

St. John Neumann Roman Catholic Church
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**A Note from the Pastor
on
the Baptism of Your Child**

Congratulations on the birth of your child! Thank you for saying “yes” to life, and thank you for working with God’s grace to nurture the eternal life He offers to your child! I offer the following FAQ (“Frequently Asked Questions”) as a way of walking with you as you prepare for your child’s Baptism.

Do I have to be registered at St. John Neumann Parish to have my child baptized here?

The short answer is “yes,” with some exceptions that I’ll explain in a minute. Let’s start, though, with a practical look at how the Church “exists” in the world. The Pope, the Vicar of Christ, has supreme authority over how the Church functions in the world; he does this through no merits of his own but rather through the authority of Jesus Christ, whose Vicar he is. The Church is divided into dioceses, each of which falls under the jurisdiction of a bishop appointed by the Pope. Each diocese is broken into geographical parishes, and the bishop appoints a pastor for each of them, giving those pastors jurisdiction over most of the affairs of the parish. Part of the pastor’s jurisdiction includes the authority to administer the sacraments to the people within his parish boundaries. This ensures that all the sacraments, when celebrated validly, are in union with the prayer of the universal Church, and thus in union with Jesus Christ, the true Head of the Church. While a priest can baptize any child – no matter where they’re from – in danger of death, under normal circumstances the priest has the authority to baptize his parishioners. Having said that, he may also baptize the parishioners of other pastors with the permission of those pastors.

So: if I am not registered, does that mean I’m not a parishioner? Not at all! Any Catholic living within the parish boundaries, unless they are registered somewhere else, is a member of St. John Neumann Parish and can count on exceptional spiritual care. Registering, though, provides many benefits. It gives one a sense of belonging and identity in a parish community; it underlines one’s commitment to practicing the Faith; it enables the pastor and staff to get to know you better, to welcome you and to minister to you (which is especially important during times of crisis). From a practical point of view, your registration helps us stay connected with you by giving you timely information and updates; it enables you to receive church envelopes, which gives us the ability to issue to you a year-end statement of your donations for income tax purposes. Registration (along with participation in the life of the parish) is also necessary for one to serve as a Godparent or Confirmation sponsor. Chances are that if you’re reading this you are already registered, but, if you’re not, please take the time to do that now. You can pick up a registration form at our parish office or download it and print it out from our website: www.stjohnneumannrcc.com.

What does it mean to be “participating in the life of the parish”?

A practicing Catholic lives his or her life in accordance with Church teaching and participates in the life of the parish in many ways. For starters, Catholics are obliged to attend Mass on Sundays and Holy Days of Obligation; the Saturday Vigil Mass (4:00 PM) counts for Sunday. People who are sick or who must take care of sick people – along with those for whom it is actually impossible to get to church – are excused from this obligation.

Sometimes parents are concerned that their very young children might not be able to get through Mass without making significant noise. For that reason, our Library (on the right-hand side of the Gathering Space as you enter the church building, near the display case) has been fitted with a large screen television and speakers that allow people in the room to participate in the Mass as it is being celebrated. Using that room also makes it easier to bring small children to and from the restrooms without having to feel like one is on parade through the church.

Practicing Catholics make use of the Sacrament of Reconciliation when appropriate. The *Catechism of the Catholic Church* states that “after having attained the age of discretion, each of the faithful is bound by an obligation faithfully to confess serious sins at least once a year” (CCC 1457). In this context, “serious sins” means “mortal sins.” For a sin to be mortal, three conditions must be met: grave matter, full knowledge, and complete consent (cf. CCC 1857). “Grave matter” means that the act itself is intrinsically evil or immoral; that’s independent of whether the person himself thinks it’s bad. Full knowledge means that the person understands what he or she is doing, and complete consent means that he or she chooses to do it anyway. A person who commits mortal sin normally reenters the state of grace only through the Sacrament of Reconciliation.

Participation in parish life means more than just reception of the sacraments, though. We are a community of believers who look out for each other and work to anticipate each other in reflecting God’s love outwardly. How do we do that? By getting involved in the workings of the parish. We’re always looking for many different kinds of help. Some parishioners volunteer to help set up parish dinners and parties; others take care of the flower beds on our property. Some teach or assist in our Religious Education programs; others serve as greeters at our weekend Masses. Volunteers take care of our altar linens, sing in our choir (temporarily suspended because of the pandemic), stuff occasional inserts into the parish bulletin. No matter what your skill set, there’s always something you can do to make our common life better. In addition, parishioners are asked to participate by supporting the works of the parish financially.

My spouse and I are in a marriage that is not recognized by the Catholic Church. Can I still have my baby baptized?

Because Christ elevated the natural goodness of marriage to the dignity of a sacrament, Catholic married life is lived to its fullest when it’s done in the context of Holy Matrimony. If your marriage is not recognized by the Church, please contact the Parish Office so that we can determine whether it can be “convalidated.” However, we can still move ahead with your child’s baptism. While the status of your marriage will not affect your child’s baptism, bringing your marriage into harmony with the life of the Church will help your child grow in his or her understanding of what life in the Church looks like as he or she begins to grow in the practice of the Faith.

I (or my Catholic spouse) have never received the Sacrament of Confirmation. Do I need to do that first?

No, but as is the case with marriages recognized by the Church, it only makes sense to complete one’s initiation into the Church if one is seeking to bring one’s child into the Church. It’s also important for the Catholic himself/herself to complete initiation. Please contact the Parish Office to find out more. This will not affect the timing of your child’s baptism.

What can I do to better understand what it means to have my child baptized?

St. John Neumann Parish offers a class on the sacrament of Baptism on the third Tuesdays of January, March, May, July, September and November at 7:00 PM in the Parish Library. The class lasts about an hour. Parents are required to attend and potential Godparents are welcome to join them.

Does the Church have any requirements concerning Godparents or can I just choose whomever I want?

The term “Godparent” is used casually and often incorrectly in today’s society. All too frequently, a parent chooses a friend to be the Godparent of his/her children as a way of honoring that friend. This has nothing at all to do with the role of Godparent in the Catholic Church.

According to Canon Law, a Godparent “together with the parents presents an infant for baptism [and] also helps the baptized person to lead a Christian life in keeping with baptism and to fulfill faithfully the obligations inherent in it” (canon 872). The role of “Godparent” is not meant to honor any human being, but rather to ensure that the

person who is being baptized has an appropriate role-model and helper as he/she grows up and learns how to honor God.

Consequently, the Church has requirements for people to serve as Godparents. Your child – as he or she grows up – should be able to look at his Godparent(s) to see what an active Catholic in good standing with the Church looks like. In light of that, the requirements for someone to be a Godparent include the following:

- He/she must be a Catholic who has been confirmed and has already received Holy Communion;
- He/she must regularly attend Mass and take advantage of the Sacrament of Reconciliation as needed;
- He/she, if married, must be in a marriage that is recognized by the Catholic Church;
- He/she must lead a life of faith in keeping with the role of Godparent;
- He/she must be at least 16 years of age.

A parent may not be the Godparent for his/her own child. A person who left the Catholic Church for another church is not eligible to be a sponsor simply by virtue of “having been raised Catholic.”

To avoid embarrassment, it’s best to make sure a person meets the above-listed conditions before asking him/her to be a Godparent, as a prospective Godparent will need to present an official endorsement from the Pastor of his/her Parish stating that he/she is eligible to serve in that important role. I’ll say more about this “endorsement” at the end of this letter.

Many people do not know that the Church only requires one Godparent. Two are allowed, but no more than two. If there are two, they must be of opposite genders: one male and one female.

What is a “Christian witness”?

As long as there is one Godparent (and as long as there is *only* one Godparent), a baptized non-Catholic Christian of *the opposite gender* may serve as a “Christian witness” to the baptism. This person is a “witness” and not a “Godparent,” as Godparents must meet the above-mentioned requirements, which include being Catholic.

The “Christian witness” must also meet certain requirements:

- He/she cannot be Catholic or ex-Catholic. (An “ex-Catholic” is by definition not in good standing with the Catholic Church and cannot serve in this role);
- He/she must be validly baptized, i.e., baptized in a church that baptizes “in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit”;
- He/she must be living an upright life;
- He/she cannot be the parent of the person being baptized;
- He/she must be at least 16 years of age.

While a prospective Godparent will need to present an official endorsement from the Pastor of his/her Parish, a prospective Christian witness will need to provide some documentation which is described later in this letter.

Are there any rules about naming my child?

As cultures become more secular, it becomes more and more common to hear of people giving names of objects to their children. “Crystal” (a rock), “Heather” (a grass), “Axel” (a cable), “Harlan” (a rocky patch of land): these and so many others have entered into the registry of names of “for-the-most-part inanimate objects” that some parents have chosen for their children.

Without encroaching on the freedom of parents, it’s important to remember that, by longstanding tradition, Catholics have named their children after one of the saints. Let me encourage you to keep that tradition, even if that means adding another (“middle” or even “third”) component to your child’s name. This serves two important purposes. On the one hand, it helps your child grow in his/her Catholic identity. I can’t tell you how many times

I've been with parents who lament the fact that their children do not practice their Catholic faith; often, though not at all always, it becomes clear that the Faith was not held out as something integral to their identity as they were growing up. Having a saint's name is no guarantee against this, but it can be an important safeguard to a young person's Catholic identity. Secondly, when we name a child after a saint, we call that saint the child's "patron." We Catholics believe that the saints intercede for us before Almighty God. What a great gift it is to our children when we invoke a powerful patron saint and ask him/her to intercede in a special way for our child! As our children grow, we can help them establish a loving relationship with that saint, one that can last throughout this life and into the next. Please, if you have not given your child a saint's name, consider adding one in prior to the baptism.

When can I have my child baptized?

St. John Neumann Parish celebrates the Sacrament of Baptism on the first Sunday of the month at 12:30 PM. Occasional exceptions are made to the schedule for serious reasons. Guests should come dressed in their "Sunday Best." It is appropriate to dress the child to be baptized in white.

I've chosen Godparents – one male and one female – who meet the requirements listed above. What do they need to do in preparation for the baptism?

Included with this letter you'll find two Godparent Eligibility Certificates, one for each of the prospective Godparents. Each prospective Godparent needs to bring their certificate to the pastor of the church in which they are registered and complete the form in the presence of the priest. The priest will then countersign the document and apply the parish seal to it. Each certificate – on its reverse – bears a letter to the prospective Godparent with detailed directions on how it is to be completed. Please ensure that the prospective Godparent reads the letter before filling out the form.

I've chosen one Godparent and would like to ask a non-Catholic baptized Christian of the opposite sex of the Godparent to serve as a Christian witness. He/she meets the requirements listed above. What does he/she need to do in preparation for the baptism?

Included with this letter you'll find one Christian Witness Eligibility Certificate. The prospective Witness needs to complete the certificate and return it to St. John Neumann Catholic Church along with a copy of his/her Baptism Certificate. Only a non-Catholic person baptized "in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit" is eligible to serve as a Christian witness. The certificate – on its reverse – bears a letter to the prospective Witness with detailed directions on how it is to be completed. Please ensure that the prospective Witness reads the letter before filling out the form.

Once again, on behalf of the clergy, staff, and parishioners of St. John Neumann Roman Catholic Church, let me extend my heartfelt congratulations to you along with a promise of prayers for you and your family. Our hope is to make the celebration of the Baptism of your child a holy and joyful experience. Please do not hesitate to call if you have any questions or need clarification on anything I've written here.

God bless you, always!

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Father Joe Cocucci, KHS". The signature is written in a cursive style.

Rev. Joseph MPR Cocucci, KHS
Pastor