

BAPTIZING YOUR CHILD



FIRST UNITED
PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH

BAPTIZING YOUR CHILD AT FIRST UNITED PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH

We're delighted to know you're interested in having your child baptized at First United Presbyterian Church. We're a warm, loving church that will welcome and support you, wherever you may be in your Christian growth.

As the parent(s) of the child to be presented for baptism, your interest shows that you value your child's relationship with God and the church. Before you begin to make specific plans about dates or other details, please read this booklet to gain a better understanding of what Christian baptism means, how it's practiced in the Presbyterian Church (USA), and what commitments are involved. It will help you know the general approach we take to baptizing children at First United Presbyterian Church. Our official policy for infant baptism may be found in the *Book of Order* of the Presbyterian Church (USA).

Ordinarily, the first step in your child's baptism is for you to establish a regular pattern of family worship at First United Presbyterian Church, and for one or both parents to be committed to following Jesus Christ as active members of this congregation. In our Presbyterian understanding, the whole congregation makes a commitment to your family, to support you and your child as together we experience and grow in God's grace. This extended church family is a wonderful support system for you and your child.

As you become firmly connected to our church family, you're warmly encouraged to begin the process of arranging the baptism in a conversation with one of our co-pastors following worship. We'll arrange an initial meeting, to talk about your faith as a parent, the meaning of Christian baptism, and your family's ongoing relationship with the church.

We look forward to hearing from you soon.

Revs. Phil and Jan Butin
479-442-4411

Why We Baptize the Children of Believers

The primary reason for baptizing infants and children is as a response to Jesus' command in Matthew 28:18-20:

*All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me.
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.
And remember, I am with you always, even to the end of the age.*

Presbyterians like to speak about baptism as a covenant. A covenant is a solemn agreement with God that is sealed with a binding vow. It is the most serious agreement a human being can make. We believe that the children of believers are included in the covenant of baptism. In Acts 2:39, when believers and their families were being instructed to repent and be baptized for the forgiveness of sins, we read:

*For the promise is to you
and to your children
and to all that are far off,
everyone whom the Lord
our God calls to himself.*

At First United Presbyterian Church, we are serious about the responsibility of helping children come to know, love, obey, and serve Jesus Christ. The covenant of baptism is an important step in that process.

Because God's grace precedes and calls forth our response of faith, it is normal in the Presbyterian Church (USA) for parents who are followers of Jesus Christ and active church members to present their children for baptism as infants and very young children. While active members need have no hesitation about bringing your child to be baptized as an infant, baptism is possible at any age. Some parents prefer to wait until the child is able to personally answer the baptismal questions, rather than to speak for their child. In baptizing children, we trust that eventually God will bring them to a time in their lives when they want to embrace their baptism by making

their own public profession of faith before the elders of the church, and by covenanting to be adult members of the Presbyterian Church (USA).

There are four parties to the covenant of infant baptism: God, the child, the parents, and the congregation.

God's commitment is to claim your child in love, and to be faithful to him or her. In baptism God reaffirms covenant with us and our children. By the Holy Spirit, we are set apart for God, who calls us by name and puts a sign on us to show that we belong to Christ. As we live out our baptism, God forgives our sin, frees us from death, and gives us new birth by uniting us with Jesus Christ through faith. We are sealed by God's Spirit, and adopted into the covenant family of the church. In being united with Christ in baptism, we are also united with all the people of God as brothers and sisters in Christ. Baptism enacts and seals what God's Word proclaims: the redeeming grace of God offered to all people, children and adults alike. (*Book of Order*)

Your child's responsibility is to respond to God in faith and obedience as he or she grows in divine grace.

Your commitment as a parent is to bring your child to church often, raise your child in the Christian faith, pray with and for him or her daily, teach him or her the meaning of baptism, and participate together in weekly worship, Christian education, and church activities.

The members of the congregation make a solemn commitment to pray for your child, to teach him or her the Christian faith, to love and nurture your family, and to be examples of Christian discipleship.

Children, parents, and congregation all rely on God's grace to fulfill the responsibilities of baptism. Since the promises made in the covenant of baptism constitute its very essence, if the human commitments above cannot be kept with sincerity and integrity, it is best for the family to wait until the child is old enough to be baptized at his or her own initiative as a young adult.

