

BACKGROUND MATERIAL FROM OUR PC(USA) BOOK OF ORDER

ON BAPTISM: W-3.0402-3.0405

The Baptism of Believers/Adults: 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.

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

Ordinarily, when a child is being presented for Baptism, at least one parent or person rightly exercising parental responsibility shall be an active member* of the congregation. Those presenting children for Baptism shall promise to nurture and provide spiritual 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.

***CATEGORIES OF MEMBERSHIP - G-1.0402 - Active Member**

An active member is a person who has made a profession of faith in Christ, has been baptized, has been received into membership of the church, has voluntarily submitted to the government of this church, and participates in the church's work and worship. In addition, active members participate in the governance of the church and may be elected to ordered ministry (see G-2.0102). Active members shall regularly, after prayerful consideration, recommit themselves to the disciplines and responsibilities of membership outlined in G-1.0304.* The Session shall have responsibility for preparing those who would become active members of the congregation.

*** The MINISTRY OF MEMBERS - G-1.0304 – Responsibilities of Active Members**

Membership in the Church of Jesus Christ is a joy and a privilege. It is also a commitment to participate in Christ's mission. A faithful member bears witness to God's love and grace, and promises to be involved responsibly in the ministry of Christ's Church. Such involvement includes: proclaiming the good news in word and deed; taking part in the common life and worship of a congregation; lifting one another up in prayer, mutual concern, and active support; studying Scripture and the issues of Christian faith and life; supporting the ministry of the church through the giving of money, time, and talents; demonstrating a new quality of life within and through the church; responding to God's activity in the world through service to others; living responsibly in the personal, family, vocational, political, cultural, and social relationships of life; working in the world for peace, justice, freedom, and human fulfillment; caring for God's

creation; participating in the governing responsibilities of the church, and reviewing and evaluating regularly the integrity of one's membership; and considering ways in which one's participation in the worship and service of the church may be increased and made more meaningful.

PCOL BAPTISM POLICIES AND PRACTICES

For Those Considering Baptism for Themselves or Their Child

We are delighted that you are considering this important step in your and your child's life. Please take time to read this information as well as the Baptism section of our website in preparation for a baptismal counseling meeting with one of our pastors.

The Importance of Baptism

Jesus' final words to his disciples were: "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." Baptism is a powerful way the Church obeys Christ's command and invites people to follow a path of life-long spiritual growth and involvement in the church. Through baptism we receive new life in Christ. Baptism is a sign of God's life-giving grace and the seal of membership within the Body of Christ – the Church.

Adult/Believer Baptism

Baptism is the way that Christian adults announce their intention to claim a new identity, a new relationship to God through Christ, and a new way of living in the world. The sacrament of baptism is a visible declaration that a person has been chosen, marked, adopted, set apart, washed, cleansed, and reborn from above. In addition to a "given" or family name, now a person can be called by new names: beloved child of God, disciple, brother or sister in Christ, saint, believer, a member of the body of Christ. Adult baptism is the beginning of new life in Christ.

Infant Baptism

Infant baptism is a visible sign and symbol of God's love, mercy, and grace. God made a promise to Abraham not only to be his God, but also the God of his descendants. In other words, God's covenant promises with the Jews included their children; circumcision being the sign of that covenant. In the same way, the church proclaims that the promises that are ours in Christ are also meant for our children. They belong, with us who believe, to the family of faith – not because they are old enough or sophisticated enough to understand or choose the way of Christ, but because God desires that they be included in the covenant community. Our Presbyterian tradition emphasizes the fact that the grace and love of God is poured out on each of us, even before we know how to respond. When an infant is baptized, this truth becomes a visual reality.

The Responsibility of the Congregation in Baptism

The congregation plays an important role in the sacrament of a Baptism. As members of the Body of Christ, the congregation promises to take an active role in each other's lives through support, encouragement, prayer, teaching, mentoring, and leading on behalf of the Church Universal. This caring role is particularly important in the baptism of an infant or child. Because the infant/child knows nothing about God, Christ, and the Church, the congregation vows to support the parent(s) (or those exercising parental responsibilities) in the Christian education and faith formation of the child. The tangible ways that a congregation does this is through prayer, welcome, worship, Christian education, children and youth programming, and mission opportunities.

