

DIOCESE OF PORTLAND

**NORMS FOR INFANT BAPTISM**

January 4, 1988

Amended February 13, 1995

Amended April 25, 2023

“The terms ‘children’ or ‘infants’ are to be understood as those who, since they have not yet reached the age of discretion, cannot profess the faith themselves. From the first centuries, the Church, to whom the mission of evangelizing and baptizing has been given, baptized not only adults but also children. Since the Lord said, ‘No one can enter the Kingdom of God without being born of water and the Spirit’ (John 3:5), the Church has always understood that children are not to be deprived of Baptism, inasmuch as they are baptized in the faith of the Church herself, which is proclaimed by the parents and godparents and the others present. For they represent both the local Church and the whole company of Saints and faithful: Mother Church, who brings each and all to birth.” (*Rite of Baptism of Children*, nos. 1-2)

I. **Those to be Baptized**

- A. For an infant to be baptized licitly, both parents, or at least one of them, or the person who legitimately takes their place, must consent (cf. c. 867 §1). An infant can be baptized if only one parent consents, even if the other parent is opposed. If there is a request for baptism and neither parent is baptized, please consult the Department of Canonical Services. If there is a legal dispute between the parents over the baptism of their child, please consult the Department of Canonical Services.
- B. Except in danger of death, foster parents or temporary guardians may not present a child for baptism.
- C. Legal guardians and adoptive parents may present a child for baptism. In these cases, please retain a copy of the document establishing legal guardianship or adoption with the baptismal register. In the case of adoption, it is preferable to wait to baptize the child until the adoption has been finalized, unless the child is in danger of death (cf. USCCB Complementary Norms on Recording the Baptism of Adopted Children).
- D. In order to baptize a child, there must be a founded hope that the infant will be brought up in the Catholic religion (cf. c. 868 §1, °2)

II. **Catechesis for Baptism**

- A. Parents and godparents are to be properly instructed in the meaning of the sacrament and the obligations which are attached to it (cf. c.851). It is the responsibility of the pastor to see to it that catechesis is provided personally or

through others. The catechesis is intended to assist parents and godparents in meeting their responsibilities. Catechesis should take place with the necessary pastoral sensitivity, considering the variety of needs. Special pastoral care and catechesis is necessary prior to baptizing children in the care of same-sex couples, divorced and civilly remarried couples, transgendered parents, and parents who are cohabitating, for example. Please note that some parents, especially single parents, may need supplemental guidance and support.

- B. Parents are obliged to see to it that infants are baptized within the first weeks after birth. As soon as possible after the birth, or even before it, parents are to go to the pastor to request the sacrament for their child and to be properly prepared for it. (c.867.1).

### III. **Place**

- A. The sacrament of baptism is a sign of entrance into the Christian community. The proper place for baptism is a church (cf. c.857). The sacrament may not be administered elsewhere except in cases of grave necessity (cf. c.860), e.g. danger of death.
- B. The celebration of baptism is especially entrusted to the pastor of the parish, with the assistance of parochial vicars and deacons. Infants are generally baptized in the parish church proper to their parents (cf. c.857).
- C. In this diocese, priests and deacons are required to request the permission of the proper pastor of a family domiciled outside the parish to which they are assigned who wish to have their child baptized. In doing so, priests and deacons will also need to determine that adequate preparation of the parents, and even godparents, has taken place either in the parish of domicile or the parish where the baptism will take place.

### IV. **Time**

- A. “Although baptism may be celebrated on any day, it is recommended that ordinarily it be celebrated on a Sunday or, if possible, at the Easter Vigil.” (c.856).
- B. “...Except for a good reason baptism should not be celebrated more than once on the same day in the same church.” (*Introduction to Christian Initiation*, no. 27).
- C. Baptism may appropriately take place during the Sunday Mass. This may take place on occasion, but not regularly or too often. (cf. *Rite of Baptism of Children*, no. 9).
- D. Parents are obligated to baptize children as soon as possible after birth. Therefore, in this diocese, parishes will provide opportunities for the celebration of baptism

no less frequently than twice per month. The celebration of baptism is to be available during all liturgical seasons, including Advent and Lent.

