



*Ave María Catholic Church
Parker, Colorado*

Baptismal Preparation Handbook

“A Communal Celebration of God’s Faithful Love!”



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The Sacrament of Baptism is the gateway to all the Sacraments and is necessary for salvation. As such, baptism is the outward, visible expression of God's invisible grace to us: a celebration of God's faithful love, made primarily manifest in the self-sacrifice of Jesus Christ. Because baptism is a sacrament, it is a public and communal celebration of the whole Church and it is upon this fundamental understanding that a proper baptismal liturgy must be built. Baptism is a sacrament of faith, but faith needs a community of believers. By baptism, one comes to share in the priesthood of Christ and in his prophetic and royal mission. Having become a member of His Church, one must profess the faith they have received from God and participate in the apostolic and missionary activity of the People of God (*Lumen Gentium 11*). Therefore, whenever possible, baptisms should be integrated into the community's Sunday Mass(es).

A child who has not completed their 6th year (have not celebrated their 7th birthday) are candidates for infant baptism. In a special way, infant baptisms celebrate the saving faith already transforming the lives of the parents and of the community. The contemporary celebration of baptism should therefore be guided by our contemporary and communal understanding of the sacrament. For example, *the General Introduction of Christian Initiation* states:

What name have you given your child?

"Baptism is the door to life and to the Kingdom of God.... Baptism is therefore, above all, the sacrament of that faith by which men and women, enlightened by the Spirit's grace, respond to the Gospel of Christ.... Further, baptism is the sacrament by which men and women are incorporated into the Church, built up together in the Spirit into a house where God lives, into a holy nation and a royal priesthood. It is a sacramental bond of unity, linking all who have signed by it..... Baptism, the cleansing with water by the power of the living Word, washes away every stain of sin, original and personal, makes us sharers in God's own life and his adopted children.... Those who are baptized are united to Christ in a death like his..... For baptism recalls and effects the paschal mystery itself, because by means of it we pass from the death of sin into life."

The very fact that baptisms should, whenever possible, be performed in a parish church, highlights the communal aspect, dimension, and universality of the Christian faith, while avoiding at the same time, the threat of preferential treatment that exceptions might give or imply.

As the primary educators of their child, the parents/guardians have the first and most important influence on the faith development of their children.

The Rite of Baptism as celebrated by our Parish

As you are aware, the parish's baptismal font is located in the front of the church. Ritually, the rite begins with the celebrant greeting the parent and godparents at the main nave entry doors. Here the parents are asked several questions:

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What do you ask of the church for _____ (child's name)?

Here the infant's name is first publicly proclaimed and the parents are asked if they are ready to assume the sacred responsibility involved in bringing up their child in the Catholic faith and to imitate Christ. Godparents are also asked if they are ready to help in this responsibility. Their task is truly ecclesial, yet never one that relinquishes the whole community of its responsibility to also assist in the growth and safeguarding of that faith. Then the celebrant and family trace the sign of the cross on the forehead of the child in an action that symbolizes that he/she is now claimed for Christ.

Each child is then baptized by the priest pouring water over their head while reciting the traditional, Trinitarian formula.

" _____ (name of child), I baptize you in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit."

After each one is baptized, they are then anointed generously with the Oil of Chrism; marking them as an "Anointed One." Next, the child is clothed with a white garment, provided by the parish, symbolizing that the child is born anew—a new creation in Christ.

Before the baptism, the Paschal candle is lit. The godparents will then proceed with the baptismal candle, light it from the Paschal candle, and hold it near the infant as the presentation of the "*Light of Christ*".

(5)

Finally, the rite of "*Ephetha*" is completed, in which the celebrant prays that the newly baptized will hear the Gospel and proclaim it with his/her life. At this point, the community often signifies its welcome and approval by applause.

Note: If the baptism occurs during the Mass, after the initial portion of the rite occurs at the back of the church (before the entrance procession), the remainder will occur after the homily.

