Frequently Asked Questions regarding Baptism

1. Who may baptize?

The ordinary minister of Baptism is a bishop, priest, or deacon. In the case of an emergency, any person may baptize, even if not baptized him/herself. This person must intend what the Church intends, and baptize the child with water, using the Trinitarian formula: "I baptize you in the name of the Father, and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit."

2. May a child be baptized if only one parent requests it?

The consent of at least one of the parents, or the person who lawfully takes their place, is required for the baptism of a child.

3. How long after the birth of a child should the Baptism take place?

As soon as possible after the birth: 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 parish to request the sacrament for their child and to be prepared for it properly (Code of Canon Law, c. 867 § 1). An infant in danger of death is to be baptized without any delay (Code of Canon Law, c. 867 § 2). See question #1 above.

4. Can our child be baptized in a parish if we do not live within the parish boundaries?

Baptism, like all of the sacraments, is a celebration of a living relationship with God and with the local believing community, the parish. The sacraments are celebrations of our Church and, as such, are normally celebrated in the parish where the family resides or is registered and normally worships.

5. How do we arrange to have our child baptized in a parish other than the one where we normally worship?

If, for a good pastoral reason (for example, so extended family may attend), parents wish to have their child baptized in another parish, they need to approach the Pastor of that parish to ask if he is willing to baptize their child. A letter of permission to have the baby baptized elsewhere must be obtained from the Pastor of the parish where the family usually worships. Normally, Baptism preparation may take place in either of the parishes.

6. Must we give our child the name of a saint to be baptized?

A baptismal name that is offensive to Christians is not permitted; a saint's name is encouraged, but not necessary.

7. Does my Parish Church keep a record of my Baptism?

Yes. The basic entry includes: name; date and place of birth of the baptized; minister of the sacrament; parents (including mother's maiden name); godparent(s), and Christian witness (if any); date and place of the conferred baptism (Code of Canon Law, c. 877).

8. Can our child be baptized if we're not practicing Catholics?

Baptism is more than a rite of passage for a child or a washing away of original sin. Baptism is a sharing in the life of the risen Christ. Baptism is also the first step of initiation into the Christian community. During the Rite of Baptism, parents promise to raise their child in the practice of the faith. Parents who are not practicing members of the community may be asked to delay the Baptism of their child until they have re-established that connection with their parish community.

9. Can our child be baptized if we're not married?

Not married in the Church? Your child's Baptism and your marriage are two separate issues. Your marital status may be discussed during your Baptism interview to encourage you to get married (or validate your marriage in the Church) if this is appropriate. However, as long as you are committed to raising your child as a Catholic, he/she may celebrate the Sacrament of Baptism and be welcomed into the Catholic Church.

10. Who can be godparents?

Since godparents take on two roles – that of support for the parents in the Catholic upbringing of their child, and that of representing the Christian community into which the child is being initiated – they must be practicing Catholics, living according to the faith and fully initiated through the Sacraments of Baptism, Confirmation and Eucharist, who are mature enough (usually at least 16 years of age) to undertake this role. (Code of Canon Law, c. 872)

A godparent does not need to be the same gender as the candidate for Baptism. The godparent assumes no legal responsibility for the child.

11. Can a parent serve as a godparent?

A parent may not serve as a godparent because the parent already has a distinct role and relationship with the child. A godparent's role is separate from that of a parent or legal guardian.

12. What does a godparent do?

A godparent is called to model what it means to live as a Catholic Christian. The godparent is to assist the child in living a Christian life.

13. How many godparents are required?

The child may have only one or two godparents. If two godparents are chosen, one is to be a man and the other a woman. (Code of Canon Law, c. 873)

14. Can a person of the Orthodox faith be a godparent?

A member of the Eastern Orthodox Church may be a godparent together with a Catholic. "For a just cause, it is permitted to admit the Christian faithful of another Eastern non-Catholic Church to the function of a sponsor, but always at the same time with a Catholic sponsor." (Eastern Code of Canon Law, c. 685 § 3.) There must be at least one Catholic godparent.

15. What if the person I have chosen as godparent is sick or unable to be present at the time of the Baptism?

In exceptional circumstances, it is possible for the godparent to be represented at the Baptism by a 'proxy'. The names of the godparent and his/her proxy will be entered in the Baptismal Register. The name of the person who has served as proxy is not included on the Baptismal Certificate.

16. May a Catholic serve as a godparent at a non-Catholic baptism?

A Catholic may act as witness at a non-Catholic baptism, but not as a sponsor. The only situation in which a Catholic may be a godparent (sponsor) in "another ecclesial Community" is in an Eastern Orthodox Church "if he/she is so invited" (Directory for the Application of the Principles and Norms of Ecumenism, 98, a, b).

