BAPTIZING CHILDREN
A review published by the Canadian Conference of Catholic Bishops

This Bulletin is primarily pastoral in scope, and is prepared for members of parish liturgy committees, readers, musicians, singers, teachers, religious, seminarians, and clergy, and for all who are involved in preparing and celebrating the community liturgy.

Editor
REV. PATRICK BYRNE

Editorial Office
NATIONAL LITURGICAL OFFICE
90 Parent Avenue
Ottawa, Ontario K1N 7B1

Business Office
PUBLICATIONS SERVICE
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Ottawa, Ontario K1N 7B1

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BAPTIZING CHILDREN

In this Bulletin, we look at the place and context of infant baptism in the Church today, and consider the importance of full preparation by all involved in the baptism of children:

• **Parents:** There are many ways in which parents may become more involved in the faith-education of their child.

• **Godparents:** Their role today needs some practical questions and answers.

• **Ministers:** Ideas for encouraging some parishioners — baptismal teams, catechists, and other ministers — to take part in helping families to prepare for baptism.

• **Other parishioners:** All the members of the parish family may share in the preparation and celebration of baptism, and in the work of helping little children and families to grow in the Christian faith.

Suggestions for preparing and celebrating the baptism of children, and for continuing pastoral care between baptism and school at five years, round out this issue of the Bulletin.
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CHURCH AND BAPTISM

THIS IS THE CHURCH

To begin to understand baptism, we must first understand the Church into which we are baptized, and whose members we become.

The Church is the whole Christ, head and members. We are the people of God, and Christ is our Lord and our leader, firstborn in creation and firstborn from the dead, in order that we may follow him through death into life.

The word “Church” means the assembly of people that God chooses and calls together. Later, the word “church” came to mean the place where the Church came together for common worship or liturgy. In Bulletin 73, we use “Church” to mean the people of God.

Scriptural images of the Church: The New Testament builds on and expands some Old Testament images for the Church or people of God (Constitution on the Church, no. 6). Various metaphors are used to describe the Church and to explore its deep and many-sided relationship with Christ, with the Father, and with the Spirit.

These images are poetic, and are based on the natural things or relationships that we accept in our daily living:

- **Growing plants:** The Church is described as branches of the vine which is Christ (Jn. 15: 1-8), and as the Lord’s vineyard (Mk. 12: 1-12). We are like a mustard plant (Mk. 4: 30-32), and like a graft on an olive tree (Rom. 11: 13-24).

- **Living beings:** The New Testament also compares us to a flock (Jn. 10: 14-16; Lk. 12: 32; Jn. 21: 15-17); and to fish (see Mk. 1: 16-20; Lk. 5: 1-11; Jn. 21: 1-14).

- **Buildings:** We are God’s building (1 Cor. 3: 9), and the temples of his Holy Spirit (1 Cor. 3: 16-17; 6: 19-20).

- **Persons:** The Church is described as the people of God (1 Pet. 2: 9-10; Rom. 9: 25-26). We are fellow citizens with the saints, and members of God’s household (Eph. 2: 19; Gal. 6: 10); we are also compared to exiles (1 Pet. 1: 1; 2: 11; see Heb. 11: 13, 9). The Church is the bride of Christ (Rev. 19: 7; 21: 2, 9; 22: 17; Eph. 5: 21-33; 2 Cor. 11: 2). We are a community of servants (Mk. 9: 35; 10: 43-45; Jn. 12: 26; 15: 20; Rev. 2: 19), and of friends (Jn. 15: 14-20; 3 Jn. 15).

- **Body of Christ:** The Church is also called the body of Christ (1 Cor. 12: 12-31; Col. 1: 18; 2: 19; Eph. 1: 22-23; 4: 15-16; 5: 23, 40). We are members of Christ (1 Cor. 6: 15).

Many other images for the Church may be discovered as we read through the pages of the New Testament.

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1 Bulletin 74, *House of the Church*, describes the relationship of the Church as God’s people and the building they use in worship.

Renewed theology of the Church: At first many thought that the Second Vatican Council had proclaimed a "new" theology of the Church in its three key documents: on the liturgy (1963), on the Church (1964), and on the Church in the modern world (1965). The images of the Church contained in these documents are not new: rather, they are a return to those used in the scriptures and by the Fathers of the Church. The renewal in the theology of the Church flows from and is related to the renewal in liturgy.

Where is the Church found today? The Council tells us that the Church is most clearly seen in the liturgical assembly, when the people of God join with their bishop, priests, and ministers in active celebration of the liturgy, particularly of the eucharist; a similar manifestation of the Church takes place at the parish level; especially in the Lord's day liturgies. (See Liturgy constitution, nos. 41-42; GI,3 nos. 74-75.)

Church as sacrament: The Council pointed out that the Church is a sacrament or a sign of the close union between God and all the human race. The Church is also entrusted with the mission of achieving this unity in Christ. The people of God are to be a light to the nations. (See Constitution on the Church, no. 1.)

A Church of praise and prayer: From the beginning, the Father has chosen us in Christ to be his people who praise his name, who live spotless lives in his sight, and who are set aside by him to sing his praises and give him glory (Eph. 1: 3-14). We are called to be people of prayer and intercession, praying in the name of all creation for all the world (1 Tim. 2: 1-4, 8; prefaces 33, 36, and 40; third and fourth eucharistic prayers).

A servant Church: Jesus came to serve and to save (Mk. 10: 45). Those who lead his people are to be servants of all (Mk. 9: 35; 10: 42-45). At the last supper, he washed the apostles' feet (Jn. 13: 3-11), and taught them the meaning of his example of love and service (Jn. 13: 12-17, 34-35). The early Christians applied the suffering servant songs in Isaiah to Jesus. In our times, the Spirit has moved the Church to see itself once again as a servant Church, and the concept of ministry has begun to appear once more and grow quickly. Our mission is to serve others in love, to let them experience Jesus' love through our caring. We are to let our light — which is Christ's — shine before others and lead them to the Father (Mt. 5: 16).

Working with Christ: We are to be a Church that bears the daily cross as we follow Jesus (Lk. 9: 23). With him and through him, we give praise to our Father. With Jesus we pray and work to save the world, and to let God's kingdom — a kingdom of justice, joy, and peace in the Spirit (see Rom. 14: 17) — come among us all.

Helpful reading:

Dogmatic constitution on the Church, Second Vatican Council (Nov. 21, 1964); and Pastoral constitution on the Church in the modern world (Dec. 7, 1965): available in any collection of the documents of Vatican II.


Teaching the Church Today, by Carl J. Pfeifer (1978, Twenty-Third Publications, PO Box 180, West Mystic, CT 06388); see review in Bulletin 67, page 45.

Toward a Renewal of Sacramental Theology, by Raymond Vaillancourt (1979, The Liturgical Press, Collegeville, MN 56321); see review in Bulletin 71, page 238.

GI: The General Instruction of the Roman Missal is a pastoral introduction and explanation of the rites of the Mass. It is found at the beginning of the sacramentary (pages 11-54 in the Canadian edition).
INITIATION INTO THE PEOPLE OF FAITH

To understand the meaning of baptism, we have to see it in its full context of the sacraments of initiation: baptism is celebrated within a process of growing in the faith of the Church.

What is Christian initiation? Christian initiation is to be understood as a combination of teaching, liturgical rites, and experiences, by which a person, led by God's grace and guided by his Church, turns away from sin and becomes a follower of Jesus in the Christian community. Through the long process of initiation, which climaxes in the sacramental celebration of baptism, confirmation, and communion, the person becomes a new creation in Christ, with a new relationship to God and the believing community. (See Bulletin 51, page 276.)

Adult Initiation Is the Norm

Sacraments of Christian initiation: We are made Christians by the celebration of the sacraments of baptism, confirmation, and eucharist. Our heavenly Father frees us from the rule of sin and Satan; he makes us die, be buried, and rise to new life with Christ; God gives us his Holy Spirit, who tells us that we are truly the daughters and sons of the Father. We are the people of God, called to celebrate the memorial of the death and rising of the Lord Jesus.

Through the sacraments of initiation, we have been brought to our full membership in the people of God, and are able to share with the Church in carrying out its mission — which is Jesus' mission — in the Church and in the world.

Baptism, confirmation, and eucharist are the sacraments of Christian initiation. They are celebrated at the end of a long process of growing in faith, in prayer, and in Christian living. (See GICI, nos. 1-2.)

A long process: The initiation of adults takes time. The Church must preach the gospel of Jesus to those who are being initiated, and lead them to the point where they want to know more about our Lord, his teaching, and his Church. The Church calls them to faith and conversion (Rom. 10: 14-15; Mt. 28: 20; Liturgy constitution, no. 9).

For adults, the full process of Christian initiation involves these five stages, over a period of some years:

• Precatechumenate: This preparatory stage is a time for prospective candidates to enquire about the faith, and to mature in their desire to follow Christ and seek baptism. The Church uses this period for evangelization, the first preaching of the gospel to these people.

• Catechumenate: The candidates are accepted as catechumens, and experience a complete program of formation, lasting over a period of several years. This includes a formation with teaching and bible celebrations; living the Christian way of life among the community of believers; liturgical rites of exorcism, blessings, and presentations; and apostolic witness by working with the community to build up the Church by their lives and faith.
Period of purification and enlightenment: During the final Lent before their baptism, the catechumens are called the elect, and spend this season in intense preparation for baptism. Prayer, meditation, and liturgical rites (scrutinies; blessings; presentation of the creed and the Lord's prayer) are part of this preparation.

Easter vigil: During the vigil service, baptism, confirmation, and eucharist are celebrated as one unbroken event.

Postbaptismal catechesis: During the Easter season, the newly baptized Christians join the people of God in meditating on the gospel, and continue to take part in the eucharist and in carrying out deeds of charity. When this period ends on Pentecost Sunday, the new Christians are expected to take their full share in the work and worship of the Church.

Methods of formation: The method of teaching is not limited to classroom instruction. In full accord with modern understanding of how adults learn, the Church's ancient process involves:

- Catechetical formation in the truths Christians believe and in the commandments they keep;
- Growing in the faith: Candidates learn about the Christian way of life by living it and by growing in their prayer life.
- Liturgical rites: By taking part in celebrations of the word of God, candidates are strengthened with grace to respond to God's love for them, and are encouraged to move from sin to Christian living.
- Apostolic witness: They join other members of the Church in doing apostolic works.

These methods of spiritual formation are described more fully in Bulletin 64, pages 136-138, and are laid down by the Rite of Christian Initiation of Adults, no. 19.

Effects: Through this process, the Spirit leads the candidates to reject their sins, profess their faith, and ask for baptism in the Catholic Church. They are washed in the baptismal bath, anointed with chrism, and nourished with the body and blood of Christ. Now they are full members of the Church, children of God, brothers and sisters of Jesus, temples of the Spirit. Now they are sharers in the priesthood of Jesus Christ, and are given the privilege and responsibility of taking full part in the Church's liturgy (Liturgy constitution, no. 14).

The Church is also affected greatly by this process of initiation of adults. The community prepares with them by prayer, example, and action; by renewal of its baptismal faith and conversion. The enthusiasm and joy of the new Christians touch the spirit of all the baptized, and help them to appreciate a little more the great love that God has shown for each and all of them.

Baptismal spirituality: Our Christian life and spirituality are shaped by the fact that we are baptized, strengthened by the Spirit, and nourished in the eucharist. Each celebration of the eucharist is a renewal of the covenant God made with each of us in

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2 A study edition of the Rite of Christian Initiation of Adults (1974, CCC, Ottawa) is available from Publications Service, 90 Parent Avenue, Ottawa, Ontario K1N 7B1. For convenience, it is cited as RCIA in this issue.
our baptism (Liturgy constitution, no. 10). Each celebration of the sacrament of reconciliation is a return to our baptismal fervor (see Rite of Penance, no. 2). Each year, Lent and Easter are a time for renewing our baptismal conversion (Liturgy constitution, no. 109).

The centrality of baptism in our Christian life is explained more fully in Baptism: Basis of our spirituality, in Bulletin 62, pages 4-8, and in Our spirituality is based on baptism, in no. 70, pages 184-185. See also A prayer of thanks for baptism, on page 70, below.

Initiation of Children

Children of catechetical age: As described above, adults come to believe, and then are made full Christians by baptism, confirmation, and communion. Unbaptized children who have reached the age of reason may enter into a form of catechumenate that is adapted to their age and circumstances. This is discussed in chapter 5 of the adult rite: "Rite of initiation for children of catechetical age," RCIA, nos. 306-369. Adapted rites and prayers are also included in this section. Other helpful reading is mentioned in Bulletin 64.

