

HOLY 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.

The Book of Common Prayer

Holy Baptism, along with the Holy Eucharist, is one of the primary sacraments of the Church. As a sacrament, it is a means of grace through which we receive the forgiveness of sins, a new life of grace, an inquiring and discerning heart, the courage necessary to persevere in the Christian life, the spirit to know and love God, and a profound sense of joy and wonder.

Baptism, however, is not simply an individual experience of salvation. Through the sacrament of Holy Baptism, God adopts us as His children. This divine action makes us members of Christ's body, the Church and inheritors of the kingdom of God. The celebration of Holy Baptism, then, is a celebration of, by, and for the Christian community. As we renew together our baptismal vows and gather before the font and the altar, we recognize that we are bound together by our common faith in Jesus Christ.

At St. Mary's we take seriously the call of God to live in Christian community. As our vision statement says:

St. Mary's Mission is to live in obedience to Jesus Christ and to make disciples who make disciples.

Living into this vision, we invite all who desire and seek God to be a part of this Christian community. For those who seek Baptism, we invite you to spend several months with us, to discern if we are the community of faith for you. During that time of seeking, we invite you to talk with the Rector and clergy about the possibility of Baptism for you or your children. We hope and pray that you will join us and that you will experience God's wondrous grace and love through this family of God.

Forming a community takes time: time to know each other and to see God's incarnate Love in our midst. For this reason it is important that those who come to the font be members of the Parish who commit themselves to undertake the solemn vows of Holy Baptism. That is why we invite those new to our Parish to spend time with us before seeking Baptism.

This booklet contains guidelines for preparing for Holy Baptism. These guidelines are meant to enhance our welcoming of the newly baptized into the household of God. Once you have had an opportunity to read this booklet, please call the Rector to establish a time to discuss your questions and hopes.

BAPTISMS IN THE EPISCOPAL CHURCH

The *Book of Common Prayer* provides the following guidelines for Baptisms in the Episcopal Church:

- ❖ Holy Baptism is appropriately administered within the Eucharist as the chief service on a Sunday or other feast.
- ❖ Holy Baptism is especially appropriate at the Easter Vigil, on the Day of Pentecost, on All Saints' Day or the Sunday following, and on the Feast of the Baptism of our Lord.
- ❖ The bishop, when present, is the celebrant; and is expected to preach the Word and preside at Baptism and the Eucharist. In the absence of a bishop, a priest is the celebrant and presides at the service.
- ❖ Each candidate for Holy Baptism is to be sponsored by one or more baptized persons.
- ❖ 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. Sponsors of infants, commonly called godparents, present their candidates, make promises in their own names, and also take vows on behalf of their candidates.
- ❖ It is fitting that parents be included among the godparents of their own children. Parents and godparents are to be instructed in the meaning of Baptism, in their duties to help the new Christians grow in the knowledge and love of God, and in their responsibilities as members of this Church.

BAPTISMS AT ST. MARY'S

At St. Mary's we believe Holy Baptism is complete initiation into the Christian community. Therefore, Baptism is a public commitment to a life of corporate worship, fellowship, education and outreach. Since both the candidate and the congregation have a responsibility to one another, families interested in Baptism are encouraged to be involved in the life and fellowship of the community of faith.

Following are the steps to take toward participating in the sacrament of Holy Baptism:

STEP ONE: CONTACTING THE RECTOR

The first step toward participating in the sacrament of Holy Baptism is a call to the Rector. The Rector will discuss with the candidate or the candidate's parents the best time available for Holy Baptism. For those new to the Parish this discussion will include ways of becoming more fully incorporated into the Parish family.

Selecting the date for Baptism is a very important decision. It involves not only liturgical preparation but family preparation. Many families invite out-of-town guests and need to know the date well in advance. Following the guidelines of *The Book of Common Prayer*, we celebrate Holy Baptism on the major baptismal feasts of the Church: Baptism of Our Lord, the Great Vigil of Easter, Pentecost, and All Saints' Day (or the Sunday following). In consultation with the Rector, you may choose which of these feasts is best for you. The dates in coming years in which baptism will be administered are:

<u>Feast</u>	<u>2009</u>	<u>2010</u>	<u>2011</u>
Baptism of Our Lord	January 11	January 10	
Great Vigil of Easter	April 12	April 3	
Pentecost	May 31	May 23	
All Saints' Day	November 1	November 7	

At other times, especially if the next Baptism is months away, the service for the Thanksgiving of the Birth or Adoption of a Child may be appropriate. The Rector will be pleased to discuss this option with you. This liturgy is especially appropriate for use with immediate and extended family and friends.

In a medical emergency, Holy Baptism will be administered immediately. Please call any of the clergy at any time.

STEP TWO: INCORPORATION

Following this discussion with the Rector, the second step is to become more fully incorporated into the life of the Parish. The hope of the Parish is that those seeking Baptism will live fully into the community. This includes worshipping regularly, participating in educational and fellowship opportunities, and making a financial commitment to the Parish.

For those who have been inactive or who have recently joined the Parish, this period of incorporation can take up to six months. The period of incorporation will be facilitated by the clergy. This time frame allows a nurturing system to develop. The family has time to determine whether or not they wish to become an active part of this Parish; the Parish has the opportunity to get to know you and to incorporate you into the life of the Parish.

Near the end of this incorporation period, as the Baptism draws near, a baptismal mentor will be available to you to provide support throughout the baptismal process.

STEP THREE: SELECTING SPONSORS

Sponsors are those persons who accept the responsibility for helping the new Christian grow in the knowledge and love of God. They also assist him or her in learning and accepting their responsibilities as members of the Church.

Both parents and godparents are sponsors; we suggest a minimum of two godparents in addition to the parents. While parents are active members of this Parish, godparents may be members in good standing with another Christian congregation. Since we take seriously the need for regular Christian nurturing, we encourage those preparing for Baptism to have at least one godparent from our Parish.

STEP FOUR: PREPARATION AND INSTRUCTION

Responsibility for preparation is shared by the Parish and the candidate or parents and sponsors. Since Baptism is the responsibility of the entire Christian community, the Parish provides instruction and support. The candidate, or in the case of infants, the parents and sponsors, commits time to worship, education and ministry.

Instruction

Instruction is a vital part of baptismal preparation. All parents and sponsors, or the candidates if adult, are invited to a pre-baptismal session. This session is normally held the Saturday morning prior to the date of the Baptism. This session has two parts: First, approximately one hour is spent discussing the nature, meaning and purpose of Holy Baptism. Second, for approximately one-half hour the specific details of the liturgy are rehearsed. This instruction is only part of a life-long journey of Christian formation. Our hope and invitation for all participants, both candidates, parents and sponsors, is to continue your spiritual growth through the various education programs of the Parish.

Support

The Parish provides support in several ways. First, each candidate has baptismal mentor who will assist you during the period of preparation as well as on the day of the Baptism itself. The mentors also sponsor a dinner for the baptismal families which occurs in the weeks immediately before or after the Baptism. Second, each candidate is prayed for during the celebration of Holy Eucharist in the weeks prior to Baptism. Third, following the Baptism a parish-

wide reception is held in honor of the candidates and their families. Finally, at the reception each candidate is presented with a gift from the Parish.

STEP FIVE: THE LITURGY

Clergy

Each member of the clergy shares in the ministry of Holy Baptism. When you talk with the Rector to discuss Baptism, one of the clergy will be scheduled to work with you. Because St. Mary's is the sponsoring congregation at Baptism, one of our parish priests celebrates the sacrament. Clergy from other Churches may be invited to assist at the discretion of the Rector.

Church

Since Holy Baptism is the rite of Christian initiation into the Church, it is critically important that the Sacrament be celebrated with the congregation present. The practice allows the newly baptized to be included in the Parish family; it charges the congregation to support the candidates in their life in Christ; and it offers each parishioner the opportunity to renew his or her baptismal vows. Special seating for parents, godparents and family guests is reserved at the back of the nave near the baptismal font.

Videotaping/Photography

Arrangements may be made with the Rector ahead of time to videotape the baptism. Remembering that Holy Baptism is a service of worship of Almighty God, we ask that **no photographs be taken during the liturgy itself**. Photographs may be taken before and after the liturgy if you desire.

Fees

As with all the sacraments of the Church, there are no fees for Holy Baptism in this Parish.

STEP SIX: LIVING OUR BAPTISM IN THE CHURCH AND THE WORLD

Holy Baptism is not an end but a beginning. Through the sacrament one is empowered by divine grace for a life-long journey with Christ. As the Vision Statement of St. Mary's says:

St. Mary's Mission is to live in obedience to Jesus Christ and to make disciples who make disciples.

St. Mary's offers many opportunities for deepening this relationship, both in spiritual growth and Christian outreach. Your baptismal mentor and the clergy can assist you in finding ways for you and your family to become more deeply involved.

Welcome to a new life in Christ. Our commitment, as a holy family formed by God's grace, is to take this Christian journey together. We look forward to sharing both the struggles and the joys that lie ahead.

Our church doors are always open to provide you with a place of peace and prayer. The clergy are always available for support, care and ministry.