

# **HANDBOOK FOR SACRAMENTAL RECORDS**

**Roman Catholic Archdiocese of Baltimore  
Office of the Chancellor  
320 Cathedral Street  
Baltimore, MD 21201**

**First Edition  
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## FORWARD

Sacramental records of the oldest archdiocese in the United States represent both a treasure of historical memory as well as an on-going record of the sacramental history of today's faithful. Those charged with keeping these records have a heavy responsibility and pastoral obligation to safeguard and keep such registers in accordance with Church law and practice. It is hoped that this document will assist those clerics and laity in keeping these records well into the years ahead.

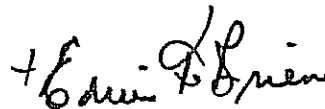
This Sacramental Record Guide has been developed with the kind assistance of the Archdiocese of Chicago, the Archdiocese of Cincinnati and the Diocese of Dallas. These, and many other dioceses, have provided this type of document to assist those charged with keeping sacramental records. Uniformity of practice and accuracy of entry are two of the basic hallmarks of good sacramental record keeping and these are reflected in the policies listed here.

Others throughout the Archdiocese of Baltimore, including Ms. Tricia Pyne, Archivist of the official Archives for the Archdiocese of Baltimore; Monsignor Robert Jaskot, former Chancellor, Dr. Diane Barr, current Chancellor and members of the Tribunal who have offered their kind assistance and knowledge in formulating this document.

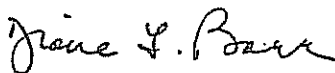
As with all guides, this is a living document that will be adjusted over time as practice demands. It should also be noted that this document binds from this day forward and no attempt should be made to make past registers conform to its policies.

As Archbishop of Baltimore, I hereby promulgate this as particular law for this territory and order its immediate distribution to all.

Given this 1<sup>st</sup> day of January, 2010 on the Feast of Mary, Mother of God.



Most Reverend Edwin F. O'Brien  
Archbishop of Baltimore



Chancellor

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## GENERAL NORMS

**CAN. 491** A diocesan bishop is to take care that the acts and documents of the archives of cathedral, collegiate, parochial, and other churches in his territory are also diligently preserved and that inventories or catalogs are made in duplicate, one of which is to be preserved in the archive of the church and the other in the diocesan archive.

§2. A diocesan bishop is also to take care that there is an historical archive in the diocese and that documents having historical value are diligently protected and systematically ordered in it.

§3. In order to inspect or remove the acts and documents mentioned in §§1 and 2, the norms established by the diocesan bishop are to be observed.

**CAN. 535** §1. Each parish is to have parochial registers, that is, those of baptisms, marriages, deaths, and others as prescribed by the conference of bishops or the diocesan bishop. The pastor is to see to it that these registers are accurately inscribed and carefully preserved.

§2. In the baptismal register are also to be noted confirmation and those things which pertain to the canonical status of the Christian faithful by reason of marriage, without prejudice to the prescript of canon 1133, of adoption, of the reception of sacred orders, of perpetual profession made in a religious institute, and of change of rite. These notations are always to be noted on a baptismal certificate.

§3. Each parish is to have its own seal. Documents regarding the canonical status of the Christian faithful and all acts which can have juridic importance are to be signed by the pastor or his delegate and sealed with the parochial seal.

§4. In each parish there is to be a storage area, or archive, in which the parochial registers are protected along with letters of bishops and other documents which are to be preserved for reason of necessity or advantage. The pastor is to take care that all of these things, which are to be inspected by the diocesan bishop or his delegate at the time of visitation or at some other opportune time, do not come into the hands of outsiders.

§5. Older parochial registers are also to be carefully protected according to the precepts of particular law.

**Can. 876** To prove the conferral of baptism, if prejudicial to no one, the declaration of one witness beyond all exception is sufficient or the oath of the one baptized if the person received baptism as an adult.

**Can. 877** §1. The pastor of the place where the baptism is celebrated must carefully and without any delay record in the baptismal register the names of the baptized, with mention made of the minister, parents, sponsors, witnesses, if any, the place and date of the conferral of the baptism, and the date and place of birth.

§2. If it concerns a child born to an unmarried mother, the name of the mother must be inserted, if her maternity is established publicly or if she seeks it willingly in writing or before two witnesses. Moreover, the name of the father must be inscribed if a public document or his own declaration before the pastor and two witnesses proves his paternity; in other cases, the name of the baptized is inscribed with no mention of the name of the father or the parents.

§3. If it concerns an adopted child, the names of those adopting are to be inscribed and, at least if it is done in the civil records of the region, also the names of the natural parents according to the norm of §§1 and 2, with due regard for the prescripts of the conference of bishops.

**Can. 878** If the baptism was not administered by the pastor or in his presence, the minister of baptism, whoever it is, must inform the pastor of the parish in which it was administered of the conferral of the baptism, so that he records the baptism according to the norm of can. 877 §1.

**Can. 894** To prove the conferral of confirmation the prescripts of can. 876 are to be observed.

**Can. 895** The names of those confirmed with mention made of the minister, the parents and sponsors, and the place and date of the conferral of confirmation are to be recorded in the confirmation register of the diocesan curia or, where the conference of bishops or the diocesan bishop has prescribed it, in a register kept in the parish archive. The pastor must inform the pastor of the place of baptism about the conferral of confirmation so that a notation is made in the baptismal register according to the norm of canon 535, §2.

