

**COMMON POLICY FOR BAPTISM
SAINT JOSEPH PARISH
MECHANICSBURG, PA**

PREPARING FOR THE BAPTISM OF YOUR CHILD

THE BIRTH OF A CHILD MARKS AN EXCITING, BEAUTIFUL AND CHALLENGING TIME IN THE LIVES OF PARENTS. THE PARISH FAMILY OF ST. JOSEPH IS HAPPY TO BE SUPPORTIVE OF PARENTS AS THEY PREPARE FOR THE BAPTISM OF THEIR CHILDREN. THE FOLLOWING INFORMATION AND GUIDELINES ARE INTENDED TO HELP PARENTS BY PRESENTING INFORMATION ABOUT THE SACRAMENT OF BAPTISM, ITS IMPORTANCE IN OUR LIFE AS CATHOLIC CHRISTIANS AND HOW THE SACRAMENT IS CELEBRATED AT ST. JOSEPH PARISH.

THE MEANING OF BAPTISM IN THE CATHOLIC CHURCH

The Catechism of the Catholic Church reminds us that “sacraments are ‘power that come forth’ from the Body of Christ...they are actions of the Holy Spirit at work in his Body, the Church...they are ‘the masterworks of God’ in the new and everlasting covenant” (#116). Thus when people are baptized, they are baptized into Christ Jesus as Jesus is lived in the church. For that reason parents must understand the importance of nourishing the faith of their baptized children within the community of the Catholic Church by active participation in the life and liturgy of the local parish. During the baptismal ceremony they promise to be the “prime teachers of their children in the ways of faith”. As in all things it is by their own example of a lively faith that parents teach children the meaning of living the “newness of life” that is baptism. Before the actual baptism parents are reminded of their duty to bring up their children as Christ taught us, by loving God and our neighbor. While Baptism is a beautiful gift that parents offer their children through the action of the church, it is also an awesome responsibility. Parents must, therefore, consider carefully this important moment in the faith life of their children and consider carefully their own faith commitment to Jesus Christ and his Catholic Church.

WORKSHOP FOR PARENTS

Parents are required to attend a workshop prior to the Baptism of their child. The workshop is intended to prepare parents for the ceremony of Baptism and also to provide information and support to parents in their role as Christian mothers and fathers. The two-hour workshop consists of presentations by experienced parents and the clergy of the parish and includes information about the ceremony, godparents and suggestions for sharing faith with children. The workshops are held six times a year on Thursday evenings. Call the parish office (766-9433) for specific dates. **PARENTS ARE ENCOURAGED TO ATTEND THE WORKSHOP PRIOR TO THE BIRTH OF THEIR CHILDREN. A SPECIFIC DATE FOR BAPTISM CANNOT BE MADE UNTIL PARENTS HAVE ATTENDED A WORKSHOP. BOTH PARENTS ARE EXPECTED TO ATTEND THE WORKSHOP.**

GODPARENT – SPONSOR

The Godparent's function is to take care that the person baptized behaves as a true witness of Christ and faithfully fulfills the duties inherent in the Sacrament.

To be admitted to undertake the office of a sponsor, a person must:

- 1) Be appointed by the candidate for Baptism, or by the parents or guardians. To be appointed, the person must be suitable for the role and have the intention of fulfilling it.
- 2) Be not less than (16) sixteen years of age.
- 3) Be a Catholic who has been baptized and confirmed, and has received the Blessed Eucharist, and who lives a life of faith which befits the role to be undertaken.
- 4) Not to be under a canonical penalty. A canonical penalty is for one who is not married according to the laws of the Catholic Church, or married more than once without the necessary annulment from the Church.
- 5) Not be either the father or mother of the person to be baptized.

What is important here?

First, that there is to be at least one godparent, or more as the parents desire and perhaps as local custom suggests.

Secondly, that the godparent be present at the rite so he/she can make his/her commitment publicly.

Thirdly, that the Church continues to understand that the bond between the godparent and the family is very close, and to ask that the godparents not only be ready to help the parents, when appropriate, in the Christian formation of their child, but even more that the godparent be an example to the child of what a Christian is.

Finally, that the godparents speak not only for themselves, but for the Church.

