

June 11, 2020

Guidelines for Resumption of Celebrating the Sacrament of Baptism

“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 28:19-20

The Sacrament of Baptism is the door to life and to the Kingdom. Baptism brings us into the Body of Christ and sets us on the path towards eternal life. Through this sacrament, the church grows and increases its members. The celebration of the sacrament is an occasion where the church and the family of those who are to be baptized come together with great joy to welcome a new member. The rites, their signs and symbols, incorporated within the Order of Baptism of Children are effective signs of the mystery unfolding in the celebration. The COVID-19 pandemic calls everyone to work together in order to prevent the further spread of the virus. These published guidelines intend to implement health and safety standards in celebrating the sacrament without compromising the integrity and dignity of Baptism.

A. General Principles

1. The General Principles published in the Guidelines for the Resumption of Public Masses (May 26, 2020) that address health and safety protocols are applicable in celebrating the rites in the Order of Baptism of Children.
2. Priests/Deacons/Pastoral Workers in the parish are to provide proper instructions to families regarding these guidelines in order to comply with the health and safety requirements while celebrating the Sacrament of Baptism in addition to the usual pre-baptismal formation class and preparation.
3. Group Baptisms should be limited as much as possible and only done when there is a clear pastoral need. Considering the necessary preparations that must be done between Masses, it is recommended during this time, that the celebration of Baptisms be done outside of Mass.
4. When possible, pastors should provide live-streaming services for Baptism. This will offer a helpful alternative and facilitate limiting the number of in-person congregants at the baptismal celebration.
5. The dignity and integrity of the Sacrament of Baptism must be upheld in the implementation of these guidelines.

B. Preparing for Rite of Baptism

1. Place of Baptism
 - a. Baptisms must be celebrated in an area of the church that complies with the physical distancing requirements, health and safety requirements, and the current proposed standard for the number of people allowed to be present in church: the lower of 25% capacity of the building or no more than 100 congregants. Baptisms should be limited to include the minimum number of

people possible, e.g. parents, godparent(s), and siblings of the child to be baptized. This is applicable even to individual Baptisms.

- b. The place of baptism must be thoroughly cleaned and sanitized after each Baptism.
 - c. The water for baptism must be new and not reused. The same water should not be re-poured over the head of another child. Have another receptacle for the water poured over a child's head. The minister of baptism should not use his bare hand to pour the water over the child's head. A baptismal shell or another worthy instrument should be used.
2. The Minister of Baptism
 - a. The minister of baptism should be not be over 65 or have an underlying health condition.
 - b. The minister is to wear a mask during the entire celebration of the rite of Baptism
 3. For Each Child to be Baptized
 - a. The parents (mother and father or guardian) and at least one godparent are required to be present at the celebration of baptism.
 - b. Parents and godparents are to wear masks during the entire celebration, as well as any other person participating.
 - c. Children under the age of two should not wear masks.
 - d. It is not advisable to have other family members present besides the parents and godparents, especially if they fall in the vulnerable category. However, if other family members are to be present during the celebration, pastors/parochial administrators are to set a limit in order to comply with the proposed standard. The physical distancing guidelines must be observed at all times if other people are present.

C. Celebrating the Rite of Baptism

1. Rite of Receiving the Child/Children
 - a. The minister is to sanitize his hands prior to signing the cross on the child's forehead.
 - If there are multiple children, the minister must sanitize his hands prior to signing the forehead of each child.
 - b. The Liturgy of the Word
 - It is advisable during this time to shorten the selection of readings and deliver a very brief homily.
 - c. Prayer of Exorcism and Anointing Before Baptism
 - The anointing before baptism may be omitted and the alternative prayer is to be used as prescribed by the rite. The minister, however, should extend his hands for the imposition of hands, without touching the head of the child. If anointing before baptism is done, the anointing must be with a cotton swab or ball which must not be reused for another baptism. The cotton swab or ball should be properly discarded after the baptism.

2. Celebration of Baptism
 - a. Blessing of the Water
 - The minister is to sanitize his hands before the prayer which asks him to touch the water with his right hand.
 - b. Baptism
 - Baptism should be conferred only by the pouring of water over the forehead.
 - c. Anointing after Baptism
 - The minister can use a cotton swab or a ball of cotton to anoint the crown of the child's head. Do not reuse on another child. The cotton swab or ball should be properly discarded after the baptism.
 - d. Clothing with White Garment
 - It is preferable that the family itself provide the white garment and place it on the child. If the parish provides a garment it is ideal that the family be allowed to keep it.
 - e. Handing of a Lighted Candle
 - Have one member of the family (e.g. the godfather) come forward one at a time to light their candles from the Paschal candle, so as to observe physical distancing.
 - f. The Ephphatha may be omitted.
 - If it is done, the minister of Baptism must sanitize his hands prior to touching the ears and mouth of the child.
3. The Conclusion of the Rite
 - The priest concludes the rite in the usual manner with the blessing and dismissal

D. Other Considerations

1. In the case of an emergency baptism, the baptism should be done just with the pouring of water and the Trinitarian formula. At a later date the Rite of Bringing a Baptized Child to the Church should be celebrated.
2. If pictures are requested by the family, these should be taken with the parents, godparents and child only. If they request one with the minister of Baptism, the parents should hold the child for the picture. Until further notice group pictures should be avoided.
3. Gatherings before and after the Baptism on parish grounds should be avoided until further notice.