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 **ST. BERNARD'S**
—CATHOLIC CHURCH—
3100 HEMPSTEAD TURNPIKE • LEVITTOWN, NEW YORK 11756

“My dear child, the Christian Community
welcomes you with GREAT JOY!”

from the Rite of Baptism for Children

Dear Parents :

Congratulations on the arrival of a new child from God!

To celebrate your child's arrival among the Community of the Human Family, and to prepare for his or her initiation into the Church of Jesus Christ, the Catholic Family of Faith at Saint Bernard's has designed a pastoral program of preparation for the Sacrament of Baptism.

We wish to help in your unique ministry as Christian parents who have accepted the gift of life from God with all its responsibilities and sacrifices.

The following is offered in the hope that you will share our enthusiasm in thanking God for the gift of your child who is called to be in Baptism another Jesus Christ.

Sincerely,
Your Parish Community and Staff

13 January, 2008
The Baptism of the Lord



WHAT DO YOU ASK OF GOD'S CHURCH?

At the beginning of the Baptism ceremony, the priest or deacon engages the parents in this dialogue:

CELEBRANT: *What do you ask of God's Church for your child?*

PARENTS: *Baptism. (The parents may elaborate.)*

CELEBRANT: *You have asked to have your child baptized. In doing so, you are accepting the responsibility of training her/him in the practice of the faith. It will be your duty to bring her/him up to keep God's commandments as Christ has taught us by loving God and our neighbor. Do you clearly understand what you are undertaking?*

Parents are asking to have their baby baptized! So, we ask them seriously to consider their role as **primary religious educators** of their child.

Far from being just something "to get done," Baptism is the power of Jesus Christ to re-create a human being in His own image. We call this power a **Sacrament**.

In this sense, Baptism is a "re-birth" because what "dies with Christ" is a bias built into every member of the human family that says, I can live my life all alone, not really needing any other people, and certainly not needing God. We call this bias "**original sin**." Baptism into the Church helps a child overcome this bias.

What "rises with Jesus," on the other hand, is a human being fully alive, dependent on God, inter-dependent with the whole human family, in the hope of becoming completely centered on the God who is Love. This "dying" and "rising" is symbolized in the waters of Baptism when a person enters the water's depth only to rise, to emerge again.

Baptism is also an "initiation" into the Christian community of faith which we call the **Church**. It is also a community of hope and love. As we immerse the child in the waters of baptism, we immerse him or her in that community of faith, hope and love.

Baptism is, therefore, an event that needs to be prepared for. And the most important preparation is for parents to look at their own faith and how they model it, live it and teach it to their child.

For, just as a child picks up many of the mannerisms of a parent, so, too, will he or she pick up attitudes about Jesus, the Catholic Church and a life committed to Christian values. Truly, then, Baptism is the time to begin the deepening of a family's closeness to God and other people. Why? **Because their faith in the Lord Jesus is the most precious gift parents can offer their children.**

THE BAPTISM PROCESS AT ST. BERNARDS

1. REQUESTING BAPTISM

Saint Bernard's Parish celebrates the Sacrament of Baptism ***on designated Sunday afternoons at 1:30 p.m. in the Church, with a 1:15 arrival time.*** (Baptism may occasionally be celebrated with the community at one of the Sunday Masses.) No more than six children will be scheduled for baptism each Sunday.

A *personal visit* at the parish office with a member of our pastoral staff is the first step in our preparation process. To arrange for the visit, call the parish office at **516-731-4220**. A member of the parish pastoral team will return your call and set up an appointment at a mutually convenient time.

During this comfortable and informal visit, the team member will invite you to reflect on your own personal faith journey and connection to the parish community, and to talk about your sense of the importance of the Sacrament of Baptism for the life of your child. In addition, he or she will obtain the practical information needed for the baptism to take place and be recorded properly, as well as schedule the dates for the pre-baptism parent gathering and the baptism itself.

Because of the importance of the parents' role in modeling and/or supporting the baptismal faith of the child, we request that BOTH parents be present for both this initial visit and the preparation gathering that follows.



Faith is more likely to be "caught" by children when the parents work as partners in the faith formation of their children—even in cases where the parents do not share the same faith. Therefore, we will expect both parents to be present. (Please feel free to discuss any particular circumstances with the pastoral team member at the time the initial appointment is arranged.)

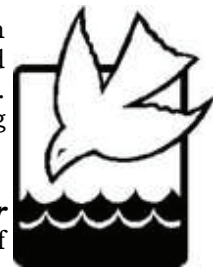
A word about parish membership...

...The Christian community welcomes you with great joy. In its name I claim you for Christ our Savior by the sign of His cross.

With these words, the priest or deacon welcomes the child to be baptized. It is obvious, then, that Baptism occurs in the midst of a community of faith. As the Sacrament that “initiates” Christians into the Church, Baptism finds its expression when a Christian lives, works and prays as an active member of the “**People of God**” (a reference of the Second Vatican Council to the Church).