- E. The “Rite of Bringing a Baptized Child to the Church” should be celebrated whenever a child was baptized in danger of death and then recovers. (cf. *Rite of Baptism of Children*, 31)

V. **Godparent(s)**

- A. In order to be a godparent, the following qualifications specified in the law are to be observed (cf. c.874):

1. A godparent must be chosen for the role by the parents and have the ability and intention of carrying out the responsibility. If the parents do not choose a godparent, the pastor can designate a godparent for them. The pastor has the authority to reject a proposed godparent if the person does not meet the qualifications listed below.
2. A godparent must be 16 years old, although the priest or deacon may make an exception for a just cause.
3. A godparent must be a fully initiated Catholic, that is, one who has been baptized, confirmed and received the Eucharist. The person designated must be living in harmony with the faith and with the role of a godparent. If married, the godparent must be validly married according to the laws of the Church. If single, the party may not be cohabitating with another in the manner of a married person.
4. The godparent must be someone other than a parent of the one being baptized.
5. The godparent must be one who has not been publicly reprimanded by the Church by means of a penalty. This is a very rare occurrence.
6. “Only one male or one female godparent or one of each sex is to be employed.” (c.873)

- B. A baptized member of a separated faith community may not act as a godparent at a Catholic baptism. However, a baptized member of such a community may serve as a “Christian witness” to the baptism together with a Catholic godparent. (cf. c.874 and *Ecumenical Directory*, no. 57) All the parties involved should understand that the role of a Christian witness is not the same as the role of a godparent. In addition, a baptized Catholic who has formally left the practice of the faith may not serve as either a godparent or a Christian witness. In this diocese, when a family has designated one godparent and one Christian witness, those persons will be one male and one female, as in the case of godparents.

- C. A member of the Orthodox Church may be invited to act as a godparent together with a Catholic godparent. If he or she is so invited, a Catholic may similarly act as a godparent at the baptism of an infant in an Orthodox Church. (cf. *Ecumenical Directory* 48)
  - D. A Catholic may not act as a godparent for a member of a separated community, but a Catholic may act as a “Christian witness” to the baptism if he or she is so invited. (cf. *Ecumenical Directory*, 57)
  - E. Unless a godparent is present, the one who administers baptism in a case of necessity is to see to it that there is at least one witness present who can later attest to the conferral of the baptism. (cf. c.875)
  - F. With regard to the choice of godparents, it should be kept in mind that whenever possible, the baptismal godparents are later to be preferred when choosing a confirmation sponsor. (cf. c.893)
  - G. It is not permissible to add requirements for godparents that are beyond the law, such as requiring parish registration, proof of parish involvement, etc.
- VI. **Minister of Baptism** (cf. c.861)
- A. The ordinary minister of baptism is a bishop, priest, or deacon.
  - B. In case of necessity, such as danger of death, any person with the right intention may licitly confer baptism. Pastors are to instruct the faithful on the correct manner of baptizing.
- VII. **Form of Baptism**
- A. The prescribed form for baptism “**I baptize you in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit**” while immersing the child or pouring **flowing water over the skin** must be strictly adhered to. (cf *Rite of Baptism of Children*, no. 60)
  - B. Any deviation in the wording of the formula of baptism will likely result in invalidity. For example, changing “I” to “We” or baptizing in the name of the “Creator, the Redeemer, and the Sanctifier” have been declared invalid formulas. Omitting the words “...in the name of...” likewise invalidates the baptism.
- VIII. **Postponement of Baptism** (cf. c.868)
- A. It is assumed that all parents requesting the baptism of a child make that request in good faith. As such, the parish normally honors the requests for baptism after appropriate catechesis and preparation without further conditions. In the case where the founded hope that the child will be raised in the faith is altogether

lacking, baptism may be deferred at the discretion of the pastor. However, in order to defer the baptism requested, the conditions in B below must be met.

