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GUIDELINES FOR HAVING YOUR CHILD BAPTIZED AT ST. GALL CATHOLIC CHURCH

(effective July 1, 2017)

Thank you for inquiring about baptism at St. Gall! The gift of grace in baptism is the *greatest* gift that you can give to your child. Of course, with this gift also comes an awesome responsibility. We look forward to supporting you as you lead your child in the lifelong journey of becoming a disciple of Jesus Christ! I offer the following guidelines in order to help answer some questions that you might have about baptism at St. Gall. Please read these guidelines in their entirety. Do not hesitate to contact myself or my staff if you have any questions.

Be assured of my daily prayers for you,

Fr. DiTomo, Pastor, St. Gall Catholic Church

Answers to some commonly asked questions about baptism at St. Gall

1. WHAT exactly does baptism entail?

- a. While all persons are born with a fallen human nature and tainted by original sin (see Genesis 3), the sacrament of baptism brings about spiritual renewal in the form of a new birth (*Catechism of the Catholic Church* [hereafter cite as CCC], 1250). Baptism brings about the forgiveness of original sin, and makes a child an adopted son/daughter of God and a temple of the Holy Spirit. Baptism gives the theological virtues of faith, hope, and charity and the gifts of the Holy Spirit. Baptism incorporates a child into the life of Jesus Christ, and they share in his priesthood and his mission as prophet and king. Baptism incorporates a child into the Church and is the necessary gateway for receiving the other sacraments (First Eucharist, Confirmation, Confession, Holy Matrimony, etc.). Baptism gives sanctifying grace and makes a child holy—set apart—for the mission of knowing, loving, and serving God and neighbor. Baptism opens up the possibility of salvation—eternal life with God in Heaven (see John 3:3-15)! Baptism is the first step in becoming a disciple of Jesus Christ. Baptism also is the source of responsibilities, duties, and rights within the Church. Of course, baptism is *only the beginning* of a persons' faith journey. Baptized children will need to be formed in their Catholic Christian faith through their parents, family, and parish community so that they can fully live out the grace of baptism. Because of the necessity of baptism for salvation infant baptism has always been an ancient tradition in the Church.

(For the full teaching on baptism see the CCC, paragraphs 1213-1284.)

2. CAN I have my child baptized at St. Gall Catholic Church?

- a. In bringing a child to baptism, the parent(s) are reaffirming their own faith in Jesus Christ and the teachings of the Catholic Church. Church law requires that there must be a well-founded belief that the child will be raised in the Catholic faith after baptism. Grandparents sometimes ask what is necessary if

they would like their grandchildren to be baptized. They may speak with the Pastor about such cases. Barring emergencies of sickness or where death is imminent, the parents of the children should consent to the baptism and have a basic understanding of the implications of having their child baptized.

- b. In normal circumstances, one should be a registered parishioner at St. Gall (or, at least reside within the parish boundaries of St. Gall) in order to have one's child baptized here.
- c. We also permit the baptisms of those who have a family connection to St. Gall (e.g. St. Gall is the home parish of one of the parents, even though the parents now live elsewhere and attend another parish) or have another kind of significant connection to St. Gall (e.g. the parents were married at St. Gall, etc.). In such special cases the Pastor of St. Gall would still have to request from the family's proper pastor (the pastor within whose territory/boundaries the family resides) the permission to baptize the child here at St. Gall.
- d. In general, it is best to baptize a child in the parish that is the family's "home parish" because that is their local faith community.

3. WHEN does St. Gall schedule baptisms?

- a. We normally schedule baptisms on **Sundays** following the 10:30am Mass. Since the 10:30am Mass typically lasts about an hour, and allowing 15 minutes for the priest to greet parishioners and get things set up for the baptism, the baptism would start approximately at **11:45am**. The baptism liturgy generally lasts about 30 minutes.
- b. We also occasionally schedule baptisms *during Sunday Mass*. There is something particularly beautiful about having a large number of the parish community present in order to witness the baptism of a child. The baptism takes place after the homily. If you would like to have the baptism of your child within the context of one of the weekend Masses (Saturday 4:30pm, Sunday 8:30am, Sunday 10:30am, or Sunday 5pm) please make this request known. (Note: we do not typically do this during Lent)
- c. In special circumstances we may be able to schedule baptisms **on another day** (Saturday around noon, for example). We only make this exception for parishioners who are regularly involved in the life of St. Gall Parish and who have a special need (for example, the availability of their guests).
- d. Baptism is necessary for salvation. While families often wish to schedule baptisms so that family and friends can be present, parents are encouraged to not defer the baptism of their children for an excessive amount of time. Ideally, children should be baptized within 3 weeks of their birth (*Fourth Synod of the Diocese of Rockford*, 102). If an unbaptized infant is seriously ill or hospitalized please contact a priest immediately.

4. WHAT FORM does the baptism ritual take?

- a. Most typically we baptize by pouring water over the head of the child three times using the Trinitarian formula ("I baptize you, [Name], in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit."). While pouring may be lawfully used, the Church actually recommends baptism by immersion, as it is "more suitable as a symbol of participation in the death and resurrection of Christ" (*Rite of Baptism for Children, Christian Initiation: General Introduction*, #22). The baptismal font at St. Gall is large enough to fully immerse the child in if the parents prefer baptism by this method. The rite also includes a reading from Scripture, several prayers, and on two occasions the child is anointed with blessed oil.

