

Chosen to be a Sponsor



JAY TREADWELL

*Holy Baptism is full
initiation by water
and the Holy Spirit
into Christ's Body
the Church.
The bond which God
establishes in Baptism
is indissoluble.*

THE BOOK OF COMMON PRAYER



What is Baptism in the Episcopal Church?

According to The Book of Common Prayer, baptism is “the sacrament by which God adopts us as his children and makes us members of Christ’s Body, the Church and inheritors of the kingdom of God ... The inward and spiritual grace in Baptism is union with Christ in his death and resurrection, birth into God’s family the Church, forgiveness of sins and new life in the Holy Spirit.” (p. 858)

Participation in a local congregation is important to Christian spiritual growth and nurture. It is the family into which the candidate is welcomed. It is expected that parents and sponsors will encourage those baptized in their life of faith. Baptism is a public beginning for a life of faith within the context of the church community.

In the Christian community, the sacrament of baptism incorporates a person into the church, connecting the person with all other members of that body. During baptism, the person is called by name, a sign of the intimate connection between God and the one baptized.

Baptism takes place within a Christian congregation. The baptismal party includes the candidate to be baptized, family members of the candidate and one or more baptismal sponsors. Sponsors of infants and young children are commonly known as godparents.

**Chosen
to be a
Baptismal
Sponsor**

It is an honor to be asked to serve as a baptismal sponsor. Whether a family member or friend, the sponsor is invited into a special relationship with the person to be baptized, with the faith community and with God.



SARAH WILLIAMS

**What
Qualifies
a person
to be a
sponsor?**

Sponsors should be baptized Christians. Only a Christian can, in good conscience, make the required baptismal renunciations and promises on behalf of the candidate.

When a person is asked by the candidate or family to serve as a baptismal sponsor, it is an expression of confidence. Becoming a sponsor serves as a reminder of one’s own relationship with God through baptism, and is a way to live into the promises made at the time of the sponsor’s own baptism.

**What is
expected
of the
sponsor?**

It is expected that the sponsor will:

- Establish a special long-term relationship with the candidate;
- Represent Christ and the church to the baptized person, standing with the candidate at the time of baptism and assisting the candidate to live into the baptismal promises;

Where did the practice of baptismal sponsors come from?

- Set an example of Christian life for the candidate;
- Support the baptized person through prayer.

The Latin root of the word sponsor is "spondere." It means "to promise" and is also the root of espouse and spouse. In the early days of the Church, when the threat of persecution was often a reality for Christians and there was a fear about spies, sponsors vouched for the candidates by presenting them and guaranteeing that they were who they said they were. The sponsor stood as a witness to the Christian community that the person seeking baptism was truly desirous of following Christ and knowing and loving God and God's creation. In addition, sponsors accompanied candidates through the baptismal preparation. This "walking together" included prayers for the candidate, instruction in the faith and preparation for Christian living in the world. Today, the sponsor has a vital role in helping the candidate and family accept their full participation in the Christian community and the world.

How can a sponsor prepare?

In preparation to serve as a sponsor, you can:

- Read the baptismal service on pages 299-308 of The Book of Common Prayer (available at St. Columba's, another Episcopal Church or bookstore);
- Explore the questions, issues and promises surrounding baptism with the person to be baptized, a member of the clergy and/or the family;
- Pray for the members of the baptismal party, especially the candidate.

What is expected of the sponsor?

Sponsors should attend class if in town, and the rehearsal in the church at 10 am on the Saturday before their candidate is to be baptized. Questions about the service and the role of the sponsor can be discussed at that time.

Sponsors sit with the candidate and family in the congregation. After the opening words, prayer, readings and sermon, the service continues in this way:

Presentation and Examination of the Candidates

The candidates and the sponsors of infants and young children make a series of renunciations and promises. These vows, following an ancient tradition, are in question-and-answer form. In this way the candidates affirm their intention to turn from evil toward God as revealed in Jesus Christ.

The Baptismal Covenant

The congregation recites the Apostles' Creed and then reaffirms five baptismal promises that provide direction for a Christian life. Special prayers are offered on behalf of the candidates. In preparation for the baptism, the bishop or priest asks God to bless the water that is to be used.

The Baptism

Each baptismal party now comes forward and gathers around the baptismal font. The candidate is baptized with water in the name of the Father, and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, sealed on the forehead with oil in the

sign of the cross and welcomed into the household of God by the congregation. The service continues with the exchange of the peace, in which members of the congregation, including the baptismal party, greet one another in love. The service concludes with a celebration of Holy Communion.



After baptism, it is hoped that the person baptized will grow and mature through the Christian faith. During the baptismal service, sponsors agree to support the candidate through prayer and example. After the baptism, they continue to include the baptized person in their prayers and to serve as examples of Christian life as well.

- Remember the anniversary of the baptism with a prayer, card, letter, telephone call or personal visit;
- Note other life events in a Christian manner—birthdays, graduations, marriage, birth of children, illness, bereavement;
- Attend worship services with the baptized person;

- Express an interest in what the baptized person is learning and experiencing in Sunday School or in other religious education settings;
- Help the person learn the basics of Christian worship and practice, such as the Lord's Prayer, the Apostles' and Nicene Creeds, the Ten Commandments, and the



- promises of the Baptismal Covenant;
- Read and talk about stories from the Bible so the person develops a knowledge and understanding of God's relationship with the creation and its people;
- Share one's own religious journey and experiences with the baptized person.

Baptism is the moment of new birth into Christ and his church. It is a gift to be remembered with joy and thanksgiving. Thanks be to God that you are part of this gift. Enjoy and rejoice in it!

**Ways
sponsors
fulfill their
role**

**What is the
Sponsor's
Role
after the
Baptism?**

Baptismal Themes in the Bible

Old Testament passages:

- Creation (Genesis 1:1-2:3);
- Deliverance and promise to Noah (Genesis 5:32-9:19), to Abraham (Genesis 17:1-18:15, 21:1-22:14), and in the Exodus (Exodus 13:17-14:31);
- The people's covenant relationship with God (Exodus 19:16-20:17);
- Promise of land and an inheritance (Deuteronomy 34:1-8).

New Testament passages:

- The baptism of Jesus (Matthew 3:1-17, Mark 1:1-11, Luke 3:1-21, John 1:19-34);
- The Christian understanding of baptism is explored in Romans 6:1-4, Ephesians 4:4-5, Colossians 2:11-15 and I Peter 3:18-22;
- Read the New Testament in the light of what you are learning about baptism, and see what happens to your understanding of God and Christian life.



St. Columba's
EPISCOPAL CHURCH

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