

BAPTISM PREPARATION

ST. PAUL THE APOSTLE CATHOLIC CHURCH

St. Paul the Apostle Catholic Church welcomes you and your child! If your child is still on his or her way or here already and is less than seven years old, this is the place to begin the steps toward Baptism! Throughout the United States, Catholic churches wish the parents to be prepared for the ongoing task of raising a child in the faith. Baptism preparation classes exist for this purpose. Here are the steps to register for these classes.

- **Register to become a member of the parish:** At St. Paul the Apostle Catholic Church, we first encourage you to be a parish member. In asking to have your child baptized, you are accepting the responsibility of training your child in their lifelong practice of the Catholic faith. By parish membership, you will be able to access the religious education and the support you may need to fulfill that desire. You can complete your [parish registration online](#), pick up a form at a weekend Mass or from the church office during regular office hours.
- **Complete [Online Baptism Registration](#)** to register for the Baptism and the Baptism Preparation Classes. This form must be completed and submitted along with a state-issued birth certificate before a Baptismal certificate can be issued. Baptisms will not be scheduled until this birth certificate is brought to class or the parish office.
- **Complete the Baptismal preparation classes, which are offered as a two-part series:**
 - First, visit the [“Belonging Series” from Ascension Press](#) and purchase the \$9.95 online certification course.
 - Second, after you have completed the online course and submitted the certificate of completion, please schedule an in-person meeting with the Marriage & Family Life Coordinator. You will be with other couples, and this is your chance to ask questions about the Rite of Baptism, Godparents, etc.
 - After you have completed the first two steps and have submitted all the necessary paperwork, you may schedule the baptism.
- **Godparent/Christian Witness Information:** Read the Godparent information page to register and have them complete the necessary paperwork. If your child’s Godparent(s) or Christian Witness is from another parish/church, please have them complete the “Godparent Certificate” or the “Christian Witness Certificate” and have their pastor sign that they are Catholics/Christians in good standing.
- **Over the Age of Seven:** If your child is over the age of seven and has not been baptized, please visit the [RCIA webpage](#). Here, you can enroll your child in the RCIA Adapted for Children sessions. Please note that if your child is over the age of seven, he or she will receive all the Sacraments of Initiation (Baptism, First Communion, Confirmation) at the Easter Vigil Mass.

WHAT IS BAPTISM?

Baptism is the sacrament- the outward, physical sign manifesting a divine action, an inward grace- by which we both embrace and are embraced by the redemption won for us by Christ. Through Baptism, we enter “heavenly” life, that is, life with God.

The word baptism is Greek and means to "plunge" or "immerse" (CCC 1214). Baptism is the "door" or "gateway" to spiritual life in Christ. Through Baptism, one is freed from original sin and all past sins, reborn as an adopted child of God, initiated into the Church, and "bonded" to other Christians. Through sanctifying grace that comes from being baptized, one is strengthened against sin and protected from death.

All humanity is caught in a system of sin; our very life, every advantage, and privilege are forfeited by our sin and the heritage of sin that we inherit. Every good work, every offering to God, is empty of meaning and can gain no access to God because it is covered by injustice. Thus, we need justification; some satisfaction must be offered. However, by our own merits, we cannot obtain this satisfaction because what we have spurned is infinite in value, and our works are finite. Therefore, only one who was himself greater than all created goods could make an offering suitable for satisfaction. By Baptism, we all participate in this offering and make it our own. Our sins are washed away by a new, free, and unmerited grace.

The newly Baptized are reborn as a son or daughter of God, an ark for the Holy Spirit to dwell within. It is the way in which one enters and embraces our status as a child of God, and this relationship, as the relationship of any child to their parent, is established as a permanent reality. We speak of this permanent state of relationship with God, this divine adoption, as an “indelibly marked” that can never be destroyed even by sin.

Baptism makes us members of the Church, which is the Body of Christ. We become part of "a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people of his own, so that you may announce the praises" 1 Peter 2:9. Baptism initiates a common bond with all Christians seeking to be in communion with the Trinitarian God (Father, Son, and Holy Spirit). A common group of people who have been saved by their faith in Jesus Christ through the grace of Baptism.

WHO CAN BE BAPTIZED, AND WHO CAN BAPTIZE?