What about little children and infants? The same requirements of gradual growth in personal faith and Christian living are there, but the process is reversed: little children and infants “cannot have or profess personal faith.” They enter the people of God through faith and baptism, but their baptism rests on the faith of their parents and of the Christian community. During the next ten to twelve years, this faith is shared with the children so that they may accept it on their own. In confirmation and eucharist, they are gradually led to full, active membership in the believing community. (See BC, 3 Introduction, nos. 1, 3.)

• Baptized into an adult Church: Children are baptized into an adult Church. This is reflected, for example, in the Directory for Masses with Children: while the parish is encouraged to give the children a separate liturgy of the word on Sunday, it is desirable that they come back into the full community for the liturgy of the eucharist (Directory, no. 17; see Bulletin 63, pages 115-122). So too, before a child is born, the community works with the parents, family, and godparents, helping them to stir up their faith, on which will depend the child’s baptism and upbringing in the Christian Church.

• Stages in infant baptism: As with the adult catechumenate, there are stages involved in preparing and celebrating infant baptism. There is a difference, however, in that it is principally the parents rather than the child who go through these stages before baptism.

These stages are outlined in the table on page 56.

The rest of this issue looks into each of these stages, and provides many suggestions for parish communities that want to make the baptism of children a true experience of initiation into the people of faith.

3 BC: Rite of Baptism for Children: see page 56, below.
Adult Initiation

1. Precatechumenate
   * Preliminary inquiry (pages 64-67):
     - to ask parents to recognize the strength or weakness of their own faith
     - to invite them to conversion and deeper faith
     - to explore the program of preparation

2. Catechumenate
   * Christian formation (pages 68-75):
     - to share the experience of Church
     - to preach the gospel
     - to share the Church’s faith
     - to pray together
     - to lead toward a decision

3. Purification and enlightenment
   * [Lent] Final preparation and decision (pages 76-77):
     - to make a decision to go ahead with baptism and continuing preparation for other sacraments of initiation
     - or (page 91):
       - to decide to take more time
       - to continue preparation

4. Celebration of sacraments of Christian initiation
   * [Easter vigil] Celebrating baptism (pages 78-87):
     - to prepare and celebrate baptism

5. Mystagogia
   * [Easter season] Catechesis after baptism (pages 88-90, 92-96):
     - to continue to live their baptismal promises
     - to share the faith with their children
     - to lead toward the completion of initiation in confirmation and eucharist.

Helpful resources for coming to a better understanding of Christian initiation today are suggested here:

Three basic documents outline the position of the Roman rite today:


National Bulletin on Liturgy:
- No. 51: Christian Initiation
- No. 64: Christian Initiation: Into Full Communion
- Further articles are listed in no. 61, pages 341-342.


The Rite of Christian Initiation for Adults: A Rite for Adults Only? by Tad Guzie (1976, Federation of Diocesan Liturgical Commissions, 1307 South Wabash Avenue, Chicago, IL 60605).


From Darkness to Light: What It Meant to Become a Christian in the Early Church, by Anne Field, OSB (1978, Servant Books, PO Box 8617, Ann Arbor, MI 48107).


Infant Baptism and the Christian Community, by Charles J. Keating (1972, Twenty-Third Publications, PO Box 180, West Mystic, CT 06388).

Three useful cassettes, recorded during the Detroit conference on worship in August 1979, are available from DCW Cassettes, c/o Time Consultants, PO Box 652, Severna Park, MD 21146:

• Initiation: A Liturgist's Perspective, by Charles W. Gusmer: cassette 9003-220.

NEXT ISSUE

A church building is a place where the Church — God's people of praise — gathers to worship God and celebrate the presence of the risen Lord among us. The form of our churches is based on and reflects our theology of the Church, and in turn, shapes the way we express our liturgy and our faith.

The next issue of the Bulletin, no. 74, is House of the Church. It looks at several important considerations about our church buildings:

• What churches have meant in the past, and what they should mean today;
• How churches should be designed or arranged to provide for better liturgical celebrations;
• The place of art in Christian worship.

Bulletin 74 provides opportunities for personal and community discussion of the meaning and use of church buildings today. It will be ready for mailing early in May.
PREPARATION

WE MUST PREPARE FOR BAPTISM

The sacrament of baptism is the primary sacrament in the Christian Church. For this reason, adequate preparation for proper Christian initiation is most important in the community's approach to the sacraments of baptism, confirmation, and eucharist. Preparation for the baptism of children helps to build up the spiritual life of each believing community.

No more Christendom: It is important to remember that parents and Church no longer have their faith supported and encouraged by the community at large. Christian values are downplayed and contradicted in our secular society. We cannot depend on others to supplement or replace the faith of parents and the local believing Church.

Why prepare? "We've all been through baptisms before. Why should we bother to spend time preparing for the baptism of our child? What good will it do?" The answer to these questions needs time and a developing understanding between the parents (and godparents also, whenever possible) and the priest with his baptismal team (see pages 62-63).

ο A celebration of faith: Baptism is a celebration of our entry into the faith of the believing community, the people of God, the Church. Before we can come to celebrate liturgy, we must be called to believe and be converted. This demands preaching of the faith by those who are sent by God (Rom. 10: 14-15; Liturgy constitution, no. 9). This is true of the community and of the family whose child is being baptized. Since the baby is being baptized into the people of faith (pages 53-57), the celebration depends on the faith of the parents and the community. This faith needs to be stirred up and made active (see 2 Tim. 1: 6). Faith is necessary whenever someone enters the body of Christ.

ο No sacraments without catechesis: In 1975, Pope Paul VI pointed out strongly in his apostolic exhortation on evangelization¹ (i.e., preaching the gospel today): "It is indeed true that a certain way of administering the sacraments, without the solid support of catechesis regarding these same sacraments and a global catechesis, could end up by depriving them of their effectiveness to a great extent. The role of evangelization is precisely to educate people in the faith in such a way as to lead each individual Christian to live the sacraments as true sacraments of faith — and not to receive them passively or to undergo them."

The Church considers that its "most basic and necessary duty" is to lead the parents and godparents of children who are waiting for baptism to remain with Christ in deep faith, and to renew their commitment to Christian living of the new covenant in Christ. To bring this about, the Church requires that the parents of the children be prepared beforehand; during the celebration of baptism, God's word is proclaimed, and the parents profess their baptismal faith. (See GICI, no. 3.)

As it prepares parents by Christian instruction, the Church is handing on and deepening the faith which the apostles have handed on to us. It is a vital ministry of the Church to help parents to raise their children in the faith of the Church after they are baptized. (See GICI, no. 7.)

Who prepares? The simplest answer to this question is: Everyone but the baby.

- **Parents:** Since the primary responsibility for raising the newly baptized child in the faith will rest on the parents, the Church wants to make sure that they are ready for this responsibility. The child's parents have to prepare for this baptism by renewing their own baptismal commitment to Christ (BC, Introduction, no. 5). They need to examine their own way of life as a response to God's gift of spiritual life in baptism. (See pages 64-67.)

- **Family:** Older children may prepare by prayer for the birth and baptism of their new brother or sister. In some cases they may wish to invite their classmates to take part in the celebration. Relatives should support the parents by their prayers, and by offering help in making preparations (candle, robe, banner: see page 80).

- **Godparents:** The revised rite of baptism for children points out that the role of the parents is more important than that of the godparents (Introduction, no. 5). The godparents are Christian witnesses of the baptism of this child into the Church of God (GICI, no. 10). Both parents and godparents represent the people of God in the celebration; the godparents also increase the family of the child being baptized, and help the parents to raise their child until he or she is ready to profess and live the Catholic faith (GICI, no. 8).

  Godparents must be fully initiated by baptism, confirmation, and eucharist; members of the Catholic Church, in good standing; and sufficiently mature to be able to carry out the responsibilities of their office (GICI, no. 10). If the parents ask, a *baptized, believing Christian* from another Church may be a Christian witness together with a qualified Catholic acting as godparent (GICI, no. 10).

  What do godparents do? Before baptism, they should check on the level of their own faith and practice; then they make sure that the parents are serious about their Christian commitment. During baptism, they join with the parents and the community in professing the faith of the Church — the faith into which this child is being baptized (GICI, no. 9). After baptism, they should pray each day for their godchild and for his or her family; from time to time they should enquire about the child's spiritual welfare.

- **Ministers** have to remain open to the overflowing grace of God which is the effect of liturgies celebrated well in faith and love. As they help parents and families to prepare for the baptism of their children, the ministers should ask God in his mercy to share his grace and love with these families.

- **Baptismal team:** Members of the parish baptismal team may serve as catechists during the time of formation: see pages 68-75.

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2 As well as acting as a friend of the family, the godparent also stands as a representative of the believing community. A person from another Church (other than the Orthodox Church) cannot be a godparent for a Catholic, nor can a Catholic act as a godparent in another Church. In these cases, the person may serve as a Christian witness. See Directory Concerning Ecumenical Matters, I (May 14, 1967), no. 57 (in *Vatican Council II*, edited by Austin Flannery, OP, document 37, pages 483-501).
• Community: Children are not baptized in a vacuum: they are baptized into a community of faith. Members of the community should be encouraged to help in the process of preparation for the baptism of children by their love, their prayer, and by their example of Christian living. Those who know the families of the children preparing for baptism should be prepared to work more closely with them (BC, Introduction, no. 4). The godparents also represent the community in the celebration of baptism (GICI, no. 8).

How do we prepare? Depending on how closely we are involved in the baptismal celebration, these are some of the ways we may prepare:

• Deepening our experience of the Church as a community of love: By our involvement in the time of preparation, and by acts of Christian love for the families and for others in the community, we can deepen our own experience of the body of Christ, and share this with others.

• Growing in our understanding of Christian initiation: The primary experience for growing in this understanding is the lenten period of preparation and renewal of baptism. Involvement with a family as it prepares for the baptism of a child can also give us a similar renewal, as can taking part in the celebration of baptism. An active parish could also provide a workshop once or twice a year for ordinary Christians who want to grow in their understanding of the faith.

• By personal faith: Faith is deepened by prayer, by reading of the scriptures, by good works, and by good liturgical celebrations.

• By prayer and fasting: Members of the community can offer their prayers for the community, and in particular for the families preparing for the baptism of their children. They may back their prayer by a day of fasting and penance (see The top ten, in Bulletin 42, pages 20-33). According to Christian tradition, we do not fast on Sundays or during the Easter season.

Beginning in the parish: Since the preparation for and the celebration of the baptism of children takes place at the parish level, it is here that renewal has to begin. This is the duty of the priests of the parish community (BC, Introduction, no. 7: 1). Today the Church is calling us away from "indiscriminate baptism" — pouring water on any children presented on Sunday afternoon at 2:00 o'clock — to a careful preparation by the parents of each child. The Catholic faith has to be preached to the parents (Liturgy constitution, no. 9); they have to accept it, be prepared to live it themselves, and be willing to hand on this same apostolic faith to their children.

To begin such a program of renewal demands a lot, but it is the only way we are going to become a dynamic, faith-filled, and loving Church. This approach asks much of pastors and parishioners and parents, but is it any more than Christ asks of his people?

The plan for preparing for the baptism of children is envisioned in the renewed rites of Christian initiation. It involves a gradual renewal of the parish community; a means of working with parents and evangelizing or catechizing them; and a serious follow-up by this community after baptism is celebrated.

The rest of this Bulletin offers practical suggestions and ideas that pastors and people can use in their work of sharing the Christian faith through the baptism of children. It proposes practical ways in which this may begin in your parish.
Working toward a diocesan program: As high priest of the diocese (Liturgy constitution, no. 41), the bishop is responsible for its liturgical life. He directs the whole process of the preparation for and celebration of baptism (see Constitution on the Church, no. 26; GICI, no. 12; BC, Introduction, no. 7: 1).

If the bishop wishes to have diocesan guidelines for preparing parents and parishes for the baptism of children, he could have these drawn up by the liturgy commission and senate, after consultation with parishes which are already providing this type of program.

A diocesan plan would include a suggested outline of a program for the period of preparation (with adequate provisions for both larger and smaller parishes); a day of formation for priests, when they could discuss and improve the proposed outline; time for parishes to develop baptismal teams; one or more diocesan or deanery workshops for baptismal teams; making reference material available.

* * *

We must always remember that the preparation of families for the baptism of their children cannot be achieved by programs, books, teams, or courses alone. The faith and love of the parish family — people, ministers, and priests together — must reach out to the parents and children, and invite them to full participation in their strong prayer life and living love in action.

Helpful reading:

* Baptism: A program of preparation for the parents and godparents of children who will receive the sacrament of baptism, by Sister Catherine Fenn, CSJ (n.d., Catholic Office of Religious Education, 355 Church St., Toronto, Ontario M5B 1Z8): see review in Bulletin 70, page 189.
* Christian Initiation: The Quest for Renewal (1979, Task Force on Christian Initiation, United Church of Canada, 85 St. Clair Avenue East, Toronto, Ontario M4T 1M8).


