

To those seeking to baptize their child or children into the Roman Catholic Church, welcome!

St. Francis Xavier Parish is always happy to welcome new members into the Roman Catholic Church, and, if possible, into our own parish community. If you would like to have your child or children baptized, we offer this packet of information to provide an understanding of the sacrament of baptism and the procedure we ask you to follow.

The sacrament of baptism is entrance into the person of Jesus Christ who calls us not servants but friends. It is also entrance into the family of God and into the love which God has for those who stand with Christ.

If you wish to embrace for your child or children this friendship with Christ and membership in God's family, you are most welcome to do so in our midst. May your child find Christ here among us. May your child learn to pray and serve with us. May your child become sister or brother with us as together we stand at the table of our God.

Rev. Joseph S. Costantino, S.J.
Pastor

Rev. Peter E. Fink, S.J.
Associate Pastor

Luz Marina Díaz, M.A.
Director of Religious Education

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Requirements for the baptism of a child.

- We ask you to present a copy of the child's birth certificate so that the place and date of birth may be properly noted.
- We ask you to complete a baptismal information form in which you list the child's name, your own names as parents and the names of your chosen God-parents or sponsors. Because the listing of baptism is a legal document, we need to have the *father's full name* and the *mother's full name with maiden name*. The baptism certificate and record will follow this requirement.
- Finally, we ask that you and the God-parents take part in a baptismal class either here at St. Francis Xavier Parish or at another church. At St. Francis Xavier, classes are offered on the first Saturday of every month.

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- Finally, we ask that you and the God-parents take part in a baptismal class either here at St. Francis Xavier Parish or at another church. At St. Francis Xavier, classes are offered on the first Saturday of every month from 10:30 am to 11:45 am in the West Room. For further information about the Baptism Class contact Luz Marina Díaz at Imdiaz@sfxavier.org.

Parents and God-parents/sponsors at infant baptism

The parents are the primary teachers when infants are baptized into the Church. Their own faith, their own growth in love and their own sense of values are what is most evident to their children as they grow.

God-parents are usually taken from family and friends. At least one of the God-parents should be a confirmed Catholic in good standing, and therefore serve in addition as a sponsor for the Church. A Christian of other traditions may also be considered as a God-parent, but cannot serve as sponsor. God-parents are listed in the baptismal records.

Times for infant baptisms.

Baptism Service	Saturday		Sunday Mass (Parishioners only)	
September	17	10:30 am	18	at the 11:30 Mass
October	15	10:30 am	_____	
November	12	10:30 am	13	at the 11:30 Mass
December	10	10:30 am	_____	
January	14	10:30 am	15	at the 9:00 Mass
February	11	10:30 am	_____	

No Baptisms will be celebrated during Lent except in an emergency.

April	14	10:30 am	15	at the 9:00 Mass
May	12	10:30 am	_____	
June	9	10:30 am	10	at the 11:30 Mass
July	14	10:30 am	_____	

The Baptism Service is the complete service involving parents, God-parents, family members and friends. Baptism at Sunday Mass is a service integrated into the Sunday mass, with the main elements employed only.

Private baptisms may take place when the church is available if you provide your own priest to preside at the baptism.

Any parishioner who regularly participates in a particular Sunday Mass may choose to have their infant baptized at that Mass on the Baptismal weekend of the month regardless of whether that Mass is a baptism Mass or not.

A suggested offering.

To the extent that one can, an offering of \$150.00 is suggested for the baptism of a child.

However, no child will be refused baptism for financial reasons.

What is Christian Initiation?

The Sacraments of Christian Initiation are baptism, confirmation and Eucharist. Though they are three separate sacraments, they are not always celebrated in three separate rituals. The three are enacted together at the Easter Vigil for adults. The three are frequently celebrated separately, and in a different order, for children.

Baptism associates us with Christ as disciples and followers. The anointing after baptism and the anointing of confirmation involve the sending of the Holy Spirit. God's heart is placed within our own. Reception of the Eucharist is the goal of Christian initiation. According to St. Augustine, participation in the Eucharist means three things: a share in the food in which Christ presents himself; the eating of the food; and what we become by eating the food.

While baptism and confirmation are not repeated, because they are actions of Christ and the Trinitarian God, Eucharist is the repeatable sacrament of initiation because we are always drawn more deeply into friendship, discipleship, forgiveness and communion.

