

IMMACULATE CONCEPTION PARISH
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Dear Parents,

Congratulations! We join with you in thanking God for the gift of your child. This is indeed a busy and wonderful time in the life of your family.

We, the people of God, the church look forward to joining you on this journey of preparation. Preparing for the celebration of a sacrament is a time of joy and anticipation in the life of the church and in the life of the family.

The Baptismal preparation process at our parish includes the following:

- Reading the Baptismal Preparation Package.
- After prayer and discussion, if you feel ready to begin the preparation please return the **Baptismal information form** and the **Baptismal questionnaires** to the parish office. You are asked to provide the godparents with the material written for them and to keep the remainder of the package.
- Shortly after returning the forms, you will be contacted by a member of the priests' team and you will have a conversation regarding your desire to have your child baptized. If appropriate, this person will assist you in registering for a Baptismal preparation session. The member of the pastoral team will explain when Baptism is normally celebrated and how a date is selected. It is common practice for the Baptism to be celebrated **at least one month** after the preparation session.

- A preparation session is held monthly on the first Wednesday at 7:30 p.m. (welcoming at 7:15 p.m.) All godparents are required to attend this session. The member of the Priests team will assist you in registering for a session.
- We celebrate the sacrament of Baptism on Sunday at 1:30 p.m., immediately after the mass of 12:30 p.m.
- If you choose to continue with the preparation during the session you will receive instructions regarding the day of the Baptism.

Baptism is the first sacrament of initiation; Confirmation and Eucharist are the other two. Baptism leads the newly baptized person to the table of the Lord. Weekly participation in the Sunday Eucharist is a valuable sign that a person is disposed to celebrating the sacrament of Baptism and being open to the wonder and grace of God.

If you have been away from the weekly Sunday Eucharist, this is a wonderful time to return to the table of the Lord. It is Jesus who desires to nourish and feed us each Sunday at the table of the Word and the table of the Eucharist.

We pray that God will bless you and your family as you continue to grow in faith.

Fr. Antony Varghese, C.F.I.C

Belonging to a Parish Community

Baptism initiates a person into the life, death, resurrection and ascension of Jesus Christ. When Baptism is celebrated in a Church, the person is also initiated into that particular believing community and he or she assumes the rights and privileges of being Catholic, Lutheran, United, Anglican, etc.

Belonging is important. From the moment of birth, children seek to belong. To know the faces, voices and touch of those we call Mother and Father is essential in the development of a child. The need to belong is not limited to our family.

When a person comes seeking Baptism into the life of the Church, he or she is asking to belong. Although through the sacrament of Baptism one is initiated into life in Christ and the Church, there is another important way to belong.

We state our desire to belong to a parish community by formally registering in the parish. Registering is a rather simple act that brings responsibility and commitment. Belonging to a parish community is more than filling out a registration form. Registration means that we want to gather each Sunday with our brothers and sisters in Christ to worship God and that we want and intend to support the work of the Church.

In practical terms, the registration form allows the parish to know how many families live in the parish and it allows parish staff to contact families when this is deemed necessary. The parish roster is developed from the registration forms.

Supporting the work of the Church is the responsibility of all registered members. We support the work of our parish by sharing our time, talents and monetary resources. A weekly offering assists with the Church's ministry needs, provides a suitable location for liturgical celebrations and assists with the living accommodations of our priests. Using offertory envelopes assists everyone and it allows the church to provide a yearly receipt for income tax.

Although a parish is busy with many activities, the primary works of the Church are to praise and worship God, to proclaim the gospel and initiate new members. All these are the work of the entire parish community (all registered members).

When someone is seeking to celebrate a sacrament, it is only natural for the Church to inquire if the family is registered with the parish. Registration is a concrete sign that the family is involved in the life and work of the Church.

The Role of Godparents

As you begin to prepare for your child's Baptism, you are invited to reflect on the role and selection of a godmother and godfather. There are various customs and traditions that shape our understanding of the role and importance of godparents.

Prior to inviting a relative or close friend to assume the role of godparent it is important to understand what our church teaches.

- A godparent is to be at least sixteen years of age and have celebrated the sacraments of initiation in the Catholic Church (Baptism, Confirmation, Eucharist).

- The godparent is to be able and willing to enthusiastically profess his or her faith during the rite of Baptism and ready to model a Catholic Christian lifestyle. Naturally weekly participation in the Sunday Eucharist is a hallmark of a Catholic Christian life. (Canon 874)
- The child may have one or two godparents. The child does not have more than two godparents. If two godparents are chosen, one is to be a man and the other a woman. (Canon 873)
- A Christian from another denomination may act as a Christian witness; however, it is necessary to have one Catholic godparent. You may have only one Christian witness. (Canon 874)
- A Christian witness is a baptized Christian and a member of a non-Catholic ecclesial community. (e.g. Anglican, United, Presbyterian, etc.)

