the faith, Carol Luebering, St. Anthony Messenger Press, 2000

We believe & Celebrate Baptism, Sadlier, 2009

DVDs:

Baptism – Helping your child get the most from life: a CaFE resource, Catholic Evangelisation Services, 2004

Further Reading:

Will our children believe? Michael Paul Gallagher, S.J., Veritas Family Resources, Dublin, 1999

How to survive being married to a Catholic, Redemptorist Publications, Hampshire, revised 2007

Your Faith – a popular presentation of Catholic belief, Redemptorist Publications, Hampshire, reprinted 2006

Useful websites for purchase of resources:

Pauline Books & Media- www.pauline-uk.org

St Pauls – www.stpauls.org.uk

McCrimmons – www.mccrimmons.com

Amazon Books – www.amazon.co.uk

Reading & Resources for catechists:

- **Catechism of the Catholic Church**, Geoffrey Chapman, London, revised 1999
- **On the Threshold – the report of the Bishops' Conference Working Party on Sacramental Initiation**, Bishops' Conference of England and Wales, Matthew James Pub, 2000
- **A New Look at the Sacraments**, William Bausch, *Twenty-third Publications*, New London, Connecticut 1983
- **Sacraments Revisited**, Liam Kelly, Darton, Longman, Todd, London, 1998
- **Baptism Source Book**, Liturgy Training Publications, Chicago, 1993
- **Words around the font**, Gail Ramshaw, Liturgy training Publications, Chicago, 1994

Diocesan Guidelines:

Baptism of Infants

a) For the first child there should be a minimum of two pre-baptism sessions. Where possible, this should be done by a team which includes lay people.

b) Where practice is strong in a family, it is not always necessary for the parents to re-attend a baptism course, though their presence can help other parents.

c) Baptism should never be refused, but might have to be delayed for pastoral reasons.

Baptism of Older Children

a) Children presented for baptism or seeking baptism between the ages of 7 and 14 are regarded as children of catechetical age. They should be prepared for the sacrament following the Rite of the Christian Initiation of Children, part of the RCIA.

b) Children under the age of seven presented for baptism by their parents should be baptised following the usual preparation appropriate for infants - see policy for Infant Baptism.

c) Young people from the age of 14 should be prepared for the sacrament following the normal RCIA process - see policy for Adult Baptism.

Baptism of Adults

The norm for adults seeking baptism is to follow the Rite of the Christian Initiation of Adults in their local parish and to be baptised at the Easter Vigil when it is discerned they are ready, following the scrutinies of the RCIA.

Sponsors:

Canon Law:

Can. 872 Insofar as possible, a person to be baptised is to be given a sponsor who assists an adult in Christian initiation or together with the parents presents an infant for baptism. A sponsor also helps the baptised person to lead a Christian life in keeping with baptism and to fulfil faithfully the obligations inherent in it.

Can. 873 One sponsor, male or female, is sufficient; but there may be two, one of each sex.

Can. 874 §1. To be permitted to take on the function of sponsor a person must:

1° be designated by the one to be baptised, by the parents or the person who takes their place, or in their absence by the pastor or minister and have the aptitude and intention of fulfilling this function;

2° have completed the sixteenth year of age, unless the diocesan bishop has established another age, or the pastor or minister has granted an exception for a just cause;

3° be a Catholic who has been confirmed and has received the blessed Eucharist, and who lives a life of faith which befits the role to be undertaken;

4° not labour under a canonical penalty, whether imposed or declared;

5° not be the father or mother of the one to be baptised.

How to help and encourage parents who are not practising:

- It is important to help parents who are distanced from the Church to feel welcome and to appreciate the importance of belonging to the Christian community. (See *On the Threshold*, in the resources for catechists listed above.)
- Introduce parents who are not practicing to parents with children of about the same age who are practicing.
- Invite parents to come to the Parent & Toddler group (or other social groups for young parents and their children).
- Do not assume knowledge and be careful not to come across as patronising.
- Invite – but do not pressurise – the parents to become involved in the life of the parish.

How to help and encourage a non-Catholic or a non-Christian parent:

- It is important to help parents to feel welcome and to appreciate the importance of belonging to the Christian community. (See *On the Threshold* in the resources for catechists listed above.)
- Consider inviting parents to come to the RCIA sessions in the parish, where they will learn more about Catholicism (without putting any pressure on them to become Catholics)
- Introduce the couples to other couples of mixed faith Consider giving publications such as *How to survive being married to a Catholic* or *Your Faith – a popular presentation of Catholic belief*. (See the list of resources for baptismal preparation above.)