

To bless or baptize

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I was baptized on Palm Sunday in 1981. I wasn't yet a year old. That's how it was done in my childhood church; the sacrament was administered to adorable babies and confirmed by awkward 13-year-olds. To be honest, neither occasion was especially meaningful to me. I don't remember the baptism, and in my confirmation class I was more interested in learning about the boys present than about the stories of Jesus.

As an adult, I joined and was later ordained to the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ), a denomination that practices believer's baptism by immersion. At first I was relieved that my infant baptism meant that I didn't have to succumb to the rather inconvenient ritual of getting completely soaked during a Sunday worship service. But as I [prepared to do my first baptism](#), I realized that I was a bit wistful that I

hadn't been immersed myself. I have only immersed one teenage girl in the name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit, and without a doubt, it was one of the coolest experiences of my life.

I settled my longing by reassuring myself that at least my children could be dunked. Possibly even by me--though when the time came to bless my older daughter, I found myself wanting to be just the mama, recruiting my best friend (a baby-baptizing Methodist) to do the honors.

But there's a twist. I'm currently serving in a congregation of Disciples' sister denomination, the United Church of Christ--which baptizes infants. Though I miss the extraordinary symbolism of a full baptistry, I have no serious theological qualms with infant baptism. I left watery thumbprints on the foreheads of several newborns during my first year of ministry in this place.

The plan is to be here for a good long while. So what to do about our children? Do we request a baby blessing for little Genevieve, so her welcome matches her sister's? Or do we do as the Congregationalists do and have both girls baptized? Not having grown up in a context where adult baptism is normative, I have this feeling that they might have a hard time accepting immersion as anything other than this weird thing their preacher mother inexplicably wants them to do.

We're leaning toward baptizing our daughters. Perhaps we'll even schedule the sacrament for Palm Sunday. Neither aesthetics nor theology sway the decision. Both ways are beautiful, and both ways--to borrow a quip of William Willimon's--"work." What it comes down to is the matter of community. While I fully intend to maintain my ties with the Disciples of Christ, it is not the tradition in which my children will be raised. Their local congregation--the community of people who will enter a covenant to love them and pray for them and, in so many words, *be their church*--baptizes babies. Who am I to withhold the fullness of the welcome offered to them in this place?

They will not remember the feel of the water on their heads and the sense of its eternal significance. But neither will they remember a time when they were not full members of the body of Christ, when their lives were not the subject of a sacred covenant. I can handle a tradeoff in which, no matter what you give up, you receive grace upon grace. I may even baptize them myself, so that their preacher mother remembers the feel of the water on their heads and is humbled by its eternal significance.