



CLAIMED FOR CHRIST!

St. Bernard's Church Baptism Program

QUICK INFORMATION

- Baptisms of children under 6 years of age are held on select Sundays at 1:30 p.m. in the church. There are normally no more than 6 children baptized at each service. Parents have the option of having the Baptism at the regular Sunday Mass that they normally attend. (To request Baptism for children 6 years of age or older, contact the Religious Education Office at 516-731-8511.)
- There is a three-stage preparation process for parents. In order to ensure that the steps can be completed before the Baptism date, **we recommend beginning the process at least 3 months before an anticipated Baptism, even before the child arrives.**
- Parents should normally request Baptism for their children in the parish in which they *currently* live and where they are *currently* registered members. We recommend registering as parish members *before* beginning the Baptism process. (You may discuss any special circumstances with a member of the staff.)
- The adoption of a child, individual baptisms by a priest or deacon who is a friend or family member, and the status of the parents' marriage or relationship are all special circumstances that we welcome you to discuss with a member of the parish staff. These circumstances are dealt with in more detail below.

INTRODUCTION

Congratulations on the expectation or arrival of a new child from God! No matter what the age of your child, we are glad that you have decided to present him or her (or them!) for the Sacrament of Baptism at St. Bernard's Church. *Please read this entire introduction before proceeding.*

This is a sacred moment in the life of your family. Whether or not your child has already arrived – either by birth or adoption - you undoubtedly feel a sense of God's presence in the anticipation or the event. We have created a Baptism process to help you experience that sense of sacredness more profoundly, and to connect more deeply with the person of Christ and with St. Bernard's parish community.

Step One: You will carefully prepare for the Baptism of your child. The preparation has three stages:

- 1. At-home parent preparation:** We provide material on the meaning of the Sacrament of Baptism in the Church, and provide questions that invite you to reflect on your choice of Godparents, as well as on your own readiness to take on the responsibilities of being a Catholic Christian parent. *This material must be completed before a Baptism can be scheduled.*
- 2. Baptism intake conversation:** When you have completed the preparation material, contact the parish office to make an appointment with a member of our parish staff. The staff member will discuss your at-home preparation with you, as well as get the information needed to schedule the pre-Baptism Sunday parent preparation gathering, as well as the Baptism itself. Please e-mail us at parish@stbernardchurch.org or call 516-731-4220 to schedule an appointment.
- 3. Sunday morning parent gathering:** You will join with other parents at one of our monthly gatherings at our “family-friendly” Sunday 9:00 a.m. Mass in church. After Mass, you will come to our parish center for some refreshments and mingling, followed by some “give and take” on the joys and challenges of Christian parenting led by parents from our parish.

Please note that if both parents are Catholic, it is very important for both to participate in all the steps of the Baptism preparation process. If one parent is Christian but not Catholic, we hope that he or she will choose to participate as well, as all Christians share one Lord, one faith, and one Baptism in Christ. If one parent is not Christian, or of no religion, he or she is most welcome to participate in the process to whatever degree he or she is interested and comfortable.



Step Two: You will celebrate the Baptism of your child at a Sunday afternoon Baptism liturgy or at the Sunday Mass that you regularly attend. Every effort is made to prepare you for this sacred event, to welcome you and help you feel comfortable at the ceremony, and to engage you, your child’s Godparent/s, and your guests in this awesome mystery of God’s life and grace being poured out upon your child.

Step Three: You will begin or deepen your family’s immersion in the Catholic faith and the life of our parish community. In addition to living out your faith in the home, participating in weekly Sunday Mass, fun family events, formation programs for adults and children, and in our outreach to those in need are all part of living the “baptismal life.” Committing to this will form and nurture the connection that is crucial if your child is to grow up with the sense of purpose, security, values and true, lived faith that you so desire for him or her. *We look forward to living our faith commitment together with you!*

Think about it and talk about it and pray about it.

When you are ready to begin this Baptism process as outlined above, please begin!

