

PREPARATION FOR HOLY BAPTISM

An orientation for those about to be baptized, their parents and their sponsors.

1. Welcome & introductions.
2. Confirm the date, time and location for the baptism service.
3. Fill out **INFORMATION FOR CHURCH RECORDS AND CERTIFICATES** (white form).
4. Preview the order of service and related matters:
 - Arrival time
 - Seating locations
 - The basic shape of the baptism service (see page 3)
 - The order of service (see pages 5-8)
 - When to come to the font and where to stand
 - What to say and do and when to say and do it
 - What not to do: flash photography (especially at night).
5. The Meaning Of Baptism
 - Why baptize infants? (see pages 9-12)
 - Baptism is ordination (page 13)
 - Baptism is adoption (page 13)
 - Baptism is being born again (page 13)
 - What Martin Luther says (see page 14)
 - Baptism is rescue from drowning (see the screen play” on pages 15-17)
6. The Role Of Sponsors
 - Their part in the order of service (see page 5)
 - Their role in the life of the baptized (see page 18)
 - Godparenting 101 (see pages 19-22)
 - Letter to sponsors (given at the orientation)
7. Questions
 - No such thing as a dumb question
 - *“I always wondered about...”*
8. Closing Prayer



THE BASIC SHAPE OF THE BAPTISM SERVICE

God brings those who are baptized out of death and into life.

Presentation

The Holy Spirit calls and invites us to receive God's grace. Sponsors present those to be baptized, promise our support.

Profession of Faith

Only by God's grace can we renounce the forces of evil and the power of sin. With the whole church, we confess our faith in the triune God.

Thanksgiving at the Font Baptism

With thanksgiving, God's saving deeds are remembered. Dying with Christ in baptism, the child of God is raised to new life through water and the Word.

Prayer for the Holy Spirit Sign of the Cross

Additional signs proclaim the meaning of baptism. We pray that the gift of the Holy Spirit sustain the baptized. The baptized are marked with the cross of Christ forever.

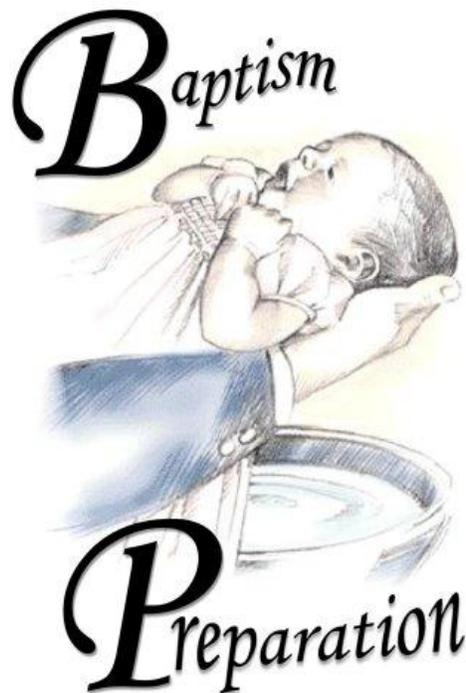
Welcome

The baptized are called to follow Jesus, the light of the world. We welcome new companions in the mission of God.

In holy baptism the triune God delivers us from the forces of evil, puts our sinful self to death, gives us new birth, adopts us as children, and makes us members of the body of Christ, the church.

The Christian community at worship celebrates God's gift of baptism in a number of ways. The sacrament itself normally takes place in the midst of the worshipping assembly as a sign that in baptism we are made one with Christ and with the whole people of God. On behalf of the whole church, we promise support to new sisters and brothers, confess the faith with them, and welcome them into the body of Christ. Water connected to the Word-God's saving promise in Jesus Christ – is at the center of the baptismal celebration.

Although a person is baptized once, the gift of baptism continues throughout a Christian's life. Instruction in the faith for a life of discipleship is part of the preparation of those who are to be baptized or their parents and sponsors. The ongoing nurture of that faith is part of the congregation's ministries of formation, education, service, and evangelical witness.