- B. In this diocese, before the pastor may postpone a baptism, he must fulfill the following conditions.
1. The pastor will meet personally with the parents to discuss their faith commitment and responsibilities.
  2. The pastor himself will examine whether the Catholic upbringing can be ensured by someone other than the parents.
  3. If there is sufficient reason to believe the child will receive an education in the faith, he/she can be baptized.
  4. If there is no real hope that the child will receive an education in the Catholic faith, the celebration of baptism can be deferred, but only until such time as an assurance that the child will be raised in the Catholic faith can be provided by the parents. In the meantime, the parish will periodically keep contact with parents in a pastoral manner.

**IX. Validity of Baptism in Other Churches**

- A. “There can be no doubt about the validity of baptism among separated Eastern Christians...” (*Ecumenical Directory*, no. 12)
- B. Occasionally, with regard to other Christian denominations, a doubt concerning baptism may occur. Please note that some denominations do not practice valid baptism. Such doubt may arise from one of the following sources:
1. Matter and form: Baptism with real water either by immersion or infusion applied together with the Trinitarian formula must be used for the baptism to be valid.
  2. Faith and intention: Insufficient faith on the part of the minister never of itself renders a baptism invalid. Proper intention is to be presumed unless there exists a serious reason to doubt his intention “to do what Christians do” when they confer this sacrament. (cf. *Ecumenical Directory*, no. 31).
- C. Some Christian communities do not practice infant baptism. Other Christian communities dedicate infants to God rather than celebrate infant baptism. Parishes need to determine whether a child was baptized or dedicated by means of a certificate or by the testimony of witnesses.

D. When there is doubt as to whether the baptism of a particular ecclesial community is considered valid, consult the Department of Canonical Services.

X. **Inter-Ritual Baptism** (cf. c.111)

A. A child born of two Latin Rite Catholics is baptized into the Latin Rite even if the minister is of another Rite.

B. When a child is born of married parents of two different Catholic Rites, the parents can decide into which Rite the child will be ascribed, regardless of the Rite of the minister of baptism. This choice must be noted in the baptism register. In the case of unmarried parents of two Catholic rites, consult the Department of Canonical Services.

C. If the parents of two different Catholic Rites cannot agree into which Rite the child is to be ascribed by baptism, the child is baptized in the Rite of the father even if the minister is not the same rite as the father. This ascription to a specific rite must be noted in the baptism register.

D. Where one parent is Catholic of any church *sui iuris* and the other parent belongs to a non-Catholic Eastern church, the child is ascribed to the rite of the Catholic parent. Contact the Department of Canonical Services for clarification.

XI. **Emergency Baptism**

A. The proper place for baptism is a church or oratory; however, in a case of urgent necessity it can be celebrated in the location of the emergency. In these emergency situations, when a Catholic priest administers Baptism in danger of death, it is expected that he will administer Confirmation also. When a priest is not available for an emergency Baptism, anyone with the correct intention can baptize.

B. An infant in danger of death is to be baptized without delay.

C. If baptism is administered neither by the pastor nor in his presence, the minister of baptism, whoever it is, must inform the pastor of the parish in whose territory the baptism was administered.

D. All emergency baptisms are to be recorded in the sacramental register for Baptism of the territorial parish in which the Baptism took place. The pastor must carefully and without delay record in the baptismal book the names of those baptized making mention of the minister, parents, sponsors, witnesses if any and the place and date of the conferred baptism, together with an indication of the date and place of birth. If Confirmation was also administered, it is recorded along with the Baptism in the territorial parish.