AT-HOME PARENT PREPARATION



PART ONE – YOUR OWN FAITH EXPERIENCE

At the very beginning of the Baptism liturgy, the priest or deacon will ask you:

What do you ask of God's Church for your child?

After you answer, he will ask you another question:

You have asked to have your child baptized. In doing so, you are accepting the responsibility of training her/him in the practice of the (Catholic) faith. It will be your duty to bring her/him up to keep God's commandments as Christ has taught us by loving God and our neighbor. Do you clearly understand what you are undertaking?

Do you?? Is your own faith in God and connection to the Church strong enough for you to be able to keep this promise? If not, what steps will you take to make it so?

Baptism is a sacrament of the Church. A *sacrament* is an outward sign of God's presence and action in our lives. The *Sacrament of Baptism* is the Church's ritual through which God's presence and action in the life of the child to be baptized is celebrated and deepened! In Baptism – which means “immersion” - the pouring of the water signifies the child's "immersion" in the life of Christ (his words, deeds and values) and the life of the Church, which is the community of Christ's followers. At the Baptism, parents, Godparents, and the whole parish community pledge to take on specific tasks of exemplifying and teaching the Christian faith for the newly-baptized child.

Just as your child will pick up many of your mannerisms, words and attitudes, so too will she or he most likely pick up your attitudes and practices about faith, Jesus Christ, the Catholic Church, and a life committed to Christian values. Faith is more often “caught” than taught, and a child is most likely to “catch” faith the same way she or he catches a cold: by close contact with people who have it! YOU are the people with whom your child has the closest contact on a daily basis. *What will she or he “catch” from you?*

With this question in mind, we invite you to reflect on and answer the following questions. (If two parents are participating in this preparation, we suggest you each reflect on them separately, then talk and write your response below.)

Think about where you are with your own faith in God, your own relationship with Jesus Christ, and your connection to his community, the Church. Think about whether someone who knows you would be able to see that these are obvious priorities in your life, or are these things that are on the “back burner” to which you don’t give much conscious attention.

1. How important is your faith in God and your relationship with Jesus Christ right now? Are these conscious priorities, or something you rarely think about? Why or why not?

2. For you, what does it mean to be a member of the Catholic faith community? (If one parent is a member of another Christian community, what does membership in that community mean for you?) How is it obvious to people who know you that you are Catholic and/or Christian, and that this also affects how you live your life and make your decisions? *How would they know?*

These are important questions to answer for yourself, because you cannot share with your child what you don’t have. Wherever you are in your faith journey, St. Bernard’s parish is here to assist and support you in taking the next step. Whether it’s beginning to come to Mass regularly, or giving your time and talent to parish ministries and activities, or participating in an *Awakening Faith* study and discussion group, we can help you take that next step for your own benefit and that of your child.



PART TWO – WHAT BAPTISM IS REALLY ABOUT

This packet contains a copy of an article for parents entitled, *Baptism is Just the Beginning!* (For those accessing this packet from our website, we have provided the article for download.) Please take some time to read the article before continuing, and mark or note any points that interest you, either because you agree, disagree, don't understand, or wish to comment. When you meet with a member of the parish staff, he or she will discuss your response to and questions about this article with you.

Notes/Questions from this article:

PART THREE - GODPARENTS

Being a Christian parent is a tough job. It's a tough world, and often you don't get support from our culture in raising children with Christian values. *You need help!!* Just as the African proverb wisely observes that "it takes a village to raise a child," so it also takes a whole "parish village" to raise a *Christian* child. St. Bernard's parish is here to be your support in this wondrous yet difficult journey of Christian parenthood. This is why participation in Sunday Mass and other parish activities is so important to raising your child Catholic. It gives your family a chance to "rub elbows" with others who are seeking to live out Christian values and Catholic practices in our culture and "catch" the Spirit of the baptized life from them.



In addition to parish support, close family and friends will play a special role in supporting you in the Christian upbringing of your child. But from among those people, you are asked to choose just one or two whose *particular* role it will be to assist you in sharing and teaching the faith. They are technically known as "Sponsors," but more commonly called "Godparents."