5. How do I SCHEDULE a baptism?

- a. In order to schedule a baptism please call the main office and speak with our parish secretary, Darlene Biggs. (phone 630-365-6030 or email darlene@stgall.com). She will help you schedule a date for the baptism. Currently, most of our baptisms are scheduled such that there is only one child baptized at each liturgy. As our parish continues to grow, however, we may have to schedule more than one child

for a given time slot. Our receptionist will also ask for some information that will help us to properly record the sacrament in our baptismal register.

6. Is there a “BAPTISM CLASS” that I must attend?

- a. Because baptism is such an important sacrament parents must be given some basic formation in the meaning and responsibilities inherent in the sacrament. A family should contact the Pastor in order to arrange a time to meet.

(Fr. DiTomo – phone 630-365-6030, email frditomo@stgall.com)

Ideally, both parents should attend this meeting. If necessary, one parent will suffice. The Pastor will use this occasion in order to welcome and connect with the parents (perhaps even meeting the family for the first time). He will also go through the prayers and symbols employed in the rite of baptism so that the parents understand more fully the meaning of the rite and the responsibility and sacred commitment that they are making in bringing their children to baptism. If you have completed this baptismal formation in the last 5 years you do not need to repeat it for the baptism of future children.

7. What are the REQUIREMENTS for someone to serve as a GODPARENT?

- a. In our culture parents often choose a close family member or friend to serve as a godparent to their child. In many cases this is done in order to honor a particular relationship. (In some cases, parents even feel some pressure from other family members to do this.) Parents sometimes choose godparents because they admire their virtues and consider them to be living a good life. While it is a great honor to be asked to serve as a godparent, the role of godparent within the Catholic tradition is a very specific role that brings with it many unique responsibilities and requirements. Please consult these requirements before you ask someone to serve as a godparent for your child.
- b. The sponsors (aka the “godfather” or “godmother”) play a very important role. They must be able and ready to help the newly baptized child on the road of Christian life (CCC 1255). They are to help the child lead a Christian life and faithfully fulfill the obligations inherent in baptism (*Code of Canon Law*, canon 872). Of course, one does not need to be morally perfect to be a godparent (no one is without sin). Yet, such a person should be striving to avoid sin and to live a life of holiness and grace. When a parent seeks to choose a godparent they should ask this basic question: “Which individual(s) will help my child grow up to be a holy disciple of Jesus Christ within the tradition of the Catholic Church?” We may have many family members and friends that we love and respect, but not all of them can fulfill this requirement.
- c. There is to be only one male sponsor (godfather) or one female sponsor (godmother) or one of each.
- d. To serve as a godparent an individual must be a **baptized Catholic** who:
- i. Is 16 years old (though the pastor or minister can grant an exemption for a just cause)
 - ii. Has already received the sacrament of Confirmation
 - iii. Has already received the sacrament of Holy Eucharist (First Communion)
 - iv. Leads a life in harmony with the Catholic faith and the role to be undertaken.
 1. Is willing and able to reject Satan and sin (this is part of the rite of baptism)
 2. Is willing and able to reaffirm their faith in God the Father, Jesus Christ, the Holy Spirit, and the Holy Catholic Church (see The Apostles’ Creed).
 3. Attends Mass on every Sunday and holy day of obligation (to intentionally skip Mass on these days is a serious sin)
 4. Is a registered member of a parish
 5. If they live with someone, they must do so within the context of marriage and their marriage must have taken place in a Catholic Church
 6. If they have children, their children must be receiving formation/education in the Catholic faith

- e. Why are there so many requirements for godparents? In order to publicly stand up and promise to support a baptized child live out their Catholic faith the godparent must, his or herself be actively living out their own faith in a Christian way of life. We cannot give to others what we, ourselves, do not possess.
- f. Sponsors will have to sign a form testifying to the fact that they meet these requirements. They will also need to receive the signature of their pastor testifying to the same.
- g. While at least one godparent must be Catholic, a non-Catholic Christian can serve as a “Christian witness.”

8. *Who is the MINISTER of baptism?*

- a. In general, the Pastor of St. Gall will celebrate baptisms. On occasion, a deacon assigned to St. Gall may serve as the minister. If a family would like a priest or deacon from outside the parish to baptize their child they should make this request with the Pastor of St. Gall.

9. *Does the parish expect a donation?*

- a. There is no donation expected. Some families choose to offer a small stipend to the minister or the parish as an expression of their gratitude. However, this is not at all required. If anything, the Pastor simply encourages families to practice regular stewardship and give of their time, talent, or treasure to the parish when they are able. When you give to our parish you make it stronger. Most of all we would love to see you at Mass!

10. *How can I get more involved in the life of St. Gall Parish?*

- a. We are very glad that you are considering baptizing your child at St. Gall. In doing so you are fulfilling one of your responsibilities as a Catholic parent.
- b. Very often parents ask the Church to baptize their children at a time when they, themselves, are not regularly practicing their faith or participating in the life of the parish. If this is the case for you then we encourage you to become more involved. Start attending Mass if you are not currently doing so. We would love to see you here! Check out our bulletin and website to see all of the opportunities to grow in your knowledge and practice of the faith and to meet other members of our community.
- c. Often parents who request baptism have been married civilly but have not been married in the Catholic Church. If this is your situation please ask the priest how he might be able to help you to have your marriage validated in the Catholic Church. When one exchanges marriage vows in the Church one receives the added grace of the sacrament of Holy Matrimony. Under normal circumstances one should be in a valid marriage in order to receive the other sacraments (Holy Communion, confession, etc.). Marriage and family life is not always easy. Everyone could use the special grace of the sacraments! Still, even if you are not in a valid marriage there are many ways that you can still grow in your faith and participate in the life of the parish. If you desire baptism for your child that means that God is at work in your soul. Keep searching and going deeper. Please let our parish help you and your family grow in your relationship with God.