

The Sanbornton Congregational Church, UCC

THE SACRAMENT OF BAPTISM



"For in Christ Jesus you are all children of God through faith. As many of you as were baptized into Christ Jesus have clothed yourself with Christ. There is no longer Jew or Greek, there is no longer slave or free, there is no longer male and female; for all of you are one in Christ Jesus."

Galatians 3:26-28

Dear Friends,

We are glad you are interested in baptism at Sanbornton Congregational Church. We look forward with joy and anticipation to you (and your family) being a part of this community of God's people and sharing with us the journey to which God calls us.

Baptism is a covenant and an exchange of joyous and solemn promises. It is a celebration of God's gift of life and an affirmation of God's steadfast love. Through baptism, we remember the covenant that God has made and has kept throughout the ages with the people of God. We too are promise-makers and promise-keepers; the sacrament of baptism confirms our covenant with God and with one another. In baptism, we recall the baptism of Christ, his life, ministry, death on the cross, resurrection and his call to us to be his disciples.

We recommend that you meet with the pastor in order to plan and talk about your baptism, or the baptism of your child. This is a time when you are free to ask questions or discuss the understanding of baptism in the United Church of Christ.

This booklet has been prepared as a tool to help you understand the significance of baptism. Participating in this sacrament is a meaningful and important step on your faith journey.

*Peace,
The Reverend Ruth A. Martz
The Board of Worship*

THE SACRAMENT OF BAPTISM

What is baptism?

Baptism is a covenant and celebration. Baptism is one of the two sacraments celebrated in United Church of Christ churches; the other is the Lord's Supper (Communion). A sacrament is the visible form of an invisible grace.[1]

What is the importance of baptism?

The sacrament of baptism is an outward and visible sign of the grace of God. The United Church of Christ shares this understanding in common with many other Christian denominations. An important aspect of baptism is the creation of connections. Through baptism, Christians are brought into union with Christ, with each other and with the church of every time and place. 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.

Who can be baptized?

Infants, children, youth and adults can be baptized. For individuals of all ages, 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 growth into full Christian faith and life.[2]

Can someone be re-baptized?

Baptism should only occur once in a person's life although it is possible to reaffirm one's baptismal vows.

Why is the water so important?

From the water of creation, to the great flood, to the baptism of Jesus in the Jordan River, water is a prominent symbol of cleansing and life in the Bible. Water is the natural symbol of life, for there is no life without water.[3] The calling of the Holy Spirit upon the water and upon the candidates for baptism is an affirmation that it is God who takes the initiative in the sacrament.

Why does the baptism take place during a church service?

Baptism is not only a personal commitment and celebration, but also a central celebration in the life of the local church which embodies the universal church in a particular place. Baptism is a sign and seal of our common discipleship.[4] There has been a rediscovery of the meaning of baptism as entrance and integration into the Church.[5] Baptism is an important event that only happens once, and it is important to have the ceremony done within the community.

Who can be sponsors and what is their role?

In the case of infant or child baptism, parents, in consultation with the pastor, may choose sponsors or godparents for the children who are to be baptized. Adult candidates for baptism may also be given this opportunity to have sponsors. At the time of the baptismal service, the sponsors, who accompany the candidates and present them for baptism, will be asked to make promises of support to the parents.

How is baptism related to confirmation?

In baptism of infants and children, the parents make the faith response for the child. At the time of confirmation, the young person confirms the promises made at the time of baptism. If a person has not been baptized, he/she will be baptized before becoming a member of our church.

[1] White, James F, Documents of Christian Worship, (Louisville, Kentucky: 1992) 122.

[2] Book of Worship United Church of Christ, (Cleveland, Ohio: 2006) 129.

[3] Schmemann, Alexander, For the Life of the World, (Crestwood, New York: 1973), 72.

[4] Baptism, Eucharist and Ministry, (Geneva, Switzerland: 2003) 3.

[5] Schmemann, Alexander, For the Life of the World, (Crestwood, New York: 1973), 68.



BAPTISM AT OUR CHURCH

How does the actual baptism ceremony take place?

At Sanbornton Congregational Church, babies and children, youth and adults can be baptized. We have baptism ceremonies during the 10:00 a.m. worship service. During the summer, baptisms take place at the 9:30 worship service. The pastor will perform the baptism ceremony and will sprinkle water on the forehead of the person who is being baptized. If it is an infant or child that is being baptized, the parents and sponsors promise to assume certain responsibilities for the Christian nurture of the child.^[1]

In the case of youth/adult baptism, the individual being baptized and the sponsors (if the person has them) make certain promises. In any baptism service, no matter the age of the person being baptized, the congregation is asked to participate and make certain promises. (Please look to the back of this booklet for a copy of the baptism service.) In each baptism, the pastor will formally baptize the child or adult by invoking the Triune God.^[2] At Sanbornton Congregational Church, the pastor says, "I baptize you in the name of the Creator, the Christ, and the Holy Spirit."