It's their job – and yes, it is a *job*, with very specific requirements and responsibilities - to assist you in raising your child to be a Catholic Christian. Here are the job qualifications:

- A baptized and confirmed Catholic who has already received the Sacrament of the Eucharist and reached the age of 16 by the day of the baptism
- A person who is leading a life in harmony with the faith and with the role of sponsor/Godparent, and who strives to actively live out his/her commitment to Christ and to the community life of the Church.
- A person in good relationship and standing with the Catholic Church (i.e., someone who has left the Catholic Church may not be a Godparent.)

The responsibilities of a Sponsor are:

- To participate regularly in Catholic worship on Sundays and Holy Days
- To give of his/her time, talent and treasure in the service of his/her parish and community as much as possible.
- To support and teach your child through prayer, as well as through his/her example of practicing the Catholic Christian faith.



Please note that *only one Godparent is required*. If two are chosen, they must be male and female to reflect the nature of parenthood. Note also that a baptized and confirmed practicing Christian who is not Catholic may not serve as a Sponsor, but may act as a “Christian Witness” in addition to a Catholic Sponsor. A Christian Witness should be a committed member of his or her church, and be able to exemplify and teach Christian values to your child. (A former Catholic may not be a Christian Witness.)

(Keep in mind that the role of the Godparent is to be a teacher and model of practicing the Christian faith. A person of another religion such as Judaism or Islam, or of no religion, is unable to do this and therefore cannot serve in this role. In addition, Godparents make a profession of Christian faith at the Baptism ceremony; it would be a violation of their beliefs to ask persons of another religion or of no religion to do this.)

So, there is a lot to think, talk and pray about before choosing Godparents! Even more so when you remember that the Church Baptism registry will contain the official, permanent record of your child's Baptism, and once the names of the Godparents are recorded, *they may not be changed*. For this reason, as well as for the spiritual well-being of your child, please choose wisely! So that we at the parish can feel comfortable admitting them to this important ministry, we ask all Sponsors and Christian Witnesses to sign and return a Sponsor Testimony to be submitted to our parish when the parents arrange the Baptism . Testimonies of Catholic Sponsors must also be signed and witnessed by their pastor or his delegate. These Testimonies are enclosed in this packet, or available for download from the parish website's baptism page at www.stbernardchurch.org.

Question to discuss about Godparents:

First, read the Godparent Testimonies. Then, read the enclosed article, *Wanted: Godparent – Read the Job Description*. (For those accessing this packet from our website they are both available online.) Who are one or two people we know who meet these qualifications and can take on these responsibilities? (Remember – if two, one male and one female!)

Catholic Sponsor _____
How does he/she qualify?

Catholic Sponsor/ Christian Witness _____
How does he/she qualify?

- Will they be able to honestly sign the Sponsor/Godparent Testimony? (Give Godparents copies, along with the Godparent article, and discuss it with them; bring signed testimonies with you to intake appointment. *The Baptism cannot be scheduled until these testimonies are fully completed and signed by the Godparents, their pastors, and approved by our parish staff.*)

PART FOUR: SPECIAL CONSIDERATIONS

Parents' Marriage or Relationship. As Catholics we believe that family life best flows from the commitment of a man and a woman in the Sacrament of Marriage, which forms the bond through which they experience and even *become* the presence of God for one another and their children. Catholics are normally expected to celebrate their wedding and live their marriage in accord with the practice of the Catholic Church; i.e. to marry in a Catholic church in the presence of a Catholic priest or deacon and two witnesses, or to request permission from the Church to marry elsewhere due to special circumstances.



