



## **Parish of Saint Michael**

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Dear Parent(s),

Congratulations! On behalf of the staff and parishioners of Saint Michael Parish, we would like to welcome your child into the Church with love and prayers for the future peace and happiness of your entire family. Your child's Baptism is definitely a time for celebration and joy!

This booklet has been prepared to familiarize you with some guidelines and answers to frequently asked questions surrounding your child's Baptism. It probably will not answer all of your questions regarding this Sacrament and ceremony, so please, feel free to contact the priest or deacon of the parish if you require additional information.

### **I. The Preparation**

#### **For Starters ...**

There seems to be so much to do when caring for young children; it feels like you're busy 24 hours a day. We understand this, but encourage you not to see Baptism as just another thing to check off your newborn's "to-do" list. As a Catholic, you need to embrace this important step, and think about how you will incorporate this and all of the Sacraments into your child's life, so that they will one day become active members of the Church.

At conception, your child begins its life journey, and over time, he or she will grow into someone unique, whose features, personality and mannerisms make them special to you, your family and to God. The same happens with their spiritual life: through nurturing and example, this too will bud and the faith will be your child's support as they transition along the path to our Heavenly home. Your choice of Baptism for your child shows that you recognize the importance of God in your life and a desire for God and the Church to be an important part of your child's life as well.

#### **The First Step ...**

At Saint Michael Parish, the first step is for you to select a date for your child's Baptism. Baptisms are scheduled for the 3<sup>rd</sup> Sunday of the month at 1:00 pm in the Church. The priest/deacon may baptize up to four babies at this ceremony.

For first-time parents or parents who have not—with an older child—attended a Baptismal Instruction class, you must first register for this class with the Parish Secretary. Complete the [Baptismal Registration Form](#) and then call the Parish Office at 781-275-6318. The quarterly Baptismal Instruction class is held on the 1<sup>st</sup> Sunday of February, May, August, and November at 1:00 pm in the Parish Center, which is located directly behind the church. Once you have attended an Instruction class, a date can be set for the Baptism. The purpose of this Catechesis is to reacquaint you with the sacredness of Baptism, its significance in the life of your child, and to remind you of your obligations as you guide and direct your child now, and in the years ahead.

If you have previously attended a Baptismal Instruction class, please complete the [Baptismal Registration Form](#), return it to the Parish Secretary, and a meeting with the Pastor or deacon will then be set. Once the meeting has been held, the Baptism may be scheduled.

The Church encourages you to choose two Catholics as your Sponsors (Godparents); however, we are aware that many marriages today are with a person of another Faith denomination, so one sponsor may be chosen who is not Catholic. There ARE certain requirements relating to this situation, which the [Sponsor Catechesis and Verification Form](#) will address. The form must be completed in the presence of a priest. Please allow ample time as all forms must be returned to St. Michael Parish no later than 30 days before the Baptism. All necessary forms can be downloaded from the sidebar.

### **What is baptism?**

Baptism is the first of the seven Sacraments of the Church and the first of the three Initiation Sacraments (the other two being the Eucharist and Confirmation). Holy Baptism is the basis of the whole Christian life, the gateway to life in the Spirit; it is the door that gives access to the other sacraments. Through Baptism, we are freed from Original sin and reborn as children of God; we become members of Christ, are incorporated into the Church, and made sharers in her mission: "Baptism is the sacrament of regeneration through water in the word."

Baptism is God's most beautiful and magnificent gift. We call it gift, grace, Baptism, anointing, enlightenment, garment of immortality, bath of rebirth, seal, and most precious gift. It is called gift because it is conferred on those who bring nothing of their own; grace since it is even given to the guilty; Baptism because sin is buried in the water; anointing for it is priestly and royal as are those who are anointed; enlightenment because it radiates light; garment since it veils our shame; bath because it washes; and seal as it is our guard and the sign of God's Lordship.

### **Why do we baptize?**

Jesus taught us that your beautiful baby is not only *your* child, but God's child as well. And he went to enormous pains to include dying on the cross to show us how much he loves every one of us! Baptism is the sign, or sacrament, that he gave us to show his love. Sometimes people imagine that we have to be baptized to show our belief in God. In a sense, that's true, but Baptism is far more than that. It shows God's belief in us.

A smile from you usually brings your baby to life, giggling and wriggling. God's smile comes in Baptism. It is the sign that Original sin is wiped away and that we are precious to our heavenly Father. That really is a re-birth which it gives us new life. This is why some people compare the water of Baptism to the womb; others compare it to the tomb in which Jesus himself was laid. When your child emerges from the water, it is like being born again. This time, however, it isn't with the life you have given the child; but it is with the life—the Spirit—of Jesus, who now looks forward to receiving your child into eternal life.

### **Who can receive baptism?**

Every person not yet baptized can be baptized. Baptism is a once-in-a-lifetime event, open to all. It means that we become a member of God's family; we become a Christian. And we cannot become again what we already are! So, in the event that a baby was baptized previously at birth due to illness, the Baptism itself can't be repeated; however, it is desirable that you have a celebration in church and share in the prayers and blessings, which are part of the Baptismal ceremony. We recommend that you select sponsors (godparents) at this same time as well. Such a service is a lovely "thanksgiving" for the safety and well-being of your baby.

