

CHRISTIAN INITIATION POLICIES

Section 1000

- 1001*** **General Introduction**
- 1002** **Rite of Christian Initiation of Adults**
- 1003** **Initiation for Children of Catechetical Age**
- 1004** **Preparation of Uncatechized Adults for
Confirmation and Eucharist**
- 1005** **Reception of Baptized Christians into full Communion
of the Catholic Church**
- 1006** **Baptism of Infants and Children prior to reaching
Catechetical Age**
- 1007** **Christian Initiation of a person in Danger of Death**
- 1008** **Canonical Qualifications of Sponsors and Godparents**

1001 General Introduction

Through the sacraments of Christian initiation men and women are freed from the power of darkness. With Christ they die, are buried and rise again. They receive the Spirit of adoption which makes them God's sons and daughters and with the entire people of God, they celebrate the memorial of the Lord's death and resurrection.

Through baptism men and women are incorporated into Christ. They are *formed* into God's people, and they obtain forgiveness of all their sins. They are raised from their natural human condition to the dignity of adopted children. They become a new creation through water and the Holy Spirit. Hence they are called, and are indeed, the children of God.

Signed with the gift of the Spirit in confirmation, Christians more perfectly become the image of their Lord and are filled with the Holy Spirit. They bear witness to him before the entire world and eagerly work for the building up of the body of Christ.

Finally they come to the table of the Eucharist, to eat the flesh and drink the blood of the Son of Man so that they may have eternal life and show forth the unity of God's people. By offering themselves with Christ, they share in his universal sacrifice: the entire community of the redeemed is offered to God by their high priest. They pray for the greater outpouring of the Holy Spirit so that the whole human race may be brought into the unity of God's family.

Thus the three sacraments of Christian initiation closely combine to bring the faithful to the full stature of Christ and to enable them to carry out the mission of the entire people of God in the Church and the world.

To this end, it is the policy of Saint Paul Parish to *form* each adult and those children who have reached Catechetical Age that seek Christian Initiation by means of a gradual process of formation that takes place within the community of the Faithful over an open period of time. This will be a spiritual journey that varies according to needs of the adult and that of those children who have reached Catechetical Age.

The Spiritual journey begins with a consultation with the Pastor or his designee of Saint Paul Parish. Based upon the unique circumstances of the individual inquiry, the Pastor will make the decision as to what course is appropriate for the circumstance. The Pastor may choose to appoint the proper text and leadership to guide the catechumen and or candidate through this spiritual process.

This period of formation is known as the Rite of Christian Initiation of Adults and the Rite of Christian Initiation of Children of Catechetical Age. Children of Catechetical Age shall be defined at Saint Paul Parish as a child who has reached the age of seven [7] who has not been baptized. There are four continuous periods that catechumen/candidates will experience in preparation for Sacramental reception. The celebration of the sacraments of Christian Initiation shall take place at the Easter Vigil.

1002 Rite of Christian Initiation of Adults

It is the mission of all of the parishioners of Saint Paul Parish to evangelize and reach out to all of the unbaptized. It is the policy of Saint Paul Parish to have a fully functioning Rite of Christian Initiation program for the inquiry and faith formation of those adult men and women who seek to know Jesus Christ and who wish to be incorporated into the people of God within the Roman Catholic Church.

Unbaptized adults will be directed to make an initial inquiry for entry into the RCIA by contact with a member of the RCIA Team, a Deacon and or the Pastor. Each inquirer will be assisted and guided during this time of inquiry and later periods of formation. In as much as Christian initiation is both a period of faith formation and a time of personal conversion, initiation is to be extended over several months or several years, if need be, before one receives the sacraments of Initiation. By God's help they will be strengthened spiritually during their preparation and at the proper time will receive the sacraments fruitfully.

1003 Initiation for Children of Catechetical Age

It is the policy of Saint Paul Parish to follow the tradition that an unbaptized child reaches "Catechetical Age" upon reaching their seventh [7] birthday. and shall be directed to make an initial inquiry for entry into the RCIA for children by contacting the Pastor or his designee from the RCIA team. This Rite of Christian Initiation is not intended for infants or children under the age of seven.

The Christian initiation of these children requires both a conversion that is personal and somewhat developed, in proportion to their age, and the assistance of the education they need. Accordingly, this initiation is to be extended over several years, if need be, before they receive the Sacraments of Initiation.

Like unbaptized adults in the RCIA, children in the RCIA with Children, are to receive all the sacraments of initiation at the Easter Liturgy: Baptism,

Confirmation and Eucharist. Therefore the Church asks that it “be established that these children are ready for the sacraments”.

