

BAPTISMAL POLICY

Through Jesus, God commanded His Church to Baptize. Baptism is a sacrament, meaning that it is an outward sign given to us by our Lord, which demonstrates an inward reality, at work in the hearts and minds and souls of those who receive the sacrament. Baptism initiates us into the Church; bestows the promise of God's favor and blessing upon us; assures us that God forgives our sins, and calls us to new life.

Baptism is not the goal of faith. It represents our first step on the journey of faith, assuring us of God's presence with us on life's journey. Baptism is the sign of new life in Jesus Christ, by which the Holy Spirit marks us as those who belong to God, and enables us to accept God's forgiving mercy throughout all of life. Baptism joins us together as members of God's family, which requires that the one who is to be Baptized must be joined to the Church, which is the visible family of God in creation.

When infants or children receive the sacrament of Baptism, it is their parents who accept the tremendously important responsibility of acting on behalf of their child, by confessing their own faith in Jesus Christ, and by committing themselves to raise their child to hear and know the Christian gospel, and to be a disciple of Jesus Christ. By bringing a child to be Baptized, parents commit themselves by solemn promises, to instruct their child in the faith of the Church, and to set a good example of Christian living, which includes active participation in the work and worship of a Christian congregation.

The Session of Johns Island Presbyterian Church will gladly consider all requests to Baptize grandchildren of our members, provided that they are consistent with the limits and requirements established for our church, by our denomination's Book of Order.

Among those terms and requirements which govern the session's consideration of a request for Baptism are the following conditions, which must be satisfied:

- 1. Baptism requires that a proper understanding of the meaning of the Sacrament be offered by the minister.**
- 2. Baptism will be celebrated in a service of public worship, because it signifies the joining together of an individual with the congregation, as an expression of the whole body of Christ.**
- 3. When a child is being presented for Baptism, ordinarily the parent(s) or those rightly exercising parental responsibility *shall be an active member(s)* of the congregation. 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.**
- 4. Those adults who present 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. Those who seek the Sacrament of Baptism for their**

children or for themselves shall make vows that:

- (a) profess their faith in Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior,**
- (b) renounce evil and affirm their reliance on God's grace,**
- (c) declare their intention to participate actively and responsibly in the worship and mission of the church,**
- (d) declare their intention to provide for the Christian nurture of their child.**

5. The congregation as a whole, on behalf of the Church universal, shall pledge to accept shared responsibility for nurturing the baptized person in the Christian life. The congregation shall:

- (e) profess its faith, using the Apostles' Creed,**
- (f) voice its support of those baptized,**
- (g) express its willingness to take responsibility for the nurture of those baptized.¹**

Finally, because it is the parents who accept the vital responsibility of teaching the faith of Jesus Christ to their child, the session of Johns Island Presbyterian Church can only consider requests for the Baptism of infants and children when they come directly from the parents of the child, or from the ones who have legally recognized parental authority.

¹ For more information on the Sacrament of Baptism, refer to the Book of Order, W-1.3033; W-2.3000; W-2.3012; W-2.3013; W-2.3014; W-4.2001; W-4.2003.

THE SACRAMENT OF BAPTISM AT JOHNS ISLAND PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH²

Individuals or parents who are seeking baptism first need to understand what baptism is and what it is not. The decision to have yourself or your child baptized is an important one and must only be made after reflection on your own spiritual journey and your commitment to Christ and his church. Baptism is a sacrament meant for those who profess their faith and for their children. Baptism is also an act of discipleship that requires commitment and looks toward growth in Christ.

The Presbyterian tradition of Christianity recognizes two sacraments: Baptism (see Matthew 28:19) and Communion (see Luke 22:17-20). Each sacrament has two parts:

1. A visible sign used as instructed by Christ.
In Baptism, this sign is water;
In Communion the signs are bread and wine/juice.
2. An invisible reality made possible by the work of the Holy Spirit.
Baptism is a sign and seal of our union
with Christ and with his church.
Through it we share in the death and resurrection of Christ
and are commissioned to his service. (Living Faith 7.6.1)

We believe that God, in the person of the Holy Spirit, is with your child. God works through you as a parent, and through the people of the congregation, so that the child/adult grows to know and love God and live as a follower of Jesus Christ.