THE SACRAMENT OF HOLY BAPTISM

1. PRESENTATION

Candidates for baptism, sponsors, and parents gather with the ministers at the font. The assembly is seated. The presiding minister may address the assembly in these or similar words:

P In baptism our gracious heavenly Father frees us from sin and death by joining us to the death and resurrection of our Lord Jesus Christ. We are born children of a fallen humanity; by water and the Holy Spirit we are reborn children of God and made members of the church, the body of Christ. Living with Christ and in the communion of saints, we grow in faith, love, and obedience to the will of God.

Sponsors for each candidate, in turn, present the candidates:

Sponsor/s: I/we present *first & middle name* for baptism.

The presiding minister addresses candidates who are able to answer for themselves:

P *Name*, called by the Holy Spirit, trusting in the grace and love of God, do you desire to be baptized into Christ?

Each candidate responds:

I do.

The presiding minister addresses parents or others who bring for baptism children who are not able to answer for themselves:

P Called by the Holy Spirit, trusting in the grace and love of God, do you desire to have *your children* baptized into Christ?

Parents: I do.

The presiding minister continues:

P As you bring *your children* to receive the gift of baptism, you are entrusted with responsibilities:

to live with *them* among God's faithful people,
bring *them* to the word of God and the holy supper,
teach *them* the Lord's Prayer, the Creed, and the Ten Commandments,
place in *their* hands the holy scriptures,
and nurture *them* in faith and prayer,
so that *your children* may learn to trust God,
proclaim Christ through word and deed,
care for others and the world God made,
and work for justice and peace.

Do you promise to help *your children* grow in the Christian faith and life?

Parents & Sponsors: I do.

The presiding minister addresses sponsors:

Sponsors, do you promise to nurture *these persons* in the Christian faith as you are empowered by God's Spirit, and to help them live in the covenant of baptism and in communion with the church?

Sponsors: I do.

The presiding minister addresses the assembly:

P People of God, do you promise to support *name/s* and pray for *them* in *their* new life in Christ?

We do.

The assembly stands.

2. PROFESSION OF FAITH

The presiding minister addresses candidates for baptism as well as the parents and sponsors of young children. The assembly may join in the responses.

I ask you to profess your faith in Christ Jesus, reject sin, and confess the faith of the church. Do you renounce the devil and all the forces that defy God?

Response: I renounce them.

Do you renounce the powers of this world that rebel against God?

Response: I renounce them.

Do you renounce the ways of sin that draw you from God?

Response: I renounce them.

The presiding minister addresses the candidates and the assembly.

Do you believe in God the Father?

**I believe in God, the Father almighty,
creator of heaven and earth.**

Do you believe in Jesus Christ, the Son of God?

**I believe in Jesus Christ, God's only Son, our Lord,
who was conceived by the Holy Spirit,
born of the virgin Mary,
suffered under Pontius Pilate,
was crucified, died, and was buried;
he descended to the dead.
On the third day he rose again;
he ascended into heaven,
he is seated at the right hand of the Father,
and he will come to judge the living and the dead.**

Do you believe in God the Holy Spirit?

**I believe in the Holy Spirit,
the holy catholic church,
the communion of saints,
the forgiveness of sins,
the resurrection of the body,
and the life everlasting. Amen.**

3. THANKSGIVING AT THE FONT

Water may be poured into the font before or during the thanksgiving. At the font, the presiding minister begins the thanksgiving:

The Lord be with you.

And also with you.

Let us give thanks to the Lord our God.

It is right to give our thanks and praise.

We give you thanks, O God, for in the beginning your Spirit moved over the waters and by your Word you created the world, calling forth life in which you took delight. Through the waters of the flood you delivered Noah and his family, and through the sea you led your people Israel from slavery into freedom. In the river Jordan your Son was baptized by John and anointed with the Holy Spirit.

By the baptism of Jesus' death and resurrection you set us free from the power of sin and death and raise us up to live in you.

