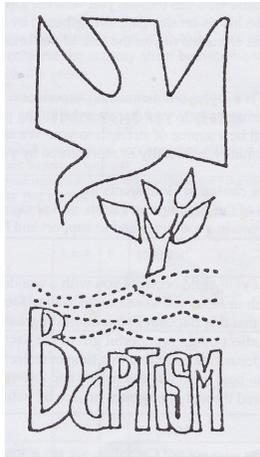


BAPTISM PREPARATION PROGRAMME



OUR LADY OF THE ASSUMPTION PARISH
UMBILO, DURBAN

THE BAPTISM CEREMONY

Dear _____

The community of the Assumption Parish welcomes you with great joy to this **Baptism Preparation programme**.

We rejoice because **God has blessed you with the gift of a child**.

He has chosen you to be his co-creator and, strengthened by His loving presence, He has entrusted to you the task of nurturing and forming your child.

Being a parent is a joyful but demanding experience. We hope that the Church, as it strives to help you discover the loving presence of Jesus in your life, will be a source of strength to you. We also pray that the Christian Community, especially as represented by

your family, and _____, whom you have

chosen as Godparents for _____ and the community of the **Assumption Parish**, will always be there to Celebrate with you in good times and to support and help you in difficult times.

The Baptism of your child presents you with a wonderful opportunity to **renew your faith in Jesus** and to recommit yourself to His Church. We hope and pray that this Baptism Preparation Programme will give you the chance to reflect on the wonderful gift of the Sacraments that we received from Jesus. We hope that this time of reflection and renewal may help you to heal broken relationships and to forgive any hurts that you have suffered through the actions or lack of action of the Christian Community.

To those parents who are not Catholics, we say a special thank you for agreeing to participate in this programme. We hope that it will build your faith and at the same time give you a better understanding of the Catholic Church.

Yours in Christ,

PARISH PRIEST AND THE BAPTISM PREPARATION TEAMS

You will be able to follow the ceremony on the cards provided. You will notice that there are certain questions that you have to answer and the Priest or Deacon may ask you further questions.

THE MAIN PARTS OF THE BAPTISM CEREMONY ARE:

- Gathering outside of the Church
- The Reception of the child and the symbolic entering of the Church.
- The Celebration of God's Word - Readings from Scripture, a homily and Prayers of Intercession.
- Prayer of Exorcism and the anointing of the child on the chest with the Oil of Catechumens
- The blessing of the Baptism water.
- The renunciation of Sin and the Renewal of Baptism Vows and Profession of Faith
- The Baptising with water - the conferring of the Sacrament
- The anointing with Chrism to signify the sharing in the Priesthood, Prophetic Ministry and Kingship of Christ.
- Clothing with a white garment.
- The lighting of the Baptism candle
- **Ephphetha** (Be opened) Prayer
- Concluding Rite - The Lord's Prayer and a blessing for the mother, for the father, and all present.

MAY IT BE A VERY HAPPY AND MEANINGFUL CELEBRATION FOR YOU

CONSIDER JOINING A SMALL CHRISTIAN COMMUNITY

Being a Christian and bringing up a child as a Christian is not an easy task. You need the support of your fellow Christian parents. A Small Christian Community can be a wonderful source of friendship and support. You and your spouse, even if one partner is not a Catholic will be most welcome.

If you would like to join a group, please speak to the leader who assisted you with the Baptism preparation or to the Parish Priest or Deacon.

REFLECTION EXERCISE

As a group discuss the following:

John and Mary have had their child Baptized. They are both Catholics but usually only go to Mass at Christmas and Easter. They never pray as a family or say Grace before meals. In fact their child hardly knows Jesus.

Mala is a Catholic but her husband Prem is not a Christian. They have not had their child Baptised as Prem's family would be upset. However, they attend Mass every Sunday and take their child with them. Mala is always teaching her child about Jesus. They say Grace before meals and pray together as a family.