Misconceptions About Baptism

There are certain reasons people sometimes present their children for baptism that indicate misconceptions about its Biblical and Reformed meaning:

***The idea that infant baptism is right for every child.** Presbyterians believe that the love and grace of God in Jesus Christ are offered without condition to all. At First United Presbyterian Church, we seek to extend God's own welcome to each person who wants to be a part of our extended family, wherever they may be in their personal faith journey. Within this welcoming context, infant baptism involves the considered resolve of a parent to enter into a solemn covenant with God, your child, and your congregation. If, after prayerful consideration, you feel you are ready to trust God to help you live by the baptismal vows (printed on page 9 of this booklet), we encourage you to present your child for baptism. If, after prayer and reflection, you are unsure about taking these vows, we encourage you to take time to cultivate your own and your child's Christian faith and church connections. In this case, it is best to wait until your child is ready to decide for him or herself to be a baptized Christian as a young adult.

***Fear that in case of accident or illness, a child may not go to heaven.** We are saved by God's grace through faith in Jesus Christ. Baptism is a powerful sign of this grace. But, it is neither a guarantee of automatic salvation, nor a necessary condition for salvation. While the seed of faith (the Holy Spirit) is communicated in baptism, God must water and nourish this seed in the context of our commitment to our child's worship and Christian education. Ultimately, we must entrust our child's eternal destiny to his or her loving heavenly Father.

***Loyalty to a church which is based primarily in the past.** Some parents think, "Since this is the church I grew up in, my child should be baptized here too." It is right to want your child to be baptized in your church. However, this sentiment must be coupled with your own present active participation in worship and Sunday School if the infant baptism of your child is to have its intended meaning. If you have moved away from this area, it is important to establish a new church home where you live now. It is usually most appropriate and helpful for your child's Christian nurture to present your child for baptism in your new congregation, where your family can participate regularly in the church's life and worship. The Session may consider a request for baptism of a child from a Christian parent

who is an active member of another congregation, in consultation with the governing body of the other congregation.

***Pressure from other family members, or a desire to honor longstanding family traditions.** When sought by believing parents who are active church members, infant baptism is certainly a deeply meaningful tradition. However, it has more to do with uniting your child with God's family (the church) than with pleasing the child's grandparents, uncles and aunts, or other relatives. Baptism is a solemn covenant between God, your child, your church, and you as (a) parent(s); not something to be done primarily to honor or please others.

***Confusion between infant baptism and "dedication" or "christening" ceremonies conducted in other churches.** You, or your family, may have connections with, or background in, a church which baptizes only adults, and "dedicates" infants. In this case, it is important for you to prayerfully decide which approach is right for you. In the Presbyterian understanding, baptism is only to be received once. It connects your child in covenant with the congregation in which he or she is baptized, as a "baptized member." Your decision should be based on careful consideration of the meaning of baptism and Christian faith in each church tradition, and honest evaluation of your intentions as to which will be most important for your child's Christian growth and training. The church in which you and your children will be most active is the best place for his or her baptism, according to the theology of that tradition.

Parental Preparation For Baptism

From birth:

*Pray daily for your child, and set an example of Christian faith and commitment for your child.

*Begin to teach your child to know, love, and serve Jesus Christ.

*Bring your child to church regularly, develop a personal relationship with our co-pastors, and talk together with one or both of them about your desire to have your child baptized.

4 months prior to baptism:

*Be consistently active and involved in worship and other church activities.

3 months prior to baptism:

*After reading this booklet carefully, prayerfully seek God's guidance as you consider presenting your child for baptism.

*As God leads you, speak with one of the co-pastors at church following worship about making specific plans for a baptism.

*Meet with one or both of the co-pastors to discuss your faith, your involvement in the church, and your child's baptism. Check the church calendar, agreeing on possible dates for the baptism.

4 -6 weeks prior to baptism:

*Prayerfully study and internalize the baptismal questions and promises.

*Decide with the pastors on an elder from the church who will participate in the baptismal service, and on baptismal sponsors for your child, if desired. You may also request that a family member pour the water into the font during the ceremony.

Day of baptism:

*Meet with the pastor 30 minutes prior to worship to clarify service details. Bring the child who will be baptized to this meeting.

*Plan to stay in worship with your child throughout the service. The baptism will follow the sermon. If he or she cries so much that worship will be disturbed, carry him/her to the entryway area or choir room until he/she is feeling more cheerful.

After baptism:

*Continue to participate regularly in worship and to be active in the life of the church with your child. We are warmly welcoming of children in worship, and happy to have "baby sounds" in the service as a testimony to Jesus' own welcoming of children to himself. You may also bring your child to our nursery in lower Calvin Hall also, which includes nurturing children's activities.