Pour out your Holy Spirit, the power of your living Word, that those who are washed in the waters of baptism may be given new life. To you be given honor and praise through Jesus Christ our Lord, in the unity of the Holy Spirit, now and forever.

Amen.

The assembly may be seated.

4. BAPTISM

The presiding minister baptizes each candidate. Water is poured on the candidate's head, as the presiding minister says:

Name, I baptize you in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit.

Amen.

After all have been baptized, the congregation usually responds with a brief hymn: "Halle, Halle."

Everyone at the font moves forward to the altar, standing at the altar rail, facing the altar.

The presiding minister continues.

Let us pray. We give you thanks, O God, that through water and the Holy Spirit you give your daughters and sons new birth, cleanse them from sin, and raise them to eternal life.

Laying both hands on the head of each of the newly baptized, the minister prays for each:

Sustain *name* with the gift of your Holy Spirit: the spirit of wisdom and understanding, the spirit of counsel and might, the spirit of knowledge and the fear of the Lord, the spirit of joy in your presence, both now and forever.

Amen.

The presiding minister marks the sign of the cross on the forehead of each of the baptized. Oil prepared for this purpose may be used. As the sign of the cross is made, the minister says:

Name, child of God, you have been sealed by the Holy Spirit and marked with the cross of Christ forever.

Amen.

A lighted candle is given to each of the newly baptized (to a sponsor of a young child) as the pastor says:

Let your light so shine before others that they may see your good works and glorify your Father in heaven.

5. WELCOME

The ministers and the baptismal group face the assembly. A representative of the congregation leads the assembly in the welcome.

Let us welcome the newly baptized.

We welcome you into the body of Christ and into the mission we share:

join us in giving thanks and praise to God

and bearing God's creative and redeeming word to all the world.



WHY BAPTIZE INFANTS?

The first mention of baptism in the Bible occurs early in each of the four Gospels. In these accounts the colorful wilderness preacher, John the Baptist, lifts his strident voice to call a self-righteous but beleaguered populace to repentance and baptizes those who respond. It catches on like wildfire. Soon "all Jerusalem" parades to the Jordan River to be baptized by the man who lives off the land and dresses in animal skin.

John's water baptism symbolized cleansing; the decision to be baptized initiated a changed life for contrite adults. But to claim that God, through baptism, actually changes an infant's relationship to himself in our day, as some Christian churches teach, seems fantasyland to many people.

Today, however, probably at least 85 percent of all Christians have been baptized in infancy. But lately an increasing number of those so baptized express the wish that they themselves might recall the experience of baptism - much along the lines of what John's baptism meant to people. Part of the problem for those who question the baptizing of infants is the failure to recognize the difference between John's baptism and that which Christ established (see Acts 19:4-5).

THE QUESTION

A new emphasis on direct experience, a smoldering spirit of anti-institutionalism, and an increasingly scientific approach to biblical studies have combined with the natural tendency of people to question ancient practices in the church and have raised the question: Why baptize infants?

Let's face the issue squarely. How did the church get this practice and is there justification for continuing it? Does infant baptism among Lutherans, for example, rest on any foundation other than Luther's centuries-old catechism?

Basic to the question is this statement attributed to Jesus: "That which is born of the flesh is flesh, and that which is born of the spirit is spirit" (John 3:6). In other words, because they are members of the human family, infants are inheritors of sinful inclinations. Sinfulness is a universal condition. Paul points out in Romans 3:23: "All have sinned and fall short of the glory of God." Infants, like adults, need help from God.

BAPTISM SAVES

God's love for the human race, evidenced by his costly plan for its salvation through the death of his Son, Jesus Christ, made provision for us to come to him in spite of our sinful condition. That provision includes baptism. When applied to any human being who does not reject or despise it, baptism establishes a new relationship with God. Through Christian baptism, we have our sin forgiven, become heirs of eternal life, and can remain his children forever. Amazing grace!

