

THE SACRAMENT OF BAPTISM

First Presbyterian Church, Marianna, Florida

The session, the governing body, of the First Presbyterian Church, Marianna, Florida has prepared this statement (primarily based on the *Book of Order* of the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) with the hope that it will help members, friends and visitors in their understanding of the meaning of the Sacrament of Baptism in our church.

JESUS AND BAPTISM

Baptism is the sign and seal of incorporation into 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.

DYING AND RISING IN BAPTISM

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 us forward to that same Christ who will fulfill God's purpose in God's promised future.

COVENANT AND WATER OF BAPTISM

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 the 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 everflowing stream. (Amos 5:24) They envisioned a fresh expression of God's grace and of creation's goodness - a new covenant accompanied by the sprinkling of cleansing water. So, Baptism is the sign and seal of God's grace and covenant in Christ.

INCLUSION IN THE COVENANT OF GRACE

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

- the faithfulness of God,
- the washing away of sin,
- rebirth,
- putting on the fresh garment of Christ,
- being sealed by God's Spirit,
- adoption into the covenant family of the church,
- resurrection and illumination in Christ.

UNION WITH CHRIST AND ONE ANOTHER

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, GRACE, REPENTANCE, COMMISSIONING

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.

SIGN AND SEAL OF GOD'S FAITHFULNESS

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.

"ONE BAPTISM": IT'S MEANING

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 presented for Baptism as children, is one and the same Sacrament.

The Baptism of children witnesses to the truth that God's love claims people before they are able to respond in faith.

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.

REMEMBERING ONE'S BAPTISM

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 of God's grace and pledge anew their obedience to God's covenant in Christ.

ONE BODY, ONE BAPTISM

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

RESPONSIBILITY FOR BAPTISM

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 whole congregation. In such cases care should be taken that

- the congregation be represented by one or more members of the session;
- a proper understanding of the meaning of the Sacrament be offered by the minister;
- the session be consulted when possible;
- the Baptism be reported by the officiating minister and recorded by the session.

RESPONSIBILITIES OF THE SESSION

The session's responsibilities for Baptism are:

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

RESPONSIBILITIES OF THE CONGREGATION

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.

PARENTAL RESPONSIBILITY

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 parent 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.

THE SACRAMENT OF THE BAPTISM AT THE FIRST PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH, MARIANNA, FLORIDA

THE SACRAMENT OF BAPTISM FOR THE CHILDREN OF BELIEVERS

The celebration of the Sacrament of Baptism for the children of believers generally takes place in the early part of the Worship Service. Those presenting the children for baptism together with the elder who will be standing with them are invited at the appropriate time to join the pastor at the baptismal font, which is located generally at the front of the sanctuary on the east side closest to the fellowship hall.

Following a statement concerning the meaning of Baptism the pastor asks the following four or similar questions to those presenting the child for baptism:

1. Do you reaffirm your own faith in Jesus Christ as Savior and Lord?
2. Do you claim God's covenant promises on your child's behalf, and do you look in faith to the Lord Jesus Christ for his (her) salvation, as you do for your own?
3. Do you now unreservedly promise, in humble reliance upon God's grace, to set before _____ (name of child) an example of the new life in Christ?

- 4 . Do you promise to pray with and for her (him) and to bring her (him) up in the knowledge and love of God?

A member of the session, or an elder who is a member of the First Presbyterian Church, then asks the congregation the following or similar question:

Do you, the members of this congregation, in the name of the whole Church of Jesus Christ, undertake with _____ (name of father) _____ and (name of mother) the Christian nurture of _____ (name of child), so that in due time she (he) may confess faith in Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior and will you endeavor by your example and fellowship to strengthen his (her) family ties with the household of God? If you so do, please signify your acceptance of these responsibilities by standing.

While the congregation stands the Apostles' Creed or another creed of the church is affirmed and the pastor leads a prayer of thanksgiving for the gift of baptism and for the child. After the congregation is seated, the pastor baptizes the child by sprinkling water on his or her head, while saying, "_____ (full name of child), child of the covenant, I baptize you in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit".

Following the baptism and blessing, a certificate of baptism is presented and those presenting the child for baptism are invited to show the newest member of the church to the members of the congregation. The ceremony concludes with a prayer of concern for the child, her (his) family and for the congregation, followed either by an anthem or hymn about baptism.

During the anthem or hymn the parents and child, and the elder will return to their seats, or take the child to the nursery. Those presenting the child for baptism should return to the sanctuary for the rest of the service. During the last hymn of the service the parents should pick up the child from the nursery and have him/her at the door of the sanctuary on Jefferson Street in order that members of the congregation may be able to greet them.

Since the Sacrament of Baptism is celebrated as part of a worship service the use of flash photographs during the ceremony is discouraged. Photographs may be taken in the sanctuary following the service. The church has a Baptism bulletin board on which a picture of all children who have recently been baptized in the church, together with their parents, is displayed. A video of the Sacrament of Baptism may be made provided that this can be done without any movement on the part of the person making the video or any extra lighting, and without any disruption to the rest of the worship service.

THE SACRAMENT OF BAPTISM FOR THOSE PROFESSING THEIR FAITH

All persons seeking to become members of the First Presbyterian Church who have not received the Sacrament of Baptism are baptized on the basis of their own Profession of Faith. In the case of young people this generally follows a period of instruction as a member of the Confirmation Class which is offered in the early part of each year. For older adults the Profession of Faith follows conversation and instruction from the pastor. In either case the people presenting

themselves for Baptism and membership in the First Presbyterian Church on the basis of their own Profession of Faith must be examined and approved by the session prior to the act of Baptism.