- E. An emergency Baptism of a child under the age of seven is to be followed by the Rite of Bringing a Baptized Child to the Church (Chapter VI of the 2020 Order of Baptism of Children), in the parish church proper to the child's parents unless a just cause suggests otherwise. If ceremonies are supplied at a later date, the parish where the ceremonies are supplied should notify the parish that holds the baptismal record so that a notation regarding these ceremonies can be made in the person's baptismal record. The parish where the rites were supplied makes no notation in its own registered if the emergency baptism took place elsewhere.
- F. Following the norm of law, Catholic hospitals and other Catholic institutions are not responsible for maintaining a sacramental register for Baptism or other sacraments that take place in their facilities. It is the responsibility of the minister who administered the baptism to notify the pastor of the place of that fact. It is the responsibility of the pastor of the place where the baptism is celebrated to record in the parish baptismal book the information required by law. Catholic hospitals and other Catholic institutions do not have the authority to issue sacramental certificates intended to establish the reception of a Sacrament.

XII. **Conditional Baptism**

Please consult the Department of Canonical Services if a child is presented for baptism because parents or guardians doubt whether a previous attempt at the baptism of the same child was valid.

XIII. **Records and Access to Records** (cf. cc.877, 878)

Please refer to the Appendix to this document for section for detailed information on the requirements of sacramental registers and their contents.

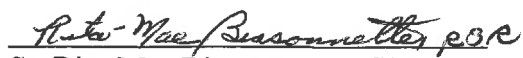
These norms are effective May 25, 2023.

**Issued this 1<sup>st</sup> day of May in the year two thousand twenty-three.**



**Most Reverend Robert P. Deeley, JCD**  
**Bishop of Portland**

Seal



Sr. Rita-Mae Bissonnette, RSR  
Chancellor

APPENDIX  
Norms on the Use of Baptismal Registers  
April 25, 2023

- I. The celebration of a baptism is always recorded in the baptismal register of the parish in whose territory the sacrament was conferred. It is not recorded in the parish where the minister is assigned, if this is different.
  - a. In this diocese, the record of baptisms celebrated in a hospital is to be recorded in the register of the parish where the hospital is located.
  - b. In this diocese, the record of baptism celebrated on any college campus in the Diocese or in the Newman Center Chapel at the University of Maine at Orono between the dates December 17, 1972 and January 1, 2009 were recorded in the baptismal register of Our Lady of Wisdom Personal Campus Parish at Orono. Baptism celebrated in the Newman Center chapel or on another college campus prior to and after those dates are recorded in the baptismal register of the parish where the college campus is located.
  - c. Even when persons from several parishes are baptized at a single ceremony, all the baptisms are recorded exclusively at the parish where the actual rite was celebrated.
  - d. An emergency baptism is recorded in the baptism registers of the parish whose boundaries include the location where the emergency baptism took place.
  - e. In the case of an emergency baptism outside of a church, the one who administered the baptism must inform the pastor of the parish whose boundaries include the location where the emergency baptism took place. This notification is done in writing so that the emergency baptism can be recorded in the baptismal register of the parish where the emergency baptism took place. After the emergency has been resolved, a minister of the Church should celebrate the Rite of Bringing a Baptized Child to the Church. A notation is made recording this event in the baptism register of the parish where the emergency baptism took place. If the place where the rites of baptism were supplied is different than the place where the emergency baptism took place, the minister who supplied the rites will see to it that notification is sent to the place of baptism. All subsequent notations of first communion, confirmation, marriage, etc., are made in baptism register of the parish where the emergency baptism took place.
  
- II. The complete information for the baptismal register is typically taken from a sacristy record, which is filled out in advance by the person in charge of preparing for the baptism and verified by a parent or guardian.
  - a. Though not required, a birth certificate or hospital record is ideal for collecting and verifying the information in the sacristy record. This is recommended in the Diocese of Portland.
  - b. Parishes should have a clear procedure to transfer the information from the sacristy record to the baptismal register.
  - c. The baptism should be recorded in the parish baptismal register immediately after the celebration, that is, no more than one week after the baptism.