Are there different paths in the church to bring people to baptism?

There is the path set aside for those who come to the church at or after what is called the catechetical age (usually about six years). This is the pattern of the Order of Christian Initiation of Adults, popularly known as the RCIA. In this pattern, the three sacraments of initiation, namely baptism, confirmation and Eucharist, are offered together, usually at the Easter vigil, with a reasonable time before hand spent as catechumens to learn the scriptures and teachings of the

Church, and a reasonable time afterward in a period of mystagogy or illumination as the newly baptized.

The second path is for children, that is, those who are not yet at catechetical age. At a convenient time after birth, the child is baptized and anointed (baptism). At a later time confirmation and first Eucharist are offered, with first penance also included as a sacrament of initiation. Confirmation ought to precede first Eucharist, but most usually it follows the Eucharist by several years.

The pattern for adults stresses the paschal dimension of baptism, confirmation and Eucharist: elements of dying and rising with Christ, of covenant, of God's fidelity as the horizon of Christian life, and of visible incorporation into the church.

The pattern for infants stresses the imagery of new birth, being heirs to the kingdom, becoming adopted children of God and citizens of a new creation.

Christian initiation starts whenever God summons and whenever one is ready. And even if things take place in a different order, the fullness of initiation takes place in either case.

What is the sacrament of Baptism?

Baptism is the first sacrament of initiation and the first sacrament of the church. It has two major purposes. It brings people into relationship with Jesus Christ and it brings people into relationship with the members of the church. Baptism establishes one in friendship with Christ. Because of that, one is geared toward an increase in faith, hope and love, and therefore away from the forces of evil. As a sacrament it signals conversion from sin to Christ. As a life-journey, it involves a constant renewal to love and act as Christ loves and acts.

Baptism also establishes one in a family relationship with sisters and brothers in the church. As a sacrament it signals constant reconciliation and communion. As a life-journey, it involves forgiving each other and growing together in the unity of the church.

Celebrating the baptism of infants.

The celebration of this sacrament combines baptism in water and the post-baptismal anointing with holy chrism. The baptism itself symbolizes new birth and friendship with Jesus; the anointing with chrism symbolizes God's spirit being placed in the heart of the one baptized.

This anointing is done again in the larger context of the Church at the later celebration of confirmation with the bishop presiding.

If we look at the ritual for infant baptism, we should ask how its truth gets into experience.

Infants are young. Therefore the enactment of the ritual means more to the parents, God-parents and the church at large than to the child. But it is the child that is being initiated. How shall we understand this?

Children are usually presented to the Church for baptism shortly after their natural birth. The urgency of baptism remains strong, though the absolute hold on people's imagination in regard to original sin has been somewhat modified.

Much greater is the sense of incorporating the child into the community of believers, and of having the child grow as a companion of Christ in the midst of a community of believers.

Much greater too is the realization that the Christian family is the smallest unit of the church.

The child born in a Christian family is conceived and born within, not outside the church.

Infant baptism is in the nature of a promise. It is a beginning. There must be catechesis, or handing on the faith. But that must necessarily follow. Parents are the prime agents to undertake this catechesis. Then the God-parents/sponsors. And finally the whole community.

Why should we baptize?

We baptize for many reasons. First, we need to face the fact that sin is part of our lives.

Therefore, our first hope is to do something that addresses the reality of sin. Original sin is best seen with Augustine as a deficiency in our lives. Baptism calls on a key biblical text to understand what God does in baptism: "I will put My Spirit within you" (Ezek 36:27).

Addressing this we anoint the child on the chest with the oil of the catechumens and offer prayers of exorcism in this regard.

In addition, Catholic tradition wishes to bring the child to Christ himself, as companion or friend of Christ, and disciple or learner of Christ's ways. Baptism or plunging into water symbolizes entrance into the life, death and rising of Jesus.

Catholic tradition wishes to do something that will bring the child into the church, what Paul calls incorporation into the Body of Christ. The child is baptized only after the community, along with parents and God-parents, reaffirms its own baptismal faith. Catholic tradition wishes to bring the child into the faith of the church, a journey which is a lifetime journey. The anointing with chrism symbolizes the faith God places in our hearts and also the force of grace that guides us forward.

Finally, Catholic tradition names baptism as the first sacrament required to participate in the remaining sacraments. Without baptism a sacramental life is not possible.

Is there resistance to infant baptism?

