



SACRED STEPS TO BAPTISM

Our Lady of Grace Church

1011 Mt. Pleasant Road, Greensburg, PA 15601

A Place to Grow in the Love & Knowledge of Jesus Christ
www.ourladyofgracechurch.org

The parish family of Our Lady of Grace is excited to help you in bringing your child into the Catholic faith. We congratulate you and are here to support you in any way we can. In this leaflet, you will find general information about the Sacrament of Baptism that we hope will be helpful in preparing for the Baptism of your child.

Our parish welcomes you as you present your child for Baptism with the intention of bringing them up in the practice of our Catholic faith. In this day and age, children are born into various family situations, and our church desires to minister to you, whatever your particular situation may be (i.e. married in the Catholic Church, single parent, unmarried couple, or married outside of the Catholic Church).

Baptism is the door to new life in Christ and his kingdom. It is the first of three sacraments of initiation in which a child becomes a new creation through water and the Holy Spirit. Baptism is just the beginning of the lifelong journey of faith. In Holy Communion, they will share the banquet of Christ's sacrifice; and in Confirmation, they will receive the fullness of God's Holy Spirit.

Like all Sacraments, Baptism belongs to the entire Church. Whether it is celebrated during Mass or outside of Mass, it is still a communal celebration that reminds us that we are all called, as a community, to nurture and care for the child who is being baptized and to support the parents in passing on the faith.

Baptism requires the faith of parents, godparents and the entire church. For an infant to be baptized, it is necessary that at least one of the parents, or the child's legal guardian, consent to it, and there is a well-founded hope that the child will be brought up in the Catholic religion.

Parenting your child involves nurturing the spiritual life of your family and allowing the love of Christ to be at its center, guided by the Holy Spirit. The occasion of your child's Baptism is a time of spiritual renewal by praying and reflecting upon your journey of faith. Remember that your child will learn the faith most effectively by what he or she **sees in you** and especially what he or she **does with you on a daily basis**.

In the years ahead, you and our parish family will together prepare your child to receive the Sacrament of First Reconciliation, the Sacrament of First Holy Communion, and the Sacrament of Confirmation.

Know that your family is an important part of our parish family. You as parents are not alone on this journey, your parish family is here to help. The community will uphold the promise we make at your child's Baptism: *"to help these parents in their duty as Christian mothers and fathers."*

We will welcome them, help them to belong, build them as disciples for Jesus Christ, and culture in them leaders in the faith.

BAPTISMS AT OUR LADY OF GRACE

Baptism is a communal event and is typically celebrated on the weekend during a regularly scheduled Mass (Saturday at 4 p.m., Sunday at 8 or 10:30 a.m). However, they can occur outside of the Mass, most commonly on Saturday at 1:30 p.m. or Sunday at 11:45 a.m. **Please note** that Baptisms are generally not celebrated during the Season of Lent (*from Ash Wednesday until the Easter Vigil*).

Our Lady of Grace will accommodate the Baptism of a child of active members registered in the parish and previous members raised in the parish. While neither parent is required to be a current member of Our Lady of Grace Church, the Catholic pastor of the parent(s) must provide a letter granting permission for the Baptism to take place here.

Getting Started

The parish staff will help you with each step of planning your child's Baptism. Because preparation may be needed, parent(s) should contact the parish office as soon as possible.

In order to begin preparing for your child's Baptism, please contact the parish office at 724-838-9480 or complete the *Baptism Request Form* on the parish website, www.ourladyofgracechurch.org.

The date of the Baptism should be fixed at least one month in advance of the desired date. Children should receive Baptism as soon as is practical after birth, taking into consideration the health of both mother and child and the readiness of the parents and godparents to accept the responsibilities that Baptism calls them to assume.

Parent Baptism Preparation Session

In order to help parents prepare for this joyous occasion, the parish community offers a Sacred Steps to Baptism Session. First-time parents and those who have been disaffiliated with the Catholic Church for an extended period of time are expected to participate in one of these sessions. They are scheduled with members from the Sacred Steps to Baptism team at a mutually agreed upon time that is best for the young family. These sessions help parents to begin their child's journey of faith through the waters of Baptism. More than introducing the Celebration of Baptism, this session reinforces the role of parents in forming their child as a disciple of Jesus Christ and equips them with lifelong tools for this role. Both parents are expected to attend. Godparents are invited to attend when possible.

Children Who Are Adopted

In the case of adoption, a certificate issued by a United States' court must be presented to verify that the adoption is formal, final and irrevocable.

Naming Your Child

At your child's Baptism, you will be asked, "*What name do you give this child?*" A name plays a significant role in a Christian's life. Throughout Scripture we hear that God calls each of us by name, acknowledging that we are known as individuals by our personal God. Our names are with us for eternity, written on the heart of God, with the hope that one day they are entered into the Communion of Saints.

For these reasons, choosing your child's name is a serious responsibility. Traditionally, Catholic children are given a saint's name. Not only is this an outward sign that links the child to the Communion of Saints, but can also offer your child a model of faith throughout their life. There is a long and beautiful tradition of Catholics naming their children after saints or persons of the Bible, but this is not required by Church law. Out of reverence for our faith, the Church does forbid a name that is offensive to Christians, our beliefs, or our way of life.

