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## GENERAL CANONICAL PRINCIPLES PERTAINING TO THE SACRAMENTS

**T**he sacraments of the Church are the principal means and experiences by which the faith of the Church is celebrated and built up. It is the belief of the Church that by way of the sacraments and the full participation of the People of God, perfect worship is offered to God through the signs given by Christ. For this reason the Church is extremely vigilant that these rites are celebrated with care and reverence and are regulated by proper liturgical norms.

**Principle 1:** The supervision of the sacramental life of the Church is entrusted to the Holy See, whose responsibility includes the determination of the requirements for validity of the sacraments, and also to the **diocesan bishop**, as specified in the law (c. 838).

Because the sacraments are of central importance to the life of the Church, an important effort is made to ensure that the integrity of the sacramental life is preserved. It is the Holy See (see **Apostolic See**) which publishes liturgical books and approves vernacular translations of the various rituals that are prepared by the **conferences of bishops** and which makes sure

that liturgical norms are universally observed. The diocesan bishop issues various norms concerning the liturgical life in his own **diocese** in those areas that have been indicated by the **universal law**.

**Principle 2:** It is first necessary that one receive Baptism before being admitted to the other sacraments. Baptism, Confirmation, and Eucharist are intimately linked as the sacraments of initiation into the Church (c. 842).

Baptism is understood to be the *gateway* to the other sacraments and to the *life of grace*.

**Principle 3:** The ministers of the sacraments cannot refuse to administer them to those who are properly disposed, ask for them at an appropriate time, and are not prohibited by the law from receiving them (c. 843, §1).

Because the sacraments are understood to be necessary for salvation, those entrusted by the Church with celebrating the sacraments should take care to make them available when reasonably requested.

**Principle 4:** Catholic ministers may administer the sacraments to others besides Catholics under certain prescribed conditions (c. 844).

Catholic ministers may administer the Sacraments of Penance, Eucharist, and Anointing of the Sick to members of the Eastern Churches not in full communion with the Catholic Church

(commonly referred to as the “**Orthodox Churches**”) when such members ask for them on their own and are properly disposed. This applies to other churches whom the Holy See has judged in a similar condition—for example, the Polish National Church.

Catholic ministers may also administer these same sacraments to members of other Christian faith traditions when it is a case of danger of death or a grave necessity that has been determined in norms issued by the local diocesan bishop or the **conference of bishops**. Those seeking the sacraments in the Catholic Church must ask for them on their own and not be able to receive the sacrament from their own minister. They must also manifest the same faith in the sacrament and be properly disposed.

**Principle 5:** No sacred minister on his own may change or alter the liturgical books that have been approved by the Holy See (c. 846).

Except where expressly allowed for at certain places in the ritual books, liturgical books are to be “faithfully followed,” both in the words spoken and in the actions performed. Such care and reverence for the texts and rubrics safeguards the universality of the liturgical prayer of the Church.

**Principle 6:** Those who administer the sacraments may not demand any payment or offering beyond what has been approved by the appropriate authority (c. 848).

No one must ever be deprived of receiving the sacraments because of an inability to make an offering.



## 2.

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# BAPTISM

**T**he Sacrament of Baptism is the first sacrament received and the gateway to the other sacraments of the Church. Through the reception of this sacrament, individuals are freed from sin and reborn in the new life of grace; there is also a configuration to Christ with the imparting of an indelible character and incorporation into the community of the faithful, the Church.

### Ritual (c. 850)

The *Order of Baptism of Children* or the *Rite of Christian Initiation of Adults* (RCIA) should be consulted for the rite that is followed for the celebration of the sacrament. In urgent necessity, all that is required is the pouring of water and the formula: “I baptize you in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit.”

### Adult Baptism (c. 851, 1°)

Adults who wish to be baptized are enrolled into the **catechumenate**. Unless a grave reason prevents it, the adult who is baptized receives immediately afterward the Sacraments of Confirmation and Eucharist, following the norms of the *Rite of Christian Initiation of Adults*.

The precepts for adult baptism are to be followed with those who are not yet adults, but have reached the age of reason (cc. 852, 1).

## Infant Baptism (c. 851, 2°)

For the Baptism of infants (children who have not obtained the **age of reason**, considered to be the age of seven), the parents and, secondarily, the sponsor(s) have responsibility for sharing their own faith through this sacrament. The **pastor** is to make sure that the parents are well prepared through an appropriate catechesis about their important role in the spiritual formation of the child.

A person who cannot be responsible for him or herself is considered an infant for the purposes of baptism (cc. 852, 2).

## Day and Place for Baptism (cc. 856–57, 860)

The actual celebration of Baptism should take place on a Sunday or, if possible, at the Easter Vigil, in the **parish** church of the person to be baptized (or, in the case of an infant, the parents' parish). Only for a grave cause and by permission of the **ordinary** may a Baptism be celebrated in a private home. It is celebrated either by immersion or by the pouring of water.

## Ordinary Minister (c. 861)

The ordinary minister of this sacrament is a bishop, priest, or deacon. If the ordinary minister is impeded, a catechist or other person deputed to this task by the **local ordinary**, as well as any person with the correct intention in case of necessity, may baptize.

## Requirements for Baptism (cc. 865, 867–68)

In order to be baptized, an adult must have freely manifested his or her desire to receive the sacrament, been properly prepared and instructed for it, and participated in the catechuminate. They should also express sorrow for any sins they have committed.

