2. Are you prepared to work at your own faith, both in knowing it and in practising it?
3. The grace of baptism in a child who is not then formed in the knowledge and love of God is like burying a treasure in a field.
4. Do you have a personal relationship with Jesus Christ? If so, resolve to strengthen and deepen it for your child's sake and for your own. If not, then seek him out as he has been seeking you out, and open up your heart and your life to him. Your child needs and expects this of you. Christ takes nothing away: he gives all.
5. If your faith has been weak until now, consider reaching out to someone you know whose faith is strong and ask their help. There is no shame in that: on the contrary, it will lead you to a new sense of freedom, joy and purpose.
6. To pray is essential if our spiritual lives are to grow. Resolve to strengthen your prayer life so that you can introduce your child into a real rapport of confidence and love for God. If you don't pray, ask someone to help you. It will change your life around!
7. Would a stranger visiting your home know that it was a Catholic home, or at least that a Catholic lived there? Put up a crucifix in a prominent place in your living room. A simple thing like that can change the atmosphere in the home for the good of souls and be a clear witness to Jesus. Hang a picture of Our Lady up, too!
8. How do you plan your time as a couple, and now as a family? Is it solely around work, money, recreation, food and sleep? Take the strong decision to arrange your week around Sunday Mass, which is the celebration of *the* main event of human history, the death and Resurrection of Jesus. If a child grows up knowing that its parents are centred and focussed on the Mass, it will give that child a solid and unshakeable foundation in faith and good living.
9. What are your true values? Have a look at how you live, what you spend your time or money on; what you're prepared to make sacrifices for. Is your faith in Jesus Christ among them?
10. What do you really want for yourself, your marriage and your family? Things that pass, or things that endure for ever?

THE SACRAMENT OF BAPTISM
GUIDELINES FOR PARENTS

ST. MARY'S, LARGS
OUR LADY'S, MILLPORT

Dear Parent,

Our whole parish community congratulates you most warmly on the birth of your child. We look forward to welcoming him/her even more warmly into the family of God very soon!

Introduction

Your love has given *human life* to your child who is truly an immense gift of God's love to you and to us all, a cause for giving joyful praise to God.

God has given you your child for a fundamental reason: to bring him/her to the knowledge and love of God. That is the most important thing any parent can do and, yes, must do for a child. Everything else is secondary in importance.

By deciding, then, to bring your child for the sacrament of Baptism in the Catholic Church, you are working with God to give him/her birth into his *own life, eternal life*. That life was won for us through Jesus Christ by his death on the Cross and resurrection to new life.

The Gifts of the Grace of Baptism

Baptism also confers on your child a number of other wonderful gifts and privileges. It likewise confers on you a number of important responsibilities.

This new birth delivers your child from the condition of *original sin*. This is a sin every human being shares in as a result of the disobedience of our first parents. It would have brought eternal death to humanity, but Jesus died and rose so that it would be destroyed. Baptism delivers us from sin and gives us the pledge of victory over death and the promise of heaven.

Baptism also means that your child is now an *adopted child of God*, a brother/sister of Jesus Christ, an heir to the Kingdom of God along with all others who have been baptised in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit.

By the phrase "all others" is meant the Church. Your child will now be a *member of the Catholic Church* and share, as in a family, in the same life, love and privileges as all other members (e.g. the other Sacraments, the worship of God in the Mass, the Word of God, the life of grace, etc.).

Duties arising from Baptism

To bring your child for baptism in the Catholic Church means, by definition, that at least one parent believes firmly in the faith of our Church. That faith is summed up in the Creed which we recite at Mass every Sunday.

The faith which you profess must be the faith of the Catholic Church, not beliefs of other kinds. As a Catholic parent, then, it is your duty to *know the faith of the Church and to pass it on to your child* whom you bring for Baptism. Your child has the right to receive this faith through you so as to nourish the new life received in baptism and to grow in the virtues of faith, hope and charity, and take his/her place in the Church.

2) The anointing with the oil of the catechumens on the child's breast accompanied by a prayer against the powers of darkness;
3) the renunciation of Satan on the part of parents and godparents and their profession of faith, to which the celebrant and the community also consent;
4) a final question put to the parents and godparents about what they want for the child, i.e. baptism.

- The *sacrament itself* consists of the washing in water by way of pouring water over the child's head and the invocation of the Blessed Trinity.
- The completion of the sacrament consists:

1) first, in the anointing on the crown of the head with chrism, which signifies the royal priesthood of the baptized and enrolment into the company of the people of God;
2) then of the ceremonies of:
    a. the white garment (sign of inner holiness),
    b. lighted candle (symbol of the Risen Jesus),
    c. and the *ephphatha* rite ("be opened"), which is a blessing on the ears and mouth of the child.

Finally, before the altar, and by way of anticipating the point in the when the child will receive Holy Communion, the priest invites all to recite the Lord's Prayer, in which God's children pray to their Father in heaven. A prayer of blessing is then said over the mother and father of the child, and over all present, to ask the outpouring of God's grace upon them.

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Some Questions and Points for Reflection

1. Have you really and truly thanked God for the *gift* of your child?

with the parish priest concerning the baptism, so that proper preparation may be made for the celebration.

