



Baptismal Vow:
With God's help we will so order our lives after the example of Christ, that [name], surrounded by steadfast love, may be established in the faith, and confirmed and strengthened in the way that leads to life eternal.



Stories of Northside: Baptism

INTERVIEWEES: **REV. CATHERINE BOOTHE OLSON, REV. JEFF ROGERS & DR. ANN BRIGHTWELL MCCORD**

The Stories of Northside series has been a fantastic way to showcase and celebrate pillars in our congregation, those whose devotion and sacrifice we now rest on today. Their stories of faith and service interlace and fuse with our own narrative, so much so that it's difficult to tell where one story begins and the other ends.

But a story is more than its characters, more than its setting even. After all, Northside Church is just a building without its congregation—storied and rife with history as it is—just as our congregation is an assembly of seemingly random people without the faith, traditions, and moments of worship that bind us together as the body of Christ, as God's community of faith.

One such tradition is baptism.

This will not be the story of baptism—for that, read Matthew, Mark, Luke, and Acts. Rather, this is the clergy-told story of how special and unique baptism is to Northside, how integral it is to our narrative, and how, despite a pandemic that forced constraints and threatened loss, we have found a way to keep this sacrament and tradition alive in the life of the church.

REV. CATHERINE

Baptism is the initiation into the community of faith; it is the proverbial, 'Welcome! Come on in!' It is God extending God's grace to us and God loving us even when we do not know we are loved. It is receiving prevenient grace and being welcomed into the community of faith so that one day, whether the same day or 15 years later, we can profess Jesus Christ as our Lord and Savior. Baptism is all about what God is doing and how we as individuals in the community respond to what God has already done.

As clergy, I get to hear from our congregants, not only in person but online, claiming and proclaiming that they want to help

rear this child so that one day they will accept Jesus Christ as their Lord and Savior. It is a legacy-building moment. I think of our Northside Bible Class. You look out into the crowd from where we sit, and you see how elated they are that the church is continuing beyond them. This is why they tithe. This is why they give. This is why they show up. Because they want and believe that they are laying a foundation so that all our kids can one day claim it for themselves—that they know God loves them and that Jesus is their Lord and Savior. It is a community event. It is a legacy event. It is a connecting-over-the-generations moment. Everybody has a role in baptism: the clergy, individual, congregation. Someone once asked me, 'Where's the Holy Spirit

in baptism?' Everywhere: in the water, the parents, the preacher, in the child, in the community, and in the liturgy.

One of the things I would like to celebrate is how we have found ways to make families feel comfortable continuing to baptize their child during COVID, and that's a huge compliment to Dr. Ann and Dr. Bill. That families feel that we can welcome their child into the community of faith in a safe way, wearing masks—families that say, 'We want our child to be part of God's community and family, and we want our Northside family to know them. We're not waiting. This is important enough to do—that has stood out to me. »



REV. JEFF

One thing that's really neat about baptism here at Northside is the way multiple generations will baptize their babies. Oftentimes we'll see grandparents and parents surrounding the child being baptized, which is such a cool realization of those vows being lived out. Not only did the grandparents and the congregation surround their children, but now those children surround their children. You then begin to see the great cloud of witnesses that we learned about in Scripture playing out in our Sanctuary.

Participating in the sacrament as a parent was one of my life's most meaningful and special experiences. There are emotions you feel—nervousness, excitement, love—that hit different when you are on that side. It is powerful. As a pastor, I love liturgy. Perhaps, I love liturgy more than the average person. But that congregational response is one of my favorites. In fact, it may be my favorite piece of liturgy. Internalizing liturgical language has been a meaningful practice

individually. On a larger scale, though, to have a congregation that knows the baptismal response like they know the Apostles' Creed or the Lord's Prayer is so cool. I believe having a community of faith internalize these words changes the very fabric of the church. These words matter. Saying these words during my son's baptism changes the way I say them now as a church member, and saying the words as a church member changes the way I parent.

Another thing I love about the uniqueness of Northside is that I've never heard the song that we sing in the Sanctuary: 'Child of Blessing.' I remember the first week I was here, we had a baptism—because we do almost every week. I was surprised when the song was sung; it felt so unfamiliar. But now—it is a song that is not only beautiful, but familiar and written on my heart. It is a piece of the ritual that Northside has established. Matt has since added 'He Knows My Name,' and now, at both Traditional and Contemporary services, we literally sing over the child.

DR. ANN

Northside Church is very blessed to have a wide range of ages of families worshipping together! It is so special to have great-grandparents, grandparents, parents, adult children, young children, and friends who are like family, surrounding an infant for Holy Baptism and pledging to join in a responsibility that is both sacred and rewarding. Baptism is the visual acknowledgement that the Church consists of believers professing together with their children.

I enjoy seeing the baptismal babies dressed in their beautiful, special hats and long gowns that drape off of their little feet (many of which have been passed down for several generations)—knowing the congregation can see the baptismal banners hanging in the Sanctuary. Northside has a wonderful group of dedicated ladies who create these beautiful banners as a gift for the baptismal family.

I also enjoy the response from the congregation during the baptismal

service, which includes saying the child's full name. When we, as a congregation, promise to support this child in his/her Christian faith, and we say his/her name out loud, I really feel like we are promising to do important things in the life of this child!

At the beginning of COVID-19, there was some understandable hesitancy in determining when we could all worship together again, but this meant that all of our baptisms needed to be rescheduled. We were so grateful for the understanding families, especially those who had to cancel plans with extended family and friends. Once services resumed, and we had baptismal families rescheduled, the actual baptism looked quite different. For safety, only Dr. Bill, Rev. Catherine, Rev. Jeff, Michael Devine, Joshua McClure, and the baptismal family were present. However, one very special addition took place: the services were livestreamed. So whether extended family was in town or out, they could watch the baptismal service online! It was so

meaningful and reassuring to know that our baptismal families were in a safe place, and that family members were able to share in this sacred moment! I am so grateful to be a part of Northside where ministry is a priority, even during a pandemic, and we continue to be the Church by preaching the Word, praying for those in need, and bringing our children up in the faith!

From the 17th century baptismal font in our Sanctuary, to the fact the we offer baptism year-round and at both styles of worship—baptism will always be a unique, integral, and incredibly special part of our story and worship as a community of faith. May we always be this excited about baptism, this elated that the church is continuing beyond us. May it spur us to volunteer at VBS, teach a Sunday school class, and fulfill our vows to see our kids "surrounded by steadfast love, established in the faith, and confirmed and strengthened in the way that leads to life eternal."

We want to take this opportunity to thank and honor Dr. Ann for her 13 years of service at Northside, especially in Pastoral Care. Her love for this congregation is matched only by the dedication she bestowed upon it. Our story—our baptismal narrative in particular—is now forever intertwined with hers. ☪