### **Why baptize an infant?**

Just as we need the love of our parents to grow as a human being, so do we need the love of our heavenly Father to grow as a child of God. Without love, we grow up unlovable. And the love we receive doesn't make us less free, but more free. Baptizing a baby, before the baby can make the slightest effort to do anything for his or her own salvation, says

very dramatically that all salvation is from God. Clearly, in the adult there must be an element of faith and some sign of accepting God's love. But the infant is carried to the baptismal font by the faith of the family.

### **What are the parents' responsibilities?**

You are the first and best teacher of your child in the ways of faith. It will be your responsibility to teach your child about God and the Church. Baptism is just the beginning of a person's faith journey. Your child needs to continue to grow in the knowledge and appreciation of God's love to complete their Christian initiation.

Christian initiation is accomplished by three Sacraments together – Baptism, which is the beginning of new life; Confirmation, whereby we are strengthened; and Eucharist, which is the Body and Blood of the Lord nourishing us during our journey. As a parent, you now need to help your child accomplish these next two sacraments.

As you help your child grow in the love of God, you will grow too; as you teach your child to pray, you will deepen your own prayer life. Your child's Baptism is only the beginning of a new life in which you will grow closer to one another in your family and closer to God.

### **Who can be a Sponsor (godparent)?**

The Church insists that at least one sponsor is a Catholic whose primary role remains that of supporting the parents in bringing up the child in the Christian Catholic faith. But most parents choose two godparents. When this happens, provided one sponsor is a Catholic, it is certainly allowable for a non-Catholic to act as a witness to the Baptism. It remains important however, that the non-Catholic is baptized and of sufficient age and maturity to appreciate their role. One godparent is sufficient and not more than two are allowed. In the latter case, one should be male and the other female. The object of these restrictions is the fact that the godparent contracts a spiritual relationship to the child and its parents, which would be an impediment to marriage.

Certain persons are prohibited from acting as godparents. They are as follows: the parents of the child, a Catholic who has not received the Sacraments of Initiation, a married person who is not validly married within the Church, a Catholic who has left the Faith for another Faith denomination and, in general, those who are objectionable on moral grounds.

### **What are the Sponsor's (godparent) responsibilities?**

Godparents go back to the days when most adult converts to the Christian faith had no Christian parents. Godparents spoke up for the baptized person and, if necessary, helped him or her grow in the faith. Today, in the vast majority of infant baptisms, these tasks belong primarily to the parents. But the godparents can still play a major role in the child's spiritual life; if they are willing to invest the time and energy. Godparents are there to support the parents in the spiritual upbringing of the child. They are required to have the intention of truly assuming the spiritual obligations of the parents for, in default of the child's parents, they are obliged to instruct the child concerning faith and morals. Parents should keep this in mind when selecting the godparents.

Godparents themselves should try to be a part of the child's life through adulthood. They should be a part of the child's First Communion and Confirmation celebrations. They should try to keep in touch with the child by being part of their everyday life or at least by visiting the child on special occasions and holidays. If the godparent cannot always be there, a periodic note or card would be an excellent way to encourage the child in their religious growth. The godparents can help further the child's religious experience with small religious gifts at religious milestones (for example, a child's bible at First Communion, a cross at Confirmation, etc.).

Parents can sometimes get caught up in the busy details of everyday life with young children. Godparents can, therefore, play an important role in encouraging a real enthusiasm in the child for the faith by spending special time with the child.

## II. The Baptism Day

### **What to bring to the Church ...**

Bring yourselves, your child, the godparent(s), and any family or friends you want to share in the Baptismal ceremony. The Parish will provide you with the new white garment (a small hand-made tunic fashioned by Ida Papilia, a parishioner of St. Michael Parish), and the baptismal candle as part of the baptismal rite. Customarily, the infants are brought to the church dressed in white baptismal gowns or suits, but any clothing is fine as long as the priest/deacon has access to the baby's breastbone so that he can anoint the baby with the Oil of Catechumen.

Cameras and video equipment are certainly welcome to capture this special moment. Before the ceremony begins, the priest/deacon will tell you the best place to stand for videotaping and taking pictures during the ceremony.

### **Arriving at the Church ...**

Please have the principals (the parents, child, and sponsors) at the church 15 minutes prior to the scheduled start of the ceremony; this will mean an arrival of no later than 12:45 pm for a 1:00 pm ceremony.

Each child being baptized will have one pew reserved with his or her name on it at the front of the church; the parents, child, and godparents should sit in this pew. Anyone else that you would like (e.g., siblings, grandparents, etc.) may sit with you in this pew as space permits. Any other family members and friends who cannot fit into the reserved pew are asked to sit somewhere behind the last reserved pew.

## **The Signs and Symbols of Baptism**

### **Water**

This is for cleansing and is a sign that our sins are washed away. Baptism cleanses us of Original sin with which we are all born. Water is also necessary for life and so is a sign, too, that the life of the risen Christ is ours.

