

ST. MARK BAPTISM GUIDELINES



*I baptize you in the name
of the Father and of the Son
and of the Holy Spirit*

This booklet has been provided to help parents understand the process of having their child baptized in the Catholic Church. We have included guidelines, which will be helpful with the preparation for the Sacrament of Baptism here at St. Mark Parish. Please read these guidelines carefully and notify the Parish or Religious Education Offices at 410-744-6560 with any questions or concerns, and we will be glad to assist you as best we can.

BAPTISM POLICIES AND PROCEDURES

Dear New Parents,

Congratulations on your new baby! Your baby may already be here or you may be eagerly awaiting your child's birth. The responsibility and wonder you sense is something we want to celebrate with you as you bring your child to the Church for the Sacrament of Baptism. Our parish family is very happy to have a new member already here or on the way—your child will bring new life to you and to our Church.

PREFACE

Baptism is a sacrament of initiation, which brings a person into union with Christ as a member of the Catholic Church. Parents who are seeking Baptism for their children are asking that their son or daughter be initiated into the Catholic Community and the local Church Community of St. Mark. The Church baptizes infants and children on the faith of the parents. The ideal is that parents have a deep faith, which they actively live out in the experience of the Catholic Church Community – and as a result, the child's faith is learned from their parents.

The Sacrament of Baptism marks the beginning of the journey of faith. For all Christians it is the defining moment that reflects a deep union with Jesus Christ. It is most fitting that a significant moment like this be celebrated within the context of the Eucharist.

We believe that Baptism is a sacrament, an action of Jesus Christ in his Church. A sacrament is an outward sign of inward grace, instituted by Jesus Christ. By the carrying out of the sacramental rite, grace is given to the soul of the person who received the sacrament.

In this sacrament, Jesus Christ

- † forgives original sin and opens the gates of heaven for us
- † welcomes us into his Church
- † makes us the sons and daughters of God

The day of Baptism is a great day for your child and your family. Your child joins a large family of faith which stretches back to the Lord Jesus and his early followers. The word that comes to mind when thinking of you and your child is "gift." The Lord has shared the life of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit through the living waters of Baptism. The child is also given the power to believe, to hope, and, above all, to love. Baptism occurs only once in the life of a Christian. It is the beginning of the journey that leads to everlasting life with God.

The Lord delights in your choice to share the gift of divine life with your child. As parents you are simply irreplaceable. Your role of sharing and cultivating the life of Jesus in your child is a great privilege and opportunity. Studies have shown that the parents have a major role in cultivating the faith life of their children.

Know that your efforts to share your faith have been incredibly important. Parents are partners with the Lord in the journey of believing. We, too, wish to work with you as your Church family. We want to be partners in your child's faith development, assisting you in any way we can. We hope that you will find St. Mark a parish where we can all grow together in faith, hope, and love.

BAPTISM SYMBOLS

Before we begin to discuss the baptismal process, we would like you to have an understanding of the symbols of baptism: water, a white garment, oil and fire, so that when the time comes for the actual baptism to take place, you will have a better understanding of how these symbols relate to this very important sacrament of initiation.

Water:

Water is a symbol of both life and death. When we are baptized into the death of Jesus, we die with him upon the cross. When Jesus dies so does all sin and death. Our baptism does not end in death but continues with life. As Jesus is raised from the dead by the Father and given new life, so are we through the waters of baptism, raised to life in Jesus Christ. The waters of Baptism wash away original sin and make us a new creation in Christ.

The White Garment:

Once we have been claimed for Christ through the water of life, we are clothed in a white garment. This white garment, the Church, tells us an outward sign of our Christian dignity. Once we have put on Christ, we are to always walk as His followers.

Chrism:

Chrism is a perfumed olive oil consecrated by the bishop during Holy Week. This oil is used to anoint the crown of the head of the person being baptized. In ancient times, men and women were anointed to be proclaimers of God's message to the world. We are anointed to bring the good news to others by the way that we live our lives. We are anointed priest, prophet and king just as Christ was thousands of years ago.

Candle:

The Light of Christ is passed on to us in the form of a lit candle, which was lit from the Paschal Candle that was blessed at the Easter Vigil. We are called to be the light of Christ in the world, and we are asked by the Church to keep that light burning brightly.



Now that you have a basic understanding of the symbols associated with the Sacrament of Baptism, we would now like to discuss the guidelines necessary for a baptism to take place here at St. Mark Parish.

