

A photograph of a priest in green vestments performing a baptism. The priest is leaning over a white font, pouring water over the head of a child who is lying back. A woman in a white robe stands behind the child, and another woman in a white robe stands to the right, looking on. The scene is set in a church.

Planning a Baptism

ST. PAUL'S EPISCOPAL CHURCH
ROCK CREEK PARISH

ST. PAUL'S
ROCK
CREEK

Baptism

“Holy Baptism is the sacrament by which God adopts us as his children and makes us members of Christ’s Body, the Church, and inheritors of the kingdom of God.”

*Book of Common Prayer
(BCP), 858*

“The bond which God establishes at baptism is indissoluble.”

BCP, 298

Baptism by water in the name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit is the only requirement for full initiation in the Episcopal Church. Baptism is the root from which all other sacraments and rites of the church proceed. As baptism marks our membership into the Body of Christ, it is a sacrament celebrated when the other members are present, usually on Sunday mornings.

Baptism was, for the early Christian community, a sacramental action to convey that one was experiencing spiritual conversion and renewal—the end of one life and the beginning of another in Christ. By using the metaphorical language and imagery of death, burial, and resurrection, the early community ceremonially expressed, that in baptism, we die to our destructive and distorted ways of being, relating, and acting, and that by the goodness and faithfulness of God, we are raised from death to a new life, guided by and filled with the Spirit of God. Baptism was an outward and visible sign of the spiritual transformation God was doing in one’s life. It was a symbolic action performed to represent our spiritual journey towards communion with God, the people of God, and all God’s creation.

Baptism involves the individual as well as the community. Both the individual and the community bear significant responsibility toward each other. The individual promises to renounce Satan; turn to Christ; and be faithful to the apostolic fellowship, teaching, breaking of bread, and prayers (BCP, 304). The community promises to do all in its power to support the individual in the new life in Christ (BCP, 303).



BAPTISM AND MEMBERSHIP AT ST. PAUL'S

For infants and children, it is required that at least one parent be an active member of St. Paul's. It is the view of the Episcopal Church that infant baptism is only appropriate when at least one parent is an active member of a congregation and thus willing and able to raise the baptized child as a Christian within the Church and congregation.

Non-members from the neighborhood are welcome to have their children baptized as part of the St. Paul's community if they attend St. Paul's regularly prior to their child's baptism, and will be welcomed as new members of the parish. The child's baptism must be planned for at least six months after the first meeting with St. Paul's clergy

Non-members from outside the neighborhood are encouraged to find a local church.

WHO CAN BE BAPTIZED?

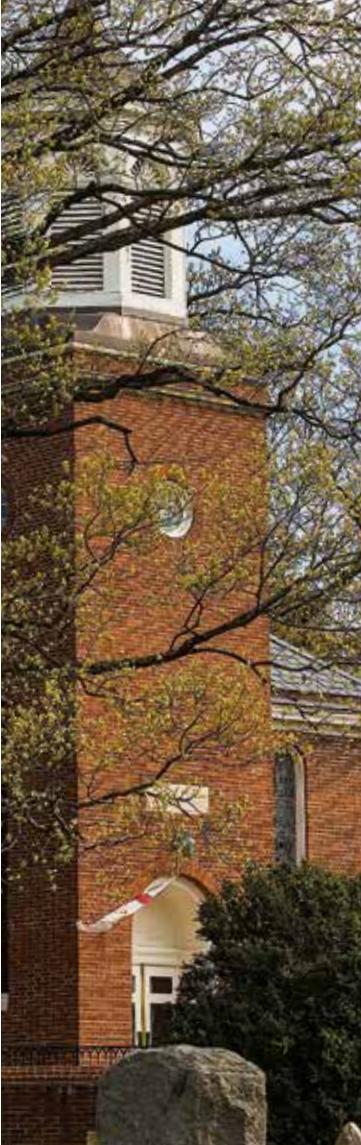
Anyone who seeks God and a deeper knowledge of God and is drawn to Jesus Christ is welcome to receive the sacrament of Holy Baptism. God's invitation extends to people of all ages and backgrounds. In the Episcopal tradition, a person may be baptized at any age. Parents who bring their young children to be baptized (infant baptism) make an additional commitment to raise these children in the Christian faith.

Infant Baptisms. We want infants to have the benefit of being in God's family all their lives. God's grace is given freely to them, and they dwell in His love. Yet babies are still babies, even when baptized. As they grow, they need to be taught

the Christian life, just as they will need to learn to read and write. It is the duty of parents, godparents, and the Church to see that the baptized child knows Jesus Christ and grows in God's grace.

Adult Baptisms. When an adult is baptized, it's recommended that s/he have two sponsors. Instruction and spiritual preparation are required in advance for the person being baptized and for sponsors.

If you have already been baptized, you do not need to be baptized again. Baptisms involving water and the invocation of the Holy Trinity (Father, Son and Holy Spirit) are recognized by the Episcopal Church and the worldwide Anglican Communion.