Do we need to meet with the pastor?

The pastor would like to arrange a meeting with you, especially if this is your first experience with baptism at Sanbornton Congregational Church. The pastor talks about the tradition and history of this sacrament, answers any questions, goes over the details of the service, and provides baptism resources for you.

Who can serve as sponsors?

We recommend that you select as sponsors those who are committed to their own growth in the Christian faith. Also, in the case of infant and child baptism, sponsors should be people who are most likely to stay in close contact with the child between the time of baptism and confirmation.

Do I have to be a member of Sanbornton Congregational Church to have my child baptized or to be baptized myself?

You do not have to be a church member. We welcome any child or adult who wants to participate in this sacred sacrament. We hope, however, that you will attend worship services and become a part of our church family,

Can other family members participate in the service of baptism?

Family members are allowed to participate in the service of baptism with the collaboration of the pastor. Sisters and brothers of the child being baptized are welcome to stand with the family during the service.

Why is a flower given?

A carnation will be given to the person being baptized as a sign of God's love and of the warm welcome and love that our faith community promises to the newly baptized. A certificate of baptism will also be given.

When can we take photos?

We ask that flash photographs not be taken during the worship service. After worship, photos may be taken, and upon request, the pastor will gladly be a part of the gathering around the baptismal font.

Where do we sit in the Sanctuary?

Seating is a matter of personal choice. We usually, however, reserve at least 2 front pews for you and your guests.

Is there childcare provided during the church service?

We currently have a staffed nursery room downstairs for children through age 3. We also offer Sunday School classes for children and youth, ages 4 through grade 8. If there are older children or if relatives and friends have children, they are welcome to attend a Sunday School class.

What if my child cries?

If the child is crying before or during the service of baptism, relax and rejoice and be glad for such is the wonderful nature of babies! If after the baptism, the child continues to cry, feel free to go to the rocking chair in the back of the church to comfort the child or bring the baby to the nursery downstairs. There are also Bibles and "Quiet Bags" near the rocking chair for early readers and readers. We hope that you and your family will remain for the entire worship service.

THE SACRAMENT OF BAPTISM

Invitation

Leader (Deacon): Members and friends in Christ, we gather now to celebrate the gift of grace in the sacrament of baptism. 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 discipleship. Baptism is both God's gift and our faith response to that gift.

All: There is one body and one Spirit. There is one hope in God's call to us.

Leader: There is one Lord, one faith, one baptism, one God and creator of us all.

Introduction

Pastor: This is the water of baptism. Out of this water we rise with new life, one in Christ and members of Christ's body.

To the parents: You have brought God's child here to receive the sacrament of Christian baptism. As a sign of your faith response, I ask you to make the following promises: Do you desire to have your child baptized into the Christian faith and the universal Church of Jesus Christ?

Parents: We do.

Pastor: Do you promise, with God's help, to teach your child about the Word of God, nurturing and leading your child to know Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior and do you promise, according to the grace given you, to grow with and lead them to an understanding of the Christian faith?

Parents: We do with the help of God.

Pastor: Do you promise, by the grace of God, to be Christ's disciples and to teach your child by your own example and witness: to follow in the way of our Lord, to resist evil, to show justice and love, to witness to the work and Word of God.

Parents: We do with the help of God.

Pastor: Do you promise to celebrate Christ's presence in your family, in your own lives and in the world, by praying with and for your child, by nurturing them in the fellowship of the Christian church so that they may affirm their baptism through confirmation?

Parents: We do with the help of God.

To the sponsors (if applicable):

Pastor: Do you, who stand as sponsors, promise to strive diligently to hold up the hands of these parents in the fulfillment of their covenant that this child instructed in the Word of God, brought up in the nurture and admonition of the Lord, kept in communion with the church, and strengthened to live in a godly manner all the days of his/her life?

Sponsors: We do with the help of God.

To members of the congregation:

Pastor: Jesus calls us to make disciples of all nations and to offer them the gift of grace in baptism. Do you, the members of this church as of the whole Church of Christ, receive this child into your love and care, and do you promise that so far as in you lies you will uphold and encourage the parents in the fulfillment of their covenant?

People: We promise our love, support and care, God being our helper.

Prayer of Baptism

Pastor: Let us pray.

Almighty and everlasting God, we thank you for the gift of water which nourishes and sustains life. We thank you for the gift of this water which reminds us of the baptism of Jesus in the water of the River Jordan. We thank you for the gift of this child now to be baptized in the Christian faith. O God, bless with your Holy Spirit this water. Bless this child that he/she might be a blessing to the home and the world. Bless these parents and all your faithful people gathered here. In the spirit of Jesus Christ we pray. Amen.

The Baptism

[1] Book of Worship United Church of Christ, (Cleveland, Ohio: 2006) 129.

[2] Luther, Martin, Three Treatises, (Philadelphia, Pennsylvania: 1970) 185.

