



**Order of Baptism of Children**  
*Guidelines for Sacramental Preparation*

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## 1. Preface

Jesus told His first disciples to “Go and make disciples....” (Matt. 28:19) All followers of Jesus since that time are blessed to participate in the ministry of disciple-making.

While a disciple can help make disciples by God’s grace and mercy, it is difficult for a person who lacks a strong sense of having a personal, disciple relationship with Jesus to form others in the Faith. Baptism preparation is a prime opportunity to evangelize parents of infants; in fact, when parishes provide Baptism preparation sessions, it is bolstering the parental sense of discipleship—lived in full communion with the mystical Body of Christ, the Church—that helps equip parents to live their call as primary educators of their children.

These brief guidelines, then, are meant to help parish leaders apply best practices in preparing parents for the baptism of their infant children. The Office of Catechesis, Archdiocese of Indianapolis, is providing these guidelines and stands ready to assist you further in this pivotal area of your service to God’s people.

## 2. Introduction

### **A Holy Opportunity**

Baptism preparation is an opportunity for evangelization. When parents approach the Catholic Church and ask for their infant to be baptized, they are expressing an openness and a desire to practice the Catholic faith. It is the privilege and sacred responsibility of pastors, and catechetical leaders commissioned by their pastors, to recognize this holy opportunity in the life of adults seeking Baptism for their infant, and to respond effectively.

### **The Vocation of Parenthood**

Because the child to be baptized is an infant, the catechetical component of baptism preparation should be for the parents. This is the time to accompany them into the vocation of parenthood, at times teaching, at times reminding, always pointing to the holiness of the call they have received, the graces that God gives them through the Church, and the duties they promise to fulfill as disciples of Jesus Christ and primary educators of their children, especially in matters of faith.

### **Discipleship and Christian Living**

In the Gospel of Matthew (28:19), Jesus asks his disciples to “go and make disciples...” When an infant is baptized the parents promise to raise the child according to the Catholic faith. In the Rite of Baptism, the celebrant makes this statement: *“If your faith makes you ready to accept this responsibility, then, mindful of your own Baptism, renounce sin and profess faith in Christ Jesus, the faith of the Church, in which children are baptized.”* (cf Rite of Baptism for Several Children, no. 56) To do this well, a parent must strive to live a good Catholic life that will be an example to their child. In addition to living a good Christian life, parents must become familiar with what the Catholic church believes and teaches. In other words, they are responsible for teaching the Faith to their children. Therefore, parents must make it a priority to continue learning about their faith throughout their life – so they may better witness to the Faith in their home and catechize their growing family, the next generation of Catholic disciples of Jesus Christ.

### **The Role of Godparents and the Parish Community**

Parents are aided in their Christian duties by godparents, whose primary role is to profess the Catholic faith and serve as models of faithful Catholics. Through the personal involvement of godparents in the life of the family and the baptized child, they represent the constant presence of the Church in the life of the baptized (cf Code of Canon Law, no. 872). “Therefore, the godparent, chosen by the...family, must, in the judgement of the pastor of souls, be qualified to carry out the proper liturgical functions ... that is to testify to the faith, together with the parents, to profess the Church’s faith, in which the infant is baptized.” (cf Order of Baptism of Children, no. 10) “Catholics with disabilities may serve as sponsors and godparents, and like others who fulfill these roles, they are to be carefully chosen and formed

for these responsibilities.” (cf USCCB Guidelines for the Celebration of the Sacraments with Persons with Disabilities, #14) The parish also has a role in the Sacrament of Baptism, because every child is baptized into the family of God and into the particular family of believers that is the parish, under the leadership of the local bishop (cf. Rite of Baptism for Children, no. 4). The parish also supports families by providing religious education and sacramental preparation for each child and, in many cases, offering education through the parochial school.

## **More Than Baptism Preparation**

From the *Directory for Catechesis*, paragraph 124: “The Church is called to cooperate with parents through suitable pastoral initiatives, assisting them in the fulfillment of the educational mission to become above all the first catechists of their own children.” While parents are primarily interested in their infant becoming a Catholic, parish leaders in charge of baptism preparation must recognize that there is more than sacramental preparation needed. Parents need to hear the encouragement and support of their local church, whether this is their first child or one of many. They must be adequately catechized on their role as Catholic parents and provided with resources to start them on their way to living the faith at home. Finally, parents who have stopped practicing the Catholic faith and are returning for the first time seeking the baptism of their child should be welcomed and accompanied in a process of evangelization. “The whole ecclesial community bears some responsibility for the development and safeguarding of the grace given at Baptism.” Catechism of the Catholic Church (CCC) 1255 “For all the baptized, children or adults, faith must grow after Baptism. Baptism is the source of that new life in Christ from which the entire Christian life springs forth.” CCC 1254

## **Prepare, Celebrate, and Live the Sacrament**

These guidelines for baptismal preparation will give parish leaders a framework to follow in order to prepare parents for the baptism of their infant. The introduction addressed the need for evangelization and catechesis as part of the formation for infant baptism. The bulk of this guiding document will focus on preparing for the celebration of the Rite of baptism.

