

Frequently Asked Questions About Baptisms

1. Who can be baptized?

Every person not yet baptized and only such a person is capable of being baptized (c. 864). There is no such thing as "re-baptism," although baptism can be administered conditionally if there is a serious doubt if a person was baptized. (c. 869)

For adults, an adult who intends to receive baptism is to be admitted to the catechumenate and is to be led insofar as possible through the various stages to sacramental initiation, according to the order of initiation (c. 851)

For children who are under the age of 7 (or who have been determined to have attained the 'use of reason'), the parents of an infant to be baptized and those who are to undertake the function of godparent are to be instructed properly on the meaning of this sacrament and the obligations attached to it. The pastor personally or through others is to take care that the parents are properly instructed through both pastoral advice and common prayer, bringing several families together and, where possible, visiting them.

Parents are obliged to take care that infants are baptized in the first few weeks; as soon as possible after the birth or even before it, they are to go to the pastor to request the sacrament for their child and to be prepared properly for it. (c. 867).

2. Can my child's baptism be postponed or delayed?

For an infant to be baptized licitly, 1) the parents or at least one of them or the person who legitimately takes their place must consent; and 2) there must be a founded hope that the infant will be brought up in the Catholic religion. *if such hope is altogether lacking, the baptism is to be delayed...* after the parents have been advised about the reason. (c. 868)

3. What is the form of baptism?

Baptism is to be conferred either by immersion or by pouring. (c. 854)

4. What names can be given at the time of baptism?

Parents, sponsors, and the pastor are to take care that a name foreign to Christian sensibility is not given.

5. Where can baptism be celebrated?

Apart from a case of necessity, the proper place of baptism is a church or oratory. As a rule an adult is to be baptized in his or her parish church and an infant in the parish church of the parents unless a just cause suggests otherwise.(c. 857) The place of baptism does not affect the validity of baptism.

6. Who can baptize?

The ordinary minister of baptism is a bishop, a presbyter, or a deacon. . When an ordinary minister is absent or impeded, a catechist or another person designated for this function by the local ordinary, or in a case of necessity any person with the right intention, confers baptism licitly. (c. 861) The baptism of adults, at least of those who have completed their fourteenth year, is to be deferred to the diocesan bishop so that he himself administers it if he has judged it expedient. (c. 863)

7. Who can be a godparent?

There is to be only one male sponsor or one female sponsor or one of each. (c. 873)

There are only two godparents for a child.

To be permitted to take on the function of a godparent a person must:

- be designated by the one to be baptized, by the parents or the person who takes their place, or in their absence by the pastor or minister and have the aptitude and intention of fulfilling this function;
- have completed the sixteenth year of age, unless the diocesan bishop has established another age (the Bishop of the Diocese of Yakima has not established another age), or the pastor or minister has granted an exception for a just cause;
- be a Catholic who has been confirmed and has already received the most holy sacrament of the Eucharist and who leads a life of faith in keeping with the function to be taken on (if married, the person must be in a marriage recognized as valid by the Church);
- not be bound by any canonical penalty legitimately imposed or declared;
- not be the father or mother of the one to be baptized.(c. 874)

A baptized person who belongs to a non-Catholic ecclesial community is not to participate except together with a Catholic sponsor and then only as a witness of the baptism. (c. 874) Non-baptized persons are not able to serve either as a godparent or as a witness to the baptism.

8. Where can I obtain a certificate of baptism?

Certificates of Baptism can be obtained from the church of Baptism. Certificates are issued only to the person who was baptized or their parent or guardian. The person requesting a certificate must positively identify him or herself to the pastor or parish staff member issuing the certificate.

If the parish church has been closed, you may contact the Diocese where the church was located. The office of the Chancellor, the Vicar General, or the Canon Law department normally will be able to tell you where the baptismal registers can be located.

If you were baptized in a hospital or similar institution, the baptismal record is maintained in the parish church in which the institution is located. For example, if you were baptized at Yakima Memorial Hospital, which is in the boundaries of St. Paul Cathedral, your baptismal records would be located there.

9. Can I change the name of a godparent after the fact?

No. What is entered in the Sacramental Register is a historical 'snapshot' of the facts on the day of baptism. Occasionally a godparent dies or is no longer able to fulfill their role - in these cases the family is free to name a new person to fulfill this role, but the Sacramental Register (and certificates) are not changed.

10. What if a child/adult's name is changed after baptism?

If there is a legal change of name, we ask for the court order (original or certified copy) giving the details thereof. Each parish has been given specific instructions regarding the notations made in sacramental registers and the issuing of certificates.

11. What about baptized adoptees?

In 1998 the USCCB issued a lengthy instruction regarding the registration of these baptisms and the issuing of baptismal certificates. Each parish in the Diocese has a copy of this instruction - please contact your local parish if you have specific questions about the registration or issuing of certificates.

12. What if I was baptized in a place that was destroyed or did not keep records?

If a baptism occurred in a parish, but was missing in the register, we ask the person or their parents/guardians to supply at least two legal affidavits from persons who were physically present at the baptism, who state that this specific person was baptized. Diocesan parishes have received instructions on the recording of these sacraments that took place at their parish that were not recorded.

If a baptism took place in a parish that no longer exists, was destroyed by fire, flood, war, etc., we ask for the same two affidavits for proof of baptism. These are not recorded in the parish register, but the affidavits are sufficient proof of baptism for other parochial needs, such as that needed for First Communion, Confirmation, or marriage. Each Diocesan parish has templates of these affidavits, if needed.