A PARISH TEAM

If family preparation for baptism is to become a normal situation in a parish, a number of dedicated persons will have to be called to form a baptismal team to help parents to prepare for the baptism of their children. Some ideas for parish discussion and action are presented in this article.

Purpose: A parish baptismal team helps parents, families, priests, parish ministers, and parishioners to prepare for a full celebration of the baptism of infants. This preparation is essential (BC, Introduction, no. 5: 1), and takes place in an atmosphere of faith and love.

Members: The priests and deacons in the parish are members of the baptismal team by reason of their many-sided ministry, which includes responsibility for baptizing people into the Church of God. Other members share this responsibility because of their own initiation into the Church and its mission. Among these members are married men and women, especially those who are raising their children in the living faith; and catechists and other teachers, who are called to share the Christian faith with the people of God. (See GICI, no. 7.)

- **Living faith is essential:** Since the team is helping parents to grow in faith as they prepare for the baptism of their children, team members must be people of strong and living faith: nothing can replace this. (See pages 53-57.)

- **Numbers:** The number of teams and their size will depend on the size of the parish and the number of children being prepared during the year for baptism. A larger city parish may find it desirable to have three or four teams in action so that the work is spread out, and no member is overloaded or unable to maintain the desired personal contact with the families he or she is serving.

As the years go on, it is desirable to invite other persons to become members. When a team member is maintaining contacts with 20 families or so, it may be time to let others take his or her place in the work of preparing other families.

Role: Members of the parish baptismal team have many important tasks to fulfill in the community during the period leading to the birth and baptism of the children:

- **Visiting each family** and getting to know them. See the following article, pages 64-67.
- **Taking part in group meetings:** See pages 68-75.
- **Being available** to the families as a friend, for advice, guidance, and prayer during the period of preparation.
- **Praying for them:** A suggested prayer is given at the end of this article.

The role of the baptismal team during the celebration is described on page 83; possible activities after the baptism are suggested on pages 90 and 93.
A workshop or study day for people who are willing to serve as members of the parish baptismal team would involve some of these points:

- **General formation:**
  - Church as people of God; diocesan family and parish
  - Ministries

- **Christian initiation:**
  - Christian initiation today
  - Baptism in our spirituality (see references on page 55)
  - Faith and the baptism of infants
  - Developing our faith in stages

- **Baptism in our parish:**
  - An outline of our program (see page 56)
  - Purpose and role of a baptismal team
  - Visiting parents (see pages 64-67)
  - A time of formation in faith (see pages 68-75)
  - Celebrating baptism: becoming familiar with the rite (see pages 85-87)
  - Follow up (see pages 88-90, 92-96).

It is suggested that each member of the team should have a personal copy of the rite of baptism of children, and of Bulletin 73.

**Installation and retirement:** In any ministry, people are publicly installed with prayer; this should be for a definite period of time (see Bulletin 53, page 92). When this time is over, they may renew their work of ministry, or retire. (See parallel suggestions for installing and retiring readers in Bulletin 56, pages 298-300.)

A prayer that members of the baptismal team may wish to use or adapt:


_Le Baptême des Enfants: matériaux pour la mise en œuvre de la pastorale (1970, Office national de liturgie, 90, avenue Parent, Ottawa, Ontario KIN 7B1). Now out of print._

_Why Be a Christian? by Rosemary Haughton (1968, Geoffrey Chapman, London): see also her cassette, mentioned on page 57, above._
By meeting with the parents in their home, and inviting them to grow in their faith, the parish is helping them to have a more active role in the preparation and celebration of their children's initiation into the Church of Christ.

The birth of a child is an event of great joy, when parents are touched by the sense of their sharing with God in bringing this child into the world. They want to do their best for their baby and for the rest of their family. It is in harmony with this spirit that the parish community wants to help them give the best spiritual care to their child.

Centered on the parents' faith: The model or norm for baptism is the Christian initiation of adults. When adults are being prepared for baptism, they are gradually led to faith, and are initiated when the Spirit leads them to proclaim that Jesus is Lord (see 1 Cor. 12: 3; Rom. 10: 9; see also Phil. 2: 11).

When infants are baptized, however, a different order is followed (see page 55). The faith involved in the baptismal celebration is that of the community and of the parents. The children's gradual growth in faith and practice, leading to their acceptance of Christ and his Church, depends entirely on the faith of the parents. For this reason, the time of baptismal preparation is centered on helping them to recognize, stir up, and develop their faith.

A time of preparation: The beginning of the time of preparation may be compared to the precatechumenate. In the Christian initiation of adults, the precatechumenate is a period for making inquiry about the Christian faith and for maturing in its basic attitudes. In this time, the Church preaches to the candidates by word and example, and leads them to an initial or preliminary conversion — a turning toward Christ as their hope or savior or source of hope and salvation. (See Rite of Christian Initiation of Adults, nos. 6-7.)

When parents are preparing for a baptism of their children, this may be considered as a time for preliminary inquiry, when they may recognize the strength of their faith or their lack of it. Where possible, this preparation begins before the child is born.

Meeting with the Family

These meetings provide an opportunity for the parish to reach out to the family in love, and to help them to see where they are in their relations with Christ and his Church.

A personal visit is essential: Introducing parents to a program of baptismal preparation cannot be done by mail or only by one or more public meetings.

The parish — in the person of a priest, deacon, pastoral assistant, or member of the baptismal team — needs to visit the couple in their home, and express the love of the community for them and for their child. (See BC, Introduction, no. 5: 1.) One or two of these persons may visit after making an appointment with the parents: surprise visits can be awkward.

1 See Paul VI, On Evangelization in the Modern World, nos. 51-52, 54, 56. (See note 1 on page 58, above.)
During this visit, the visitor may:

- Express the joy of the parish community at the birth of their child, and promise them continuing prayers and concern for them and their family.
- Explain the parish program of preparation for baptism, and show its importance for them, their child, and the entire parish community.
- Give them a copy of a brief outline of the program, and a leaflet or booklet about baptismal preparation.
- Offer them a leaflet containing a prayer which they may use each day before their child is born.
- Invite them to take part in the group meetings, either before or after this child is born. Leave a schedule of these meetings with them.
- Celebrate a blessing before childbirth; if the child has already been born, a prayer of praise and thanksgiving may be offered.
- Leave them time to ask questions and discuss the process with them.

Throughout the visit, the emphasis is on kindness and community caring rather than legalism. At the same time, the seriousness of Christ's invitation to them to repent and believe is not to be forgotten.

Where Are We in Our Faith?

The Church wants to help the parents explore their own faith, their relationship to Christ and his Church, their prayer life, and their Christian living. For the Church, it is a time to preach the gospel to them and to call them to conversion and deeper faith.

Some questions: If the parents are serious in their desire to have their child baptized into their faith and the faith of the Church, they need to ask themselves these questions:

- **Christ:** Do we love Jesus as our brother and our Lord?
- **Church:** Are we active members of the people of God in this place?
- **Commandments:** Do we let God's will guide the way we live? Are we trying to live up to God's commandments to love him and to love other people?
- **Prayer:** Do we pray regularly? Do we teach our children to pray through our example?
- **Community worship:** Do we take part in the worship of our parish community each week?
- **Family life:** Are we living as Catholics? Are we raising our children in the Catholic faith and its practices?

A final question: After asking themselves the above questions, the parents need to ask another:

*If we answered "no" to some of these questions, are we willing to improve our lives and turn back to Jesus and his Church?*
Working toward a change: The parish accepts them where they are in their faith, and invites them to move forward with Christ and his Church:

○ People of strong faith: If the parents are already practising Christians, perhaps some small improvements are needed in their life — but they should always be challenged to do better. The Church — through the pastor and the baptismal team — invites them to come even closer to Christ. Depending on the individuals involved, they may be invited to take part in the various ministries or apostolic activities in the community, or to move toward a deeper prayer life.

○ Ordinary Catholics: If the parents take part in Sunday Mass but do little else in the community, they could be invited to share in one of the many ministries active in the parish.

○ Weak or marginal Christians: Where the parents are not strongly committed in faith or practice, the local Church has a strong opportunity to evangelize them (see page 58). Priest, baptismal committee, friends, and neighbors may use this time to encourage the parents to want to become strong and active Christians.

Sometimes the couple inquires about baptism because they are being pushed by their own parents 'to get the baby baptized.' As well as working with the couple, the priest and team may encourage the grandparents to stop pushing, and instead to start praying for the couple's conversion and growth in faith.

○ Parents with “no faith” — When a couple comes to discuss the baptism of their child, and insists that they are non-believers, or atheists, or “Churchless Christians,” the priest should be aware that they have come because of some trace or remnant of faith. Rather than showing them the door, he should recognize their good will and interest, and use this opportunity to invite them to be open to God's work in them. He can invite them to be at least associated with the people of God in its good works and concern for others.

Further ideas on a period of Christian formation for such parents are suggested on page 91.

Special circumstances: The pastor has to use his judgment when visiting families who are in particular situations.

These include mixed marriages between a Catholic and a member of another Christian Church; marriage between a Catholic and a non-Christian; a single-parent home; people who are just living together; people who do not practise the faith; minimal Catholics; and people who are baptized in infancy but who do not consider themselves as Catholics today.

In each case, the pastor — perhaps with a member of the baptismal team — has to try to understand the specific situation and needs of the family, to bring Jesus' message of love to them, and to remain open to them as a loving fellow-Christian. No book can teach this kind of pastoral concern.

Helpful reading:

Your Child's Baptism: threefold leaflet (CCC, 90 Parent Avenue, Ottawa, Ontario K1N 7B1); This three-color leaflet, with illustrations, is intended to be given to the parents, and explains the parish celebration of baptism. Also available in French: Le Baptème de Votre Enfant.
A PRAYER FOR PARENTS

All members of the parish may wish to pray for the parents in their community of faith:

Heavenly Father, giver of all good gifts,
look with love and mercy
on the parents in our parish.

Bless their lives,
and help them to reflect Christ’s love for us.
Fill them with your love,
and let them bring your light into our community.

Help them to bring good children into this world.
Guide them as they raise their families.
Bless their children as they grow in wisdom, age, and grace.

Loving Father,
give your Spirit to each family in our parish,
and help us to follow your Son.

Father, we give you praise and glory
as we ask this grace through Christ our Lord
in the love of your Spirit,
now and for ever. Amen!
GROUP MEETINGS

There are no automatic, instant, or guaranteed ways of helping parents to prepare for the baptism of their children. No "program" can achieve our goal of adequate preparation. Only concerned believers can help the parents, godparents, and family members to take a full part in and benefit from meetings of several families or sets of parents as they prepare for the baptism of their children.

Varying circumstances: In smaller parishes, where fewer children are born, the pastor and the baptismal team may meet with only one or two couples at a time. Larger parishes need larger meetings more often during the year.

Purpose: These meetings have several purposes:

- **Experience of Church:** In the friendship and concern of the local community, and in the sharing of faith and prayer, the couples may experience the meaning of Church as the body of Christ. Our Lord is found in the concerned love of his brothers and sisters in this believing community.

- **Teaching and evangelizing:** The Church shares the gospel message with the couples, and encourages them to deepen their faith and live it more fully; if they have been negligent, the Church invites them to conversion and return to Catholic living. (See BC, Introduction, no. 5: 1.)

- **Reflection and prayer:** The meeting provides time for quiet reflection in faith, and for personal and community prayer. The priest should make sure that the meetings are prayerful, and not only a time for classroom lectures. Some aids to personal and family prayer are also discussed during these sessions.

- **Preparation for baptism:** The meaning of baptism and its implications for themselves and for their child are discussed. They also look at the celebration, and at ways in which they may prepare for it (see pages 78-81 and 84-87).

- **Preparation for the years after baptism:** The baptism of children is the beginning, not the end: see pages 88-90 and 92-96.

Catechumenate: In the initiation of adults, this is a period of formation, when the Church shares its faith with the candidates, helping them to grow in prayer and in Christian action.

In the preparation for the baptism of children, this is a period of Christian formation, when the Church helps the parents to deepen their faith and their prayer. (See pages 68-75.)

Teaching methods: The Church teaches adults by catechetical formation, by liturgical rites, and by giving them opportunities to grow in the faith and to give apostolic witness. (See Rite of Christian Initiation of Adults, no. 19; Bulletin 64, pages 136-138; above, page 54.)

Should we have two groups? Each parish community should discuss the question of having two distinct groups of parents: one for those who are convinced and practising Catholics, and one for those who are more lax.
Ideas for Meetings with Parents

The parish baptismal team may wish to discuss these ideas, and adapt them to their local situation.

**Times:** Depending on varying circumstances — such as city or rural surroundings, summer or winter, stage of pregnancy — the baptismal team should choose appropriate times for meetings with parents. In some communities, evening meetings may be good; in others, Sunday afternoon may be better.

- **Length:** Between 90 minutes and two hours should be adequate for each meeting.

- **Number:** Three meetings would seem to be a reasonable minimum. More could take place if desired or needed by the parents. Outlines for four meetings are offered on pages 72-75.

- **Frequency:** Two or three weeks between meetings would allow the parents and families time to reflect on what they discover at these meetings, to pray, to begin new practices, and to live their faith more fully.

**Godparents:** When they live nearby, they may be invited to take part in the procession of formation through which the parents are being helped to prepare for their child's baptism.

**Attitudes:** As parents prepare for the birth of their child, they are filled with awe, wonder, and the joy of new life and birth; a sense of amazement and reverence touches them when they realize that they are sharing with God in his power of creating new life. Parents are willing to do the best for their child. When the Church co-operates with and builds on these positive attitudes, the parents can be encouraged to do their best for their child's spiritual welfare too.

**Something to take home:** Since the formation of parents is not something to be accomplished only in a classroom atmosphere, it is important for the parish baptismal team to provide other means to help the parents grow in faith. As well as the liturgical rites and apostolic works mentioned on page 72, the team may want to provide suggested prayers for parents, families and godparents to use before and after the birth of the child; prayers in preparation for baptism; prayers for other parishioners to use.

**Prayer** — individual, family, and community prayer — is part of the time of preparation for the baptism of infants. The parish should encourage parents, families, godparents, members of the baptismal team, and other parishioners to pray for the children to be baptized, and for their parents as well.

- **Psalms:** Parents and godparents may be introduced to a few psalms during the period of preparation. Appropriate psalms include Ps. 8, Ps. 23, Ps. 27, Ps. 51, Ps. 95, Ps. 100, Ps. 117, Ps. 121, Ps. 136, Ps. 139, Ps. 150. Bulletin 75, *Praying the Psalms,* offers many suggestions for using the psalms in our Christian prayer.

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1 The psalm numbers follow the numbering system used in *The Jerusalem Bible* and other modern versions.
Adaptations: When some families are not ready for the baptism of their children at this time, it is important to help them to take whatever steps of prayer or action they are able to do now. Further ideas are discussed on page 91.

Opportunities: The time of Christian formation provides many opportunities for the Christian community to evangelize or share the gospel message and experience of Jesus with the parents and families of the children to be baptized.

- In some communities, it may be considered desirable to invite the parents to renew their marriage vows at a time when they are more deeply aware of what they undertook on their wedding day.

Contents of the group meetings are discussed in the following article, *Sharing the Christian faith*.

* * *

Helpful reading:


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**A PRAYER OF THANKS FOR BAPTISM**

*Lord Jesus Christ,*
*for calling us to follow you,*
*for being our Lord and brother,*
*for letting us share your cross,*
*we give you thanks, O Lord.*

*For sharing the life of the Father with us,*
*for leading us in your light,*
*for sending your Spirit to live in us,*
*we give you thanks, O Lord.*

*For baptizing us into your death,*
*for raising us to new life with you,*
*for calling us to be members of your kingdom,*
*we give you thanks, O Lord.*

*For marking us with your seal of life,*
*for giving us faith and hope,*
*for filling us with your love,*
*we give you thanks, O Lord.*

*For calling us to give you praise,*
*for bringing us to eternal life,*
*for letting us be your saints,*
*we give you thanks, O Lord.*

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SHARING THE CHRISTIAN FAITH

When we share our faith with others, we teach them about a person, and about the truths, attitudes, and commandments he taught us as a way of life.

Faith is a Spirit-inspired acceptance of Jesus as Lord (see Rom. 10: 9; 1 Cor. 12: 3; Phil. 2: 11). We believe in Jesus as our leader, and seek to live according to his commandments. We do not believe by our own power or initiative. Faith is a free gift of God, and if we accept it — moved, of course, by grace — we give ourselves to Christ in faith and love and service.

Teaching the Christian faith: The word “teaching” tends to make us think of intellectual formation alone. For too long, we have presumed that the Church’s teaching included only truths that were presented in an intellectual way and that we were to accept in faith. In its wisdom, the Church shows us that teaching is a well-rounded form of total immersion in the Christian life.

Main teachings: The principal teachings of our faith concern the way that the Father chose to save us through the life, death, and rising of the Lord Jesus:

- We are in need of salvation.
- Jesus is our Lord and savior, our brother and leader.
- He has made us his Church.
- He calls us to be people of praise and prayer.
- We share in the eucharist and in the other sacraments.
- He invites us to build up the kingdom, using the gifts given to us by the Spirit.
- We are called to follow Jesus in doing God’s will.
- We hold and live the values that Jesus gives us in the gospel.

These are developed more fully in The faith we teach, in Bulletin 64, pages 139-142.

During the Meetings with Parents

Methods: These meetings should be a combination of catechesis, opportunities for parents to grow in the faith, prayers and rites, and a time for apostolic ministry. (See RCIA, no. 19; above, pages 54 and 68.)

Some examples: In planning the meetings, the team may wish to include some of these approaches. It is not necessary to use all of them in each meeting.

- Catechesis:
  - Teaching by one or more members of the baptismal team
  - Film or filmstrip, followed by discussion
  - Reading and discussion at home
  - Handouts

- Helping parents to grow in their faith:
  - Scripture readings proclaimed with reverence
  - Bible enthroned, with lighted candles
  - Reflection on God’s word, in silence and together
Discussion
Practical ideas for putting our faith into practice
(faith in Jesus leads to prayer to Jesus, reading gospels)
Praying with parents and for them

- *Prayers and liturgical rites* (BC, Introduction, no. 5: 1):
  Praying together
  Singing a simple baptismal hymn (CBW II, nos. 3-16)
  Blessings and prayers:
  - for a safe childbirth
  - for parents
  - for the child
  - for their family
  Gestures and ritual actions, especially signing with the cross
  Study parts of the rite of baptism of children
  Preparation of baptismal robe and candle

- *Apostolic ministry*:
  Toward parents, family, new child
  by care, preparation, prayer, teaching
  Toward godparents: parents share experience of faith with them
  Parents toward each other
  Parents toward other parents at meeting:
  - encouragement, mutual prayer
  Toward rest of community and whole Church.

When a couple is unable to take part in a meeting, the members of the baptismal team should be prepared to go through it with the parents at their convenience during the weeks before the next meeting.

**Sample Outline for Group Meetings**

These outlines suggest some ideas for content. The actual order of presentation and teaching methods should be worked out by the baptismal team, and adapted where necessary to the needs of the parents who are taking part.

**First meeting:** Begin by listening together to a gospel passage (chosen from the lectionary, no. 761: 1-12, for the baptism of children).

- *Catechesis*:
  Jesus and his Church
  Becoming a Christian is a long process
  Sacraments of initiation: baptism, confirmation, eucharist

- *Growing in faith*:
  Discussion
  Invitation to respond in faith, prayer, action
  Choosing suitable godparents
  Practices for home:
— Christian art in home: Bulletin 63, pages 75-78
— Making the sign of the cross on the children

• Prayers and rites:

  Helps for praying in the morning and evening
  Prayer
  Signing with cross
  Blessing children
  Presentations? (see Bulletin 64, page 154; page 81, below)

• Apostolic ministry (by sharing, praying, inviting):

  By team to parents (and godparents)
  By parents to own children
  By parents to own parents and other relatives
  By parents to godparents.

Close with prayer and a simple blessing.

Second meeting: Begin by listening together to a gospel passage (chosen from the lectionary, no. 761: 1-12).

• Catechesis:

  Living as a good Christian today
  Effects of baptism
  What we promise when we ask for our child's baptism

• Growing in faith:

  Silent reflection
  Discussion
  Invitation to respond in faith, prayer, and action
  Choosing a Christian name for their child
  Practices for home:
     — Family prayer and meal prayers
     — Reading the gospel
     — Daily use of the Our Father
     — Making a baptismal robe
     — Making or decorating a baptismal candle

• Prayers and rites:

  Begin to study baptism ceremony: introductory rites, liturgy of the word
     (see Rite of Baptism for Children, nos. 32-48)
  Discuss choice of readings at the ceremony
  Pray together for all parents and children in this group

• Apostolic ministry:

  Team explains rite to parents
  Parents share this with own children, parents, relatives, godparents
  Invite them to continue praying for one another

Close with prayer and a simple blessing.
Third meeting: Begin by listening together to a gospel passage (chosen from the lectionary, no. 761: 1-12).

- *Catechesis:*
  
  Implications of baptism
  — for the child
  — for the parents and family
  — for the Church
  Moving toward a decision (see pages 76-77)

- *Growing in faith:*
  
  Discuss readings chosen for their baptismal celebration
  Discuss role of godparents, now and in years to come
  Discuss human and Christian values (see page 89, below)

- *Prayers and rites:*
  
  Study the rites of baptism (see Rite of Baptism for Children, nos. 49-61)
  Discuss baptism by immersion (see pages 78-79)
  Look at the music in the rite (CBW II, nos. 3-16)
  Pray the litany here and at home (see page 80, below)
  Decide which additional names to include
  Finish baptismal robe and candle before next meeting

- *Apostolic ministry:*
  
  By team toward parents
  By parents toward own children, parents, relatives, godparents
  Prayer for help in making own decision

Close with prayer and a simple blessing.

Fourth meeting: Begin by listening together to a gospel passage (chosen from the lectionary, no. 761: 1-12).

- *Catechesis:*
  
  Responsibilities for the years to come
  Unity of the sacraments of initiation:
  — baptism, confirmation, communion
  God is always with us

- *Growing in faith:*
  
  Regular participation in the worship of the believing community
  Belief and action reinforce each other
  Religious practices in our home (see pages 95-96)

- *Prayers and rites:*
  
  Study rites after baptism and concluding rites (see Rite, nos. 62-71)
  Pray the Lord's prayer together
  Sing one of the baptismal acclamations
  Pray for all as we prepare for our decision
• **Apostolic ministry:**

By team toward parents  
By parents toward children, parents, relatives, godparents  
Prayers for all as we prepare for our decision.

Sometime after this meeting, each set of parents should meet with the priest and — if they so desire — also with some members of the baptismal team to discuss whether they should ask for baptism for their child now, or whether they should continue their preparation now for baptism at a later date: see pages 76-77.

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**Helpful reading:**

• On blessings: *Bulletin 49, Blessed Be God and His Creation; Sunday Mass Book*, page 1318.  
• *Bulletin 63, Children and Liturgy.*  


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**CORRESPONDENCE COURSES IN SCRIPTURE**

The Divine Word Center in London, Ontario, continues to offer JOURNEY, its guided study program in the scriptures:

• Lessons 1-20 deal with the Old Testament;  
• Lessons 21-40 are on the gospels and other principal writings of the New Testament.

For further information and application forms, get in touch with:

**In Canada:**

Guided Study Programs  
260 Colborne Street  
London, Ont. N6B 2S6  
Telephone: (519) 439-7211

**In the U.S.A.:**

Center for Pastoral Ministry  
21 East Superior St.  
Chicago, Illinois 60611  
Telephone: (312) 337-3537

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During the time of Christian formation (see pages 68-75), the Church is concerned not only with sharing its faith and its teachings, but also with the response of the parents and godparents.

In the initiation of adults, the catechumenate continues as long as necessary for the formation of those who wish to be baptized. When they are ready to be initiated into the Church, the Church chooses them by name. Then they enter a final period of purification and enlightenment. Traditionally this takes place during the season of Lent, leading up to the celebration of the sacraments of initiation in the Easter vigil.

- **Period of final preparation:** In the baptism of infants a similar period may be necessary, so that the parents may reflect and pray over their faith and the meaning of their child's baptism. This time follows the group meetings, and may be brief or long according to the needs and situations of the parents. During this period, they come to a decision concerning the baptism of their child.

A **time for decision:** This is a period when the parents have to reflect and pray about their own faith and the faith of the Church:

- **Questions:** When they began the process of preparation for their child's baptism, they were invited to ask themselves the questions on page 65. Now, in the light of their weeks of prayer and preparation, they should ask themselves these questions once more.

- **Recognizing their faith and commitment:** Where do they stand in regard to Christ and the Church? Are they ready to live with the Church from now on?

- **Role of the priest:** In this stage of the process of initiation, the priest has the responsibility of inviting the couple and the others around them to listen to Christ's invitation, and to think and live with the Church. He counsels them, encourages them, prays with them and for them. According to the circumstances, he invites them to celebrate the sacrament of reconciliation and begin anew.

- **Role of the team:** Given the sensitive nature of the questions being discussed, and the newness of lay ministries, it would seem wise to ask the parents if they would like to have one or more of the team members involved in the decision process. Good relationships often develop during the public meetings with the parents, and they may feel quite at ease in discussing these matters.

In any case, team members should continue to pray in a special way as the parents are making their decision.

- **Role of godparents:** As well as considering the level of their own faith, and their need for personal renewal, they should be praying for and with the parents during the time of final preparation.