### **Sign of the Cross**

A sign on something shows its origins or ownership; the sign of the cross is the mark of Christians. Parents and godparents trace it on a child's forehead to show that the baby belongs to Christ, who now offers his help and grace to face and overcome the sufferings of life.

### **Oils**

*Oil of Catechumen* is olive oil rubbed on the breast of the baby, just as athletes used to rub themselves with oil to strengthen and prepare them for the fight ahead. *Oil of Chrism* is a mixture of Olive Oil and Balsam (sweet-smelling ointment) and is rubbed on the crown of the head. It is a sign of sealing with the gifts of the Holy Spirit. The profession of faith, which you make on behalf of your child at baptism, will later be confirmed personally by your child at the Sacrament of Confirmation when Oil of Chrism will be used again. These oils are blessed by the bishop during Holy Week.

### **White Garment**

This garment is a relic of the new clothes worn by Christians after Baptism in the first centuries. It is a sign of innocence and the new life of resurrection.

### **Candles**

These symbolize Christ - the Light of the World. The Baptismal candle is lit from the Paschal candle, which stands near the altar at Easter as a sign of the risen Christ. The Baptismal candle reminds us that the light of Christ has entered the child's life; and its flame symbolizes the flame of faith that will burn through the life of the child.

## **Baptismal Register**

Your baby's Baptism will be recorded in the parish Baptismal Register. In years ahead, proof of Baptism may be obtained in the form of a certificate issued on the basis of this registration. Your child's confirmation, marriage or ordination will also be noted alongside this entry in the register.

## **The Ceremony**

### Welcoming

The ceremony begins with a warm welcome to you and your family and friends from the priest or deacon on behalf of the whole Church. The priest/deacon asks what name you have given your baby and whether you accept the responsibility of bringing up your child in the practice of the faith. With parents and godparents, he greets your baby with the sign of the cross. In the Gospel reading, Jesus speaks of the new life that Baptism brings. After the Gospel and Homily, prayers are offered for your baby, for you, and for your family. Finally, the prayers of the saints are asked for so that the Baptism becomes a gathering of the whole family of the Church.

### Washing

To prepare for the Baptism, the priest/deacon prays that your baby may be delivered from every evil and this prayer is reinforced by the anointing with Oil of Baptism as a sign of God's strengthening power. The water is blessed. Then the priest/deacon asks you to renew the vows which were made for you at your own Baptism, at the same time reminding you of your duty to bring up your child as a good Christian.

Now comes the heart of the whole ceremony! The priest/deacon pours the Baptismal water over your child's forehead three times, saying:

*"N., I baptize you in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit."*

### Worshipping

Your baby is now a Christian. Following an ancient custom, your baby is anointed with Oil of Chrism. "Christ" means "anointed one," for Jesus was given special work to do. He suffered, died and rose again to unite us to his heavenly Father. Your baby has the special work of living as a member of the Church. The offering of thanks and praise to the Father, which begins at Mass, is the beginning of an eternal life of joy.

### Witnessing

Your baby has been given the Spirit of Christ and so can reveal this life in the world. As a sign of this power to witness to Christ, the godmother wraps a white garment around your baby to show that he or she is a new creation clothed in Christ. Finally, the godfather is given a candle to light from the Paschal candle. This symbolizes the light of Christ that will shine on and through your child for life.

The ceremony is now over, and the Church sends you on your future life together as a family. Everyone prays together the prayer that Christ taught us, the Our Father. This is followed by special prayers for each parent and all who have joined in this joyful welcoming of a new Christian into the world.

### After the Ceremony ...

After the Rite of Baptism has concluded, the priest/deacon will be available to you for pictures. You may want to take pictures in front of the altar or by the baptismal font.

### III. Reminders

#### Donations

There is no charge for Baptism or any other church service. It is customary, however, for an offering to be made. This is at the discretion of the family and may be equivalent, for example, to the cost of a small family meal or an article of clothing for your baby. But if you cannot afford any offering, please don't be anxious; it is a purely voluntary contribution.

You may give any donation to the priest or deacon at the conclusion of the ceremony.

#### **This is just the beginning ...**

By its very nature, infant Baptism requires a post-baptismal catechumenate. Not only is there a need for instruction after Baptism, but also for the necessary flowering of baptismal grace in personal growth.

The most Holy Trinity gives the baptized sanctifying grace, the grace of justification, which:

- enables them to believe in God, to hope in Him, and to love Him through the theological virtues;
- gives them the power to live and act under the prompting of the Holy Spirit through the gifts of the Holy Spirit;
- and allows them to grow in goodness through the moral virtues.

Thus the whole organism of the Christian's supernatural life has its roots in Baptism.

#### **And Finally ...**

We opened this booklet with our offer to pray for and support your growing family. We would like to close it praying that your days be filled with God's abundant blessing, joy and peace. Be not afraid to share your love for God with others or to allow us to return the favor to you.

You are in our prayers now and always,

*The Priest, Deacon, and Baptismal Catechists of Saint Michael Parish*