First Things First

When you are ready to commit to a specific date, the process is quite simple. Planning for a baptism should begin at least six months ahead of time. The first step is to meet with one of the clergy for instruction prior to your child's, or your own, baptism. Please contact our Parish Administrator to begin your inquiry—and please do come to church, worship with us, and become a part of our community. You will also need to choose your godparents or sponsors. There are no fees for baptisms and the administration of sacraments that are used by God for his powerful redeeming work.

WHEN ARE BAPTISMS OFFERED?

The calendar of the Christian church has four feast days on which baptisms are especially appropriate:

January: The Baptism of our Lord because it is Christ's Baptism which sets the example for us.

Early spring: The Great Vigil of Easter because it is the death and resurrection of Christ into which candidates are baptized.

Late Spring: The Day of Pentecost because it is the Holy Spirit who is poured out upon the candidate in baptism.

November: All Saints' Sunday because it is the communion of saints into which the candidate is welcomed.

It is also fitting to celebrate Holy Baptism when the **Bishop visits** because the Bishop is the chief minister of Christian initiation (a responsibility he or she delegates to the priests).

If circumstances necessitate a different date, we will try to accommodate your need. Baptisms are not held in the season of Lent (the forty days leading up to Easter) and are not encouraged during Advent (the four weeks preceding Christmas).

Godparents and Sponsors

The Book of Common Prayer (BCP) requires that each candidate for Holy Baptism “is to be sponsored by one or more baptized persons.” (BCP, 298). At least two sponsors (for adults) or godparents (for minor children) accompanies each candidate for baptism on his or her faith journey. The commitment of the sponsor is to support the candidate in the Christian faith and life. One sponsor must be a Christian, preferably an Episcopalian. Anyone else can also serve in this role, including persons from other faith traditions or no faith tradition—as long as the individual is sincere in promising to support the candidate’s spiritual growth as a Christian.

While there is no fixed number of sponsors for a candidate, nor the need for any particular combination of males and females, traditionally, a boy had two godfathers and one godmother, whereas a girl had two godmothers and one godfather. Today, however, any number of sponsors is considered appropriate.



Preparing for Baptism

Candidates for baptism—or their parents and godparents if the candidate is an infant—enter into a time of holy preparation before the baptism. A meeting between parents, godparents, and members of the immediate family is required before baptism. This meeting will be led by the clergy or a lay minister, called a “Catechist,” who will give information and instruction about the sacrament and the responsibilities involved. Preparation can involve more extensive formation, depending on the candidate’s age, background, and desire. We also encourage you to come to church regularly, well in advance of a baptism. During this time, candidates reflect prayerfully on the five promises of the Baptismal Covenant:

Celebrant: Will you continue in the apostles’ teaching and fellowship, in the breaking of bread, and in the prayers?

People: I will, with God’s help.

Celebrant: Will you persevere in resisting evil, and, whenever you fall into sin, repent and return to the Lord?

People: I will, with God’s help.

Celebrant: Will you proclaim by word and example the Good News of God in Christ?

People: I will, with God’s help.

Celebrant: Will you seek and serve Christ in all persons, loving your neighbor as yourself?

People: I will, with God’s help.

Celebrant: Will you strive for justice and peace among all people, and respect the dignity of every human being?

People: I will, with God’s help.

(BCP, 304-305)

These five promises serve as a foundation for a commitment to the Christian faith and life. The Christian journey is a lifelong process, and baptism marks the beginning of a commitment to grow in faith.

After Baptism

Because baptism is a rite of initiation and welcome, the church yearns for the newly baptized to have an authentic relationship with God and the Christian assembly. A mark of this relationship will be regular participation in the life of this parish. We invite candidates for baptism to take seriously this aspect of the Christian life, expressing a sincere commitment to “continue in the apostles’ teaching and fellowship, in the breaking of bread, and in the prayers.”

When a child is baptized, a small Christ Candle is lit, signifying a new life in Christ. Keep this candle and light it on the anniversary of the child’s baptism each year. You should observe the anniversary of a baptism as you would a birthday. Most importantly, work hard to keep your child close and growing in God’s love.

BAPTISM, WORSHIP, AND THE EUCHARIST

The Christian community is a worshipping one, as is the Christian family. Whether child or adult, a baptized person is a full member of Christ’s Body and of the Family of God and is welcome to fully participate in the worship life of the Church.

CHRISTIAN EDUCATION

St. Paul’s Church offers a complete program of Christian education for children and adults. Learning the Christian way of life is a group process as well as a family enterprise. It is never too early to begin, or too late to continue. This is the most important part of growing in faith. Please talk to St. Paul’s Parish Life Coordinator or the clergy or check our website to find out more about Christian education opportunities.



We Look Forward to Your Baptism

We look forward to welcoming you or your child to our family through the rite of Holy Baptism. Please call the Church office at 202.726.2080 and make an appointment with the clergy to discuss your upcoming baptism.

**ST. PAUL'S
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