- **Role of the community:** All the members of the parish community should be invited to help the parents by their prayer, fasting, encouragement, love, and example.
Making a decision: The baptism of children depends greatly on their parents' living faith, and so it is important for parents to find out where they stand in the faith and in their commitment to Jesus and his Church. They have to make one of two basic choices:

- **We are ready to ask for our child's baptism:** This means that they are ready to believe and live and worship with the Church, and to continue to do so during the years following their child's baptism. They have shown their sincerity by living as good Christians over the past few months, or by returning to this way of life. Regular prayer and participation in the Sunday eucharist are or are becoming a normal part of their family life. They are open to Christ's grace and the promptings of the Spirit.

- **We are not ready yet to ask for our child's baptism:** We need more time to prepare, and are willing to work with the Church in continuing to prepare. In the meantime, however, we would like our child enrolled as a "catechumen" or seeker, based on our initial conversion and willingness to move forward (see Rite of Christian Initiation of Adults, no. 6a).

These decisions are to be made with prayer and reflection. The priest should be ready to help the parents in this time, but it is their decision.

Varying degrees: In each group, there will be varying degrees of commitment and conversion. It is the role of the Church to encourage and pray, and to help the couples to give themselves more fully to Christ.

Problem cases: What do we do about parents who will not prepare for baptism by developing their own faith life? about those who insist they are ready, but are not? about those who point to several children baptized indiscriminately, and who wonder why we have changed our policies?

There is no simple answer. We are a Church always in need of reform, and this aspect of it is only now beginning to touch our awareness. After 1500 years of "y'all come" baptism, a serious reform is not always understood or welcomed at first telling. The Church needs to continue to evangelize, while recognizing that some will not listen to the word: remember the parable of the sower (Mk. 4: 1-9, and parallels).

For a while we are still going to have people who will go to a neighboring parish if they do not like our policy — a good reason for working toward a diocesan policy on adequate preparation for celebrating the sacraments well (see page 61). And many a diocese has its "sacramental Sam" who will baptize, anoint, absolve, or marry anything that moves.

* Parents who are ready continue to prepare for baptism: see pages 78-81.

* Those who are not yet ready may continue to work and pray with the Church to develop their spirit of faith and conversion: see page 91.

Helpful reading:

Constitution on the liturgy, no. 9; GICI, no. 9; Baptism of Children, Introduction, nos. 4-5, 8.

CELEBRATING BAPTISM

The notes in the next three articles (pages 78-87) are based on the rite of baptism of several children, with the participation of a representative group of parishioners: this is the first celebration given in the ritual (nos. 32-71). An adapted form is given for the baptism of one child (nos. 72-106).

DEVELOPING OUR CELEBRATION OF FAITH

Emphasis on faith: The baptism of adults is a celebration of the faith of the candidates and of the Church. The baptism of infants is a celebration of the faith of the parents and of the Church: see Initiation into the people of faith, pages 53-57.

During the period of Christian formation (pages 68-75) and of final decision (pages 76-77), the Church works with the parents to call them to deeper faith and to conversion. Preparations for the celebration continue during these periods, especially during the group meetings. The outlines for these meetings prepare for many of the elements of the celebration (pages 71-75).

Time and place of baptism: Since baptism brings us into the paschal mystery of Christ, into his dying and rising, the normal times for celebrating Christian initiation in the Catholic Church are the Easter vigil and Sunday (GICI, no. 6; BC, no. 9).

• Place: The normal place for baptism is at the baptismal font in the parish church. Only in case of danger is baptism celebrated elsewhere (BC, nos. 10-13). See further notes on pages 84-85.

Baptism by immersion: It was suggested on page 74 that this be discussed at one of the group meetings. The Church recommends immersion as being a more suitable symbol of our sharing in the death and rising of the Lord Jesus (see GICI, no. 22; BC, no. 18: 2).

• Meaning: The waters of baptism are seen both as bringing death (to sin) and life to the one being baptized; the symbolism of burial with Christ (see Rom. 6: 3-11) is totally lost when baptism is by pouring only.

• Baptism by immersion: The baptism of Jesus in the Jordan is considered the model for all Christian baptism. Adult baptism is the norm — the proper and ideal way of celebrating Christian initiation. The pouring of a few drops of water on a child's forehead over a stylized "bird bath" cannot provide a good picture of Christian baptism, by which we are buried with Christ the suffering servant, and rise with him to new life for God.

One pastor of a large city parish tells us how he tries to encourage baptism by immersion. "We talk with the couple before their child is born. After the birth, we meet with them, and with the godparents if possible, and go over the celebration, using both printed material and a filmstrip. We discuss the implications of baptism for them and their child, as well as for the Christian community into which their son or daughter is being baptized.

"When it comes to the method of baptism, we talk about immersion and its meaning, and show how it is preferable. Some choose this method when they understand its significance, and when they see how it can be done in a reasonably simple manner; we hope that more parents will choose this method in the next few years.

"On the day of baptism, the child wears a diaper, and is wrapped in a large towel and blanket. At the moment of baptism, he or she is unwrapped and the diaper is removed. The child is handed to the priest, who lowers him or her into the font, up to the chin. Then he pours

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the water over the child's head as he says the words of baptism. (The warmth of the water is carefully tested beforehand by a mother.)

“When the child is raised from the water, he or she is handed to the mother or godmother and wrapped carefully in the towel; it may take a moment to dry and cover the child.”

- If baptism by pouring is chosen, care should be taken that a good quantity is poured from a respectable pitcher; that the action of pouring is visible to all; and that, where possible, the sound of pouring is audible to all: see pages 86-87.

**Ministries:** The celebration of baptism should reflect the nature of the Church by using all the ministries possible:

- **Readers:** A different reader proclaims each of the first two readings (see GI, no. 71). If a deacon or another priest is present, he should read the gospel to the assembly (see GI, no. 34). Those who read should be trained and experienced readers; amateurs — even though related to one of the families involved — cannot replace responsible readers: the people have the right to hear the word of God proclaimed as well as possible, and in a spirit of faith.

- **Ushers** have the responsibility of greeting the people as they arrive, of bringing them to their seats, and of organizing processions (see GI, no. 68b). In the baptism of children, it may be desirable for members of the baptismal team to be with the ushers as the families come in; then the ushers would lead the families and their friends to their places, and be responsible for the processions during the celebration. These details should be worked out beforehand to avoid any misunderstandings.

- **Babysitters:** The rite makes provision for taking the babies to a separate place during the liturgy of the word (no. 43). Teenagers or young adults may be invited to provide this service, as they do in many communities during one or more of the Sunday Masses.

- **Other ministers:** The importance of the celebration requires that the presiding priest or deacon be assisted by other ministers, including a crossbearer and servers carrying candles for the processions, and one or two other assistants (e.g., MC, bookbearer) during the rites. In larger groups, other priests or deacons may assist the one who presides.

**Music:** Good use of music will help to increase the effect of the celebration on all who take part in it. Moments for music are described in CBW II, nos. 3-16. These include an entrance psalm or hymn; a psalm during the procession before the liturgy of the word; a responsorial psalm and gospel acclamation; general intercessions; litany; procession to the baptismal water; acclamations during the blessing of the baptismal water; an acclamation after the profession of faith and after each baptism; a hymn during the procession from the font to the sanctuary; the Lord's prayer; a closing hymn or canticle. There does not have to be music or singing at all these points, but there should be at the major moments.

Those who are closely involved in the celebration should express their ideas and preferences during the group meetings (see pages 68-75). The parents should have the opportunity to become familiar with these acclamations, psalms, and hymns during the period of Christian formation.

**Silence:** In today's noisy and busy world, it is too often forgotten that silence is also a positive way of sharing in a celebration. In silence we can be active in listening, reflecting, praising, asking, and being open to the Spirit. (See Liturgy constitution, no. 30; also *Silence is necessary! in Bulletin 71, pages 204-205.*) Those who are planning the baptismal celebration should remain open to the values of silence, especially after each of the readings and the homily.

**Blessing baptismal water:** During the Easter vigil, the water is blessed in a solemn way; throughout the Easter season, it is desirable to use this water for baptism; a prayer of thanksgiving is prayed over it (see BC, no. 55). During the rest of the year, the water is blessed within the baptismal rite (no. 54).

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2 See GICl, no. 20.
In either case, the format is that of a berakah or blessing (see Bulletin 49, pages 152-156; Bulletin 68, pages 73-74; Sunday Mass Book, page 1318). We may be able to understand the blessing prayer better when we come to realize that it is similar to the eucharistic prayer: with praise, we recall what God has done in the past; we ask him to continue his action today; we pray for his people; we offer him glory.

Processions: The rite of children's baptism suggests that the community should move from one location in the church to another as the celebration develops and moves to its conclusion. These movements are part of the movement of the rite, and should not be ignored or considered unimportant.

During the processions, the ushers carry out their role of leadership and direction. In churches with movable seating, they should make sure beforehand that the chairs are arranged in the most suitable way: see Bulletin 74, House of the Church.

Other gestures: Our bodies express, proclaim, and influence our faith (see Bulletin 46, pages 311-312). Our gestures and postures during liturgical celebrations declare our beliefs, influence other people, and may strengthen our own faith.

Baptismal litany: This may be sung during the meetings as well as during the actual celebration of baptism (CBW II, no. 8). The patron saints of the children being baptized, of the parish, and of other local patron saints may be added to the litany. If desired, the full litany of the saints may be sung as it is during the Easter vigil (CBW II, no. 193), adding the patron saints.

Baptismal symbols: Parents, godparents, and families are invited to become involved in developing three main symbols for use at the baptismal celebration:

- **Baptismal robe:** The rite notes that it is desirable for each family to provide the baptismal garment for the child (no. 63): it should be a real robe that can actually be worn. This garment symbolizes the fact that we put on Christ when we are baptized (Gal. 3: 27), and that we are a new creation (2 Cor. 5: 17). It is reminder that the baptized are the children of light (Eph. 5: 8). The just are dressed in white, and walk with the Lord (Rev. 3: 4-5). The prayer accompanying the robing expresses the Church's hope that we will retain our baptismal dignity until we enter heaven (see BC, no. 63).

- **Lighted candle:** The presiding priest or deacon lets someone from each family light the baptismal candle from the flame of the Easter candle. It is now the responsibility of the parents and godparents to help these children to follow Christ by keeping the flame of faith bright in their lives until they enter the fullness of the paschal mystery through their death, and meet the Lord Jesus with all his saints in the kingdom of heaven (see BC, no. 64).

- **Opening of our ears and lips:** Though at first it may seem an insignificant rite, this ceremony proclaims the Christian design of salvation: God speaks to us, and we respond in faith and love.

We admit that we are dependent on God's action: we listen to his word; the children are vested in robes which proclaim that they have been baptized into the life of the Christian people; and the family shows that it is open to the action of God's word in its life and in the sharing of the faith of the child being baptized.

**Preparing the Celebration**

Areas of creativity: There are many areas of creativity and choice in preparing and celebrating the rite of baptism for children. Priests, ministers, and all those involved in preparing the celebration are encouraged to meet the needs of this worshipping community within the body of the universal Church.

- **Readings:** The lectionary (nos. 757-761; Rite, nos. 186-215) suggests three Old Testament readings, six from the New Testament, three responsorial psalms, six gospel acclama-
tions, and 12 gospel passages. This treasury of God’s word should be looked at during the group meetings, and the most appropriate passages chosen by the group and team together. 4

- **Choice of prayers:** Some of the prayers and blessings have alternative forms given in the appendix to the rite.

- **General intercessions** (prayer of the faithful): Members of the baptismal team, and all or some of the parents could work on the petitions.

- **Presentation:** A New Testament, cross, holy picture, statue, or other religious symbol may be presented to the parents before the last blessing, or during an informal gathering after the celebration.

- **Arrangement of seating:** Where the seating is flexible, creative arrangements may be made for the liturgy of the word, around the font, and at other places where the people go for the celebration.

- **Invitation to the parish:** Some imagination might be used in preparing an invitation to the people of the parish to come to the celebration. This could be included in the parish bulletin a week or two before the chosen day.

The other points mentioned throughout this article provide room for creative preparation.

**Minimalism:** Sometimes there is a tendency on the part of some to omit, combine, or tone down rites, to streamline them, or to make them less challenging to our faith. 5 Priests and people have to strive to make the celebrations as strong and full of faith as possible. The Church is moving toward a more generous use of signs — a real bathing in water or a generous pouring of it; more breadlike bread and the use of the cup in the eucharist; a real anointing with real oil. With the background of hundreds of years of minimalistic symbols, we have to try to break out of the constricting shells of habit, and move toward a fuller celebration of the Church’s liturgy.

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**Helpful reading:**


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**NORTH AMERICAN ACADEMY OF LITURGY**

The North American Academy of Liturgy brings together many liturgists in the United States and Canada to share their work and projects. A summary of the work group reports from the 1980 meeting is to be published in the July issue of *Worship* (Collegeville, MN 56321).

