

INTRODUCTION TO BAPTISM

Somers Congregational United Church of Christ

In accordance with the teaching of our Lord and practice prevailing among evangelical churches, the United Church of Christ recognizes two sacraments: Baptism and the Lord's Supper or Holy Communion.

-from the Preamble to the Constitution of the
United Church of Christ

INTRODUCTION

We are happy that you have chosen to have your child Baptized at the Somers Congregational Church. This is a special moment for you and your family and for our congregation. If you are already a member of this church, we rejoice with you. If you are not, we rejoice and we hope you will take this opportunity to learn more about us and consider becoming part of our community.

We have prepared this flyer as a way of introducing you to Baptism: its meaning, its importance and the traditions of our church. Please take a few moments to review it. If you have any questions, one of our pastors will happily assist you.

WHAT DOES BAPTISM SIGNIFY?

The sacrament of baptism is an outward and visible sign of the grace of God. Through baptism a person is joined with the universal church, the body of Christ. In baptism, God works in us the power of forgiveness, the renewal of the spirit, and the knowledge of the call to be God's people always.

HOW DOES BAPTISM TAKE PLACE?

Baptism with water and the Holy Spirit is the sign and seal of our common discipleship. Since baptism is God's gift, the Holy Spirit is called to be upon the water and those being baptized. The act of baptism also marks the beginning of a new life of discipleship with Christ, the human response to that gift.

WHY IS WATER USED?

Water is an essential element of baptism. Water is a prominent symbol of cleansing and life in the Bible - - the water of creation, the great flood, the liberation of Israel through the sea, the water of Mary's womb, the baptism of Jesus, and his washing of the feet of the disciples. That is why water is visibly present in the service. In the United Church of Christ, the mode of baptism is a matter of choice. Some traditions use sprinkling, some pouring, and some immersion. The tradition of our congregation is to sprinkle the water on the forehead of the person being baptized.

WHO IS BAPTIZED IN THE UCC?

Infants, children, youth, and adults. For infants and children, as well as for youth and adults who have never been baptized before, baptism marks their acceptance into the care of Christ's church, the sign and seal of God's grace and forgiveness, and the beginning of their Christian faith and life.

IS RE-BAPTISM NECESSARY?

The United Church of Christ recognizes the validity of all baptisms, therefore there is no need for re-baptism. If there is a question about whether baptism has taken place, a conditional phrase may be added as a person is baptized, such as "if you are not already baptized."

IS THERE A SPECIAL TIME FOR BAPTISM?

Baptism is a personal celebration in the lives of the individual candidates and their families. It is also a celebration within the local church family and a recognition of its commitment. For this reason, baptism is celebrated in the presence of the community gathered for worship. If circumstances require baptism to take place outside of corporate worship, members of the local church, if possible, may participate in the ceremony with the pastor. In urgent circumstances, such as imminent death, any Christian may perform the baptism.

WHEN SHOULD A PERSON BE BAPTIZED?

Baptism may take place at any worship service where the community is gathered. In the early Christian church, the season of Lent was used as the final period for the preparation of candidates. In the scriptures that are read during the seasons from Advent up to Easter, there are many texts that teach the faith and point toward baptism. In the early church, the candidates were baptized together at the Vigil of Easter (the pre-dawn Easter service). Here at the Somers Church you may arrange a baptism with one of the pastors at any time during the year.

WHAT ABOUT GODPARENTS?

Parents may choose Godparents or sponsors for infants and young children who are to be baptized. At the time of the baptismal service, the godparents, who accompany the parents and stand with them during the baptism, make promises similar to those made by parents. Historically Godparents were expected to become guardians of their Godchild if the need arose, but now there is no legal responsibility. Because Godparents are asked to enter the covenant between God, the parents and the child, it is important that they have beliefs similar to the parents and that they be willing to assist in bringing the child up in the church. Godparents are not required and some parents choose not to name any. Older youth and adults do not need Godparents.

WHAT PROMISES ARE MADE?

During the Baptismal service promises are made by parents, Godparents if there are any, and the members of the local church. All of the promises are made with recognition of the covenant that is being affirmed between the one baptized, the parents, the church and God.

Parents promise to help their child learn about the church, its history, stories and practice, and to grow in faith and service to God. The promises recognize that each person will reach an age and a point in life when individual decisions will be made about faith.

Godparents promise to assist the parents in raising the child to have faith, and to practice and share a faithful lifestyle themselves.

The congregation welcomes the newly baptized on behalf of the entire Christian church and promises to provide an environment in which growth in faith is encouraged. The congregation further promises to support the parents and Godparents and to bring the child into their daily prayers.

An older child or adult being baptized would make these promises on his/her own behalf.

Before Baptism Day

Baptisms are celebrated during the 10 o'clock worship service. During the week before the scheduled date of your baptism one of our Deacons will telephone you to go over details about the service with you and answer any questions you might have. This same Deacon will meet you before worship on Sunday morning to help you get settled before worship begins.

Baptism Day

On the day of your baptism, you should plan on arriving at the church in plenty of time to be settled by 9:50. Although there is no specific place you must sit, many families prefer to sit near the front. You will find it helpful to have any guests you are expecting to be present arrive with you so that you may all be seated together. The time before the worship begins, during the Prelude by our Organist, is a time for quiet meditation for many of those attending, so as little conversation and commotion as possible is appreciated.

The baptism will take place within the morning worship service. We invite and encourage you and your guests to fully participate in the entire service following the bulletin, joining in hymns, readings and responses.

The Baptism

At the appropriate time you will be called forward. Parents, the one(s) to be baptized, Godparents, and the Assisting Deacon will join the pastor around the baptismal font. The pastor will do an introduction then questions will be asked and responses made by parents, Godparents and congregation. The actual baptism will take place as the pastor takes the child and marks, with water, the sign of the cross on his/her forehead three times, "in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit." Then, as the choir sings, the pastor will walk the aisles of the church with the child in order to introduce him/her to the congregation.

After the Baptism

Following the baptism, the worship service continues and, as before, we hope you and your guests will take full part in it. We have enclosed an outline of our order of worship so you can see where the baptism will fall in the service, and a copy of the Baptism service so you can see the questions asked, and share them with the Godparents if there are to be Godparents.

The Deacon who speaks with you will tell you about and give you directions to the Child Care area of the church, located very near the sanctuary. The worship service can be a long time for a child to sit, so we encourage you, and your guests, to make use of the Child Care room at any time during the service. This can help make child, parents and congregation more comfortable.

Photographs

A word about pictures is appropriate here. Taking photographs has become a part of most family celebrations, and so we do allow them to be taken during a baptisms, *within certain guidelines*. Those taking either video or still pictures are asked to remain in their seats. A flash may be used for still photos, but videos should be taken using available light. It is acceptable for families to remain after the service to take some photographs in the sanctuary. If you wish to have the pastor in any of these, please let him know and take those with him as soon as possible.

After Worship

Baptism is the act of welcoming the one being baptized into the community. We ask people in the congregation to greet him/her after the worship service and hope that parents and guests will help make this possible by remaining at the front of the church for a few minutes as worship ends. We also hope that you and your guests will join us for coffee following the worship service in the Foundation Room, located directly below the sanctuary on the first floor of the church.

We know there are sometimes friends and family members attending the baptism who are not familiar with worship, so we ask that you share this information with them. Together we can create a wonderful and meaningful baptismal service.

“Jesus came and said to them, ‘All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. 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, and teaching them to obey everything that I have commanded you. And remember, I am with you always, to the end of the age.’”

Matthew 28:18-20