

Baptism

Frequently Asked Questions

Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you; and lo, I am with you always, to the close of the age.

Matthew 28: 19-20

These materials are designed to help newcomers in the faith and lifelong church members learn more about the meaning and significance of baptism. Our hope is that by reading this you might come to know more about baptism and develop a renewed appreciation for this gift of God's grace.

1) Why do we celebrate baptism?

United Methodists celebrate baptism because it is a sacrament that was instituted by Christ in the Gospels. A sacrament is an "outward sign of an inward grace" and a means by which we receive God's grace. Through baptism, we receive God's grace and are incorporated into Christ's church.

2) Why is it necessary to use water during baptism?

Water is used during baptism to symbolize cleansing from sin, death to old life, and rising to begin new life in Christ. In the United Methodist Church, water can be administered by sprinkling, pouring or immersion.

3) Does salvation occur at the moment of baptism?

"Baptism is the means of new life in Christ, but new birth may not always coincide with the moment of administration of water or the laying on of hands. In whatever way the reality of the new birth is experienced, it carries out the promises God made to us in our baptism."

4) Why is it important to celebrate baptism in front of the congregation?

An infant or unconfirmed child becomes a member of Christ's universal church at baptism. Adults and children at confirmation age or older become members of Christ's universal church, and the denomination of the local congregation at baptism. Therefore, baptism is a rite of the whole church, which ordinarily requires the participation of the gathered worshiping congregation.

5) What is the difference between adult and infant baptism?

The primary difference between adult and infant baptism is that when an adult is baptized, he/she is able to profess his/her Christian faith. In an infant baptism, the parents make this profession of faith for the child with the understanding that by their guidance (and the guidance of the church), the child can eventually profess his/her faith for himself/herself.

6) When my child is baptized, what is my role as parent?

As a parent, you make a profession of faith for your child until he/she is old enough to do the same. As your child continues to grow, intentional faith development is crucial. By bringing your child regularly to worship, Christian education programs and mission projects, you fulfill your baptismal vows and nurture your child in the faith. When your child is old enough to profess his/her Christian faith, he/she participates in Confirmation (this program takes place at Providence UMC when students are in the 6th grade).

7) I was baptized when I was an infant but now want to make a profession of faith for myself. Can I be baptized again?

The United Methodist Church believes that God's grace can work in our lives even before we are aware of this grace. Keeping this in mind, baptism is viewed as an act of God and is only to be received once. An adult who has already been baptized cannot be baptized again in the United Methodist Church but instead can reaffirm his/her faith through a baptism renewal service.

* All quotes are taken from "By Water and the Spirit"

Suggested Resources

If you would like to learn more about what United Methodists believe about baptism, here are some suggested resources:

William Willimon
United Methodist Beliefs
Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2007

This short book is an excellent guide for those who want to learn more about the theology and doctrine of the United Methodist Church. Although Bishop Willimon's words are profound, you do not need a seminary education to understand what he is writing about baptism. This is an excellent resource for those who want to learn more about why we believe what we believe.

Kenneth H. Carter, Jr.
Baptism Services Sermons and Prayers
Nashville: Abingdon Press, 2006

This book is written by Providence UMC's former pastor, Dr. Ken Carter, and presents concise and clear explanations of the meaning of baptism for our lives. The second and third section of the book contain sermons and prayers which can be used as daily devotions to help you learn more about baptism and grow closer to God.

"By Water and the Spirit"
in *The Book of Resolutions of the United Methodist Church*
Nashville: The United Methodist Publishing House, 2004

This brief article is found in *The Book of Resolutions of the United Methodist Church* and presents the United Methodist Church's official stance on the sacrament of baptism.