

Presiding at Baptism

Principles for Presiding in Worship

- The presider is a person who has been called by God through the voice of the church to lead the people in praise and prayer. The presider has been equipped for this calling by the gifts of the Spirit and the instruction of the church. Therefore, the presider should have a clear role in visibly and graciously leading the congregation in worship, ordinarily taking responsibility for the majority of the speech and action in the liturgy.
- The role of the presider should be understood as *servant* leadership—a ministry undertaken in the name of Christ and for the sake of the church. Such leadership is a responsibility or calling to serve others, not a right or privilege to be lorded over others. Above all, the presider points to God’s gracious action in Jesus Christ and facilitates the people’s grateful response in worship and service.
- Liturgy is best understood as a prayerful activity of the whole body of Christ, worshiping God together. While it does consist of particular words and gestures by particular people, liturgy cannot be reduced to these elements in isolation; it depends on the relationships among them and the work of the Holy Spirit through them.
- Ordinarily, one presider is sufficient. Be mindful of unintended messages that may be conveyed by the practice of co-presiding. An attempt to share leadership among two or more persons may be perceived by worshipers as a display of dignitaries or even a power struggle among the pastoral staff. Of particular concern is the impulse to pair women and men at the font or table; in some contexts this may give the false impression that the woman’s leadership is incomplete.
- There are no magic words, magic actions, or magic people. But there *are* certain words, actions, and people that help us to identify “what the church does” when it celebrates the sacraments of Baptism and the Lord’s Supper. Careful consideration should be given to the use of the words of institution, prayer for the Holy Spirit, manual actions with the water, bread, and cup, and the role of the Minister of Word and Sacrament as presider.
- A speaking part isn’t the only form of leadership or participation, and bold print in the bulletin (unison reading) doesn’t necessarily amount to meaningful engagement in worship. Our primary form of participation in worship is prayer, and the presider’s role is to draw people into this prayerful communion with God.
- The Presbyterian form of government and understanding of the church is built on shared responsibility and accountability, exercised through councils of the church that covenant together to seek the mind of Christ, the will of God, and the way of the Spirit. When in doubt about a particular practice or pattern of leadership at Baptism or the Lord’s Supper, consult with the appropriate council—the session, at the congregational level, or presbytery, for gatherings beyond the local congregation.
- Let faithfulness to God, vitality in Christ, and responsiveness to the Spirit be the goals of sacramental celebration, not validity. The sacraments are signs of Christ’s abundant grace and should be offered and received as “gifts of God for the people of God.”

Read John 13:1–17, 31b–35, the Gospel reading for Maundy Thursday. What does Jesus do and say this passage? How does he demonstrate and exemplify the role of the presider? How does the presider proclaim and embody the “new commandment”—to love and serve one another as Christ has loved us? How do these actions reveal to others that we are Christ’s disciples?

In the pages that follow, the words in black boxes and in the left-hand column (marked with W-references) are from the Directory for Worship, found in the *Book of Order*, Part II of the Constitution of the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.). The words in the right-hand column and the illustrations are from the *Book of Common Worship* (WJK, 2018), pp. xxi–xxii, 407–413.

“†” – In the Directory for Worship, the functions described as belonging to teaching elders may be, in particular circumstances, also performed by ruling elders.

W-1.0106: Word and Sacrament

In Christian worship Jesus Christ is truly present and active among us, by the power of the Holy Spirit, through the gifts of Word and Sacrament. Wherever the Scriptures are read and proclaimed and the Sacraments of Baptism and the Lord’s Supper are celebrated, the Church bears witness to Jesus Christ, the living Word, and proclaims the mystery of faith. Through these means of grace, God imparts and sustains our faith, orders our common life, and transforms the world. Through these same acts of worship, we share in the life of the Spirit, are united to Jesus Christ, and give glory to God.

Questions for Reflection or Discussion

- Why are the proclamation of the Word and the celebration of the Sacraments such important signs of Christ’s presence and action with the church?
- Why is the work of the Holy Spirit so important in the proclamation of the Word and the celebration of the Sacraments?
- How have you experienced Christ’s presence and action through the proclamation of the Word and the celebration of the Sacraments?

