

Baptismal Instructions and Q and A for Parents and Godparents

All Saints of the North Shore, Danvers 2020

**Baptismal Belonging and Vocation:
Thoughts for Those Who Desire the Sacrament of Baptism**

Welcome!

COVID 19 Guidelines

Our diocese has indicated that COVID-19 cases, hospitalizations and deaths indicate near-zero community transmission of the virus before we can again administer the sacraments of baptism and eucharist.



INSTRUCTIONS and RESOURCES

Baptismal identity is central to how Episcopalians see our place and purpose in the world. Every human being is created in the image and likeness of God, and is loved beyond imagining. And every human being has been given gifts needed for the healing of the world. Being baptized is accepting both that sense of belonging and that sense of call – or vocation – to make the world a better place.

To be baptized is a life long process, not something to be prepared for and then accomplished. It is all about ongoing relationship. If you are considering asking the people of All Saints to baptize your child, what that means is that **you are asking us to be an integral part of your child's life.** It's a promise we take seriously.

In the service itself we as your faith community make this pledge:

Will you who witness these vows do all in your power to support this person in his/her life in Christ?

To which we all say: **We will.**

In order for us to fulfill the promise you are asking us to make, you promise to be an active part of the church community. There are many ways to be an active part of the church community. In what follows, we will connect some ideas for participation in the community to the Baptismal promises you will make for your child.

Even though at All Saints we spend much time and care on the spiritual development of children and youth, we know that the primary place children learn about the life of faith is in the home. So having your child baptized is as much about your faith practices as it is theirs. They will learn to live as they see you live.

Therefore, what follows are some thoughts on each of the five Baptismal Covenant promises. You will see questions for your own reflection, as well as practical ideas about how to deepen and strengthen your own inner spirituality, your participation in liturgy, and how you use your gifts for the healing of the world. Some of these ideas will fit better at some times in your life and not in others.

Think about these suggestions as a way to strengthen the quality of our relationships. In developing lifelong faith practices, ('holy habits 'some call them), you will likely find them useful to you in times of sorrow, temptation, or test. You will find they become the lens through which to become attentive to and grateful for the Mystery we call God at work in our hearts and in our world.

“Will you continue in the Apostle's teaching . . . “

God gave us minds to think, and so part of the Christian life is to study scripture, tradition, and reason (the hallmarks of how Episcopalians make decisions), giving each equal weight.

What about your patterns of 'continuing in the apostle's teaching 'will your child learn by watching you? When they come to you with questions (and oh they will!) about God, faith, prayer, Jesus, death, etc, have you thought through these questions for yourself? What do you think about forgiveness? Healing? Jesus? Other religions? Church? Death?

Practical Ideas for continuing in the apostle's teaching

- Attend church.
- In church we hear readings from scripture, set in context by the preacher. You will participate in prayers intended to turn our hearts to gratitude, and to collaborating with God to make the world a better place.
- Sample the variety of any of our three services that All Saints offers. Attend a service at the Episcopal Cathedral of St. Paul (it's like our "mother ship" for Episcopalians in , the way Canterbury Cathedral is for Anglicans like us all over the world).
- Google and read Anne Lamott's essay: Why I Make Sam Go To Church, or follow this link: <http://www.christianitytoday.com/le/2003/winter/13.89.html?start=4>

Here is a list of some great books and other resources about scripture and church that folks at All Saints have found interesting and useful:

- The Underground Church by Robin Meyer
- Saving Jesus from the Church by Robin Meyer
- Zealot by Reza Aslan
- People of the Way by Dwight Zscheille
- Unabashedly Episcopalian by Bishop Doyle
- Saving Paradise by Brock and Parker
- Love Wins or Velvet Elvis by Rob Bell
- Any books by Bishop Spong, John Dominic Crossan, Marcus Borg, Anne Lamott, Barbara Brown Taylor, Phyllis Tickle, Brian McClaren, Nadia Boltz-Weber
- Bishop Prior's blog
- Episcopal Café
- Krista Tippet's radio shows and Podcasts, On Being
- The Spiritual Child by Lisa Miller
- Searching for Sunday by Rachel Held Evans
- Get a Bible. [Here](#) are some bible translations that are the most accurate to the language in which they were written (it's strongly recommended that you choose one with good foot-notes to help set the historical context):
 - New Revised Standard Version
 - The Common Bible
 - The Message (not a translation, but much more readable)

- Here are some good bibles for your children as they get older (for full descriptions visit our web page on this) :
 - Children of God by Bishop Tutu
 - The Spark story bible
 - Read Aloud Bible Stories
 - The Children's Illustrated Bible by DK
 - CEB Deep Blue Sea Bible
 - Whirl bible (3-6 graders)
 - Connect bible (4-6 graders)
 - The Message: Solo Remix for teens (not an accurate translation, but much more readable than your average bible).



