

BAPTISMAL GUIDELINES

What response do we give children when they ask to be baptized? How do we go about preparing them to accept God's grace and to walk fully in His light? What resources do we use to get our primaries and juniors ready for baptism? What do they need to know before baptism? What is the best age for baptism? We should not hesitate too long, for the child's decision will fade away. If we don't respond to their exciting decision to follow Jesus and be baptized, we may lose the golden opportunity to do so later.

Making a decision to follow Jesus is a serious step toward spiritual growth. *The Church Manual*, p 29 states that:

"Baptism is a spiritual relationship. It can be entered into only by those who are converted. Only in this way can the purity and spiritual calibre of the church be maintained. It is the duty of every minister to instruct those who accept the principles of the truth, that they may enter the church on a sound, spiritual basis. While there is no stated age for baptism, it is recommended that very young children who express a desire to be baptized should be encouraged and entered into an instruction program that may lead to baptism."

Ellen G White also recognizes that children do make serious decisions for baptism. She counsels the church in *Testimonies*, vol 1, p 169 that:

"Children of eight, ten or twelve years are old enough to be addressed on the subject of personal religion. Do not teach your children with reference to some future period when they shall be old enough to repent and believe the truth. If properly instructed, very young children may have correct views of their state as sinners, and of the way of salvation through Christ."

Affirmation of Faith

When a child makes a decision to become a follower of Christ, the Children's Ministries coordinator should encourage the church leadership to arrange a service of Affirmation of Faith for that child. Such a ceremony helps to affirm the child's decision and to let him know that the congregation rejoices with him/her for making such a commitment.

A sample ceremony

Song:

- Allow the child to choose a song that is familiar to him/her.
- It does not have to be a song from the hymnal; it could be a song from Sabbath School.

Introduction:

- Have the child sit in the front row before the ceremony.
- The Pastor or a Faith-Friend who knows the child best can introduce him/her to the congregation.
- Give a brief history of when, where, and what prompted the decision.
- Focus of remarks is about the child. You could say:

"I would like to introduce you to Bryan Nelson. Many of you have seen Bryan here at church. Last month at our Children's Retreat Bryan made a decision. He decided to make Jesus his friend, and wants to be one of His children."

Affirmation:

- To be read or recited by the child to the congregation.

For example:

"Because I know that God loves me
I choose to live my life as one of His children,
Because Jesus died for me
I want to please Him through the way I live."

**Faith Friend
Introduced:**

- Explain their role.

For example:

"Having a friend to support you can mean the difference between success or failure. The Bible says that, 'If one falls down, his friend can help him up. But pity the man who falls and has no one to help him up!' (Eccl. 4:10).

Bryan has chosen his Sabbath School teacher, Mr Jerry Page, as his faith friend. A faith friend is someone who will encourage him in all aspects of his life, but most importantly, on his spiritual walk with Jesus."

- Faith-friend recites commitment to the child.

For example:

"As your faith-friend, I promise to support and care for you. Life you, I may make mistakes, but I know that God forgives me. I want you to know you can come and talk to me any time. I want to be your friend."

Congregation Response:

- Get congregation to participate in the ceremony by raising their hands or standing as support.

For example:

"Bryan, there are many other people here who I know would also like to be your faith-friend. Would those of you in the congregation who would like to be a "friend" to Bryan please stand? Would those who are willing to encourage and support him with love; those who want to make a commitment to be positive and not criticize or condemn, but be a friend, please stand now."

Prayer:

- The pastor offers a short prayer.

Shake Hands:

- Give the *Affirmation of Faith* card to the child.

Children and Baptism

Children can understand that they belong to the family of God from an early age. Parents, teachers, and pastors should continually affirm and reinforce the child's sense of belonging in the community of believers. Pastors do this by acknowledging the child's presence when the entire church family worships together and involving them in worship instead of ignoring their presence. Involving children in service projects also binds them to the community.

A Child's Faith Development

The faith of a child develops in clear stages. At first a child's faith is experienced faith. During the primary/junior years, children develop a belonging faith. At this stage, faith is still experienced--it cannot be examined and discussed. But just as kids develop an interest in joining clubs, they begin to see the church family as a community. Parents, pastors, and teachers need to reinforce in children positive values for belonging to the community of believers. They need to answer the children's questions about what their church believes and instruct them in what it means to be a baptized member of the church.

At ages 8-12 children are naturally joiners. They want to join their church and take part in church life. Kids need an opportunity to act on this desire to participate. There are many ways they participate, one of which is baptism. Too many wrongly believe that children should not be baptized until they are of an age to understand fully the beliefs of their church. But by then kids may be more into pre-adolescent rebellion than into joining.

When Children Are Too Young for Baptism

Some children request baptism at age 8 or earlier. Parents, pastors, and teachers should take such requests seriously. The baptismal class for 8-year-olds can meet monthly or bimonthly for two years. Children should have a chance to study all the beliefs of the church as is developmentally appropriate. They will not get into word studies or into abstract concepts, but they need to know at least the Bible stories relevant to the concept.

Baptismal lessons for children need to be in two parts (a). Establishing a relationship with Jesus (understanding how they are saved), (b). Studying major beliefs in addition to salvation. This will need a minimum of 20 lessons. The lessons should involve active study that relates the beliefs to life. This is included in the Kids in Discipleship ministry Bible studies.

Parents should not assume that the church is responsible for grounding their child in Adventist beliefs. They should ask the pastor how many classes he/she takes children through, what topics they will take up, and when they plan for the baptism. If the pastor plans for only 10-12 lessons, the parents can continue the lessons at home. In some cases, the parents may need to do all the preparation for baptism.

SIMPLIFIED BAPTISMAL VOWS

1. I believe in God the Father; in His Son, Jesus Christ; and in the Holy Spirit.
2. I accept the death of Jesus to pay for my sins.
3. I accept the new heart Jesus gives me in place of my sinful heart.
4. I believe that Jesus is in heaven as my best friend and that He gives me the Holy Spirit so I can obey Him.
5. I believe God gave me the Bible as my most important guidebook.

6. By God living in me, I want to obey the Ten Commandments, which include the observance of the seventh day of the week as the Sabbath.
7. I want to help as many people as possible to be ready for the soon coming of Jesus.
8. I believe God gives special abilities to His people, and that the Spirit of Prophecy is given to His chosen people.
9. I want to help God's church with my influence, effort, and money.
10. I want to take good care of my body because the Holy Spirit lives there now.
11. With God's power, I want to obey the basic principles of the Seventh-day Adventist Church.
12. I want to be baptized to show people I am a Christian.
13. I want to be a member of the Seventh-day Adventist Church, and I believe this church has a special message to give to the world.

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