

## **INTRODUCTION**

Your child's baptism is an important event for you and your church. In presenting your child for baptism, you are identifying him or her with the community of God's people, His Church, and you are making a promise to God. We want to do everything to make this a special time for you.

### **THE MEANING OF INFANT BAPTISM**

Baptism is not something we do *to* our children; it is something we do *for* them. Baptism is a sign of God's new covenant with His people. It is a covenant (promise) we enter into with God regarding our children in response to His invitation, "*Let the little children come unto me,*" (Mt. 19:14) and the admonition from the Apostle Peter who said, "*For the promise (of God) is for you, for your children, and for all who are far away, everyone whom the Lord our God calls to Him.*" (Acts 2:39) So, we baptize our children believing that if we as parents live out what it means to follow Christ and if God's Holy Spirit is at work in the lives of our children, they will one day come to claim Jesus Christ as their personal Lord and Savior.

Baptism is a sign of God's involvement with humankind. When you have your child baptized, you enter into a three-way promise. It is a promise between (1) God, (2) the parents and (3) the Church community.

1. The first part of the covenant of baptism is the overwhelming promise of God's gracious love to a child. This love is extended to the child even before he or she is aware or able to respond. Further, God promises to be at work in the child, drawing him or her toward faith in Jesus Christ. Baptism does not promise a child's salvation. The question is often asked, "Do Presbyterians believe that baptism 'saves' a person?" The answer is that baptism is only effective when it is accompanied by faith in the life of the individual believer.
2. The second part of the covenant is that you promise to raise your child as a Christian. This means that you will teach your child about the Christian faith, include your child in activities of the church so as to expose him/her to the truth of the Gospel, and that your life will be an example of what it means to follow Jesus Christ.
3. The third part of the covenant is that God gives us the community of His people, the Church, to help us raise our children as Christians. During the baptism the congregation promises to join with you in the responsibility of teaching your child about the Christian faith. That is why baptism is performed during the worship service (Book of Order, W 2.3000). As a part of the promise the congregation agrees to provide nurturing care and Biblical instruction. They also promise that as

individuals their lives will reflect the values of one who follows Christ. Whenever your child sees them, whether at church or in the community, what he or she has learned at home will be reinforced by what is seen in the lives of God's people.

As your child grows we believe that the salvation offered by God in Christ must be individually claimed. Often this takes place for baptized children in a communicants or confirmation class, where they personally claim the faith into which they were baptized. The confirmation class at First Presbyterian is specifically designed to not only teach children about the history and traditions of our faith, but also enable young persons to articulate a personal faith in Jesus Christ as Savior and Lord, thus claiming the promises that began with their baptism.

Baptism, then, is an act of faith by the believing parents of a child and the community of God's people who ask God to be at work in all of their children, drawing them toward a day when they want to individually claim Jesus Christ as their own. Baptism is more fully described in The Book of Order, 'Directory of Worship' sections W-2.3000 and W-3.3600. If you have further questions about the sacrament of infant baptism, one of our pastors will be happy to visit with you.

One question that is sometimes asked by parents is, "If I have my child baptized now, will he/she be able to be baptized again when they trust in Christ if he/she wants to do so?" The Presbyterian Church takes its instruction from one of the earliest church councils that wrestled with this issue. They observed that to re-administer the sacrament of baptism would be to say that God had not been faithful at the first baptism when the person's faith attests to exactly the opposite fact; indeed God has been at work in this child's life, drawing them to faith. For this reason, Presbyterian ministers will decline to "re-baptize" persons who have already been baptized.

### ***GODPARENTS***

The tradition of Godparents has come to us primarily from the Roman Catholic and Episcopal traditions. Part of the traditional role of a Godparent is to take responsibility for the spiritual upbringing of a child in the event that parents are unable to fulfill that role. Godparents are also encouraged to supplement the spiritual education of the child given by the parents. Within the Reformed family of faith, the congregation serves the role that Godparents serve. During the baptism the congregation commits itself to help the parents with their responsibility of raising the child and teaching him/her about the faith.

Sometimes there is a special person who has indicated a willingness to stand with the parents in their role as spiritual mentor. They volunteer to take the lead in the commitment of the congregation. It is entirely appropriate to have such a person stand with you during the baptism of your child. If you have such a person, please notify the

minister performing the baptism before the service begins. He or she will be able to introduce them and share with the congregation the special role they have agreed to fill in your child's life.

### ***MEMBERSHIP***

Baptism is a covenant between parents, their church and God. The Book of Order states that one of the parents presenting a child for baptism must be a person who holds to the Christian faith and should also be a member of the church where the child is being presented. Baptism apart from one's home congregation loses its symbolism. Therefore, it is usually inappropriate to baptize a child from another congregation in our worship services. However, The Book of Order also allows, in special circumstances, for the Session of First Presbyterian to approve the baptism of children from another church when the governing body of that church specifically requests that First Presbyterian do so on their behalf. This request must come to the Session in writing and should be made at least two months prior to the time you wish your child to be baptized. If you are a member of another church and would like to have your child baptized here, please consult with the Senior Minister. If, after consultation, there is ground for special consideration, he will take your request and the communication that comes from the governing body of your home church to the worship committee of our Session.

