

Norms for Conditional Baptism

Archdiocese of Cincinnati

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“If there is a doubt whether a person has been baptized or whether baptism was conferred validly and the doubt remains after a serious investigation, baptism is to be conferred conditionally,”¹

“There may be a reasonable and prudent doubt concerning the Baptism of [some] Christians which cannot be resolved after serious investigation into the fact and/or validity of Baptism, namely, to ascertain whether the person was baptized with water and with the Trinitarian formula, and whether the minister and the recipient of the sacrament had the proper requisite intentions.”²

Canonical Considerations

The sacraments of Baptism, Confirmation, and Holy Orders imprint indelible sacramental character. Therefore, these sacraments cannot be repeated. However, if, following a diligent inquiry, a prudent doubt remains as to whether these sacraments were actually conferred, they may be conferred conditionally.³

Unnecessary attempted repetition of these sacraments endangers the dignity of the sacramental character, and of the sacraments as a whole. Special concern exists as regards the sacrament of baptism, because it is validly conferred in the majority of the various non-Catholic ecclesial communities, whose celebration of baptism and the effects thereof should be respected. [For a list of ecclesial communities whose baptisms are considered valid or invalid, [click here](#).] Usually such an inquiry into the records and ritual practices of a Christian church or ecclesial community should resolve the doubt of whether or not baptism had been conferred.

In the case of where it is known that the attempted baptism was invalid, baptism is to be conferred absolutely, not conditionally.

In cases where a doubt exists, either due to uncertainty about the fact of a baptism taking place (doubt of fact) or due to a deficiency in the matter and form used (doubt of validity), a serious investigation is to take place to attempt to determine the facts.

¹ Canon 869 § 1

² National Statutes on the Catechumenate, 37

³ Cf. Canon 845

This investigation can involve the testimony of witnesses. If there is no danger of conflict of interest, “the testimony of one witness beyond exception is sufficient or the oath of the one baptized if the person received baptism as an adult.”⁴ The witness should be able to give testimony to the fact of the baptism and the matter and form used. The witnesses may be family members, sponsors, ministers, or others who can provide useful information about the event in question.

Additionally, photos, videos, and social media posts may also be helpful in proving the validity of baptism.

The intention of an adult seeking baptism or of the minister of the baptism may also affect its validity.⁵ On the part of the minister, he or she must have had at least the minimal intention of doing what the Church prescribes (pouring water and saying the sacramental formula). If an adult knows that he or she exteriorly manifested an intention not to be baptized, then the requisite intention for valid baptism was not present.

If after such an investigation, a doubt still remains as to the validity of the baptism, baptism should be conferred conditionally, as below.

In danger of death, an individual may be baptized conditionally without any investigation and without the required catechesis,⁶ if the minister believes that a prior baptism was invalid.

Liturgical Norms

When conditional Baptism seems necessary, the following norms are to be observed:

- a) The minister must explain to the person to be baptized the reasons supporting the decision to baptize conditionally.⁷
- b) If an adult or child of catechetical age, conditional baptism is celebrated when the pastor and catechists are confident that the person to be baptized possesses sufficient formation and intention to persevere in Catholic faith; this normally occurs when a date is set for a candidate’s reception into full communion (e.g., a candidate anticipating reception into full communion at Easter would be baptized conditionally around the time of the Call to Continuing Conversion). Conditional baptism may not be celebrated during the Paschal Triduum.

⁴ Canon 876

⁵ Cf. Canon 869 §2

⁶ Cf. Canon 869 §3

⁷ Canon 869 § 3; RCIA 480

- c) Conditional baptism is conferred privately,⁸ without solemnity,⁹ employing only these limited rites:
- 1) A brief greeting or introduction to the liturgy;
 - 2) One of the following readings from the Sacred Scriptures:
Matthew 28-18-20; Mark 1:9-11; or John 6:44-47;¹⁰
 - 3) The renunciation of sin and profession of faith;
 - 4) The pouring of water with the Trinitarian formula:
“N., if you are not baptized, I baptize you in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit;”
 - 5) A simple blessing and dismissal.
- d) Conditional baptism is recorded in the parish baptismal register with the notation, “baptized conditionally.”
- e) Candidates who have been baptized conditionally should still celebrate the Sacrament of Penance before reception into the full communion of the Catholic Church.
- f) The Sacrament of Confirmation is not joined to the celebration of conditional Baptism.

With canonical questions or concerns, please contact the Chancery,
chancery@catholicaoc.org.

With liturgical questions or concerns, please contact the Office for Divine Worship & Sacraments, worship@catholicaoc.org.



⁸ NS 37; *Directory for the Application of Principles and Norms on Ecumenism* 99.d.

⁹ RCIA 480

¹⁰ These may be found in, among other places, the *Lectionary for Mass* 760.2, 3, and 6.