It shall be the norm in Saint Paul Parish that no child of Catechetical age in the Rite of Christian Initiation with Children, shall be initiated at Easter without having been in Faith Formation and Sabbath worship for a minimum of three liturgical years. After completing the third year of formation in the RCIA for Children, the Director of the RCIA, the Director of Faith Formation and the pastor or his designee, shall determine if the child should be formally accepted into the order of Catechumens. This should be done when it has been determined that it is time to bring the child to the Rite of Election in the upcoming enrollment, thus making them eligible for the Easter reception of the Sacraments of Initiation.

1004 Preparation of Uncatechized Adults for Confirmation and Eucharist

Saint Paul Parish will follow the pastoral guidelines as expressed in the National Conference of Catholic Bishop’s Decree in the Rite of Christian Initiation of Adults, with regard to uncatechized Adults for Confirmation and Eucharist. It will be the policy of Saint Paul to direct these baptized but uncatechized Catholics to join in the catechetical formation process by our RCIA program and to worship with the faith community on the Sabbath.

As is the case of catechumens, these adults will also be required to show that they are open to a conversion of life to the person and teaching of Jesus Christ. The preparation of these adults requires a sufficient time, during which the faith infused in baptism will grow in them and take deep root through the pastoral formation they receive.

As these Uncatechized Adults progress in their spiritual and moral development, and show that they have markedly conformed their life to the teaching of the Gospel and to the person of Jesus Christ, they would be invited by the RCIA Team and or the pastor [or his designee] to enter a period of preparation made holy by means of liturgical celebrations. These rites would then lead towards preparation for their reception of Confirmation and Eucharist at the Easter Vigil.

1005 Reception of Baptized Christians into full Communion of the Catholic Church

This is the liturgical rite by which a person born and baptized in a separate ecclesial Community is received, according to the Latin rite, into the full communion of the Catholic Church. The rite is so arranged that no greater burden than necessary is required for the establishment of communion and unity.

In the case of Eastern Christians who enter into the fullness of Catholic communion, no liturgical rite is required, but simply a profession of Catholic faith.

Saint Paul Parish will follow the pastoral guidelines as expressed in the National Conference of Catholic Bishop's Decree in the Rite of Christian Initiation of Adults. Baptized Christians are to receive both doctrinal and spiritual preparation, adapted to individual pastoral requirements, for reception into the full communion of the Catholic Church.

Candidates for reception and full communion will be directed to meet with a member of the RCIA Team, or a Deacon, or the Pastor to establish the pastoral path best suited to the unique needs of the candidate. During the period of preparation the candidate will be asked to share in worship in conformity with the provisions of the RCIA.

Candidates for reception and full communion will attend doctrinal and spiritual preparation as directed by the RCIA Team. In accord with the Diocese of Gary they will participate in various liturgical celebrations including those with the Bishop. The Candidate for reception and full communion may make his/her profession of faith within a designated Sunday Mass or at the Easter Vigil or during the Easter season. The process of preparation and formation will vary to the extent to which the baptized person has led a Christian life and been appropriately catechized to deepen his or her inner adherence to the church and teachings of Jesus Christ.

1006 Baptism of Infants and Children prior to reaching Catechetical Age

From the earliest times, the Church, to which the mission of preaching the gospel and of baptizing was entrusted, has baptized children as well as adults. Our Lord said: "Unless a man is reborn in water and the Holy Spirit, he cannot enter the kingdom of God." The Church has always understood these words to mean that children should not be deprived of baptism, because they are baptized into the faith of the Church. This faith is proclaimed for them by their parents and godparents, who represent both the local Church and the whole society of saints and believers.

It is the policy of Saint Paul Parish to baptize infants under the Catechetical Age of reason in conformity to the Code of Canon Law and the following pastoral standards. For an infant to be baptized by the pastor, the infant must have at least one parent who is a registered member of the parish. At least one parent is to be a practicing Catholic. This is essential. To fulfill the true meaning of the sacrament, children must later be formed in the faith in which they have been baptized. Parents are the primary teachers of

the faith. If the infant does not have at least one parent who is a registered *and* practicing Catholic in good standing with the Church, the infant baptism will be deferred until such time as the child does have a parent who is him or herself living the faith.

It shall be the policy not to baptize infants of newly registered parishioners for six months, unless it can be established that at least one Catholic parent was a registered and practicing Catholic who recently transferred their parish membership.

