

Baptisms and Dedications

First United Church of Christ
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We are delighted that you are seeking baptism for yourself or your child. We would like to share with you our understanding of this sacrament, and its place in the life of our congregation.

After you have read this booklet, please call the church to make an appointment with the Minister to discuss your wish for baptism. At that meeting you will have a chance to get acquainted and to ask any questions you may have.

About First United Church of Christ

First UCC is a spirited and diverse community where we worship God, pass along the faith, care for each other, and work at changing the world. Our 450 members come from a variety of religious backgrounds, and some have had

no previous church experience at all. We are part of the United Church of Christ, a liberal mainline Protestant denomination.

What Does Baptism Mean?

In the United Church of Christ, baptism with water and the Holy Spirit is the mark of acceptance into the care of Christ's church, the sign and seal of participation in God's forgiveness, and the beginning of new growth into full Christian faith and life.

The scriptural basis of baptism comes from the story of Jesus' own baptism by John in the River Jordan [Matthew 3:13-17], and from his instructions to his disciples to "...make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son

and of the Holy Spirit.” [Matthew 28:19]

Baptism is not a magical act: it does not protect a person from life’s challenges or make someone immune to temptation or sin. Moreover, God’s love and care does not depend upon the act of baptism; God already pours out that love and care to all humanity. Baptism, then, is both God’s gift and our human response to that gift.

We do not require that you be a member of the church to receive baptism for yourself or your child. However, we do expect that you will take seriously the promises you make “to grow in the Christian faith and to be a faithful member of the church of Jesus Christ,” however you may choose to do that.

Who Can Be Baptized?

In our tradition, persons of all ages may be baptized. Baptism should occur only once in a person’s life, so if you have been baptized in the past (in any Christian church), you need not be baptized again.

Because many persons were baptized when they were infants, we re-affirm our baptismal vows from time to time during our

regular worship services (for example, at confirmation and when welcoming new members to our congregation).

Infants: When an infant or young child is baptized, one or both parents promise to assume certain responsibilities for the Christian nurture of the baptized child. The parents may also invite sponsors (sometimes known as Godparents) to participate in the baptismal service and to share these responsibilities for the child’s growing faith.

Children: Children who were not baptized as infants sometimes express a wish for baptism. With their parents’ support, such children are invited to make their own professional of faith.

Youth: Young people who were not previously baptized may receive the sacrament during the Confirmation Program or at another time of their choosing.

Adults: Adults who were not previously baptized are invited to receive baptism as part of their faith journeys. For many people, the occasion for baptism is becoming a member of the congregation, but membership is not required for baptism.

What Is an Infant Dedication?

Most families in our congregation choose to have their children baptized as infants, but some families reserve the choice of baptism for the children to make themselves when they are old enough.

For those families, the congregation offers a service of *Infant Dedication* to celebrate the presence of the child in the family and to welcome him/her to the life of the congregation. As part of our Sunday worship, blessings are asked for the child and family, and the congregation pledges their support in the rearing and nurture of the child.

When Do Baptisms Happen?

Baptism is both a personal celebration and a central event in the life of the church. Therefore, baptisms are part of our Sunday morning worship, for which the entire community is gathered.

Occasionally family circumstances or special needs make it appropriate for a baptism to be held apart from Sunday worship.

In these cases, a representative of the church (often a member of our Board of Deacons) represents the congregation during the service.

What Happens in the Baptismal Service?

After the opening elements of the Sunday service, the candidates, his/her family and sponsors, and a member of our Board of Deacons are invited to come forward.

Candidates (or their parents) are asked the traditional questions of the faith:

- Do you desire to be baptized into the faith and family of Jesus Christ?
- Do you renounce the powers of evil and desire the freedom of new life in Christ?
- Do you profess Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior?
- Do you promise, by the grace of God, to be Christ's disciple, to follow in the way of our Savior, to resist oppression and evil, to show love and justice, and to witness to the word and word of Jesus Christ as best you are able?

- Do you promise, according to the grace given you, to grow in the Christian faith and to be a faithful member of the church of Jesus Christ, celebrating Christ's presence and furthering Christ's mission in all the world?

The congregation, in turn, promises to love, support, and care for those being baptized, and they speak together an affirmation of faith.

The Prayer of Baptism recalls the role of water in God's saving activities for all humanity, and asks God's blessing on the water to be used for the sacrament.

The words of the baptism, "You are baptized in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit," are accompanied by marking the forehead with water three times in the sign of the cross.

The congregation responds by saying, "The Holy Spirit be upon you, [name], child of God, disciple of Christ, member of the Church."

When an infant is baptized, the minister usually invites the family and sponsors to walk around the congregation (during a hymn) to introduce the baby to the gathered community.

The service concludes with a prayer for the newly baptized person, and the presentation of a certificate and small gifts.

What Happens After Baptism?

Baptism is not an end in itself, but rather is the entry point to a life of Christian discipleship as part of a church community.

We hope that after your (or your child's) baptism, your relationship with God will continue to grow. We also hope that you will participate in the life of the congregation – worshipping, learning, caring for others, and serving the wider world.

