

CHRISTIAN PRACTICES WITH CHILDREN
Session 1: Why Practice Christianity with Children?

Resources

- Audience** This class is designed for parents of children ages 3- 11.
- Setting** Sunday afternoon Lunch and Learn Series
- Time Frame** Approximately 1 hour class, 12:15 – 1:30
- Environment** Fellowship Hall, round tables, chairs, dry erase board, CD player, DVD player and TV.
- Leader Preparation** Bring copies of invitational liturgy, laptop, butcher-block paper, markers, *Water, Come Down!: The Day You Were Baptized*, and copies of *I Was There To Hear Your Morning Cry*.
- Study Focus** Why We Practice Christianity with Children

Invitation

One: Who are you?

Many: I am a child of God.

One: What does it mean to be a child of God?

Many: That I belong to God, who loves me.

One: What makes you a child of God?

Many: Grace—God's free gift of love that I do not deserve and cannot earn.¹

One: Hear, O Israel: The LORD is our God, the LORD alone. You shall love the LORD your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your might. Keep these words that I am commanding you today in your heart. Recite them to your children...

Many: We will recite them to our children.

One: and talk about them when you are at home...

Many: We will talk about them when we are at home.

One: and when you are away...

Many: We will talk about them when we are away.

One: when you lie down...

Many: We will talk about them when we lie down.

One: and when you rise...

¹ Belonging to God: A First Catechism

<http://www.pcusa.org/theologyandworship/confession/catechism.pdf>

Many: We will talk about them when we rise.

One: Bind them as a sign on your hand...

Many: We will bind them as a sign on our hand.

One: fix them as an emblem on your forehead,

Many: We will fix them as an emblem on our forehead.

One: and write them on the doorposts of your house...

Many: We will write them on the doorposts of our homes.

One: and on your gates.

Many: We will write them on our gates.

All: When our children ask us in time to come, we will say...²

Devotional Reading

Water, Come Down!: The Day You Were Baptized by Walter Wangerin, Jr. written for the occasion of his granddaughter's baptism, or as he writes "at the start of her life under God."

Welcome to "Kid Talk." This class will be a seven week series: 1. exploring the Reformed understanding of infant baptism and its implication on Christian parenting; 2. exploring the cognitive, social, and emotional development of young children and their implications on children's Christian lives; 3. applying our understanding of the cognitive, social, emotional development of children to the Christian practices of prayer, healing, worship, and Bible study. Today's focus will be on baptism. The Reformed understanding of infant baptism is **why** we are undertaking this study on Christian practices with children.

Encountering God's Promise

"For the promise is for you, for your children, and for all who are far away, everyone whom the Lord our God calls to him" (NRSV).

At Covenant Presbyterian Church, under the leadership of Dr. John Rogers, baptism sounded like this: Minister, "What is the Christian name of this child?" Parents, "Kimberley Faye Norton." Minister, "Kimberley Faye Norton, child of the covenant, I baptize you in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit." And then Dr. Rogers would say, "Little child, for you Jesus Christ came into the world. He did battle in the world; he suffered. For you he went through the agony of Gethsemane and the darkness of Calvary. For you he cried, 'It is fulfilled;' for you he triumphed over death. And you, little child, do not yet understand anything about his. Thus confirms the Apostle's statement: 'We love God because God first loved us.'"

² Adapted from Deuteronomy 6:4-9, 20 (NRSV).

This ancient liturgy is at the heart of the Reformed understanding of infant baptism: We love because God first loved us.

We are saying: "Long before we can act, God has acted on our behalf."

In an article written for *Presbyterian Today* magazine on *What Presbyterian's Believe*, Tom Walker, a Presbyterian minister, illustrates his understanding of infant baptism by recounting the story of his discovery of a shoebox full of letters that his parents had kept between an adoption agency and themselves. Looking through the letters, Tom realized that his parents had been preparing to receive him and loving him long before he was even born. He likens this to the way God prepares and loves us even before we are born.

<http://www.pcusa.org/today/believe/past/mar06/infant-baptism.htm>

Responding Out Of

In groups of three, we will share our children's baptism stories.

Encountering Our Promises

Questions to Parents:

Do you reaffirm your own faith in Jesus Christ as Savior and Lord? Do you?

Do you claim God's covenant promises on your child's behalf, and do you look in faith to the Lord Jesus Christ for his/her salvation, as you do for your own? Do you?

Do you now unreservedly promise, in humble reliance upon God's grace, to set before **(everyone say your child's name)** an example of the new life in Christ? Do you?

Do you promise to pray with and for him/her and bring him/her up in the knowledge and love of God? Do you?

Responding Out Of

Describe your initial thoughts as you stood before our Household of God and made those promises.

Let's talk about some of the Christian practices you are using currently with your children?

Who do you turn to for help? What resources have you found helpful?

Encountering our Household of God's Promises

Questions to Congregation:

Do you, the members of this congregation, in the name of the whole church of Christ, undertake with these parents the Christian nurture of (name of children) so that in due time she may confess faith in Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior? Do you?

Will you endeavor by your example and fellowship to strengthen his family ties with the household of God? Do you?

Responding Out Of

Describe your thoughts as you heard your Household of God make these promises on behalf of you and your child(ren).

How has the church as a whole kept these promises? How have individual members of this congregation kept these promises? What can the church do a better job of by way of keeping these promises?

Closing Remarks

In the covenant act of baptism, we make vows on behalf of our children and others' children to guide and nurture children into the Christian life. Next week we will explore how children think, and their psychosocial development.

Closing

Let us stand and sing *I Was There to Hear Your Borne Cry*. (This hymn by John Ylvisaker can be found in *The Presbyterian Hymnal*.)

This series of lessons was prepared by Union-PSCE student Kim Lee, MACE, Fall 2009.