

Infant Baptism Policy

The question is often asked of our pastors and Session, “Will you baptize our baby?” Our response to this important question arises from our Presbyterian theology as to the nature of Baptism. Eligibility for the Sacrament of Infant Baptism is neither a new nor easy question to answer. Our first principle is that we understand water baptism to be the outward sign of faith in Christ. Calvin said, “Without faith there is no Baptism.” Thus, the Sacrament of Infant Baptism presupposes a personal commitment to Jesus Christ on the part of the parents as well as their commitment to Christ’s church. Therefore, we administer baptism in the Presbyterian Church to adult believers in Christ as well as to the children of believing parents who, having made a public Christian profession of faith in Christ, give evidence of their faith by a formal membership commitment to a local congregation of the Christian Church. The Book of Order (W-2.3014) states that “*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 personal profession of faith and assume the responsibility of active church membership. (W-4.2002; W-4.2003) 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.*” There are good reasons for insisting upon these parental commitments. At the heart of the matter is the fact that infant baptism involves the exchange of several promises and vows between several parties. The parties are God, the parents and the congregation. God’s promise is to bless the child, the parent’s promise is to raise their child in Christian faith and the congregation’s promise is to support the family in achieving these spiritual goals. As a matter of fact, at every infant baptism the entire congregation makes the public promise to support the family as they raise their child in the Christian Faith. Baptism in the Presbyterian Church is, therefore, not a private family ritual but a public statement of faith in Jesus Christ which is demonstrated by a commitment of the whole family to be an active participant in the life of St. Andrew’s. Normally, there is little controversy regarding these Baptismal requirements. Young couples who desire Christian Baptism for their children (if not already members of the church) enter a new member class and join the congregation, then we baptize their children. Occasionally, however, the situation arises when grandparents, who are members of St. Andrew’s, ask us to baptize their grandchildren while the younger generation is visiting Tucson from someplace out of town. The Session is happy to do this if the child’s parents are active church members at some local congregation in the community where they reside. It is also assumed that the local church is willing for St. Andrew’s to perform the Baptism ceremony on their behalf.

Since the Presbyterian Constitution does not allow for the baptism of infants whose parents or guardians have no formal commitment to a local church, this can cause tension and hard feelings in the case where the grandparents are members of St. Andrew’s and desire to see their grandchildren baptized in spite of the fact that the child’s parents have no church commitment. As a Session, we cannot set aside the requirement that (a) “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” or (b) “the Session may also consider the request for the baptism of a child from a Christian parent who is an active member of another congregation.” (Book of Order W-2.0314) “Confessing members of other Christian churches

may ... present children for baptism.” (Book of Order G-5.0301c) In all cases we are open to consider cases where parents feel that there are special, unique and extenuating circumstances that merit an exception to the rule. The ministers of St. Andrew’s Presbyterian Church have some flexibility within the boundaries of the policy. They have the freedom to baptize children of non-members any time as long as there is a commitment of the family to join St. Andrew’s.

Having outlined our church’s policy in the matter of eligibility for presenting children for baptism, there are several final points we want to make clear:

- (1) We do not advance the spiritual welfare of persons involved by performing a Baptism ceremony that implies an existing parental church commitment when in fact no such commitment has been made.
- (2) Baptism does not “make one a Christian,” only faith in Christ does that. We are not denying the child any spiritual benefit.
- (3) Infant baptism is not an absolute Christian practice. As a matter of fact, parents in our church have the option to dedicate their children rather than have them baptized. In these cases the young person receives the Sacrament of Adult Baptism at their own volition when they are grown. Although this is not a common practice in the Presbyterian Church, it is indirectly provided for in The Book of Order by its affirmation of Adult Baptism. Furthermore, over the last two decades there have been many precedents for parents choosing a prayer of infant dedication.

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