The Sacrament of Baptism for those professing their faith generally is celebrated following the hymn after the sermon. After words of introduction, the persons to be baptized, together with any persons who have previously been baptized who are coming to make a Profession of Faith, as well as the members of the session or other elders of the First Presbyterian Church who will be supporting them are invited to join the pastor at the baptismal font which is located at the front of the sanctuary on the east side closest to the fellowship hall.

After a statement concerning the meaning of one's Profession of Faith the pastor asks all those professing their faith the following or similar questions:

1. Do you acknowledge yourselves to be sinners in the sight of God, justly deserving God's displeasure, and without hope except in God's sovereign mercy?
2. Do you believe in the Lord Jesus Christ as the Son of God and Savior of sinners, and do you receive and depend upon Christ alone for your salvation as offered in the gospel?
3. Do you now resolve and promise, in humble reliance upon the grace of the Holy Spirit, that you will endeavor to live as becomes the followers of Christ?
4. Do you promise to serve Christ in the church by supporting and participating in its service to God and its ministry to others to the best of your ability?
5. Do you submit yourselves to the government and discipline of the church and promise to further its purity and peace?

After a statement concerning the meaning of the Sacrament of Baptism and a prayer of thanksgiving the pastor baptizes the persons concerned by sprinkling water on his (her) head while saying, _____ " (name of person) I baptize you in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit".

Following the welcome and charge to the new members and to the congregation, certificates of church membership are presented by the clerk of session. The ceremony concludes with a prayer led by the pastor, after which all involved in the Sacrament of Baptism will return to their seats. At the conclusion of the service all those persons who have made their professions of faith together with the elders who has stood with them shall stand at the door to the sanctuary on Jefferson Street in order that members of the congregation may greet them.

Since the Sacrament of Baptism is celebrated as part of a worship service the use of flash photographs during the ceremony is discouraged. Photographs may be taken in the sanctuary following the service. The church has a bulletin board on which are displayed pictures of all persons who have been received as members of the church.

A video of the Sacrament of Baptism may be made provided that this can be done without any movement on the part of the person making the video or any extra lighting, and without any disruption to the rest of the worship service.

PRACTICAL CONSIDERATIONS AND SUGGESTIONS FROM THE SESSION OF THE FIRST PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH, MARIANNA

1. THE BAPTISM OF THE CHILDREN OF MEMBERS OF THE FIRST PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH

The session would like to encourage parents, who are members of the First Presbyterian Church, to give serious consideration to presenting their infants for the Sacrament of Baptism at the earliest convenient time. The pastor, or any member of the session, will be happy to talk with you concerning this matter. A specific date should be set only after consultation with the pastor.

2. THE BAPTISM OF CHILDREN OF NEW MEMBERS OF THE FIRST PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH

The session recognizes that in our mobile society, there are many who become members of the First Presbyterian Church whose previous church background has either not permitted or not encouraged the presentation of infants for the Sacrament of Baptism. The session would like to encourage those parents, who are now members of this congregation, and who have not presented their children for Baptism to do so at an appropriate time. The pastor, or any member of the session, will be happy to talk with you about this matter.

3. THE RESPONSIBILITY OF THE CONGREGATION

As stated earlier, in the act of Baptism for infants in the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.), the entire congregation, as a covenant community, is asked to assume, together with the parents, the responsibility for the Christian nurture of the child, so that in due time, he or she may confess faith in Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior. Since this responsibility is assumed by the congregation on behalf of the whole Church of Jesus Christ, the Presbyterian Church, unlike some other Churches, does not require God-parents or sponsors for the child being baptized.

4. THE RESPONSIBILITY OF AN ELDER

Those presenting children for the Sacrament of Baptism are invited to choose an elder of the First Presbyterian Church to stand with them to ask the question to the congregation. If any parents, grandparents or other close relations or friends of the couple are elders in other Presbyterian Churches they are welcome to stand with the couple and the elder for the Sacrament of Baptism.

Each person who comes to the Sacrament of Baptism on the basis of his or her own Profession of Faith is invited to choose an elder of the First Presbyterian Church to stand with him or her.

5. BAPTISM IS REQUIRED FOR MEMBERSHIP IN THE PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH.

As stated earlier, since Baptism is a rite of initiation into the life of the Church, any person seeking membership in the First Presbyterian Church, who has not previously been baptized, would be baptized on the basis of his or her own Profession of Faith. The Presbyterian Church recognizes all Baptisms with water in the name of the Father, of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit administered by other Christian Churches whether to infants or adults and does not require any re-baptism for membership.

6. BAPTIZED CHILDREN ARE WELCOME TO THE LORD'S TABLE

The session recognizes its responsibility to nurture those who are baptized to respond to the invitation to the Sacrament of the Lord's Supper. This invitation includes baptized children prior to their making a Profession of Faith.

The session would anticipate that baptized children would not participate in the Sacrament of the Lord's Supper until they have been attending the Worship Service on a regular basis. For this reason the Sacrament is shared only with the adults who are working in the nursery and not with the children, and Children's Church is not held on Sundays when the Sacrament of the Lord's Supper is being celebrated. It is also expected that parents would not encourage their children to participate in the Sacrament of the Lord's Supper until they have instructed them on the meaning of such participation.