W-3.0401: Theology of the Sacraments

The Sacraments are the Word of God enacted and sealed in the life of the Church, the body of Christ. They are gracious acts of God, by which Christ Jesus offers his life to us in the power of the Holy Spirit. They are also human acts of gratitude, by which we offer our lives to God in love and service. The Sacraments are both physical signs and spiritual gifts, including words and actions, surrounded by prayer, in the context of the Church’s common worship. They employ ordinary things—the basic elements of water, bread, and wine—in proclaiming the extraordinary love of God. The Reformed tradition recognizes the Sacraments of Baptism and the Lord’s Supper (also called Eucharist or Holy Communion) as having been instituted by the Lord Jesus Christ through the witness of the Scriptures and sustained through the history of the universal Church.

Questions for Reflection or Discussion

- What does it mean that the Word of God is “enacted and sealed in the life of the Church, the body of Christ,” through the Sacraments?
- How have you experienced the Sacraments as divine acts of grace? How have you experienced them as human expressions of gratitude?
- What are the distinctive words, actions, and prayers involved in Baptism and the Lord’s Supper? What are the “physical signs” and “spiritual gifts” of the Sacraments?
- Why do we say that Baptism and the Lord’s Supper have been instituted by Jesus Christ in the Scriptures and sustained through the history of the universal Church?

W-3.0402: Theology of Baptism

Baptism is the sign and seal of our incorporation into Jesus Christ. In his own baptism, Jesus identified himself with sinners—yet God claimed him as a beloved Son, and sent the Holy Spirit to anoint him for service. In his ministry, Jesus offered the gift of living water. Through the baptism of his suffering and death, Jesus set us free from the power of sin forever. After he rose from the dead, Jesus commissioned his followers to go and make disciples, baptizing them and teaching them to obey his commands. The disciples were empowered by the outpouring of the Spirit to continue Jesus' mission and ministry, inviting others to join this new way of life in Christ. As Paul wrote, through the gift of Baptism we are "dead to sin and alive to God in Christ Jesus" (Rom. 6:11).

The Sacrament of Baptism holds a deep reservoir of theological meaning, including: dying and rising with Jesus Christ; pardon, cleansing, and renewal; the gift of the Holy Spirit; incorporation into the body of Christ; and a sign of the realm of God. The Reformed tradition understands Baptism to be a sign of God's covenant. The water of Baptism is linked with the waters of creation, the flood, and the exodus. Baptism thus connects us with God's creative purpose, cleansing power, and redemptive promise from generation to generation. Like circumcision, a sign of God's gracious covenant with Israel, Baptism is a sign of God's gracious covenant with the Church. In this new covenant of grace God washes us clean and makes us holy and whole. Baptism also represents God's call to justice and righteousness, rolling down like a mighty stream, and the river of the water of life that flows from God's throne. ...

Questions for Reflection or Discussion

- What are the biblical stories, themes, and images you associate with Baptism?
- What does the sacrament of Baptism convey about: (a) who God is and what God does; (b) who we are and what we are called to do; and (c) who our neighbors are and how we called to live with them?

[W-3.0402 continued: Theology of Baptism]

... Baptism enacts and seals what the Word proclaims: God's redeeming grace offered to all people. Baptism is at once God's gift of grace, God's means of grace, and God's call to respond to that grace. Through Baptism, Jesus Christ calls us to repentance, faithfulness, and discipleship. Through Baptism, the Holy Spirit gives the Church its identity and commissions the Church for service in the world.

Baptism is the bond of unity in Jesus Christ. When we are baptized, we are made one with Christ, with one another, and with the Church of every time and place. In Christ, barriers of race, status, and gender are overcome; we are called to seek reconciliation in the Church and world, in Jesus' name. ...

Questions for Reflection or Discussion

- In the liturgy for Baptism, how can the presider communicate God's gracious action and facilitate the people's grateful response?
- How can the presider embody and express God's invitation to repentance and new life, the unity of the Church as the body of Christ, and the call to justice, reconciliation, and service in the world?

[W-3.0402 continued: Theology of Baptism]

... Both believers and their children are included in God's covenant love. The baptism of believers witnesses to the truth that God's gift of grace calls for our grateful response. The baptism of our young children witnesses to the truth that God claims people in love even before they are able to respond in faith. These two forms of witness are one and the same Sacrament.

God's faithfulness to us is sure, even when human faithfulness to God is not. God's grace is sufficient; therefore Baptism is not repeated. There are many times in worship, however, when we may remember the gift of our baptism and acknowledge the grace of God continually at work in us. These may include: profession of faith; when participating in another's baptism; when joining or leaving a church; at an ordination, installation, or commissioning; and at each celebration of the Lord's Supper.

Baptism marks the beginning of new life in Christ. The new way of life to which God calls us is one of deep commitment, disciplined discernment, and growth in faith. The gifts of the Holy Spirit, given with and through Baptism, equip and strengthen us for the challenges of Christian faith and life.

Baptism is ordinarily celebrated on the Lord's Day in the gathering of the people of God. The presence of the covenant community bears witness to the one body of Christ, into whom we are baptized. When circumstances call for the administration of Baptism apart from public worship, the congregation should be represented by one or more members.

As there is one body, there is one Baptism. The Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) recognizes all baptisms by other Christian churches that are administered with water and performed in the name of the triune God—Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.

Questions for Reflection or Discussion

- How are infant and believer's baptism "one and the same Sacrament," yet different?
- Why is it important to remember baptism? Why is it important not to repeat baptism?
- How can baptism be an act of the local congregation and of the universal church?

W-3.0403: Responsibility for Baptism

Baptism shall be authorized by the session and administered by a teaching elder†. The session's responsibilities for Baptism include: encouraging parents (or those exercising parental responsibility) to present their children for Baptism without undue haste or undue delay; encouraging new believers to be baptized; examining candidates for Baptism, or their parents, and instructing them in the significance of the Sacrament; enrolling those who are baptized as members of the congregation; and providing for their ongoing nurture and formation for baptismal life in the world. The congregation as a whole, on behalf of the universal Church, is responsible for nurturing baptized persons in Christian life. The session may designate certain members of the congregation as sponsors or mentors for those who are baptized or for their parents. ...

Questions for Reflection or Discussion

- Why is it important to have authorization from the session when celebrating Baptism?
- Why is it important that Baptism be administered by a teaching elder (or ruling elder) who is authorized and trained for this ministry?
- Why is it important for Baptism to be celebrated as an act of the congregation?

[W-3.0403 continued: Responsibility for Baptism]

... When a young child is presented for Baptism at least one parent (or person exercising parental responsibility) should be an active member of a Christian church, normally the congregation in which the baptism takes place. The session may consider a request to baptize a child whose parent is an active member of another church. If the session approves such a request, it should communicate with the council of the other congregation and notify them when the Sacrament has been administered. Those presenting children for Baptism will promise to nurture and guide them until they are ready to make a personal profession of faith and assume the responsibility of active church membership.

A council may authorize a Baptism, to be administered by a teaching elder†, in certain situations beyond the congregational setting, such as hospitals, prisons, schools, military bases, or other ministry settings. In these cases, the teaching elder† is responsible for ensuring that the name of the newly baptized person is placed on the appropriate roll of a council (G-3.02, G-3.03).

Questions for Reflection or Discussion

- In what ways can parents (or others exercising parental responsibility) be a significant part of a child's life of Christian formation and baptismal discipleship? How do members of the congregation share in this task?
- In what ways can parents (or others exercising parental responsibility) prepare children for active membership in the church and service in the world? How do members of the congregation share in this task?

W-3.0404: Presentation

The teaching elder† introduces the Sacrament of Baptism with sentences of Scripture; other sentences of Scripture may be spoken by ruling elders, members of the congregation, or ecumenical witnesses. ...

Rubrics (in red print) offer instructions for planners and leaders of worship as well as guidance on liturgical action. They are not spoken in the service and ordinarily do not appear in printed worship aids for participants. Rubrics are especially important in helping us to embody the action of the liturgy through movement, posture, and gesture.