**Can. 896** If the pastor of the place was not present, the minister either personally or through another is to inform him as soon as possible of the conferral of confirmation.

**Can. 1573** The testimony of one witness cannot produce full proof unless it concerns a qualified witness making a deposition concerning matters done ex officio, or unless the circumstances of things and persons suggest otherwise.

## REGISTERS

- Required Records*** Each parish is required to maintain records of baptisms, confirmations, marriages and deaths.<sup>1</sup> Maintaining records of first Communion is optional. **No registers for first Penance are to be kept.**
- Parishes*** Generally only parishes are to maintain sacramental records and registers.
- Other Institutions*** Non-parochial institutions must obtain the express approval of the Chancellor to maintain sacramental records and registers.<sup>2</sup>
- Format*** Special registers, which are available from private vendors, are required. A parish may retain separate Baptismal, Confirmation, Marriage, and Death Registers or combined registers, depending on the needs of the parish.
- Acid-Free Paper*** The pages of the registers should be made of acid-free paper.
- Computer Reproductions*** Sacramental records may be  **duplicated**  on computers. A complete written record must be maintained in the sacramental registers, and the registers themselves are never to be destroyed or discarded. The registers are considered the  **only**  authentic copy of sacramental records.
- Repair of Old Registers*** As registers become worn, they are to be rebound by a professional binder. Only if a register is beyond repair may the records be transferred to a new register. The original register is to be retained in as safe a condition as possible.
- Safe Storage*** The sacramental registers are to be stored in a locked place, preferably one which is fire-proof or fire-resistant. They may be removed only by authorized personnel and only for legitimate purposes. The registers may never be taken off the parish premises except for microfilming by the Diocese.
- Reporting Loss or Destruction*** The loss or destruction of any sacramental register should be reported immediately to the Chancellor's Office.

## CONFIDENTIALITY

- Nature of Information** Care must be taken to protect people's privacy. Although sacramental registers contain information about public events and other facts readily known to any interested party, they also contain information which is very personal and confidential.
- Access to Registers** The sacramental registers belong to the individual parish. They are maintained for the good of the Christian faithful; but they are private documents, not public ones. No one other than the pastor or his delegate can claim a right to direct access to the registers.
- Authorized Personnel** The pastor is always and ultimately responsible for the care and confidentiality of the sacramental registers themselves as well as any reproductions. He may designate other persons to make entries in the registers and to prepare certificates. These may be employees or volunteers, but their number should be small. These designated persons must be known well to the pastor, must be capable of careful work and protecting confidentiality, and must be adequately trained to work with the registers. Their work with the registers is not to exceed their mandate from the pastor.
- Genealogical Research** Sacramental registers **should never** be made available to genealogical researchers. The pastor or other regularly designated person may research information as requested and as time permits and make the information available on separate paper. Care must be taken not to disclose confidential information.
- Legal Issues** For other legal issues, please contact the Chancellor's Office.

## ENTRIES

- Type of Data** Only that data required by canon law and otherwise necessary for the complete and accurate maintenance of sacramental records is to be entered in the sacramental registers.
- Timeliness** Entries should be made as soon possible after the event to be recorded, but ordinarily within **one week**.
- Place of Entry** As a general rule, the proper parish for the recording of sacraments and deaths is the parish in whose territory the sacraments or rites of Christian burial were celebrated. For exceptions, see the individual register sections below.
- Chronological Order** Entries should be made in chronological order. If the chronological order cannot be kept in some particular case, a small note should be made in the proper chronological location in the register, cross-referencing the actual entry, e.g., "See JONES, page 37".
- Specific Columns** Each page of the register has several columns, and each column is titled. It is important to enter the data in the proper columns. At least the Baptismal Register will have a column titled "Remarks", "Notations", or something similar. There are many references to this column throughout this handbook.<sup>3</sup>



- Index*** Every entry is to be listed in the register's index, according to the person's last name.
- Excess Data*** If there is inadequate space for all the data to be entered, the excess data may be entered elsewhere on the same page or even on a different page of the register. Clear cross-referencing is essential, e.g., "See SMITH, bottom of page".
- "Sacramental Records" File*** Discursive material should not be written in sacramental registers. Such material or related documents (e.g., civil records, correspondence) should be retained securely in a file in the parish archives. However, discretion must be exercised in deciding which material to place in this file; not everything has to be retained. This file should be marked "Sacramental Records," and the words "See Sacramental Records File" should be printed in the "Notations" column of the sacramental register.
- Printing/Ink*** Neat printing is preferred to script. Entries should be made in fade-proof/water-proof ink.
- Style for Names and Dates*** The last name of the entry's subject should be printed in upper case, e.g., "JONES". Printing the name of the month is preferred to using the month's number (e.g. "Aug" rather than "8").
- Confidential Data*** Data which is confidential and which is not to be included on certificates is to be so marked when entered in the register, e.g., "Confidential-do not include on certificate". However, the provisions of can. 535, §2 (adoptions) are to be observed.
- Minister of Sacrament*** The actual minister of a sacrament does not need to sign the register if the person making the entry personally witnessed the event or has available a document (e.g., Sacristy Record of baptism) signed by the minister which certifies the conferral of the sacrament. In these cases the name of the minister is printed in the register.