Selecting Godparents

As you begin to prepare for your child's Baptism, one of your first decisions will be the selection of sponsors (godparents). Prior to inviting a relative or close friend to assume the role of sponsor, it is important for you to understand what our church teaches. Choosing sponsors can be a sensitive issue, but a greater understanding of the role of a sponsor may help you in this matter.

Sponsors play a very important role in your child's spiritual life and should serve as role models of the faith. Your child should be able to look to their sponsors as an example of how the Church teaches us to live our Catholic faith. They should support you in your work as parents to teach your child about your Catholic faith. Additionally, in their role as sponsor, they represent the larger Church community. Being a sponsor is not only an honor, it is a tremendous responsibility. Our parish provides the following guidelines to help parents choose the best possible sponsors for their children.

Sponsor (Godparent) Eligibility Guidelines

There are typically two sponsors, one male (godfather) and one female (godmother); however, the church does permit there to be just one sponsor (male or female). There may be no more than two sponsors, and if two sponsors are chosen, they may not be of the same gender.

Each sponsor for Baptism must meet all of the following:

1. Be at least 16 years of age.
2. Be a fully initiated Catholic (must have received all three Sacraments of Initiation: Baptism, Confirmation and Eucharist).
3. Be a practicing Catholic in good standing, who leads a life of faith necessary to fulfill the responsibility of being a sponsor.
4. Be a registered member of a parish in the area where he or she lives.
5. Attend Mass on Sundays and holy days of obligation.
6. Support the parish both financially and through service, to the best of their ability.
7. If married, the sponsor must be in a valid marriage. That means, married according to the laws and regulations of the Catholic Church, either by a Catholic priest, or have obtained an official permission for getting married outside of the Catholic Church.

Please note: Those Catholics who are invalidly married *do not qualify* as a sponsor at Baptism even though they may fulfill other requirements listed above. *Examples of invalid marriages:* before a Justice of the Peace; without proper dispensation before a minister of a Protestant church or before a rabbi; and those Catholics who are divorced and invalidly remarried.

8. If single, may not be cohabiting with someone without the benefit of marriage.
9. May not be the father or the mother of the person to be baptized.

Christian Witness

If only one Catholic sponsor is chosen, a Christian of another denomination (i.e. Baptist, Lutheran, Presbyterian, etc.) may be chosen to be a witness to your child's Baptism. This role is referred to as a Christian Witness, though most parents still commonly think of and refer to him or her as a godparent.

- A baptized non-Catholic Christian may serve as a Christian Witness (witness to the Baptism), but there must also be a Catholic sponsor/godparent.
- A Christian Witness should understand the role and play an active and important part in supporting the parents as they teach their child the Christian way of life.
- A Christian Witness must provide either proof of Baptism or a letter from the pastor of his or her church stating he or she is an active member of the church. Either form is due in the parish office the Monday prior to the Baptism.

Please note: A non-practicing Catholic or a former Catholic who left the Catholic faith and converted to another Christian denomination may not serve as a Christian witness.

SPONSOR CERTIFICATE

A sponsor certificate is a letter or a form of eligibility issued by the pastor that certifies that the person requesting a sponsor certificate is a registered member of the parish and is qualified to serve as a sponsor according to sponsor eligibility guidelines. **All** sponsors must verify their eligibility to serve as a sponsor.

If the intended sponsor is registered at Our Lady of Grace Church

He or she must call the parish office as soon as possible to verify his or her parish membership and sponsor eligibility.

If the intended sponsor lives outside of our parish boundaries

He or she must obtain a sponsor certificate from the parish in which he or she is registered by contacting that parish and requesting a sponsor certificate for Baptism.

Please advise sponsors to make this request as soon as possible to allow a sufficient time to process the request.

Baptism Checklist

PRIOR TO THE BAPTISM

- Call the parish office, email the parish office, or complete a *Baptism Request Form* on the website as soon as possible to begin the necessary paperwork for your child's Baptism.
- Review the guidelines for selecting godparents/sponsors PRIOR to asking anyone to take on this role.
- Determine whether or not the person(s) you want to be your child's godparents/sponsors meet the eligibility guidelines. If you have any questions, please do not hesitate to call the parish office for assistance.
- Ask the person(s) to be your child's godparents/sponsors.
- Register and attend a Sacred Steps to Baptism Session.
- Schedule your child's Baptism.
- Turn in sponsor certificates to the parish at least 7 days prior to the Baptism. The forms may be mailed to the office or dropped off at the Welcome Center in the gathering space of the church.
- If you are having the Baptism during Mass, notify the parish office about reserving pews 7 days prior to the Baptism. Typically, the first 3 pews are reserved which is enough to accommodate 24 people.

DAY OF BAPTISM

- On the day of the Baptism, parents and godparents need to arrive in the church gathering area 20 minutes before Mass (if the Baptism is being celebrated during a weekend Mass) or 20 minutes before the scheduled start time of the Baptism (if celebrated outside of Mass).

*On behalf of the Our Lady of Grace Parish family, congratulations on the birth of your child!
We look forward to welcoming them as they take their place in God's family through the Sacrament of Baptism.*