We therefore require both parents to undergo a Spiritual Formation Programme called “Companions in Christ” for six weeks. There are two additional meetings with the Rector: one before the programme and the other being the rehearsal for the Baptism Service in which Godparents are required to attend.

The Companions Programme has many different themes and thus there is no repeating the same theme. Thus even if you baptize for the 2nd or 3rd time, there is always something new to learn.

It is advisable, where possible for parents to attend Formation classes during the mother’s pregnancy as some parents find it challenging to do so when children are still too young.

# Godparents

Godparents (Sponsors) are primary representatives of the congregation throughout the childhood life of the baptized infant. They are entrusted with a share in the spiritual growth of a child until that child is able to accept the responsibility personally. Therefore, **they must be committed members of the church**. It is ideal that they should be members at St Monnica’s but if they are members of a church other than St Monnica’s whether Anglican or some other denomination, we require a letter from their church to testify that they are members in good standing. Godparents are usually most effective when they are local – this means they are able to see the godchild regularly and frequently; attend the Baptism Preparation Course; and attend the Baptism itself. It would be preferable if the godparents were active, practising Anglicans. The primary requirement for godparents, then, is church membership, not friendship or family ties, though obviously it is ideal if good friends or family also meet the primary requirement. One of the purposes of settling in to the congregation and becoming known here before the baptism is that, if necessary, you are able to find godparents from members who know you and who can meaningfully represent the congregation to your child.

# Baptism Services

# Baptisms are normally held during Sunday worship, one Sunday each quarter, so that preparation classes can be held in a group and so that Sunday worship is not dominated by constant baptisms. For adequate planning, the Rector issues the Preparation and Baptism Service dates at the beginning of each year. If you have family who are geographically separated from you, please think ahead so that your family will be able to plan their travel. And make sure that you have entered the process outlined above in plenty of time so that you have completed it when your family are going to be present. We do not like to rush baptisms simply to accommodate family gatherings.



**BAPTISM POLICY**



**Please read the Baptism Policy carefully and consult the Parish office should you need more information.**

**Tel: +27 11 805 5201/03**

**Email:** **rector.pa@stmonnica.org.za****comms.events@stmonnica.org.za**

**Office Hours: Monday – Friday: 08H30- 16H00**

# BAPTISM: THE PRACTICE AT ST MONNICA’S

# Introduction

Few events in life have quite the magic of new birth, not surprisingly for us as Christians, for birth illustrates in a uniquely graphic way the genius of God. The Christian faith teaches that your child is God’s gift to you. We follow the Scriptures in taking your child’s Baptism with the utmost seriousness. Our policy, outlined below, is designed to help you understand what your child’s Baptism means, and to help us deal with this important event in a way which respects the meaning it has always had in the life of the church.

# What Baptism *Is Not*

These days, before saying what Baptism *is*, it is necessary to say what it *is not*, because there appears to be no other area of Christian life so imbued with superstition rather than faith.

So many people have a nameless fear that if their infant were to die unbaptized something dreadful would happen to him/her. No-one thinks much about what this ‘dreadful’ fate would be but ‘hell’ would probably describe what people fear, even if no-one would dare utter the word. Behind this fear lies a common, but mistaken, human fear that God is an angry, threatening Being, ever ready to punish us whenever He has half a chance.

 This fear is, in fact, also rooted in rather severe teaching which used to be common in the church and which is associated largely with St Augustine who lived some 1600 years ago. Augustine took the Christian belief that all human beings are sinners and pressed it into the service of what was called “original sin”. In terms of this teaching, all of us are tainted with sin which was conveyed through the male sperm in the act of conception, and which excluded us from heaven. To Augustine, this taint was removed by God’s Grace through Baptism. Augustine’s importance in the thinking and practice of the church endured for centuries, and the tangible reality he gave to sin through his belief that it was physically transmitted in the sexual act helped to give the idea of a permanently-disfigured human nature a peculiar grip on the human imagination.

 Today, while it remains orthodox Christian teaching that all human beings are born sinners, we do not hold to Augustine’s mistaken biology, nor to the doctrine of original sin in the way he and others emphasized it. Today we believe that every child is primarily an illustration of the wonderful love of our Creator God. As far as sin is concerned, we emphasize the constant presence of a loving God, offering us the free gift of forgiveness and healing as we repent of our sins. In other words, our teaching on sin emphasizes that Baptism begins a life in which, as we grow in

adult understanding and responsibility, we learn to bring our sinfulness to Christ in repentance and to receive his forgiveness.

 There is, therefore, no need to rush Baptism out of fear of some act of wrath on God’s part. Nor is it appropriate to hurry a Baptism for social reasons such as family coming on holiday to SA. While such occasions are rightly important to families, and while it is ideal if all family can be present at a Baptism, Baptism’s meaning is not connected with such occasions. We do, however, have a service

which is specifically designed to celebrate the gathering of a family on the occasion of the birth of a child. This service is called, **“Thanksgiving for the Birth of a Child”**;

it can be held during any of the Sunday services, or at your home at a time to suit your family needs.

 It is also important to note that the church does not “christen” children; the church “baptizes” them. Whatever the historical origins of the term “christen” it has no biblical warrant and confuses the practice of Baptism. This means that you do not need to come to church to name your child – all parents name their children; only Christian parents baptize their children.

**What Baptism *Is***

Baptism is an act of God expressed through an act of God’s church. It expresses God’s love for your child, already shown in his/her creation. From this perspective, God deals directly in Baptism with your infant child which God, being sovereign, is fully able to do.

 However, God has entrusted God’s own child to you, his parent(s). Within this life God has given you the privilege and the task of revealing God’s love to your child, by your teaching and your example. Thus, the Baptism service asks you to make promises that you are ready and willing to undertake this responsibility.

The Baptism of your child thus expresses our faith that the purpose of life is that we should know and live in God’s love for us, expressed in many ways but most centrally for Christians in the incarnation, death and resurrection of Jesus Christ. **It expresses your intention to commit yourselves and your child to Christ, by bringing your child into the church** which is the chief way in which Christ’s presence among us is continued in everyday life. **This is why we said earlier that Baptism is not primarily** **a family occasion, but is, in fact, a church occasion.**

# The Practice at St Monnica’sBecause Baptism begins our life-in-Christ through our participation in the Body of Christ, the church, we baptize only the children of members, that is to say, people who are committed to Christ and show that commitment through regular worship, dedicated giving, and active ministry of some kind.

Thus, if you have recently started attending at St Monnica’s, Baptism is not the appropriate first step in bringing your child to God. This process is better begun by asking for the service **of “Thanksgiving for the Birth of a Child”**, after which there needs to be time **(at least three months)** for you to be sure that St  Monnica’s suits you, and for you to become known as a practising member of the congregation. When the time is right, you will then begin the preparation formation process, after which the Baptism of your child will follow.

# Preparation and Formation

Parents are required as per our Diocesan rules to undergo Baptism classes as a means of parental preparation and teaching on the sacrament of Baptism.

At St. Monnica’s we believe Spiritual Formation is of utmost importance and thus impacts on all aspects of our lives especially our families. Thus it could also shape and influence the nature of our parenting to our children.