In this resource, parenthetical references to page numbers indicate the location of additional liturgical texts in the Book of Common Worship (WJK, 2018); parenthetical page number references preceded by the abbreviation GTG indicate related musical materials in Glory to God: The Presbyterian Hymnal (WJK, 2013); the abbreviation PH refers to similar materials in the Presbyterian Hymnal: Hymns, Psalms, and Spiritual Songs (WJK, 1990).

Green letters (ABCD, etc.) refer to illustrations of liturgical gestures.

PRESENTATION

The presider addresses all present:

Hear the words of our Lord Jesus Christ: Matt. 28:18–20
All authority in heaven and on earth
has been given to me.
Go therefore and make disciples of all nations,
baptizing them in the name of the Father,
and of the Son,
and of the Holy Spirit,
and teaching them to obey
everything that I have commanded you.
And remember, I am with you always,
to the end of the age.

Hear also these words from holy scripture:

A member of the congregation or ecumenical representative may speak these or similar words (441–42):

- 1 There is one body and one Spirit, Eph. 4:4–6
just as you were called
to the one hope of your calling,
one Lord, one faith, one baptism,
one God and Father of all,
who is above all and through all and in all.
- 2 As many of you as were baptized into Christ Gal. 3:27–28
have clothed yourselves with Christ.
There is no longer Jew or Greek,
there is no longer slave or free,
there is no longer male and female;
for all are one in Christ Jesus.

The presider continues:

Obedying the word of our Lord Jesus,
and confident of his promises,
we baptize those whom God has called.

In baptism God claims us,
and seals us to show that we belong to God.
God frees us from sin and death,
uniting us with Jesus Christ in his death and resurrection.

By water and the Holy Spirit,
we are made members of the church, the body of Christ,
and joined to Christ's ministry of love, peace, and justice.

Let us remember with joy our own baptism,
as we celebrate this sacrament.

**[W-3.0404 continued:
Presentation]**

... On behalf of the session, a ruling elder presents each candidate for Baptism. Those desiring Baptism for their children or themselves express their intent to receive the Sacrament. Parents, sponsors (if applicable), and the congregation make vows to support and nurture those being baptized. No one comes to Baptism alone; we are encouraged by family or friends and surrounded by the community of faith.

An elder or session-appointed sponsor presents each candidate for baptism:

***For adults
and older children***

On behalf of the session,
I present N. [and N.]
to receive the
Sacrament of Baptism.

***For infants
and younger children***

On behalf of the session,
I present N. [and N.],
child of N. [and N.],
to receive the
Sacrament of Baptism.

The presider addresses, in turn, candidates for baptism, parents bringing children for baptism, sponsors, and the congregation:

***Adults
and older children***

Putting your whole trust
in the grace and love
of Jesus Christ,
N. [and N.],
do you desire
to be baptized? **I do.**

***Parent(s) of infants
and younger children***

Do you desire
that N. [and N.]
be baptized? **I do.**

Relying on God's grace,
do you promise
to live the Christian faith,
and to teach that faith
to your child? **I do.**

The presider addresses the sponsors, if any are present:

Will you, by your prayers and witness, help N. [and N.]
to grow into the full stature of Christ? **I will.**

Additional questions may be asked of the children of the church (442–43).

The presider addresses the congregation:

Do you, as members of the church of Jesus Christ,
promise to guide and nurture N. [and N.]
by word and deed, with love and prayer? **We do.**

Will you encourage *her/him/them* to know and follow Christ
and to be faithful members of his church? **We will.**

W-3.0405: Profession of Faith

Candidates for Baptism or their parents shall renounce evil and profess their faith in Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior. Those who are being baptized upon profession of faith declare their intent to participate actively and responsibly in the church's worship and mission. Together with the congregation they profess their faith, using the Apostles' Creed, the baptismal affirmation of the early Church.

PROFESSION OF FAITH

Through the Sacrament of Baptism we enter the covenant God established in Jesus Christ.

Within this covenant God gives us new life, strengthens us to resist evil, and nurtures us in love.

Through this covenant, we choose whom we will serve, by turning from evil and turning to Jesus Christ.

