



GO INTO ALL THE WORLD...
BAPTIZING
...IN THE NAME OF THE FATHER,
AND OF THE SON,
AND OF THE HOLY SPIRIT.

The Sacrament of Baptism

“The sacrament of Baptism is an outward and visible sign of the grace of God.” This brief booklet has been prepared in order that you might better understand this sacrament of the Church and comprehend more fully the promises which God, you and the members of the Church will make at this sacred moment.

Infant Baptism - Adult Baptism

Our United Church of Christ (UCC) heritage has offered the sacrament of infant Baptism. However, because of our diverse nature, believer's Baptism and adult Baptism are also practiced. For the UCC, the rite of Confirmation is an important second step in the baptismal process, for it is in that rite that the youth makes his or her own the promises, which parents made in Baptism. Therefore, for youth preparing for Confirmation, Baptism is a prerequisite. This may be done within the worship of the church.

What Is the Meaning of Baptism?

Often Christian Baptism is approached as “something that should be done” with little understanding of the true meaning of its sacramental nature. Let us take a brief look at the meaning of this first sacrament of the Church. There is a universality in these meanings that could be applied to both infant and adult Baptism.

Baptism is a symbolic act signifying God's grace and forgiveness. In the person of Jesus Christ, we have seen the face of a forgiving God. The Baptism service and the sprinkling with water is a sign of cleansing from sin and God's continual forgiveness to those, who realize they stray from the Gospel's way. Rather than a statement concerning “original sin,” the doctrine that holds to the sinful nature of the human race from birth, it is a statement of God's forgiving love, realizing that we do err in spite of our intention to follow the Gospel.

Baptism is an act of celebration. It is a moment in which to celebrate the gift of life. It is an opportunity to step aside from the routine of one's daily existence and offer thanks to God for a newborn child. For the young adult or adult considering Baptism, it is an opportunity to recognize with thanksgiving a growing personal relationship with God.

Baptism is an act of proclamation. “Let the children come to me and do not hinder them, for to such belongs God’s Realm.” These words of Christ are reinforced each time a child is presented for the sacrament of Baptism. We are called in the sacrament to regain the childlike nature that God desires us to put on in Christ’s name. Open, inquisitive, gentle...we are called to incarnate in faith those qualities.

Baptism is an act of dedication. This is the most central of all the reasons for participating in the sacrament of Baptism. Parents dedicate themselves to rearing the child in the ways of the Gospel. Adults accept the journey of the Gospel message as the way in which they wish to travel. Members of the congregation dedicate themselves to being a part of the nurturing process for the child or the adult. The service of Baptism is a time of dedication to growing in the Faith together.

As has been mentioned previously in this booklet, a central part of the sacredness of this act of Baptism is the sincere dedication to an active involvement in Christian growth. The sacrament is not some magical act. Let us look at the questions that may be asked of parents and sponsors as well as the members of the congregation and interpret these questions in understandable ways:

✠ Is it your desire that this child be baptized into this Faith
It is.

We promise to hold the Christian message as paramount in our lives.

✠ Do you promise, with God's help, by your life and teaching to lead this child toward an understanding of the Christian Gospel and into the service of Jesus Christ? We do.

We promise by teaching and example to expose our child to the way of Christ. This promise is a planned procedure, not education in Christ's way through casual example and teaching. It involves regular exposure to the Bible and an active devotional life at home and in the Church School. It involves setting a responsible example of participation in the life of a church and seeking to live a Christian life in your daily routine.

✠ Will you endeavor, God being your helper, to guide and instruct this child that he/she may be led to the confession of Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior of the world, to the Communion of the Lord's table, and to Confirmation into responsible membership in Christ's church?

We shall expose our child to the ways of the Christian Faith through an active involvement in the ministry of a local church. We shall be responsible Christians in our lives so that our child will grow in the knowledge of faithful witness for Christ.

Not only are promises made by the parents and sponsors, but also by the congregation and membership of the Church.