When an infant's parent(s) have fallen away from the practice of the faith, and the pastor has serious doubts that the infant would be raised in the Catholic faith, the baptism shall be deferred. The pastor shall attempt to provide pastoral care to help encourage the baptized Catholic parent(s) return to the practice of the faith with the hope of being able to someday baptize the infant.

An infant born to a parent without the benefit of the Sacrament of Marriage is eligible for baptism, provided that the custodial parent is the Catholic. Before any determination can be made as to the appropriateness of baptizing the infant, the Pastor and at least one of the infant's parents who are Catholic, shall meet to discern whether the parent(s) is committed to the Lord, the practice of their Catholic faith.

Prior to the baptism of an infant, parent(s) are required to participate in a Baptism Preparation course at the parish. One parent is required to attend although both are encouraged to come together, even if they are an interfaith couple.

1007 Christian Initiation of a person in Danger of Death

It is the tradition of the Church that when persons, whether catechumens or not, who are in danger of death but are not at the point of death and so are able to hear and answer the questions involved may be baptized with a short rite. Persons must make a promise that upon recovery they will complete the usual catechesis.

Infants who are in danger of death shall also be baptized. Parent(s) must make a promise that upon recovery of their child they will complete the usual catechesis necessary for the child to come to know the Lord and live the Catholic faith.

Rites of Welcoming those Baptized in Danger of Death will be celebrated with the family and the parish when the sick person has recovered sufficiently for the celebration.

1008 Canonical Qualifications of Sponsors and Godparents

An important office in the sacramental initiation of both adults and children is that of godparents. The revised Code of Canon Law established what is meant by the term canonical godparent or sponsor.

The role and duties of godparents are distinct in infant and adult initiation can be considered in three phases: the period of preparation or catechumenate, the celebration of the liturgical initiation, and the postbaptismal relationship.

For the celebration of infant baptism the chief duty of the godparent is to be present and profess the faith of the church. They are “to represent both the expanded spiritual family of the one to be baptized and the role of the church. They profess the church’s faith in which the child is being baptized.

At adult initiation the godparent plays a major role, beginning in the catechumenate. He or she is to be close to the catechumen, a friend, one whose example and character *is* a model of Christian life for the catechumen. It is desirable that the canonical godparent also be the sponsor during the rite of admission to the catechumenate. The public office of the godparent begins at the Rite of Election when the church hears the godparent’s testimony concerning the suitability of the catechumens.

Qualifications

- 1. *Number and sex:*** Ordinarily there should be one godparent for each person to be baptized, male or female, or there can be two godparents, one godmother and one godfather (canon 873). This excludes two godparents of the same sex.
- 2. *Designation and approval:*** For infant baptism the parent(s) choose the godparents. In adult initiation, the godparents are chosen by the person to be baptized. They are approved by the local priest with, insofar as possible, the acceptance of the Christian community (canon 874). It is imperative that only faithful Catholics who are fitting models of the Christian life be approved for this role. Accordingly, godparents and sponsors are to have a “sponsor certificate” signed by the godparent(s) and or sponsor’s parish pastor or his delegate to attest that a person is a member of a parish, is a practicing Catholic and is qualified to be a godparent/sponsor.
- 3. *Age:*** Godparents must be *at least sixteen* (canon 874).

- 4. *Fully initiated Catholic:* Godparents/Sponsors must be Catholic and they must have received the Sacraments of Confirmation and Eucharist (canon 874).**

The Ecumenical Directory, 48, provides one exception to this rule for Eastern Christians, commonly called the Orthodox. A suitable Eastern Orthodox can be a godparent at the baptism of a Catholic, provided there is also a Catholic godparent.

Protestants may not be godparents at the baptism of a Catholic, but a validly baptized Protestant can be admitted and recorded as a Christian witness together with the Catholic godparent (canon 874). Saint Paul Parish welcomes and encourages all interfaith parents to have a member of both traditions for their child's baptism.

- 5. *In Good Standing:* Godparents and Sponsors must lead a life of faith *in harmony with the undertaking of their role (canon 874)*. A divorced and remarried person who does not have an annulment or dissolution is living in an irregular second union, that contradicts objectively the teachings of Christ and the Church. While some individuals may be in the process of seeking an annulment or dissolution of their previous marriage, they are not yet eligible to be a Godparent or Sponsor until their second union is able to be convalidated. Those individuals who are living together or in cohabitation would also be ineligible as this is contrary to our beliefs and practices. This includes couples of the opposite and same sex.**
- 6. *Not a parent:* A godparent may not be the father or mother of the person being baptized. There is nothing in the 1983 code of Canon law to prevent spouses, clergy or religious from being godparents.**