Place and Time of Baptisms (Baptismal Ceremony)

The Sacrament of Baptism is celebrated for infants (age 1 and under) of parents who are registered members of St. Mark Parish or those registered at another parish within the Archdiocese of Baltimore on the 2nd and 4th Sunday of every month at 12:30 p.m. in the Chapel. These are considered "group" baptisms and are celebrated by Deacon Presberry or Deacon Knepper. For those children ages 1-6, Fr. Whatley (Pastor) will speak with the family and perform a "private" baptism, if he deems it appropriate at a designated time, as the parish and Pastor's calendars permit. Please be aware that baptisms can be held during Lent, but no baptism can be scheduled on Easter Sunday.

What Parents Are Required to Do First

Parents who wish to have their infant (age 1 and under) baptized should first call the Parish Office at 410-744-6560, ext. 1 between the hours of 8 a.m. and 4 p.m., Monday through Friday, as soon as possible after the birth of their child. Parents also have the option to contact the Parish Office before the

birth of their child to discuss baptism arrangements or with any questions or concerns regarding this sacrament and the preparation involved. If the parents are not registered parishioners of St. Mark or attend Mass at another parish, a letter of permission from the Pastor of their parish is required before a baptism can be celebrated at St. Mark Parish.

For those children ages 1-6, parents will need to contact Fr. Whatley, and if he deems it appropriate, will perform a private baptism.

Parents of children seven (7) years and older or adults are to contact Mrs. Anne Kidwell, Director of Religious Education, to go through the RCIC (for children) or RCIA (for adults). However, there must be prior approval from Fr. Whatley before this process can begin.

Baptismal Preparation Class

Participation in our Baptismal Preparation Class for parents-to-be, a pre-requisite session held on the 1st Monday of each month in the Youth Ministry Room of the Parish Community Center at 7:00 p.m., is a requirement before a baptism can be scheduled. The session should last about an hour. We hope this session will give parents an even greater appreciation of this sacrament and will present them with suggestions on how to pass on the beliefs and values of the Catholic Church to their children. Both parents are encouraged to attend this preparation class, as well as the Godparents, in order to prepare for the celebration of this sacrament, but the Godparents are not required to attend this session. However, those parents who have had children baptized at St. Mark previously need not attend the class again if they attended this class within the past 3 years, unless they feel it is necessary. If this class was taken at another parish within the Archdiocese, a written statement from that Catholic Church is required. Those parents and Godparents who attend this preparation class are suggested not to bring their babies or children.

Dress for the Child

There is no specific dress required for your child, as a baptismal garment is presented to him or her at the Baptism, but he or she should be appropriately dressed.

Those Who Can Be Baptized into the Catholic Faith

Every parent who wishes for their child to be baptized has that right. Infants ages 1 and under are baptized in a group setting; for those ages 1-6, Fr. Whatley speaks with the family and performs a private baptism (if he deems it appropriate); and those children who are seven (7) years or older will need to go through and experience the RCIA or RCIC process with Mrs. Anne Kidwell (Director), depending on their age to demonstrate sufficient understanding of the sacrament before the reception of this sacrament. However, before any child/adult can be a part of this process, there must be approval from Fr. Whatley. With his approval, contact should be made with Mrs. Kidwell through the Office of Religious Education at 410-744-6560, ext. 224 for more information. Again, if parents are not registered with St. Mark Parish, they are required to obtain a letter of permission from the Pastor of their parish before a baptism at St. Mark can be celebrated.

Baptisms for Children of Those Parents Who Do Not Attend Mass

Since the child is being initiated into the Catholic Faith, the Church needs assurance that the child will be raised in the practice of the Faith. This means that parents who are the primary educators of their child in matters of faith and morals practice their faith by attending weekly Mass in order to be a good example of Christian living for their children to follow. In some instances there may only be one practicing Catholic parent. Furthermore, Baptism is a sacrament in the Church that must be taken seriously. That means that the parents will take their role as Christian parents seriously. The Church's role is to assist the parents in their duty as Christian parents. If there is not at least one parent living a life in harmony with

the Catholic faith, the baptism will be delayed until such harmony exists. To be in harmony with the Catholic faith means a Catholic regularly worships at Mass on Sunday (or Saturday evening), has been baptized, confirmed and married by a priest. If there is some doubt concerning this matter, the priest or deacon celebrating this sacrament will discuss this with the parents at length. In addition, an appointment will need to be made with a priest or deacon for those parents who are married but not in the Catholic Church or those not married but living together.