‡ Will you endeavor to live so that she/he may grow in the knowledge and love of God and of our Savior, Jesus Christ? Will you support these parents in their efforts to guide this child in the way of the Gospel and to faithful service in Christ's Church? We will endeavor to do so, and we promise our support.

The congregation promises that they will be sponsors for the child. They promise that individually and corporately they stand ready to be of assistance in the nurturing of your child and, in the case of adult Baptism, in the nurturing of your faith.

The promises that are made should not be made without serious thought on the part of the parents, sponsors, and church membership. For they have consequences...regular study of God's word in the home, active involvement in the life of a particular church, committed Christian living. For if these promises are taken lightly, the sacrament is devoid of its "sacredness."

Should the Baptism Take Place in the Worship Service?

Since the sacrament of Baptism is a covenanting act of the community of Faith, the Board of Elders suggests that unless there are extenuating circumstances, all Baptisms should take place within the worship service. Baptisms in other contexts and at other times should be discussed with the Minister. Even in those other settings, First Church will make every effort to have a representative of the laity to symbolically offer the support of the whole membership of the Church.

When you decide on your desire to participate in the sacrament, call the church office and be prepared to provide the following information for the church records: full name of the child, the full name of both parents, date of birth, place of birth, names of Godparents/sponsors, and possible dates on which you wish to participate in the sacrament.

It is asked that you attend at least one worship service prior to meeting with the Minister that will be performing the Baptism.

Preparation for the Baptism and Day of Celebration

Usually an in-person meeting or a telephone visit with a Minister will precede the service of Baptism. On the day of the service, candidates for Baptism and sponsors should arrive 30 minutes prior to the service and go to the Parlor where a photograph of the child receiving Baptism will be taken for the bulletin board and files. An Elder will be there to instruct you on the procedure and to assist in any way, and a Minister will also be there to greet you briefly. When the Minister calls you forward for the sacrament of Baptism, if the child being baptized has a covering on his/her head, please remove it before the Minister takes the child. Please face the congregation to receive the sacrament of Baptism.

Following the service of Baptism, you may ask the Elder to lead you to the narthex. You may then take your child/children to the nursery or Church School and return to the sanctuary for the remainder of the service, or you may bring the child/children back to the sanctuary with you for the remainder of the worship service.

At the end of the worship service, please leave by the left front sanctuary door, and with the Elder's assistance, please proceed to Palmer Hall where you are invited and encouraged to attend Fellowship Hour.

The Baptismal Certificate

The certificate that you will receive at the time of the Baptism or after the service of worship is a document of the Church. It does have some legal powers in the absence of a birth certificate. The certificate will mention the date and place of Baptism, as well as contain the seal of the church. If there is a mistake on the certificate, please call the office or bring it to the office and a new certificate will be issued.

The Role of Sponsors/Godparents

Although in our denominational tradition there is no requirement for sponsors/Godparents, you are free to select relatives or friends for this role. Symbolically they promise to be of primary support to you in your rearing of your child in the Faith.

Resources for Christian Growth as a Baptized Christian

- ✠ First Church of Christ Church School - 10:00 every Sunday. Care and instruction are available for children from birth through high school age.
- ✠ The Bible and other Faith resources - Located on the second floor of the church is a children's library with children's Bibles and books. On the second floor is a well-equipped library with many books for devotions for adults.
- ✠ In the narthex and in pamphlet holders located in the Potter Wing are a large number of devotional and Christian growth resources. Please contact one of our Ministers or Elders if you wish more information on any resources.

On behalf of the Ministers and Elders of First Church, we celebrate with you the joy of this special moment. We look forward to our sharing with you in our ministry at First Church.

Other Important Guidelines

Please remember to arrive at least 30 minutes before the service.

If you have other family members and friends attending the Baptism, please tell them to inform our Ushers when they enter the church. They will then be seated in the front section of the sanctuary.

You are asked not to take videos or use a camera during the Baptism. The clergy will be available immediately after the worship service for any photo opportunities the family requests.

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