Some have been concerned that a focus on sin has so dominated Christian life that they are embarrassed to act simply for the sake of original sin. It is for this reason that a stronger sense of incorporation into Christ and the Church has been restored as the primary intent of baptism.

Removal of original sin is one aspect of that incorporation.

Some have been concerned about baptizing a child when the child does not know what is happening. They think it better to wait for baptism until a later time when the child is old enough to appreciate it. A difficulty with this position is that there is then no church context for one's faith to grow.

For this reason the church has re-instated its concern that initiation takes place within a believing community, so that the child will learn to believe, pray, relate and serve among those who believe, pray, relate and serve.

Some think the adult baptismal procedure ought to control the initiation of infants as well. In point of fact, however, it does. Even though the ordering of the sacraments might seem to be different, the difference is more related to the way faith develops in the young rather than the old. As said above, the fullness of initiation takes place in either process.

In spite of occasional resistance, it is more usual to baptize than not. The celebration of baptism is a fun experience for the family, the parish and the whole church. Baptism sets in motion a promise of the community of believers to pass on (tradition) their faith, their hope and their love.

The ritual of initiation for children.

The Baptismal Service

- An introductory ritual that asks for the name of the child and the intent of the parents who bring the child. There is an address to the child that leads to the signing of the cross by the priest, the parents and the God-parents.
- A liturgy of the word and a brief homily.
- Pre-baptismal rituals, which include a prayer of exorcism and a first anointing with the oil of the catechumens. The child is now a disciple of Christ, ready to listen to Christ's word and way of life.
- A brief litany which will include the names of those being baptized. The water is blessed for the baptism itself.
- The assembly then renews its own baptismal promises with a renunciation of sin and the profession of the creed.
- The question is asked if the parents wish to have their child baptized in the faith of the Church.

- The baptism and post-baptismal anointing
- A candle is given, the light that comes from Christ
- A prayer to open the ears and eyes
- The Lord's Prayer – which may take place at the altar

Baptism integrated within a Eucharistic liturgy.

– Parents, God-parents and child enter in procession between the ministers and the presider. These take their place to the right and left of the altar facing the congregation.

– After a greeting of the assembly, the first part of the baptismal rite begins. The name of the child and the intent of the parents who bring the child are asked. Then an address to the child that leads to the signing of the cross by the priest, the parents and the God-parents and possibly two members of the community. The parents, God-parents and children go to their seats.

– The regular liturgy of the word and homily.

– The water is blessed. The whole assembly renews its baptismal promises. The parents are then asked if they wish to baptize their child in the faith of the Church.

– The baptism and post-baptismal anointing

– A candle is given, the light that comes from Christ

– A prayer to open the ears and eyes

– Applause and return to seats for the Eucharistic liturgy

– After final prayer, a blessing on the families and the child before a blessing on the whole assembly. Procession out.

The child will now be catechized by learning the ways of the faith from parents, God-parents and the whole church.

Advancing toward first confession.

When the child comes later to receive first communion, there is frequently a rite of confession at the same time. First confession for children is different from other uses of this sacramental rite.

– First confession cannot be reconciliation for serious sin committed after baptism, for in most cases children have simply minor “sins”, if any, to name before God.

-- First confession cannot be a devotional confession, as in the processes of spiritual direction, because few have yet to be involved in spiritual direction.

-- First confession, if it happens for youngsters, is an initiation sacrament. Its primary purpose is to name and confirm God's love for the children who present themselves to God. Deciding on the value of first confession is something that

both the parents and the child need to reflect upon. But if it is an initiation sacrament, it too must take place in the midst of a praying assembly. Common celebrations of penance would be the best way initiate children into the experience of the sacrament.

A final word

The parents are the primary teachers when infants are baptized into the Church. Their own faith, their own growth in love and their own sense of values are what is most evident to their children as the children grow.

When parents bring their child to baptism, it is primarily because their own faith requires them to do so. As members of the church, they want their children to join them in faith. As believers in

Jesus Christ, they want their children also to experience Christ as the church presents him.

Parents may also do this because of custom, or because its expected in the family.

But finally it is not a question of the parents' good will. It has to do with God who cares for each child, and who wants that care to spread. It has to do with Jesus Christ who has said: "Let the children come to me; do not prevent them, for the kingdom of God belongs to such as these"

(Mk 10:14).

Therefore, the baptism of your child is itself an act of worship of God.