In his Large Catechism Luther wrote that baptism is a living, saving water. The power, effect, benefit, fruit, and purpose of baptism to bring to completion that restored relationship to God that Jesus' atonement gained for all humanity. In 1st Peter 3:21 we are told: "Baptism...now saves you, not as a removal of dirt from the body but as an appeal to God for a clear conscience, through the resurrection of Jesus Christ." If this is the case, then certainly a loving God would not provide baptism as a means for adults and make no provision whatever for infants who are just as precious in his sight.

JESUS COMMANDS

The most direct continuing reason for baptizing infants rests in the simple command that Christ gave to his church: "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" (Matt. 3:19). Note that all people of all nations are to be made disciples. It would be difficult to argue that children are not to be considered part of a nation's population until they reach a certain age. Even census takers require that all members of a family be counted regardless of their age. If children are that important to a nation, how much more precious they must be to the Lord who has given them life. Would God exclude infants when it comes to the method by which persons are reclaimed for fellowship with God for all eternity?

A look back into ancient church history shows some favorable testimony for infant baptism by the earliest church fathers. They testified to receiving the tradition of infant baptism from the apostles. The catacombs of Rome bear inscriptions with the names of children, indicating the dates of their deaths at ages ranging from a few months to a few years and stating that they had been baptized. The practice of infant baptism has a long and continuous, though not undisputed, history among Christians.

Our Lutheran view of baptism holds that baptism benefits infants because the power of baptism lies not in what humans do, but in what God does.

In fact, we do not bring anything to our baptism except our need. It is God who acts through this water, performing his miracle of grace. Nothing bars the infant from this benefit since the child neither rejects nor despises baptism or the grace of God. Jesus, in fact, said: "To such belongs the kingdom of God" (Mark 10:13-16).

The infant who is baptized receives all that Jesus' death and resurrection gained for humankind. The child does not contribute anything to his or her salvation; the infant is not in a position to contribute anything. But, then, neither are adults! Salvation is purely a gracious gift of God. Therefore, as with any good gift, the appropriate thing to do is to respond with love and faith to so generous a giver.

GOD INITIATES

It is important to remember that baptism is a sacrament complete in itself. It is a once-for-all-time experience. Even if a person afterwards walks away from God, rejects him, but later returns, that individual is not baptized again. Like the biblical prodigal, the lapsed person upon repentance reenters the covenant relationship which God not only initiated but which he also never canceled.

God wants all people to be saved and has made provision through Christ for anyone to be saved. "He who believes and is baptized will be saved" (Mark 16:16) is a reliable word. For infants, "believing" is not a condition arrived at rationally. It is, rather, a broad description of a new relationship to God who creates a kind of faith-relationship in the heart of the infant. God now has chosen the baptized child as his own, and through this baptism he will save that child through the "washing of regeneration" (Titus 3:5). The second birth has now superseded the first. The inheritance of sin, which was a part of the human birth, is now removed and in its place is the inheritance of eternal life through the gift of God. That relationship must be nourished or it will be lost, but of itself it is a full incorporation into fellowship with God.

It must be added that when an infant is brought into fellowship with God through baptism, he or she also is brought into fellowship with all believers. The child becomes a part of the household of faith, the church. In that household the baptized one is nurtured, fed, and cared for spiritually. As the child grows he or she will learn more about what it means to live as a redeemed and chosen member of God's family. Such a person will be able to rejoice in the confidence that he or she

belongs to Christ. No one can pluck a person out of the hand of the One who chose that individual in baptism, washed away all sin, and lifted him or her out of the water into the fellowship of all believers. Only the person himself or herself can break that relationship willfully or carelessly.

God has made it clear that the covenant relationship also includes children. And the provision for their entry into the kingdom—this relationship—is clearly stated in John 3:5: "Unless one is born of the water and the Spirit, he cannot enter the Kingdom of God." God has created a sacrament by which he will establish this relationship with an infant as with any believing adult. Therefore, we can be assured that God will receive children as his own, washed clean from sin, delivered from death and the devil, and claimed by him as members of the kingdom to live with him forever.



Through water God touches a weak and vulnerable
crown of his creation and says

YES!

