



Baptism



Northminster Presbyterian Church

Baptism

What About Baptism?

This booklet is designed to help parishioners understand Baptism from the Presbyterian perspective. We hope you will find it useful.

It includes the procedures for making arrangements for Baptism at Northminster and one model of a baptismal service.

Also incorporated is the entire chapter on Baptism from the Constitution of the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) There is little that can be added to that chapter. The entire statement is a comprehensive effort to interpret the scriptural references to Baptism found in the New Testament.

In summarizing the information from our Constitution, we would have you remember:

1. Baptism is both God's act and the people's response. Baptism testifies first to God's action toward us and only secondarily to our faith in God.
2. In the Baptism of our children, we dedicate ourselves to all the responsibilities of Christian parenthood—teaching by example and word, praying with and for our children, reading and interpreting the Bible to our children, and accompanying our children to worship and church school.
3. Members of the congregation dedicate themselves to providing Christian nurture for baptized children and their parents, providing a comprehensive ministry to children and youth, and welcoming baptized children into the life of the congregation.

In Baptism we acknowledge that we are all the children of God, belonging to the family of God in Christ. So, whether we receive the Sacrament as an infant, youth, or adult, we receive Baptism as a child. In the words of Jesus, "Whoever does not receive the Kingdom of God like a child will never enter it."

The pastors of Northminster are available to discuss Baptism with you, to help you prepare for this Sacrament for yourself or your child, and to answer any questions you may have.

Making Arrangements in Northminster Church for . . .

Infant Baptism

1. Parents desiring Baptism for their child are asked to call the church office to schedule the Baptism. Baptisms are not scheduled on the first Sunday of the month and there are Sundays set aside during the year specifically for Baptism.
2. In scheduling the Baptism you may, if you desire, state which pastor you would like to administer the Sacrament and which elder you would like to participate. Your desires will be accommodated if at all possible.
3. It is required that the Session approve Baptisms in advance. The Session meets on the third Tuesday of each month. You should begin your scheduling arrangements at least one full month in advance.
4. Please arrange a personal meeting with the pastor who will perform the Baptism.

Believer's Baptism

1. Sometimes pastors are asked, "I was baptized as an infant and don't remember. Should I be baptized again?" or "I was baptized in such-and-such church. Do I need to be baptized again?" If you were baptized "in the name of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit" at any age, in any church, we will not baptize you again. Your original Baptism is sufficient in God's eyes and in the eyes of Christ's church.
2. If you have not been baptized, Baptism is a significant part of your affirmation in coming into membership in Christ's church. You will learn about Baptism as a part of our new member orientation classes. Baptism will be administered on the Sunday you are publicly received into our congregation. At that time the entire congregation will celebrate your Baptism into faith in Jesus Christ and welcome you into membership here at Northminster.

Service of Baptism for Children

The pastor shall speak to the parents and the congregation concerning the institution of the Sacrament by our Lord, Jesus Christ, and the meaning of Baptism.

Then the pastor shall propose to the parents the following or similar questions:

Friend, in presenting your child for Baptism, you announce your faith in Jesus Christ and show that you want your child to study Christ, know Christ, love Christ, and serve Christ as a chosen disciple.

Show your purpose by answering these questions:

1. *Do you desire that _____ be baptized?*

(I do)

2. *Relying on God's grace, do you promise to live the Christian faith and to teach that faith to your child?*

(I do)

An Elder representing the congregation shall then ask the congregation to assume responsibility with the parents for the Christian nurture of the child. The Elder asks:

Do we, as members of the church of Jesus Christ, promise to guide and nurture _____ by word and deed, with love and prayer, encouraging him/her to know and follow Christ and to be a faithful member of this church?

If you are willing to accept this care, please say "We do."

The pastor asks the parents to affirm their faith by responding to these questions:

1. *Trusting in the gracious mercy of God, do you turn from the ways of sin and renounce evil and its power in the world?*

(I do)

2. *Do you turn to Jesus Christ trusting in his grace and love?*

(I do)

3. *Do you desire for _____ to be Christ's disciple, to obey his Word, and to show his love?*

(I do)

The pastor shall pray that the water be set apart from a common to a sacred use and for a blessing on the Sacrament to be administered. After this the pastor, calling the child by her or his given name, shall say:

Name of the child)_____, I baptize you in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit.

