

Dear Parent(s),

We are excited that your child has expressed a desire to be baptized and we want to join you in helping prepare them for that day. Because SGC allows baptism only for those who are 12 years of age or older we'd like them to become a "baptismal candidate" and use the time between now and their 12th birthday to prepare. To prepare we'd like you and them to do two things. First of all we'd like you to observe your child's behavior and attitude during the time that they are a candidate. We all know that when someone is truly "born again" it changes their life. The changes may not be huge but they are real. We wish for you to confirm your child's testimony of faith in Jesus as saving-Lord as evidenced by their actions and attitudes. Secondly, we'd like you to help them complete a course of study. We currently recommend the course entitled, *Growing Strong in God's Family*, published by the Navigators. They are available to you and your child at no charge from the church office. We still want the child to wait until he or she is 12, so you can work through the course anytime before then. We also believe that the younger a child is the more important it is that the initiative for baptism come from the child and that their motivation to complete the course is further evidence of their readiness.

There are two reasons why we ask children to wait until they are 12 to be baptized. First of all, because we want them to have the maturity to better understand the spiritual significance of baptism. Jesus was 12 when he was taken to the Temple to prepare for his Bar Mitzvah. Jews through centuries have their children wait until 12 or 13 years of age before they were brought into full status in the congregation. Through the centuries, Christian churches of many denominations have taken children through a confirmation period when the children were about 12 or 13. Modern education theory informs us of what has been obvious for centuries, that children develop an ability to think abstractly at about 12 or 13.

It is also true that many children have multiple "salvation" experiences during the years they are growing up. Most parents know not to either confirm or deny the earlier spiritual experiences of their children but instead allow the Spirit of God to work in them as he will. For example, if a child makes a profession of faith at a very early age and then questions that experience as they get older, it is unwise for a parent to assure the child that they are already a Christian based on the earlier experience. It is wiser to ask questions and allow the child to think through the issue with their increased "maturity" and the guidance of the Spirit. Such questioning by a child may happen many times in the elementary and adolescent years. We don't want to give assurance of faith when the Spirit is not giving it. During these formative years, I think it is best to allow for such questioning.

For these reasons we strongly suggest that children prepare for baptism as a "candidate" and wait until 12 years of age to be baptized. I look forward to talking to you and your child about your baptism when they are 12.

For Christ's Kingdom,

Jerry Nelson
Senior Pastor
Southern Gables Church