



The telephone rings and an excited voice at the other end all but shouts, “Our son and his wife had a baby! We are grandparents! And we have even more good news: They’re going to come from Minneapolis and visit us at Christmas. We are going to plan a big family get-together so everyone can meet our new grandchild, and we’d like to have you baptize the baby on the Sunday right after Christmas.”

Now imagine how quickly the excitement of the new grandma or grandpa evaporates when I say, “It sounds wonderful, but I am afraid we cannot baptize the baby.” Why? Because I know that I am always in a grumpy mood after all the busy-ness of Advent and Christmas? Because I don’t like babies? No, of course not. We would decline because of the theological practices of our church.

The *Book of Order*, part of the Constitution of our Church, provides both me and our Session with guidelines for how, when, where, and to whom we administer the Sacrament of Baptism. The guidelines are there for a reason: to help assure that we are following the practices of Reformed theology, especially when it comes to celebrating the sacraments of Baptism and Communion.

Baptism is for us “the sign and symbol of inclusion in God’s grace and covenant with the church.... It is adoption into the covenant family of the Church.” Baptism is done within a

service of worship, and the expectation is that the person baptized, or in the case of a child, the parents, are actively involved in the life of the church where the baptism is done, where their “covenant family” is.

We do this for two reasons: first, the parents make a promise to nurture their child in the Christian life, “within the community of faith” where the baptism occurs. Second, when we baptize, the congregation “as a whole assumes responsibility for nurturing the baptized person in the Christian life”. In order for these promises to have any meaning the baptized person and his or her parents need to be part of our church community.

If, as in my example, parents want their child baptized, but live elsewhere, the Session and I would counsel them to find a church home in their own community, a place where they can grow in Christ. Baptism of their child should wait until they themselves have found a place where they can be nurtured and nourished in faith.

We Presbyterians take very seriously our responsibilities for “nurturing the baptized person in the Christian life.” That may mean that there are times when even though we might want to baptize a child, we have a responsibility to help the child’s parents first find a church home for themselves, a covenant community for mother and father. And we can do this with confidence, knowing that for us baptism is not about salvation, so the child’s baptism can happen at any time. And if it doesn’t happen for another year, and happens at a church in Minneapolis, it will still be a joyous occasion because for mother, father, and child, it will be in their church home.