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**PASTORAL GUIDANCE  
REGARDING THE CONDITIONAL BAPTISM  
OF THOSE SEEKING RECEPTION INTO THE  
FULL COMMUNION OF THE CATHOLIC CHURCH**

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**OFFICE FOR WORSHIP OF THE ARCHDIOCESE OF PHILADELPHIA**

**BACKGROUND INFORMATION**

The following statement from the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith on February 1, 2008, requires greater vigilance with regard to the use of the proper formula for the Sacrament of Baptism for Roman Catholics and those seeking reception into the full communion of the Catholic Church.

The need for this statement from the Congregation arises in large part because of the troubling issues surrounding language, that is, the reluctance on the part of some to name the Most Blessed Trinity as the Father, and the Son and the Holy Spirit.

CONGREGATION FOR THE DOCTRINE OF THE FAITH

Responses to questions proposed on the validity of Baptism conferred with the formulas:

**“I baptize you in the name of the Creator, and of the Redeemer, and of the Sanctifier” and “I baptize you in the name of the Creator, and of the Liberator, and of the Sustainer”**

Questions

**First question: Whether the Baptism conferred with the formulas “I baptize you in the name of the Creator, and of the Redeemer, and of the Sanctifier” and “I baptize you in the name of the Creator, and of the Liberator, and of the Sustainer” is valid?**

**Second question: Whether the persons baptized with those formulas have to be baptized in forma absoluta?**

**RESPONSES**

**To the first question:** Negative.

**To the second question:** Affirmative.

The Supreme Pontiff Benedict XVI, at the Audience granted to the undersigned Cardinal Prefect of the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, approved these Responses, adopted in the Ordinary Session of the Congregation, and order their publication.

The particular law for the United States for the Conditional Baptism of those seeking reception into the full communion of the Catholic Church can be found in the 1988 National Statutes for the Catechumenate, n. 37 (found in the appendix of the *Rite for the Christian Initiation of Adults*) [see also Canon 869]:

There may be a reasonable and prudent doubt concerning the Baptism of such 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. If Conditional Baptism then seems necessary, this must be celebrated privately rather than at a public liturgical assembly of the community and with only those limited rites which the diocesan bishop determines.

An initial response to statement of the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith prompted the following instruction issued by the Chancery on March 13, 2008.

Further, it has become increasingly prevalent that ministers from other ecclesial communions often use one of the 'alternate formulae,'...even though the certificates of Baptism from these communions state the person was baptized using the traditional Trinitarian formula.

Accordingly, the following course of action is to be implemented immediately:

Baptized non-Catholics who are to be received into the full communion of the Catholic Church, even those who provide you with a certificate of Baptism, are to be conditionally baptized in a private ceremony without solemnity (that is, without the accompanying rites), then received into full communion.

## **PASTORAL PRACTICE IN THE ARCHDIOCESE OF PHILADELPHIA**

In light of further discussion and reflection on the topic, with both the statement of the Congregation in mind combined with the norm provided in the National Statutes, the following is observed in the Archdiocese of Philadelphia for the Conditional Baptism of those seeking reception into the full communion of the Catholic Church:

Baptism is the doorway to all of the Sacraments. Therefore, the pastor needs moral certitude that a person was baptized with the Trinitarian formula and the water pouring/immersion before other Sacraments are celebrated. This moral certitude requires more than the evidence of a baptismal certificate and must be the case in each individual circumstance. Such moral certitude can often be readily obtained through inquiry with the candidate. If moral certitude is lacking, a conditional Baptism is necessary (see Canon 869 and National Statutes for the Catechumenate 37).

## **HELPFUL QUESTIONS AND ANSWERS ABOUT CONDITIONAL BAPTISM**

### **To whom does this pastoral practice apply for moral certitude of a valid Baptism?**

This pastoral practice for moral certitude of a valid Baptism applies to all baptized Christians, adults and children, who are seeking reception into the full communion of the Catholic Church. This policy does not apply to members of the Orthodox Church which strictly prohibits any alternate wording for the Baptismal formula.

### **How is the question of Conditional Baptism initially addressed with a candidate?**

During the initial interview with a candidate, the interviewer determines the place and manner of a candidate's Baptism. The pastor judges from this information or with needed additional information whether or not the Baptism was with the Trinitarian formula and water. If moral certitude is lacking, then a Conditional Baptism is necessary.

### **When does the celebration of Conditional Baptism take place?**

The celebration of Conditional Baptism takes place once a candidate is committed to seeking reception into full communion of the Catholic Church. If the candidate is married, Conditional Baptism is planned provided the marriage is valid.

### **How is the Conditional Baptism celebrated?**

The celebration of Conditional Baptism occurs at the font in a private and simple manner with the candidate and a chosen godparent present. The sacred minister, vested in an alb/surplice and stole, briefly introduces the rite with an invitation to enter into the mystery of Christ and celebrate the faith of the Church. A short reading follows from Scripture chosen from the Lectionary for the conferral of Christian Initiation. Water is then poured over the head of the candidate three times with the proper Trinitarian formula. The Lord's Prayer and a simple blessing conclude the celebration. If possible, Conditional Baptism should take place on a Sunday.

### **Where is the Conditional Baptism recorded?**

The Conditional Baptism is recorded in the designated register in the parish where the reception into full communion with the Catholic Church takes place. Both the original and the Conditional Baptism are recorded.

## **OTHER RELATED QUESTIONS AND ANSWERS**

### **What is required for a valid Baptism?**

A valid Baptism always requires the use of the Trinitarian formula, "I baptize you in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit," with water. The Trinitarian formula is pronounced as water is poured on the candidate's head or by immersion in water by the one and same person.

### **How is moral certitude achieved?**

Moral certitude occurs with objective verifiable evidence that the Baptism took place with the use of the Trinitarian formula and the pouring of water or by immersion in water. Examples of objective verifiable evidence include a DVD or video recording of the Baptism

in question, the testimony of the minister of the candidate's Baptism as to the formula and matter, as well as, the known practice with regard to Baptism of a particular church. Baptismal certificates do not alone count as verifiable evidence. The pastor arrives at moral certitude in cooperation with the candidate.

**When is the sacrament of Penance celebrated for a candidate?**

The sacrament of Penance can be celebrated shortly after the Conditional Baptism takes place.

**Who is the godparent for a Conditional Baptism?**

The godparent for a Conditional Baptism is someone who meets the usual requirements:

- The godparent is designated by the person to be baptized.
- The godparent is at least sixteen years old.
- The godparent is a fully initiated Roman Catholic.
- The godparent is not impeded by any canonical penalty.
- The god parent is not the parent of the person to be baptized [see Canon 874].

This same godparent may also act as the candidate's sponsor for reception into the full communion of the Catholic Church.

**Does the Baptism of a child who has previously made his or her Profession of Faith and First Communion and has not been confirmed require investigation for validity?**

Yes, in this case the pastor must have moral certitude that the Baptism is valid as described above before the celebration of the Sacrament of Confirmation.

Typically, however, a child receives the sacrament of Confirmation along with Holy Communion upon reception into full communion of the Catholic Church (see National Statutes for the Catechumenate, n. 18).