

Preparation and Registration for Infant Baptism

Welcome.

Below you will find a short check list of necessary requirements for the baptism of children and answers to frequently asked questions.

On the following pages you will find a booklet on the Sacrament of Baptism. Please take some time to read through it and reflect on it.

A Short Check list

The Archdiocese of Baltimore and the Catholic Community of South Baltimore recommend the following:

! Parents or Guardians please register the child for the Sacrament of Baptism by contacting Dorris van Gaal at 410-752-8498 ext 1123 / e-mail: dorris.vangaal@archbalt.org.

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! Parents/guardians attend a baptism preparation session at the Catholic Community of South Baltimore. This provides an opportunity to have a fuller understanding of the significant commitment you are making in raising the child in the practice of the Catholic faith as well as the commitment being made to the Catholic Community of South Baltimore. . If you have already attended such a preparation session in past three years here or elsewhere, you may request an exemption. Godparents are strongly encouraged to attend the preparation session in preparation for their role in fostering the faith of your child.

Frequently asked questions

When do the baptism preparation classes take place?

The preparation sessions for the Catholic Community of South Baltimore are typically held the *second* Sunday of every month at 12:30 PM in the library, next to the church of Our Lady of Good Council (1532 Fort Avenue). Please call Dorris van Gaal at 410-752-8498 x1123 to register for a preparation session. Please register at least a week ahead of time.

How many Godparents / witnesses may we have?

Only one godparent is required, though the custom is to ask two Godparents. They both have to be Christians and one of them must be a Roman Catholic who has been confirmed, has received the Eucharist and lives a faithful life. If you choose to have more witnesses during the ceremony, you are welcome to do so, but we would like to be informed of this ahead of time. Please be aware that only two Godparents/witnesses will be registered as the official Godparents in the sacramental books. In years to come when you need to have an official baptismal certificate issued for First Communion, Confirmation etc they will be the ones mentioned on the certificate.

I am a member of the Catholic Community of South Baltimore, but I would like to have my child baptized in the church where most of my relatives live?

You are certainly welcome to do so. You are welcome to attend the baptism preparation class here if that is more convenient for you. We will send a letter to the parish where the child will be baptized to confirm your participation at the baptism preparation.

Most of my relatives live in the area of the Catholic Community of South Baltimore, or we would like to have our child baptized in the church we grew up in or where we were married?

You and your child are welcome to receive the sacrament in our community. Please register your child to be baptized and make sure all the proper documentation is sent to the Catholic Community of South Baltimore, such as sponsor certificates for the Godparents and a confirmation letter from your present parish that you attended the baptism preparation.

Is it possible to have our child baptized during mass?

Yes it is possible to have your child baptized during Sunday mass. There are typically two forms of baptism: baptism celebrated within the celebration of the Eucharist, or a baptism celebration outside of mass.

Especially for those families who are regular attendants to Sunday liturgies and feel acquainted with the community it is most appropriate and great opportunity to strengthen to relationship with the community by having the baptism within a mass.

May I invite a family friend or relative who is a priest or deacon to preside at the baptism?

You are most welcome to do so. The scheduling of the baptism and the preparation session will still be completed through the parish offices. The baptism would be scheduled at a time mutually convenient for all especially the parish sacristans who will need to be present to open/close the Church. A fee of \$75 is required for the sacristan. The fee is to be paid prior to the baptism by check. Please make the check payable to the respective church and send it to Catholic Community of South Baltimore, 110 E. West Street, Baltimore, MD 21230.

Is there a fee for having our child baptized?

A baptism for a child is free of charge. We do however require a Sacristan fee of \$75 if the time, place (that is if the church needs to be separately opened), and if the presider (that is if the family brings a guest priest or deacon to be the presider) ask for extra sacristan support.

The fee is to be paid prior to the baptism by check. Please make the check payable to the respective church and send it to Catholic Community of South Baltimore, 110 E. West Street, Baltimore, MD 21230.

Introduction to the Sacrament of Baptism

Dear Parents or Guardians:

Preparation for a child's baptism is a time of great joy for a family as well as for the entire Christian community. In seeking the baptism of a child, parents and family make a very important request of the *People of God* to welcome their child into the Catholic family of faith. With this request, parents take upon themselves a **significant commitment**, one that should be preceded by counsel, reflection, instruction and prayer. This booklet will assist you in preparing for the baptism of your child in your family by exploring the following areas:

- The Meaning of Baptism
- Why we baptize our Children
- Requirements of the Parents
- The Role of Parents
- Signs and Symbols
- The Role of Godparents
- Registration of a Family in the Parish Community
- Participation in a Baptism Preparation Session

What is Baptism?