- ✦ You are incorporated into Christ and into his body, the church.
- ✦ You are initiated, adopted into my covenant people
- ✦ You are called! Chosen! Saved! Born again!
- ✦ You are forgiven - free to live without excuses.
- ✦ You are ordained, set aside to be a minister.
- ✦ You are marked with the cross of Christ forever.
- ✦ You are given the gift of the Holy Spirit.

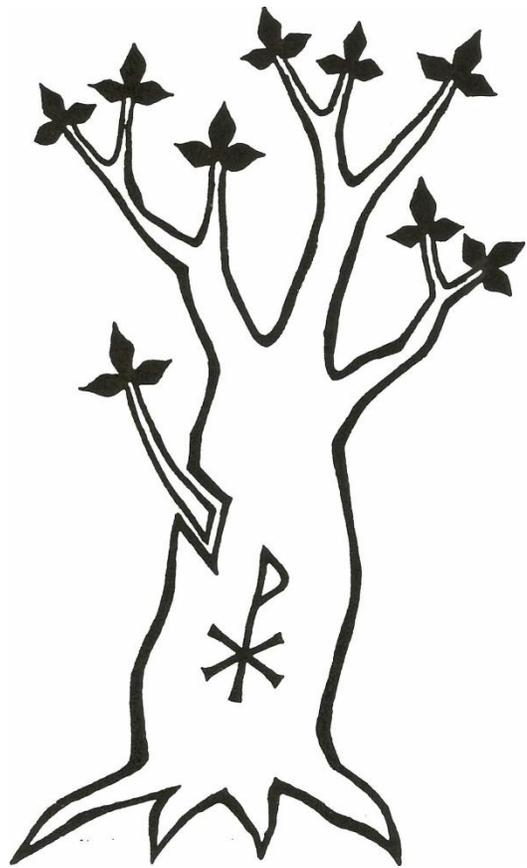
In the baptismal water we died with Christ.
We were crucified and buried in order that we
might be raised with Christ to live the new
life, to dwell in a new reality, a new order of
existence.

Because of Baptism we are Christians.
Never does our status before God depend on
...

- ✦ how we feel.
- ✦ having the right experience.
- ✦ being free of doubts.
- ✦ what we accomplish.
- ✦ our success or our position.

We are Christians because God surprised us.
Coming in water, God washed us and grafted
us into Christ. Our identity for all the days of
our life is set! We are children of God,
priests of the King, disciples of Christ, a
servant people, a holy nation, the communion
of saints, the followers of the Way, proclaimers of the Wonderful deeds of God.

Jesus' story becomes our story. Baptized into his death, we are raised to live as the
Body of Christ in the world today.



From: *Baptized We Live* by Dan Erlander

HOLY BAPTISM



1. What is Baptism? Baptism is not water only, but it is water used together with God's Word and by his command.

What is this Word? In Matthew 28, our Lord Jesus Christ says: "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)

2. What benefits does God give in baptism? In Baptism God forgives sin, delivers from death and the devil, and gives everlasting salvation to all who believe what he has promised.

What is God's promise? In Mark 16 our Lord Jesus Christ says: "He who believes and is baptized shall be saved; but he who does not believe will be condemned." (Mark 16:16)

3. How can water do such great things? It is not water that does these things, but God's Word with the water and our trust in this Word. Water by itself is only water, but with the Word of God it is a life-giving water which by grace gives the new birth through the Holy Spirit. St. Paul writes in Titus 3: "He saved us...in virtue of his own mercy, by the washing of regeneration and renewal in the Holy Spirit, which he poured out upon us richly through Jesus Christ our Savior, so that we might be justified by his grace and become heirs in hope of eternal life. The saying is sure." (Titus 3:5-8)

4. What does baptism mean for daily living? It means that our sinful self, with all its evil deeds and desires, should be drowned through daily repentance; and that day after day a new self should arise to live with God in righteousness and purity forever. St. Paul writes in Romans 6: "We were buried therefore with him by baptism into death, so that as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, we too might walk in newness of life." (Romans 6:4)

From:

Luther's Small Catechism



Baptism

A Screenplay



Imagine you are watching a movie, a drama. This is a story in three acts and a story that moves from one scene to another. Use your imagination now, and in your mind watch this "movie" that is taking place in three different places, at three different times. Yet all three scenes tell the same story. The three locations are a church, a tomb and a pool.