## CERTIFICATES

- Definition*** A certificate is an official document certifying that a particular individual has received a sacrament. It is an exact duplicate of data already entered in a sacramental register.
- Church Use Only*** Certificates of sacraments are intended primarily for internal church use, not for civil purposes.<sup>4</sup>
- Authorized Source of Records*** Only the parish or other location holding the original sacramental record may issue a certificate.<sup>5</sup> Only the actual register, rather than a microfilm reproduction, should be used in preparing certificates. A computer copy of the record may be used for a certificate, so long as there is assurance that the computer copy corresponds identically to the original register.

- Authorized Requests*** Any member of the Christian faithful has a right to obtain a certificate of a sacrament he or she has received and which was recorded in a sacramental register. But only that person, the parents of a minor, someone with legal guardianship of another and a bona fide pastoral minister at another Catholic parish have this right. When the parents of a child are separated or divorced, both parents, regardless of legal custody, are presumed to have the right to a certificate.
- Procedure for Requests*** Requests for certificates should be submitted in writing, although telephone requests from a Catholic parish or agency are acceptable. The written requests and a log of telephone requests should be kept on file for one year. No information from sacramental registers should be provided by telephone or other electronic means except to another Catholic parish or other Catholic agency. Even then care for the privacy of persons is to be exercised.
- Format*** Certificates should have an official appearance and should be issued in a consistent format. Parishes may obtain blank certificates from commercial vendors or may have them printed locally. All certificates must bear the name and address of the parish.
- Authentication*** Certificates must be typed, printed by computer or hand-printed in ink. They are to be signed by the pastor or his delegate and impressed with the parish seal. Photo and facsimile copies of certificates are not considered authentic documents.
- Required Data*** Certificates are to include all data contained in the sacramental register, except that which is marked confidential or which is extraneous to the person's canonical status. Data in the "Notations" column are to be included. If there is no data in the "Notations" column, the words "No Notations" should be printed on the certificate.
- Missing Record*** Sometimes when a certificate is requested, the record in question cannot be found. If there is any possibility that the sacrament may have been conferred in some other parish, the inquirer should be encouraged to check the sacramental records of that other parish or parishes or consult the Archives of the Archdiocese of Baltimore. If such a search is unwarranted or fails, cc. 876 and 1573 can be applied. Only that data which can be vouched for with certainty should be entered in the register, even though this may leave an incomplete entry. The name of the witness or witnesses, the date of his or her testimony and the words "Based on the testimony of \_\_\_\_\_" should be printed in the "Notations" column of the register.

## **CHANGES TO ENTRIES**

- Caution About Changes*** Once entered into a sacramental register, data is considered official and permanent. It may not be modified except under special conditions, as detailed below. Original data should never be scratched out, erased, "whited out" or otherwise destroyed or obliterated.
- Style for Minor Changes*** Minor changes (e.g., correcting a misspelling) may be made directly to the original entry. Such changes are to be made by drawing a straight, simple line through the word, number or letter to be changed and printing the change immediately above or below it.

***Style for Major Changes*** Major changes (e.g., to record an adoption after baptism) may require that a new entry be created. In these cases, the original entry is to be preserved without change; a new entry, with all the data from the original entry reproduced (except the relevant change or changes), is to be made in the same register as close to the original entry as possible; both entries, as well as listings in the index, are to be cross-referenced; "Do Not Issue Certificate from This Record" is to be printed carefully across the face of the original entry.

***Authorization for Insubstantial Changes*** An insubstantial error (e.g., misspelling) may be corrected upon request of those persons who have a right to a certificate, as mentioned in the **CERTIFICATES** section above.

***Authorization for Substantial Changes*** More significant errors and other changes require authentic supporting documentation. Such documentation will ordinarily consist of an original, "raised seal" certificate from a civil or ecclesiastical office, court, agency, etc. The issuing agency, date of the certificate and any protocol number should be printed in the "Notations" column of the register. When an error involves data pertaining directly to the celebration of a sacrament or rite of Christian burial (e.g., date, identity of godparent) such that no external verifying documentation exists, the written or oral testimony of a reputable witness will suffice.

***Permitted Changes*** Some permitted changes

- correct name
- correct date
- correct spelling
- new legal name
- adoptive parent(s)

***Non-Permitted Changes*** Some non-permitted changes

- new godparents or sponsors <sup>6</sup>
- non-adoptive stepparents
- customary name or nickname

***Data on Certificates After Changes*** Once specific data has been changed in the sacramental register, the original data is not transcribed onto certificates (e.g., the natural parents' names after adoption).

## BAPTISMAL REGISTER

**Can. 296** – (from the Eastern Canons) §2. In the baptismal register are also to be noted the enrollment of the baptized into a determined Church *sui iuris* according to the norm of can. 37, the administration of chrismation with holy myron as well as those things which pertain to the canonical status of the Christian faithful by reason of marriage, with due regard for can. 840, §3, adoption, and sacred orders or perpetual profession in a religious institute; these notations are always to be noted on the certificate of baptism.

**Can. 852** §1. The prescripts of the canons on adult baptism are to be applied to all those who, no longer infants, have attained the use of reason.

§2. A person who is not responsible for oneself (*non sui compos*) is also regarded as an infant with respect to baptism.

**Can. 869** §2. Those baptized in a non-Catholic ecclesial community must not be baptized conditionally unless, after an examination of the matter and the form of the words used in the conferral of baptism and a consideration of the intention of the baptized adult and the minister of the baptism, a serious reason exists to doubt the validity of the baptism.

**Can. 870** - An abandoned infant or a foundling is to be baptized unless after diligent investigation the baptism of the infant is established.

**Can. 873**- There is to be only one male sponsor or one female sponsor or one of each.

**Can. 874** §2. A baptized person who belongs to a non-Catholic ecclesial community is not to participate except together with a Catholic sponsor and then only as a witness of the baptism.

**Can. 877** §1. The pastor of the place where the baptism is celebrated must carefully and without delay record in the baptismal register the names of the baptized, with mention made of the minister, parents, sponsors, witnesses, if any, the place and date of the conferral of the baptism, and the date and place of birth.

§2. If it concerns a child born to an unmarried mother, the name of the mother must be inserted, if her maternity is established publicly or if she seeks it willingly in writing or before two witnesses. Moreover, the name of the father must be inscribed if a public document or his own declaration before the pastor and two witnesses proves his paternity; in other cases, the name of the baptized is inscribed with no mention of the name of the father or the parents.

**Can 878** - If the baptism was not administered by the pastor or in his presence, the minister of baptism, whoever it is, must inform the pastor of the parish in which it was administered of the conferral of the baptism, so that he records the baptism according to the norm of can. 877 §1.

**Can. 1685** - As soon as the sentence is executed, the judicial vicar must notify the local ordinary of the place in which the marriage was celebrated. The local ordinary must take care that the declaration of nullity of the marriage and any possible prohibitions are noted as soon as possible in the marriage and baptismal registers.

## ENTRIES

For baptism celebrated under normal circumstances, the following information is to be entered in the Baptismal Register (can. 877, §1):

1. the Christian name(s) of the child as designated by the parent(s)/adoptive parents; or the legal name of the adult (always use the maiden name of a woman);
2. the name of the father (first, middle if any, and surname) and the name of the mother (first, middle if any, and maiden name); or names of adoptive parents;
3. the date and place of birth;
4. the name(s) of the sponsor(s);
5. the place and date of the baptism; and
6. the name of the minister performing the baptism.

### ***Source of Data***

Ordinarily, the data used to create a record of baptism (as required by can. 877, §1) originates on a "Sacristy Record of Baptism", a small form from a pre-printed pad, sold by commercial vendors. A birth certificate is required in order to verify information. The Sacristy Record is filled out by someone in the parish office at the time the baptism is scheduled, by a member of the baptism preparation team during the catechetical program, or by the minister of baptism at the time of the actual baptism. Before the data is transferred to the Baptismal Register, a parent, guardian or adult candidate should verify the data written on the Sacristy Record (usually at the time of baptism), and the minister must sign the Sacristy Record verifying that the sacrament was conferred. There should be a clear procedure in place for assuring that the data is transferred from the Sacristy Record to the Baptismal Register as quickly as possible.

***Recipients from More Than One Parish*** When persons from more than one parish are baptized or received into full communion with the Catholic Church at a single ceremony, the records for all the persons are to be retained at the parish where the rites are celebrated.

***Baptism outside Parish Church*** When baptism is conferred solemnly (that is, with a priest or deacon celebrating the full rite of baptism) in a chapel, hospital or home (can. 877, §1 and 878), the minister is to see to it that the requisite data is transmitted in writing to the territorial parish in which the chapel, hospital or home is located for recording in the Baptismal Register.

***Emergency Baptism*** When a baptism is conferred in an emergency situation, ceremonies are to be supplied at a later date in order to bring the child into full communion with the Roman Catholic Church. The baptism is recorded properly in the territorial parish where the emergency occurred; that is where the hospital or other place is located. When the ceremonies are supplied at a later date [cf. 1973 *Rite of Baptism for Children* #31.3], a

notation should be made in the margin indicating the date and place the ceremonies were supplied in the territorial parish of the baptism).

***Conditional  
Baptism***

When conditional baptism is conferred, "Baptized conditionally" is to be written in the "Notations" column. Otherwise the entry is the same as for any other baptism. By virtue of can. 869, §2, baptisms in other faiths are presumed valid until the contrary is demonstrated. Therefore, only after careful investigation and with a positive doubt remaining as to the fact of a baptism or its valid celebration, a person is conditionally baptized. This conditional baptism is done privately (i.e., no fanfare and only the essential participants). In such cases the date and place of baptism should be noted instead of the purported earlier baptism. A note as to its conditional celebration should be included.

***Reception  
Into Full  
Communion***

When persons are received into full communion with the Catholic Church, after having been baptized previously in another Christian communion, an entry must be made in the Baptismal Register. The data concerning the Rite of Reception should be entered in the spaces provided for baptism, and the data concerning the original baptism should be entered in the "Notations" column, especially the date and place.

Special care must be taken to follow this procedure when young children are received into full communion along with their parents. In these cases, it is suggested that the ceremonies be supplied as in an emergency baptism, so there is a formal reception into the Church. For further details, see Page 15, "Bringing a Baptized Child into the Church."

The date the ceremonies were supplied should be noted in the spaces provided for Baptism. The data concerning the original baptism should be entered in the Notations column, especially the date and place.

For the "full reception into the Church" celebrated for a baptized adult (RCIA), the following information is to be entered in the Baptismal Register:

1. the given and/or Christian name(s) of the person (always use the maiden name of a woman);
2. the name of the father (first, middle if any, and surname) and the name of the mother (first, middle if any, and maiden name);
3. the date and place of birth;
4. the name of the sponsor;
5. the date and place of the Rite of Reception are noted in the space provided for Baptism;
6. marginal notations giving the date and place of the original baptism, reception of Eucharist and confirmation, and marital status (either current valid marriage or the convalidation of the current marriage). Any declaration of invalidity (including where granted and protocol number) should be noted.

**Celebration of Baptism of an Adult** For baptism celebrated for an unbaptized adult (RCIA) the following information is to be entered in the Baptismal Register (can. 877, §1):

1. the given and/or Christian name(s) of the person (always use the maiden name of a woman);
2. the name of the father (first, middle if any, and surname) and the name of the mother (first, middle if any, and maiden name);
3. the date and place of birth;
4. the name of the sponsor(s)
5. the place and date of the baptism;
6. the name of the minister performing the baptism; and
7. marginal notation of reception of Eucharist and confirmation and marital status (either current valid marriage or the convalidation of the current marriage). Any declaration of invalidity (including where granted and protocol number) should be noted.

**Bringing a Baptized Child into the Church** For baptized children before age 7 (can. 852, §1) who are being received into the Church, the following information is to be entered in the Baptismal Register:

This procedure also is to be followed when the child is being received, along with the parents, into full communion with the Catholic Church.

1. the Christian name(s) of the child as designated by the parent(s);
2. the name of the father (first, middle if any, and surname) and the name of the mother (first, middle if any, and maiden name);
3. the date and place of birth;
4. the name(s) of the sponsor(s) now selected by the parents;
5. the date and place (church and town) ceremonies are supplied to effect formal reception into the Church are noted in the spaces provided for Baptism (cf. 1973 *Rite of Baptism for Children* #31.3); and
6. data concerning the original baptism should be entered in the Notations column, especially the date and place (cf. 1973 *Rite of Baptism for Children* #31.3).

**Unmarried Parents** It is important that the provisions of can. 877 concerning unmarried parents be followed. It is unjust to enter unauthorized names of parents in the Baptismal Register.

**Children of Unknown Parentage** For children whose parentage cannot be known (can. 870) or is unknown (can. 877, §2), the following information is to be entered in the Baptismal Register:

1. the Christian name(s) of the child as designated by the mother or guardian(s);
2. the name of the mother (first, middle if any, and maiden), if publicly known or requested by her before two witnesses;
3. the name of the natural father (first, middle if any, and surname) only if paternity is established by a legal document or he makes a declaration before the pastor and two witnesses; otherwise leave blank;
4. the date and place of birth, if known, or of being found or placed under guardianship;

5. the name(s) of the sponsor(s) selected by the parent or guardian;
6. the place and date of the baptism; and
7. the name of the minister performing the baptism.

On October 20, 2000, the USCCB issued norms under can. 877, §3 for the purpose of assisting those with the responsibility of recording the baptism of children who had been adopted or who later are adopted. These norms were originally passed on November 18, 1998, and in turn received Roman approbation on September 30, 2000.

***Baptism Before Adoption*** For children baptized before adoption, the following information shall be added in the Baptismal Register after the adoption is finalized. (can. 877, §3):

1. parentheses ( ) shall be placed around the names of the natural parents;
2. the name(s) of the adoptive parent(s) shall then be added;
3. the child's former surname shall also be parenthesized ( ) and the new surname added; and
4. a notation shall be made that the child was legally adopted.

Baptismal certificates issued by the parish for these individuals should give the name(s) of the adoptive parent(s), the child's new legal surname, the date and place of birth, the date and place of baptism, and the name of the minister who administered the sacrament. The name(s) of the natural parents and the sponsor(s) shall not be given, and no mention of the fact of adoption shall be made on the baptismal certificate.

A new entry should be made, and in the index cross-reference should be made to the old entry, with the following information:

1. the new legal, Christian name of the child as designated by the adoptive parents;
2. the names of the adoptive parents;
3. the date and place of birth;
4. the date and place of the baptism;
5. the name of the minister performing the baptism;

Any certificate for this person should be issued from the record created after the adoption;

No certificate ever should be issued from the record created before adoption.



**Baptism After Adoption** For children baptized after adoption, no reference to the adoption or the natural parents is to be made in the Baptismal Register. Any such data which has been recorded is to be treated as confidential and is not to be included on any certificate.

The following information shall be entered in the register (can. 877, §3):

1. the Christian name(s) of the child as designated by the adoptive parent(s);
2. the name(s) of the adoptive parent(s);
3. the date and place of birth;
4. the names of the sponsors selected by the adoptive parent(s);
5. the place and date of the baptism;
6. the name of the minister performing the baptism.

Baptismal certificates issued by the parish for adopted children will be no different from other baptismal certificates. No mention of the fact of adoption shall be made on the baptismal certificate.