For this reason, Catholics are baptized in the local (i.e. parish) Church in whose territory they reside. Practically, this means being registered in one Church. If you are not already a registered as members of St. Bernard’s parish, the parish staff member will assist you in registering in the parish at the time of the initial visit.

Normally, Catholics who are registered in a **Catholic Church other than St. Bernard’s** have their children baptized in the Church of registration. For sufficient reasons, however, Baptism may occur here.



2. PREPARATION GATHERING

In preparation for the baptism, parents are required to attend a session with other parents.

The focus of these parent gatherings is threefold:

- (1) **A sharing on parenting** designed to highlight the miracle of your child’s arrival as God’s magnificent gift. This also provides an opportunity for parents to meet one another.
- (2) **A teaching on Baptism** designed to stress this Sacrament as God’s love for us desiring to re-make or re-image a person in the likeness of Christ Himself. (Remember: the other name for Baptism is **Christening**, as in “making one like Christ!”)
- (3) **A demonstration in visual form** of the signs and symbolism of the Baptism liturgy.

In essence, these sessions are our way of saying that, just as you have welcomed your child into the human family by God’s grace, we begin to welcome your child into the further family of Catholic faith. We promise to offer our prayers and practical assistance as you assume your duties as Christian mothers and fathers.

3. SPONSORS or “GODPARENTS”

At the Baptism ceremony, the priest or deacon instructs the godparents:

Are you ready to help the parents of this child in their duty as Christian parents?

The role of godparent is clearly more than just being “a friend of the family,” or a special member of the family, upon whom you confer the honor of “godparent.” They are people whom you choose with care and sensitivity because they, by their faith and virtue, moral practice and example, will be among ***the first models of active Christian faith for your children.***

The term which the common law of the Church more precisely uses for godparent is ***Sponsor***. Please note the following directives of the Church regarding Sponsors for Baptism:

- ◆ A candidate for Baptism must be sponsored by a ***baptized and confirmed Roman or Eastern Catholic who is at least 16 years old on the day of the baptism.***
- ◆ Sponsors should be people who both understand their faith and practice it in a visible and inspiring way, including active membership in a parish community.
- ◆ Only one sponsor is required. If there are two (the maximum permitted), they must be male and female. Parents may not act as sponsors.
- ◆ A baptized, practicing Christian who is not Catholic may not be a Sponsor but may act as a “Christian Witness” in addition to a Catholic Sponsor.
- ◆ A person who is not a baptized and confirmed Christian may not act as a Sponsor or Christian Witness.

(Keep in mind that the role of the Sponsor and Christian Witness is to be a teacher and role model of active Christian faith. A person of another religion—or no religion—is unable to do this. In addition, Sponsors and Witnesses make a profession of Christian belief at the baptism; it would be a violation of their beliefs to ask a person of another religion to do this.)

- ◆ A Sponsor who is represented by proxy must give written agreement to being a Sponsor. A proxy for a Sponsor must be a Catholic.

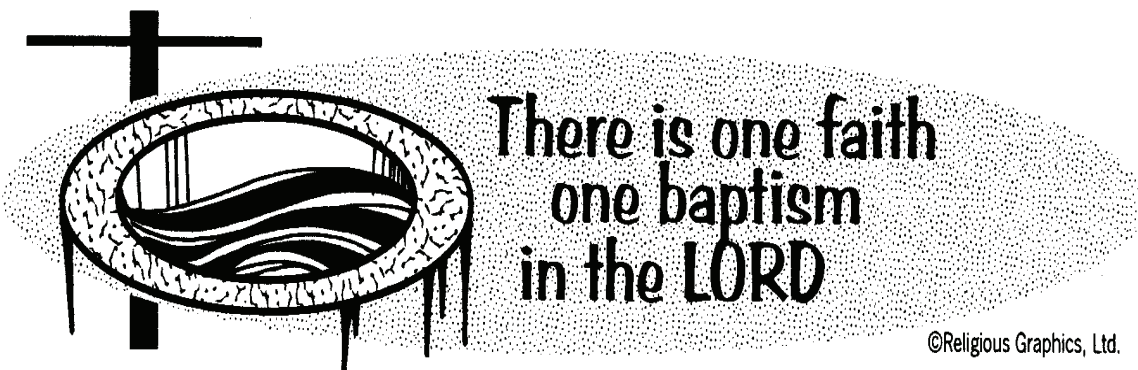
Your child’s baptism is recorded in the official Baptism Registry of the Church, and is the official, permanent record of the Baptism. The names of the Sponsors or Witness are part of this permanent record and may not be changed. For this reason, as well as for the spiritual well-being of your child, *please give careful thought and prayer to your choice of Sponsors.*

4. ADOPTION

In children of adoption God blesses the Community of the Human Family. Together with the adopting parents, the Church rejoices as we welcome the presence among us of another precious gift of God.