- III. Except as indicated below, the baptismal register entry should include the name of the baptized person, the name of parents and godparents, the name of the minister of baptism, the date and place of birth, the ecclesial ascription of the one baptized if it is different from the Latin Rite, and any necessary notations. (See VIIIb below.)
- IV. The baptism of a child of unmarried parents requires special care (cf. c. 877).
  - a. Marriage creates a presumption of paternity for any children born to the wife. In the case of the birth of children outside of marriage, paternity needs to be proven.
  - b. It is unjust to place the unauthorized name of a parent in the baptismal register.
  - c. If an unmarried father declares he is the father and the paternity is not contested by the mother, or if there is some other proof of paternity such as a birth certificate, hospital record, or civil finding of paternity, his name should be added to the register. If no such civil record exists, an unmarried father who voluntarily acknowledges his paternity should make this declaration in writing. That document needs to be signed, dated, witnessed by pastor and one other witness, then sealed with the parish seal. In this diocese, this document is then retained with the baptismal register.
  - d. The expressions “father unknown,” “*pater ignotus*,” or “illegitimate” are not to be written in the baptismal register or on any certificate.
- V. Adoption: The baptism of adopted children also requires special care, as does the subsequent adoption of an already baptized child.
  - a. See the USCCB complementary norms on how to record the baptism of an adopted child. Note that the record is different depending on whether the adoption is finalized before or after baptism.  
<https://www.usccb.org/committees/canonical-affairs-church-governance/complementary-norms#tab--canon-877-%C2%A73-recording-the-baptism-of-adopted-children>
  - b. Except in danger or death or in cases of special urgency, if the adoption is in process, the baptism should be delayed until the final order of adoption and an amended birth certificate are issued.
  - c. Special care regarding the confidentiality of baptismal registers should be taken given the sensitivity of this type of information. For example, baptismal certificates should not reflect the fact of a person’s adoption. Members of the public should not be given access to baptismal registers. (See section IX below.)
- VI. Godparents
  - a. A godparent can be present in person or by proxy; if a proxy is used, indicate the godparent’s name in the register but write “present by proxy” over the name.
  - b. If a baptized non-Catholic is invited to serve as a Christian witness (c. 874 §2), “Christian witness” should be placed after the person’s name.
  - c. The names of godparents should not be changed, even if parents feel the individuals are no longer suitable or if the individuals have died.

VII. Ascription

- a. One of the canonical effects that occurs at baptism is ascription to a Church *sui iuris*, i.e. membership not just in the Catholic Church generically but in the Latin Catholic Church or one of the Eastern Catholic Churches.
- b. In accordance with the modification to the Code of Canon Law made by Pope Francis in 2017, the Church of ascription should always be recorded in the baptismal register, even for the ascription to the Latin Church. In this diocese, this notation of ascription to the Latin Church should be made on the title page of each baptismal register for all the entries in that volume, with exceptions recorded in the notations for a specific individual as required. The notation on the title page of the baptismal register should read, “Unless noted otherwise, the persons whose baptisms are recorded in this register were ascribed to the Latin Church at the time of baptism.”
- c. In every case, at least a cursory inquiry should be made to determine the ascription of the person being baptized.
  - i. Ascription is **not** determined by the parish where the baptism takes place or by the minister who confers the sacrament. For example, a person could be baptized at a Latin Catholic parish by a Latin Catholic priest and still be ascribed to the Syro-Malabar Catholic Church because of the rite of ascription of his or her parents or their choice.
  - ii. See Norms for the Baptism of Infants of the Diocese of Portland section X regarding how the ritual church of ascription is determined. Please consult the Department of Canonical Services.
  - iii. Ascription to an Eastern Church *sui iuris* must be included in the notations at the time of the baptism of an infant in every case.

VIII. Conditional baptism should be indicated as such in the notations.

IX. Access to Records: In this diocese, the baptismal record books are not considered public records. Baptismal certificates can be given to the baptized person, the parents of a minor, or diocesan officials. If questions arise as accessing records, please consult the Department of Canonical Services.