While saying these words, the pastor shall baptize the child with water applied visibly and generously. The child is introduced to the congregation and a prayer is offered.

O Loving God, we thank you for the gift of Baptism as our sign and seal of acceptance into your kingdom. Look with special favor upon this child today and prepare us for our task as we seek to nurture him/her in the ways and love of Jesus the Christ. Amen.

The Elder concludes the service with a statement of welcome.

A word of explanation: In the act of baptizing only the child's given name is used. This is symbolic of the fact that we are all members of the same family whose family name is "Christian."

Service for Believer' Baptism

Baptism for the believer takes the same form as Baptism for children. The person being baptized answers the questions as follows:

Trusting in the gracious mercy of God, do you turn from the ways of sin and renounce evil and its power in the world?

(I do)

Do you turn to Jesus Christ and accept him as your Lord and Savior, trusting in his grace and love?

Will you be Christ's faithful disciple, obeying his Word and showing his love?

(I will)

Will you be a faithful member of this congregation, giving of yourself in every way, and will you seek the fellowship of the church wherever you may be?

(I will)

Some Scriptural References to Baptism

Jesus

“Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything that I have commanded you.” (Matthew 28: 19-20)

The Apostle Paul

“For just as the body is one and has many members, and all the members of the body, though many, are one body, so it is with Christ. For in the one Spirit we were all baptized into one body—Jews or Greeks, slaves or free—and were all made to drink of one Spirit.” (1 Corinthians 12: 12-13)

“As many of you as were baptized into Christ have clothed yourselves with Christ.” (Galatians 3:27)

“There is one body and one Spirit, just as you were called to the one hope of your calling, one Lord, one faith, one baptism, one God and father of all, who is above all and through all and in all.” (Ephesians 4: 4-6)

The Apostle Peter

““Can anyone withhold the water for baptizing these people who have received the Holy Spirit just as we have?’ So he ordered them to be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ.” Then they invited him to stay for several days. (Acts 10: 47-48)

The Leader of the Synagogue in Corinth

“Crispus, the official of the synagogue, became a believer in the Lord, together with all his household; and many of the Corinthians who heard Paul became believers and were baptized.” (Acts 18:8)

The Jailer at Phillipi

“At the same hour of the night he took them and washed their wounds; then he and his entire family were baptized without delay. He brought them up into the house and set food before them; and he and his entire household rejoiced that he had become a believer in God.”
(Acts 16: 33-34)

From the Constitution of the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.)

Baptism

Baptism is the sign and seal on incorporation in Christ. Jesus through his own Baptism identified himself with sinners in order to fulfill all righteousness. Jesus in his own Baptism was attested Son by the Father and was anointed with the Holy Spirit to undertake the way of the servant manifested in his sufferings, death, and resurrection. Jesus the risen Lord assured his followers of his continuing presence and power and commissioned them to go throughout the world teaching and baptizing others in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit. The disciples were empowered by the outpouring of the Spirit to undertake a life of service and to be an inclusive worshiping community, sharing life in which love, justice, and mercy abounded.

In Baptism, we participate in Jesus' death and resurrection. In Baptism, we die to what separates us from God and are raised to newness of life in Christ. Baptism points us back to the grace of God expressed in Jesus Christ, who died for us and who was raised for us. Baptism points forward to that same Christ who will fulfill God's purpose in God's promised future.

In Baptism, the Holy Spirit binds the Church in covenant to its Creator and Lord. The water of Baptism symbolizes the waters of Creation, of the Flood, and of the Exodus from Egypt. Thus, the water of Baptism links us to goodness of God's creation and to the grace of God's covenants with Noah and Israel. Prophets of Israel, amidst the failure of their own generation to honor God's covenant, called for justice to roll down like waters and righteousness like an ever flowing stream. (Amos 5:24)
They envisioned a free expression of God grace and of creation's goodness – a new covenant accompanied by the sprinkling of cleansing water. In his ministry, Jesus offered the gift of living water. So, Baptism is the sign and seal of God's grace and covenant in Christ.

As circumcision was the sign and symbol of inclusion in God's grace and covenant with Israel, so Baptism is the sign and symbol of inclusion in God's grace and covenant with the Church. As an identifying mark, Baptism signifies

- a. the faithfulness of God
- b. the washing away of sin
- c. rebirth
- d. putting on the fresh garment of Christ
- e. being sealed by God's Spirit
- f. adoption into the covenant family of the Church
- g. resurrection and illumination in Christ

The body of Christ is one, and Baptism is the bond of unity in Christ. As they are united with Christ through faith, Baptism unites the people of God with each other and with the Church of every time and place. Barriers of race, gender, status, and age are to be transcended. Barriers of nationality, history, and practice are to be overcome.