**Number of Godparents** No more than two names may be entered in the "Godparents" or "Sponsors" column. Church law (can. 873) stipulates one and no more than two sponsors (one female and one male) of baptism. Church law (can. 874, §2) allows a baptized person, who is not a member of the Catholic Church, to serve as "a Christian witness." The designation "CW" might be useful for clarity. Church law (*Ecumenical Directory* # 98b) holds that a baptized Eastern Orthodox is properly a godparent and not a Christian witness.

**Proxy Godparent** When a godparent or sponsor appoints a proxy to participate in the rite of baptism, both names should be entered in the register, with "Proxy" written after that person's name. No more than two godparents are allowed.

**Ascription to Proper Church Sui Iuris** Ascription to a uniate Church *sui iuris*, (e.g., Byzantine, Maronite) is determined by the rite of the father, not by the rite of the minister or parish of baptism, unless the person is 14 years of age or older, at which age the individual can choose his/her rite. Thus, when a Latin priest or deacon baptizes someone who by law is ascribed to an Eastern Catholic Church, a notation should be made in the "Notations" column.<sup>7</sup> (can. 111)

**Registers for Ritual Use** A register used as part of the Church's ritual (e.g., Book of the Elect) should be completely distinct from the regular sacramental registers. The data from the ritual register should be transferred to the Baptismal and Confirmation Registers as soon as possible after the conferral of sacraments or the reception into full communion.

The issuance of a baptismal certificate should reflect what is recorded in the Baptismal Register. Its purpose is to prove the fact of baptism and the reception of any subsequent sacrament or church action that affects that person's status in the Church.

## CHANGES TO ENTRIES

- Most Changes Occur in Baptism Registers*** The baptismal record is the primary sacramental record for Catholics. It serves as a log for all the significant, public developments in one's relationship with the Church. As a result, most changes to entries in the sacramental registers will be made in the Baptismal Register.
- Changes to Original Data*** Some of these changes are actual modifications of the original data entered for Baptism, for example, change of name or change of parent. Directions for making such changes can be found in the **GENERAL NORMS** section of this handbook.
- Additions to "Notations" Column*** Some of the changes are additions to the "Notations" column. For example, when a Catholic is confirmed, married or ordained, the churches where these sacraments are celebrated notify the church of baptism, so the new sacraments can be noted in the Baptismal Register.<sup>8</sup> Also, when a marriage is declared invalid by an ecclesiastical tribunal or when an individual is returned to the lay state, the tribunal will notify the church of baptism, so that a notation can be made in the person's baptismal record (See can. 1685). Notification documents should include a "turn around" document to verify notations have been recorded.
- Defection from Church*** A parish occasionally will receive a notification from an individual or a church indicating that the person is no longer a Catholic and even asking that her/his name be removed from Catholic Church records. While it is appropriate to remove the person's name from the parish membership roles, no changes are to be made to the sacramental records. The Holy See has clarified canon law in this area to say that while a person may leave the Church, he or she will also be bound to canonical form for the purposes of marriage. The Chancellor's office should be contacted with any questions.
- Style for Notations*** The notations mentioned in the two preceding paragraphs should be made neatly and succinctly in the "Notations" column. Names, dates, places and protocol numbers are usually the only information needed. These notations are not confidential and should ordinarily be included on certificates.

## **COMMUNION REGISTER (Optional Record)**

### **ENTRIES**

For first Communion the following information is to be entered into the Communion Register if one is utilized (not required by Church law):

1. the legal and Christian names of the child;
2. the date and place of baptism;
3. the church and date of the first Communion; and
4. the name of the main celebrant of the Mass.

## **FIRST PENANCE REGISTER (May not be kept)**

**No parish may keep a register for the reception of first penance or any type of reception of the Sacrament of Penance.** This is a violation of the Seal of Confession for the cleric and the penitent. No certificates are to be issued for the Sacrament of Penance for the same reason. **There are no exceptions to this rule.**

## CONFIRMATION REGISTER

**Can. 894** - To prove the conferral of confirmation the prescripts of can. 876 are to be observed.

**Can. 895**- The names of those confirmed with mention made of the minister, the parents and sponsors, and the place and date of the conferral of confirmation are to be recorded in the Confirmation register of the diocesan curia or, where the conference of bishops or the diocesan bishop has prescribed it, in a register kept in the parish archive. The pastor must inform the pastor of the place of baptism about the conferral of confirmation so that notation is made in the baptismal register according to the norm of can. 535, §2.

**Can. 896**- If the pastor of the place was not present, the minister either personally or through another is to inform him as soon as possible of the conferral of confirmation.

### ENTRIES

For confirmation celebrated under normal circumstances, the following information is to be entered in the Confirmation Register (can. 895):

1. the legal and Christian names of the child or adult (use maiden name of a woman);
2. the name of the father (first, middle if any, and surname) and the name of the mother (first, middle if any, and maiden name);
3. the date and place of baptism;
4. the name of the sponsor selected by the person;
5. the place and date of the confirmation; and
6. the name of the minister performing the confirmation.

The place of baptism should be notified of the confirmation. In the case of a baptized person who was brought "into full communion in the Church," the place of reception ("Profession of Faith") is to be notified instead of the place of baptism.

***Emergency Confirmation***

As in the case of emergency baptism, the record of an emergency confirmation is to be kept in the territorial parish in which the confirmation occurred.