Baptism is a sacrament, that is, it is a symbolic and ritual action that accomplishes something in our lives. It is the gateway to all the sacraments of the Church, and the beginning of a life in Christ. It is the first of the three sacraments of Christian Initiation (Baptism, Confirmation and Eucharist). Baptism joins the new baptized person to Jesus Christ, to his life, death and his rising to new life - to all that Jesus has promised to his disciples. The promise we receive is the **forgiveness of sin**, both **personal** (*those things we do or omit that injure our relationship with God and others*) and **original** (*that shared sin of our humanity that causes us to rebel and turn from the way of wholeness and peace that God intends for us*). We also receive the promise of **eternal life**. By sharing in Christ's death in baptism, we will rise with him to life in heaven. The effective sign of baptism is water. Water signifies the newness of life and the cleansing power of God's grace, which the person baptized, receives through the act of Baptism. Water is poured over the person's forehead (or the person is immersed in water) and the words of Jesus as he directed his disciples are carried out: "Go therefore, and make disciples of all nations. Baptize them in the name of the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit. Teach them to carry out all that I have commanded you." (*Matthew 28:19-20*).

Baptism not only joins the person to Jesus, but to the visible body of Christ on earth, the Church. With Baptism a person begins a lifelong journey of spiritual growth, increased discipleship and greater love for God and neighbor. The baptized person is obliged to grow in the life of charity, caring for the poor, the weak and the suffering. The baptized person has an obligation to support the church community by participation in prayer, worship and moral behavior. The church community is obliged to support the baptized person by sacrament, worship and pastoral care offered by priests, deacons, religious sisters and brothers and lay ministers.

Baptism ultimately relies on the act of faith: Faith in Jesus as the one whom God has sent to bring salvation to the world; Faith, that through Jesus, sins are forgiven; Faith that God's grace is sufficient for us, and that our efforts alone will not lead to salvation.

Why Baptize Children?

Some might say that because a child cannot make an act of faith on his/her own that the church should not extend baptism to the child. This was custom in the early church. When Christianity became an acknowledged religion and whole families would convert to Christianity, the church started to accept children for baptism. The Church trusts the parents will keep the commitment they make on behalf of their child so that there is nothing to keep God's love from taking hold in their lives. Baptism is not magic however. The life of faith of the newly baptized child depends in large part on the practice of the faith of the parents and godparents.

Requirements of the Parents

Parents or guardians must consent to the baptism. Parents/guardians must show the intention that the child will be brought up in the Catholic Religion as witnessed by the practice of their faith through regular mass attendance and active participation in the faith community.

The Role of the Parents

The role of a parent in the raising of a child in the Christian faith is essential. From the moment of birth, a child's spiritual formation begins. From the first

marvelous moments of life, learning and growth progress at a remarkable speed. By age seven, the child has made tremendous strides in physical, psychological and spiritual growth. Parents obviously do not wait until a child is ready to enter the first grade before they teach the child how to walk, or speak or relate to others. Parents should not think that they can wait until school begins to help their child formalize their relationship with God and discover the wondrous love God has for each of us.

Wonder and praise of the Lord come spontaneously to young hearts. It is through parent-child relationships and interaction that a child's spiritual life and religious values are shaped dramatically in the early years. The child first learns religious values by copying and modeling the attitudes, values and vision of the parents. This happens quite unconsciously at first and can become more deliberate as the child grows in self-awareness and awareness of the teaching role of the parent.

Of course, baptism, the sacrament, is much more than baptism, the ritual. Rituals begin and end, but this sacrament is a lifelong reality that establishes the child in a unique relationship with God and the community of the church. While baptism is an event it is also a life process of continual growth. The parents have primary responsibility to foster the child's development. The *Rite of Baptism* involves a commitment on the part of the parents to those practices of faith, prayer and worship that will assure the continuing faith-life of the child after baptism. In other words, the fruitfulness of baptism relies heavily on the parents to tend to the spiritual life of themselves and the child. The living faith of the parents is not an extra option (something a parent may choose to follow or not follow). Repeatedly in the baptismal ritual the centrality of the faith of the parents is underlined. The following are taken from the *Rite of Baptism*. Please reflect on these for a few moments before proceeding.

- "Dear Parents...you have asked to have your children baptized. In doing so you are accepting the responsibility of training them in the practice of the faith..."
- "...the lives of their parents and godparents (are) examples of faith to

inspire these children..."

- "Parents and godparents...on your part you must make it your constant care to bring them up in the practice of the faith... If your faith makes you ready to accept this responsibility, renew now the vows of your own baptism."
- "Parents is it your will that your child should be baptized into the faith of the church which we have all professed with you?"
- "Receive the light of Christ. Parents and godparents, this light is entrusted to you to be kept burning brightly..."

Baptism always calls people to conversion. In the case of adult baptism this is obvious. It is just as true for the baptism of children. The church community invites you to pause and consider:

"How well am I living out the faith that I wish to pass on to my child?"

"Does it make sense for me to present my child for this sacrament if I am not intending to live out the call to conversion myself?"

Baptism is an occasion of grace, not only for the child but for the parent as well. There is always room for improvement in our spiritual lives and in our practice of the faith. These are some areas to consider:

- Participation in the worshiping community by attending liturgy on weekend and frequently receiving the Eucharist.
- Regular celebration of the Sacrament of Penance.
- Personal and family prayer.
- Efforts to grow in faith through reading the bible or joining a bible study; reading spiritual material; participating in parish programs; sharing faith with

your spouse or the godparents of your child; praying with your child, etc.