Anyone who has not been baptized and has been instructed in preparation for receiving God into their life can be baptized. Infants and young children can be baptized if their parents and/or godparents have received instructions and pledged to foster the child's Christian faith.

Anyone can baptize someone if they have the right intentions and follow the appropriate rite (CCC 1256). This is used solely for emergencies when someone is about to die, and a Catholic priest or deacon is not available. A right intention entails the desire to fulfill the purpose of Baptism as per the Catholic Church. The rite requires water and specific words and actions to be valid.

WHEN CAN YOU BE BAPTIZED?

From the moment after birth until the moment before death. It is never too early or too late to be born again in the Holy Spirit and marked as a child of God. Before Baptism, one should be appropriately instructed in the meaning and purpose of this beautiful and life-changing sacrament of initiation.

WHERE CAN YOU GET BAPTIZED?

In ancient times, it was outside of a church since it was a "prerequisite" or "gateway" to entering full communion with the Church. It might have even been at a river or lake. Now, most Baptisms are performed within a church at a baptismal font, which could be in the narthex, the back of the church, or near the altar. This format has been adopted because most baptisms are for infants, and those who are being baptized are no longer restricted from entering the church sanctuary. Also, since Baptism is the sacrament by which we enter the Church, it is fitting that Baptism is done in a church, the place dedicated as the common home of the faithful and the house of God. This is also why Baptisms should be done by the priests or deacons because they stand at the head of the household, the community.

WHY DO CATHOLIC CHRISTIANS GET BAPTIZED?

Christians are baptized first and foremost because it is the sign that Christ established for becoming his disciple and participating in the victory over sin that he won for us: "Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit." Matthew 28:19

Christians are baptized to begin a permanent relationship with God. It is the first step in a journey towards the paradise that God our Father has prepared for us. It cleanses us from original sin that we received from Adam and Eve. It does not remove our tendency to sin, or concupiscence, but through sanctifying grace, we are strengthened against it.

Baptism is the prerequisite or gateway to all the other sacraments. One cannot receive the other sacraments or be in full communion with the Church until they have been baptized. It is the ordinary means by which we enter eternal life, by which we receive the redemption won by Christ, outside of which there is no salvation. While this is the certain path established by Christ, it does not mean that redemption is impossible for those who are not baptized. While we are bound to enter communion with God through the concrete means through which he promised to act, God's actions in the world are not limited to the sacraments, and each person will be judged according to their desire to seek God and participate in his plan.

This applies in a special way to those who pass from this life in infancy before Baptism. These we commend to the mercy of God, who will not condemn the innocent. We should not, however, relativize or cheapen the Sacrament of Baptism because it is the sacrifice of Christ; by it, we are washed in the blood of the Lamb. By the Baptism of the child, we recognize and affirm that there is no redemption outside of Christ.

BAPTISM PREPARATION FOR NON-PRACTICING AND/OR UN-MARRIED PARENTS

Through Baptism, God enables us to participate in his life in Jesus Christ and makes us his children. It is through this sacrament that we receive the Holy Spirit and become members of the People of God, of the Body of Christ, which is the Church. Baptism becomes our commitment to grow in this new life and to strive to acquire spiritual maturity. By baptism, God purifies us from sin.

Baptism is the sacrament of faith that has the Risen Christ as its source, and it is the offer of salvation for all people. Intimately linked to Confirmation and to Eucharist, Baptism is, with these two sacraments, Christian Initiation. The child is baptized in the faith of their parents, godparents, and of the Church. Parents are the first teachers of the faith to their children. If you, the parents, are non-practicing in the faith, you will be required to meet one-on-one with a parish priest or deacon.

Your marital status will be clarified during the baptismal preparation process. Baptism is not denied if the parents are unmarried or not married in the Roman Catholic Church. However, there may be reason to postpone Baptism if parents are not practicing the Faith or have no intention of living a Catholic life in harmony with the Gospel. If your status is not in harmony with the Roman Catholic understanding of sacramental marriage, you will be required to meet one-on-one with a parish priest or deacon. Also, you may inquire as to how we may help you enter a proper sacramental marriage or, if need be, seek a declaration of nullity by the Church.

Throughout this process, if you have any questions, please do not hesitate to contact the parish office. We would be more than happy to help you.

Sincerely in Christ,

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BAPTISMAL PREPARATION CHECKLIST

- _____ Register to become a member of St. Paul the Apostle Church
- _____ Complete online baptismal registration form
- _____ Purchase Ascension Press' "Belonging Series" (\$9.95)
- _____ Complete the "Belonging Series" and send in the certificate of completion to Annette
- _____ Schedule and attend in-person baptismal prep, offered once a month
- _____ After in-person meeting, contact Annette to schedule Baptism

BAPTISMAL PREPARATION DOCUMENTS

These documents will be needed prior to scheduling the Baptism date.

- _____ Birth certificate
- _____ Baptismal registration form
- _____ Certificate of completion for the "Belonging Series"
- _____ Godparent eligibility form (filled out)
- _____ IF NECESSARY—Christian Witness eligibility form (filled out).

GODPARENT & CHRISTIAN WITNESS REQUIREMENTS

According to Canon Law, you must have at least one active, confirmed Roman Catholic Godparent who is in good standing with the Church. You, as parents, may choose two Godparents. However, there can only be one female godparent and one male godparent.

If only one Godparent exists, another person **may** serve as a *Christian Witness* at the Baptism (though not required).

A *Christian Witness* simply “witnesses” the celebration of the Sacrament of Baptism.

- The *Christian Witness* is an individual, at least 16 years of age, who has been baptized into Christ in a non-Catholic Christian community.
 - A *Christian Witness*' Baptism must be recognized and approved by the Catholic Church (i.e., with the Trinitarian baptismal formula).
 - A baptized person from a non-Catholic ecclesial community may be admitted only in company with a Catholic Sponsor and simply as a witness to the baptism. [Canon # 874.2]
- The *Christian Witness* is **not** a Godparent and, therefore, does not assume the responsibilities of a godparent.
- A *Christian Witness* cannot be listed as a Godparent because their life does not witness to the practice or support of the Catholic faith to which you, as parents, are professing to your child.
- The *Christian Witness* is not listed on the baptismal certificate or record.
- The *Christian Witness* cannot be the mother or the father of the person to be baptized. [Canon Law # 874.1.5]
- The *Christian Witness* cannot be Catholic. An ex-Catholic is still a Catholic, one who is under canonical penalty, having been excommunicated, and therefore not in good standing with the Catholic Church.

If a Godparent cannot be present at the Baptism, a *proxy* can be designated to witness the Baptism rite. A *proxy* must be designated in writing by the godparent and approved by the parents. A *proxy* will need to have the same qualifications as the Godparents. They will be listed in the baptismal record as “proxies.” A *proxy* is not listed on the baptismal certificate.

Please note: if someone is baptized a Catholic and currently attests to “having left the Catholic Church,” has not yet received **all** the sacraments of Initiation [Baptism, Confirmation, Eucharist], or is not an active member of a parish, then he/she cannot be a Godparent or a *Christian Witness*.

In the following pages, please find the document outlining the “role of a Godparent” and a certificate of eligibility from their parish or Christian community.

THE ROLE OF THE GODPARENT

The principal responsibility of a godparent is to give witness to the Catholic faith by his/her words and actions. The role is, together with the parents, to present the child for baptism and help it live a Christian life befitting the baptized and faithfully fulfill the duties inherent in baptism. When called upon to profess the Catholic faith on behalf of the infant, the godparent must believe in what he/she is professing.

Is the godparent expected to be someone who attends church every Sunday? It makes sense if they do. After all, you are asking this person to assist you in bringing up your child in the Catholic faith. The church reasonably expects parents and godparents to help the child "lead a Christian life in harmony with baptism." Baptism depends on the faith of the Church, expressed by parents and godparents. Therefore, they must live what they say they believe.

After the baptism, the godparent's role begins, not just sending presents on birthdays and Christmas. Ideally, a godparent will continue to pray for their godchild; keep in touch with them and their family; give a present or a card at the baptism anniversary and each sacramental milestone in the life of the godchild; lead the child by their example towards a Christian way of life; be supportive of the godchild's parents in their role as Christian parents and primary educators of their child.

THE HISTORY OF GODPARENTS

Godparents are a tradition in the Sacrament of Baptism that goes back to the early days of the Catholic Church. In those days, conversions came in two ways. In the first instance, whole families were received into the Church through the Sacrament of Baptism after they had been instructed and prepared by a friend or someone appointed by the Church. In the second instance, individuals were instructed and prepared by a friend, or someone appointed by the Church.

During those days, the first four centuries, the Catholic Church was under intense persecution by the Roman Empire. To avoid persecution and the infiltration of pagans into the Church, every person who was received into the Church was required to have a Godparent. This Godparent performed two roles. First, they protected the Church by authenticating the sincerity of the convert. Secondly, as a catechist, they supported the person as a candidate for the Church.

During the first centuries, emphasis was placed on the baptism of adults. That all changed when the Council of Trent (1545 - 1563) affirmed that Adam's disobedience not only transfused physical death to the individuals but also that all were born afflicted with a sin that is the "death of the soul." "Because of this certainty of faith, the Church baptizes for the remission of sins even tiny infants who have not committed personal sin." (C.C.C. # 403; Council of Trent: DS 1514)

In harmony with this new Decree and in consideration of the inability of an infant to speak for himself or herself, more than ever, it became necessary to appoint a godparent who would make the Profession of Faith in the child's name. This same person would also be responsible for instructing the child in the faith as if adopted by the Christian parents to protect their child's faith.

CERTIFICATE OF ELIGIBILITY FOR CATHOLIC GODPARENT(S)

GODPARENT FOR: _____

(Name of person being baptized or confirmed)

NAME OF ADDRESS & PARISH: _____

(Parish where Baptism or Confirmation to be held)

GODPARENT INFORMATION

I _____ affirm that:

(Please print first and last name)

- I am at least 16 years of age.
- I am a practicing Catholic registered at a parish.
- I have received the sacraments of Baptism, First Holy Communion, and Confirmation in the Catholic Church.
- I regularly participate in the Mass on Sundays and Holydays and receive the Sacraments of Eucharist and Reconciliation.
- I regularly contribute to the financial needs of the parish.
- If married, I am validly married according to the laws of the Catholic Church. If divorced, I have not remarried outside the Catholic Church.
- I actively strive to live out my commitment to Christ and the Church's community life through my loving response to those with whom I come in contact.
- I realize I assume a great responsibility before God and the Church in becoming a Godparent and will faithfully fulfill its obligations. I will support the person I am Godparenting by my prayers and the Christian example of my daily life.

By my signature, I attest to be a practicing Catholic who seeks to be admitted as a Godparent and solemnly affirm that I fulfill the requirements of the Catholic Church for this role as presented above. With God's grace, I intend to continue practicing my Catholic Faith, and I will, to the best of my ability, carry out the obligations of my role as Godparent.

(Godparent Signature)

(Date)

TO BE COMPLETED BY THE GODPARENT'S PARISH

This is to certify that _____ is
a registered member of the above-stated parish.

_____ is in good standing in this parish and that he/she meets the requirements for being
a Godparent.

_____ is registered in our parish as an active, practicing Catholic.

Priest Signature _____ Date: _____

Church of _____

Address _____

Phone # _____

CERTIFICATE OF ELIGIBILITY FOR CHRISTIAN WITNESS

CHRISTIAN WITNESS FOR:

(Name of person being baptized or confirmed)

NAME OF ADDRESS & PARISH: _____

(Parish where Baptism or Confirmation to be held)

CHRISTIAN WITNESS INFORMATION

I _____ affirm that:

(Please print first and last name)

- I am at least 16 years of age.
- I am a practicing Christian affiliated with a church.
- My baptism is recognized and approved by the Catholic Church (i.e., with the Trinitarian baptismal formula).
- I regularly participate in services on Sundays and Holydays
- I actively strive to live out my commitment to Christ and community life through my loving response to those with whom I come in contact.
- I am not an ex-Catholic, nor have I been baptized in a Catholic Church.

By my signature, I attest to be a practicing Christian who seeks to be admitted as a Christian Witness and solemnly affirm that I fulfill the requirements of the Catholic Church for this role as presented above.

(Christian Witness Signature)

(Date)

TO BE COMPLETED BY THE CHRISTIAN WITNESS'S CHURCH

This is to certify that _____ is
a registered/practicing member of the above-stated church.

_____ is in good standing in this church and that he/she meets the requirements for being
a Christian Witness.

Pastor Signature _____ Date: _____

Church of _____

Address _____

Phone # _____