“Will you continue in the apostle’s teaching and fellowship . “

Being a Christian means patterning your life after Christ, who surrounded himself with a community of people with whom to share life, and to work for a world in which all live in dignity and love (what he called “The Kingdom of God”). What will your child learn from you about what it means to be a vital part of the web of relationships that is church? What will they learn from you about working together for the common good? What will they learn from you about sharing time, laughter, and service with church friends?

Practical Ways for Being in the Apostle’s Fellowship

- Be a part of Sunday morning leadership by: reading, greeting, chalice bearing, being an usher or serving on altar guild, baking communion bread, singing, playing an instrument on Sunday mornings.
- Provide hospitality at coffee hour

- Pledge money to the church budget, and talk about it with your child
- Teach Sunday school, work with the youth group
- Bring meals to those who are ill, visiting the home-bound, befriending residents at Retirement homes, celebrating joys (knitting a prayer shawl), mourning losses (writing a card, attending a funeral). . .
- Serve on a small group around a particular task, such as on vestry, shoveling snow, watering plants, finance committee, decorating for Christmas . . .
- host a newcomers party. . .

“Will you continue in the Apostle’s teaching and fellowship, through the Breaking of Bread”

Come to church. Again we say, “Come to church”. Feel the collective heartbeat. Sing and laugh and cry and bring your whole, authentic self. Be fed and be sent.

What will your child learn from you about the importance of Eucharist to you? Music? Prayers? How will you make church attendance fit into the regular rhythm of your week? How will you invite your child into full participation in the liturgy?

- In addition to fully engaging in the service yourself, here are some thoughts for how to fully engage children in worship:
- Teach them to use their ‘inside ’voices, walking feet, and respect other worshiper’s experience
- Teach them the important phrases: “I will with God’s help”; “Amen”; “Life is Short”,
- Teach them to stand to sing, turn to face the Gospel reader, bow when the cross or the Gospel book comes by.
- Teach them to hold hands for bread as if they were receiving a gift
- Encourage them to invite friends to church.
- Prepare them for worship. “I wonder what the Jesus story will be today?” “I wonder what songs we will sing?”
- Ask them about their experience. “What was the best part of church for you today?” “Who were you happiest to see today?”
- Encourage them to be readers, greeters, ushers, singers, acolytes.

“Will you continue in the Apostle’s teaching and fellowship, through the Breaking of Bread, and the Prayers”

Feeling connected to the presence of God is about attentiveness and awareness, which is how we think about prayer. Through prayer we invite the love and light of God to surround a person or

situation. Through prayer we are offering ourselves to be sent out to be Christ's hands and feet in the world. There are many, many ways to be in prayer.



What are your feelings about prayer? Do you pray? When? How? Why? What will your child learn about prayer by watching you? Here are some tools to help you expand and deepen your experience of prayer:

- Attend a Sunday evening Perfect Paws Pet Ministry Service
- Take some time to pray in our Saint Francis meditation garden.
- Read An Altar in the World by Barbara Brown Taylor
- Know your way around the Book of Common Prayer
- Spend time in silence
- Read Taking Jesus Seriously– Buddhist meditation for Christians
- Do Yoga (we even have a yoga studio in our building!)
- Read Naked Spirituality by Brian McClaren
- Here are some ideas to widen and increase the experience of prayer in your child
- Have them participate in Sunday School, where they learn prayers to pray at home, and also how to pray in a group.
- When your children are old enough to sit still for longer stretches, take them with you to a Quaker Meeting.
- Spend time with them just sitting in silence (it's easier if you time it, starting with less than a minute, and then increasing over time. Children need silence spaces as much as adults do!)
- Bless them as you drop them off for day care or school
- Pray before meals
- Pray before bed
- Teach being still and silent as prayer (it doesn't always have to be words)
- Grateful? Praise God
- Sing church songs at home
- Make it physical if possible –
 - Light a candle

- Hold your hands a certain way
- What seasonal differences will you celebrate in the home?
 - Advent candles, calendars, crèches
 - Lenten practices

“Will you persevere in resisting evil”

There is evil in this world. Although many or even most of us don't believe in a single entity such as Satan that is creating evil, the reality is that our collective action and inaction creates space where the good of some triumphs over the good of all. There is violence, greed, and destruction of the earth. There are interlocking systems of oppression from which we benefit because of our race, class, gender expression, education, sexual orientation, all sorts of ways. To be a Christian is to stand clearly and strongly against evil, and to spend our lives working for love, justice, and peace.