Some Catholics, for whatever reason, choose not to marry according to Catholic practice, or perhaps not even to marry at all before having children. In these situations, as long as you have the intention of actively raising your child in the faith and keeping the promises you will make at the Baptism, your child may be baptized. However, if you are not married, or if your marriage has not been blessed by the Catholic Church, we encourage you to speak openly with us at your Baptism intake appointment. We can answer your questions about entering into marriage in the Catholic Church, as well as address any issues (such as previous marriages) that may need to be resolved before entering into a Catholic marriage. *You've chosen to make your child a member of the Catholic Church – maybe now's the right time to make your relationship part of the Catholic Church!*

Adoption. If your child is adopted or in process of adoption, there are some special steps that need to be taken to determine that the child has not been already baptized and that you are indeed the legal parents of the child. Please bring to your appointment any documentation from attorneys or adoption agencies that indicate that the adoption is in process. If the adoption is completed, please bring the amended birth certificate. The Baptism will not be scheduled until we have submitted these documents to the diocesan Chancery Office and received authorization to proceed with the Baptism.

(Please note that if it has been determined that the child was or might have been previously validly baptized by any Church, we cannot “re-baptize” your child, but will joyfully either conditionally baptize your child, or welcome him or her into the Catholic Church at the baptism ceremony.)

Parish Membership. The Baptism of your child should normally take place at the parish where you *currently* live and are *currently* registered parishioners. (If you grew up in St. Bernard’s parish but have not registered independently as an adult, you are *not currently registered here!*) This makes sense when you think about it: Part of what Baptism is all about is making your child a *member* of the Catholic Church in general, but also of the particular parish where you will bring him or her to Mass and to be nurtured by the active faith life of the community. (Remember those promises you will make!) If you live in St. Bernard’s parish but are not registered, we will ask you to commit to parish membership and begin the registration process



before the Baptism. If you don’t *currently* live in St. Bernard’s parish, you should register in the parish where you live, and have the Baptism there. There may occasionally be special circumstances when the Baptism of a child whose parents are not registered St. Bernard’s parishioners may be held here; please feel free to discuss your circumstances when you contact our parish office.

Special Requests. If you have a friend or family member who is a Catholic priest or deacon and wishes to baptize your child, please discuss this at your Baptism intake appointment.

Occasionally parents request to have Baptisms outside of the parish’s regular Baptism and Mass schedule. As Baptism is by nature a “village” affair rather than a private affair, these requests can be granted only under very unusual circumstances. Please discuss your situation at your Baptism intake appointment.

WHAT'S NEXT?

BAPTISM INTAKE CONVERSATION

- When you've completed the above at-home preparation (including getting signed Godparent Testimonies), call or e-mail the parish office for a Baptism intake appointment at 516-731-4220 or parish@stbernardchurch.org.
- Bring this completed preparation packet and the Godparent testimony forms with you. The staff member will discuss these materials with you.
- Look over the Baptism Program dates, provided in this packet or on our parish website Baptism page. (Go to www.stbernardchurch.org, click on the "Sacraments" tab on top, then "Baptism.") Check your calendar to determine which dates for the Baptism Preparation Mass and Gathering and for the Baptism itself might be possible for you. *Note there is normally a limit of six children at each Baptism ceremony, so it is possible your preferred date might be filled; please have several dates chosen.*
- At this meeting, the dates for the Preparation Mass and Gathering and the Baptism itself will be scheduled. *If you are regular Mass-goers at St. Bernard's, consider scheduling the Baptism to take place at the Mass you normally attend!*

BAPTISM PREPARATION MASS AND GATHERING



Prior to the Baptism, you and your family will attend a special gathering for Baptism parents which will begin with participation in our weekly 9:00 a.m. Sunday "family-friendly" Mass. There you will have the chance to meet other parents and worship with our parish family. Afterwards, you will be welcomed with refreshments at our parish center, after which parents from our parish will lead an informal presentation and discussion about the joys and challenges of living the baptismal life in the family. They will share their experiences with you, and hopefully learn from yours as well! A supervised children's area will be provided to occupy any young children you may have with you. Older children are welcome to join in the discussion! *Gatherings are held once a month on designated Sundays; see schedule enclosed or online.*

THE BAPTISM!