The Baptism Register and Godparent/Christian Witness Eligibility Statement

The *Baptism Register* is a form that is required to be filled out in order for a baptism to be celebrated at St. Mark. This register can be filled out before or after the Baptismal Preparation Class. The Parish Administrative Assistant would be happy to help you fill out this register over the phone to be sure all information is received preceding the baptism. You also have the option to fill out the register on your own accord as long as the Parish Administrative Assistant receives this completed register before the actual baptism. The *Godparent/Christian Witness Eligibility Statement* should be filled out by the appropriate individual who will act as the Godparent or Christian Witness. Please be sure this individual returns this eligibility statement to the Parish Office as soon as possible upon completion.

Godparents and Christian Witness Requirements

The choice of Godparents is important. Ideally, a Godparent represents the Catholic Church at Baptism, and then serves as the role model for the child by living a fully Christian life, providing a life-long example of Christian living, encouraging your child in the experience of our Catholic Faith. The Godparents should be people whose faith lends itself to this living example.

There are usually two Godparents, but there must be at least one (1), and no more than two (2) will be permitted. If two Godparents are desired, one must be male and the other female. Neither the Godparent nor the Christian Witness can be the father or mother of the child, but one non-Catholic Christian is permitted to serve as the Witness, provided they are not a former Catholic.

According to Canon Law, the law governing the Catholic Church, Godparents should be at least 16 years of age, practicing Catholics and should have received the sacraments of Baptism, Eucharist, and Confirmation, meaning they are fully initiated into the Catholic Church, and be living a life in harmony with the Catholic Faith. They are asked to obtain a certificate from their parish certifying their eligibility to serve as Godparents. However, if this certificate is not returned preceding the baptism, this person cannot serve as a Godparent.

The Godparents' current lifestyles should be in accord with the Catholic faith. This means regular attendance at Mass is expected and regular participation in the Sacrament of Reconciliation is encouraged. If married, the Godparent needs to be in a marriage considered valid in the Catholic Church. This may be proved with a recent copy of the person's baptismal certificate; the Godparents may be asked to provide this document to the Parish Office for verification purposes.

If a Godparent is a baptized, practicing member of another Christian denomination, this person is referred to as a "Christian Witness," and his or her role in the Baptism ceremony is the same as the Catholic Godparent. Likewise, the expectation is that the Christian Witness will be a Christian role model for the child.

It is customary to choose a Godfather and a Godmother, although there is no requirement that there be two Godparents. Regardless of whom you choose as sponsors, at least one of the sponsors must be a Catholic, meeting the above mentioned requirements.

Any Godparent who is unable to attend the Baptism should have a proxy be present at the celebration to take his or her place. The name of the Godparent, however, not the proxy, will appear on the child's baptismal certificate.

It is important to be aware that an appointment to meet with a priest or deacon is required and most necessary if any Godparent is married but not in the Catholic Church or not married but living together. If this person is married, his or her marriage must be recognized by the Catholic Church.

Role of Parents and Godparents During the Celebration

The Second Vatican Council of the Church called for the full, conscious, and active participation of the assembly in the liturgy. This participation is important, in fact essential, at the celebration of Baptism. Parents and godparents are invited to profess their faith and renew their own baptismal commitment as they pledge to model and pass on their faith to their children.

There are also specific roles to be carried out by individuals during the rite. To allow for the Baptism to proceed smoothly, it should be decided in advance who will hold the child, who will receive the baptismal candle, and who will receive the baptismal garment and place it on the child.

An Offering to St. Mark Church

There is no charge or fee required for the celebration of Baptism held here at St. Mark Parish. However, it is customary to make an offering to St. Mark Church on the occasion of the Baptism of your child. This voluntary contribution helps those persons responsible for preparing for this special celebration to continue to provide an adequate program of baptismal preparation. This donation is not required or asked for – it is your discretion.

Paperwork and Preparation Class

It is important that all documents and the attendance at the Baptismal Preparation Class are completed prior to the baptism. Your child's baptism may be postponed if the necessary items have not been completed and on file in the Parish Office.