1. Why do you think that John and Mary had their child Baptized?
2. Is John and Mary's child a Christian?
3. Is Mala and Prem's child a Christian?
4. Will Baptism add anything to the life of Mala and Prem's child?
5. From this discussion, what can we learn about Baptism and in particular, our Baptism??

CELEBRATING THE ANNIVERSARY OF YOUR BABY'S BAPTISM

We celebrate Birthdays every year. Baptism is a New Birth, and so we should also celebrate the anniversary our Child's Baptism each year.

We suggest that each year, on the anniversary of the baby's Baptism, you light the child's Baptism candle and pray together as a Family. On that night you could have a special family meal and invite the Godparents.

You may want to use the celebration in the enclosed leaflet.

PREPARING FOR THE BAPTISM CEREMONY

- **Gather** outside the Church with your family and friends at least 20 minutes before the start of the ceremony.
- Your baby should be **dressed** in clothes that you consider suitable and in **any colour except white**. The **Baptism garment, which should be white**, should not be worn but placed on a table on the steps of the sanctuary
- You should provide a **Baptism candle, (you can order from the Repository)** which may be decorated, for the Baby. This should also be placed on the table on the sanctuary steps.
During the ceremony the candle will be lit from the Pascal (Easter) Candle by the Father (or Godparent)

It is customary to make a Financial Offering (*Stipend*). An envelope is provided.

MY HOPES FOR MY CHILD

All parents want the best for their child. Fathers and mothers have hopes for their children and are prepared to make many sacrifices so that their children will be given opportunities to achieve these hopes.

What are the hopes that you have for your child? We ask you to take a few minutes to complete the activity sheet below. We will then share your responses with the group.

HOPES FOR MY CHILD					
Mark those hopes which you think are very important with an A . Mark those hopes that you think are not important with a B .					
Choose the three most important hopes that you have for your child and mark the 1, 2, and 3 in the rating box marked R .					
If you have other hopes for your child, add them in the blank boxes					
HOPES	A or B	R	HOPES	A or B	R
Do well at school			Be happily married		
Have lots of friends			Be happy		
Know how to enjoy life			Make money		
Know right from wrong			Be truthful		
Have a nice home			Be confident		
Have a good job			Be gentle		

How can the Church help you to fulfil these hopes for your Child?

What would you like the church to do for you?

WHY DO YOU WANT YOUR CHILD TO BE BAPTIZED?

As we prepare for the Baptism of your child, it is important that you answer the question - *Why do I want our child to be baptized?*

We, as a group, can help you, by reflecting on the reason why we would choose to be Baptized, if we were not yet baptised. We will complete the exercise below and then share our thoughts with the group.

WHY I WOULD CHOOSE TO BE BAPTISED		
<i>Please tick those that you think are good reasons for deciding to be baptised and then choose the three that you consider the most important reasons.</i>		
REASON	TICK	MOST IMPORTANT
<i>It would make my parents happy.</i>		
<i>It's the right thing to do.</i>		
<i>I believe in Jesus Christ and want to be one of His Followers.</i>		
<i>All my brothers and sisters have been baptised.</i>		
<i>We will be able to have a party to celebrate my baptism.</i>		
<i>I want to be part of the worshipping Christian Community.</i>		
<i>I am afraid I will not go to heaven.</i>		
<i>I want to be cleansed of my sin.</i>		
<i>I want to be part of a loving and serving Christian Community.</i>		
<i>I need help to live a good and happy life.</i>		
<i>I believe in the Catholic Church.</i>		

Godparents should set an example of what it means to be a follower of Jesus.

Godparents should show by the quality of their lives what it means to be a member of God's family and should be prepared to pray regularly for their Godchild.

Godparents should be able and prepared to take an active interest in the life of the baby and particularly in the growth of their Faith.

Godparents should not only be friends to the parents, but friends who will support the parents in good and difficult times.