## **Special Situations**

These guidelines suggest several resources as practical tools for parish leaders, as well as tools for supporting parents in living their vocation after their child’s baptism day. Attention is also given to special pastoral needs, cultural context, and canonical requirements.

## **Scope of Guidelines**

These guidelines are intended to serve parishes in preparing adults for the baptism of their infant child. Preparation for the baptism of children of catechetical age and the baptism of adults are outside the scope of these guidelines and should occur in the context of the *Rite of Christian Initiation of Adults* (RCIA) or the *RCIA* adapted for children.

### 3. Preparation

#### **Remote Preparation**

If parents have been actively practicing their faith, it is appropriate to have an initial conversation inviting them to share their love for the Faith and desire for their child to be part of it.

If parents have been less active in their faith, it is appropriate to have a conversation to reignite their faith and help them to reflect on why they want their child to be a part of it. The Archdiocesan evangelization office can help parish leaders prepare for these conversations if desired.

If parents are no longer practicing the Faith but have approached the Church seeking baptism for their child, a conversation focused on evangelization and accompaniment should occur before moving forward with preparation. Here again, our Office of Evangelization is a good resource in all phases of evangelization and discipleship.

#### **Proximate Preparation**

This is the bulk of the Baptism preparation process. Here we discuss what baptism is, why it is important, how it relates to other aspects of our faith, and what the role of parents is after the baptism day.

The *National Directory for Catechesis* states that dioceses and parishes should present baptismal catechesis that:

- Teaches that Baptism (1) is the foundation of the Christian life because it is the journey into Christ's death and Resurrection, which is the foundation of our hope; (2) gives sanctifying grace, that is, God's life; (3) gives them a new birth in which they become children of God, members of Christ, and temples of the Holy Spirit; (4) cleanses people from original sin and from all personal sins; (5) incorporates them into the life, practices and mission of the Church; and (6) imprints on their souls an indelible character that consecrates them for Christian worship and is necessary for salvation in the case of all those who have heard the Gospel and have been able to ask for this sacrament (CCC 1257)
- Teaches that through Baptism we receive a share in the mission of Christ as king, priest, and prophet
- Teaches that Baptism "symbolizes the catechumen's burial into Christ's death, from which he rises up by resurrection with him, as 'a new creature'" (CCC 1214)
- Teaches that 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" (CCC 1213)
- Teaches that through Baptism the faithful "share in the priesthood of Christ, in his prophetic and royal mission" (CCC 1268)

- Teaches that “the Most Holy Trinity gives the baptized sanctifying grace, the grace of justification” (thus “the whole organism of the Christian’s supernatural life has its root in baptism”)
  - “enabling them to believe in God, to hope in him, and to love him through the theological virtues”
  - “giving them the power to live and act under the prompting of the Holy Spirit through the gifts of the Holy Spirit”
  - “allowing them to grow in goodness through the moral virtues” (CCC 1266)
- Teaches that “having become a member of the church, the person baptized belongs no longer to himself, but to him who died and rose for us. From now on he is called to be subject to others, to serve them in the communion of the Church, and to ‘obey and to submit’ to the Church’s leaders, holding them in respect and affection” (CCC 1269)
- Includes a thorough explanation of the Rite of Baptism together with the fundamental signs and symbols that it employs: immersion in or the pouring of water, the words of the Trinitarian formula, and the anointing with oil
- Teaches that the ordinary minister for the Sacrament of Baptism is a priest or deacon (in the Eastern Catholic Churches the priest is the only ordinary minister of Baptism, since Chrismation follows immediately) but that, in the case of necessity, any person who intends to do what the Church does can baptize by pouring water on the candidate’s head and saying the Trinitarian formula

## **Immediate Preparation and Celebration**

This is the shortest part of the baptism preparation process. During immediate preparation, the parents are instructed on what will happen the day of the baptism. While this meeting has a “rehearsal” aspect to it, and parents should feel like they know what to expect at the Baptismal celebration, it is also important to explain what the prayers of the Rite mean, and what is happening during each portion of the Baptismal Rite.

## 4. Mystagogy and Accompaniment

### **Reflecting on the Baptism**

Mystagogy is an opportunity for parents to reflect on the baptism of their child. Conversation should center around the parent's experience of the celebration, their new understanding of their role as parents, and their understanding of God in light of celebrating this sacrament. This mystagogical reflection could occur in a group setting, possibly with childcare somehow provided.

