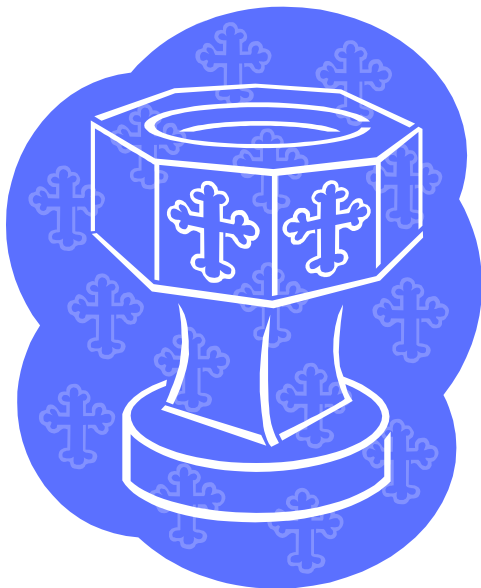


Infant Baptism at Christ Church



**Information for Parents &
Sponsors**

The Baptism of Infants in the United Methodist Church



Few practices of the Church are as misunderstood as Infant Baptism. Some view the Sacrament as nothing more than an act of infant dedication, while

others see it as providing an automatic right of entry into heaven. Neither of these positions is consistent with the United Methodist understanding of the Sacrament. In 1996, the General Conference of adopted an official statement on Baptism entitled, *By Water and the Spirit*.^{*} This statement addresses the denomination's view of the sacrament:

We respect the sincerity of parents who choose not to have their infants baptized, but we acknowledge that these views do not coincide with the Wesleyan understanding of the nature of the sacrament. The United Methodist

^{*} The complete text of *By Water and the Spirit* is available online at <http://www.gbod.org/worship/images/water&spirit.pdf> . It is the United Methodist denomination's official statement on baptism.

Church does not accept either the idea that only believer's baptism is valid or the notion that the baptism of infants magically imparts salvation apart from active personal faith...

Consider these words from the introduction to the services of the baptismal covenant in *The United Methodist Book of Worship*.[†]

Baptism is an act that looks back with gratitude on what God's grace has already accomplished, it is here and now an act of God's grace, and it looks forward to what God's grace will accomplish in the future. While baptism signifies the whole working of God's grace, much that it signifies, from the washing away of sin to the pouring out of the Holy Spirit, will need to happen during the course of a lifetime. If an act of personal Christian commitment has taken place, baptism celebrates that act and the grace of God that has made it possible. If such an act has not yet taken place, baptism anticipates that act, declares its necessity, and celebrates God's grace that will make it possible... (pp. 81-82)

[†] The United Methodist Book of Worship (Nashville: United Methodist Publishing House, 1992) contains the denomination's official worship resources.

The United Methodist understanding of baptism is thus both sacramental (that is, we believe it is God who is at work in baptism) and evangelical (we recognize that God's activity requires a personal response). Baptism is not an end, but a beginning. It is not a human achievement, but a gift of divine grace.

Questions on Infant Baptism at Christ Church



Who is an appropriate candidate for infant baptism?

[W]e are not to practice indiscriminate baptism. Children and others who have not reached the developmental stage of making decisions for themselves are presented by parents and/or sponsors (godparents) who make the same profession of faith that a candidate would make and who promise to nurture the candidate(s), in their family and in the church family, so that they will come to accept God's grace for themselves, to profess their faith openly, and to lead a Christian life... Parents or sponsors (godparents) should be members of Christ's holy Church...[‡]

Active church members who intend to raise their children in Christ Church may present infants for baptism. Families planning to raise their children in other churches or other communities should seek to have their children baptized in those settings, since the baptismal covenant within the United Methodist tradition

[‡] *The United Methodist Book of Worship*, p. 82.

involves a congregational pledge to nurture the child in faith.

By Water and the Spirit notes,

The United Methodist Book of Worship contains "An Order of Thanksgiving for the Birth or Adoption of a Child" (pages 585-87), which may be recommended in situations where baptism is inappropriate, but parents wish to take responsibility publicly for the growth of the child in faith. It should be made clear that this rite is in no way equivalent to or a substitute for baptism. Neither is it an act of infant dedication.

What vows do parents and sponsors take at the baptism of an infant?

Parents and/or sponsors affirm the vows of baptism themselves and promise to nurture the child in the Church and in the faith.

1. On behalf of the whole church, I ask you: Do you renounce the spiritual forces of wickedness, reject the evil powers of this world, and repent of your sin? **I do.**

2. Do you accept the freedom and power God gives you to resist evil, in

justice, and oppression in whatever forms they present themselves? **I do.**

3. Do you confess Jesus Christ as your Savior, put your whole trust in his grace, and promise to serve him as your Lord, in union with the church which Christ has opened to people of all ages, nations, and races? **I do.**

4. Will you nurture this child in Christ's holy church, that by your teaching and example this child may be guided to accept God's grace for himself, to profess his faith openly, and to lead a Christian life? **We do.**

What vows does the congregation take when an infant is baptized?

The congregation takes vows to nurture and care for the baptized infant in the Christian faith. As a part of the baptismal service, the congregation promises:

With God's help we will proclaim the good news and live according to the example of Christ. We will surround this child with a community of love and forgiveness, that she may grow in her service to others. We will pray for her, that she may be a true disciple who walks in the way that leads to life.

Because the service of baptism involves a promise on the part of the congregation to nurture the child in the faith, it is essential that those who present a child for baptism intend to raise that child within Christ Church.

I am not comfortable with infant baptism. Can I have my infant dedicated?

Infant dedication is not practiced at Christ Church. Upon ordination, United Methodist ministers pledge to accept the order, liturgy, doctrine, and discipline of the United Methodist Church, which does not make provision for the dedication of infants.

The church does, however, have an approved "Order of Thanksgiving for the Birth or Adoption of a Child." This service is neither a substitute for baptism nor an act of dedication, but a joyful celebration of God's gift of a child.

What do I do if I want to have my child baptized?

Speak with Pastor Chris! There are specific days in the Christian year when baptisms are particularly appropriate, and other worship considerations will need to be taken into account as well.