UNDERTAKING BY GODPARENTS

I _____, have
been asked to be the Godparent/ Christian Witness for:

I am aware of the responsibilities of a Godparent / Christian Witness
and with God's help, I am willing to accept them.

Signed: _____

Date: _____

THE CHRISTIAN COMMUNITY

You are choosing to give your child the Gift of the Christian Community. If we want our child to be part of a group or community, we need to know about that community.

As we prepare to bring your child into the community, it presents us with a good opportunity to reflect on the Christian Community.

READ: Acts 2: 37 – 47

SHARE WITH THE GROUP WHAT THIS READING IS SAYING TO YOU ABOUT THE CHRISTIAN COMMUNITY

- To be a member of the **CHRISTIAN COMMUNITY**, you need to turn away from sin and turn to God.
- The Christian Community is a **COMMUNITY OF FAITH** - a Believing Community.
- The Christian Community is a **WORSHIPPING COMMUNITY** - they gather on a regular basis to worship together as a community.
- The Christian Community is a **SERVING COMMUNITY** - they love one another and share their time, talents and possessions.

CHOOSING TO JOIN THE CATHOLIC COMMUNITY

You have chosen to have your child Baptized in the Catholic Church. By doing this you are signifying that you want your child to be a member of the Catholic Community.

Baptism is one of the **SACRAMENTS OF INITIATION**. This means that the person receiving the sacrament is welcomed into the church as a member. It is an important event not only for the person receiving the sacrament but also for the Catholic community who welcomes into their midst a new member.

In the liturgy recommended for Baptism, the community bringing the child for Baptism, should gather outside the Church building. The Priest or Deacon will welcome the community at the door of the Church and after asking a few questions will invite the community to bring the child into the church building. Although this is not part of the sign of Baptism, it is symbolic of the child being invited to become a member of the Church and being welcomed into the Church.

THE GODPARENTS

A Godparent is someone who represents the Catholic Community, which is welcoming the baby as a new member.

As Christians we are called to love and support other members of the community. A Godparent is called in a special way to love and support the person who is being baptized. They are called to be a witness to the child and to encourage that child to grow in faith and commitment to God.

CHOOSING GODPARENTS

Choosing Godparents for your baby can be a very sensitive matter. When a person is asked to be a Godparent they are being invited to share in a very special way in the life of your family. However, Godparents play an important role in Baptism and in the life of the child and when choosing a Godparent, we need to answer a few questions:

WHAT IS A GODPARENT?

In the light of what has been said above, share with the group some the characteristics that you think a Godparent should possess.

GODPARENTS - GUIDELINES SET BY THE CHURCH

At least one Godparent must be a **practising member** of the Catholic Church and must have been baptised, **CONFIRMED** and **RECEIVED HOLY COMMUNION**.

Provided there is one Catholic Godparent, the family may wish to invite other family members or friends, who are **Baptised Christians**, to be Christian Witnesses to the Baptism.

Except in exceptional circumstances be **over 16 years of age**.

WHY BE BAPTISED - REFLECTING ON THE WORD OF GOD

To deepen our understanding of why we want to be baptised, let us spend a few minutes reading from scripture and then discussing the Word of God in our group.

After each reading - share with the group

- What you think this reading is telling you
- Any questions that you would like to ask arising from this reading

READ

1. John 3: 5 - 6
2. Matthew 3: 13 - 17
3. Matthew 28: 16 - 20
4. Acts 2: 37-41
5. Romans 6: 1 - 4
6. Galatians 3: 23 - 29

SUMMARY

It is clear from these readings that Jesus wanted His followers to be Baptized and from the very beginning of the church, his disciples followed the instructions of Jesus and baptized new members of the church.

They were baptized because they believed in Jesus, they accepted His teachings and they wanted to be full and active members of the community of His followers.

The Church has continued, throughout its history, to recognise Baptism as a **Sacrament** that must be received by all who want to become full members of the Catholic Church.

