

BAPTISM INFORMATION AND POLICY

FIRST CONGREGATIONAL CHURCH OF HADLEY

We gladly offer the sign and seal of God's grace in the waters of baptism, both to children whose parents are on the journey of Christian faith and discipleship and to adults of any age who are coming to that journey for the first time.

What does Baptism signify? The sacrament of baptism is an outward and visible sign of God's grace. Through baptism a person is joined with the universal church. 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 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. In the United Church of Christ, the mode of baptism is a matter of choice. Some traditions use sprinkling, some pouring, and some immersion.

Who is baptized? In the United Church of Christ infants, children, teenagers, or adults can be baptized. What is required is the desire to respond to God's saving love, shown in Jesus Christ, and acceptance of the covenantal nature of baptism—either on the part of the person, or of responsible adults.

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." It is a well-accepted practice, however, for people to renew their baptismal vows in a service of baptismal renewal.

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 Sunday 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.

Are sponsors present? Our church promises to sponsor all who are baptized here. However, parents, in consultation with the pastor, may choose sponsors or godparents for their infants and young children. Other 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, may make promises identical to the promises of the parents concerning their role.

What baptism is not. Baptism is not a civil or legal necessity. Unlike a wedding, it has no significance outside the church, though a Certificate of Baptism may serve as legal identification in some cases. In the United Church of Christ, baptism is not insurance against damnation. Instead, it signifies the wonderful things God has done, not the terrible things God might do. Nor is baptism merely some “right thing to do” for a child. Its significance is made specific in the promises that are part of the ceremony.

Who performs the baptism? The pastor is responsible, as representative of the Universal Church. The pastor prepares persons to be in covenant, and administers the sacrament. The pastor operates within the context of theological integrity, the traditions of the UCC and the varying situations of families. The pastor may refuse the sacrament if it seems unlikely the baptismal covenant will not be honored. Another minister may officiate or co-officiate, by invitation of the pastor. Clergy related to the baptized person are warmly welcomed. Discuss such wishes with the pastor. It is customary for a deacon to participate in the ceremony. Other participants are possible at the discretion of the pastor.

Other concerns. Parents concerned that infants have no choice about being baptized should know that young people take responsibility for their own covenant with the church through the process of “confirmation,” when they reach their teens.

Scheduling a baptism. Scheduling is largely at the convenience of the person or parents and the pastor’s calendar. Scheduling should be done at least a month in advance, except in emergency circumstances. While baptism by immersion is neither necessary nor usual in the UCC, requests for it will be considered. Please contact the Rev. Thomas Hawkins at revthomashawkins@gmail.com to discuss your intentions.

Donation. Because baptism is one of the holy sacraments of the church there is no fee. If you feel moved to make a donation to the church, please make a check out to the First Congregational Church of Hadley.

Photography. Photographs and videos may be taken, with discretion.

Accessibility. The FCCH is a handicap accessible facility. The sanctuary, on the second floor, is accessible by an elevator. The first floor and the bathrooms are accessible by a ramp at the rear of the church.

Dedication. Families wishing a dedication rather than baptism may discuss this with the pastor.

I (we) have read and agree to the above policy.

Signature: _____ Signature: _____

Date: _____ Date & time of baptism: _____