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The baptism of Christ by John the Baptist is depicted in a stained-glass window at St. Anthony

The baptism of Christ by John the Baptist is depicted in a stained-glass window at St. Anthony's Church in North Beach, Md.. July 15, 2021. (OSV News/CNS file, Bob Roller)

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If it would not cause scandal or confusion among other Catholics, "a transsexual -- even one who has undergone hormone treatment and gender reassignment surgery -- may receive baptism under the same conditions as other faithful," said a document from the Vatican's Dicastery for the Doctrine of the Faith.

The document, signed Oct. 31 by Pope Francis and by Cardinal Víctor Manuel Fernández, prefect of the dicastery, was posted in Italian on the office's website Nov. 8.

Cardinal Víctor Manuel Fernández, prefect of the Dicastery for the Doctrine of the Faith, leave

Cardinal Víctor Manuel Fernández, prefect of the Dicastery for the Doctrine of the Faith, leaves the Vatican's Paul VI Audience Hall after a working session of the

assembly of the Synod of Bishops with Pope Francis at the Vatican Oct. 6, 2023. (CNS photo/Lola Gomez)

A note published with it said the document was a response to a letter submitted in July by Bishop José Negri of Santo Amaro, Brazil, "containing some questions about the possible participation in baptism and weddings by transexual persons and homo-affective persons."

The questions about weddings involved whether trans persons or other LGBTQ+ persons could be witnesses at a Catholic wedding. The response to both questions was that "there is nothing in current universal canonical legislation that prohibits" either from serving as a witness at a Catholic marriage.

Responses to the questions about baptism were longer, more nuanced and urged pastoral prudence to minister to the people in question, safeguard the sacrament and prevent scandal.

Whether deciding to baptize a person or to permit him or her to serve as a godparent, "due pastoral prudence demands that every situation be wisely pondered, in order to safeguard the sacrament of baptism and especially its reception, which is a precious good to be protected, since it is necessary for salvation," the document said.

Special care must be taken, it said, when "there are doubts about the objective moral situation in which the person finds him- or herself, or about his or her subjective dispositions toward grace."

The church teaches that when baptism is received without repentance for serious sins, it said, he or she receives the "sacramental character" but not "sanctifying grace."

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The Catechism of the Catholic Church, the Vatican's note said, affirms that "this configuration to Christ and to the Church, brought about by the Spirit, is indelible, it remains forever in the Christian as a positive disposition for grace, a promise and guarantee of divine protection, and as a vocation to divine worship and to the

service of the Church."

Because that mark is indelible, once the person baptized without the proper disposition repents, sanctifying grace is present, it said. That possibility, it added, is why Pope Francis, in his 2013 exhortation *Evangelii Gaudium* wrote that the church must have very serious reasons for turning someone away and must be especially hesitant before denying someone baptism.

Therefore, it said, even if there are doubts about the person's current commitment to living a fully Christian life, "one must never forget this aspect of the fidelity of the unconditional love of God, which is capable of generating even with the sinner an irrevocable covenant, always open to a development that is also unpredictable."

The church and its ministers do not simply wait for a person's conversion, though, it said, but constantly call people "to live fully all the implications of the baptism received, which must always be understood and unfolded within the entire journey of Christian initiation."

On the question of whether a trans person can be a godparent, the document said it is possible "under certain conditions," but because the role is not a right, "pastoral prudence" is required to avoid the "danger of scandal" or confusion among the faithful.

It also cautioned that gay persons living together in a relationship like a marriage, especially if it is known in the community, probably should not serve as godparents, but can be invited to serve as witnesses to the baptism.

The dicastery repeated an affirmation that the child of a gay couple can be baptized when there is a well-founded hope that the child will be raised Catholic.

A version of this story appeared in the **Nov 24-Dec 7, 2023** print issue under the headline: Vatican note allows trans persons to be baptized and serve as godparents.