17. In the future, may I change the Baptismal sponsors?

On occasion, one or both of the people who served as godparents are no longer a part of the child's life or they have moved a great distance and the possibility of an ongoing relationship is compromised. Although a new person may now hold a

place of prominence in the faith life of the child it is not possible to alter the Baptismal register. The register is a legal record and the original godparents were a witness to the event. It would be untruthful to remove the name of the original witness and replace it with a new name, perhaps someone who was not even present at the Baptism.

18. May a priest or a deacon serve as a godparent and also preside at the baptism?

Clergy may serve as godparents (sponsors) but are asked not to be the minister of baptism if serving as a godparent (sponsor) so that the roles are not confused.

19. What is meant by the term "Christian witness"?

A Christian witness is a baptized Christian and a member of a non-Catholic ecclesial community. (e.g., Anglican, United, Presbyterian, etc.) A member of the Eastern Orthodox Church may serve as a godparent if there is a Catholic godparent. A Christian witness is a witness to the Baptism, not a godparent.

One Christian witness is allowed only if there is one godparent. (Code of Canon Law, c. 874) If there is a Christian witness, when his/her name is entered in the Baptismal Register the term Christian witness should be included.

It is not necessary to have a Christian witness.

20. Does our child have to be baptized in order to attend a Catholic school?

It is important to check with the school board that has jurisdiction where your child will attend school. The trustees of each board interpret the admission requirements in their own way. Some school boards require proof of a parent's Catholic Baptism, especially if the child has not been baptized. This establishes their eligibility to direct their taxes to the Catholic board. This is a government, not a Church stipulation. If the child is not baptized, the parents are usually encouraged to meet with the Pastor of their parish (or his delegate) to discuss this issue.

Baptism is never to be seen as a means to enroll in a Catholic school.

21. May a child be "re-baptized" if he/she was baptized in a hospital, etc. in an emergency situation?

A person may be baptized only once. If a child is baptized in an emergency situation, once the child returns to health the parents may bring the child to their parish to celebrate the further rites as indicated in Rite of Baptism for Children. See "Rite of Bringing a Baptized Child to the Church Outside Mass" [nn. 267-287′] or "Rite of Bringing a Baptized Child to the Church within Mass" [nn. 288-312].

22. What happens if the child is adopted?

See Rite of Baptism for Children, Appendix II: "Rite of Welcome for an Adopted Child who is Baptized [nn. 345-363].

The baptismal records of adopted children are subject to both canon and civil law. If persons come to the parish looking for information on their birth name or parents they are to be directed to the Ontario government, which has legislation relating to adoption disclosure. Parish personnel have a legal obligation not to disclose any information that would identify or reveal, directly or indirectly, the fact that a person was adopted (L&L p. 9, 520, 1523, 1945, 2068, letter dated January 30, 2004).

For children baptized after their adoption is finalized, the following information is entered in the register: given name designated by the adopting parent(s); name(s) of the adopting parent(s); date and place of birth; sponsor(s) or godparent(s); minister performing the baptism; a statement that the child is adopted. The baptismal certificate issued for an adopted child is the same as a typical baptismal certificate. However, please note that the notation of adoption is not entered on the certificate.

For children already baptized, who later become part of an adoption process, the names of the adopting parent(s) and the new names for the child are added to

the baptismal register after the adoption has been finalized. A notation is also made stating that the child was adopted along with the name of the court or agency involved, the date of adoption and the case number. Children who are in the process of being adopted who have not already been baptized should not be baptized until the process is finalized, unless it is a matter of danger of death or urgent necessity.

Baptismal certificates issued by the parish for these individuals give only the name(s) of the adopting parent(s), the child's new legal name, the date and place of baptism, and the name of the priest/deacon who conferred the sacrament. The name(s) of the sponsor(s) are not given unless the adopting parents designated honorary sponsors. The notation of adoption in the register is not entered on the certificate.

23. Is there a fee for sacramental preparation sessions?

In some parishes a fee is charged to cover the costs of the preparation process and material used. This fee goes to the parish, not the priest. It is understood that regardless of their financial situation the preparation process is available to all members of the parish.

24. I no longer want to be Catholic. Can I remove my name from the baptismal register?

Baptismal Registers are records of historical fact. They are not archives of membership enrollment. Accordingly, a person's name can never be removed from a Baptismal Register after he or she has been Baptized. The only changes allowed are those necessary to correct errors originally transposed into the record.

If you have any further questions about this Sacrament, please email us at stmarymtforest@wightman.ca.