Your Duties

The ceremony of Baptism assumes a well-founded hope that you will bring your child up in the practice of the faith. This means

- † you teach your child to pray
- † you teach your child to lead a good Christian life
- † you come to Mass on Sundays
- † you teach your child the Catholic faith
- †



Every effort will be made to ensure your child's baptism is a special moment in your lives, as well as the lives of other family members. Therefore, please call the Parish Office at 410-744-6560, ext. 1 between the hours of 8 a.m. and 4 p.m., Monday – Friday with any questions or concerns regarding this process, and we will be glad to assist you.

On behalf of the St. Mark Parish Community and Staff, we would like to congratulate you on your child's baptism and welcome him or her with "open arms" into the Catholic Faith.



PLEASE NOTE: Baptism is not simply a “naming ceremony” or even just a blessing for a new baby. It is the beginning of the Christian life and the gateway to eternal life. Because of this, the sacrament of Baptism is taken very seriously in the Church.



OTHER BAPTISM INFORMATION:

Here is some pertinent information regarding the baptism process that parents and godparents should be aware of to fully be prepared for the reception of this sacrament for their child. Other information not presented here will be discussed with you during the Baptismal Preparation Class; information provided below will also be discussed at the Baptismal Prep Class. There will be an allotted time period during this class session for questions or concerns to be addressed.

- ✚ Each child being presented for Baptism should be in the first seat of the pew off the main aisle, and parents and godparents should accompany them. Parents normally present the child for Baptism, and parents and godparents are to hold or place a hand on the child while they are being baptized.
- ✚ Please remove hats, bonnets, or other articles from the child before the rite begins. The Baptismal garment should also be unfastened so the chest of the child can be anointed with oil. Please consider providing for the comfort of your child by making sure he/she has eaten prior to the baptism.
- ✚ The child must wear a white garment, such as a baptismal gown.
- ✚ As the Baptism rite begins, parents will be asked to respond together by stating the NAME of the child and what they are asking of the Church for their child - namely BAPTISM.
- ✚ The godparents will also be asked if they are willing to assist the parents with the spiritual upbringing of the child. Both parents and godparents should be good role models and actively practicing their faith.
- ✚ Parents may make the baptismal robe and provide a candle if they so desire. If you do bring a robe/candle with you, please present these items to the priest or deacon before the ceremony begins. A symbolic robe and candle will be presented to each of the newly baptized. The father or godfather may receive the candle on behalf of the baptized child.
- ✚ During the Baptism, someone other than parents or godparents may take pictures. However, rules of common courtesy and presence of minds are to be observed in the Church, reflecting the solemnity of the service.
- ✚ Following the Baptism, certificates will be given to each family. It is customary for a donation to be given to the Church of St. Mark. Additional pictures may be taken at this time, for one-half hour only.
- ✚ We ask that you and your family be in Church no later than 15 minutes before the Baptism.
- ✚ Godparents must be able to represent the larger community and pledge to continually support the parents of their Christian way of life so they can better convey to the child the beliefs and practices of the Catholic Faith.
- ✚ It is preferred that one godparent must be a practicing Catholic.
- ✚ One godparent may be a baptized and practicing Christian who is not Catholic. This person is referred to as a "Christian Witness."
- ✚ Godparents are encouraged to attend the baptism preparation class with the parents.
- ✚ Parents and godparents who have not been confirmed are encouraged to attend our annual adult confirmation preparation classes.

What goes on at a Baptism?



The priest or deacon is usually the minister of Baptism, but anyone can baptize in an emergency, such as in a hospital or whenever someone's life is in danger.