Conclusion

Baptism is the foundational sacrament through which one is united to Christ in his Church and gains entrance into a Eucharistic community. Being part of this experience should mean that others will come to recognize God's loving presence in our words and actions. Participation in the Paschal Mystery of Christ demands that care should be taken to ensure that all involved (candidates, parents and godparents) understand the implications of this great mystery into which they have been immersed. In choosing baptism for an infant, parents and the community accept the responsibility to continue the initiation of the baptized through the Eucharist and Confirmation.



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Baptism for Children of Catechetical Age (Ages 7-18)

Baptism is an initiation into a community, so it follows that those seeking baptism would participate in community life. Since your child(ren) is/are old enough to understand what living life as a baptized Christian entails, they will take part in a special process of being fully initiated by receiving the initiation Sacraments of Baptism, Confirmation, and Eucharist at the Easter Vigil, just as they did in the early church. This is normally a one-year process. The length of time depends on the readiness and dedication of the person seeking baptism. The goal of the process is to develop a real relationship with our God that will express itself in love for our neighbor. In some cases, it may mean changing attitudes, habits or lifestyle.

1. **What is so different for baptisms for children of catechetical age?** At the Ave María Parish, the young people (7-18) prepare in an intergenerational process (i.e., the whole family participates). We have had wonderful responses from the families who have been through the process about the experience of growing in faith together. Between each step, there is an interview to talk about progress and difficulties, and whether the person wishes to continue the process. This must be an absolutely free choice on their part.

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2. **Baptism Preparation:** Preparation for the sacrament of baptism at the Ave María Parish consists of participation in a children's peculiar portion of the Rite of Christian Initiation of Adults (RCIA) and youth groups, if/as appropriate. The advantages to doing this are forming peer relations in the community and being exposed in Catholic practice, doctrine, role models, and friends. It should also significantly reduce the inquiry period (suggested 6 months), as questions can be asked in these groups, and hopefully the young people should have a good idea by the end of the year whether or not they want to embrace the Catholic faith and way of life.

3. **Contact Information:** Please call the Parish Office at (303) 841-3750. We will be glad to meet with you and outline the process in more detail for you, if you have any questions. Please call and leave your phone number if you would like to be called regarding a schedule of preparation classes.

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Baptism Preparation Information and Procedures

1. **Register in the Parish:** Parents of the child to be baptized must be registered members of the Ave María Parish or at their other parish* for at least three (3) months prior to initiating the process for baptism.

* Please obtain a letter from your parish stating that you are confirmed, an active registered member, and your home parish is aware that you are choosing to celebrate the Sacrament of Baptism and/or baptism preparation at the Ave María Parish.

If you are not already registered, you may do so by contacting the parish office at (303) 841-3750 or visit the parish's website (www.avemariaonline.org).

2. **Contact the Baptism Coordinator:** Ask the parish office for available dates, a baptism registration form and information packet, and to schedule a baptism preparation/retreat.
3. **Selecting Godparents:** The Church requests two godparents. Godparents play a very important role in your child's spiritual life. They should serve as role models of the faith. The child should be able to look to their godparent as an example of how the church teaches us to live our Catholic faith. They should support not only the child but the parents as well. Additionally, in their role as godparent, they represent the larger Church community. Therefore, being a godparent is not only an honor, it is a tremendous responsibility. Therefore,

the godparents should be carefully chosen. Please refer to the suggested criteria below. In recognizing the importance of the godparent and their duties, the Church has provided guidelines to help parents choose the best possible godparent(s) for their children. Ave María Parish strictly adheres to Canon Law and Diocesan policies in all aspects of baptism. If potential godparents are not practicing members of the church or have converted from the Catholic faith to any other faith, they should not be considered and will not be accepted.

Godparents are expected to:

- a. Accompany the parent/guardian during the time of baptismal preparation.
- b. Present the infant child for baptism.
- c. Be active stewards regarding the continuing faith journey of the child.
- d. Assist in guiding the child in the Catholic faith.