What will your child learn from you by watching how you about stand up against racism? Poverty? Violence? Destruction of the earth? Chasing after wealth?

– Encourage conversation around discerning what brings holiness and what brings brokenness in this world.

– Become involved with groups at All Saints who are working to slow climate change, learning about white privilege, or standing against gun violence.

– One practical thing we ask some All Saints folks to do is to attend a Safe Church training event, where we learn about child sexual predators and how to create environments where predators are unable to function.

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

Every one of us makes mistakes. We do things or leave things undone, resulting in broken relationship with ourselves, others, and the earth. This baptismal promise reminds us to live a reflective life, to pay attention to the effects of our actions, if possible amend the wrongs we have done, and strive to do better.



Being aware of our capacity for sin, (a word that simply means 'missing the mark 'of who we would like to be in the world), Episcopalians take confession very seriously. So seriously, in fact, that at almost every worship experience we offer the opportunity as a large group to confess our sins and hear the words of forgiveness (absolution).

What will your child learn by watching you live a reflective life? Do they watch you look over your shoulder at the effect your actions have had on your relationships? The earth? Those who have hurt you? Those you don't like? What will they learn from watching how you admit your mistakes? Try to mend what has been broken? Forgive those who have hurt you? Forgive yourself? Try to be better in the future? Work for the healing of the earth?

- Talk to your child about when you make mistakes.
- Teach your child language about how to forgive, and accept forgiveness.

Will you proclaim, word and example the Good News of God in Christ?

The world has plenty of cynics. But we, as people believing in Good News, are bearers of hope. We cling to the notion that things can be better. This hope comes to us in the story of Jesus the Christ, who was persecuted, murdered by the state, buried in a tomb, and rose again.

What will your child learn from you about hope? About Jesus 'vision for a world where all have food, and safety, dignity and love? What will they learn from you about the power of a life patterned after Jesus that has the power to heal what is broken, include what has been cast out, inspire the defeated?

- Engage your child in conversation about what can make the world better, or about how they might bring some hope to a friend who is angry or in despair.
- As age appropriate, pay attention to the news, and imagine ways to be hopeful in the real situations facing our communities



Will you seek and serve Christ in all persons, loving your neighbor as yourself? Will you strive for justice and peace, and respect the dignity of every human being?

Every single person is a child of God and worthy of dignity and respect. Again we say, every single person, without exception. As Christians, we strive to love everyone as God loves everyone, regardless of what they have done or left undone.

What will your child learn from you about the dignity of every human being? Will they see you serving others? Sharing your time and talent? Standing up against injustice in day-to-day relationships, in unkindness anywhere? Will they see you participating in the gift of democracy to make sure the poor are cared for and the common good served? To what degree will they be aware that the privileges they lucked into (class, race, public schools, democratic country, etc) are not shared by most of the world? Or even most of our country? (1 in 4 children in Massachusetts live in poverty).

Here are some ways to fold justice and service into your family life, so that your child grows up knowing that being baptized means you work to make the world a better place:

- Serve at Lifebridge or Haven from Hunger
- Commit 1 hour a month to assemble sandwich with goodies for Peabody homeless
- Deliver food to the Danvers Food Pantry
- Shop for the Giving Tree at Christmas
- Work at two hour shift at the All Saints Thrift Shop which serves as a resource to our community
- Offer communion to those who are in special circumstances once per month
- Stock and maintain a KIVA micro-loan account (hint – this is a great thing for a godparent to do!) <https://www.kiva.org/>
- Model visiting your elected representatives on behalf of those in need, or to stand against violence and exploitation
- Model to them the importance of your voice by voting!
- Read Toxic Charity

- On each anniversary of their baptism day, spend time doing something good to make the world a better place
- Watch age-appropriate movies about children whose lives are very different than theirs, and then discuss them.
- Give generously to charitable causes, and encourage your children, from a very early age, to follow your example

As you can see, being baptized is all about relationship: relationship with God, self, church, the world. This document is our way of fleshing out how seriously we take the promises made at baptism. It is far more than what happens in the actual ceremony, it is a commitment to pattern your life after Christ, and through your example, help your children to pattern their lives after Christ.

