



ST. JOHN'S EPISCOPAL CHURCH

A Loving Family of Faith
United in Christ and Equipped for
a Ministry of Service

A CUSTOMARY FOR HOLY BAPTISM

UPDATED 05/03/2013

WHAT IS HOLY BAPTISM?

Simply stated, "Holy Baptism is full initiation by water and the Holy Spirit into Christ's Body, the Church. The bond which God establishes in Baptism is indissoluble." (*Book of Common Prayer, P. 298*). By the term, "full initiation," the *Book of Common Prayer* means that no other rite or sacramental act is required of a person for full membership in the Episcopal Church. **Through Baptism, one is admitted to the Holy Eucharist and enabled to participate fully in the life of the congregation as age and ability permit.**

Further, as stated in the Book of Common Prayer, the union established between the person baptized and God is unbreakable. In Baptism, we are mystically united in Christ and all other baptized persons forever. God remains faithful to the covenant made with us even when we are not.

WHY DO WE BAPTIZE?

Christian baptism has its historical roots in Jewish proselyte or convert baptism. In this baptism, the person entered the water with an old (Gentile) identity and name. When the individual emerged from the water, he was given a new Jewish name and identity, and neither their former life nor name was mentioned again within the community of faith.

Jesus received the baptism of John in the Jordan River and hence the Holy Spirit manifested him as God's Son. In the Acts of the Apostles and other New Testament writings, numerous persons were baptized into the church, and almost without exception those events were marked by the reception of the Holy Spirit by the newly baptized. Also, at the end of Matthew's Gospel, our Lord commands the disciples (and us) to evangelize and baptize all nations (Matthew 28:19).

Thus, from its earliest existence, the Church has baptized as a sign and seal of incorporation into Christ and the Church. The symbolism of Baptism, therefore is powerful and important. This act symbolizes our mystical joining to Christ in His death and resurrection (Romans 6:3ff). It symbolizes our being washed clean of all sin and being reborn to new life in the Holy Spirit (II Corinthians 5:17-21). Finally, it symbolizes our incorporation into the mystical Body of Christ, the Church (I Corinthians 12:12-25).

WHO MAY BE BAPTIZED?

Anyone of any age who is desirous of their own reasonable will for the reasons given above. Also, any infant or child whose parents or guardians and sponsors are willing and desirous that the child be brought up in the “knowledge and love of the Lord.”

As stated earlier, Holy Baptism is full incorporation into the Church. Therefore, all persons baptized in water in the name of the Holy Trinity are welcome at the Eucharistic Table in the Episcopal Church. Further, anyone baptized in any other church or Christian denomination with water under the Trinitarian formula (“in the name of the Father, and the Son, and the Holy Spirit”), **is considered to be fully baptized and requires no re-baptism or other act for membership in the Episcopal Church.** However, if a person desires to become a member of the Episcopal Church and has no record or memory of having been baptized, a form of “Conditional Baptism” is provided and is administered with the words, “If you are not already baptized, I baptize you.....”

HOW IS SOMEONE PREPARED FOR BAPTISM?

For adults entering the church through Baptism, there is a program of instruction and initiation into the Christian religion. This program is known traditionally as the **Catechumenate**. This program and process has its historical roots in the very earliest period of the church, but which fell into disuse as infant Baptism became the norm. The Rector will be happy to discuss this program with any adult who is interested in being baptized.

In the case of infants and small children, the parents and sponsors of the candidate are expected to meet with the Rector for a minimum of two sessions lasting about one hour each. This provides everyone involved in the baptism and upbringing of a child in the Christian faith adequate instruction relative to the responsibilities and joys of church membership and life in Christ.

The role of parents and godparents in infant baptism cannot be stressed strongly enough. These persons make the vows of the baptismal covenant in the name of and for the sake of a candidate who is not mature enough to speak for himself or herself. It is a great responsibility, as well as a great joy, to nurture a child in the Christian faith. Therefore, it is not a function to be entered into lightly because the people who act in this role **are committing themselves to a lifelong journey in the faith with the child whom they sponsor.** Godparents must be baptized and practicing Christians and it is very helpful to their godchild if they are active communicants in the Episcopal Church where the child is baptized. If you have any questions concerning the choice of sponsors or godparents, please speak with the Rector.

WHEN IS BAPTISM DONE?

