

Baptism



Discussion for kirk session

A great moment in a congregation's life

A baptism is one of the great moments in a congregation's life. Whether it is parents bringing their child to be baptised, or an adult coming forward to profess their faith and become a new member of the church, everyone enjoys these moments as a little glimpse of what God is doing and how he is at work.

Minister and kirk session have a particular role to play in preparing those coming forward for baptism. The Code of the Presbyterian Church in Ireland sets out their responsibility as follows: *"A minister shall encourage baptism of the children of all such as may make a credible profession of faith", and that, "a minister shall not decide on admission or refusal of a person to baptism without the authority of the kirk session"* (The Code, paragraph 83, sections 1&2).

So, the task is to help others explore what it means to express faith in Christ as Saviour and Lord. It involves sensitively listening and encouraging reflection. This has become such a matter of angst for many ministers and elders, that baptism has become an area of church life fraught with fear and charged with conflict. *How can our kirk session approach what should be a joy of church life in a more positive mind?*

A guide summarising what we believe

The first thing that is helpful for any kirk session in considering how to be positive in their approach to baptism, is to understand what we teach about it in the Presbyterian Church in Ireland.

This is not always readily, or easily, understood by everyone in the congregation. So it is good to be clear as leaders and to give clear leadership on the matter. Watch this clip summarising some of what Presbyterians believe about baptism.

>> Show the 'Baptism' video clip
vimeo.com/presbyterianireland/baptism-introduction

For discussion

- What did you learn about what the Presbyterian Church in Ireland teaches about baptism?
- What did you find encouraging?
- What do you think others in the congregation might find potentially challenging?

A great opportunity to explore with others what they believe about God

Discussions about baptism are a great opportunity to explore with parents, or adults coming forward for admission to the sacrament, what they believe about God and their particular journey of life and faith.

Sometimes, it won't be possible to proceed to a baptism at that time because of one of three reasons that emerge in conversation with those requesting baptism:

- They do not show an understanding of the basics of Christian faith relating to the profession of faith they will be making and the promises they will be taking;
- There is a lack of general consistency of life with that profession of faith;
- In exceptional cases, there might be a particular issue in which an area of their life seems openly and obviously at odds with Christian belief, lifestyle or values.

However, this should not be considered the norm. Even when it does happen, it can be turned into a positive experience when handled well as part of an ongoing journey of further reflecting upon and considering what it means to experience and express Christian faith. Watch this clip as one minister explains how he has come to find conversations about baptism to be a very positive experience.

>> **Show the 'Exploring baptism in our congregation' video clip**

vimeo.com/presbyterianireland/explorebaptism

For discussion

- What struck you about the minister's and congregation's approach to discussing baptism with those requesting the sacrament?
- What was the same, or different, from the way you approach such requests?
- What might you learn as a kirk session from this story?

Going on a journey of discovery

Perhaps exploring baptism with parents and others is best described from the outset, and positively developed as a journey of articulating and affirming an existing living faith in God, or discovering what that involves.

The suite of baptism resources produced by the Presbyterian Church in Ireland can provide some help with that in the following ways:

- The 'Understanding baptism' video clip could be shown to the whole congregation to aid the overall appreciation of what is involved in baptism and added to your church website for visitors;
- The 'Your child, baptism and growing up in the family of God' and 'Considering baptism' leaflets are available as a first response to those requesting baptism;
- A follow-up framework for a positive discussion exploring Christian faith and the vows involved in baptism is provided in the 'Let's chat about baptism' resource;
- A range of clips explore baptism from the point of view of a parent, someone baptised as a child, someone baptised as an adult and what baptism means for a congregation as a whole;
- A PowerPoint for use in a service of baptism explains the sacrament for children present;
- A session for young people is also available.

For discussion

- In what ways could you use these resources to make the most of the moment of baptism in your congregation's life and witness?

Further reading

Baptismal vows

Parents presenting a child for baptism

In presenting this child for baptism:

- *Are you affirming your belief in one God, Father, Son and Holy Spirit?*
- *Are you trusting in Jesus Christ alone, as your Saviour from sin and as Lord of your life?*

Depending on the grace of God:

- *Are you committed to living as a follower of Jesus Christ, led and empowered by the Holy Spirit?*
- *Are you willing to provide a Christian home, and bring up your child in the worship and teaching of the Church, so that he/she may come to know Jesus Christ as Lord and Saviour?*

As a church family, the congregation makes this commitment:

As we receive (name) into the fellowship of the Church, do you promise with God's help, to be faithful in prayer, spiritual nurture, Christian example and influence, for him/her and his/her family?

Adult presenting themselves for baptism

In presenting yourself for baptism:

- *Do you believe in one God, Father, Son and Holy Spirit?*
- *Do you trust in Jesus Christ alone, as your Saviour from sin and as Lord of your life?*

Depending on the grace of God:

- *Do you promise to live as a follower of Jesus Christ, led and empowered by the Holy Spirit?*
- *Do you commit as a baptised member of the Church, to worship, serve, give and participate fully in its life and witness?*

The congregation makes this commitment:

As we receive (name) into the fellowship of the Church, do you promise to join with him/her in the life of prayer, worship and service that we, together, offer to God?

Westminster Standards

The Westminster Confession of Faith chapter 27;
the Westminster Larger Catechism questions 165–167;
the Westminster Shorter Catechism questions 94–95.

