

**SAINT THOMAS'S PARISH
276 SOUTH COLLEGE AVENUE
NEWARK, DELAWARE 19711
368-4644**

GUIDELINES FOR BAPTISM

"Holy Baptism is full initiation by water and the Holy Spirit into Christ's Body, the Church. The bond which God establishes in Baptism is indissoluble. "

Book of Common Prayer, page 298

"Baptism is more than a momentary rite. It is entrance upon a life-long journey a life-long quest to actualize the implications of a new inheritance. Baptism not only starts us on the way of faith, but it signifies to the whole world that we are among the company of those who are signed, sealed, owned, claimed, and commissioned to do Christ's work in the world."

John H. Westerhoff II, Bringing up Children in the Christian Faith

Baptism is the way one becomes a member of the church, but more than that, it is the Sacrament of inclusion into God's covenant. Baptism marks the beginning of our life in Christ within the community of faith; it signifies our adoption into the people of God.

Baptism is a concrete action, a sacrament, "an outward and visible sign of an inward and spiritual grace," taken by a person or the person's parents. It establishes a permanent relationship between Jesus Christ and that person. The bond can be ignored, or, as with other relationships, it can be fostered and grow.

When is Baptism Administered?

"Holy Baptism is appropriately administered within the Eucharist as the chief service on a Sunday or other feast"

Book of Common Prayer, page 298

Because "we are buried with Christ by Baptism into his death and raised with him to newness of life", it is especially appropriate to administer Holy Baptism at the same time as we are celebrating the other great sacrament, the Holy Eucharist, when we especially recall Christ's death and resurrection. Also, because we are by Baptism incorporated into the Body of Christ, the community of faith, it is fitting that the community be gathered as a new member is received.

Therefore, Holy Baptism is administered at Saint Thomas's as part of the 10:30 a m service on Sunday. Our schedule calls for Baptism to be held approximately one Sunday a month or on certain feasts as suggested in the Prayer Book.

Godparents and Sponsors

"Each candidate for Holy Baptism is to be sponsored by one or more baptized persons."

Book of Common Prayer, page 298

Sponsors of infants are commonly called Godparents, They "... present their candidates, make promises in their own names, and also take vows on behalf of their candidate."

Book of Common Prayer, page 298

The promises are: a) to be responsible for seeing that the child is brought up in the Christian faith and life; b) by prayer and witness to help the child to grow in Christ.

Book of Common Prayer, page 302

The vows, made on behalf of the child, are: a) to reject all forms of evil; b) to accept, trust, and follow Christ.

Book of Common Prayer, page 302

Parents: *"It is fitting that parents be included among the godparents of their own children."*

Book of Common Prayer, page 298

At Saint Thomas's, both parents are normally considered to be Godparents, and they make the promises and take the vows along with the other Godparents.

"Sponsors of adults, and older children" present their candidates and thereby signify their endorsement of the candidates and their intention to support them by prayer and example in their Christian life."

Book of Common Prayer, page 298

Such sponsors do not make any promises or take any vows.

Qualities: Godparents and sponsors must themselves be baptized Christians and should be active participants in the life of their own church. They need to be persons who will maintain close contact and faithfully care for the child throughout life. Godparents take on important commitments and need to be chosen with this in mind. Therefore, choosing godparents or sponsors should be done carefully and not as a gesture to honor friends or family.

Number: The Prayer Book used to call for at least three Godparents - 2 males and a female for a boy and 2 females and a male for a girl. The current Prayer Book specifies "one or more." The important thing is that those chosen be faithful persons themselves and willing and able to be faithful as Godparents.

Denomination: Godparents need not be Episcopalians, but, as noted above, they do have to be baptized members of a Christian church and should be faithful and active members in their own congregations.

Instruction for Parents and Sponsors

"Parents and Godparents are to be instructed in the meaning of Baptism, in their duties to help the new Christian grow in the knowledge and love of God, and in their responsibilities as members of his Church.

Book of Common Prayer, page 298

At Saint Thomas's the instruction takes the form of a Baptismal Seminar, normally held on the Saturday before the Baptism in the church. All parents, Godparents, sponsors, adults and older children being baptized, attend. The Seminar provides an opportunity to discuss the meaning of Baptism, to review the responsibilities of parents and sponsors, and to "walk through" the service. Adults and older children are also expected to participate in the Youth or Adult Confirmation courses and to present themselves to the Bishop for Confirmation.