At the conclusion of the preparation gathering, you will receive practical information about the Baptism day itself. Baptisms take place on designated Sundays at 1:30 or, by special request, at the Mass that your family normally attends. Members of our Baptism Greeter team will welcome you and your guests and, together with the priest or deacon, guide you through the process so you can relax and focus on the amazing gift of God's grace that is being poured out on your child and your family.

The Baptism liturgy – whether separate from or part of Sunday Mass – is a ceremony rich in symbolism! At the intake meeting and preparation gathering you will hear more about this, as well as receive short books for both parents and Godparents which explain the symbols further. But even before the ceremony, it's good to have an idea of the deep meaning of the baptismal liturgy and symbols, and to begin praying that your child and your whole family will be consciously aware of the graces that they impart.

- **Reception of the Children** – your child is called by name, and you are asked to state your readiness to take on the challenge of raising him/her in the Christian faith. Your child is then “claimed for Christ” with the sign of the cross.
- **Celebration of God’s Word** – The children, parents and sponsors gather to hear and ponder God’s word.
- **Prayer of the Faithful** – Together we pray for Christ to look lovingly on the children, their parents and sponsors and all the baptized who are gathered.
- **Prayer and Anointing to Resist Evil** - We pray that the children, through their Baptism and continuing association with the Church community, will have the strength and courage to resist evil.
- **Blessing of the Baptismal Water** – The priest or deacon asks God to bless the water used to baptize your child so that it will “cleanse” him/her from sadness and sin and their effects.
- **Renunciation of Sin and Profession of Faith** – Before the Baptism, the priest or deacon asks the parents and Godparents to declare the faith that they believe and live, and that they pledge to share with the child.
- **Baptism** – Water is poured three times over your child’s head – in the name of the Father, and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit – as a sign of his or her immersion in the life of Jesus Christ and his community, the Church.
- **Anointing with Chrism** – “Chrism” is the name given to the most important of our Church’s blessed oils. Your child is to follow in Christ’s footsteps by offering her or his life to God (priest), in speaking God’s truth (prophet), and in leading others to God (king).
- **Clothing with White Garment** –Your child’s white baptismal garment is a symbol of being, in the words of Saint Paul, “clothed with Christ.”



- **Lighted Candle** – Parents and Godparents are reminded of their responsibility to keep the flame of faith burning brightly to continually “enlighten” your child in the ways of Christ.
- **Conclusion** – The Baptism liturgy concludes gathered around the Lord’s Table, as we pray the Lord’s Prayer, and the parents and children are given one final blessing to send them off to begin living the Baptismal Life! *Thanks be to God!*

AFTER THE BAPTISM

The Baptismal life begins! Start right away to make good on your baptismal promises!!

- Our “fuel” for the Christian life comes from the weekly Sunday Eucharist. That’s where we hear and ponder together God’s words to us in the Scriptures, where we pray for one another and for the needs of our world, and where we present ourselves to God and ask the Holy Spirit to fuel and feed us with the Real Presence of Christ in Holy Communion. Now it’s our mission to go forth and *bring* and *be* the presence of Christ which we have received to our homes, neighborhoods, workplaces and our parish. *Make Mass-going a family priority!* (Remember especially our “family-friendly” 9:00 a.m. Mass!)
- Each year we gather all families who have baptized children in the previous year to a special Mass with a Blessing of Baptized Children, followed by a festive reception. *Watch for an invitation to this Mass right after Easter!*
- A parish community flourishes when all the members contribute what they do best to make things happen. St. Bernard’s parishioners participate in a wide variety of ministries from stocking the busy food pantry, to tending the parish gardens, to reading the Scriptures at Mass, to gathering in social and/or prayer groups. *Whatever it is that you do best and enjoy the most, we can put your time and talent to work here at St. Bernard’s!*
- You will receive our monthly St. Bernard’s Faithful Families e-newsletter with articles and parish events and programs of interest for your own faith development as well as family-oriented activities . (Also available in our weekly parish bulletin and on the parish website www.stbernardchurch.org.) *Help your child get to know his/her “brothers and sisters” in the family of faith!*