The role of the godparent should not be confused with that of a legal guardian. The relationship is spiritually based not legally based. Parents are invited to make their choice of godparents with the following in mind.

Inviting someone to be a godparent implies the following:

- ❖ **A request** by the parents for the assistance of the Christian community in general and the individual godparents in particular in raising their child in the Catholic faith.
- ❖ **An admission** by the parents of their awareness that they need this assistance.

- ❖ **An affirmation** of the faith of the individuals invited to be godparents and a challenge to them to witness their faith.
- ❖ **A statement** by the parents that they want their child to be positively influenced by the faith and lives of the people they have invited.
- ❖ **A reminder** to the entire community that it has a shared responsibility to support each of its members.

Godparents “must be firm believers, able and ready to help the newly baptized - child or adult - on the road of Christian life. Their task is a truly ecclesial (church) function.” (Catechism of the Catholic Church, #1255)

Prior to the Second Vatican Council and the revision and renewal of our sacramental rites during the Baptism of an infant, the godparents were asked to answer for the infant in rejecting Satan and professing faith. The 1989 **Rite of Baptism for Children** asks the parents and godparents to renew their own rejection of evil and to profess their faith so that they may offer these to nurture and foster the faith of the growing child.

In reflection upon the responsibilities of a godparent, it is apparent that what is asked of the godparent is really the mission each of us as Christians accepted as a part of our own Baptism. All of the baptized are to nurture faith and reach out to others in faith throughout our lives.

The godparent is to be a model, guide and witness for your child as he or she grows in faith. It is good when a godparent lives close to the family and is able to visit throughout the year. Before you invite someone, a relative or friend, to be your child's godparent you are encouraged to spend time in prayer seeking guidance and wisdom.

A CASE TO THINK ABOUT BEFORE BAPTISM

Author Unknown

Kevin and Joan's eyes flamed with anger when they heard my words: "No, I don't think I will baptize your baby this month." Experience had prepared me for their anger and resentment, but I knew this storm had to be confronted.

"But you've got to ... that's unfair!" objected Joan.

"What's unfair?" I questioned.

"You're a priest . . . you can't refuse to baptize a baby. That's unethical.

You're cheating our little girl."

A sharp answer would have destroyed everything. Now would I be able to salvage the wreckage of hurt feelings?

"Give me a chance and I'll try to explain," I cautioned.

"But I never heard of this before – a baby being refused Baptism!" said Kevin painfully.

"Let me try to explain," I calmly began. "I do not want to baptize your baby now because I do not think that you as parents really want to have your baby baptized."

This couple, whom I had never met before, had telephoned in the early afternoon to make arrangements about having their baby, a bright-eyed, seven-pound girl, baptized. Usually I cannot tend to the matter immediately, but since today was a very light day in the parish, I made the appointment for the early afternoon. Kevin and Joan were both in their early twenties. He worked for one of the engineering firms as a draftsman. Joan worked as a legal secretary for one of the law firm's downtown. They were very friendly and polite. Offering me a cup of tea, they spent a few moments discussing their planned holidays in the mountains. Joan then raised the reason for the appointment. Their situation presented three difficulties. First, Joan and Kevin no longer prayed or really considered it an important part of their married life. They both had stopped joining in Sunday Mass two years prior to their marriage. Nor did they feel the Church had all that much to offer their lives as adults. But this seemed the proper thing to do as new parents: to have your children baptized. This couple could not at first understand my reason for delay. They had been brought up with a clear understanding that all Catholic parents have a duty to present their children for Baptism. Without Baptism a child would certainly be lost for all eternity! Now here was a Catholic priest doing exactly the opposite of what they had been taught!

IS YOUR FAITH REAL? A very small child cannot speak for itself. But the parents, on the strength and convictions of their own faith, ask the Church to baptize their child. At this moment they promise to raise their child as a Catholic. Kevin and Joan did not seem to be aware of the commitment that Baptism demands. Baptismal promises are only the beginning of life as a Catholic. These promises are made to God, to the Catholic community, and to the child itself. It is a long-range commitment of eighteen to twenty years wherein the parents help the child become a faithful follower of Christ. If the parents do not nourish their child spiritually, the child can come back and rightfully ask why these

promises made to him or her were broken. The promises are also made to the community of the Church. As individual parents, we promise our fellow believers to raise our family according to the values and outlook of the Church. At the same time, by accepting these promises, all our fellow Catholics accept the obligation to help these parents in the difficult task of raising a Catholic family today. The members of the Church should also demand that the Baptismal promises be faithfully kept. Almost always in the past, what the parents promised at their child's Baptism was actually carried out as they raised the family. They did bring their children up to be faithful Catholics. Of course, there were a few parents who did not remain faithful to their promises, but not enough to lead anyone to seriously question the matter. Infant Baptism was a good practice, for the children, the parents, and the local parish community. Kevin and Joan's situation, and hundreds like it, force us to re-think the practice of the Church. Many parish priests have concluded that indiscriminate Baptism does more harm than good. The Sacrament of Baptism is actually being abused!

