



NEW BIRTH BAPTISMAL MINISTRY

Baptism is the initiatory sacrament by which we believe persons enter the Christian faith and community. Baptism is the gift of naming, claiming, birth, death and new life which carries the baptized from birth to death. Baptism focuses one's life on discipleship – the way of the cross, the way of pilgrimage.

The congregation will have an overall emphasis which supports the baptismal ministry. This will include having baptismal guidelines, announcing a yearly schedule for Baptismal Sundays, planning events to highlight the day(s) and working with teachers and other leaders to understand the fullness of this ministry.

HOME VISITATION TEAMS:

The congregation will have several, trained teams of two persons each who will visit in the home as soon as it is known that a child is expected (or that an older child/adult desires baptism). The purpose of the visit:

- Share the congregation's congratulations (or concerns for particular situations)
- Talk about the importance of nurturing faith in the home.
- Discuss spiritual preparation for this new birth, specifically the sacrament of baptism:
- prebaptismal classes (outline, importance and schedule)
- role of the congregation
- selection of godparents
- Recognize siblings and their excitement/apprehension over this new birth.
- Present a gift from the congregation. Perhaps Martin Marty's book, Baptism or Erlander's Baptized, We Live.

PRE-BAPTISMAL CLASSES:

As parents plan for the physical birth of their child, it is also important that they plan for the spiritual birth and nurturing of their child. These sessions also become good refreshers for parents as they renew their own understanding of baptism. The classes should last at least 4 weeks with 1 ½-2 hrs. per session. When possible, there is value in having these classes planned as a group event with several classes scheduled and announced throughout the year. In smaller congregations, or those with few births, the sessions may have to be individually planned. Several congregations might consider offering the classes together.

It is possible to have older children or adults who are planning to be baptized as part of these same classes.

If possible, hold the classes in a home. It is important to provide child care so that both parents can be free to immerse themselves in the classes.

If possible, have godparents at all of the sessions. If they live out of town, send them a letter of congratulations and words about their responsibility. Send them some reading material about the meaning of baptism. Check to see if they can attend any of the sessions.

Session 1: “The Meaning of Baptism”

- Before the first session have participants research their own baptismal date. Invite them to bring pictures, certificates, clothing, stories to share.
- Begin the session with a brief Affirmation of Baptism devotional.
- Get acquainted by having each introduce themselves and discuss their own baptism – sharing any pictures or items they brought.
- Lead a discussion about what they value about their baptism.
- Discuss the biblical and theological meaning of baptism.
- Give reading or other assignment for next time.
- Closing prayer

Session 2: “The Life of Faith”

- Opening devotions
- Lead discussion: How do I speak of my faith? When is it easy? Hard?
- Discuss faith development stages for children. Where have they experienced these stages with their older children, relatives, friends.....
- Lift up and discuss some examples of “questions most often asked by children: who is God? Where is God? How does God hear me?....
- Learning to name the “God-moments” in everyday life.
- Closing prayer

Session 3: “The Service of Baptism”

- Devotions
- Use the Evangelical Lutheran Worship Book to look at the service of Baptism.
- Go through each part of the service looking at the biblical and theological base for the service.....why we do what we do.
- Discuss the symbols that will be used and what they mean.
- Visit the sanctuary and walk through the service.
- Closing prayer

Session 4: “Baptism as the Daily Garment I Put On”

- Devotions
- Review last session, questions.....Need to go over details but be sure to save plenty of time for “after baptism discussion”
- Discuss the service elements and participants – hymns, lectors, would a family like to contribute the bread and wine? Special flowers? Congregational reception?
- Photography policy.....will pose for pictures before/after the service – not during the service. Please inform family/friends.

- This session should primarily focus on helping them to see the importance of, and giving them plenty of assistance for, nurturing faith in the home. Talk about home devotions, beginning prayer with child as soon as he/she comes is born, talk about the importance of family rituals, table talks.....
- Devotions.

BAPTISMAL SUNDAY:

Except in the case of medical emergency, all baptisms should take place at a regularly scheduled congregational worship service. It is recommended that the congregation plan, well in advance, when baptisms will take place throughout the year (usually 3-4 x's) so that families can plan for out of town visitors and the congregation can give full attention to making these celebration times. Times particularly appropriate are: 1st Sunday after Epiphany (Baptism of our Lord), Easter Vigil, Easter Sunday, Pentecost, All Saints.

FAMILY SUPPORT:

The congregation enters into a relationship with this new member of the body of Christ. That calls on the community to share in the nurture and care of this new member. An intentional ministry of support should be developed which might include:

- Events, resources to always assist the family in nurturing the faith in the home.
- Letters to the home at various stages of the the child's development
- Worship that includes children
- Quality Christian education for all ages
- Recognizable sense of community in which all person's are aware that they are full members of the body of Christ
- Child care for events
- Intergenerational events such as family nights, retreats, service opportunities.
- Home devotional materials recommended for daily use and special events.
- Resources to celebrate baptismal anniversaries in the home.