The presider asks questions (443) of the candidates for baptism and/or the parents or guardians of children being presented for baptism.

Trusting in the gracious mercy of God,
do you turn from the ways of sin
and renounce evil and its power in the world?

I renounce them. or I do.

Who is your Lord and Savior?

Jesus Christ is my Lord and Savior.

Will you be Christ's faithful disciple,
obeying his word and showing his love?

I will, with God's help.

The presider asks the following question of those being baptized on public profession of faith:

Will you devote yourself
to the church's teaching and fellowship,
to the breaking of bread and the prayers?
I will, with God's help.

Acts 2:42

The people may stand.

With the whole church, let us confess our faith.

All profess their faith by reciting the Apostles' Creed as follows or in another version (85), or using the question and answer form (443-44):

**I believe in God, the Father almighty,
creator of heaven and earth.**

**I believe in Jesus Christ, God's only Son, our Lord,
who was conceived by the Holy Spirit,
born of the Virgin Mary,
suffered under Pontius Pilate,
was crucified, died, and was buried;
he descended to the dead.
On the third day he rose again;
he ascended into heaven,
he is seated at the right hand of the Father,
and he will come to judge the living and the dead.**

**I believe in the Holy Spirit,
the holy catholic church,
the communion of saints,
the forgiveness of sins,
the resurrection of the body,
and the life everlasting. Amen.**

W-3.0406: Thanksgiving over the Water

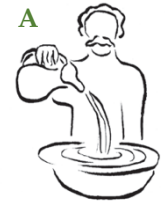
At the place of baptism, a teaching elder† leads the people in prayer: giving thanks for God’s covenant faithfulness through history; praising God’s gracious and reconciling action in Jesus Christ; and asking the Holy Spirit to attend and empower the Baptism, give deliverance and rebirth, and equip the church for faithfulness.

D The orans (Latin for praying) posture for prayer is traditionally used in eucharistic prayer, and may be used in other prayers in the liturgy as well. This ancient gesture, associated with the image of Christ crucified and risen and with the idea of opening or lifting our hearts to God, can be seen in depictions of prayer from early Christian art.

THANKSGIVING OVER THE WATER

A *Water is poured visibly and audibly into the font.*

The presider leads the people in the following or similar prayer (445–48):



B The Lord be with you. **And also with you.**

C Let us give thanks to the Lord our God.
It is right to give our thanks and praise.



D We give you thanks, Eternal God, for you nourish and sustain all living things by the gift of water.

In the beginning of time, your Spirit moved over the watery chaos, calling forth order and life.

In the time of Noah, you destroyed evil by the waters of the flood, giving righteousness a new beginning.

You led Israel out of slavery, through the waters of the sea, into the freedom of the promised land.

In the waters of the Jordan Jesus was baptized by John and anointed with your Spirit.

By the baptism of his own death and resurrection, Christ set us free from sin and death, and opened the way to eternal life.

We thank you, O God, for the water of baptism. In it we are buried with Christ in his death. From it we are raised to share in his resurrection. Through it we are reborn by the power of the Holy Spirit.



E/F *The presider may touch the water or extend a hand over the water.*

Send your Spirit to move over this water that it may be a fountain of deliverance and rebirth. Wash away the sin of all who are cleansed by it.

Raise them to new life, and graft them to the body of Christ.

Pour out your Holy Spirit upon N. [and N.], that she/he/they may have power to do your will, and continue forever in the risen life of Christ.



[D] To you be all praise, honor, and glory; through Jesus Christ our Savior, who, with you and the Holy Spirit, lives and reigns forever. **Amen.**

W-3.0407: The Act of Baptism

Accompanied by a visible and generous use of water, the teaching elder† shall address each person by their Christian or given name and say: “[Name], I baptize you in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit” (Matt. 28:19). The water used for Baptism should be from a local source, and may be applied with the hand (G), by pouring (H), or through immersion (I). ...



THE BAPTISM

Children and adults who are to be baptized by sprinkling may kneel. Those to be baptized by pouring may either be held over the font (G) (in the case of a small child), or extend their heads over it (H); or, when water is to be poured over the whole body, stand in a place properly prepared. Where there is a pool that permits full immersion (I), the candidate will step into the water.