A new rule? Kevin framed his question with a deep frown. "But why have things changed so quickly? Why this about face?"

"We have to come to realize in the past decade (so it is not sudden) that what parents say at the time of Baptism is not what they actually intend," I replied. "In the past we could rely – to a great extent – on what the parents asked for in Baptism as being what they planned to do in the future. Today, we have so many young parents who have literally dropped out of the Church. Any type of faith that they might have can only be classified as minimal. How can they promise to bring up their children as Catholics when they do not believe in it themselves?" Joan objected quickly. "What do you mean – 'don't believe?' We believe in God. We haven't rejected that." "The majority of people claim to believe in God today, but not too many are really serious

about it. Somehow, faith in God does not take root in their lives,” I returned.

Even though Kevin and Joan have been brought up Catholic, they have not made a definite decision to follow the faith of their parents. When I hold their description of their own religious faith against the Gospels, I know it would be wrong to meet their request by baptizing their baby. We must have assurance that the life of God that has been planted in Baptism promises not be allowed to die in the germination stage. It's like planting a garden, but never bothering to water it. When all these implications are understood, Baptism cannot be received lightly.

CONFRONTING THE IMPLICATIONS: As parents, how can you convey to your child a sense of God when prayer does not find a place in your daily life? How can you want to have your child become a member of the Catholic Church when as parents you have dropped out of the Church? How can you strengthen the faith commitment of your children when you never join a praying community at Sunday Mass? How can you bring your children to be sensitive to the needs of others (as Jesus was) when you avoid hearing God's Word proclaimed today?

“So you see, Joan and Kevin, the issue is not that the Church no longer believes and practices infant Baptism. We still firmly believe in this tradition. But we now see that if we continue to baptize whenever a request is made without some assurance that the parents will try to nourish their child's spiritual life, then we are being unfaithful to the commands of Baptism, which is the child's initiation into the Christian way of life.

“Parents can only give what they possess themselves. They cannot lead their children to a true following of the Christian faith if they ignore it themselves or do not consider it useful for their own lives. That is why I said at the beginning that I do not think you really want your child to be baptized!”

The discussion had come to a subdued end. The faces of Joan and Kevin were covered with questions, which they would now have to seriously look at together.

Some Questions Related to Baptism

Can a person enter heaven without Baptism?

The understanding that no one can enter heaven without Baptism has caused much turmoil and confusion. Those who have come to recognize Christ and the means of grace laid out in Christ's Church are bound by their own needs to be baptised and come to the Eucharist. However, the universal change brought about by Christ affects the whole of humanity. It is not for us to determine if an unbaptized person who has lived and reflected gospel values is welcomed into heaven.

What does the Church teach about original sin?

“The doctrine of original sin is, so to speak, the ‘reverse side’ of the Good News that Jesus is the Saviour of all, ... that all need salvation and that salvation is offered to all through Christ.”

(# 389 Catechism of the Catholic Church)

Sin is humankind's estrangement and alienation from God. Jesus in his life, death, resurrection and ascension repairs this estrangement for all people and for all time. Through the Sacraments of Initiation (Baptism, Confirmation and Eucharist) the initiated are configured to Christ in his dying, rising and ascension. Our estrangement from God is overcome in our own person when we celebrate the Sacraments of Initiation.

What is the stipend for the celebration of a sacrament?

The Church clearly states that there is absolutely no dollar amount attached to the celebration of a sacrament. No donation is required.

Each registered member of the parish is asked to support the parish not only by sharing their time and talent but also by contributing financially each week. This is why parishes encourage the use of weekly offertory envelopes. On the day of your child's Baptism you are invited to continue your contribution to the life and work of the parish by including your envelope in the collection basket. We consider that \$ 50.00 can be a reasonable donation.

Father's Baptismal Questionnaire (Please Give to the priest during the meeting) (page 1 of 2)

Please take some time to reflect and complete the following statements. There are not right or wrong answers. These sheets are to assist the parish in meeting your particular needs.