*Help your child begin friendships with the children of the church.

*Pray for your child, and begin to pray out loud with your child. Read the Bible to your child and talk about the meaning of the stories, using both a children's story Bible and an accessible Bible translation.

*Bring your child to Sunday School beginning at age 3, and participate in an adult Sunday School class yourself at the same time. Come on a weekly basis.

*Put the date of your child's baptism on your calendar and celebrate it annually. You will receive a gift box from the church that will assist you.

*Pray regularly for the day when your child will embrace his/her own baptism by making a public profession of faith in Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior and by becoming an adult member of the church.

SAMPLE SERVICE OF BAPTISM

Minister: Hear the words of Jesus:

All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. 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, teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you; and lo, I am with you always, to the close of the age. (Matthew 28:18-20)

Hear also the following words of scripture:

God's promise is to you and to your children, to everyone whom the Lord our God calls. (Acts 2:39)

Obedying the word of our Lord Jesus, and confident of his promises, we baptize those whom he has called.

In baptism God reaffirms his covenant with us and our children. He sets us apart for himself, putting a sign on us to show that we belong to him. Through our baptism God frees us from sin and death, by uniting us with Jesus Christ in his death and resurrection. By water and the Holy Spirit, we are made members of the church, the body of Christ, and joined to its ministry. Let us all remember and rejoice in our own baptism, as we celebrate this sacrament.

Elder: On behalf of the session, I present _____ to receive the sacrament of baptism.

Minister: _____, in presenting _____ for baptism, you declare your faith in Jesus Christ, and show that you want your child to learn of him, know him, love him, and serve him as a chosen disciple. Now affirm your purpose by answering these questions:

Minister: Why do you bring _____ to be baptized?

Parents: We want God's covenant with us to include him/her also.

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

Parents: I do.

Minister: Who is your Lord and Savior?

Parents: Jesus Christ is my Lord and Savior.

Minister: Do you trust in him?
Parents: I do.
Minister: Will you be Christ's faithful disciple, obeying his word and showing his love?
Parents: I will, with God's help.
Minister: Do you promise, through prayer, teaching, and example, to support and encourage _____ to be a faithful Christian?
Parents: I do.
Minister: Will you be faithful in bringing him/ her to church with you to share in our worship of God, our Christian education, and our service of God in the world?
Parents: I will, with God's help.
Minister: Then with the whole church, let us confess our faith.
Do you believe in God the Father?

All: I believe in God, the Father almighty, maker of heaven and earth.

Minister: Do you believe in Jesus Christ, God the Son?

All: I believe 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.

Minister: Do you believe in God the Holy Spirit?

All: 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.

Minister: The Lord be with you.

All: And also with you.

Minister: Let us give thanks to the Lord our God.

All: It is right to offer our thanks and praise.

Children's Vow

Minister (or family member) pours water into font

Minister: We thank you, O God, for the water of baptism. In this water, by your Word and Spirit, we are united to Christ, we are cleansed of our sin, and we are set apart for salvation through the resurrection of Jesus Christ. By the power of your Spirit, bless this water, that it may be a spring welling up to new birth and everlasting life. Amen.

Minister: _____, child of the covenant,
I baptize you in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit.

All: Amen.

Minister: O Lord, uphold ____ by your Holy Spirit. Give him/her the spirit of wisdom and understanding, the spirit of counsel and might, the spirit of knowledge and the fear of the Lord, the spirit of joy in your presence, both now and forever.

All: Amen.

Elder: _____ is now received into the holy catholic church. Through baptism God has made him/her a member of the household of faith. Do we, the members of this congregation, commit ourselves to pray for him/her, to nurture and love him/her, to teach and show him/her the Christian faith, and to help him/her to be a faithful disciple of Jesus Christ?

All: With joy and thanksgiving, we welcome you! We promise to pray for you, to love, encourage, and support you, to share the good news of the gospel with you, and to help you know and follow Christ.

Minister: The peace of God be with you always.

All: And also with you.

INFORMATION FORM FOR BAPTISM

Child's full name: _____

Parents' full names: _____

Baptismal sponsors, if desired: _____

Date of birth: _____

Place of birth: City _____

County _____ State _____

Preferred dates for baptism:

(1) _____

(2) _____

(3) _____

Special considerations: