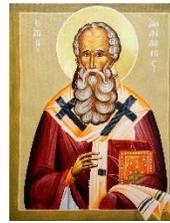




Sacred Heart Church

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PARENTS' GUIDELINES FOR HAVING A CHILD BAPTIZED AT SACRED HEART OR ST. ATHANASIOUS CATHOLIC CHURCH

Thank you for inquiring about the sacrament of Baptism! The gift of grace in Baptism is the *greatest* gift that you can give to your child. Of course, with this gift also comes an awesome responsibility. We look forward to supporting you as you lead your child in the lifelong journey of becoming an intentional disciple of Jesus Christ.

I offer the following guidelines in order to help answer some questions that you might have. Please read this document in its entirety, and do not hesitate to contact the staff or myself if you have any questions.

Be assured of my daily prayers for you,

In Christ,

Fr. J. Marcel Portelli

FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS ABOUT BAPTISM

1. **WHAT exactly does Baptism entail?**

- a. While all people are born with a fallen human nature and tainted by original sin¹, the sacrament of Baptism brings about spiritual renewal in the form of a new birth.² Baptism brings about the forgiveness of original sin, and makes one an adopted son/daughter of God and a temple of the Holy Spirit.

Baptism gives the theological virtues of faith, hope, and charity and the gifts of the Holy Spirit. Baptism incorporates people—even infants—into the life of Jesus Christ, and they participate in His mission as Priest, Prophet and King.

As the first sacrament of initiation, Baptism incorporates a soul into the Church and is the necessary gateway for receiving the other six sacraments.³ Baptism gives sanctifying grace and makes someone holy—set apart—for the mission of knowing, loving, and serving God and neighbor. It opens up the possibility of salvation.⁴

Although Baptism is the first formal step in becoming a disciple of Jesus Christ, it also is the source of responsibilities, duties, and rights within the Body of Christ (the Church). Of course, Baptism is only the

¹ Genesis 3

² *Catechism of the Catholic Church* (hereafter cited as CCC), paragraph 1250

³ Eucharist, Confirmation, Reconciliation, Matrimony, Holy Orders, Anointing of the sick

⁴ John 3:3-15

beginning of a persons' faith journey. Baptized children will still need to be formed in their Catholic Christian faith through their parents, family, and parish so that they will become disposed to the grace of Baptism and live it out. Because of the necessity of Baptism for salvation, infant Baptism has always been practiced since the time of the apostles.⁵

2. CAN I have my child baptized at Sacred Heart or at St. Athanasius Catholic Church?

- a. In bringing a child to Baptism, the parent(s) are reaffirming their own faith in Jesus Christ and the teachings of the Catholic Church. Church law (and common sense) requires that there must be a founded hope that the child will be raised in the Catholic faith after the Baptism ritual. Barring emergencies or the danger of death, the parents of the child should consent to the Baptism and have a basic understanding of their responsibilities.
- b. Normally, one or both parents should be registered and practicing parishioners of Sacred Heart or of St. Athanasius in order to have a child baptized here.
- c. In general, it is preferable to baptize a child in the family's current parish because that is the local faith community within which they will be raised. Nevertheless, we also welcome the Baptism of non-parishioners who live elsewhere if they have family or other significant ties to Sacred Heart or to St. Athanasius. In such cases, permission will have to be requested from the family's pastor (the pastor within whose boundaries the family resides).

3. WHEN does the parishes schedule Baptism?

- a. We normally schedule Baptisms during Mass on the weekends, ideally during the week's preeminent Mass, which is Sunday. This is so that the members of the Body of Christ may welcome their newest member and be reaffirmed in their own Baptisms. The Baptism occurs after the homily.
- b. In special circumstances, we may be able to schedule a Baptism on another day, e.g., during a weekday Mass. We only make this exception for parishioners who have a pressing need such as the availability of their guests.
- c. Multiple children may be baptized during the same liturgy.
- d. At the discretion of the pastor, Baptisms may also be performed outside of Mass if there is concern for the possibility of public scandal.
- e. Baptism is necessary for salvation. While families often wish to schedule Baptisms so that family and friends can be present, parents are strongly encouraged to not defer the Baptism of their children for an excessive amount of time. Ideally, children should be baptized within two weeks of their birth.
- f. If an unbaptized child is seriously ill or hospitalized, please contact a priest immediately. Baptisms may occur in the hospital in an emergency.

4. WHAT FORM does the Baptism ritual take?

- a. Following the ritual of the Catholic Church, we baptize by pouring water over the head of the child three times using the Trinitarian formula ("I baptize you, [Name], in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit."). Immersion may be used instead of pouring. The rite also includes public promises by the parents and Godparents, readings from Scripture, a minor exorcism, a candle lighting, special prayers and petitions, and two anointings with blessed oil.

5. How do I SCHEDULE a Baptism?

- a. Please call the main office and speak with our Director of Religious Education, Anne Edick (phone 989-426-7154 or email anne.edick7@gmail.com). She will help you schedule a date for the Baptism. She will also ask

⁵ For the full teaching on Baptism see the Catechism of the Catholic Church, paragraphs 1213-1284

for some information that will help us to properly record the sacrament in our baptismal register.

6. Is there a “BAPTISM CLASS” that I must attend?

- a. Because Baptism is such an important sacrament, and because infants and small children rely on their parents to grow in the faith (“you can’t give what you don’t have”), parents must receive some basic formation in the meaning and responsibilities inherent in the sacrament. Parents should contact the Director of Religious Education in order to arrange a time to meet, preferably one month in advance.

It is crucial that both parents and Godparents attend this 60-to-90 minute class. One parent will suffice if absolutely necessary. The Director of Religious Education will use this occasion to welcome and connect with the parents and Godparents (perhaps even meeting the family for the first time). The class will cover the promises, prayers and symbols in the rite of Baptism so that the parents and Godparents will understand more fully the meaning of the rite and the sacred commitment that they are making in bringing their children to Baptism. A Baptism class does not have to be repeated within five years.

7. What are the REQUIREMENTS for someone to be a GODPARENT?

- a. In our culture, parents often choose a family member or friend to serve as a Godparent to their child. In many cases, this is done in order to honor a particular relationship. Parents sometimes consider someone to be a Godparent because they admire their virtues and consider them to be living a good life. While it is a great honor to be asked to serve as a Godparent, it is more importantly a sacred responsibility. The role of Godparent within the Catholic tradition is very specific and brings with it unique responsibilities and requirements. Please consult these requirements before you ask someone to serve as a Godparent for your child.
- b. The Godfather or Godmother play a very important role. They must be able and ready to help the newly baptized child on the road of Christian life.⁶ They help the child lead a Catholic Christian life and faithfully fulfill the obligations inherent in Baptism.⁷ Of course, one does not need to be morally perfect to be a Godparent (no one is without sin). Nevertheless, such a person should be striving to live a life of holiness. When parents consider selecting prospective Godparents, they should ask this basic question: “Which individual(s) will help my child grow up to be a holy disciple of Jesus Christ within the tradition of the Catholic Church?” We may have many family members and friends that we love and respect, but not all of them can fulfill these essential requirements.
- c. There can only be one Godfather and one Godmother. There cannot be two of the same gender.
- d. A Godparent must be a baptized Catholic who:
 - i. Is at least 16 years old (though the priest can grant an exemption for a just cause);
 - ii. Has already received the sacrament of Confirmation;
 - iii. Has already received the sacrament of Holy Eucharist (First Communion);
 - iv. Leads a life in harmony with the Catholic Faith and the role to be undertaken:
 1. Is willing and able to reject Satan and sin (this is part of the rite of Baptism);
 2. Is willing and able to reaffirm their faith in God the Father, Jesus Christ, the Holy Spirit, and the Holy Catholic Church (see The Apostles’ Creed);
 3. Attends Mass on every Sunday and holy day of obligation (to intentionally skip Mass on these days is a mortal sin);
 4. If living in a domestic partnership, he or she must do so within the context of a marriage recognized as valid by the Catholic Church.

⁶ CCC, 1255

⁷ Code of Canon Law, canon 872

- e. Why are there so many requirements for Godparents? In order to publicly stand up in the Baptism ritual and promise to support the child to live out his Catholic faith, the Godparent must be actively living out the Catholic faith. We cannot give to others what we, ourselves, do not possess. Prospective Godparents will have to sign a form testifying to the fact that they understand these expectations.
- f. While at least one Godparent must be Catholic, a validly baptized but non-Catholic Christian can serve as a “Christian Witness.” A “Christian Witness” is strictly an honorific and is not a Godparent.

8. *Who is the MINISTER of Baptism?*

- a. In general, the parish priest will celebrate Baptisms. If a family would like a priest or deacon from outside the parish to baptize their child, they should make this request with the priest.

9. *Does the parish expect a donation?*

- a. No donation expected. Some families choose to offer a small stipend to the priest and/or the parish as an expression of personal gratitude, however, this is optional. If anything, we simply encourage families to practice regular stewardship and give of their time, talent, or treasure to the parish. When you give to our parish, you make it stronger. Most of all we would love to see you worshipping with us at Mass!

10. *How can I get more involved in the life of the Parish?*

- a. We are delighted that you are inquiring about baptizing your child. In doing so you are fulfilling one of your responsibilities as a Catholic parent. Very often parents ask the Church to baptize their children at a time when they, themselves, are not regularly practicing their faith. If this is your situation, we encourage you to become more involved. Start attending Mass if you are not currently doing so and frequent the sacrament of Reconciliation. We would love to see you here! Check out our bulletin and website to see all of the opportunities to grow in your knowledge and practice of the faith and to meet other members of our community.
- b. Oftentimes, parents who request Baptism have been married civilly or in a non-Catholic setting. If this is your situation, please ask the priest how he might be able to help to have your marriage validated in the Catholic Church. When one exchanges marriage vows in the Church, one receives the added grace of the sacrament of Holy Matrimony. If married, one should normally be in a marriage recognized by the Catholic Church in order to receive the other sacraments (Holy Communion, etc.). Marriage and family life are not always easy. Everyone can benefit from the special graces of the sacraments. Nevertheless, even if you are currently in such a marriage, there are many ways that you can still grow in your faith and participate in the life of the parish. If you desire Baptism for your child that means that, likely means that God is already at work in your soul. Keep searching and going deeper. Please let us help you and your family grow in your relationship with Our Lord.