Baptism enacts and seals what the Word proclaims: God's redeeming grace offered to all people. Baptism is God's gift of grace and also God's summons to respond to that grace. Baptism calls to repentance, to faithfulness, and to discipleship. Baptism gives the Church its identity and commissions the Church for ministry to the world.

God's faithfulness signified in Baptism is constant and sure, even when human faithfulness to God is not. Baptism is received only once. The efficacy of Baptism is not tied to the moment when it is administered, for Baptism signifies the beginning of life in Christ, not its completion. God's grace works steadily, calling to repentance and newness of life. God's faithfulness needs no renewal.

Human faithfulness to God needs repeated renewal. Baptism calls for decision at every subsequent stage of life's way, both for those whose Baptism attends their profession of faith and for those who are nurtured from childhood within the family of faith.

- a. Both believers and their children are included in God's covenant love. Children of believers are to be baptized without undue delay, but without undue haste. Baptism, whether administered to those who profess their faith or to those present for Baptism as children, is one and the same Sacrament.
- b. The Baptism of children witnesses to the truth that God's love claims people before they are able to respond in faith.

- c. The Baptism of those who enter the covenant upon their own profession of faith witnesses to the truth that God's gift of grace calls for fulfillment in a response of faithfulness.

Baptism is received only once. There are many times in worship, however, when believers acknowledge the grace of God continually at work. As they participate in the celebration of another's Baptism, as they experience the sustaining nurture of the Lord's Supper, and as they reaffirm the commitments made at Baptism, they confess their ongoing need for God's grace and pledge anew their obedience to God's covenant in Christ.

As there is one body, there is one Baptism. (Ephesians 4: 4-6). The Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) recognizes all Baptism with water in the name of the Father, of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit administered by other Christian churches.

For reasons of order, Baptism shall be authorized by the Session, administered by a Minister of the Word and Sacrament, and accompanied by the reading and proclaiming of the Word. Baptism is celebrated in a service of public worship. Extraordinary circumstances may call for the administration of Baptism apart from the worship of the congregation. In such cases care should be taken that

- (1) the congregation be represented by one or more members of the Session;
- (2) a proper understanding of the meaning of the Sacrament be offered by the Minister;
- (3) the Session be consulted when possible;
- (4) the Baptism be reported by the officiating minister and recorded by the Session . . .

The Session's responsibilities for Baptism are:

- a. encouraging parents to present their children for Baptism reminding them that children of believers are to be baptized without undue haste, but without undue delay, and authorizing the Baptism of those presented;
- b. admitting to Baptism children of believers, after appropriate instruction and discussion with the parent(s) or one(s) rightly exercising parental responsibility, acquainting them with the significance of what God is doing in this act, and with the special responsibilities on parents and congregations for nurturing the baptized person in the Christian life;

- c. admitting to Baptism, after appropriate instruction and examination, those not yet baptized who come making public their personal profession of faith;
- d. placing all baptized persons on the appropriate roll as members of the congregation:
- e. making certain that those baptized are nurtured in understanding the meaning of Baptism, of the Lord's Supper, and of their interrelation, and they that are surrounded by Christian encouragement and support.

The congregation as a whole, on behalf of the Church universal, assumes responsibility for nurturing the baptized person in the Christian life. In exercising this ministry, the Session may designate certain members of the congregation as representatives of the church charged with special responsibility for nurture. For any person who is being baptized, sponsor(s) may be appointed by the Session in consultation with those desiring Baptism for themselves or for their children and given the specific role of nurturing the baptized person.

When a child is being presented for Baptism, ordinarily the parent(s) or one(s) rightly exercising parental responsibility shall be an active member of the congregation. Those presenting children for Baptism shall promise to provide nurture and guidance within the community of faith until the child is ready to make a personal profession of faith and assume the responsibility of active church membership. The Session may also consider a request for the Baptism of a child from a Christian parents who is an active member of another congregation. If the Session approves such a request, it shall consult with the governing body of the other congregation and shall notify them when the Sacrament has been administered.