Act I

The Church

A mother and a father bring their little child to church to be baptized. Father holds the baby snugly in his arms as the pastor scoops up a handful of water and allows it to cascade over the baby's head. The pastor says, "*I baptize you in the name of the Father...*"

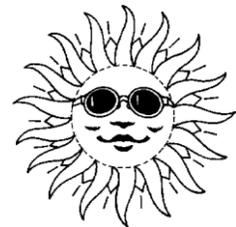


The Tomb

Jesus had just died on the cross. His friends untie the ropes and pull out the nails and lovingly lower his body to the ground. They make a simple stretcher out of a long piece of linen fabric and carry him to a waiting, empty tomb. There they lay his body on a cold stone shelf.

The Pool

It is a hot Summer afternoon at the park pool, which is filled with children of all ages, all of them seeking relief from the blazing sun. And many more are moving back and forth along the walkways surrounding the pool. The lifeguards are hoarse from shouting over and over, "*Walk!! Don't run! Walk!!*" Like many of the others, one child ignores the warnings of the lifeguards, but this one slips on the wet cement very near the edge of the deep end of the pool, hitting head very hard, and falls very quickly into the water.



ACT II

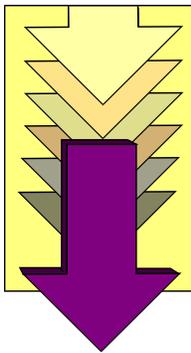
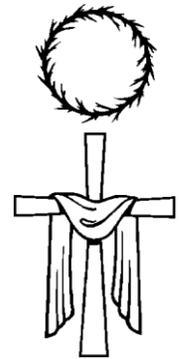


The Church

The pastor reaches again into the water and brings up a second handful of water. As it runs down through the soft hair on the baby's head, the pastor says, "*And in the name of the Son...*"

The Tomb

Once the body of Jesus had been placed in the tomb, the linen that had been used as a stretcher is hastily wrapped around the body. It is late on the eve of the Sabbath. They are not supposed to be here and working. They leave the tomb just as the soldiers are beginning to shove a huge, round stone. The stone is rolled roughly into place in front of the door of the tomb. And as it finishes its short journey, it falls into place with a resounding, "*Boom!*"



The Pool

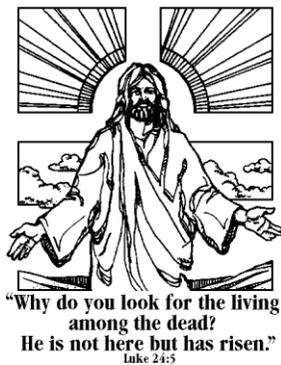
The little child's body slowly sinks to the bottom of the pool and comes to rest very near the drain. There is no movement. There are no bubbles from the mouth. No sign to anyone at all in the crowded pool that this child is in deep, deep trouble.

ACT III

The Church

The little baby's eyes are wide open now. Fully awake from the feel of the cool water, the child, along with those gathered around the font hear the pastor finally say, "*And in the name of the Holy Spirit¹. Amen!*"



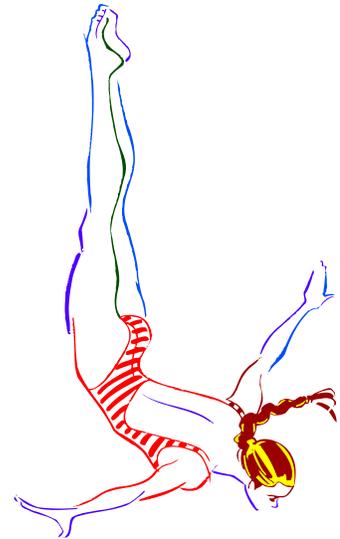


The Tomb

On Sunday morning, the friends of Jesus go to the tomb and are surprised: the stone has been rolled away. The tomb is empty. Jesus is not there. He has been raised from the dead.

