

INFANT BAPTISM: DIOCESAN POLICIES

1. The celebration of Baptism should always reflect the paschal mysteries, the communal nature of the Church and of faith.
2. Ideally, Baptism should be celebrated during Mass so that the community may be present and the integral relationship between Baptism and the Eucharist be clearly seen. Celebrations should be scheduled at suitable intervals.
3. To bring forth the paschal character of Baptism, the sacrament should be celebrated on Sunday when the Church commemorates the Lord's Resurrection.
4. So that Baptism may clearly appear as a sacrament of the Church's faith and of incorporation into the people of God, it should normally be celebrated in the parish church.
 - a. Permission of one's own pastor is needed to celebrate Baptism in another parish church.
 - b. Baptism should not be celebrated in private houses.
 - c. Except in emergency, Baptism should not be celebrated in hospitals or homes. In such an event, the parish priest should be notified and care should be taken for the suitable preparation of the parents either before or after the Baptism. Ceremonies should be supplied, if not supplied at the time of Baptism.
5. Every effort should be made to highlight the important role of the community in the celebration of the sacrament. In this way, it is clear that the faith in which the children are baptized is not the private possession of the individual family but is the common treasure of the whole Church of Christ.
6. Parents have an important role in the celebration of the Baptism of their children. They should be present for the celebration.
7. At least one parent should be a baptized Catholic
8. At least one godparent is necessary at Baptism, but a child may have one godfather and one godmother (R. Bapt. C. 6). The godparent must be a fully initiated Catholic and leads a life in harmony with the faith and the role to be undertaken. The godparent should have completed the 16th year, unless it seems to the pastor that an exception is to be made for a just cause. (Canon 874). In addition to the godparent, a Christian of another ecclesial community may be invited as a Christian witness.
9. Only the rite of Baptism for children is to be used for the baptism of infants or children who have not yet reached the age of discernment.

Revised September 2002

10. Each parish in the diocese is to establish a program of Baptismal preparation for parents according to the catechetical guidelines in this document:
 - a. Parents are expected to prepare for the sacrament of Baptism. Godparents are encouraged to participate in the program.
 - b. Repetition of preparation for Baptism of other children in the same family is left to local discretion.
 - c. Non-Catholic parents/guardians should always be invited to take part in the preparation along with the Catholic parents/guardian and godparents. In the case of inter-faith marriages, special care should be taken to explain the church's understanding of Baptism and the sacraments to the non-Catholic parent.
11. Parents requesting Baptism of their children should ordinarily be registered members of the parish. With special permission of their pastor they may request Baptism in another parish.
12. The act of requesting Baptism for a child is in itself a sign of faith. Therefore, parents are to be welcomed and shown an appreciation by the minister for approaching the Church for Baptism. However, there must be an active hope that the infant who is brought for Baptism will be raised in the Catholic community. If the pastor determines that, at the present time, there is no such hope then Baptism may be delayed. It is vitally important when Baptism is delayed that pastoral follow-up and dialog continue with the family. Our mentality should be to look for reasons to justify giving the sacrament rather than for reason to postpone or delay it. The priest or deacon who works with the parents in place of the pastor who has delegated this task to them is the one to make the decision to baptize or to delay with consultation of the pastor.
13. The Baptism is to be recorded in the baptismal book of the parish. The name of the baptized as well as those of the minister, parents, sponsors and witnesses are to be noted, along with the date and place of birth.

Appendix: Canon 855 says the parents, godparent and parish priest are to take care that a name is not given which is foreign to Christian sentiment. Granted, we must respect culture but too easily today is a name chosen which has no connection with a Christian background. Indeed most parents today choose two names at Baptism. We should encourage that at least one name should have a Christian ring to it.

INFANT BAPTISM: CATECHETICAL GUIDELINES

1. Baptism celebrates incorporation into the death and resurrection of the Lord, initiation into the community of believers, and the Lord's triumph over sin. Baptismal catechesis centers on these beliefs.
2. As the primary catechists of their children, parents will pass on their faith to them. Catechesis for Baptism introduces parents to this role and to a basic understanding of the principles of religious development in children. Post-baptismal programs for parents of preschoolers which expand on these principles are recommended.
3. Catechesis connects the sacrament of Baptism with Confirmation and the Eucharist, and other sacraments of initiation.
4. Immediate preparation includes catechesis concerning the baptismal ritual and symbols, especially as they reflect the mysteries of incorporation, initiation and cleansing.
5. Catechesis for the sacrament encourages parents to explore their own experience of faith and their participation in the life of the believing community. The needs of the parents and godparents determine the duration of catechesis.
6. Each parish should have a team for baptismal preparation. The number of team members will depend on the size of the parish and the number of baptisms. Team members receive comprehensive formation which includes opportunities for reflection on their own faith journey, catechesis pertinent to baptism, and development of skills appropriate for their particular roles. The parish priests should be present with the parents and godparents at some time during the preparation.
7. Programs for baptismal preparation should be scheduled with suitable intervals between programs to allow for a community of parents to form for catechesis. The schedule should be well publicized.
8. Since incorporation into the faith community is an essential aspect of the baptismal experience, every effort should be made to allow parents to experience a sense of belonging to the community in which they are preparing for their child's Baptism. Typically, this will involve more than one preparation session.
9. Particular attention should be paid to the role of the non-Catholic parent in his or her child's Baptism and religious upbringing. Every effort should be made to include the non-Catholic parent in the preparation process.
10. Catechesis of adults reflects the catechetical norms and guidelines set forth in the National Catechetical Directory, specifically Articles 176 and 182 to 189.

Revised September 2002

PASTORAL NOTES ON HISPANIC BAPTISMS

PROLOGUE

“*Sacramentum propter homines*” is a liturgical principle of Catholic theology. Sacraments are indeed for the people and we live out our relationship with God and our Church in an embodied spirit which manifests itself in culture, that is, a way of being in the world. This “way of being” is forged by many forces, one of them being the Church itself. But that experience of Church is also shaped by culture.

From the above premise, in order that the sacraments may serve the people well, it would be good pastoral practice to consider some cultural influences that are brought to bear when Hispanics ask for their child to be baptized. These pastoral notes on Hispanic baptisms are an effort to help the minister reflect a parish that is welcoming to all.

Finally, it must be mentioned that the below are generalizations and do not reflect every Hispanic’s culture since there are many cultures in the Latino world and even that culture would be further modified by its level of education, color, immigration history and faith story.

AGE

Although there are Hispanics who bring a child a few weeks after baptism as is encouraged in church law, the cultural practice is to seek baptism when the child is one year old. This is so because the parents try to coordinate the date of the baptism with the first birthday. Coming from countries where infant mortality rates have been historically high, reaching the first year of life is a reason for celebration and Hispanics will want to celebrate. It will be important to have a fiesta immediately after the baptism and because of their economic status here or in their countries, it would be prohibitive to have two celebrations in one year.

Sometimes children will be presented at an age in which they are able to “walk to the font.” Although this may indicate a lack of attention to the spiritual life of the child; it may also indicate that the family has been waiting for the “right” godparents and for them to be able to travel; or the family may have been separated due to immigration issues; or there may have been personal difficulties in their marital life. Latino culture dictates that personal relations are placed above norms and rules and they believe that God knows this and understands.

PARISH REGISTRATION

The concept of parish registration is not present in Latin America or the Caribbean. They will not know that they have to register. They will not know about the envelope system and the concept of parish boundaries is not well formed. Supporting the parish is not a matter of a family budget but is a matter of not letting the left hand know what the right is doing. To reject the person out of hand because they are not registered would do pastoral damage.

Parish registration could take place at some point along the baptismal preparation when it can be well explained in the context of belonging to a parish community and a relationship has been established. Some will still be wary because of the reluctance to give information due to their undocumented resident status.

CATECHESIS

Most Hispanic parents are accustomed to some type of pre-baptismal preparation and they will participate along with the godparents if possible. Like other Catholics there is the cultural imperative to have their child baptized even though they might not “practice” the faith. It must be remembered, however, that Hispanic religiosity is not necessarily connected to institutional practice. One would be surprised to find in a “non-practicing” house – holy pictures, statues, and home altars. Hispanic spirituality is a “home faith” and one that is not compartmentalized. The world breathes God. Lack of institutional practice could also reflect the cultural history of a lack of priests, weak evangelization, and a scarcity of church structures in rural areas where many Hispanics have their roots.

Generally, Latino faith believes that baptism is necessary for the salvation of the child and there is worry if a child dies without it. For example, Dominicans describe the unbaptized child as “*moro*” which means a Moor as in the Moors (Islamics) who were expelled from Spain during the Reconquest.

Baptism is known to be one of the seven sacraments but a sacrament may be described as a “blessing”. A child may be brought for baptism because she is sickly, not sleeping well, restless, or having nightmares. These symptoms could be understood as having a spiritual or demonic root and therefore the remedy is a spiritual one, baptism.

GODPARENTS

Godparents are an important element in the baptismal experience. Parents usually take seriously who they will ask to serve in this role. It establishes a lifetime commitment between the baptized, the godparents and also the parents. There is an expectation of respect, loyalty, honor, and perhaps an economic support between all the parties. Being asked to be a godparent is similar to becoming a member of the family. To call godparents, “sponsors,” has no meaning for the Latino.

Occasionally, it will be the godmother who will first make the contact with the parish to make arrangements. Physical presence is important. The concept of a proxy is not appreciated. At the moment of baptism the child may be held by the godmother and later given to the parents (mother) after the actual baptism.

A recurring pastoral problem is that many parents find it difficult to find godparents who, if married, are united in sacramental marriage. This is so because the pool of godparents is reduced because many of the eligible candidates are in their native countries. Secondly, civil marriage is required first by the state in Latin American countries with a separate ceremony before any church proceedings. Sometimes civil marriages requires much documentation and is costly, so common law marriage may be a norm. Thirdly, a church marriage is a traditional marriage with all the trimmings and it will be postponed until there are sufficient economic resources to meet the expectations of society and family. Fourthly, many Hispanic immigrants wish to marry in their hometowns in order to celebrate with family and because of immigration issues this can be a lengthy delay.

THE RITE

The baptismal rite is as indicated in the ritual. The pouring of the water is very important. Holy Water is a respected sacramental. Sometimes a medal, a gift, a rosary, a cross will be given to the child and they will want them blessed. This may be done after the ceremony or be included in the final blessing. Sometimes the godparents will bring a baptismal candle. The godparents will be expected to provide gown, clothes or dress.

Expect the presence of professional photographers as well as the unprofessional. Memory of the past is important particularly in relationship to people. However, in order to maintain decorum, appropriate boundaries may be set but expect them to be tested! If the celebrant is willing, he may tell the people at the preparation or at the ceremony that he is willing to stay immediately after the baptism to pose for pictures even re-enacting the important moments like the pouring of water if they refrain from taking pictures. If explained that a better picture can be had, a deal can be struck!

Hispanics generally understand that this is a moment to make a generous donation to the church. Therefore, it would not be inappropriate to hand out envelopes for this purpose, for example, during the baptismal preparation. One needs to explain carefully here because by some Latin American customs they will ask what is the price for a baptism? It usually is the godparent who provides the donation.

FIESTA

After the baptism a gathering will take place. It may be as simple as a family meal or as elaborate as a reception hall party. The fiesta is important. The parents are expected to provide a meal for the godparents. It is also one of the manifestations of the Hispanic world-view. In a cultural history marked by much suffering and oppression, the celebration of baptism gives a pause in life to rejoice and to show this through the very human expressions of food, music, conversation, and dance. For the priest, deacon or baptismal preparation team to respond to an invitation to such a gathering would be considered an honor and would make them part of that circle of life.

BAPTISMAL REGISTER

Much confusion can be had around the recording and indexing of the Hispanic last names particularly those from Central And South America. If the child's name is **Guadalupe Julia Martinez Rojo**, the underlined last name is the father's name. **Rojo** is the mother's. The two family names make the complete last name and therefore for registering and indexing the entry should appear under Martinez, that is 'M' and not **Rojo**. The mother's name in the register would follow the father's and the certificate would be as above. This is important to remember in order to avoid incorrect indexing. Also baptismal certificates may be accepted as legal documents in Latin America.

RESOURCES

For further resources and consultations the diocesan **Hispanic Ministry Office** is of service.