In case of danger of death, it is sufficient that the person has some knowledge of the Christian truths and expresses some sign of their desire to receive the sacrament and promises to observe the commandments of the Christian religion.

Parents should see to it that their infants are baptized within the first weeks of their birth. In danger of death, the infant should be baptized immediately. At least one of the parents (or guardian) of an infant to be baptized must agree to the Baptism; in danger of death, the Baptism is to be celebrated even if one or both parents object. There must be a founded hope that the child will be raised in the Catholic faith. If such hope is lacking, the Baptism may be delayed in accordance with **particular law**, with an explanation for such a delay communicated to the parents.

### Doubtful Baptism (c. 869)

In situations where there exists a doubt as to whether or not Baptism has been conferred, and the doubt remains after serious investigation, Baptism should be conferred conditionally—that is, “If you have not been baptized, I baptize you . . .” A person who has been baptized into another Christian community should *not* be conditionally baptized unless after serious investigation of the ritual used and the intention of the minister conferring the sacrament there remain doubts as to the validity of the Baptism received. If conditional Baptism is then required, the doctrine of the sacrament is to be explained and the reasons provided (to the parents, if an infant).

### Baptismal Sponsors / Godparents (cc. 872–74)

A sponsor, commonly known as a godparent, assists an adult to be baptized, or assists the parents in presenting an infant for Baptism. The godparent assists the newly baptized in living the Christian life. If two godparents are chosen, they are to be of different sexes.

To serve as a godparent, one must be

- designated for this role by the one to be baptized (or by the parents in the case of an infant);
- sixteen years of age or older (the local bishop may establish a different age; the minister of Baptism may also make an exception in a particular case);
- a Catholic, confirmed and who has received the Eucharist, leading a life in conformity with the faith and the role assumed as a godparent;
- not bound by any **canonical penalty**; and
- not a parent of the one to be baptized.

A baptized person who is not Catholic may serve as a witness to the baptism along with a Catholic godparent.

### Proving Baptism (c. 876)

To prove the conferral of Baptism, it is usually sufficient to obtain the declaration of a single witness or even the oath of the baptized person if the person was baptized as an adult.

### Recording Baptism (c. 877)

The pastor of the place where the Baptism is celebrated is to record the Baptism immediately in the baptismal register, including the name of the baptized, minister, parents, sponsor(s) (and witness), place and date of conferred Baptism, and place and date of birth.

If the child's mother is not married, her name is included in the register if there is public proof of maternity or if the mother asks willingly in writing or before two witnesses that this be done; in the case of the father, his name is to be inserted if his paternity is established either by public proof or by his



declaration before the pastor and two witnesses. Otherwise, the names of the father and/or mother are not indicated.

If a child is adopted, the names of the adopting parents are recorded; the names of the natural parents are also included in accordance with local **civil law** and the prescriptions of the **conference of bishops**.

## Membership in a Church *Sui Iuris* (cc. 111–12)

Within the Catholic Church, there exists the Latin Church and twenty-three autonomous Eastern Churches with their own hierarchies, all of which are in communion with the Bishop of Rome. A person obtains membership in a **church sui iuris** through Baptism or transfer.

### Baptism into a Church *Sui Iuris* (c. 111)

A child born of parents who belong to the Latin Church is ascribed to the Latin Church when baptized. If one parent is not a member of the Latin Church, but both parents *agree* to have the child baptized in the Latin Church, the child is ascribed to it by Baptism. If there is no agreement between the parents, the child becomes a member of the church *sui iuris* of the father. Anyone to be baptized who is fourteen years of age or older may choose the church *sui iuris* in which they wish to be baptized.

### Church *Sui Iuris* Transfer (c. 112)

One may transfer from one church *sui iuris* to another by obtaining permission from the Holy See (see **Apostolic See**). Should a member of the Latin Church wish to transfer to an Eastern Church that has a bishop with jurisdiction in the same **diocese**, the agreement of both bishops is sufficient for the transfer and no intervention of the Holy See is required.

A Latin Rite Catholic, husband or wife, can transfer to the Eastern church of their spouse. However, only an Eastern Catholic wife, not an Eastern Catholic husband, can transfer to the Latin Rite of their spouse. They may return to their original church if the marriage has ended.

When a parent transfers to the church *sui iuris* of the other spouse, children under fourteen years of age are likewise transferred to the common church. Similarly, children of parents in a **mixed marriage**, when the Catholic parent transfers to another church *sui iuris*, likewise transfer to that new church. However, when such children reach fourteen years of age, they may return to their original church.

The custom of attending liturgy and receiving the sacraments according to the rite of another ritual church does not carry with it the enrollment into that church.

In accordance with the Vatican II **decree *Orientalium Ecclesiarum*** (no. 4), baptized non-Catholics coming into full communion with the Catholic Church must enter the Catholic Church through the ritual church most similar to their own; e.g., Protestants come into full union with the Catholic Church through the Latin Church, Greek Orthodox through the Greek Catholic Church, etc. Any exception must receive the permission of the Holy See or of the two bishops who share jurisdiction.

## *Frequently Asked Questions*

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*1. May a pastoral minister refuse Baptism to a child of parents who are not practicing Catholics?*

Unfortunately, it frequently happens that one or both parents presenting a child to the Church for Baptism do not practice their faith. A variety of reasons may be present. A once-active faith for one reason or another may have grown dormant. One parent may have had a bad experience with a pastoral minister,