If your faith life needs to be rekindled, then this is the time to make a new beginning, both for yourself and for the sake of your child to whom you want to pass on the precious treasure of our faith.

Signs and Symbols Used In Baptism

- Sign of the Cross - The cross is a sign of Christians because Jesus died on the cross. It is both the sign of suffering and salvation. In the Baptism Ritual a sign of the cross is traced on the child's forehead.
- Water is used both as a sign of new life and that sins are washed away. In the Baptism Ritual water is poured over the child's forehead.
- Oils are used as a sign of the Holy Spirit. Through the oils, the Holy Spirit penetrates us body and soul. The oils are sacred and blessed at the Chrism Mass.
- White Garment is a sign of putting on a new life and taking on the name of Christ.
- Candle symbolizes the Light of Christ. The light is taken from the Easter candle. The Easter candle is blessed during the Easter Vigil and symbolizes that Christ, through the resurrection, has become our Eternal Light.

The Role of the Godparents

With such high expectations of parents, it is no wonder that the church community calls for the supportive and active role of godparents at the time of baptism. Godparents are called upon to help and challenge parents in Christian parenting. They are called to be examples and spiritual friends for this godchild. Selection of godparents is very important and should not be undertaken lightly.

The godparent has two important roles to play: First, ***they represent the larger church community***. They, along with the priest or deacon and the parents welcome

the child to the community and signify that welcome by marking the child with the sign of the cross. As full members of the community, the godparents are morally obliged to protect their newest member, guiding, advising and nurturing the child as he or she progresses in the understanding of the faith. Additionally, the godparents ***pledge to support the parents*** so they can successfully raise the child in the practice of the faith. They pledge an allegiance to the parents to bolster them in times of discouragement and to celebrate with them in times of joy.

What should you look for in a Godparent?

You should look for godparents who are practicing members of the Catholic Church. In addition, they need to be people who have continued to grow in their own faith. They should be persons willing to question and willing to learn.

The following criteria established by the church are helpful in selecting a godparent:

1. Godparents are appointed by the person to be baptized or by the parents of the candidate for baptism and have the intention of fulfilling this role.
2. Godparents can not be less than sixteen years of age unless there can be deemed a just reason for making an exception.
3. Both godparents must be a Christian and at least one of the Godparents must be a Catholic who has been confirmed, has received the Eucharist and lives a life of faith, which befits the role to be undertaken.
4. Godparents should not be under a canonical penalty, whether imposed or declared.
5. Godparents may not be either the father or mother of the child to be baptized.

Please note:

Only one godparent is required, though we tend to invite two people to be godparents. For pastoral reasons, someone from another ***Christian*** tradition may be a witness to the baptism. This person should be baptized and practicing the Christian faith in earnest. The non-Catholic party will be admitted only in company with a Catholic and confirmed godparent and then be a witness to the baptism.

The Catholic Community of South Baltimore asks for a sponsor certificate from the Godparent(s), to confirm that he/she is a confirmed Catholic and a faithful participant in the life of the faith community.

Registration of a Family in the Parish Community

Under church law and practice, the pastor of a parish, assisted by the associate pastors and deacons, has a moral obligation to see that parents of children presented for the sacraments are properly disposed and prepared to raise the child in the faith. Registration in a Parish in the Catholic Community of South Baltimore is one of the primary ways this is determined. Registration in the parish assists the pastoral staff in getting to know the parents and families. It allows us to communicate with you on a regular basis and to provide other ministries to you as well.

Registration in the parish community is accomplished by completing a parish census form and that information being recorded in the parish files. The minister conducting the Baptism Preparation Session will provide forms for those who need to register. **Or**, contact the parish office in person or by phone. A form will be sent to you or you may complete one on site. The form may be returned to the parish office or dropped in the collection basket.

Participation in a Baptism Preparation Session

When the latest *Rite of Baptism* was issued in the church community, church law required that pastors provide for the preparation of parents presenting children for baptism. Such preparation takes time and effort.

The preparation session for baptism will assist the parents in understanding the obligations and benefits of baptism for themselves and their child. Godparents are encouraged to join the parents at this session because of the importance of their role.

Parents are required to complete the baptism preparation session before a baptism may be scheduled. At these sessions, the team will discuss the sacrament of baptism, its meaning and purpose. We ask that you share your ideas and understanding of church, community and your understanding of the sacrament.

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Conclusion

Thank you for taking the time to read and reflect on this introduction to the sacrament of baptism. If questions were raised while reading please feel free to contact the parish for further clarification, or save your questions for the preparation class. This will enhance our discussion.

We are looking forward to meet you at the preparation class or at the baptism of your child.

Dorris van Gaal (DRE)
Deacon Rick Clemens
Reverend Patrick Carrion