These reports are helpful in showing current trends, emphases, and concerns among liturgical scholars in various Christian Churches. We recommend them for your careful study.
Our Community Becomes Involved

Christian initiation — which includes baptism, confirmation, and first communion — is a community affair: it goes far beyond the interests of the individuals and families involved, and touches the life of the whole believing community. This is true of the initiation both of adults and of children.

Importance for the community: Initiation is a process by which individuals are gradually brought to their full stature in Jesus Christ (Eph. 4: 13). They become members of the people of God, and are able to be one with them in carrying out their mission both in the Church and in the world (see Constitution on the Church, no. 31; GICI, no. 2).

○ Initiation of adults: Catechumens are initiated gradually into the Church community during their time in the catechumenate. They meet Christ through the living faith and love of the members of the community. Gradually, the catechumens are encouraged to join members of the local Church in apostolic activities, prayer, and Christian living. All God’s people are called to live the gospel and to make the Church more attractive to others. Catholics should take part in all the events and celebrations leading to the Christian initiation of adults. (See GICI, no. 7; Christian Initiation of Adults, nos. 19, 41.)

This process of initiation has an effect on the life of the community too. At every stage of the catechumenate, the people of God have the opportunity to live once more their own process of conversion, and thus to share in the enthusiasm and deepening faith of the catechumens. [A similar process goes on with other sacraments and rites: many married people like to go to weddings, priests to ordinations, and religious to professions, since they are helped to recall the day this took place in their own life, and thus they experience a form of renewal in their personal commitment.]

○ Initiation of children: When babies or children too young to be catechized are being presented by their parents for baptism, they are at the beginning of a journey: plunged into the baptismal bath now, they begin the process of initiation, which will lead them through years of gradual immersion in the Christian faith, until they are ready to be confirmed with chrism and nourished with the eucharistic bread of life and the cup of salvation.

When the parish is serious about the sacraments of initiation, its members will work and pray with the parents at all stages of their journey of faith, and be with them as they help their children to grow in wisdom, age, and grace (BC, Introduction, no. 5; see also Directory on Masses with Children, no. 11). At the same time, the more that members of the parish are involved in helping parents to exercise their role as the first teachers of the faith to their children (Constitution on the Church, no. 11), the more the community will grow in the faith and love of God.

Leadership and responsibility: Jesus Christ is our teacher, priest, shepherd, brother, and servant. His roles are shared in different ways by all who are baptized into his body, the Church. In a particular way, however, he has placed these responsibilities on the bishops, who are chosen by the Holy Spirit to nourish and guard the flock of Christ (Acts 20: 28). The bishop1 is the high priest and chief liturgist in the local diocesan Church (Constitution on the liturgy, no. 41; GICI, no. 12; BC, Introduction, no. 7: 1), and shares these responsibilities with the priests (presbyters) who are his brothers and co-workers (Liturgy constitution, no. 42).

While the bishop and priests have this responsibility, they cannot ignore the God-given gifts and responsibilities of the laity: they need to listen to the Spirit as he speaks to members of the body of the Lord Jesus (Constitution on the Church, no. 37).

Bishop, priests, other ministers, and people have to work together to proclaim the message of the Lord Jesus that we should repent and believe (see Mk. 1: 15). One of their major tasks is to make the baptism of children a time of conversion and renewal on the part of the parents and families involved.

Renewal of the community: The process of Christian initiation is not reserved to the adult catechumens or to the families who are preparing for the baptism of their infant children. The Church expects all members of the baptized community to use the time of Lent each year to renew the commitment of their baptism, and to express this during the Easter vigil (Liturgy constitution, no. 109). In Canada and the United States, the declaration of this renewal may also take place at Masses on Easter Sunday (see Canadian sacramentary, pages 273-274).

During the 50 days of the Easter season, the Church encourages all believers — newly baptized and veterans alike — to reflect on and rejoice in the teachings and actions of Jesus and his Church; through baptism, they die with Christ to sin, and are raised to new life with Jesus for God.

Community celebration: It is desirable for the community to be involved in the preparation and celebration of baptism. A good example of neighborhood groups helping catechumens and parents of children preparing for baptism is described in Yes, you can! in Bulletin 51, pages 298-300. This concern continues in the years after baptism. See pages 88-90 and 92-96, below.

Ways of helping people to be involved: These are some suggestions for discussion and action in the parish:

- **Baptismal team:** The team is closely involved. Members should continue to pray for the parents and children, and to be available to them.

- **Parishioners:** They should be invited to pray personally and in their family prayer for the parents, their families, and for the baptismal team. During the time of Christian formation, the parish should remember these persons in the general intercessions at Mass and in morning and evening prayer. In the last few weeks before the celebration of baptism, they should be remembered often.

- **Parish bulletin:** At several points during the periods of preparation and decision, the parish bulletin should help the people of the parish know at what stage the parents are in their preparation, and should invite the whole community to pray for them and with them. In the weeks before the celebration, the bulletin should invite the whole community to come and participate in the celebration of the baptism of these children. (See page 81.)

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**PRAYER OF THANKS**

_Blessed are you, O God,_

_Lord of all the universe:_

_you have chosen us as your children_  
_and have forgiven all our sins_  
_through the obedient death and glorious resurrection_  
_of your beloved Son, our Lord and savior._

_We praise you, Father of love,_  
_through Jesus your Son_  
_in the communion of your Holy Spirit,_  
_now and always and for ever._  
_Amen! Alleluia!_
CELEBRATING BAPTISM

The baptism of children must always be seen in the context of the Christian initiation of adults. What we do in the baptism-confirmation-communion of adults is the model, norm, and guide for what we do in the present separated rites of initiation of children.

Time and Place of Celebration

When do we celebrate the baptism of children? Our tradition encourages several times:

- **Easter vigil:** The Easter vigil is the time when adults celebrate the sacraments of initiation — baptism, confirmation, eucharist — in the midst of the Christian community (see *Christian Initiation of Adults*, nos. 8, 27-36, 208-234). It is also the most appropriate time for the baptism of infants (BC, nos. 9, 28). It is quite proper to have no children baptized during Lent, and to celebrate their baptism in the full splendor of the Easter vigil. The vigil is celebrated as the anniversary of everyone's baptism (see Bulletin 70, page 161).

- **Sunday:** This is the day when the people of God celebrate the resurrection of our Lord in a particular way (Liturgy constitution, no. 106). The paschal meaning of baptism is made more evident when the celebration takes place on the Lord's day (BC, no. 9).

  The *Rite* recommends that baptism may be celebrated during Sunday Mass, but "not too often" (BC, no. 9). Details of the celebration are described in no. 29. [Notes on baptism at weekday Masses are given in BC, no. 30, but this would seem to be rather exceptional in the light of no. 9.]

  A parish might wish to consider the idea of celebrating baptism at Mass so that the people at each scheduled Sunday Mass have the opportunity of participating in the baptism of children at least once a year. Thus, in a parish which has Masses at 7:00 p.m. on Saturday, and on Sunday morning at 8:30, 10:00, and 12:00, baptism could be celebrated once a year at the Saturday evening Mass, and at some time during the year at each of the other three.

  - **Appropriate Sundays** for the celebration of the baptism of children are Pentecost and the Baptism of the Lord:
    - Pentecost: In northern Europe, Easter baptisms were often postponed until the warmer weather around Pentecost. [In 1965, the English-language missal omitted the blessing of baptismal water at Pentecost] This is still an appropriate day for baptism, but should never be considered more important than the celebration at the Easter vigil.
    - Baptism of the Lord: This feast is another appropriate time for celebrating the baptism of children. The baptism of our Lord Jesus in the Jordan is seen as the model for our baptism.

- **Emergencies:** Anyone may baptize a baby who is dying or in danger of death (GICI, no. 16; BC, no. 18: 1).

  - **How long may we wait?** The requirements of GICI and the Introduction of BC leave us with a pastoral balancing act. All children who have been born recently should be baptized together in one celebration (GICI, no. 27); children should be baptized “within the first weeks after birth” (BC, no. 8: 3); when the parents are not prepared to profess the Catholic faith or bring up their children as believers, the baptism may be delayed (BC, no. 8: 4).

  **Place of celebration:** Adults receive the sacraments of initiation in the parish where they take part in the catechumenate, or at the cathedral (see RCIA, no. 44).

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1 See *Disintegration: decline and fall*, in Bulletin 51, pages 286-290. The gradual moving away from the unity of the sacraments of initiation has left us with unfinished theology and pastoral confusion today.

2 *Recently:* This is in distinction with the former requirement of canon 770, which required baptism to be "as soon as possible." The revised rites urge the participation of both the mother and father in the celebration (BC, no. 5: 2-4).
• Parish church: Children are normally baptized in the parish church of their own community (BC, no. 10). The baptismal font is discussed in Bulletin 74, *House of the Church*.

• Other churches: The bishop may permit a baptismal font in a mission church (BC, no. 11).

• Emergencies: In case of danger, baptism may be celebrated anywhere (BC, nos. 11-13). If the child lives, there is a special rite of bringing the child to church (nos. 165-185).

• Abuses: It is not proper or correct to celebrate baptism in homes or schools (BC, no. 12). Its full ecclesial meaning is brought out only by a community celebration in the community's place of public worship; it is good, however, to invite classmates of the children in the family to come to the church for the celebration of baptism.

A Full Celebration

The baptismal team and liturgy committee may wish to discuss these ideas. References are to the *Rite of Baptism for Children* (BC).

Welcoming: The priest or deacon (perhaps in alb) and the baptismal team join the ushers in welcoming the families as they arrive in church. In churches with movable seating, a special welcoming area may be prepared, with a nearby coatrack.

Introductory rites: When all have gathered, the priest or deacon who is the minister of the sacrament goes to vest. With servers (cross and candles, at least) and a reader carrying the book as on Sunday, he comes to the place where the families have gathered. A psalm or hymn may be sung during this entrance procession (no. 35). The minister greets them as a group, and speaks briefly to them (no. 36).

• Questions: He asks the parents to tell him the name of each child, asks them what they are requesting of the Church, and asks them if they are ready to raise the child in the practice of the Catholic faith (nos. 37-39). Then he asks the godparents if they are ready to help the parents (no. 40).

• Signing with the cross: In the name of the community, the minister again welcomes the children, and marks the sign of the cross on their foreheads to claim them for Christ. The parents and godparents are invited to make the cross on the child as a symbol of their sharing in this child's faith life in the future (nos. 41, 16).

• Preparing for the liturgy of the word: The infants may be taken by the babysitters (see page 79) to a separate place while the liturgy of the word is celebrated for the adults (nos. 43, 14). The priest or deacon invites them to share in the liturgy of the word. If this takes place in another part of the church, all may move there in procession (no. 42). In a church with flexible seating, a group of seats may be placed near the lectern.

Liturgy of the word: The Church wants to stir up the faith of the parents, godparents, and all who are present (no. 17). Together they pray for the graces of baptism for the children.

• Readings: See note 4 on page 81. It is better to have a separate reader for each of the first two readings (see page 79, above). A responsorial psalm is sung after the first reading, and a gospel acclamation during the gospel procession. When another priest or deacon is present, he reads the gospel (no. 44).

• Homily: This is intended to be brief, helping the parents and godparents to understand baptism more fully, and encouraging them to accept the responsibilities they are taking on when their children are baptized (no. 45). This is the purpose of the time of Christian formation; if proper preparation has taken place, the homily will be a reminder and an encouragement. It is desirable for the minister to invite all to a moment of silent prayer after the homily (no. 46).

3 Vesture: For baptism outside Mass, the presiding priest or deacon wears an alb and a white stole. A surplice and white stole may be used, but an alb is preferred, since it is the vestment which is common to all ministers (see GI, no. 298). He may also wear a cope. The vestments are of festive color (BC, no. 35).
Intercessions: The community prays for the children, for their parents and godparents, and for all the baptized (no. 47; other forms are given in nos. 217-220).

Litany of the saints (no. 48): Names of the children's patron saints may be added (see page 80, above). Music is provided in CBW II, no. 8; the longer form is given in CBW II, no. 193.

The babysitters bring the children back to their parents (no. 48).

Liturgy of the sacrament: This consists of preparatory rites, the rites leading to baptism, and the explanatory rites:

- Prayer of exorcism (no. 49): In today's Church, an exorcism is a prayer by which the Church asks Jesus or his Father to free a person from evil in all its forms, and to give this person his gifts, especially the Spirit. This is evident from a study of the prayer texts used for exorcism in the Christian Initiation of Adults, nos. 113-118, 373, 164, 171, 178. (See Bulletin 64, page 152.)

- Anointing with the oil of catechumens (nos. 50-51): Each child is anointed on the breast. We ask that Christ may strengthen this child with his power.