Baptism is initiation into the Christian Community. It is important to me that my child become a member of this community because_____

My understanding of Church is _____

My understanding of faith is _____

I am Catholic_____

The things I like about being a Catholic are_____

The things I dislike about being a Catholic are_____

My belief in Jesus makes these differences in my personal and family life:_____

Baptism will make my child's life different because_____

How did you choose these Godparents? How do they fulfill the criteria offered in *The Role of Godparents*? _____

The following questions refer to “A Case to Think About”

1. What was your initial reaction to this case? _____

2. What validity do you see in the priest’s decision to delay Baptism? _____

3. What is your reaction to the priest’s statement that “belief in God is not sufficient cause for Baptism?” _____

4. Having read this case study, in what ways do you feel ready to take on the commitment of Christian parenting? _____

5. Where would you need help with this commitment? _____

Mother's Baptismal Questionnaire (Please Give to the priest during the meeting) (page 1 of 2)

Please take some time to reflect and complete the following statements. There are not right or wrong answers. These sheets are to assist the parish in meeting your particular needs.

Baptism is initiation into the Christian Community. It is important to me that my child become a member of this community because _____

My understanding of Church is _____

My understanding of faith is _____

I am Catholic _____

The things I like about being a Catholic are _____

The things I dislike about being a Catholic are _____

My belief in Jesus makes these differences in my personal and family life: _____

Baptism will make my child's life different because _____

How did you choose these Godparents? How do they fulfill the criteria offered in *The Role of Godparents*? _____

The following questions refer to “A Case to Think About”

1. What was your initial reaction to this case? _____

2. What validity do you see in the priest’s decision to delay Baptism? _____

3. What is your reaction to the priest’s statement that “belief in God is not sufficient cause for Baptism?” _____

4. Having read this case study, in what ways do you feel ready to take on the commitment of Christian parenting? _____

5. Where would you need help with this commitment? _____

For a Parent from Another Religious Tradition

Please take some time to reflect and complete the following statements. There are no right or wrong answers. These sheets are to assist the parish in meeting your child's particular needs. Baptism is initiation into the Christian community. I support the decision for my child to become a member of this community because: _____

My understanding of church is: _____

My understanding of faith is: _____

The faith of my spouse makes these differences in our family life:

Baptism will make my child's life different because: _____

Why did you choose these Godparents? How do they fulfill the criteria offered in *The Role of Godparents?*) _____

What is your reaction to "A Case to Think about Before Baptism"?

As a spouse from another tradition what reservations do you have about the Baptism of your child? _____

Parent's Prayer

God, our Creator and loving parent,
thank you for the gift of life.

Cherish me as your child,
and fill my life with the creative power of your love.

Jesus, our saviour and brother,
thank you for showing me the way of love.

Be with me as I try to be like you -
patient, supportive and gentle with my child.

Let me share again the delight and wonder of childhood,
of discovering your face in the little things:

in the vivid petals of a flower,

in the measured movement of the caterpillar,

in the comfort of loving arms around me when I fall.

Spirit of God, our constant friend and guide,
thank you for leading me in the way of faith.

Help me to show my child the loving face of God
during our life together.

Let me bring healing
in times of pain and doubt.

Help me care for my child
materially and spiritually,

and let us always be friends and believers together.

God – Creator, Saviour and Spirit,
you have trusted me with my child's life.

Help us grow together in all that is good and right.

Be with us in times of joy and in moments of pain.

Let us know that you are there for us,
even when we seem to lose sight of you.

Please be light and warmth in our home and in our hearts. Amen.

Godparents for Life

To be given to the godparent

Congratulations! The relationship between a godchild and godparent is unique and lifelong. You are embarking on a special journey, one that will last years.

On the day of Baptism the Church asks the godparent if he or she is ready to assist the parents in raising the child in the practice of the faith. The role of the godparent is not limited to the day of Baptism. The Church invites you to be an active presence in the life of your godchild.

Weekly participation in the Sunday Eucharist is foundational to our lives as Catholics. Weekly participation in the Sunday Eucharist is the centre of our lives. As a godparent you will model what it means to live as a Catholic Christian.

Some Suggestions

The following suggestions may assist you in your role as godparent.

- ❖ Pray for your godchild each day.
- ❖ Regular visits with your godchild are encouraged.
- ❖ Begin a sacramental scrapbook for your godchild. Later you can work on it together.
- ❖ Write a letter to your godchild telling him or her how you felt on the day of the Baptism. Keep the letter until the child is older.

- ❖ Send a letter or a visit each year on the anniversary of your godchild's Baptism.
- ❖ Whenever possible the godparent and the godchild should participate in the Sunday liturgy and other liturgical celebrations together.
- ❖ It is important for the godparent to continue to grow in his or her faith therefore take advantage of retreats, special workshops or presentations.

As you journey with your godchild may both of you discover more and more about the mystery of God's abiding love.