### ***SCHEDULING THE BAPTISM OF YOUR CHILD***

Certain Sundays are reserved for special activities in the life of the church such as the celebration of the Lord's Supper, the reception of new members, the commissioning of mission teams, etc. Infant baptisms are not scheduled during these services. Some of these activities restrict scheduling in only one service or the other; others restrict scheduling at all services. Parents who wish to schedule a baptism should work with the designated staff member to schedule a time that is available on the church calendar and is convenient for them. Please contact Jeanne Nifong at 723-1621 (ext. 234) or [jeannen@1stpres.com](mailto:jeannen@1stpres.com) to secure the available dates for a baptism.

### ***PROCEDURES***

It is best if you arrive at least 20 minutes before the service begins. The ushers will have seats reserved for your family and guests. If you will need more places please arrive earlier and ask them to rope off additional pews. You may also want to tell your guests about parking in the lot south of the church or in the Central Parking Deck. Please sit near the aisle so you can easily come forward when the minister performing the baptism

invites you to. You may bring other children if you so desire. Walk to the front of the auditorium and stand with the pastor.

We use the Apostles Creed as part of the baptism service because it defines, in a succinct way, the essentials of the Christian faith. It is printed below for you to review.

The questions parents are asked will be reflected from this creed. They are:

- “Do you confess your faith in God as revealed in the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit?”
- “Do you trust only in the death of Christ for the forgiveness of your sin?”
- “Do you promise, with God’s help, to raise your son/daughter as a Christian, teaching him/her by your example what it means to follow Christ?”

The appropriate answer to each of these questions is “We do.” Parents are encouraged to speak up so that people in the congregation will be able to hear you.

The minister will either take the child from the parents or will leave him/her in their arms and ask, “What is the Christian name of this child?” Parents should respond with the name by which the child will be baptized. After the baptism the minister will offer a prayer and the parents will be presented with the child’s baptism certificate and a children’s Bible that is a gift from our church.

It is not uncommon for babies to cry during their baptism or do other things that are characteristic to babies. Relax. It won’t be the first time it happened. After the baptism persons may either return to their seat or go straight to the nursery and return to the service after getting their child settled. Don’t forget to take a bulletin home to put in the baby’s book!

### ***PHOTOGRAPHS AND VIDEO RECORDINGS***

As with every important moment in our lives, pictures provide vivid memories and teaching opportunities as our children grow. However, a baptism is a part of a worship service and a certain amount of decorum is expected. **Please have family and friends refrain from taking flash pictures during the service.** Video recordings that do not require special lighting are fine if the person is taking video refrains from standing and moving around during the service. Some persons find the front seats of either the auditorium or balcony is a good place for taking videos.

Because of the schedule on Sunday morning the minister will make him/herself available for all the pictures people may want *following the service* (flash is OK here). Following the 9:30 service, the minister has only a very brief time in which he/she is available. If you desire pictures after this service it may be advisable to get your child from the nursery (if you have taken him/her there) and return during the singing of the closing hymn. Because of the ‘busyness’ of post-service times, it is often helpful to remind the minister that you want pictures taken.

## ***SEATING***

The ushers will reserve seats in one of the center sections of the auditorium or sanctuary for the family. Additional seats can be reserved if you need them. Those who are coming to the chancel for the baptismal ceremony will need to sit by an aisle for easier exit. Following the baptism, parents may either return to their seats or take the baby to the nursery. When returning to the sanctuary, please consider other worshippers. There are several natural times to re-enter such as during a hymn or when the offering is being received.

## ***INVITATIONS***

The church provides invitations for the parents of the child being baptized to mail to family and friends. The Administrative Assistant will mail these to you at least one month prior to the date of the baptism. Typically we provide eight invitations but if more are desired, the Administrative Assistant will be happy to arrange for them to be supplied.

## ***APOSTLE'S CREED***

*I believe in God the Father Almighty, Maker of heaven and earth,  
And in Jesus Christ his only son our Lord; who was conceived by the Holy Ghost,  
born of the virgin Mary, suffered under Pontius Pilate, was crucified, dead, and  
buried; he descended into hell; the third day he rose again from the dead; he ascended  
into heaven, and sitteth on the right hand of God the Father Almighty; from thence he  
shall come to judge the quick and the dead.*

*I believe in the Holy Ghost; the holy Catholic Church; the communion of saints;  
the forgiveness of sins; the resurrection of the body; and the life everlasting. Amen.*