***Source of Data***

When a large number of persons is to be confirmed, it is essential that someone collect the necessary information and see to it that it is communicated accurately to the parish or parishes of the recipients for proper recording in the Baptismal Register.

***Large Group of Recipients***

When several persons are confirmed at the same ceremony by the same minister, the date of conferral and the name of the minister may be written only once in the register, so long as it is clear that the references apply to all the confirmed. If there is more than one minister at a single ceremony, the record should show clearly which ministers confirmed which recipients.

- Recipients From More Than One Parish*** When confirmation is conferred upon persons from several parishes at one ceremony, all records are made at the parish where confirmation was celebrated with notification sent to the parish of baptism.
- Baptismal Certificate*** In order to satisfy the obligation of notifying the parish of baptism about the conferral of confirmation, a baptismal certificate for each candidate for confirmation should be obtained in advance of the celebration of confirmation.<sup>10</sup>
- Baptismal Data*** It is recommended that the place and date of baptism be noted in the Confirmation Register. (This can be especially helpful when a person has difficulty locating a baptismal record later in life).
- Notification of Church of Baptism*** Notification of the church of baptism about the fact of confirmation should be made as soon as possible by the pastor of the place where the record of confirmation is retained. This notification is to include the name of the recipient and the date of baptism, as well as the place and date of confirmation. The names of the minister, parents and sponsor are not required. When a person previously baptized in another Christian communion is received into full communion and confirmed, the church of baptism is not notified. Notification documents should include a “turn around” document to verify notations have been recorded.

## MARRIAGE REGISTER

**Can. 1081-** The pastor or the priest or deacon mentioned in can. 1079, §2 is to notify the local ordinary immediately about a dispensation granted for the external forum; it is also to be noted in the marriage register.

**Can. 1121 - §1.** After a marriage has been celebrated, the pastor of the place of the celebration or the person who takes his place, even if neither assisted at the marriage, is to note as soon as possible in the marriage register the names of the spouses, the person who assisted, and the witnesses, and the place and date of the celebration of the marriage according to the method prescribed by the conference of bishops or the diocesan bishop.

**Can. 1122 -§1.** The contracted marriage is to be noted also in the baptismal registers in which the baptism of the spouses has been recorded.

**Can. 1123-** Whenever a marriage is either convalidated in the external forum, declared null, or legitimately dissolved other than by death, the pastor of the place of celebration of the marriage must be informed so that a notation is properly made in the marriage and baptismal registers.

**Can. 1685-** As soon as the sentence is executed, the judicial vicar must notify the local ordinary of the place in which the marriage was celebrated. The local ordinary must take care that the declaration of the nullity of the marriage and any possible prohibitions are noted as soon as possible in the Marriage and baptismal registers.

## ENTRIES

For weddings celebrated with recognition by the Catholic Church, the following information is to be entered into the Marriage Register (can. 1122-1123):

1. the legal names of the groom;
2. the name of the father (first, middle if any, and surname) and the name of the mother (first, middle if any, and maiden name) of the groom;
3. the legal names of the bride (Always use the maiden name of a woman, even if a second marriage);
4. the name of the father (first, middle if any, and surname) and the name of the mother (first, middle if any, and maiden name) of the bride;
5. the date and place of baptism of each party;
6. the date and place (actual church and town) of the wedding;
7. the names of the witnesses;
8. the name of the priest/deacon/minister asking for and receiving the couple's vows; and
9. notation of any permissions, dispensations and delegations obtained for the valid celebration of the wedding (including protocol number if existing).

The informational facts in the prenuptial file are the source for the Marriage Register. The marginal notation column is for the purpose of noting any permission or dispensation, regardless of the source for the permission/dispensation, and other significant factors (for instance, delegation for the minister or sanation).

**Source of Data** The pastor is responsible for seeing that the necessary information is recorded in the parish where the marriage was celebrated. The premarital file ordinarily contains all the necessary information. However, the celebrant should be alert to any last minute changes or corrections to the information contained in the premarital file.

**Marriage Outside Parish Church** When a marriage is celebrated in a location other than a parish church (e.g., a chapel), the proper parish for the marriage record is the territorial church in which that location stands. The only exception is with a dispensation from the Catholic form: in that situation, the proper parish for the marriage record is the parish of the Catholic party.

**Convalidation** When a marriage is convalidated, the data concerning the convalidation are to be placed in the usual columns. The date, place and official of the original ceremony are to be noted in the "Notations" column.

**Sanation** When a marriage is sanated, the data concerning the original ceremony are to be placed in the usual columns. The date, diocese and protocol number of the sanation are to be noted in the "Notations" column.

Marriages of persons who are baptized or received into full communion in the Catholic Church are not to be recorded in the Marriage Register, unless the marriage now is being convalidated or sanated. A notation concerning the marriage is to be placed in the person's baptismal record, in the "Notations" column.

**Notation of Dispensations and Annulments** When a dispensation is granted prior to marriage, or an annulment is granted after marriage, the date, diocese and protocol number, along with the type of dispensation (e.g., "Dispensation from Disparity of Worship") or the word "Annulment" (with the diocese granting and protocol number), are to be noted in the "Notations" column (See can. 1081). Any special recording directions contained in the dispensation or annulment document are to be followed.