“Holy Baptism is appropriately administered within the Eucharist at the chief service on a Sunday or other feast.” (*Book of Common Prayer, p. 298*). Also the Church has provided five occasions during the liturgical year when Baptism is particularly appropriate. Those times are **Easter Vigil, the Day of Pentecost, All Saints’ Day or the Sunday after All Saints’ Day, and on the feast of the Baptism of our Lord (the First Sunday after Epiphany).** Also, any time that the Bishop visits is an appropriate time for baptism. The baptismal days are spaced throughout the year in such a way that it should not be inconvenient to wait until an appropriate time to administer this sacrament.

All of this is to show that Holy Baptism is the rite of incorporation into the community of the faithful. Therefore, it is most important that the community be gathered to “break the Bread and join in the prayers” whenever Baptism is administered. In the case of the Bishop’s visit, the bishop is the symbol of the larger church, and the unity that we share in symbolism of the catholicity of the church is made powerfully clear.

Likewise, all of this should point to the fact that private baptism is not normative in the Episcopal Church and is not used except in cases of dire emergency. Even then, as soon as the person baptized is well enough to attend worship, he should be received into the congregation as a new brother/sister in Christ.

WHAT ARE THE RESPONSIBILITIES OF BAPTIZED PERSONS?

Persons baptized into Christ's one holy catholic and apostolic church are expected to grow in the faith into which they have been incorporated by this sacrament. This means that they will resist and renounce evil in their lives and wherever they encounter it, follow Christ as their Lord and Savior, and put their whole trust in the love of God as revealed in Christ Jesus. As Paul wrote, "If anyone is in Christ, that person is a new creation, the old has passed away, behold the new has come" (II Corinthians 5:17-21). Therefore, anyone who has been baptized should seek to live as a new person, a new creation in Christ. That new state of life may manifest itself in many ways in love and service of our neighbors as Christ served his flock. However, because baptism is often administered to infants, **it is most important that the parents and sponsors of the child also be baptized and practicing Christians** so they may by their "prayers and witness help the child to grow into the full stature of Christ." (*The Book of Common Prayer*, P. 302).

THE LOGISTICS OF HOLY BAPTISM?

The Rector (and/or celebrant of the rite and any other assisting clergy) will meet with all baptismal candidates in a rehearsal session prior to the time of the service, normally the morning or evening of the baptism, just prior to the service, so that all persons involved will be familiar and comfortable with the rite. All sponsors, parents, and godparents are expected to be present for this rehearsal.

All present at the baptism should be able to see and hear what is happening. We invite you to move to a better location if your vision or hearing is obstructed. Children are especially invited to come forward so that they may see and hear.

If more than one person is to be baptized, the oldest is baptized first, and the youngest last.

The family or the parish of the newly baptized by custom provides a reception following the service. We cordially invite all present to join us in welcoming our new sister or brother into the community of the faithful.

Because Baptism is a Sacrament and a service of worship, no fee is charged by the church or the clergy. If any member of the baptismal party wishes to give an honorarium, it will be given to St. John's Doorstep Ministry Fund, used to support ministry and to help persons in need.

WE WELCOME YOU INTO THE HOUSEHOLD OF FAITH!

It is a profoundly joyful thing to welcome new brothers and sisters in Christ through the sacrament of Holy Baptism. If you are interested in seeking incorporation into the Church for yourself or someone else, please talk with any member of this parish, lay or ordained, about his or her faith journey. Also, please know that you are welcome in our midst to learn and to grow along with us, as we regularly hear and study God's Word and participate in the celebration of the Lord's Supper, the Sacrament of Holy Communion. If such a commitment to Jesus Christ and His church interests you, please make an appointment with the Rector to discuss the process that leads to Holy Baptism.



CONTACT INFORMATION

The Reverend C. Earl Mahan, Rector
earlmahan@stjohnswichita.org

ST. JOHN'S EPISCOPAL CHURCH

**402 NORTH TOPEKA STREET
WICHITA, KS 67202-2414
stjohnswichita.org
(316) 262-0897**



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HOLY BAPTISM APPLICATION

Date of Application: _____

Person to be baptized:

Full Legal Name _____

Date of Birth _____ Place of Birth _____

Contact Information:

Address _____

Phone _____ Email _____

Church Baptismal Records Information:

Mother's Legal Name and
her Maiden Name _____

Father's Legal Name _____

Godparent 1 Name _____

Godparent 1 Address _____

Godparent 2 Name _____