



Guidelines for Addressing Invalid Baptisms
September 11, 2020

As we continue to move towards remedying possible invalid baptisms, the following will be useful in indicating how to proceed in certain situations. It is worth recalling that a sacrament once celebrated *is presumed to be valid* unless there is a compelling reason to regard it as invalid and celebrate it again.

The following outlines **possible situations** which may be encountered and **how to respond** to each situation:

Situation #1:

An individual comes forward stating to have witnessed an invalid baptism and has sufficient evidence.

- If the invalidity of the baptism is determined to have been established, then baptism must be celebrated anew.
- Once the invalidity of the baptism has been established, the current Pastor of the person will perform the new baptism, and if confirmation is also required, he shall be given the faculty to confirm that person by the Bishop.
- The place where the new baptism occurs will become the location where all sacramental records are kept, and a notification of the new baptism should be sent to the parish where the invalid baptism took place so that any future enquiries may be directed to the new location.
- The Diocese will send a notification to the original parish of the invalidity of the original baptism.

Situation #2:

An individual comes forward stating he or she has witnessed an invalid baptism but does not appear to have sufficient evidence at first glance.

- The determination of invalidity will depend on the nature of the evidence provided. Questions as follow may need to be answered: Is the minister of the baptism still alive and able to be contacted? Is the minister of the baptism one who is known to have done other invalid baptisms? Are there any witnesses, and if so, how many? Are these individuals willing to swear to the truth of their assertions?
- The person should fill out the appropriate form on the diocesan [website](#), and do so along with a priest or staff member of the parish if possible. The form should be forwarded to the diocese.

Situation #3:

A priest or a deacon comes forward to acknowledge that he has made use of the “We baptize ...” formula when baptizing.

- In such a case, the invalidity of the baptism will be deemed to have been established and, as such, baptism must be celebrated anew.

- The priest or deacon should fill out the appropriate form on the diocesan [website](#) and forward it to the diocese.

Situation #4:

It is established that multiple invalid baptisms were celebrated within a parish.

- In situations in which multiple invalid baptisms have been celebrated, efforts will be made to contact all those who may have been affected by it.

Situation #5:

It is established that an investigation does *not* result in a sufficient evidence of the invalidity of the baptism, but does appear to seriously call into question the validity of the baptism.

- Sometimes it is not possible to make a clear determination because of the lack of sufficient evidence, but there is still cause for questioning the validity of the baptism. For example, there might be multiple witnesses who believe that the “We baptize ...” formula was used or that the priest or deacon might be one whom multiple individuals believe to have used the “We baptize ...” formula. In these instances, we will explore in more detail the available evidence. Following that investigation, the findings will be presented to the Bishop who will determine the appropriateness of a conditional baptism. The persons involved will be informed of the decision.
- If determined to be valid, it should be recorded in the original registry book.

Situation #6:

Someone comes forth with the initial information that does not provide sufficient information to question the presumption of validity of the baptism.

- This may happen when the person who comes forward has only hearsay evidence or by their own admission is not convinced of their own recollection of the baptism. Unless another person with direct knowledge of the situation also questions its validity, the baptism will be presumed to be valid and no further action will be taken.

The seal of confession is absolutely inviolable. Therefore, any priest aware of the invalidity of a baptism only by means of the sacrament of Reconciliation cannot reveal this under any circumstances. If a person comes to confession, either for having conducted such a baptism or having witnessed it, the priest may encourage him or her to report the incident outside of confession. If a priest has this knowledge from a previous confession however, he must not contact the person to talk about it.

It is important that any person who comes forward — whether a layperson; priest; or deacon — be made known to the Bishop’s delegate by forwarding the appropriate form that can be found on the [website](#) of the Diocese. Should the person coming forward with such questions prefer to speak with their pastor or a parish staff member, they should be encouraged to do so and advised that the information they provide will be forwarded to the diocese for review. This will help to ensure a uniform response.

The following information is requested from anyone making a report of questionably valid baptisms:

1. Your name (person coming forward):
2. Your relation to the baptized person:
3. Your email address and phone number:
4. Were you actually present, or did you hear about it from someone else?
5. Do you have an audio or video recording or other evidence of the baptism?
6. If you are not the person who was baptized, and if that person is still a minor, may we contact their parents?
7. What was the approximate date and location of the baptism and who performed it?

Outcomes of the process:

Once the above information has been provided to the Diocese of Gaylord, it will be possible for us to move forward. We will contact the person to go over the information already provided and to review any evidence they may have. Wherever possible, we will also arrange to speak with the priest or deacon who performed the baptism.

Once established, either by the acknowledgement of the priest or deacon who performed the baptism or baptisms that he used the “We baptize ... ” formula, or by the information gathered, arrangements will be made to baptize the person or persons absolutely and not conditionally.

An annotation will be made in the original baptismal record of the declaration of invalidity and date. Depending on where the new baptism takes place, the recipient will receive either information on where to find the new records, or, if the baptism takes place in the same parish, where the new information will be found.

If it is not possible to make a clear determination, we will see if there is still probable cause for questioning the validity of the baptism. For example, there might be multiple persons who believe that the “We baptize ... ” formula was used or that the priest or deacon might be one whom multiple individuals believe to have used the “We baptize ... ” formula. Following additional review, the findings will be presented to the Bishop so that a determination of the appropriateness of a conditional baptism can be made. The decision of the Bishop will be relayed to the person or persons concerned.

In cases where other sacraments (confirmation) are also required, the priest who celebrates the baptism will be delegated to celebrate them as well.

In cases where it is determined that there is no reason to consider the original baptism invalid, and there is not sufficient reason to perform a conditional baptism, this information will also be provided to the individual so that his or her conscience may be at peace being ever mindful that God’s grace comes to us through the sacraments, but is not limited to the sacraments.