

My sole commitment as a pastor is to make disciples of Jesus Christ, and to make disciples better disciples.

Most important part of this proposal: **we are not changing the way we “make disciples and baptize them in the name of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.”**

- We are addressing the issue of **Christians** who have professed and practiced their faith in another tradition and how they may be invited to join Broadmoor.
- Presently, these Christians must be baptized. We are careful to say this re-baptism does not invalidate their previous commitment or baptism but clarifies their commitment to practice their faith in the Baptist tradition. Nevertheless, we do require re-baptism.
- I propose that Christians from other traditions be given the choice of joining by baptism or statement of faith. The statement of faith option would include their affirmation that they have been baptized previously, and, if baptized as an infant, went through a confirmation process.

Why address this issue now? Again?

- Churches are seeing more “movement” among Christians than ever before.
  - 30-40 years ago less than 5% of a church came from another denomination.
  - Today the average is near 50%. Christians from other traditions are much more likely to be visiting our church.
- The dramatic “rise of the nones”
  - In 2005, when Christians were asked to identify a denominational affiliation, 7% checked “none.” In 2010, that percentage had more than doubled to 15%.
  - We have a dramatic rise of “unattached” Christians.
- Most Christians who were baptized as infants and later confirmed their faith, or were sprinkled as adults, find their baptismal experience valid and meaningful and do not understand why Baptists would require them to be re-baptized.

My experience with Christians and this issue.

- I have spoken pastorally to perhaps 100 people who fall into this category of being interested in the church I served but coming from another baptismal tradition. Their response falls into one of three categories:
  1. They join by baptism because it reconfirms their faith. Baptism for them is a meaningful spiritual experience.
  2. They join by baptism because “it fulfills the rules of the club.” They acquiesce to baptism because they want to be members and are willing to fulfill the requirements, but it is not spiritually meaningful.
  3. They decline to join and either continue to attend as non-members or go elsewhere.
- I personally have felt for a very long time that we are declining membership to Christians whose faith we would not question, but by requiring baptism are, in effect, making it harder for them to join a church than it is to get into heaven.

I do not have a perfect solution to this problem, but I do have a solution I believe is better for today's situation and reflects clearly the teaching of the New Testament.

My proposed solution:

- Welcome as members other Christians who have been baptized and confirmed, even if that baptism was infant baptism (with confirmation later) or by sprinkling as a child or adult.
- Develop a course from our Classically Christian, Classically Baptist, Classically Broadmoor document that is taught to **all** new members.
- I will still offer, and urge when appropriate, baptism to these other Christians but allow them to make the decision as to what is spiritually significant to them. They can still join by baptism if they wish, and there are many scenarios in which baptism would be helpful to their spiritual commitment to Christ. I believe allowing these Christians the option, respecting their Spirit-led right to choose, is entirely positive in our goal to make stronger disciples.

Advantages of this solution:

- Offering this choice respects their Soul Competency (a Baptist emphasis) and their Priesthood of the Believer (a Baptist emphasis).
- It encourages church membership, and membership enhances discipleship.
- We preserve the importance of baptism by immersion for believers as it is properly applied (we still baptize new converts by immersion) without misusing it on long-time practicing Christians as a requirement to join our church.

Other considerations:

- The word baptism is a direct transliteration of the Greek word *baptizo* and means to dip or immerse. This is not seriously debated any longer. There is no solid example of infant baptism in the NT (an entire household being baptized is unclear in meaning). Baptists "have it right" in practicing believer's baptism by immersion. Broadmoor will continue immersion baptism as the only form we offer.
- We are addressing here a practice, not a point of theology.
- We have long faced a situation that the NT simply does not address. Baptism in the NT was for believers immediately following their commitment to Christ. In re-baptizing practicing Christians we are engaging in a practice that would have been foreign to the writers of the NT.
- We do not have any guidance from the NT as to what would have occurred had a member of First Presbyterian Church in Ephesus come to join First Baptist Church of Corinth.
- Broadmoor has faced other "difficult" decisions (the issue of race and ordination of women, for example) and chose a solution that was right and good for our church. We have a unique opportunity to expand our ministry.
- We have "open communion" now. Changing our membership guidelines makes us consistent in saying "you are 'Christian enough' to share communion and to be a member.
- This move affirms and fulfills our commitment to be ecumenical in thought and practice.

- Picture someone you know that is in this position of being unquestionable Christian, but prevented from joining Broadmoor because of the present requirement to be re-baptized. What would we lose by allowing that person to join?

In our discussion:

- You have the right and expectation to voice your opinion. I personally will ensure that right, whatever your stance on this particular issue. The right to free expression is a Baptist distinctive.
- You also have the obligation to love one another that is more important than your right to say whatever you want. With that in mind, I urge and expect the following:
  - Do not project an intellectual or spiritual superiority over another brother or sister in Christ.
  - Take very special care with what you say and how you say it. People have very deep opinions and feelings about this issue. No conviction is void of an emotional context. You may not mean to offend (I certainly hope no one is intentionally offensive!), but “listen” to your words from the perspective of someone who disagrees with you. Be loving in your speech and especially respectful of those who hold another opinion.
  - My personal goal is to preserve and deepen our unity at Broadmoor. This unity does not mean unanimity! We will not all agree on this issue. A vote will not be 100%! I pray daily that after we have resolved this issue, we can all say “I love and support Broadmoor Baptist Church.” I count on you, whatever your opinion, to manifest that character in public forums and private discussions. God will then bless us through this process.
  - I commend this passage of scripture for setting the tone of our discussion: “Do nothing from selfishness or conceit, but in humility count others better than yourselves. Let each of you look not only to his own interests but to the interests of others. Have this mind among yourselves which is yours in Christ Jesus.” (Phil. 2:3-5)