To be admitted to the role of godparent, a person must:

- a. Be designated by the parent/guardian, or in their absence, by the pastor or deacon, and is to have the qualifications and intention of performing this role.
- b. Be at least 16 years of age (unless the pastor or minister has granted an exception for just cause).
- c. Be practicing Catholic who participates in the Eucharistic celebration on Sundays (e.g.,

attends Mass regularly, is in good sacramental standing, and is able to receive Holy Communion).

- d. Be a fully initiated Catholic (e.g., someone who has been baptized, confirmed, and received First Communion in the Catholic Church), who leads a life of faith in keeping with the function to be taken on.
- e. Not be restricted from such a role due to any canonical penalty or impediment.
- f. Not be the father or mother of the one to be baptized.
- g. If they are parishioners of a parish other than Holy Trinity, present a letter from their home parish pastor attesting that they are a practicing Catholic and in good standing.
- h. Be present for the baptism. If it is impossible to be in attendance, a proxy is acceptable.

Additionally:

- a. If there are two sponsors, one must be male and the other female.
- b. The two godparents do not necessarily have to be married to each other.
- c. A baptized person who belongs to a non-Catholic church may be a witness to the baptism. One Catholic godparent is required.
- d. Where there is a cultural practice of multiple godparents, the pastor may allow the family to involve a number of persons to assist them in raising the child in the Catholic faith, however, only two godparents need to be recorded.

4. **Godparent Certificates:** All godparents and Christian witnesses must obtain a certificate or letter from their own

home parish/church stating they are members in good standing and are eligible to assume the role as a godparent/Christian witness for baptism. These certificates should be submitted to the Ave María Parish Baptism Coordinator with the initial baptism registration. These certificates and other documentation are required before the child's baptism may be scheduled at Ave María.

5. **Baptism Preparation Class:** All parents and god-parents are required to attend a Baptism Preparation Class. This general, two hour preparation is presented in a retreat style format. The class is normally held the first Saturday of every other month in the church. Parents and godparents are encouraged to schedule and attend this preparation class prior to the birth of their baby. If they have already completed a parish-level baptism preparation class within the last 2 years, an exception may be granted by the parish pastor. Call the Ave María Parish's Baptism Coordinator to set a baptism date.

6. **Naming Your Child:** The name you select in addition to your family name will provide your child with a unique identity. The long standing tradition of the Church has been to give at least one name of a saint or person from our Biblical tradition. A Christian name is given to provide your child with a model for Christ-centered living.

7. **Pictures at the Baptism:** Photographs and video are encouraged at the baptism ceremony. These are excellent means of sharing the memory of this joyous and special day with your child as he/she grows in age and faith. They will also turn out to be a good teaching tool.

Please be sure to follow the instructions of the celebrant and/or Baptism Coordinator to insure that you will be getting the best pictures and not interfering with the ceremony. The presiding priest will be happy to stay for pictures with the family after the baptism, if/as needed, also.

8. **Clothing and Candle:** A white Christening gown is customary, but not required. Whatever clothing is worn should be loose enough at the neck to allow anointing of the child's breast by the priest. If a hat is worn, it should be removed for the baptism. The parish will provide a white baptismal bib/garment and a baptismal candle. After the ceremony they will be yours to keep as a reminder of this joyous celebration. The candle can be burned on baptismal anniversaries and when the child receives other sacraments in the future (e.g., Confirmation, First Holy Communion, Marriage, etc).

9. **Family Donation:** There is no baptism fee, however many families often do wish to offer a donation to the church on the occasion of their child's baptism. This may be placed in an envelope and given to the Baptism Coordinator on the day of the baptism or it may be mailed to the parish. Please indicate that the donation is for the occasion of the child's (name) baptism.

10. **Baptismal Record and Certificate:** The baptism will be recorded in the permanent records of the parish from the information you provide. Therefore please be sure of the accuracy of the information and the spelling of names. A baptism certificate will be given to you at the baptism.