When adopting parents seek to have their child baptized, the following should be noted:

- ◆ *If the Baptism is to take place **prior to the completion of an adoption**, copies of any official documentation from an attorney or adopting agency should be brought to the Rectory at the time of your personal visit with the pastoral team member. This documentation will be sent to the Bishop's Office, which will, in turn, ensure that the child has not been previously baptized. (Please note that an adopted child who has been previously validly baptized may not be re-baptized. He/she may be "welcomed into the parish community" at a ceremony where other children are being baptized.)*
- ◆ *If the Baptism is to take place **after the adoption has been completed** the amended birth certificate should be brought to the Rectory. This, in turn, will be sent to the Bishop's Office.*
- ◆ ***In either case, no date for Baptism may be set until written authorization from the Bishop's Office has been received.***



5. PARENTS' MARRIAGE

If you are in a **first marriage that is not currently recognized by the Catholic Church as valid** (“blessed by the Church,” “married in the eyes of the Church,” “married with the permission of the Church”), we extend an invitation to discuss the matter with one of the parish priests in the hope that the marriage can be made valid (“convalidated”) in the Church.

Similarly, if you are in a **second marriage after a civil divorce but without a Church annulment**, we extend the same invitation to discuss this with a priest. Many divorced Catholics have found the annulment process to be an opportunity for healing and reconciliation.

Why go through all this? **So that you can give good example in faith and practice to your children by receiving the sacraments with them.** Many Catholics are confused about this process and have false impressions about the cost and the time it takes. We encourage you to discuss this with us!

Remember: **Even though your marriage might not be recognized in the Church, your child may be baptized as long as it is your sincere intention to actively raise your child in the Catholic faith.**

6. THE DAY OF BAPTISM

Baptism is a celebration for your family and for the Church. We urge you to, amidst the excitement of preparations and celebrations, to be careful about keeping the focus of the day on the joyous spiritual reality that is being celebrated.

At the session you attend before the baptism, you will be given some written practical instructions and reminders for the day of the Baptism. As you begin to prepare for the day, we ask you to especially keep in mind the following:

- ◆ It's necessary for the parents, child and godparents to arrive **15 minutes before the ceremony start time** so that everyone can be in place and prepared to begin on time.
- ◆ We gladly welcome your guests and invite them to participate fully in the ceremony as is appropriate to their own religious tradition. We ask you to remind your guests about the need to be thoughtful and reverential regarding the use of photographic equipment and cell phones. (It may be helpful to designate ONE photographer to take pictures during the ceremony; additional photos may be taken by anyone after the ceremony.) **Professional photographers or videographers are not permitted in the church during the ceremony.**
- ◆ We welcome young children to the ceremony! Please ask guests to take special care of these young ones, and remove them to the back of the church if they become restless so as not to disrupt the ceremony.

7. BAPTISMAL OFFERING

If you want to give a gift to the Church, there is a special offering envelop provided. Please note that whatever you give will be used to further the worship, education and service programs of the parish. The parish relies on your ongoing generous support to carry out its mission and ministries. ***Your donation is a gift to the Church, not to the celebrant.***

8. AFTER THE BAPTISM

With the Baptism liturgy, ***the baptismal life begins!*** Your child is now a part of God's family, and is expected to develop a "family resemblance!" The Saint Bernard Community is committed to helping that happen. Shortly after the Baptism, a member of the parish will call you and arrange to deliver the Certificate of Baptism and a gift for your child. After that, we hope you will take advantage of:

- ◆ Monthly e-mailings on faith in the family and news of parish events.
- ◆ A Mass with a special blessing for families who have had a child baptized in the previous year, with refreshments to follow.
- ◆ Regular gatherings of parents to discuss matters of family and faith
- ◆ Sunday Mass.
- ◆ Many family-oriented activities sponsored by our Family Ministry group and other parish organizations. All activities are announced in the weekly parish bulletin.

9. INDIVIDUAL BAPTISMS

Because of its public importance as an expression of communal faith in Jesus Christ, ***all Baptisms are celebrated in Church***, with the assembly of God's people.

If you have a relative or friend, however, who is a Catholic priest or deacon, and whom you would like to baptize your child, this can be arranged. Please inform the parish staff at the time of your pre-baptismal visit. All other preparations and requirements will have to be completed as usual.

10. SPECIAL CIRCUMSTANCES

Please feel free to discuss any other concerns or questions you may have that have not been covered in these guidelines. One of the priests or pastoral assistants will be happy to help you.

Congratulations, welcome, and God bless you and your family!

I baptize you
in the name of the FATHER,
and of the SON,
and of the HOLY SPIRIT.



Amen!
Alleluia!!