In addition to the Baptismal Seminar, parents presenting children for Baptism meet with one of the clergy to establish a pastoral bond and to discuss the Christian nurturing of their child and their own relationship to the Church.

The Service of Holy Baptism

A careful reading of the liturgy for Holy Baptism found in the Prayer Book on pages 299-308 is recommended. The Baptism liturgy forms the first part of the service and is followed by the Holy Communion of the Eucharist (pages 361 ff.)

The parents, Godparents, Sponsors and candidates gather in the church before the service and sit as directed to do during the Baptismal seminar. After the entrance, opening responses, collect, lessons, and sermon; all those to be baptized and those presenting them go to the font. The candidates are presented and the promises of the Godparents and the vows of Baptism are made (pages 301-303).

The whole congregation then joins in the Baptismal Covenant, the Prayers for the Candidates, and the Thanksgiving over the Water (pages 304-307). The Prayers for the Candidates (pages 304-305) are usually led by one of the sponsors.

Each candidate (child or adult) is then baptized in the name of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit as water is poured upon the head three times. Each is also sealed with the sign of the cross on the forehead with oil.

The newly baptized are welcomed by all the people (page 308). and the Peace follows, during which greetings are exchanged throughout the congregation.

After the Peace, the service continues with the Offering and the Great Thanksgiving of the Eucharist. At the time of the serving of Holy Communion. all persons present who are baptized Christians are welcome to receive the consecrated bread and wine.

Beyond Baptism

Christian Education: Parents of children who have been baptized are expected to be active members of the parish. If not already Confirmed or Received into the Episcopal Church, they should take this step as soon as possible. Confirmed Episcopalians are expected to transfer their membership to Saint Thomas's.

Child care for children and infants is provided from 7:45 to 11:45 a.m. on Sundays so that parents can attend either the 8 or 10:30 a.m. service and participate in the Christian Education programs for adults at 9:30 a.m.

Nursery and Kindergarten Sunday programs for pre-school children and Iull Church School for Grades 1-6 are available from September through May at 9:30 a.m.

There is a wide variety of opportunities for children: choirs, acolytes, etc.

Holy Communion: Because Baptism is the way one becomes a Christian, any baptized person may receive Communion. Therefore, adults baptized receive Communion beginning with the service at which they are baptized. Newly baptized infants and young children may receive Communion at any time. The clergy will be happy to talk with parents about this.

Confirmation

"In the course of their Christian development, those baptized at an early age are expected, when they are ready and have been duly prepared, to make a mature public affirmation of their faith and commitments to the responsibilities of their Baptism and to receive the laying on of hands by the bishop."

"Those baptized as adults ... are also expected to make a public affirmation of their faith and commitment to the responsibilities of their Baptism in the presence of a bishop and receive laying on of hands ."

Book of Common Prayer, page 412

For young people, the preparation for Confirmation at Saint Thomas's takes the form of an intensive course that is part of the Sunday School program for sixth graders. The program for adults varies, but usually includes instructions in an Inquirers/Newcomers class led by one of the clergy that meets on a week night for 6 weeks.

It is suggested that Godparents be alerted to the preparations for Confirmation, that they participate in any way they can, and that they be invited to the Confirmation service.

Arranging for a Baptism

Parents should call the church office or speak to one of the clergy and ask for a Baptism application form, which will be sent to the family and should be filled out and returned as soon as possible. There is no "minimum" or "maximum" expected age for Baptism. What is important is the family's intention to see that the child *"is brought up In the Christian faith and life."*

Adults desiring Baptism should speak to one of the clergy and also request an application form and available dates for the Inquirers/Newcomers class.

There is no fee for baptisms at Saint Thomas's. It is appropriate, however, for the family to make a thank offering. Checks may be made payable to "Saint Thomas's Church" and placed in the offering plate at the Baptism service.

All adults baptized at Saint Thomas's, and parents presenting children, are expected to consider their own personal stewardship and to make a pledge of offerings to God through the Church as a way of regularly offering back to God a portion of those gifts entrusted to them.

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