It is a sacrament that gives us new life, cleanses us from sin, gives us the power to turn away from evil and choose God, and makes us members of the Christian Church.

OTHER REASONS WHY WE WANT TO BE BAPTIZED

To help us reflect on our human need for the sacrament of Baptism let us spend a few minutes talking about **signs and symbols in our lives**.

Look at the wedding or engagement ring on your finger or the finger of your spouse and describe what you can see with your eyes.

Now describe what you can see with your heart and your mind as you look at the ring.

As you look at the ring, does it make another person *present to you*?

Our lives are filled with **symbols and signs** and we seem to have a deep seated human need for them. We use signs and symbols to communicate, to sell and market goods and to express some of our deepest emotions. Many religions of the world use symbols in their rituals and worship.

For example, the Jewish religion into which Jesus was born, uses many symbols and signs in their Passover Meals. Jesus and His followers saw the value of symbols and signs in helping people to experience the presence of God in their lives. The Church, often following the teaching and example of Jesus, fills its worship with many symbols and signs.

The **SACRAMENTS** are a very important part of the Catholic worship.

The **SACRAMENTS are signs of God making himself present to us and touching our lives**. As Christians we believe that Christ is present to us and loves us from birth through death to all eternity. However, as humans, words are not enough and we need signs to remind us of Christ's loving, supportive and healing presence in our lives.

When a child is born, we need a sign that will tell us that *this child is loved by God* and that we, the parents and friends of the child, want the child to choose God and live in His love rather than to choose evil. We want to signify to the Catholic community that we want this child to be a member of the Christian Community.

We want to have a sign that will signify *a new life* - that the child will not only have human life but will share in the life of Christ and in the life of the Christian community.

We want to *signify a cleansing* – a sign that the child will be given the strength and means to turn away from evil in its life and turn to God.

In the sacrament of Baptism the sign that we use is **WATER** and water is for us a sign of *New Life and Cleansing*.

The Priest or Deacon will pour water over the forehead of the child and say *“I baptise you in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit. Amen”*.

RECEIVING THE LIFE OF CHRIST

What do we mean when we say that in Baptism we received the *LIFE OF CHRIST* within us?

We can draw an analogy with marriage. When you marry your spouse, you receive, in certain sense, the life of your spouse within you. Your way of life will be deeply influenced by the presence of your spouse. When making decisions you will have to consider your spouse. You will celebrate happy events with your spouse and your spouse will be there to support and help you in difficult times.

You could choose to ignore the presence of your husband or wife in your life. You can choose to do your own thing and go your own way, but such a marriage would not be a true Christian union.

Although Christ is always in our life, in *Baptism we receive a sign* to remind us of that presence and by deciding to be baptised we are choosing to fully acknowledge the presence of Christ in our lives. We are acknowledging that our way of life will be deeply influenced by the presence of God in our lives. When making decisions we will have to consider God's will. We will celebrate happy events with Jesus and He will be there for us in difficult times.

We can choose to ignore the presence of Jesus in our lives but will we then be true Christians?

Obviously this is an imperfect analogy as we cannot compare God to our spouse. While a person's spouse may love them deeply, God's love is perfect and eternal.

BAPTISM AND THE CATHOLIC COMMUNITY

SIGNS AND SYMBOLS AND THE COMMUNITY

A South African flag has little or no meaning for an American.

An engagement ring only has a deep meaning and significance for the couple.

A community, whether it be a family, or a group of people, or a nation will have symbols and signs that only have meaning for that community. The more you are involved with that Community, with its way of life, its culture and traditions, the deeper will be the significance of its signs and symbols.

In the Christian Community, we have signs and symbols. We can describe what we can see or hear, however because we are active members of this community of Faith, our hearts and minds can discover deeper meaning in these symbols and signs. If we are not active members of the community and do not share in the faith of the community, the signs will be meaningless to us.

We will not be touched by their deeper significance and we will not see them as signs of Christ's presence in our lives.