Later, the child will be encouraged to receive instruction in the Christian faith through a process called Confirmation. The goal of Confirmation is to give the child a deeper understanding of God, Jesus, and the Church, so that the child is able to confirm for him/herself the vows that others took on the day of his/her infant baptism. Confirmation is about making the Christian faith one's own. This happens when a person makes a profession of faith and assumes the responsibilities of active church membership.

Baptismal promises do not end once a child is confirmed (make their own profession of faith), but are lifelong. Therefore, the congregation makes the same promise to support, encourage, and nurture adults who are baptized. The congregation remembers its baptismal promises—the ways it upholds them as well as the ways it has been a recipient of them—every time a person is baptized. A reaffirmation of baptism may be a feature of a regular worship service. This is a time when each baptized person is invited to reflect on the grace of God and life in Christ.

The Responsibilities of Parents (or Those Exercising Parental Responsibility) in Baptism

When a parent(s) (or those exercising parental responsibilities) present a child for baptism, they reaffirm their own faith in Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior. They also take a solemn vow to teach their child to know and follow Christ, to raise the child in the church, and to share their own faith with their child. The goal is that their child become a faithful disciple of Jesus Christ.

Where Does a Baptism Take Place

In our Presbyterian tradition, Baptism happens in the context of worship and is celebrated as a sacrament by the whole church. Because the role of the whole congregation is to help the child become a follower of Christ, baptism ordinarily takes place in the family's home church during a regular worship service. However, because baptism is a sacrament that welcomes a person into the Christian faith (the Church Universal), and not into a particular congregation, the baptism may occur in a Christian congregation other than the family's home church. Therefore, when we

baptize a child at PCOL under such circumstances, we are making the congregational vows of baptism on behalf of the home church. PCOL will communicate the details of the baptism to the home church where they will be recorded.

POLICIES AND PRACTICES REGARDING INFANT BAPTISM

[Adopted by the Session March 20, 2019]

According to the constitution of the Presbyterian Church (USA), it is the Session's responsibility to approve all baptisms, and ensure that parent(s) or one(s) exercising parental responsibilities receive adequate instruction and support as they prepare for the baptism of their child.

When at least one parent/person exercising parental responsibilities is an active member of PCOL

Parents desiring to have their child baptized should first contact one of the pastors to set up a time to meet in person or by any means appropriate. At this meeting the pastor will share Presbyterian understandings of baptism, make sure that parents understand the vows involved, and clarify any questions. Together they will arrive at a date for the baptism. This date will be communicated to the Session for final approval. Parents will be invited but not required to attend a Session meeting prior to the baptism date in order to connect with members of the Session, and sense the support that officers of the church offer to a person(s) presenting a child for baptism.

When a former member (now an active member of another congregation) requests a baptism

Former members desiring to have their child baptized should first contact one of the pastors to set up a time to meet in person or by any means appropriate. At this meeting, the pastor will share Presbyterian understandings of baptism, make sure that parents understand the vows involved, and clarify any questions. Since baptism ordinarily takes place in the church in which the child will be nurtured, the pastor will ask why the request is to perform the baptism at PCOL rather than the home church. After making sure that the parents concur with Presbyterian understandings of baptism, and understand the vows involved, the pastor will communicate a date for the baptism to the Session for final approval. Following the baptism, PCOL will communicate the details of the baptism to the home church where they will be recorded.

When a former member (presently not an active member of any church) requests a baptism

A former member desiring to have a child baptized should first contact one of the pastors to set up a time to meet in person or by any means appropriate. At this meeting, the pastor will share Presbyterian understandings of baptism, make sure that the former member understands the vows involved, and clarify any questions. The pastor will also inquire as to the reason for

non-participation in any Christian congregation, the willingness to follow-through with vows to raise the child in the Christian faith as referenced above, and the possibility of becoming an active member of the congregation again. Once this meeting has taken place, the pastor will inform the Session regarding whether a baptism should be considered, and will ultimately be guided by the decision of the Session.