### **Engaging Parents After Baptism**

The parish has a part to play after the baptism as well. Practical help, such as meals delivered to the new family, is one way to get the parish involved initially. Ongoing accompaniment may involve inviting parents to a parenting class, a marriage enrichment opportunity, or men's/women's group, in addition to inviting them to celebrate the sacraments and participate in ongoing catechesis. "Either personally or through others, the pastor is to see to it that the parents of an infant with a disability, those who take the place of the parents, and those who will fulfill the function of godparent are properly instructed as to the meaning of the Sacrament of Baptism and the obligations attached to it." (cf USCCB Guidelines for the Celebration of the Sacraments with Persons with Disabilities, #12)

## 5. Resources and Best Practices

### **Number of Sessions for Baptismal Preparation**

Three models are provided for Baptismal Preparation, to better fit the needs of different parishes.

#### **Model 1: Baptismal Catechumenate**

1. When a family announces they are expecting, the parish rejoices with them and offers their support in prayer. The “Blessing of a Child in the Womb” is suitable for this occasion. There are also special prayers for the adoption of a child.
2. An initial meeting is scheduled at the parish, about 6 months before the baby arrives. This meeting should focus on conversation about what the Catholic faith means to the parents and why they are choosing to have their child baptized. See the “Remote Preparation” section for additional notes. At this meeting, plans are made for parents to attend a Baptism Day of Reflection.
3. After the initial meeting and before baby’s arrival, a baptism day of reflection should take place at the parish to cover catechetical formation on the sacrament of Baptism and the role of Catholic parents. See the “Proximate Preparation” section for additional notes.
4. After the baby’s safe arrival, a rehearsal meeting should take place to go over the celebration and to reflect on what is taking place through the prayers of the Rite.
5. The celebration of Baptism follows.
6. An informal meeting should be scheduled in the weeks after the Baptism to offer an opportunity for reflection and accompaniment. Ongoing engagement with the family and active participation in parish life rounds out the Baptismal formation. See the “Mystagogy and Accompaniment” section for additional notes.

#### **Model 2: Shorter Preparation**

1. If a family approaches the parish seeking Baptism once a child has been born or has other circumstances where a shorter preparation might be more suitable, they should have a meeting at the parish to discuss their intent for Baptism and receive materials they can go through on their own.
2. Formation takes place with the use of one of the recommended resources for baptism, used at home or online.
3. A second meeting at the parish will discuss what was gleaned through the formation resource, any questions parents might have, and a preview of the Rite of Baptism prayers and their significance.
4. After the baptism, the parish should continue to accompany parents in their vocation of family life. See the “mystagogy and accompaniment” section for additional notes.



### **Model 3: Preparation at a Distance**

1. For parents who are not able to attend baptismal preparation together at their local parish, (for example, in the case of military service or families that are separated) every effort should be made to make a personal connection with parents using modern means of communication if necessary.
2. Formation should be provided using materials that are well-suited for home study.
3. A brief rehearsal meeting may address “immediate preparation.”
4. Care should be taken to recommend resources for ongoing formation, as it may not be feasible to offer accompaniment in person.

### **Pastoral Considerations**

Various circumstances surrounding preparation and celebration of baptism might require additional pastoral care and attention to canon law. These include, but are not limited to:

- Cultural norms in specific ethnic communities
- Families and persons with disabilities
- Couples in irregular marriages
- Guidance for alienated or non-practicing Catholics who are coming back to the Church for their child’s baptism
- Parents faced with a prenatal diagnosis of a life-threatening condition (see <https://benotafraid.net/>)

Parish leaders are encouraged to collaborate with the applicable Archdiocesan office(s) for information and guidance regarding specific types of cases. The Office of Catechesis can help direct you to the best local and national resources for serving your parishioners in the ministry of Baptism preparation.

### **Recommended Resources**

**This list will be updated at [www.archindy.org/catechesis](http://www.archindy.org/catechesis)**

#### **Formation for Parents:**

1. **Belonging: Baptism in the Family of God** by Ascension Press
  - Video & Journal Preparation Program
2. **Catholic Baptism Prep.com** from Agape Catholic Ministries
  - Online Preparation Program
  - Available in English, Spanish
3. **Reborn: You, Your Child and the Heart of Baptism** by the Augustine Institute
  - Video and study preparation program
  - Available in English or Spanish
4. **Parent Letters from your Parish** by Our Sunday Visitor
  - Post baptism letters sent by parish to parents of newly baptized

- Continuing catechesis to parents for three years
5. **Your Baby's Baptism** by Liguori Sacramental Preparation Series
    - How-to guides for baptismal-prep meetings
    - Page-by-page tips for using the *Parent Guide*
  6. **Springs of Faith Baptismal Preparation** by Loyola Press
    - Building faith and family in the parish
    - Catholic themes of community, welcoming, and faith
    - Bi-lingual
  7. **Baptism Matters** by Renew International
    - An online learning program
    - Prepares the whole family for Baptism
    - Provides parishes with the activities & communication tools they need to transform sacramental preparation into an evangelizing experience
  8. **Guidelines for the Celebration of the Sacraments with Persons with Disabilities, USCCB**
  9. **Be Not Afraid**, <https://benotafraid.net/>

**Godparents:**

10. **Archdiocese of Indianapolis Godparent Resource English and Spanish**
  - Both resources are included with this document.

**Children:**

11. **First Steps in Your Journey of Faith and Parish Life: A Baby Journal from Baptism to First Reconciliation** by Saint Benedict Press
  - Parent/Child keepsake book, available in English or Spanish

## 6. Conclusion

Legitimate diversity and suitable subsidiarity are hallmarks of effective Church governance, leadership and ministry. While these guidelines have articulated general principles and offered several specific suggestions, it is the Spirit-guided wisdom of parish leaders that will best apply the timeless truths of our Catholic faith to parents living that Faith in the time and space unique to each parish community.

Ongoing priorities that will help unify baptism preparation efforts throughout the Archdiocese for years to come then, can be summarized as follows:

- Discipleship is an essential ingredient in baptism preparation; when its benefits are proclaimed and witnessed to, parents are better equipped to nurture and shepherd the faith life of their children.
- Both alienated and practicing Catholics—as well as spouses who might be, practically speaking, unchurched—number among those parents who are inspired by the Holy Spirit to bring their infants to the Church for the Sacrament of Baptism. Rather than a one-size-fits all approach, parish leaders will accompany parents of very young children in ways reflecting where these adults are on their faith journey—mindful of God’s plan for each of His people.
- Like the adult on an airplane securing her or his oxygen mask before helping a child, parents must be encouraged in their disciple relationship with Jesus, so they have the best chance at helping their children become fellow disciples of our saving Lord. Baptism preparation, again, is a prime opportunity to provide such encouragement through Spirit-filled witness and teaching.

May you use these guidelines in combination with your unique blend of charisms and pastoral know-how—all for God’s glory and the salvation of souls.

## 7. A Prayer for Baptism Preparation

Good and gracious God, our Father in heaven,  
we ask for the gift of your Holy Spirit  
to help equip parents and godparents for their role  
in preparing for, celebrating and living  
the baptism of N.

Through the Divine Mercy of your Son, our Lord Jesus Christ,  
prepare us well to be good stewards,  
helping guide this child through life as a Christian.

We ask for strength in mind and body  
as we watch our young person grow in your love.

Through the forgiveness of sin,  
brought about in the cleansing water of Baptism,  
help N. live a life of faith, hope and charity,  
embraced in the mystery of the Holy Trinity—  
itself a community of love.

Our Lady of Guadalupe...pray for us.

Saint John the Baptist...pray for us.

Saint N. ... pray for us. + Amen.

# ***Prayer of Godparents for their Godchild***

Heavenly Father,

We thank you for our godchild N.  
whom you have freed from sin  
through baptism.

May the flame of faith burn brightly  
in his (her) heart;

May he (she) remember his (her) dignity  
as your beloved son (daughter);

and after living a Christian life,  
may he (she) one day rejoice  
in your heavenly kingdom,  
where you live and reign,  
forever and ever. Amen.



# ***Baptism for Children Guide for Godparents***



Jesus approached and said to them, “All power in  
heaven and on earth has been given to me. 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. And behold, I am with you always, until the end  
of the age.”

Matthew 28:18-20

***With joy,***

***we commemorate the commitment of***

\_\_\_\_\_

***and***

\_\_\_\_\_

***to be the godparents of***

\_\_\_\_\_

***born on***

***the*** \_\_\_\_\_ ***day of*** \_\_\_\_\_, \_\_\_\_\_

***and baptized***

***on the*** \_\_\_\_\_ ***day of*** \_\_\_\_\_, \_\_\_\_\_

***by*** \_\_\_\_\_

***at*** \_\_\_\_\_

***in*** \_\_\_\_\_, \_\_\_\_\_

## ***The Role of Godparents***

“It is a very ancient custom of the Church that an adult is not admitted to baptism without a godparent.... In the baptism of children too, the godparent should be present... together with the parents, to profess the Church’s faith, in which the child is being baptized.”

(Rite of Baptism for Children,  
General Introduction 8–9)

## ***The Responsibility of Godparents***

To profess the faith of the Catholic Church

To model a Christian life for the baptized child

To continue their own formation in the Faith, and  
teach their godchild

To help parents bring up their child in the faith of  
the Church

To help the baptized throughout their life to  
persevere in faith and fulfill their obligations as a  
Christian

To pray for their godchild’s faith, holiness,  
vocation and eternal salvation