An infant should normally be baptized within the first weeks after birth. The human birth of a child is beautiful, but his or her rebirth to eternal life in baptism is far more beautiful and important.

Baptism at Easter or during a Sunday Mass is possible, but not necessary. In view of our parish priest's commitments on Sunday in both Largs and Millport, baptisms will normally take place on Saturdays at 12 Noon in Largs or in Millport, unless another day or time is agreed.

How The Rite of Baptism Unfolds

The ceremony begins with the reception of the child. This little rite allows the parents and godparents to state explicitly before the community what their intention is in bringing the child to the church, i.e. the celebration of the sacrament of baptism. This intention is expressed in action when the parents and the priest trace the sign of the cross on the foreheads of the children.

Then the reading from the Scriptures takes place (also called the "liturgy of the word"). It is directed at stirring up the faith of the parents, godparents, and congregation and at praying in common for the fruits of baptism before the sacrament itself is administered to the child.

Then comes the celebration of the sacrament itself:

- The *immediate preparation* consists of:

  1) the solemn prayer of the priest which, by invoking God and recalling his plan of salvation, blesses the water of baptism or makes reference to its earlier blessing;

Therefore, to bring your child for baptism is a very wonderful thing, a very important and serious thing. It points forward to a deeper life of faith for yourself and for those who live in your home so that this child of yours, who is really God's child, will come to know and love the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit.

Godparents

The godparents you choose should be *able to support you and your child* in this inspiring adventure. The Church's rule is that there be only one male godparent, one female godparent or one of each. Godparents must be at least 16 years of age. They must be Catholics who have already been confirmed and made their First Communion. A non-Catholic Christian cannot be a godparent, but may be a witness to the baptism together with a Catholic godparent.

Sometimes people want to choose old or special friends as godparent or witness, or a close relative but who lives far away. While that is perfectly understandable from a social point of view, *the purpose of the godparent in baptism is very specific*: i.e. to help the child lead life in keeping with baptism and to fulfil faithfully the obligations that come from it. Ideally, then, it should be someone who lives nearby and who can be "hands on" in helping you, the parent, in your responsibility to raise your child in the faith of the Church.

In terms of the choice of name you want to give your child, the practice has been lost of naming them after a saint of the Church. Please consider, however, doing just that, to give your child a saint's name at least as a second or middle name. It means that you can teach your child to make friends with their own saint and is a very beautiful way of opening them to thoughts of heaven and holiness.

Importance of Baptizing children

From the earliest times, the Church has baptized not only adults but children as well. Our Lord said: 'Unless a man is reborn in water and the Holy Spirit, he cannot enter the kingdom of God.' The Church has always understood these words to mean that children should not be deprived of baptism.

To fulfil the true meaning of baptism, children *must gradually be formed in the faith in which they have been baptized*. The foundation of this formation will be the grace they have already received. They have a right to Christian formation, first from their parents, to lead them gradually to learn God's plan of salvation. In this way, they will come to accept for themselves the faith in which they have been baptized.

Ministries And Roles In The Celebration Of Baptism

The local parish community has an important part to play in the baptism. The child has a right to the love and help of the community. During the baptism ceremony, the community should be represented to show its consent and support to the child and family. This is especially the case when it comes to the profession of faith. In this way it is clear that the faith in which the child is baptized is not the private or personal outlook of the individual family, but the *common treasure of the whole Church of Christ*.

Parents in particular have a role of service and responsibility during the baptism which is more important than that of the godparents.

- *Before the baptism takes place*, it is of great importance that parents should prepare to take part in the ceremony with understanding and with prayer. The wider family or local parishioners can help in this. The parish priest will, circumstances permitting, make an appointment to visit the family or invite them to see him in the parish house.

- *The parents must of course be present* at the celebration in which their child is reborn in water and the Holy Spirit.
- *In the celebration of baptism*, the father and mother (or another guardian) have special parts to play. They listen to the words addressed to them by the celebrant, they join in prayer along with the congregation, and they exercise a genuine ministry when:
  1) they publicly ask that the child be baptized;
  2) they sign their child with the sign of the cross after the celebrant;
  3) they renounce Satan and recite the profession of faith;
  4) they (and especially the mother) carry the child to the font;
  5) they hold the lighted candle, symbol of the Risen Jesus;
  6) they are blessed with the prayers formulated specifically for mothers and fathers.
- A parent unable to make the profession of faith (for example, because not a Catholic) may keep silent. Such a parent, when making the request for the child's baptism is asked only to make arrangements, or at least to give permission, for the child's instruction in the faith of its baptism.
- *After baptism* it is the responsibility of the parents, out of thanks to God and in faithful observance of the duty they have undertaken:
  1) to assist the child to know God, whose adopted child it has become;
  2) to prepare the child to receive confirmation;
  3) and to participate in the holy eucharist.
  In this duty they are again to be helped by the parish priest by suitable means.

Time And Place For The Baptism Of Children

Unless there is danger of death, a child should be baptized *as soon as possible.* Even before the child is born, the parents should be in touch