

PREPARING FOR INFANT BAPTISM

Dear Parishioners:

In Autumn (2009), Bishop McCormack sent an instruction to all Pastors regarding the Sacrament of Baptism. He noted, accurately, that not all parishes follow the same procedures regarding the requirements of parents seeking Baptism for their child. This has created some confusion among the faithful. The Diocese of Manchester has established a policy, taken from the universal law of the Church (Canon Law) that standardizes the procedures in parishes regarding the Sacrament of Baptism.

Here at Divine Mercy Parish, as of January 2010, we fully comply with this policy.

Since this policy will affect most parishioners in some way, let me go over the requirements and the reasons for them.

When parishioners contact the parish office to arrange for a Baptism, the following information will be needed.

- 1) name of the child to be baptized
- 2) date and place of birth of the child
- 3) photocopy of the child's birth certificate
- 4) street address and phone number of household
- 5) maiden name and religion of mother
- 6) name and religion of father
- 7) are the parents married according to the law of the Catholic Church?
- 8) name(s) of godparent(s)
- 9) a godparent, who is not a parishioner of Divine Mercy Parish, must provide a letter from his/her Pastor which will indicate to Fr. Gerry that he/she is a practicing Catholic. A parishioner of Divine Mercy Parish will not need a letter, but he/she must meet the requirement of practicing the faith.

Most of the above information is easy to provide. Items #7, #8, and #9 need some commentary.

When parents approach the Church to request a Sacrament on behalf of their child, the Church is also concerned about the sacramental life of the parents. Item #7 is asking if the marriage of the parents is recognized (valid) in the Catholic Church. If the parents were not married according to the law of the Church, this is a moment when the Pastor can assist the couple in having their marriage become a Sacrament. Every situation is different in terms of what is involved in this process. In most cases, the priest knows what needs to be done. Occasionally, he has to consult a higher authority for direction.

Will the child be refused Baptism if the parents are not sacramentally married? The short answer is **NO**. **However**, in that case the priest must remind Catholic parents that they are not able to receive Holy Communion until the marriage is blessed by the Church.

Items #8 + #9 concern godparents. The Church requires that a godparent (a.k.a. sponsor) be a baptized Catholic, age 16 or older, who him/herself has received the three Sacraments of Initiation (Baptism, Eucharist, Confirmation). Furthermore, a godparent (sponsor) must lead a life in harmony with the faith and the role to be undertaken. If married, the godparent (sponsor) must be married according to the law of the Catholic Church (see Canons #872-874). Canon #874 also states that a baptized non-Catholic may be a witness to baptism together with a Catholic sponsor.

Understanding what is involved in being a godparent, the Church expects that a godparent is attending church regularly. **This necessity seems to surface the most problems**. And yet, the Church truly is not being unfair in setting this expectation. Practicing the Catholic faith is more than just a nice idea or ideal. Celebrating the Eucharist and receiving Holy Communion (going to Mass) is **at the very heart of** what it means to be a **Catholic**. In fact, it is impossible to define what it means to be a Catholic, and leave out the centrality of the Mass. It is a matter of integrity for a Catholic who presents him/herself as a godparent to be serious about practicing that faith. If a person is not ready to meet these requirements, he or she should conclude for him/herself that this honor should be declined at this time. Keep in mind that Fr. Gerry

is ready to help any person do what it takes to get back “in the habit” of practicing the Faith. Also keep in mind that what is said here about godparents applies to parents as well.

Canon Law allows for one godparent, male or female, or two godparents, one male and one female. There cannot be more than two godparents, nor does church law permit two godparents of the same gender.

What is expected of persons, living outside of Divine Mercy Parish, who request that a baptism take place here? This request usually comes from adults who grew up here and now want to “come home” for the baptism of their child.

First of all, it is important to understand that adult Catholics who grew up locally, but no longer live locally (within the parish boundaries), are no longer parishioners of this parish. Please understand that this is a matter of church law and not the local Pastor’s rule (see Canon 106).

Former parishioners may request a baptism for their child here at Divine Mercy Parish. In order for this to happen, Fr. Gerry needs a letter from the Pastor of the parish in which the former parishioner now lives. This letter gives Fr. Gerry permission (jurisdiction) to perform the Sacrament. Naturally, this means that these individuals need to be registered in their local parish and recognized by their Pastor. If they attend Mass on a regular basis, even though the Pastor may not know them by name, he will recognize them as active parishioners. In such cases, Fr. Gerry expects that these parents will receive instruction from their parish regarding the meaning of Baptism and the responsibilities that are incumbent on parents of a baptized child.

Other Important Information

There is no “charge” for a baptism celebration! However, if you choose to make an offering to the church it is always appreciated. Checks should be made out to Divine Mercy Parish.

If you have a relative or friend who is a Catholic priest or deacon, he is most welcome to come to celebrate the baptism of your child.

Finally, be aware that there is no guarantee that a baptism ceremony will be a private baptism, i.e. only one family involved. The very nature of the Sacraments is that they are part of the Church’s public worship; therefore, there is no such thing as a private ceremony.

Once the parents have assembled the needed information, please call our parish office @ 603-924-7647, and a date will be reserved for your child’s Baptism. Please note that **sponsor forms must be received prior to the baptism’s being scheduled**. A meeting with Fr. Gerry or his delegate is required for parents baptizing their first child. Depending on circumstances, Fr. Gerry may ask to meet with any parents.

There is a lot of material in this instruction. Reading it a second time will be helpful! The most frequently asked questions are covered. If you have additional questions, call the office. Remember that this **policy comes from the Diocese of Manchester**, and is not a personal policy drawn-up by Fr. Gerry. The policy is challenging, but it protects the integrity of this first and most important of the Sacraments. Without Baptism, there is no sacramental life in the Church.

CONGRATULATIONS on the birth of your child! Let us work together to bring her/him to the beautiful light of our Faith!

Yours in Christ,

Fr. Gerry