11. **Required Documentation for Baptism:** The following items are required to be submitted to the parish's Baptism Coordinator prior to the baptism being scheduled:

(A baptism will not be scheduled until the Baptism Preparation Program is completed and *all documents are submitted to the Parish Office*. After the documentation is received, the office will call you to confirm the date and time for the baptism.)

- a. A completed Baptismal Application.
- b. Parents/godparents must obtain a letter from their parish stating that they are confirmed, active/registered members of that community (for at least three (3) months).
- c. Parents/godparents must provide letter confirming attendance at a Baptismal Preparation Retreat/Class (here or at another Catholic parish).
- d. If the parents of the child to be baptized are not members of the Ave María Parish, we will need a letter of permission from the pastor of their Catholic parish to perform the baptism.
- e. If one of the parents is non-Catholic, he/she must provide the church with written correspondence which states that they agree that the child(ren) will be raised in the Catholic faith. Additionally, they are encouraged to attend and participate in the Baptismal Preparation Program.

12. **Discernment of Readiness for Parents of Infants:**

- a. The parents or at least one of the parents or the person who lawfully takes their place, must give consent for the lawful baptism of an infant.

- b. There must be a well-founded hope that the infant will be brought up in the Catholic religion.

the Parish Office (303) 841-3750) to schedule the baptism. (be prepared to give the date and Mass time *preference* and we will try to accommodate your family. We do not schedule baptisms on holiday weekends and during the season of Advent and Lent.

If you have any questions or need additional information, please contact the Baptism Coordinator at (303) 841-3750.

The Role of Godparents

Congratulations! You have been chosen to be a godparent. From its very title, you can see that this role is connected with "**God**" and therefore belongs primarily to the realm of the spiritual and the holy. It is not a reward for past deeds and certainly not connected with civil guardianship or future care of the child. Your new role is a sacred and faith-filled responsibility, entrusted to you now to participate and share in your new godchild's Christian life and education.

What a privilege! Full of potential and yet somewhat daunting! You have been chosen from the countless family members and friends the parents of this child have, to share in this most intimate and special way, their primary parental responsibility of bringing their child up in the Christian faith and "to keep God's commandments as Christ taught us" (*Rite of Baptism*).

So what then is your role?

During the opening portion of the Rite of Baptism, the godparents are addressed in the following manner:

"Are you ready to help the parents of these children in their duty as Christian parents?"

Presumably, after due reflection beforehand, you will be ready to answer "**Yes**. Your role is to assist the parents in guiding their child to know God and to belong to his Church in the fullest way possible. Special attention should be paid to the forms and symbols used in the Rite of Baptism: **the waters** that wash away sin and restore us to new life in Christ; that new life signified in **the white garment**; **the Holy Oil of Chrism** that brings both healing and strength and sets us apart for the work of the Kingdom; and of course that **lighted candle** symbolizing that Christ and his Gospel has become in the words of the psalm a "light for our feet", guiding us along the road of faith. This is why, at its very heart, your relationship with your new godchild is a "**spiritual**" one.



History of Baptism

"Baptism incorporates us into Christ and forms us into God's people. This sacrament pardons all our sins, rescues us from the power of sin and darkness, and brings us to the dignity of adopted children; a new creation through water and the Holy Spirit. Hence we are called and indeed are the children of God. (Christian Initiation: General Introduction, #2)"

From Scripture and the Post-Apostolic Period

The sacramental mystery of Christian baptism finds its scriptural origins in the great commission of Christ to his disciples at the end of Matthew's gospel (Matthew 28:19) ***"go teach all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit"***. Thus there is an inseparable connection between faith and the acceptance of baptism. Jesus tells Nicodemus in the Gospel of John: ***"unless one is born of water and Spirit, one cannot enter the Kingdom of God"*** (John 3:5). Baptism is the very basis of the whole Christian life, the gateway to the Spirit and the door to the other sacraments (*CCC 1213*) without which no one can enter the Kingdom of God.