The Pool

One of the lifeguards, sitting high on a tower next to the pool, suddenly sees a motionless shape at the bottom of the pool. She dives in and at the bottom of the pool scooped the little child's body into her arms. She pushes up and brings the little lifeless form to the surface. Others help to gently lift the child out of the water and onto the side of the pool, where she begins first aid. She tilts the head back, pinches the nose, and blows a breath into the lungs. Then another. And after the third breath of new life, there is a cough and the child awakens to a new life.



When you were baptized, what happened to Jesus happened to you.

When you were baptized, what happened to the little child in the pool happened to you.



In baptism, you are united with the death, burial and resurrection of Jesus. What *did* happen to him, *will* happen to you.

You are the little child in the pool. God is the lifeguard. God says, "*You are important to me and I will not let anything take you away from me.*"

¹ The in the Old Testament, Hebrew word *ruah*, and in the New Testament, the Greek work *pneuma* both can mean breath, wind, and spirit.

SPONSORS (*also known as God Parents*)

Each candidate, child or adult, should be presented for Baptism by one or more adult sponsors who are practicing Christians, mature in faith and piety. The sponsor represents in a specific way the congregation's desire to nurture those about to be born into the Christian family. Although the mobility of the population can create difficulties for the faithful discharge of the sponsor's responsibilities, especially where young children are concerned, this office continues to commend itself both symbolically and practically.

The primary sponsors of children are their parents, but additional sponsors may be chosen. They should be encouraged to remain close to the family of the child, just as the congregation should maintain close ties with baptized children. Parents obviously will exercise primary responsibility in the nurture of their children by the quality of family relationships, the development of a vital devotional life, and by direct teaching of God's word. But the sponsor can support the parents and cooperate in the task, giving it a dimension broader than the individual family. Because of their mutual responsibility, both parents and sponsors should participate in the baptismal liturgy.

Sponsors are not only for young children. When one enters the church, one passes from one community to another, from one world to another. Mature Christians can be helpful in that transition and can help integrate the new members into the various dimensions of the life of the parish. Too often new members are, in effect, deserted after being received into the congregation. Sponsors can help build a lifelong relationship that will benefit the candidate, the sponsors, and the congregation as a whole. Candidates may choose sponsors themselves or they may ask the congregation to make the choice.



GODPARENTING 101

An 11-year-old, when asked what his favorite part of the summer was, answered, “Reading comics with my godmother.” A woman in her 60s made a long plane trip to visit her godmother. It had been decades since they’d seen each other, but they had kept in touch all those years.

A teenager, when asked what she’d rescue from her burning house, named a stuffed toy that she’d had since she was a baby and a quilt her godmother had made. A five-year-old whose godfather gave him Dr. Seuss books started calling him “Uncle Horton.” Decades later, after drifting out of contact, the godson sought out Uncle Horton on the Web, and they struck up an adult friendship.

Sometimes it works. The relationship between godparent and godchild can be deep, meaningful, and lifelong. What it looks like concretely is as individual as the personalities of the two people involved. But it’s always a relationship that recalls for both people the ongoing meaning of God’s baptismal promise.

HOW DID GODPARENTING START?

In the early church, adult baptismal candidates had sponsors—Christians who vouched for their good character and accompanied them through the long process of becoming part of the Christian community.

Babies and small children didn’t need character witnesses, but someone had to speak the baptismal promises for them and take responsibility for those promises until the child matured. In the first centuries of the church’s life, a parent usually sponsored a child. By the beginning of the sixth century, people other than the parents were given that role.

We don’t know why this shift from parents to nonparent sponsors occurred. No record exists of any bishop or council advising this change, and the rule was established centuries after the custom started. Parents, in fact, may have begun the practice of asking other adults to act as sponsors, perhaps as a way to honor friends and ensure their interest in a child’s welfare. Imagine, a key sacramental role created by and for laypeople.

