

The Sacrament of Baptism
at
The First Congregational Church
United Church of Christ
Bristol, CT

We, at the First Congregational Church, celebrate two sacraments: baptism and communion, the two sacred acts that Jesus himself participated in.

A Brief History of Baptism

Prior to the coming of Jesus, the Jews baptized Gentiles who wanted to convert to Judaism. John the Baptist introduced a baptism of repentance (Luke 3:3). In both of these baptisms, water was used as a symbol of washing or cleansing when a person wanted to change their life, either by conversion or repentance.

Jesus, himself, was baptized in the River Jordan by John the Baptist, who told the crowds that while he baptized them with water, the “one who is more powerful than I is coming after me...He will baptize you with the Holy Spirit.” (Matthew 3:11)

The early Christian Church continued the practice of baptism using water as a cleansing symbol of change in a person who accepted Jesus Christ as Lord and as a sign of initiation into the Christian Church.

Various denominations within Christianity use different forms of baptism and have slightly different understandings about baptism.

Our Understanding of Baptism

We believe baptism can happen at any age and that in baptism God says that this person (infant, child, youth, adult) is “my beloved child in whom I am well pleased.” The sacrament of baptism is an outward and visible sign of the grace of God. Through the sacrament of baptism we declare that the love of God comes to us in different ways, but always with the same assurance.

The baptism of an infant reminds us that the love of God comes to us before we are even aware of it. The baptism of a child reminds us that God’s love does not depend on our understanding. The baptism of a youth or adult reminds each of us of our own commitment to affirm publicly our love for God and our desire to be marked as one of God’s own. Regardless of when baptism is performed, it is a sign that the love of God comes into our lives freely. It becomes real as we learn to see the world with eyes of faith and experience life together in a community of faith.

Infant baptism is the most common form of baptism, signifying God’s gracious gift of life. When a child is baptized, we celebrate the possibilities of new life and our mutual responsibility in caring for that life. Water is used because it is a symbol of life (Genesis 1:2). Life comes from water, depends upon water, and out of the waters of a mother’s womb a child is born.

We believe that baptism brings a person into the universal church of Jesus Christ. Through baptism, one becomes a Christian. Confirmation is the time later in life when a young adult will choose to specifically join this church. There is only one baptism. It is a sign that we are God's forever; there is no need for renewal. We recognize baptisms from all other Christian churches and denominations.

We also believe that baptism should be performed during communal worship, when the entire congregation may gather to participate. A congregation accepts responsibility in nurturing and teaching all children. Adults and older youth who are shy about being baptized in front the entire congregation may make arrangements with the minister.

Because baptism marks the entrance into the Christian Church, the parents, godparents/sponsors, and the congregation make a promise to ensure that the person baptized will have the opportunity to know and experience the Christian faith by participating in the church and by celebrating Christ's presence in their lives and family.

While we will baptize those who are not members of the First Congregational Church, we hope that parents will plan to raise their children in our church or another local church, upholding their promise to teach their children the stories of our faith and guide them in the way of Jesus Christ. When a person is baptized at the First Congregational Church, we take seriously our promise to help nurture them in their faith journey. It is our intention to teach and support them in their faith through Children's Ministry, worship, fellowship, and Bible study.

It is our tradition to use a small amount of water from the baptismal font, make the sign of the cross on the person's forehead, and baptize them in the name of the Trinity: God, Jesus Christ, and the Holy Spirit.

Procedures for Baptism

We typically have baptisms once a month. We will baptize up to four individuals on a baptism Sunday.

If you would like to schedule a baptism, please return the baptism form to the church office administrator as soon as possible so she can place you on the worship calendar.

Prior to a baptism, the minister appreciates the opportunity to meet with all of the parents and children participating in the baptism for that month. These meetings are typically the Monday before the baptism Sunday from 6:30-7:30pm in the Church Library.

During this gathering, we will get to know one another and talk about what the sacrament of baptism means and how it is performed. We understand that people come from different faith traditions within the Christian church and some from no particular faith tradition. During our gathering, we will be discussing the promises made in the sacrament of baptism, asking questions about faith and about how you hope to celebrate Christ's presence in your child's life and in your family. There are no "right" answers, only real answers to these questions.

We will be reserving pew(s) for your family and guests. Please let us know approximately how many people you expect. Your family and guests are welcome to sit anywhere in the congregation. Please let them know that our service of worship begins at 10 a.m. For guests who will be bringing children, please let them know we have coloring clipboards in worship and a Time for Children. Children are welcome to go to Children's Ministry after the Time for Children and have a snack and do a Bible activity.

Because baptism is held during a worship service, we strongly discourage the taking of flash photography, until after the service. We also ask guests to remain seated throughout the sacrament of baptism. Video cameras are allowed as long as the camera operator remains seated in their pew. Our worship services are often videoed and can be found on our church website. After the service of worship is also a wonderful time to take photographs with family and friends.

If you would like to celebrate the baptism with flowers, please speak with the church office administrator to make arrangements.

Baptism is a Christian sacrament and a part of Sunday morning Christian worship. Unlike a wedding, we do not have special decorations, bulletin covers, or special music for baptisms. There is no fee for this Christian sacrament.

We do hope that you will invite your family and friends to join the congregation for this joyous occasion.

And we want you to know what an honor it is to celebrate this important moment in your and your child's life.

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