- † During the Baptism of an infant, the priest or deacon asks the parents, "What name do you give your child?" The reason for him asking this question is because that person becomes a child of God by name and Jesus becomes his/her brother by name as soon as the person is baptized. The parents respond aloud, hopefully, with a Christian name, such as one of the saints or heroes of the Bible.
- † The priest or deacon asks, "What do you ask of God's church for your child?" The parents respond, "Baptism."
- † The priest or deacon then asks the parents and the godparents whether they're willing and able to fulfill their duties to bring up this child in the Christian faith.
- † As a symbolic gesture, the priest or deacon makes the sign of the cross with his thumb gently on the forehead of the child to show that the cross of Christ has saved him or her. The parents and godparents do likewise.
- † A particular passage from the Bible is read, usually from the New Testament, where Baptism is mentioned or alluded to.
- † After some other prayers, the first anointing takes place, and the infants' white garb is pulled slightly beneath the neck so the priest or deacon can smear a little *Oil of Catechumens* on the infant's neck with his thumb. The local bishop blessed this olive oil once a year during Holy Week and distributes it to all the parishes. It symbolizes that the person, born into the world, is now being set apart from the world by the anointing. He/she is soon to be baptized and therefore belongs not to the world but to God and heaven.
- † The priest or deacon blesses the water of Baptism. The prayer recalls how water has played an important role in salvation history as recorded throughout the Bible: It represents a sign of new life, the washing of sin, deliverance from slavery, and a new beginning.
- † The baptismal promises are made. Because the infant can't speak for him/herself, the mother, father and the godparents answer for him/her. The priest or deacon asks, "Do you renounce Satan? And all his works? And all his empty promises?" If things go as planned, everyone says, "I do." If not, you have to check for devil worshippers among the crowd.

- † After the renunciation of evil, the *Apostles' Creed* is put in question form: “Do you believe in God, the Father Almighty, creator of heaven and earth?” Again, the hoped-for response is “I do.” Then the other two persons of the Trinity are mentioned: “Do you believe in Jesus Christ . . .” and “Do you believe in the Holy Spirit . . .” and so on.
- † Finally comes the actual Baptism. The immediate family gathers around the baptismal font (see a picture on next page), and the child is held over the basin while the priest or deacon pours water three times over the child’s head and says, “I baptize you (the first and middle names are said aloud) in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.”
- † The priest or deacon anoints the top of the new Christian’s head with *Chrism Oil*. Like the Oil of Catechumens, the local bishop blesses the Chrism Oil during Holy Week, but this olive oil has balsam added to it to make it smell nice. The anointing symbolizes that the newly baptized Christian is now exactly that – a *Christian*. The word *Christ* means *anointed*, and a *Christian* is someone who’s anointed in Jesus Christ. This anointing also means the person is now to share in the three-fold of Christ – to sanctify, proclaim, and give Christian leadership and example to the world.
- † A Baptismal candle is lit from the burning Easter Candle, which is present throughout the ceremony. It symbolizes that the new Christian is a light to the world. Then the *Our Father* is said and a blessing is given for the parents and the family, and everyone celebrates.



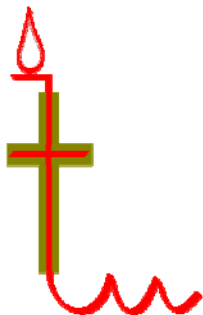
BAPTISMAL FONT: A basin or vase, serving as a receptacle for baptismal water in which the candidate for baptism is immersed, or over which he/she is washed, in the ceremony of Christian initiation. In the Church’s present practice it is ordinarily a decorative stone basin, though metal or wood are used; supported on a pedestal or columns at a convenient height for receiving the water which is poured over the graphically illustrating the history of the mode of conferring baptism.

The following article has been provided for you, the parents, as a resource when making the decision on godparents for your child's baptism. There is also a section designated for godparents. Once you have chosen a godparent(s) for your child, please have them read this section.

Godparents for Infant Baptism

What is Expected of Them Today?

by William F. Wegher



Have you ever wondered why some people have very involved godparents, while others don't even know theirs? Perhaps part of the problem is that many godparents were chosen for the wrong reasons, or because those same people don't really know what they're supposed to do! Through this article, it is hoped for you to have a better understanding of this role.

Most of us at some point have to choose a godparent for our children, but how do we choose these people? Or you yourself may someday be asked to be godparent. What is expected of a godparent today?

Take for example Julie and John, a happy, "thirty something" couple who have just had their first child. They're really into their Catholic faith, so they're excited to have their baby baptized. A big family celebration is planned, but John and Julie are wondering about godparents. What about John's sister and her husband who helped Julie out so much during her pregnancy? It would be a great way to thank them—but they don't practice their faith. Or how about Julie's best friend, Mary, who is actively involved in a young Catholic adult program, even though Mary's husband is a devout practicing Protestant? Will this be all right with the Church?

FOR PARENTS: *How to choose godparents*

This is a big day for your family, and you want to do the right thing. Choosing godparents is a decision not to be taken lightly. Too often parents want to honor a special friend, repay a favor, or encourage a non-relative to have a closer relationship with their child. While all of these motives are well intentioned, they are not ideal. If you want to be happy about your decision, consider the following.

