

The Baptismal Customary

Baptisms at Good Shepherd

Congratulations! We are overjoyed that you or your child seek to join the Body of Christ through the sacrament of baptism. We cannot wait to celebrate with you.

This customary is designed to support you as you prepare for your/your child's upcoming baptism. We hope that you find it useful as you plan dates and details, and seek to learn more about baptism in the Anglican tradition.

What is baptism?

As it says in the Book of Alternative Services, "Baptism is the sign of new life in Christ. Baptism unites Christ with his people. That union is both individual and corporate. Christians are, it is true, baptized one by one, but to be a Christian is to be part of a new creation which rises from the dark waters of Christ's death into the dawn of his risen life. Christians are not just baptized individuals; they are a new humanity."

Baptism is the door by which we enter the kingdom of heaven and the means by which we are incorporated into the one Body of Christ. It is the first step on a lifelong journey of following Jesus.

Who may be baptized at Good Shepherd?

Anybody! Anyone who has never before been baptized may be baptized at Good Shepherd. In the Bible, God sends the apostle Philip to meet with an Ethiopian eunuch on the road to Gaza. After Philip discusses Scripture with him, the eunuch asks, "Here is water. What is to prevent me from being baptized?" There is nothing to prevent anyone from being baptized: not age, not previous religion, not feelings of guilt, nothing. Infants, children, and adults are all baptized here.

All baptisms that took place in water and in the name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit are recognized as valid in the Anglican tradition, no matter how long ago or what you have been practicing since. We do not rebaptize. If you are unsure if you have been baptized, a conditional baptism may take place. If you are sure you have been baptized and would like to reaffirm your commitment to following Jesus, please speak with the rector about scheduling a Reaffirmation of Baptismal Vows at a time when the bishop may be present.

When do baptisms take place?

Baptism is not private to the individual or family alone; it represents joining the wider Body of Christ and should be undertaken in the midst of the whole community. The church family also makes vows to support the baptismal candidate.

Therefore, all baptisms at Good Shepherd take place during a regular service of worship that all are invited to attend.

There are four Feast Days in the Church calendar we find particularly appropriate for baptism. They are:

The Feast of the Baptism of Our Lord, the first Sunday after 6 January

The Great Vigil of Easter, the eve of Easter Day

The Feast of Pentecost, the Sunday fifty days after Easter Day

The Feast of All Saints', the first Sunday in November

Except in cases of dire emergency, we don't schedule baptisms during Advent or Lent. If one of these four dates does not work for you, please consult with the rector to arrange for yours to be held on an alternate date in the Church year.

What preparation is required for baptism?

We believe that baptism is the acceptance of God's free gift of grace. Therefore, all that is required is the commitment to show up and continue receiving that grace.

For adults and older children, the rector may seek a short meeting to determine the candidate's free consent and understanding to undertake the baptismal covenant.

For all candidates, including infants and younger children, a rehearsal will take place the day before. Parents and sponsors are expected to attend.

What is the Baptismal Covenant?

The Baptismal Covenant contains three promises of belief and six promises of action the candidate will undertake during their lifetime following Jesus. These promises are:

- Belief in God the Father Almighty, creator of heaven and earth.
- Belief in Jesus Christ, the Son of God, who was conceived by the power of the Holy Spirit and born of the Virgin Mary. He suffered under Pontius Pilate, was crucified, died, and was buried. He descended to the dead. On the third day he rose again. He ascended into heaven, and is seated at the right hand of the Father. He will come again to judge the living and the dead.
- Belief in God the Holy Spirit, the holy catholic Church, the communion of saints, the forgiveness of sins, the resurrection of the body, and the life everlasting.
- Commitment to continue in the apostles' teaching and fellowship, in the breaking of bread, and in the prayers.
- Commitment to persevere in resisting evil and, whenever one falls into sin, repent and return to the Lord.
- Commitment to proclaim by word and example the good news of God in Christ.
- Commitment to seek and serve Christ in all persons, love one's neighbour as oneself.

- Commitment to strive for justice and peace among all people, and to respect the dignity of every human being.
- Commitment to safeguard the integrity of God's creation, and respect, sustain, and renew the life of the Earth.

The promises are undertaken not with the expectation that all Christians will perfectly hold to them at all times. Such an expectation would be impossible. Rather, we understand this to be the framework to guide our life journey as we daily take up our Cross and follow Jesus.

Parents and sponsors undertake this covenant on behalf of infants and children too young to speak for themselves. Such children should affirm their participation in the Baptismal Covenant by seeking Confirmation at an appropriate age, usually during the teen years.

What about godparents?

All baptismal candidates, of any age, should be supported by sponsors. Traditionally, sponsors of infants and young children have been called godparents. These sponsors should be baptized Christians of any denomination (ie. they don't have to be Anglican). Because they promise to be responsible for seeing that the child they present is nurtured in the faith and life of the Christian community, and by their prayers and witness to help the child grow into the full stature of Christ, it is most appropriate for them to be active in the life of their local church.

At Good Shepherd, we typically see between one and four sponsors step forward to support baptismal candidates. The gender balance of these sponsors is irrelevant.

May photos be taken?

Good Shepherd usually asks one volunteer to take photographs during the service. This volunteer is one who can be trusted not to block the view of the congregation or disrupt the solemnity of the service. We ask that others refrain from taking photos during the service of baptism. You may ask for copies of these photos if you wish.

Following the service, the family is invited to stay for posed photos. Anyone may take photos during this time.

We assume consent to be photographed at a public service of worship, and for such photos to be shared on church web platforms, including social media, without listing the names of minor children. If you would prefer your photo not be shared, please speak with the rector well in advance of the rehearsal.

A note about documentation:

Good Shepherd will provide you with a baptismal certificate that is yours to keep. We will also record your/your child's baptism in the parish register, for which we will require your contact details. If you ever require proof of baptism in future,

please do not hesitate to contact us. We will use the information in the parish register to verify baptisms for any purpose.

Everyone who is baptized at Good Shepherd is considered a member of the church and will be added to the parish list. If we have not heard from you in a number of years, you may be moved to inactive status, but your membership can be reactivated immediately upon your return to worship with us.

A note about fees, honoraria, and gifts:

While it is not typical in Canada for families to offer an honorarium on the occasion of baptism, we know that many of our members come from backgrounds where it is common at this time to make a financial gift. Please know that it is our privilege to welcome you/your child into our church family, and no honorarium is expected.

If you wish to express your gratitude for Good Shepherd's ministry as you/your child become part of the church, we will gladly accept a thank offering. This should be done via a cheque made out to Good Shepherd Anglican Church, with "Baptism[name of candidate] [name of clergy member]" in the memo line. This will allow the treasurer to ensure this money is put into their Benevolent Fund. Cash gifts or cheques made out personally to clergy members are discouraged, though when made, go directly to that member of clergy. The usual range is from \$100 to \$300.