

St Dunstan's Parish

INFORMATION FOR THE BAPTISM OF INFANTS

February 2008 - January 2009



A NEW BABY? CONGRATULATIONS!

If you have just had a baby or are expecting one, the Parish Community at St Dunstan's, Woking offer you their congratulations.

No doubt you have been making preparations to give your child a warm welcome into your family and, as a gift from God, your child should also be welcomed into His family - the Church.

WHY BAPTISM?

The beginning of a new life is exciting.....

But it can be a little frightening too....

You have already had some time to get used to the idea of a brand new person arriving in your life....

You have begun to prepare for the arrival...

You have thought of possible names....

Everything is going according to plan - BUT wait a minute....

There's one more important piece of planning.....

You have thought about your baby's physical well-being....

You have thought about your baby's material comfort....

You have begun to think about what your baby will be like....

Have you had a chance yet to think about your baby's growth as a child of God?

You have probably already prayed that your baby will grow safe and well.

Now you can build on that prayer.

The Sacrament of Baptism is a celebration of God's love for us.
In Baptism we are freed from sin and are reborn as children of God.
We become members of the Church and sharers in the mission to make
Christ known to all.

- At baptism our parish community welcomes a young child* and accepts that, alongside the parents and godparents, we will share in their responsibility to be the first teachers of their child in the ways of faith, and as the child grows older, to prepare him/her to celebrate the Sacraments of Reconciliation, Eucharist and Confirmation.
- We have a parish baptismal preparation programme. This consists of three preparation evenings and attendance at a Sunday Mass for the Rite of Welcome. If you have been out of touch with the Church for a while, we would suggest that this is an opportunity to renew your own faith. Your child is utterly dependant on you to lead by example. The preparation evenings are an integral part of the celebration.
- Choosing Godparents can be a sensitive issue but a greater understanding of the role of a Godparent may help in this matter. The Godparents help the parents in living their example of faith, and they join with the parents in making the act of faith on behalf of the child. Since Godparents have such an important responsibility it would be beneficial for them to attend the meetings. We strongly suggest that at least one Godparent is local to your family and is someone who is likely to keep in touch with you. *It may be helpful for them to read the back two pages of this booklet to understand the commitment that they will be making.*
- Godparents must be confirmed, committed Catholics. The child to be baptised must have at least one Godparent who meets this criteria. A baptised Christian of another denomination, who would be a good example of Christian living, may act as a 'Christian Witness' alongside the Godparent(s) but is not a Godparent.
- If a child is over the age of 5 then it is more appropriate that they be prepared for Baptism themselves, and it is likely that they will be asked to join one of the Parish Catechetical programmes. If this is the case please contact the Parish Office (760652).

As baptism is an important community event, it will usually be celebrated in two stages:

1. A 'Rite of Welcome' which takes place at the beginning of the Sunday Mass you and your family would normally attend, this will usually be arranged at the second preparation evening.
2. The actual Baptism on the designated Sunday at 1.15pm (this is usually the second in the month, but see the programme).

START PLANNING YOUR CHILD'S BAPTISM

By thinking about your child's baptism and getting in touch now, you are giving yourself a chance to sort out in good time any difficulties or anxieties you might have.

If you've been out of touch for a while....

If your spouse is not a Catholic...

If you are a single parent....

If you are not sure about baptism....

Don't worry!

We look forward to hearing from you.

What do we do now?

1. Complete the enclosed form and return it to the presbytery.
2. You will then be contacted by a member of the parish team who will answer any questions you may have and help to make preparations to celebrate your child's welcome into the family of the Church.

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BEING A GODPARENT

In the early Church people seeking to join the new “movement” known as Christianity had to have a sponsor, someone who recommended the newcomer and guided him/her in the ways of the Faith. When it became the custom for whole families to ask for Baptism and when infants were baptised, sponsors of children became known as Godparents. We see the tradition of family baptisms in Acts 2:38-39: “You must repent” Peter answered, “and everyone of you must be baptised in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of sins, and you will receive the gifts of the Holy Spirit. The promise that was made is for you and your children.”

To be asked to be a Godfather or Godmother is a great privilege but it also carries responsibilities. It is probable that your relations or friends have asked you to be a Godparent to their child because they respect you and trust that you will be a good role model for their child. During the Service of Baptism, parents and Godparents are asked to “make a profession of Faith” – a statement of their belief, which includes a statement of their belief in the Catholic Church. For this reason at least one Godparent should be an adult (over 16) confirmed and committed Catholic. Christians of other denominations chosen to be “Godparents” are technically known as “Christian Witnesses”, though most parents would still think of them and refer to them as Godparents.

The first thing you should do for your Godchild is to pray for him/her and pray with him or her. The following prayer is brief and could be learned easily to be said each day.

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Lord God, thank you for the gift of (name of Godchild) and for all the joy he/she brings us. Be with him/her in all moments of his/her life that he/she may come to know you as his/her saviour and friend. Amen

Christian Responsibilities of a Godparent:

- Pray for and with your Godchild regularly
- A Godparent, together with the parents, publicly proclaims his/her Faith during the Service of Baptism on behalf of the child. You must be sincere and comfortable about making this proclamation
- Be there for them
- Set an example of Christian living – children tend to follow examples rather than words
- Help him/her to grow in the Faith in which he/she was baptised – this could mean going to Mass with your Godchild.
- Give every encouragement to your Godchild to develop a personal relationship with Jesus and help them to stay away from the evils of the world
- Affirm him/her. Let him/her know that he/she is valued and loved

Practical Ideas: The best thing you can give is your time!

There are many different ways of carrying out your duties as Godparent, but one of the most important things to do is to build a relationship with your Godchild. Make time to see your Godchild as regularly as you can. Try to give him or her one-to-one attention: find out what makes them tick, what makes them happy or sad.

Try to remember the anniversary of Baptism in a special way, send a card and perhaps get together and think again about what Baptism is all about.

Keep in touch, especially through the teenage years – be a role model for your Godchild and have a fun time.

Help your Godchild to look forward to celebrating the other Sacraments of the Church at the appropriate ages: Reconciliation, Eucharist (Holy Communion) and Confirmation as he/she grows into adulthood. Support parents at such times by participating in the Parish programmes in preparation for the Sacraments. Join them in the celebration of Mass each week.

Your Godchild's Confirmation is a very important opportunity for you to make yourself available - not just at the ceremony, but in the lead up to it. Get involved in the thought process that leads up to it. Talk it through. Don't think that Confirmation is the end of your responsibilities as a Godparent. It can be the beginning of the time they need you most. That delightful little angel may be developing into a confused and “difficult” teenager! The chances are that this is when they most need to be able to talk to an adult they can trust and who is not one of their parents. You may need to reassure a teenager that his/her parents do actually care for and love him/her.

Write to them regularly as they get older, send them postcards, e-mails etc. to maintain regular contact. This means when the child is older and wants to ask questions, he/she will feel able to write or talk to you. Teenagers in particular may have thoughts and feelings about their faith that they may not want to share with parents and this is where your relationship may be valuable.

A Godparent can continue to be a role model and influence in everyday and relationship matters, as well as matters more spiritual, for many years to come. The more you put in to being a Godparent, the more you and your Godchild will benefit.

John Sexton, November 2007

‘You have called your children to this cleansing water and new birth, that they may share in the faith of your Church and have eternal life.’