Above all, a godparent serves a special role for one to be baptized, whether it be a child or an adult. Godparents are to represent the Christian Catholic community, the Church. They are to assist in the preparation of adult candidates for Baptism and to be supportive of them afterwards. When it comes in infant Baptism, godparents are to assist the child's parents in raising their child in our Catholic faith, so that the child may profess and live it as an adult.

Thus if we remember a few basic things about Baptism—it gives a person both a new and special status as a child of God and it makes a person a member of the Body of Christ, the Church—then

what you are looking for are godparents who can truly represent that Christian community. Basically this means you want at least one active and committed Catholic. The *Catechism of the Catholic Church* states “...the godfather and godmother...must be firm believers, able and ready to help the newly baptized—child or adult—on the road of Christian life” (#1255). This is the Church’s way of saying that being a godparent is truly a ministry in the Church, and not simply an honor.

In fact the whole Church community or parish bears some responsibility for the development and nurturing of the grace given your child at Baptism. Much of this will come later in parish religious education and even classes for you on Christian parenting.

What does this mean for our friends John and Julie that we mentioned above? As much as Julie and John appreciate all the help that John’s sister and brother-in-law have given them, this is not a good motive for having them be godparents. Rather, John and Julie should choose a firm believer, someone who is truly committed to the Catholic faith in which their new baby will be baptized. Thus, Julie’s best friend, Mary, so active in her faith, is a perfect choice. But what about Mary’s husband who is not Catholic, since John and Julie want a married couple to be godparents? The Church has a solution for this too!

Since Mary is a practicing Catholic, and a perfect choice as a godmother, she will be the officially designated *godparent*, while her husband—a great Christian and committed to his own faith—can serve as an official witness. This is fully in line with canon law (see #874). Only one *godparent* is necessary, although both a godfather and a godmother are preferred. So while Mary’s husband—a *witness*—will set an example, it will be Mary’s duty as *godmother* to share specifics of the Catholic faith.

To ensure that a godparent is capable of this, Church law also insists that *this person be at least 16 years old* (for maturity’s sake), *full initiated* (having received Confirmation and Eucharist), be *someone other than the legal parents* and *one who leads a life in harmony with the Church*.

All this may seem like quite a bit, but the purpose is to ensure that the rich and beautiful faith of the Church is passed on to your child in the most loving and authentic way possible. Hopefully you know by now that the task of choosing godparents is one which should be performed with much prayer, careful thought and with greatest concern for the precious spiritual life of your child.

FOR GODPARENTS: *Be at your best*

If you think that the role of parents in *choosing* godparents is a serious one, so is the role of *being* a godparent. Being chosen is an honor, and says a lot about the parents’ perception of you.

I remember how excited and humbled I was when my brother and sister-in-law asked me to be the godfather for their first baby. Even though I’m a priest, I had to consider the investment of time and energy it would require of me. So remember not to rush into anything too quickly here! Make sure that you have the *time*, the *willingness* and the *faith* to live out this *sacred vocation*.

A vocation is a calling, an appeal to live something out in your life. These parents are calling you to be something special for their child: to set an example, help teach their child about the Catholic faith, have a lifelong relationship of prayer, faith sharing and love. Before accepting this invitation, take some time to pray and reflect on your ability to do this.

You should ask, “Can I share my faith unashamedly? Do I live close enough to really get to know my godchild? Am I an active member of my local Catholic parish?” If you are from another parish, you’ll probably be asked for a letter from your home parish attesting to your active faith in the Church. If you’re an active Catholic, getting such a letter from your pastor will be easy. If you’re not, may be you need to question your fitness to serve as a godparent at this time. But if you are able to say yes to these questions and if your faith makes you ready to accept this honorable vocation, here are a few helpful hints to assist you in being the best godparent that you can be:

- ✠ **Prepare with the parents.** In most parishes, the parents will be required to attend a Baptism preparation class to reflect on many of the things mentioned in this article. If you’re able, you should be there too! Your willingness to be with the parents now says a lot about your willingness to be present to your godchild in the future.
- ✠ **Be there on the “big day.”** Be available for the Baptism ceremony. This may even mean missing less important events. Besides saying, “We are,” when the priest asks if you are ready to assist the parents in raising the child in the practice of the faith, you will have the opportunity to clothe the child in the white baptismal garment, and to light the baptismal candle. Take seriously the profound yet beautiful words: “Parents and godparents, this light has been entrusted to you to be kept burning brightly.” You may also be asked to write a touching intercession for the Prayers of the Faithful on behalf of your godchild. Later at a family party, you could make a toast or say a meaningful prayer for your godchild and your role in his or her life.
- ✠ **Don’t forget the “big day!”:** Hopefully you will always remember your godchild’s biological birthday, but don’t forget this “birthday” into the Body of Christ. Make a phone call or send a card. Better yet, suggest having a get-together to honor this day each year. Bring out and light the baptismal candle, recalling the Light of Christ burning in the heart and soul of your godchild. Or, create a photo album to be shared with your godchild when he or she gets older.
- ✠ **Pray for your godchild.** Keep your godchild in your daily prayers. The constant prayer of godparents never hurt anyone! On occasion, take time to celebrate Eucharist together, for it is, after all, the source and summit of our faith lives.
- ✠ **Share the faith that’s been shared with you.** When your godchild is young, introduce him or her to a children’s edition of the Bible. Teach about his or her patron or name saint. Attend and offer encouragement at the child’s first Communion or share your own faith story as your godchild approaches Confirmation. Continue your lifelong relationship by participating in your godchild’s wedding. Remember, being a godparent is about more than an infant Baptism ceremony!

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Parents: Please give the following information to each of your child's godparents so they are aware of their role as being godparents. Thank you!

The role of the godparent is a special honor that has a specific role. Most parents choose a person to be a godparent because he or she is very dear to them. The individual is deeply respected and the parents want their child to be guided and influenced by his or her life. In addition to these qualities the Church also specifies the godparent must be living example of faith. Their commitment to the Church is evident in their life.

The Role of Godparents.

Congratulations! You have been chosen to be a godparent. From its very title, you can see that this role is connected with “**God**” and therefore belongs primarily to the realm of the spiritual and the holy. It is not a reward for past deeds, and certainly not connected with civil guardianship or future care of the child. Your new role is a sacred responsibility, entrusted to you “**now**” to participate and share in your new godchild's Christian life and education.

What a privilege! Full of potential and yet somewhat daunting! You have been chosen from the countless family members and friends the parents of this child have, to share in this most intimate and special way their primary parental responsibility of bringing their child up in the Christian faith and “*to keep God's commandments as Christ taught us*” (taken from the Rite of Baptism)

So what then is your role?

Dear parents and godparents: you have come here to present these children for Baptism. By water and the Holy Spirit, they are to receive the gift of new life from God, who is love. (**Rite of Baptism**)

During the opening rites of the Liturgy of Baptism, the godparents are addressed in the following manner: “***Are you ready to help the parents of these children in their duty as Christian parents.***” Presumably, after due reflection, you will be ready to answer: “***Yes.***” In other words, your role is to assist the parents in guiding their child to know God and to belong to his Church in the fullest way possible. As a Christian and now as a godparent, allow the Liturgy of Baptism to speak directly to you, not just about your new role but also as fellow traveler along the road of faith. Pay special attention to the forms and symbols used: **the waters** that wash away sin and restore us to new life in Christ, that new life signified in **the white garment**, **the oil of chrism** that brings both healing and strength and sets us apart for the work of the Kingdom and of course that **lighted candle** symbolizing that Christ and his Gospel has become in the words of the psalm, a “light for our feet,” guiding us along the road of faith. This is why, at its very heart, your relationship with your new godchild is a “**spiritual**” one. Of course as with any special relationship, the affection that underpins it can be demonstrated in practical and giving ways.

Baptism is the sacrament of faith. But faith needs the community of believers. It is only within the faith of the Church that each of the faithful can believe. (Catechism of the Catholic Church #1253)

Over the next few years, try some of the following ways to nurture and develop this spiritual relationship:

- † Keep a note of the date of the Baptism and on each anniversary celebrate the day with a visit, a card, an appropriate gift (*such as a bible, religious books/goods, jewelry, etc.*) or a phone call.
- † As your godchild grows in his/her knowledge of the Christian faith, try to be present to encourage and share your own Christian faith and values. Send assurances of prayers and blessings to your godchild. Always speak well of the gift of our Christian faith and the need for regular prayer and worship of God.
- † Mark each sacramental milestone in the life of your godchild with a special card or appropriate gift. Try to be present for his/her reception of First Reconciliation, First Communion and Confirmation.
- † Be supportive of your godchild's parents in their role as Christian parents and primary educators of their child.
- † Use this wonderful opportunity to review your own faith life and practice. Become a model of Christian living for your godchild through the practice of daily prayer, weekly attendance at Mass and an active and full participation in the life of your own parish. When the initial delight and pride of your choice as godparents has evaporated, you still remain in this sacred responsibility, a responsibility you undertook before God and his Church, in response to that invitation. Try to remain faithful to that invitation and active in the life of your godchild. It is after the Baptism ceremony that your real work begins!

Remember always, that it is only by living a full Christian life that you both will experience the great and joyful potential this relationship has to offer.

Congratulations once more, and may God bless you and your new godchild.



BAPTISM SUGGESTIONS



If you're invited to a baptism...



You don't need to be Catholic or even Christian to attend. Your presence is a sign of love, support, and friendship for the parents and for the baptized.



If you're a Christian, you may want to join in the renewal of baptismal promises when they're asked.



If you're the godfather, it's unwritten and unofficial tradition that you give the priest a token of appreciation in the form of a modest donation. Some parishes and dioceses allow the one officiating at the Baptism to keep it; others require that he give it to the parish; still others divide it up among the priests and deacons of the parish. It's not really a suggestion but an honorarium, and it's never required or expected. Yet in the United States, it's become customary for the godfather to make this offering, usually anywhere from \$20 to \$100.

SOME FINAL NOTES:

The Sacrament of Baptism is the defining moment in the life of the Christian. It celebrates a powerful union with our Savior, Jesus Christ. It is a statement of commitment that identifies and connects the individual with the Catholic faith. With this in mind, please read the following:

Connection to the Eucharist:

The Eucharist lies at the heart of who we are as a believing people. It is the meal that sustains and nurtures us through the journey. This meal is meant to be a regular part of life experience, not just at milestone celebrations. It is essential that you are regularly and actively involved in Sunday Eucharist.

Connection to the Parish Community:

Your family is part of our family. Any family relationship requires commitment. We expect a commitment on your part to St. Mark's parish. You should be registered members of the parish. We will look to see that you participate in and support the parish community in a demonstrable way, such as involvement in a parish ministry and/or regular use of contribution envelopes.

Consistency in the Sacramental Life of the Church:

Baptism is the great moment that begins the spiritual journey. It is the way of life that you are seeking for your son or daughter. It is wonderful that you desire your child to share in the

sacramental life of the Church. As you make this request for your child, it should also be a reality in your own life. Do you actively participate in the sacramental life of the Church? Do you regularly attend Mass? Do you make use of the sacrament of Reconciliation? Are you fully initiated into the Church through Baptism, Eucharist, and Confirmation? Does the Church recognize your marriage? We understand that life can get complicated and we do not want to judge. But, we expect that parents lead by example. The birth of a child often raises issues about the faith life of adults. The miracle of birth might inspire you to seek your own Confirmation or have your marriage blessed by the Church. We are happy to assist you with these issues.

Seasons of the Church Year:

There is a rhythm and pattern to celebrations in the Church year. The seasons of Advent and Lent provide specific themes in the celebrations of the Eucharist. Advent provides a time of patient and prayerful anticipation of the birth of our Savior. Lent is a time in which all people are called to reconciliation through fasting and sacrifice. These seasons have a unique focus in the mysteries of Christ. Baptisms can be celebrated during Advent and Lent but cannot be celebrated on Easter Sunday.

Prayerful Participation:

While baptism is a day of great joy and celebration, it is also a profound time of prayer. While prayer need not be somber, it should not compete with, or be compromised by other activities. Therefore, we ask that no pictures (video, flash, digital, etc.) at all be taken during the baptism. This is the same guideline we maintain for other parish celebrations such as First Communions and Confirmation. We ask you to be sure that all your family members and guests understand this expectation. The priest is happy to take pictures with the family after the baptism.

A Community that Abounds with Life:

We are a large, vibrant, and active parish community. There are many activities and celebrations that are part of what we do. At times, those celebrations take place on Sundays. Occasionally, it may be difficult to schedule a private baptism because of other events and celebrations.

**From the clergy and pastoral staff
of St. Mark Parish,
congratulations on your child's baptism**