

## About the Catholic Church

Welcome to the Catholic Church, a community of believers professing faith in Jesus Christ. There are over five million Catholics in Australia, the largest single denomination representing over 27% of the population. The Catholic community includes people of every nationality.

Bishops and priests, religious brothers and sisters as well as families and single people make up the Catholic Church. The Catholic community has a place for everyone, whether young or old, married or single, and of all races and nations. Each person is invited personally to share in the love of Jesus through his Church.

The Catholic Church seeks to live its mission by supporting all sectors of the community – through prayer and worship, education, healthcare and social welfare services.

People are welcomed into the Catholic family through the Sacrament of Baptism which is going to take place today.

## What is the Sacrament of Baptism?

Through Baptism a person is welcomed into the Church community. The person – infant, child or adult – through the waters of Baptism enters more deeply into the life of God – Father, Son and Holy Spirit. He or she is dedicated to God and all that is good.



The bond of Baptism binds a person to God forever; the bond is unbreakable and unrepeatable.

## What happens during the Baptismal Ceremony?

You've been invited to the Church to attend the Baptism of the baby of your friend or relative and you might be wondering what to expect...

### *Baptismal Promises*

The family will gather around the baptismal font – a large bowl, usually made of stone, marble or glass which holds the water used for baptism. The priest or deacon asks the parents what they ask for their child and they reply “Baptism”. Later the parents make the baptismal promises on behalf of their child. These promises are based on the Apostles Creed.

### *Sign of the Cross*

The cross is a reminder of the love that Jesus Christ showed by giving his life for his friends. The tracing of a cross on the forehead of the person being baptised is an invisible “marking” that says “they belong to Jesus”. The priest or deacon will trace the cross on the forehead of the baby and invite the parents and godparents to do the same.

### *Word of God*

Every liturgy is based around the word of God in Scripture. The priest gives a short homily or reflection on the readings.

### *Baptism with Water*

The priest pours water over the baby's head (or immerses the baby in the water) and says “I baptise you in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit”.

The water is a sign of cleansing, symbolically washing away all the sin of the person being baptised. It is also a sign of life, because without water nothing can grow. And it is a sign of the new spiritual life into which the baptised person is entering.

### *Anointing with Oil*

The priest anoints the baby on the chest with the Oil of Baptism. After baptism, he then anoints the baby's forehead with the Oil of Chrism.

The Oil of Baptism (Catechumens) is olive oil which has been specially blessed. It is associated with the days when athletes used to rub oil into their bodies before events to strengthen them and make their skin more supple, and symbolises strengthening for the challenges of life ahead. The Oil of Chrism is a combination of olive oil and balsam, and symbolises the sealing with the Holy Spirit.

### *White Garment*

The child is clothed in a white garment which is a symbol of purity and innocence. Sometimes families like to use a christening gown or shawl that has been used by previous generations while others will use a white baptismal gown, a stole or a white bib.

### *Candle*

A candle will be lit as a sign of this new life. It is usually lit from the Easter Candle which symbolises the light of Christ, and will be held by a parent or godparent.

### *Baptismal certificate*

At the end of the ceremony the parents are given a Baptismal Certificate which they will keep as a record of their child's initiation into the Church and present at future sacraments.

## Why are there several babies baptised at the one ceremony?

Usually there are several babies baptised at the one ceremony to symbolise that each baby is joining the universal Church, which is made up of over a billion people. In fact, the gathered community is also a symbol of the Church. The priest says to each child, calling him or her by name, 'The Christian community welcomes you with great joy. In its name I claim you for Christ our saviour by the sign of the cross.'



## I am not baptised but I would like to find out more?

If you or a member of your family is not yet baptised, the first step is to make an appointment to meet with the parish priest or pastoral associate. You may be asked to come along and talk about the meaning of baptism and why you or your children would like to take this step.

Adults will probably be asked to participate in a series of talks to learn about the faith. Sometimes the priest does this himself while some churches have a program – the Rite of Christian Initiation of Adults (RCIA) to prepare people for baptism.

## Am I alone in wanting to become Catholic?

Many people are Catholic because they were born into a Catholic family. But others make the decision to become Catholic during their adult life.

Each year thousands of people enquire about the Catholic faith and go on to be received into the Catholic Church.

Others who were baptised as an infant make an adult decision to follow Jesus more closely in the Church.

## Prayer of Commitment to Jesus Christ

*Jesus,  
I am seeking more meaning in my life.  
I seek happiness and peace for myself and my loved ones.  
Up until now You have not played a big part in my life.  
But little by little, as I look back over my life,  
I can see You have been calling me to Yourself.  
Through all the events and people that have come into my life  
I can see Your presence, Your guiding hand through it all.  
Help me not to be afraid as I resolve to learn more about  
You and Your Church  
and make You more of a part of my life. Amen.*



## Contacting the Catholic Enquiry Centre

If you or someone close to you is interested in finding out more about the Catholic faith, please contact Catholic Enquiry Centre on 1300 4 FAITH (1300 432 484) or email [info@catholicenquiry.com](mailto:info@catholicenquiry.com)

## Other places you might like to look for information:

[www.catholic.org.au](http://www.catholic.org.au)  
[www.acbc.catholic.org.au](http://www.acbc.catholic.org.au)  
[www.catholicaustralia.com.au](http://www.catholicaustralia.com.au)  
[www.vatican.va](http://www.vatican.va)



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Reaching out in faith  
Australian Catholic Bishops Conference

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# The Sacrament of Baptism

A GENERAL GUIDE



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