Thus, **YOU ARE TO BE A MATURE MEMBER OF THE CATHOLIC CHURCH**, one who has received the sacraments of initiation (Baptism, Confirmation and Eucharist). You are to be someone who can share the task of handing on a faith, whose life shows that faith in great and small ways of everyday living. You are to be someone who knows that being a Catholic has to do with prayer, with justice toward the poor, with kindness alike for friends and strangers, with many things that are not so popular or common in our own society. The church also – that is, the parents and other people who make up our parish – is looking to you, the godparent. You have been selected, but you do not represent the parents at Baptism. You represent the Church. The church is an assembly of baptized-confirmed people. Those same sacraments have and are being offered to this child. We ask one another to take this Baptism very seriously. We ask that you be prepared to speak honestly when you say that you understand and will do all that Baptism implies.

Since you were asked by someone to be a godparent, you were asked to witness this promise for the church. More than that, you are being asked by the baptized to bring the church to life, embody the church in the life of the baptized. That is what it means that godparents, “represent Mother Church” at baptism.

Practical ways to fulfill your role:

- 1) Pray for your godchild and tell him/her that you are praying for him/her. Jesus prayed. Encourage them to pray.
- 2) Mark the date in your calendar; send them a card. Buy them a religious rosary, statute, bible, medal and chain, prayer books.
- 3) Have a Mass said for them and their family
- 4) Visit them on the anniversary; share baked goods with them, etc.
- 5) Encourage the parents to continue the religious education of their child.

The Christian life is not an individualistic life. By himself/herself, a Christian is incomplete. The gift of the Spirit led the first Christians to join together and form a community in which they helped one another to grow. Be faithful to the Church. Imitate the Christians on the Day of Pentecost.

“That very day about three thousand were added to their number. These remained faithful to the teaching of the apostles, to the brotherhood, to the breaking of bread, and to the prayers. The faithful all lived together and owned, everything in common. They shared their food gladly and generously; they praised God and were looked up to by everyone. Day by day, the Lord added to their community those destined to be saved”.
(Acts 2:41-47)

If you love other people, you will want to share with them the best thing you have – the Lord. Share what you have found with wisdom, following the leading of the spirit. God’s Word says:

“Be tactful with those who are not Christians and be sure that you make the best use of your time with them. Talk to them agreeably and with a flavor of wit and try to fit your answers to the needs of each one.” (Col. 4:5-6)

THE ROLE OF GODPARENTS

To be chosen as a godparent is a special honor. You, above all others, have been entrusted with the responsibility to participate in this child's Catholic Christian life and education. This privilege offers you the opportunity to develop a mutually enriching spiritual relationship—one that will last throughout this life and beyond.

There are many ways you can nurture this spiritual relationship and become a special friend to your godchild. Among them are:

Celebrate the anniversary of this holy day of Baptism each year with a visit, a call, or a card.

As your godchild grows, listen to and share in the struggles and the triumphs of living a Christian life, and keep yourself informed on Catholic doctrine and values, to be able to answer questions as they arise.

Encourage a consistent life of faith through special cards, letters, or gifts which celebrate holy events...and personal growth events...graduation, first job, engagement (Gift suggestions: a bible, spiritual book, rosary, religious jewelry, gift certificate for religious goods/books, retreat opportunity.)

Participate in, or send assurance of prayer, as your godchild receives the other sacraments, particularly First Communion and Confirmation, which complete initiation into the Church community.

Be supportive of your godchild's parents in their role as the primary religious educators of their child.

And most importantly, become a model of Catholic Christian living for your godchild, through daily prayer, virtue and active participation in parish life and liturgy.

By living a Catholic life in partnership with your godchild, both of you will experience the great joy of sharing a life of faith.

GODPARENT REMINDERS

1. GODPARENTS NEED A SIGNED DOCUMENT FROM THEIR HOME PARISH SAYING THEY QUALIFY TO BE A GODPARENT.
2. IF THERE IS ANY DIFFICULTY IN OBTAINING THIS LETTER YOU MUST CALL THE PARISH OFFICE (ST. JOSEPH) IN ADVANCE OF THE BAPTISM.
3. THE LETTERS SHOULD BE PRESENTED TO THE PARISH OFFICE ANYTIME PRIOR TO THE BAPTISM.