

WATER & ROOTS THEOLOGICAL FOUNDATION

Baptism and the UMC

The United Methodist Church has a beautiful history and theology of baptism. As we commit to rediscovering the power of baptism, first we can root ourselves in the understanding of what we believe. Here please find information that we have prepared for our churches, as well as links to important denominational resources, to deepen our understanding of baptism.

What do we believe about baptism?

Baptism is...

- An act of divine grace to which we respond. God is the primary actor.
- God's gift to us.
- A means of grace.
- A moment when a person is given identity as a daughter or son of God.
- An initiation into Christ's holy church and incorporation into the Body of Christ.
- A commissioning into ministry to continue the work of Christ for the redemption of the world.
- A ritual that is part of a lifelong process of salvation.
- A sacrament, like the Lord's Supper, in which Jesus participated (Matthew 3:13-17; Mark 1:9-11; Luke 3:21-22).

[Click here for a Frequently Asked Questions document.](#)

Theological Danger Zones

- Believer's baptism. You do not have to believe to receive God's gift of grace and be initiated into the community and ministry.
- Rebaptism. We do not rebaptize Catholics or others who were baptized in the name of Father, Son and Holy Spirit. We do re-baptize Mormons and Jehovah's Witnesses, who were not baptized in the name of Father, Son and Holy Spirit.
- Baptism must be done in community.
- Baptism isn't the end of the journey, it is the beginning.

Clergy Reference Sheet

Logistical Advice

- Use warm water, especially with babies to avoid shocking them.
- Put the baptismal font in a location that is visible to the congregation with enough space for the family, sponsors and congregational representatives to stand around it.
- There are options about who can hold the baby during the baptism- the pastor, the parents or the sponsors.
- Baptizing an infant before the sermon can lessen the anxiety of parents trying to keep their child quiet during worship. The baptismal liturgy can also come after the sermon.
- For infant baptisms, a parent or sponsor must be a member of a Christian church.
- Sponsors vs. Godparents: functionally they are the same and there is no legal implications of either.

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Other Baptism Theological Resources

Want to learn more about the United Methodist understanding of baptism? The resources below are provided by Discipleship Ministries.

[By Water and the Spirit: Making Connections for Identity and Ministry](#)

By Water and the Spirit is the official document outlining United Methodist beliefs on baptism.

[The Meaning of Baptism in the United Methodist Church](#)

This recent, free book from Mark Stamm provides a clear, easy to read description of baptism in the United Methodist Church.

[This is Your Baptismal Liturgy](#)

This document outlines the baptismal liturgy, what it means, and where it came from.

[Services of Baptismal Covenant](#)

These are the services approved by General Conference.