**Notification of Church of Baptism** When the marriage of a Catholic is celebrated, convalidated or sanated, the pastor of the parish where the record of marriage is retained must notify the church of baptism as soon as possible. This notification is to include the names of the spouses and the date and place of the wedding, convalidation or sanation; the names of the official and witnesses are not required. Commercial vendors sell marriage notification forms.

## PREMARITAL FILES

**Contents** Each parish is required to maintain a file of the papers collected during the period of marriage preparation. The file typically will include prenuptial forms, questionnaires,

correspondence, notes and dispensation documents. A copy of the civil license also is retained in this file.

***Location*** Ordinarily, the premarital file for each couple should be retained by the parish where the marriage is recorded in the Marriage Register.

***Filing*** The file for each couple is to be kept in its own envelope or folder, clearly marked with the parties' names and the date of the marriage. The files should be arranged in alphabetical or chronological order and kept together in a locked file cabinet or safe.

***Retention*** The premarital files are to be retained for sixty years or until both parties have died. Expired files are to be destroyed or otherwise disposed of so that no one can gain access to them.

***Transmission of File*** If a legitimate request for the copy of the file is made by an ecclesiastical tribunal, a photo copy of the file should be sent. The original file should remain in the parish's archive. If the photocopy of the original file is later returned, it should be destroyed.



## **DEATH REGISTER (Optional Register)**

**Can. 1182** – When the burial has been completed, a record is to be made in the register of deaths according to the norm of particular law.

### **ENTRIES**

For deaths where the funeral is celebrated in the parish or in the parish boundaries, the following information is to be entered into the Death Register (can. 1182):

1. the legal and Christian names of the person;
2. the residential address of the deceased person;
3. the date and place of death; and
4. the church and date of burial.

***Source of Data***      The data needed for the Death Register is ordinarily provided by the funeral director.

***Cremation***            When the body has been cremated, no reference to the date or place of cremation is made in the Death Register. However, the fact of cremation should be noted as well as the date and place of the ashes' interment.

***Notification of  
Church of Baptism***      No notice of death needs to be sent to the church of baptism.

## ENDNOTES

1. Even when a priest serves as pastor of more than one parish, separate registers are to be maintained for each parish. For security and convenience, however, the registers may all be stored at one of the parishes.
2. If a chapel or pastoral center operates under the authority of the local pastor, its sacramental records should be kept in the parish registers rather than separately.
3. For the sake of convenience this column will be referred to as the "Notations" column throughout the handbook.
4. Since certain data is entered in the sacramental registers based purely on the word of someone else (e.g., the date of birth of a person being baptized), the certificate is simply repeating that data but not certifying it as true.
5. When a parish closes or merges, formal arrangements are made for the transfer and retention of its sacramental registers. Contact the Chancellor's office as to where these are to be maintained.
6. The names of godparents or sponsors are not to be changed because they have died or because parents feel they are no longer suitable. In these situations, parents can ask someone else to serve in this role without making a change in the permanent record or on certificates.
7. Latin priests and deacons do not automatically have the faculty to baptize persons who by law are ascribed to an Eastern Catholic Church. If it is determined that one or both parents are ascribed to an Eastern Catholic Church, contact should be made with the Chancery before the celebration of baptism. If an Orthodox Christian is to be received into full communion with the Catholic Church, contact should be made with the Chancery before reception of the person.
8. Some parishes still give notice of first Communion, although this is no longer required.
9. Such situations may call for a letter to the individual explaining the parish's action and inviting the person to return, at some future time, to the Catholic Church.
10. There are some additional reasons for obtaining a baptismal certificate: 1) the fact of valid baptism and Catholicity will be established; 2) any previous reception of valid confirmation, especially in the case of Catholics who were baptized in uniate Eastern Churches, will be uncovered; 3) any discrepancies between name and parentage provided in the Baptismal Register and given at the time of confirmation will be discovered; 4) the identity of baptismal godparents can be ascertained, pursuant to can. 893, §2.

## APPENDIX I

### Selected Latin Terms in Sacramental Registers Defined

Historic registers may have both Latin and complimentary English terms in them or they may have only the Latin term for some part of the information required in the register. This list is not meant to be exhaustive given the rarity of the use of the older registers. Any questions regarding definitions listed here (or not) may be directed toward the Chancellor's Office.

**Anni** – Year

**Baptizatum in** – Baptized at

**Dies Baptismi** – Date of baptism

**Dies Confirmationis** – Date of confirmation

**Dies et Locus Nativitatis** – Date and place of birth

**Dioecesis** – Diocese

**Dispensationis** – Dispensations

**E loco** – Residing at

**Filiam** – Daughter of

**Filium** – Son of

**In Ecclesia** – In the church (of)

**Matrimonii Vel Religionis Professionis vel. Sub-Diaconatus Registratio. Observanda** – Record of Marriage, Religious Profession or Sub-Diaconate. Remarks – also known in more recent registers as “notations”.

**Matris Nomen Originis** – Mother's maiden name

**Mensis** - Month

**Nomen Baptizati** – Name of the person baptized

**Nomen Familiae** – Family name

**Parochio** - Parish

**Patrini** – Sponsors

**Patris Nomen** – Father's name

**Presentibus testibus** – Witnesses present

**Registrum Matrimoniorum** – Marriage Register

**Sacerdos** - Priest