- Procession to the baptistry (no. 52): The group goes in procession to the baptistry, while singing a psalm, especially Ps. 23.

- Celebration of the sacrament (nos. 53-61): These rites are celebrated at the font:
  - Invitation to prayer (no. 53): The minister reminds all of God's wonderful plan to make us holy through water.
  - Blessing of baptismal water (outside the Easter season, no. 54): Recalling God's great works recorded in the bible, the minister asks the Father to send his Spirit on the water in this font, so that these children may be buried with Jesus in death to sin, and rise with him into the new life of grace.
  - Thanksgiving over blessed water (during the Easter season, no. 55): The minister thanks God for his works, and asks him to bring these children to a new birth in the Spirit.
  - Renunciation of sin (nos. 56-57): The parents and godparents are invited to express in public their own personal conversion by declaring that they are ready to turn away from sin. Two forms are offered in the ritual; the newer form (“Do you reject sin”) is stronger.
  - Profession of baptismal faith (no. 58): The parents and godparents complete their declaration of conversion by turning to God and proclaiming their faith three times. This is the faith in which they have promised to raise their children.
  - Community assent (no. 59): The minister and all the community accept the declaration of faith by the parents and godparents. It is much more effective to sing it: see CBW II, no. 10.
  - Baptism (nos. 60-61): For each family, the priest or deacon asks the parents and godparents if they want this child baptized in the faith of the Church. When they assent, he baptizes the child by immersing him or her three times (see pages 78-79) or by pouring a good amount of water over the child's head as he says the words of baptism.
  - Acclamation (no. 60): After each baptism the community may sing a brief acclamation: see CBW II, nos. 11-14.

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5 See Baptismal Anointing, by Leonel L. Mitchell (1978, University of Notre Dame Press, Notre Dame, IN 46556): this book was reviewed in Bulletin 64, page 186.
In celebrating baptism, it is important that the rest of the community present be able to see these actions, and — where possible — even to hear the sound of the water splashing or pouring. (A server could hold a microphone close by in a larger celebration: see Bulletin 51, page 300.)

- **Explanatory rites** (nos. 62-66): These four rites act out symbolically what the Lord has done for each child — and for us — in baptism.

— Anointing with chrism (no. 62): In the adult rite, the anointing at this point is the celebration of confirmation (see *Christian Initiation of Adults*, nos. 227-231). In the baptism of children, the anointing with chrism is a reminder that this child is a member of the anointed people of God, a member of Christ's body, and a sharer in his role as priest, prophet and king (see *Constitution on the Church*, nos. 10-13, 30-38). A generous use of scented oil, blessed by the bishop shortly before Easter, is fitting.

— Clothing with the white garment (no. 63; see page 80, above): The white robe is a sign of their membership in the people of God, and a reminder of their dignity as Christians.

— Presenting a lighted candle (no. 64; see page 80, above): The flame is a symbol of the light of faith in Christ. It is the duty of the parents and godparents to keep this light burning in their own lives and in the life of the child baptized today, helping this child to live his or her life for Christ.

— Prayer over the ears and mouth (no. 65; see page 80, above): This rite is rich in symbolism. We ask that Jesus will open their ears to hear his word in faith, and their mouths to proclaim praise to the Father.

**Concluding rites:**

- **Procession to the altar** (no. 67): The families move from the font to the altar. A baptismal acclamation may be sung: see CBW II, nos. 15, 11-13.

- **Lord's prayer:** This is the prayer of the daughters and sons of God our Father, taught to us by Jesus our brother (see Mt. 6: 9-13, 14-15; Lk. 11: 1-4).

— Introduction (no. 68): The minister reminds all that these children are to be formed in the Catholic faith until they celebrate the other two sacraments of initiation and grow into "the full stature of Christ" (GIC, no. 2). This is a further reminder of the sacraments of initiation, baptism, confirmation, and eucharist (see also no. 47).

— Prayer (no. 69): As God's beloved children, we pray the *Our Father* with Jesus and all his Church. It is especially appropriate to sing this prayer during the baptismal celebration. Many settings are given in CBW II; the one used should be familiar to most of the parishioners present.

- **Blessings** (no. 70): The minister concludes the celebration by blessing the mothers (as they hold their newly baptized child), the fathers, and all who are present. Several forms of the blessing are provided.

- **Thanksgiving hymn** (no. 71): A final hymn of thanks or the canticle of Mary may be sung to conclude the celebration.

**After the celebration,** it would be appropriate to invite those present for the liturgy to gather in the parish hall for a brief celebration over coffee and donuts, with light refreshments for the brothers and sisters of the baptized children.

**Family celebrations:** A family gathering after the baptism is appropriate; an extravaganza is out of keeping with the meaning of membership in the Church today.

**Helpful reading:**

CONTINUING CARE

Baptism is the beginning of the Christian formation of children in the faith and service of the Lord Jesus. Those who promise to help these children to grow in the faith have a serious responsibility: parents promise to bring their children to full Christian maturity, and godparents are to help the parents in this task; clergy and other ministers in the community are to help parents and godparents to grow in prayer, teaching, Christian customs, and in the daily living of the gospel.

WE CONTINUE TO TEACH

Time after baptism: Adults who are initiated at the Easter vigil are helped during the Easter season to become full and active members of the Church. This is the time for their mystagogia or catechesis after baptism. It is the final stage in their Christian initiation, as the Church helps them to understand more fully what God has done in them; it is a time for reflecting on the gospel, for experiencing the Christian mysteries, and for a deepening relationship with the believing community. (See Bulletin 64, page 177.)

• For children baptized in infancy, before they were able to be catechized, the Church does a similar thing: they are helped to grow in the faith until they are able to accept it themselves, and to be confirmed and given the eucharist.

Five Important Years in the Family

For some years now, psychologists and educators have been telling us that the first five years of a child's life are the most important: in these crucial years a boy or girl has received his or her basic formation and direction. This means that parents — and those who try to assist them — have a most important task to achieve in the first five years.

First teachers of the faith: By their co-operation with God in bringing a new child into being, parents share in his creative power. Their lives reflect and share in the love between God and his people, and between Christ and his body, the Church.

Their children are adopted as God's children in baptism, and are thus received into the people of God. The family is a little church, where parents are the first teachers of the Catholic faith to their children.

In their family life the light of the gospel shines before others — before their children first of all — and may lead other people to give glory to the Father (see Mt. 5: 16). Parents witness to each other and to their family that they believe in Jesus Christ and love him. A Christian home is an example of God's kingdom now, and a sign of the eternal life he promises.

Through their example in love and sacrifice and in their family prayer, parents can lead their children to maturity, to holiness, and to eternal salvation; they can encourage them to be apostolic in outlook and action.

Parents are the first to introduce their children to prayer, liturgy, concern for others, and works of mercy. (See Vatican II, Constitution on the Church, nos. 11, 35; Constitution on the Church in the modern world, nos. 47-52; Decree on the apostolate of the laity, no. 11.)

A Christian atmosphere should penetrate the home. Prayers, celebrations, God's word, good religious art, and religious observances should be part of family living.

Parents would benefit from this exercise: they are asked to write out a list of the religious practices that their parents taught them (e.g., visits, use of holy water, praying the rosary, wearing medals); then, beside this list, they write a list of the practices they are passing on to their children. (This may be done during the group meetings before baptism.)
The prayer life and worship of the parish depend on the Christian atmosphere of the homes in the parish. Many positive suggestions for families and parishes are described in Bulletin 63, *Children and Liturgy*, and in no. 68, *Family Prayer*.

**Values:** The family has the first responsibility in teaching their children human and Christian values:

- **Human values:** In order for children to experience God and his values, they need to experience human values found in liturgy. They should be able to experience these values according to their age and individual capacity, and be able to grow in them, for they are part of every child's formation. These human values include: being able to celebrate, to listen, to express thanks; to forgive and to ask forgiveness; to greet and welcome others; to take part with a group in an activity; to share in a friendly meal; to experience actions which are symbolic.¹

To these we might add the beginning of an ability to share, to be generous, to give, to be a friend. Gradually we might consider others: moderation in all things, doing one's best, working hard for the Lord; a feeling for the dignity of work and of service for others; self-respect (a sense of our own worth); a sense of honesty, respect for law and order, concern for others.

- **Christian values:** Children should be led gradually beyond these human values to understand gospel values. In this way, according to their age, mentality, and way of life, they will slowly become able to celebrate the Lord's paschal mystery.

Jesus and his apostles also teach us his values. The sermon on the mount (see Matthew's gospel, chapters 5-6-7, and parallels) is a good mirror in which to view our ways and Christ's. Parents, teachers, and the rest of the Church in this community should be asking themselves how they are helping children to open their minds and hearts gradually to Christ's values, and to join his people in celebrating his paschal mystery.

Parents should try to make sure that these values are part of their family life, so that their children may be more able to take part in daily events as well as in the community's worship as they move toward maturity. (See also Vatican II, Declaration on Christian education, no. 2.)

**Celebrations:** Throughout the year, there are many events in the life of the nation, the community, and the Church which also influence the family's life, activity, and prayer.

- **Liturgical year:** During the Church's year of praise, the family may observe the seasons and feasts, and let these guide their prayer. Sunday is the Lord's day, and Friday is a special day of love and penance (see Bulletin 43, pages 18-19). The seasons and special days also influence the family in its celebrations. See *Year of praise and prayer*, in Bulletin 63, pages 103-110; also no. 70, *Liturgical Year and Spirituality*.

- **Family celebrations** include birthdays, anniversaries of baptism, weddings, and other sacraments; anniversaries of religious vows; anniversaries of death of family members; other special days in the family's history. See *A family calendar of celebrations*, in Bulletin 68, pages 78-80.

- **References:** Suggestions for these celebrations are contained in Bulletin 63, *Liturgy and Children*; no. 67, *Planning Our Year of Worship*; and no. 70, *Liturgical Year and Spirituality*.

The National Office of Religious Education is presently doing research on early childhood religious education program, for use with children in the years before they go to school; this will be a resource that is centered on the family. As more information become available, it will be published in the Bulletin.

¹ See Directory for Masses with Children (Congregation for Divine Worship, November 1, 1973), nos. 10, 9. This text is contained in the sacramentary (Canadian edition, pages 55-64), and also in *Masses with Children/Masses of Reconciliation* (1975, CCC, Ottawa), pages 11-20. See also *Preparing preschool children for prayer*, in Bulletin 63, pages 70-74; and page 113.
Experiencing Christian living: The Christian spirit is caught more than taught. When children experience love, understanding, forgiveness, and service, they may be moved to do these for others. An atmosphere of Christian love in both home and parish is the only way to help children to continue to experience the faith in their lives.

Help from the Community

Continuing to share the faith: The parish has a responsibility to help parents as they try to let their children develop in a Christian way of life. (See GICI, no. 7; BC, Introduction, no. 4.) This is also a responsibility for priests and for the bishop (BC, Introduction, no. 7: 1). Many suggestions for discussion and action are given in Role of the parish community, in Bulletin 63, pages 95-102.

Role of the baptismal team: After the child's baptism, one or more members of the baptismal team may continue to work with the family as they continue to share the Catholic faith with their child, and lead him or her toward confirmation and communion, and the acceptance of the faith in its implication for daily living with the Lord Jesus and his Church.

Team members will pray for the families with whom they have been involved; remain available to them as friends; and be ready to come to their help in times of stress, doubt, or drifting. Members of the team continue to be witnesses of Christian living to all the families in whose lives they have become involved.

It must be done now! The religious formation of children and their preparation for the sacraments of confirmation and communion cannot be left totally to parish or school in later years. From the moment of baptism, these are the responsibility of the parents, aided by godparents, family, parish, and school.

What is the answer? There is no automatic way to teach the faith or pass it on to the next generation. We have to live it before we can share it. When we let what we believe show in what we do, when we let our faith influence our daily actions, when we let our principles guide our practice: only then can we share the Christian faith and teach it to our children.

PRAYER OF PRAISE

All praise to you, Father in heaven,
for leading us out of the darkness of sin
into the light of your kingdom.
We bless you for sending us your Son to save us,
to die for us that we might die to sin,
to be raised that we might share your life.
We thank you for giving us your Spirit of love,
to live in our hearts and lead us to you.

All glory, praise and honor be yours,
Father, Son, and Holy Spirit,
now and evermore. Amen!
WHEN BAPTISM IS POSTPONED

The Church is called to teach all to become followers of Christ and to keep his commandments; then it may baptize them (see Mt. 28: 19-20). When an adult is not ready to enter the final stages of preparation and profess the Christian faith, the celebration of the sacraments of initiation is postponed for this person; more time, instruction, and prayer are needed before he or she is ready to become a Christian. Similarly, when the parents of an infant are not yet ready to renounce sin and profess the faith, or to carry out the responsibilities arising from their child's baptism, the celebration of baptism is postponed until they are ready for it.

