

BAPTISM

INFORMATION AND PROCEDURES



HOLY TRINITY
LUTHERAN CHURCH

Infant Baptism

When infants are baptized, the parents, sponsors and congregation make promises to provide Christian nurture and instruction for the child. A mutual accountability is involved. In the early centuries of Christianity, adults were baptized. The norm, therefore, was baptism followed by catechesis (instruction) and spiritual formation. Later, the baptism of infants became common for children born into families of active Christians. The baptism of infants means that catechesis follows baptism rather than precede it.

The parents, sponsors and congregation take responsibility for this nurture in the following ways:

- nurturing the child's relationships with God and with the congregation, its pastors and members
- bringing the child to worship
- teaching the child to pray at meals, bedtime and other occasions
- bringing the child to Sunday School
- providing instruction prior to first communion
- providing Confirmation instruction and the opportunity for the child to affirm his/her own baptism
- celebrating the anniversary of the child's baptism
- providing an example of a Christian life
- giving the child a Bible and other religious books/gifts or

Since baptism is the beginning of lifelong growth in the Christian faith there is not a strong reason for infant baptism if parents are not committed to the spiritual nurture and education of their child within the life of a congregation. In such a case it may be preferable to celebrate a naming or blessing of a newborn. The child may choose to be baptized later as a teen-ager or adult and subsequently participate in the life and ministry of a congregation.

Method of Baptism

Holy Trinity's font is a large clear bowl that enables the water to be seen and used more generously. Infant baptism is normally done by immersion, meaning the child is placed in the font and water is poured on his or her head. Most parents also choose to use the Orthodox tradition of baptism in which the child is naked. The baptismal font is often described as the womb that gives us new birth.

The generous use of water signifies baptism as a bath in which we are cleansed and refreshed by the Spirit of God. A Statement on Sacramental Practices of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America encourages a generous use of water to symbolize the drowning of the sinful self in the waters of baptism.

Age for Baptism and Communion

Children may be baptized at any age. Infants three to six months old are ideal for immersion in the font because at this age most babies do not have separation anxiety and are willing to be held by the pastor.

Since Lutherans believe that God's grace is offered before we can understand or respond to it, both the sacraments of Baptism and Holy Communion are offered to children at any age. Some parents choose to commune their child for the first time on the day of their baptism, others wait until the child begins to reach for the bread or expresses a desire to participate. Please speak to the pastor for further discussion and planning.

Sponsors

Sponsors are normally baptized and practicing Christians. Otherwise it would be difficult for them to take responsibility for the promises that they and the parents make at baptism.

As parents choose sponsors, they should consider individuals who would be role models and would take seriously the Christian nurture of the child. When at least one sponsor is a member of the congregation a special relationship with the parish community can develop. Though this is not required, it is an option to carefully consider.

In addition to sharing the responsibilities above, the sponsors could help make the anniversary of the child's baptism an important occasion by giving cards or gifts or doing something special on that day.

HOLY TRINITY LUTHERAN CHURCH

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ARRANGING A BAPTISM

1. **MEMBERSHIP / FAITH COMMUNITY:** Since baptism is the beginning of life in the Christian community, it is desirable that families planning to baptize a child choose and become members of a congregation in which they will regularly participate. It is preferable that the baptism be held at that congregation since the members of the parish share the responsibility for nurture of the child. It isn't *membership* alone that is central; rather we hope that the parents begin attending the congregation so there is a relationship with this particular community of faith. We prefer to not rush the baptismal process. There is not a specific ideal age to baptize an infant or young child. We recommend that you begin attending Holy Trinity for a number of months before beginning the baptismal process.

2. **MEETING:** Please call or e-mail Pastor Michelle Miller to arrange a date to meet and discuss the baptismal process. A baptismal class for parents is normally offered several times a year. The baptism of a child is a unique and opportune time for parents to grow in their own spiritual lives and commitment.

3. **BAPTISMAL DATE:** Since baptism is seen as initiation into a community of faith, the common practice is to hold baptisms during the Sunday morning service. Due to the number of baptisms at Holy Trinity, certain baptismal Sundays are designated at the 10:30 a.m. service (9:30 a.m. in the summer). If other dates are needed for unique family situations, it may also be possible to schedule a baptism at the 8:30 a.m. service.

2011 Baptismal Sundays

January 9, February 27, April 23 (Saturday evening Easter Vigil), May 15, June 26, August 21, October 23, December 4.

4. **ADULT BAPTISM:** Adults desiring to be baptized participate in a period of spiritual formation, joining with a sponsor and other members of the congregation for study of scripture and reflection. This process can be deeply meaningful for both the person preparing for baptism and the congregation. Adult baptisms are normally held at the Easter Eve Vigil liturgy.

5. **REHEARSAL:** A rehearsal will be scheduled prior to the baptism to walk through the baptismal liturgy. Sponsors (and parents in the case of infant baptism) are asked to be present.

6. **PICTURES:** We request that flash pictures not be taken during the actual baptismal service; we are happy to repose scenes from the liturgy following the service. If a video camera is used, we ask that that it remain in one place during the liturgy.