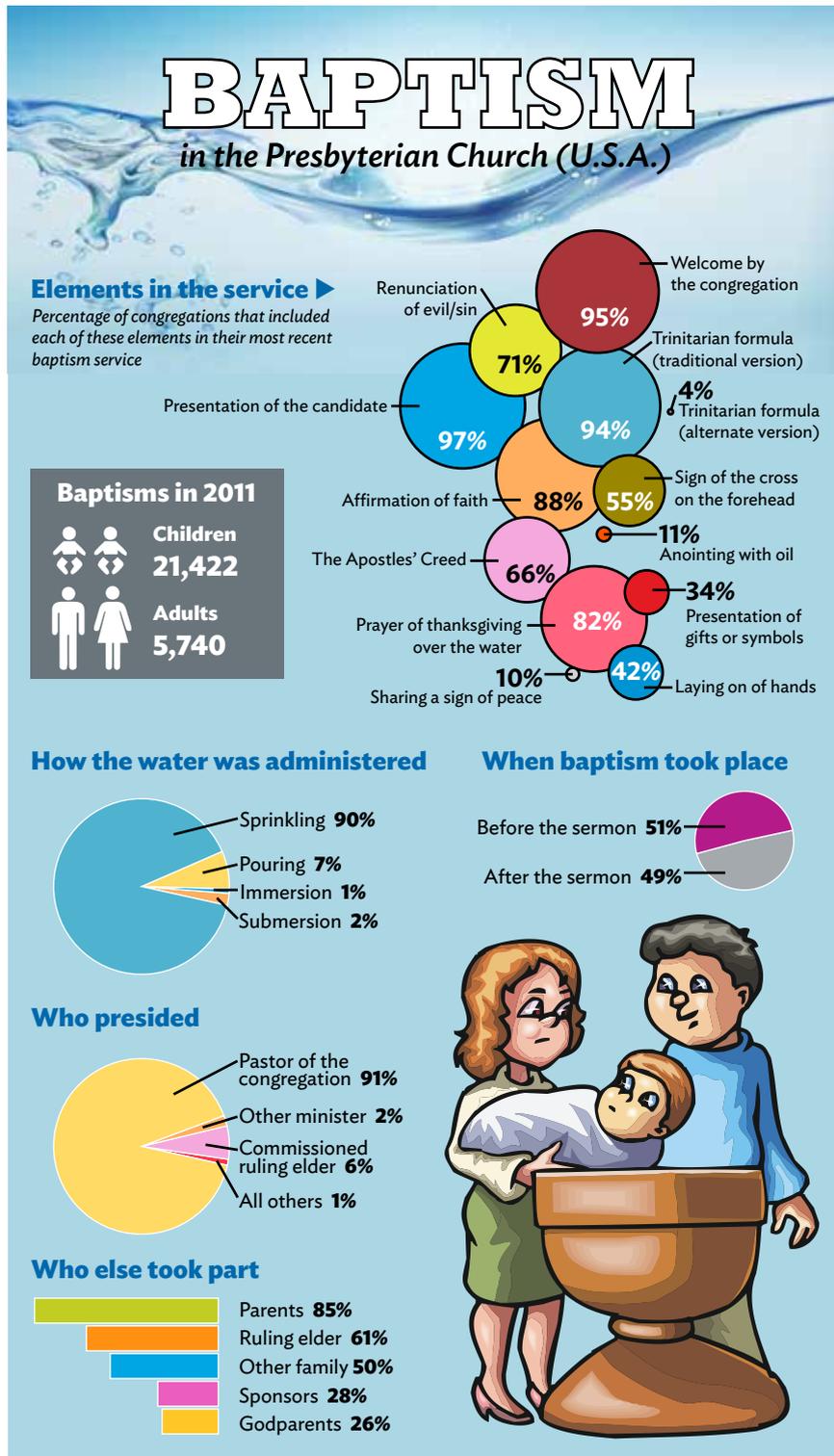


# The service of baptism



Is there a typical Presbyterian baptismal service? These results, from a recent survey of a representative sample of PC(USA) congregations, suggest that the answer is “yes, but . . .”

Beyond a presider who administers water, there are no apparent universals. True, some features are almost always found: presentation of the candidate, affirmation of faith, prayer of thanksgiving over the water, administration of water by sprinkling, use of the traditional Trinitarian formula, and welcome by the congregation. But the key word is *almost*. Even the traditional formula of “Father, Son, and Holy Spirit” is, in a few cases, replaced with an alternate Trinitarian formula.

Yet, beneath these differences, a core service reveals a common theology. That service includes all or almost all of the near universals just described—plus, more often than not, one or more other features: renunciation of sin, recitation of the Apostles’ Creed, and making the sign of the cross on the forehead. Other elements may be present, some only rarely, either as additions to the service or as replacements, as when immersion replaces sprinkling.

The next time you’re in a different PC(USA) congregation for a baptism, reflect on what you see. While it may be tempting to focus on the differences, I suggest dwelling instead on the similarities. If the results of the survey are any guide, you’ll see a service that is, in most of its key features, like the one back home.

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