Using each candidate’s Christian (first or first and middle) name, the presider shall pour water visibly and generously on the candidate’s head, or immerse the candidate in water, while saying the baptismal formula (448):

N., I baptize you
in the name of the Father,
and of the Son,
and of the Holy Spirit. **Amen.**

The newly baptized may be given a white garment or be wrapped in white towels.

The presider continues, saying one of the following:

- 1 As many of you as were baptized into Christ Gal. 3:27
have clothed yourselves with Christ.
- 2 As God’s chosen ones, holy and beloved, Col. 3:12
clothe yourselves with compassion, kindness,
humility, meekness, and patience.

LAYING ON OF HANDS AND ANOINTING

The presider lays hands on the head of each person baptized, saying the following, or a similar prayer (449). Or, all present may be asked to extend their hands in a gesture of blessing while sponsors place their hands on the heads of those baptized, and the presider prays:

O Lord, uphold N. [and N.] by your Holy Spirit. Isa. 11:2
Give her/him/them the spirit of wisdom and understanding,
the spirit of counsel and might,
the spirit of knowledge and the fear of the Lord,
the spirit of joy in your presence,
both now and forever. **Amen.**

The presider may make the sign of the cross with oil on the forehead, or pour oil on the head, of each of the newly baptized, while saying:

- 1 N., child of the covenant,
you have been sealed by the Holy Spirit in baptism,
and marked as Christ’s own forever. **Amen.**
- 2 N., child of God,
you have been sealed by the Holy Spirit in baptism,
and grafted into Christ forever. **Amen.**

The presider addresses those who have been baptized with these or similar words.

God who began a good work in you Phil. 1:6
will bring it to completion
by the day of Jesus Christ. **Amen.**

Candidates who have been kneeling will stand.

[W-3.0407 continued: The Act of Baptism]

... Other actions signifying the gift of the Holy Spirit, such as the laying on of hands and anointing with oil, may be included. However, the central act of baptizing with water in the name of the triune God must not be overshadowed.

At the reaffirmation of baptism for a congregation, the presider may make the sign of the cross (J) over the congregation.



W-3.0408: Welcome

The newly baptized person is welcomed as a member of the Church, the body of Christ. Appropriate gifts may be given, such as a candle (reflecting the light of Christ) or a baptismal garment (signifying being clothed with Christ). The peace of Christ may be exchanged, if not previously shared.

The Church's way of welcome into the body of Christ involves the unrepeatable Sacrament of Baptism and the repeatable Sacrament of the Lord's Supper. Christ bathes us with mercy, then feeds us with grace. Since this ancient pattern of initiation includes both Sacraments, the Lord's Supper appropriately follows Baptism; those who have just been baptized may be invited to receive communion first.

WELCOME

An elder or ecumenical representative may say:

N. [and N.], you have been received into the one holy catholic and apostolic church through Baptism.

By the power of the Holy Spirit, you have become members of the household of God, to share with us in the ministry of Christ and the priesthood of all believers.

With joy and thanksgiving we welcome you into the body of Christ. **Alleluia! Amen!**

A baptismal candle may be lighted from the paschal candle and given by a sponsor or elder to each of the baptized or to those presenting children for baptism.

Live as a child of the light *Matt. 5:16; Eph. 5:8*
and let your light shine before others. **Amen.**

The presider says:

The peace of Christ be with you. **And also with you.**

Those who have been baptized are welcomed in a manner appropriate to the particular congregation. The people may sing a refrain such as "You Have Put On Christ" (GTG 491) or "You Belong to Christ" (GTG 492), an ascription of praise (GTG 580–91), or a baptismal hymn (GTG 475–93).

The people may exchange signs of God's peace, greeting those who have been baptized.

The service continues with the prayers of the people, which include petitions for the newly baptized and for those who will nurture them (449–51).

It is appropriate for the newly baptized to receive Communion first.

Questions for Reflection or Discussion

- What have you learned about presiding at Baptism from this resource?
- What surprised, confused, or challenged you? What other questions do you have?
- How will you seek to make use of this learning in your practice of ministry?