So what do I need to do to have my child baptized?

Episcopalians strive not for conformity but instead strive for a sense of humility, able to dine at the holy table together, loved equally by God. For us, loving each other well is far more important than believing the same things.



By now you have caught on that baptizing your child into the Christian faith and life is mostly about how you as parents and godparents engage the baptismal promises in your own lives. They will learn by watching you.

Some of us at All Saints feel that baptism is so important that there should be some requirements of the parents and godparents before baptism. This would reclaim some of the earliest practices from the first 200 years after Jesus. At that time those preparing for baptism went through a lengthy and thorough process of aligning their lives with Christ's teaching before they were baptized. The pattern was believing/vocation first, then belonging/baptism.

Others of us feel that baptism is so important that we should be responsive to our over-busy and over-full lives in this century. Most of us are already overwhelmed by the pace of our lives and the tasks before us that to take on more tasks and requirements before baptism is not only off-putting, it opposes the value we have on hospitality for all. So some of us believe there shouldn't be any requirements, just suggestions, for before or after the actual baptism. The pattern in this case is belonging/baptism first, then believing/vocation.

Therefore, in true Episcopalian style, we walk the middle way. What follows are suggestions for you to prepare your spiritual life before the baptism of your child or godchild. *Some of you will welcome the opportunity to engage in these ideas and practices before baptism. Others will fold them in as time goes on.*

Regardless, patterning your lives after Christ is a life-long process. It is both about your inner journey with the Mystery, as well as your role in the community's journey as followers of Jesus.

Here are some ideas:

- Attend church for at least two months, perhaps sampling our different worship opportunities.
- Serve regularly at All Saints in some Sunday morning capacity (offer to be on a coffee hour team).
- Turn in a pledge card to support All Saints budget. Although generosity is a value, the amount on the card is less important to us than the commitment to sharing in the ministry of the church.
- Expand and deepen your prayer life by experimenting with different forms of prayer.
- Work to make the world a better place through at least one of our outreach activities

Q & A

Who can be baptized?

Anyone who seeks 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 from every kind of background.

Can little children really be baptized?

Yes, of course. The celebration of an infant's baptism is a joyous occasion for that child and for the family, as well as for the family-in-Christ, the church. Baptism celebrates God's love for us, and that God calls each of us to a special and personal relationship.

Must we be active members or regular givers?

No. We welcome everyone. Period. Since part of what baptism conveys is membership in the Body of Christ, the church, we welcome you to participate in our worship and community life--before, during, and after the baptism.

What happens if we decide to postpone baptism of our child?

Nothing. If you wish to let your children make an informed choice at a later age, that is just fine.

What do I do if I don't know if I was ever baptized?

No problem; we've got that covered. Although we consider baptism an unrepeatable event, we also have the ability to perform what is called a "conditional baptism" in circumstances like these.

I was baptized elsewhere; do I need to be baptized again?

No. Baptism is baptism. You could have been baptized in the Roman Catholic church, a Baptist temple, or down by the riverside by a Congregationalist minister—whatever, so long as involved water and an invocation of the Triune God. These are all recognized by the Episcopal Church and the worldwide Anglican Communion.

When are baptisms offered?

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

The Feast of the Baptism of our Lord, in January

The Great Vigil of Easter in early spring

The Day of Pentecost, in late spring, and

All Saints' Sunday, in November.

We encourage baptisms on these joyous occasions. If circumstances necessitate a different date, we will try to accommodate your need.

Who can be godparents?

Every candidate for baptism is accompanied in their faith journey by at least one sponsor (for adults) or godparent (for minor children). 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 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. Today any number of sponsors is considered appropriate.

What are the expectations of the church 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."

How much does baptism cost?

There is no charge for this or any other sacramental rite. As a sign of God's love freely bestowed upon all people, baptism come without a price tag. Many people, however, feel called to make a monetary donation in thanksgiving for a baptism. We remind you that the biblical standard for giving to the church is a tithe—ten per cent of all you have. If you are not currently giving at this

level, we encourage you to consider prayerfully, your giving. If you are not currently a member of the parish, making regular financial support as you are able, we will also ask you to make a contribution. Cost must never be a barrier to providing a joyful baptism.

How do I schedule a baptism?

When you are ready to commit to a specific date, the process is quite simple. Please contact our Parish Administrator to begin your inquiry--or, better yet, just come to church, worship with us, and become a part of our community.

———*Adapted from St. Mary's Episcopal Church, St. Paul, MN*