



St Elizabeth's, Richmond

Baptism Guide



Introduction

Congratulations on the birth of your child and thank you for considering having him or her baptised in the Catholic Church. We have prepared this Guide to help you understand what is expected when parents request baptism and also to explain the process here at St Elizabeth's. We hope this Guide will answer many of your questions and we ask you to read it before contacting the parish.

Section One

Baptism: the Start of the Journey of Faith

The Church asks Christian parents to pass on the gift of faith to the next generation. They can only do this when their own Catholic faith is strong and a lived reality in their lives. Baptism is the Sacrament that plants the seed of faith in an infant. Through the teaching and example of parents and Godparents that seed needs to germinate and grow before the Christian life can bear fruit in eternal life.

In the Acts of the Apostles we read how Christians are called to live as 'disciples' of Christ. It describes the first Christians as being united in "*the teaching of the Apostles, the fellowship, and the Breaking of Bread and prayers*".¹ These are the essential elements of Christian life and from them the Church develops her **expectations** regarding baptism.

The Teaching of the Apostles

A child is baptised into the 'teaching of the Apostles' as handed down to us by the Church. An infant cannot make the Profession of Faith and so its parents, assisted by the Godparents, must profess the Catholic faith on its behalf and show their commitment to it by their way of life. The Church therefore expects parents to know and live the faith.

The Fellowship

In baptism we become part of the wider Christian community where we are called to worship together, to grow, to serve, and to support one another². The Church therefore expects her members to be engaged in and support the life of the parish community and not to be doing anything that would undermine or harm it.

¹ Acts 2:42

² At St Elizabeth's we encourage all our parishioners to get involved and to help us make a difference by supporting our work both financially and also with the gift of their time, each according to their means.

The Breaking of Bread and the Prayers

Prayer is the way we express our trust and reliance upon God. Apart from daily personal prayer, Catholic Christians gather together each weekend to honour the Lord's Day by uniting themselves to, and drawing life from, the prayer of Christ on the Cross. In the early Church this was called the Breaking of Bread. Today it is more simply known as the Mass. Attendance at Mass each week in accordance with the discipline of the Church is the most obvious sign of our willingness to live a Christian life. Weekly Mass attendance gives a well-founded hope that the child will be brought up as a Christian. Without this hope the church is explicit that a baptism should be deferred³.

³ Code of Canon Law Canon 868, s 1.2

Section Two

Enquiry Stage

To have your child baptised at St Elizabeth's this should be the church where you regularly attend Mass. If you have a particular connection with our church but attend Mass elsewhere, we will need a letter of permission from your parish priest or the priest of the church you regularly attend.

If you are not currently attending Mass each weekend please contact us so that we can offer you the possibility of a course before baptism that will help you understand and make the necessary commitment. This is because the Church asks us to delay the baptism of an infant until there is a well-founded hope it will be brought up as a Catholic.

Initial enquiries about infant baptism at St Elizabeth's are handled through the Baptism Enquiry Form on our website. There is a link at the end of this document.

Infant baptisms usually take place during the 10.30am Mass on the third Sunday of each month. They need to be booked at least six weeks in advance and we recommend you contact us as early as possible.

Section Three

Preparation

Initial meeting

After your enquiry you will be invited to meet with the parish priest or a baptism catechist to discuss the meaning of the Sacrament, what pre-baptism preparation you may need and, if appropriate, to consider dates.

Pre-Baptism Courses

Most parents are expected to attend a pre-baptism course. The exact format will depend on the needs of each individual case. Somewhat longer courses are also available for those who do not currently attend Mass.

Baptismal Name

Choosing a name for your child is very personal but please bear in mind that some names may be unsuitable because they are incompatible with the Christian faith (for example, the girl's name Nnenna means "reincarnation of the father's mother"). As a rule of thumb, each child should be given a Saint's name as part of their Christian identity.

Section Four

The Ceremony

Parking

The church does not have a car park and street spaces are limited. There is a multi-story car park in Paradise Row and also by the train station. It is advisable to ask guests to allow time to find a parking space.

Punctuality

At St Elizabeth's infant baptisms usually take place during the 10.30am Sunday Mass. You and your guests are asked to be in your places by 10.15am. The 10.30 Mass is a public Mass and we are unable to delay the start because of latecomers.

Respecting the Church as a House of Prayer

Please let your guests know that many people arrive early to pray before Mass and conversations should not take place inside the church.

Photographs & Videos

GDPR limits what can be photographed in Church and therefore you will only be able to take photographs after the ceremony. The parish has a list of photographers who have been approved to take photographs during a service. No other professional photographer is permitted. Videoing is not permitted.

The Baptism Certificate

The Baptism Certificate will be prepared using the information given in the online Baptism Enquiry form. It is important to ensure that all the details are correct including the spelling of names. The Certificate will be available for you to collect from the sacristy after the ceremony.

Section Five

FAQ's

What are my duties and responsibilities as a Christian parent?

- You commit yourself to teaching the Catholic faith to your child.
- You commit yourself to ensuring the child grows up as part of a Christian community.
- You commit yourself to bringing your child to Mass each weekend and to teaching him or her to pray.

I don't go to church, can I still have my baby baptised?

The Church says that an infant shouldn't be baptised until there is a well-founded hope that it will be brought up as a Catholic. In practice, this means that at least one of the parents should be attending Mass each weekend.

If you are not practising, or have questions about the Christian faith, we will ask you to take part in one of our Alpha courses where you will have an opportunity to ask questions and think carefully about the Christian commitment.

Do Godparents have to be Catholics?

At least one Godparent must be a practising member of the Catholic Church. They should be comfortable with her teaching and living accordingly. A Catholic Godparent is called a "Sponsor".

How many Godparents can I have?

You can have two Catholic Godparents (usually a Godmother and a Godfather). You may also choose additional non-Catholic Godparents who must be practising Christians and whom we call "Christian Witnesses".

Can I have a non-Christian Godparent?

No. During the ceremony the Godparents will be asked to make a public profession of the Christian faith. The role of the Godparent is to assist you in the Christian upbringing of your child. They should be committed, practising members of the church.

What happens if a Godparent can't be present at the ceremony?

Sometimes distance or personal commitments mean a Godparent cannot be present at the baptism. In those circumstances it is possible to appoint another person to stand in as a proxy. The absent Godparent (Sponsor or Christian witness) should confirm in writing

their willingness and suitability to take on that role. It must also be explained to the proxy before the ceremony that they are not themselves taking on the responsibilities of being a Godparent.

Is there a charge?

We don't charge for baptism but we are grateful for any contribution you can make to our work. Everyone's financial situation is different and so, as a guideline, we recommend a day's wage (which means that those who are not earning are not expected to make a donation). Gift Aid envelopes are available for UK tax payers.

Making your enquiry

Please email Fr Stephen to make an appointment;
richmondpp@rcaos.org.uk



www.CatholicRichmond.org

St Elizabeth of Portugal is a parish of the Roman Catholic Archdiocese of Southwark, a registered charity 1173050