Since the beginning of time, water, plentiful and yet essential, has been the source of life and fruitfulness for the earth. The waters of the Great Flood recorded in the Book of Genesis as well as the Crossing of the Red Sea by the Israelites are seen as prefiguring the ongoing drama of salvation by our loving and merciful God.

Christ's public ministry opens symbolically with his baptism in the Jordan and closes with the great commission to his disciples to ***"go teach and baptize"*** (Matthew 28:19). From its very beginning on the day of Pentecost, the Church has celebrated and administered Baptism as essential to its very mission to preach the Gospel of Christ to the ends of the world. Indeed, Peter declares to the astonished crowd in Acts: ***"Repent and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins; and you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit"*** (Acts 2:38). While Paul declares to his jailer: ***"Believe in the Lord Jesus and you will be saved"*** and the text continues: ***"he [the jailer] was baptized at once, with all his family"*** (Acts 16:31-33)

Throughout the New Testament there are several instances of baptismal practices of the early Church from the baptism of Saul (Paul) (Acts 9:18); to the baptism of the Eunuch by Philip (Acts 8:38-40); and the baptism of the large group by the disciples (Acts 2:41, 10:46-48 and 19:3-7).

We should remember that the rite of immersion for the washing away of sins is not a New Testament experience. Immersion or ritual purification has a long history among all the religious systems of the world, especially within Judaism.

From Early Church Sources

One of the oldest Church documents, not part of the Canon of Scripture, the ***"Didache"***, (dated from around the start of the 2nd century) required that one should be baptized where pos-

sible in flowing/living water and advises the candidate and the community to fast as part of the preparation of entering into the community of faith. The fast was part of the sacramental preparation process.

"The water cleanses the body, but the Spirit seals the soul"

- St. Cyril of Jerusalem



Through Baptism one is washed clean from attachments to things of this world and raised to new life in Christ. Confirmation is our acknowledgement that the Spirit of the Risen Christ is in our hearts enabling us to respond to the Gospel message and to pray as Jesus taught us. As part of the Body of Christ (the Church), we recognize who we truly and fundamentally are, as we gather around the table of the Lord, to offer our endless sacrifice of praise.

Post-apostolic and Medieval Eras

As the Christianization of Europe was completed, there were fewer and fewer adults who were not baptized and so the full process of initiation could not be celebrated. Thus the celebration of baptism became divorced from its integral union with the other sacraments of initiation. The Rite of Baptism as codified by the reformers after the Council of Trent was an adapted and abridged version of this earlier fuller process, now addressed to the needs of infant baptism. Pre-baptismal rites also included the renunciation of sin and the ways of evil, the rite of exorcism by blowing on the infant, placing salt on his/her tongue, an anointing with the Oil of Catechumen, and the "*Ephetha*" by which the nostrils and ears of the infant were touched with spittle and the words "*Be open*". Post-baptismal rites included the anointing with the sacred Oil of Chrism, the clothing with a white garment, and the receipt of a lighted candle.

As is still the case today, the ordinary minister of baptism was declared to be an ordained deacon/priest/bishop, unless an emergency situation had occurred. In all cases the minister must have the intention of "doing what the Church does" in baptism and must employ water and the Trinitarian formula. In the Western Church this is the declarative formula: " (*name*), *I baptize you in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit*".

Note: In cases of *extreme emergencies* and when no ordained deacon/priest/bishop is present or available, the Church authorizes any baptized Catholic to baptize another provided the aforementioned baptismal formula and water is used. Please contact a priest for further information and details. If an emergency baptism is performed, please contact the parish office, as soon as possible afterwards, so that it can be recorded in the permanent records.



Postbaptismal Mystagogy

Following the celebration of this sacrament, the parents, godparents, and child are encouraged to deepen their understanding of their Catholic faith through appropriate adult and child formation programs at the parish-level. Additionally, parents and godparents are encouraged to fully participate in the Sunday celebration of Eucharist and in the life of the parish.