In Baptism, water is administered in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit. The water signifies the washing away of sin, the start of new life in Christ, and the gift of the Holy Spirit. (Living Faith 7.6.2)

Baptism is extremely important and should not be entered into lightly. As you bring your child forward or come forward yourself to receive the sacrament of baptism, you are responding to Christ's invitation and affirming your child's or your rightful place as a member of the family of God. It is here that you will make a deep commitment to God to teach and nourish your child in the Christian way so that one day they will affirm their Baptism for themselves by making a public profession of faith.

Baptism is also an act of discipleship that requires commitment and looks toward growth in Christ. Those baptized in infancy are called in later years to make personal confession of

² Adapted from a document provided by Trafalgar Presbyterian Church, 354 Upper Middle Road East Oakville, Ontario.

Christ. Congregations and those baptized must strive to nurture life in Christ. (Living Faith 7.6.4-5)

Baptism is not merely a pretty, or superstitious ritual.

Sometimes baptism is seen as something people ought to "have done" to be on the safe side. However, saying some words over a person and using water at the same time does not ensure health and wealth. It is not within the Biblical understanding of faith that an unbaptized person is deprived of God's love or that an unbaptized child who dies will go to Hell.

Baptism is not a merely a quaint social custom.

Baptism is not "done" just to make grandma happy or because it is a family tradition. When parents and children take part in baptism, it is the beginning of a long-term relationship with God and the church. Baptism is a brief event but its meaning is lived throughout a whole lifetime.

Baptism is not naming the child.

The child receives his/her name when the parents file the birth certificate with the government. In Baptism, we receive Christ's name and are thereafter known as "Christian". Using the child's name in baptism signifies that the child is given to you in trust, and that you as parents are responsible to God for your parenting and for the child's growth.

Baptism is not a private act or ceremony.

Baptism is an initiation into the body of Christ (the church), and that happens through a particular congregation. If the person baptized is a young child, parents make promises on the child's behalf. The congregation also makes promises on behalf of the Church of Jesus Christ. Together with God, parents and the people of the congregation enter into an agreement with God--a covenant--that we will raise the child in the Christian faith. All of us together agree to support, teach, pray for the child.

Baptism is not something WE do.

Instead, baptism is a celebration of what God in Christ has done for us. It is a formal recognition that the person baptized is a child of God. Baptism doesn't mean that suddenly the child or adult is able to receive love from God, but acknowledges that we are human and claims forgiveness for the baptized person.

By the power of the Holy Spirit God acts through Baptism. it is the sacrament not of what we do but of what God has done for us in Christ. God's grace and our response to it are not tied to the moment of Baptism, but continue and deepen through life.

Baptism carries with it both blessings and responsibilities.

The blessing of baptism is new life through the forgiveness of sins, made possible by Jesus Christ. This blessing is nurtured, sustained, and celebrated within the fellowship of the church. There is a sense of belonging that comes with being baptized, because through this sacrament we are welcomed into God's family.

At least one of the parents who brings their children forward for baptism must themselves be baptized and will have made a public profession of faith, being involved actively in the life of a congregation. They will be prepared to affirm their allegiance to Christ and their rejection of all that is evil. Friends or relatives may stand with the parents and take vows along with the congregation. Here is a brief outline of the parents' and congregation's responsibilities:

Parent(s) who bring their child for Baptism will make a solemn commitment to give their children a Christian upbringing. This will include:

- Helping the child to be at worship and Sunday school often and with regularity;
- Co-operating with the congregation as it attempts to fulfil its responsibilities of nurture and support;
- Having a Bible in the home and helping the child to hear the stories of God's people;
- Setting an example of love, forgiveness, and sharing;
- Being an active part of the life and work of the congregation;
- Praying for their child, and teaching their child to pray.

The family of faith at Johns Island will also commit to carrying out certain responsibilities. These include:

- Encouraging the family as they seek to fulfil their commitment to God;
- Praying regularly for those who are baptized;
- Working hard at offering spiritual nourishment to parents and adults through sermons, worship, sacraments, Bible study and friendly support;
- Providing high-quality church school teachers and Bible-based resources in Sunday school to supplement Christian nurture in the home.

In the service of Baptism, parents will be asked to make solemn commitments on behalf of their child/children. Among these solemn commitments, parents are asked to:

- Profess their own faith in Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior;
- Renounce evil and affirm their reliance on God's grace, given in Jesus Christ;
- Declare their intention to participate actively and responsibly in the work and mission of the Church of Jesus Christ;
- Commit themselves to providing Christian nurture and education for their child.