Martin Luther, although he noted that sponsorship was a human addition to the sacrament, commended it as an ancient and faithful practice. The Reformation churches generally carried on the job description for a godparent that had been

used since the sixth century: giving moral and spiritual guidance and teaching the child the things every Christian should know by heart, especially the Lord's Prayer and the creed.

A GODPARENT'S ROLE TODAY

Sponsorship always has been the church's way of giving people company on their faith journey. No one becomes a Christian in isolation; Jesus calls us into community. The baptismal sponsor represents the community's care for the baptized. The godparent—the sponsor—accepts responsibility along with the parents for the baby's or child's Christian nurture. Since the church hopes each child baptized will come to claim the community's faith as her or his own, the godparent is asked to be a spiritual mentor, to support the child's growth into faith.

Terms like “spiritual mentor” can make us itchy and uneasy. What am I supposed to do, ask him if he's gone to church? Give her a doll that says prayers? If we can only think of doing things that feel uncomfortably pious, we may have trouble seeing ourselves living out the spiritual side of godparenting.

You don't have to be a certified saint or a religious geek to be a child's spiritual mentor. You just have to be willing to form a relationship with the child, one of genuine appreciation and care. That takes time, lots of listening, sharing what the child enjoys, and regular visits if you live far away.

IDEAS FOR GODPARENTS

Then you get to find ways in that relationship to remind your godchild of baptism and to share faith and values:

- Mark his baptismal anniversary with him. Do something fun and water-related together.
- Take her to an Easter Vigil or to an Eastern Orthodox Easter midnight service: dramatic—and she gets to stay up late.
- Give him faith-related books or toys (good sources are www.beulahenterprises.org and www.vibrantfaith.org).
- Let her designate some of your charitable giving
- Talk with him (or draw pictures with him) about the names we use for God
- Ask her what she'd like you to say to God (about her) in your prayers.

- Play board games together that allow for discussion of feelings and values, like Life Stories and the Ungame.

Most of all, be there for your godchild in good times and bad, with a reminder that you've loved him "ever since I held you at your baptism."

IS GODPARENTING IMPORTANT?

One study of faith development among young people identified the top seven most important factors leading to commitment to faith. The first four have to do with the parents. The fifth is "a regular dialogue with an adult other than the parents on faith/life issues." Another study revealed that one of the most important factors associated with resiliency in young people was how many adults they named whom they felt they could talk to and go to for help. Some young people could name only one, the custodial parent.

Geographic mobility, the isolation of nuclear families from extended family, the loss of community in neighborhoods, and divorce are factors that make it harder for children and teens to develop relationships over time with adults other than their parents. At church we try to link kids with caring adults, Sunday school teachers, youth leaders, confirmation mentors, "church grandparents." But among all these roles, godparents have the unique advantage of a relationship that need not end if someone moves. They have the best chance of providing the child with a caring relationship that will last throughout the growing-up years and beyond.

IT'S NEVER TOO LATE

If you've lost touch with your godchild over the years, don't give up the ship. This is a lifelong relationship, and many godparents have managed to reconnect with their godson or goddaughter. One man lost touch with his godson when he moved away from the family. When the godson was in high school, the godfather contacted him by e-mail. They developed a close e-mail friendship in the years that followed.

Remember that even adults need older friends who love and support them in their faith journey. We all need to remember our baptism, to be reminded that our identity is rooted deep in the promise of God. It's the godparent's job to do that reminding. Write a note, by e-mail or the old-fashioned way, when your adult godson or goddaughter goes through an important transition. Let them know that

the promise of God is always there for them, no matter what changes they experience.

When one young man married, his godmother gave him a tablecloth, candlesticks, and a note about the importance of the family dinner. Another godparent gave a book of table graces when a godson's first child began eating at the table. When one woman's father died, her godmother wrote her a letter about how baptism speaks to us in all our losses the word of enduring love. Even if you're not at ease communicating your faith so explicitly, the mere fact that you stay connected and concerned as a godparent is a witness that one splash of water is enough grace for a lifetime.

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