Baptism is not refused, but it is postponed (BC, Introduction, no. 8: 4). The Church cannot baptize children indiscriminately, simply hoping that the community will make up for the parents' lack of faith: today we are no longer living in a Christian culture.

From the first contacts before the child is born, the parents are invited to begin to return to life with Christ and his Church. They are invited to come back to prayer, and are given help to pray together and with their children. They are made to feel part of the parish, and to be welcome at all community events and celebrations.

A form of catechumenate: When parents are unwilling to enter the program of preparation for baptism, or when they go through it and find themselves not ready at this time to go ahead with the celebration of the sacrament, the parish is still able to help them in their spiritual journey.

To encourage parents to return gradually to the practice of the Christian faith, a community may wish to develop a simple form of "catechumenate" or time of further preparation. If the parents are willing to do this, their child may be received as a catechumen (thus being recognized as a member of the Church: see RCIA, no. 18). The whole family and the godparents may take part in the rite, since they are the ones who will lead the child to personal faith; relatives, close friends, neighbors, and members of the baptismal team may also be involved.

This is not a new practice: It was done in the fourth and fifth centuries, during the lifetime of Augustine; the initial part of the rite of baptism for children today is still the rite of making catechumens.

Developing a simple rite: This may be adapted from the rites of becoming catechumens: see RCIA, nos. 68-96; BC, nos. 36-43.

• Introductory rites:
  Gathering
  Hymn
  Instruction

• Entering the catechumenate:
  Giving the child a Christian name
  Promise by parents, godparents, community
  Signing with the cross

• Liturgy of the word:
  Reading
  Brief homily
  (Presentation)
  Prayer for the catechumens and their families

• Concluding rites:
  Prayer
  Blessing

After the child and the family are welcomed in this form of catechumenate, the parish community continues to pray with them and for them. The catechumenate is a gradual process, a time of prayer and love and faith.
SHARING SOME PRACTICAL IDEAS

This article contains some practical suggestions on ways that parish communities may follow up the baptism of children, and help parents and families during the first five years of a child's life.

A variety of ideas is suggested here. Each parish community may consider the ones that will be most useful in their circumstances: the location of the parish (rural, urban, suburban, military base); the number of people, priests, ministers, and members of the baptismal team. The practices and events outlined in this article take place over a period of time. It would do little good to drop a copy of this article on a family and then neglect them. Creative use of these ideas will help a parish maintain contact with families whose children are in the five years between baptism and kindergarten.

Certificate of Christian Initiation

Baptismal certificate: The idea of presenting a baptismal certificate to a family is not new. Some ideas are suggested here for further discussion and development.

• Ecumenical certificate: Agreement on the wording of a common baptismal certificate has been reached in the Joint Working Group of the Canadian Council of Churches and the Canadian Conference of Catholic Bishops. From now on, the major Churches1 may use this wording, adding the name of their own denomination:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>CERTIFICATE OF CHRISTIAN BAPTISM</th>
</tr>
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</table>
| This is to certify that ____________________________
| was baptized with water* in the name of the Father and of the
| Holy Spirit on the ____ day of ______ 19__, at ________________
| by ________________________________
| according to the practice of the Roman Catholic Church.
| Date of birth ____________________________
| Place of birth ____________________________
| Father's name ____________________________
| Mother's maiden name ____________________________
| Names of sponsors ____________________________
| ____________________________
| Signed by ____________________________
| in his/her capacity as ____________________________
| Address ____________________________
| ________
| SEAL Date of issue ____________________________

* With water means flowing water by immersion or pouring.

1 At present this includes Anglicans, Lutherans, Presbyterians, Roman Catholics, and members of the United Church of Canada.
 Fuller certificate needed: In the light of the current renewal and understanding of the sacraments of Christian initiation, it may be suggested that what we need is not a "baptismal" certificate but a certificate of Christian initiation. A person initiated as an adult would thus have one certificate, stating that he or she was initiated fully by baptism, confirmation, and communion in one celebration (preferably at the Easter vigil).

For a child baptized in infancy, this certificate would consist of three parts:

— Certificate of baptism, using the ecumenical form described above;

— Certificate of confirmation, including the names of the sponsors (preferably the god-parents or parents — Rite of Confirmation, no. 5), date, parish, place, minister;

— Certificate of first communion, including the date, (minister,) parish, and place.

Such a certificate will be filled in as each of the three sacraments is celebrated. It will show the child's progress into the completion of the sacraments of initiation much better than three individual certificates. (It would also show clearly that the sacrament of penance is not one of the sacraments of initiation.) The family may desire to frame this certificate of Christian initiation.

Presentation: The certificate of Christian initiation, filled in for the celebration of baptism, may be presented at the end of the baptismal celebration. Some parishes may prefer to make this presentation during a visit soon after the baptism; this provides an opportunity for the priest and the baptismal team to make a further contact with the family.

Announcement: On the Sunday after the celebration, the parish bulletin may give the names of the children and their parents, and ask the people of the community to continue to pray for them.

Prayers for the Week after Baptism

After the initiation of catechumens at the Easter vigil, the Church prays for them throughout Easter week, and also during the whole Easter season. A parish baptismal team might wish to develop a set of prayers that parents and families might use during the week following their child's baptism. The prayers would be simple, and could praise God for the gifts he has given this child in baptism. Some examples are suggested here to give parish committees ideas to develop further.

These prayers may be said at one meal each day, or before the baby is put to bed, or at another convenient time. Before praying, the parents may wish to light the baptismal candle and place the baptismal robe on the child.

Sunday (day of baptism):

Heavenly Father,
we praise you for adopting N. as your son/daughter today.
Bless our child, and let him/her grow in your love.
Help us to be good parents,
and to lead our family to love you more.

Father,
we ask this grace through Christ our Lord. Amen!

Monday: We thank our Father for making our child a brother or sister of Christ.

Tuesday: We praise God our Father for making our child a temple of the Holy Spirit.
**Wednesday:** We glorify Jesus, who has called our child to be a member of the people of God:

_Blessed are you, Lord Jesus,_
_our savior and our brother._
you have called our child N._
to be a member of God's holy people._
_Help him/her to grow up in your love,_
_and to follow you closely each day._

_Lord Jesus, we love you._
_Hear and answer our prayer. Amen!_

**Thursday:** We thank our loving Father for calling our child to praise him._

**Friday:** We praise God our Father for calling our child to be a person who will pray for all the world._

**Saturday:** We thank the Father for inviting our child to join with Christ and all the Church in giving praise to God:

_Loving Father,_
_we thank you and give you praise_ for calling our son/daughter N._
to share in the priesthood of Jesus._
_We thank you for letting our child_ join your Church in giving you praise and glory._
_Help our child to be holy,_ a person of prayer and good works._

_Father,_
_we ask this grace through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen!_

**Sunday:** We give thanks to God, who promises resurrection and eternal life to us and our child._

A prayer of thanks for baptism is given on page 70._

**Ideas for Godparents**

**In the first year after baptism:** The godparents try to join with the family in the prayers for the week after baptism. They continue to pray each day for their godchild and for the parents. By inviting the family to their home occasionally, and by visiting their godchild, they will continue to develop the links between the families. The daily prayer and way of life of the godparents continue to be important expressions of the faith that will help the parents and baptized child.

At Christmas and Easter, on birthdays and on the anniversary of baptism, godparents should try to prepare or select gifts which show their loving concern for their godchild and his or her parents. Many ideas are suggested in Bulletin 63, pages 75-85._

**Anniversary of baptism:** Ways of marking baptismal anniversaries include family gatherings, prayer, and religious gifts. Godparents should encourage parents to continue or renew Catholic practices and family prayers in their daily life. Family Mass on the Lord's day should remain at the center of their life._

**In the following years:** Godparents may exercise their responsibilities by daily prayer and example, by occasional visits to the family, by religious gifts, and by encouraging parents and children to visit them once or more each year._

**When the child enters school:** As well as observing the points mentioned above, the godparents may invite their godchild to visit them for several days or longer at least once a
year. They should feel free to discuss religious practices and family life with the parents of their godchild. Most of all, their personal practice and prayer should guide both their godchild and his or her parents in their daily living as members of the Church.

**Celebrating the Anniversary of Baptism**

Each year in the Easter vigil, the whole community of believers celebrates the graces God has given us in bringing us into the people of God: the Easter vigil is the baptismal anniversary of the whole community. Families and individuals may celebrate their personal baptismal anniversary on the exact date of baptism, on a nearby Sunday, or during the month in which baptism was celebrated. Some ideas are outlined here; families and parishes may wish to develop these celebrations for the greater benefit of those who take part in them.

A simple home celebration: After lighting the baptismal candle or another candle, the parents may pray in these or similar words:

Blessed are you, Lord God,  
king of the universe:  
we praise you for your love and mercy  
which you have shown to all your people.

Today we give you thanks and glory  
as we celebrate the anniversary of the day  
when you made N. your son/daughter in baptism.

Give him/her the grace to live in your love,  
and help us to lead our family closer to you  
by our faith, prayer, and example.

All glory be yours, Father,  
through Jesus your Son  
in the communion of your Spirit,  
now and for ever more. Amen!

At the end of the prayer the parents may lay their hands on the head of the one who is celebrating the anniversary, and then on the other members of the family.

A more developed rite could include a scripture reading from the baptismal rite, a prayer (see pages 93-94), a hymn, the prayer given above. Older children could be encouraged to make up their own personal prayer of thanks; see also page 70.

Family calendars showing birthdays, anniversaries, special events, and other days for prayer and celebration could be developed in each home. A sample is given in *A family calendar of celebration*, in Bulletin 68, pages 78-80.

**Religious Symbols in the Home**

Religious symbols — including actions, gestures, practices, customs, objects — help us to express and deepen our faith. Once a strong part of Catholic life, they were dropped for a while in the sixties and seventies (see page 88). Now they are coming back into our homes, renewed with the spirit of the Second Vatican Council (see Liturgy constitution, nos. 60-62).

A few of these are mentioned here. They need to be discussed in the parish. Each ethnic group in the community will have other practices to add to these. Further notes on these and other symbols are contained in Bulletin 62 and 63.

Bible: God's word should be read and respected in every home. The book of God's word should be in a place of honor, and used regularly. See Bulletin 62, pages 10-15; no. 63, pages 79-85.

Cross: The symbol of our Lord's suffering, death, and victory over sin should be prominent in our homes. See Bulletin 62, pages 27-30; no. 63, page 76.
Blessed water: Water may be blessed at the beginning of Sunday Mass as a reminder of our baptism. (The former approach of using it for exorcism against evil is no longer emphasized.) Families may use blessed water at times of prayer, especially on the Lord's day, and when blessing members of the family.

Candles: These remind us that Christ is the light of the world, and that we too are called to let our light shine before others and thus lead them to give glory to the Father. Candles may be used in times of prayer and festivity.

Seasonal symbols: Both religious and secular traditions use various symbols — including ritual foods — in the different seasons and feast days of the year. It has always been the Church's practice to find and develop a religious aspect of these symbols. See Bulletin 70, *Liturgical Year and Spirituality*; no. 67, *Planning our Year of Worship*; also *Year of praise and prayer*, in no. 63, pages 103-110.

Blessings: We praise God for his goodness, and we ask him to help us use the things of creation in his service. Blessings are once more a part of our family life, and anyone may bless God. See Bulletin 49, *Blessed Be God and His Creation*; no. 63, pages 70-71; no. 68, pages 73-74.

A place for prayer: Each family may choose a spot, a corner, or a room, and set it aside for prayer and reflection. A bible, cross, and candle may be used to mark it. This place of prayer is used only for individual or family prayer. Further ideas are given in Bulletin 63, page 86, and in no. 68, pages 61 and 65.

Banners: There are many ways of using temporary banners to deepen family prayer life and devotion. Banners are better when they emphasize symbols more than words. See Bulletin 63, page 77; no. 48, pages 108-113; no. 61, page 285.

Prayer life of the community: The priests and parish council, including its liturgy committee, are responsible for the prayer life of the people of the parish. A strong individual and family prayer life is necessary if the community's public worship is to be prayerful. Further articles on the responsibility of the parish community for helping families to pray better are contained in Bulletins 44, 66, and 68. See especially *Role of the parish community*, in Bulletin 63, pages 95-102.

Helpful resources:

* National Bulletin on Liturgy: Past articles and book reviews on children and liturgy are listed in Bulletin 61, pages 291-292. See in particular:
  * Tell me a story, on bible stories for children: Bulletin 37, pages 57-62.

* "Spiritual Development in the Beaver Program," by Patrick Byrne, in *The Leader*, April 1974; reprinted with a few editorial changes in October 1978 (Box 5112, Station F, Ottawa, Ontario K2C 3H4).

* Filmstrips:
  * The Formative Years, by Dorothy A. Dixon (1977, Twenty-Third Publications, PO Box 180, West Mystic, CT 06388).

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