

DECREE

Promulgating Norms for the Conditional Celebration of the Sacrament of Baptism

As the Sacrament of Baptism stands as the gateway to Christian life and membership in the Church of Jesus Christ, and as I, Wilton Daniel Gregory, have, as the Archbishop of Atlanta, a sacred duty to defend and promote the integrity of the Sacraments of the Church;

And as cases have arisen not infrequently where the fact or validity of the conferral of the Sacrament of Baptism cannot be established;

Desiring to provide clearer guidance to that portion of the flock of Jesus Christ entrusted to my care, and to open more broadly the means of salvation, do I enact the following norms as particular law for the Archdiocese of Atlanta, effective immediately:

I. When to Administer Conditional Baptism: The Sacrament of Baptism should only be administered conditionally when it is impossible to verify whether or not an individual has been baptized, or when there is a serious reason for doubting the validity of a previous attempt to confer Baptism. (cf. CIC 845, 869)

A. In order to establish the fact that an individual was baptized, if there is no conflict of interest, it is sufficient to have either one unexceptionable witness or, if the Baptism was conferred upon an adult, the sworn testimony of the baptized person (cf. CIC 876)

B. i. Baptism is assumed to have been administered validly in the Catholic Church or in any church or ecclesial community that habitually uses valid form, matter, and intention. An individual baptized under such circumstances should not be re-baptized unless there is a serious reason to believe that form, matter, or intention was lacking. (cf. CIC 869 §2)

ii. In order for a Baptism to be valid, the form used must name the three persons of the Blessed Trinity as Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. Formulas such as "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" are not valid forms for the Sacrament of Baptism. If it is known that such a formula was used at an attempted Baptism, the person should be baptized absolutely. If there is serious reason to believe that such a formula may have been used, the individual should be baptized conditionally. (cf. Sacred Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, *Responses to Questions Proposed on the Validity of Baptism*, February 1, 2008)

iii. Questions regarding the validity of the celebration of Baptism within a particular ecclesial community may be directed to the Office for Divine

Worship of the Archdiocese of Atlanta. (cf. Pontifical Council for Promoting Christian Unity, *Directory for the Application of Principles and Norms on Ecumenism*, 99)

C. In the event where a serious doubt exists regarding the valid conferral of Baptism, the individual, if an adult, should be properly catechized on the nature of the sacrament before a conditional celebration of the Sacrament of Baptism. (cf. CIC 869 §3)

D. In danger of death, an individual may be baptized conditionally without any catechesis or investigation into the circumstances of the first attempt to confer the sacrament if the minister has reason to believe that a prior attempt to confer Baptism was invalid.

II. Individuals Preparing for Reception into Full Communion with the Catholic Church: In the case of individuals preparing for reception into full communion with the Catholic Church, the following norms should be followed if, after serious investigation, the fact or validity of Baptism cannot be established: (cf. RCIA #480)

A. Conditional Baptism should be administered outside of mass within the weeks prior to the Easter Vigil. It should be administered with a minimum of solemnity and not be publicly announced.

B. Baptism should be administered according to the form given in numbers 340-361 of the Rite of Christian Initiation of Adults (RCIA.) The celebration of the Sacrament of Confirmation and the post-baptismal anointing with sacred chrism are omitted. The clothing with a baptismal garment and presentation of a lighted candle may be omitted.

C. The form used for conditional Baptism is as follows:

If you are not baptized, N., I baptize you in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit.

This form is accompanied by the pouring of water, as indicated in number 226 of the RCIA.

D. The individual's sponsor for the RCIA should preferably serve as a sponsor at the conditional Baptism.

E. At the Easter Vigil or at another appropriate time, the individual who has received conditional Baptism will join the candidates for reception into full communion with the Catholic Church in making a profession of faith and receiving the Sacrament of Confirmation.

III. Individuals Already Living as Members of the Catholic Church: Should a serious doubt arise regarding the validity of the Baptism of an individual already living as a member of the Catholic Church, they should be conditionally baptized.

A. If the individual is a child who has not yet reached the age of reason, the *Rite of Baptism for Children* should be followed, with the form given in II(C) above.

B. If the individual has reached the age of reason, they should receive conditional Baptism according to the form given in numbers 340-366 of the RCIA. The celebration should be conducted outside of mass, with a minimum of solemnity, and should not be publicly announced. The form of the sacrament is that given in II(C) above.

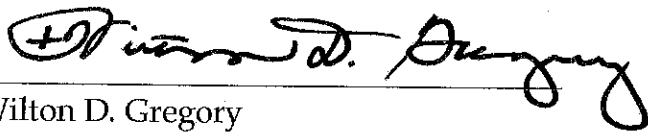
C. If the individual has reached the age of reason, they should receive the Sacrament of Confirmation at the same ceremony. If they have previously attempted to receive the Sacrament of Confirmation, it should be administered conditionally. Otherwise, Confirmation should be administered absolutely.

IV. Individuals who may not be Alive: If there is a question as to whether an individual is alive, they should be baptized immediately, if it is known that they are unbaptized and desire Baptism. This is accomplished through the pouring of water and the sacramental formula. Children under the age of reason may be baptized even without the parents' permission, although this is not required. (cf. CIC 868 §2)

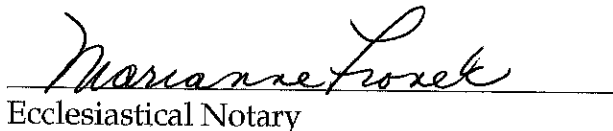
V. Recording Conditional Baptisms: Conditional Baptisms should be recorded. If the original attempt at Baptism was celebrated in a Catholic Church, the conditional Baptism should be noted in the margin of the entry that recorded the original attempt at Baptism. If the original attempt was in a non-Catholic community, a new entry should be made in the baptismal register of the parish within whose boundaries the conditional Baptism was celebrated. A marginal note should indicate that the Baptism was conditional.

VI. Circumstances Requiring Variations from these Norms: The local ordinary may decide in each case which rites are to be included or excluded in conferring conditional Baptism. If pastoral circumstances suggest a variation from the norms described in this document, the Archbishop's Office should be contacted, preferably in writing, with the request. (RCIA 480)

Given at Atlanta, on the 8 day of September, in the year of Our Lord two thousand and ten.



†Wilton D. Gregory
Archbishop of Atlanta



Ecclesiastical Notary