

Baptism at UCB

Although we do not have an official position on Baptism other than what is found in our Statement of Faith, our leaders teach from the position on Baptism found in the Heidelberg Catechism, a foundational document of the Protestant Reformation. Our elders are evaluated theologically using this document (along with the Apostles and Nicene Creed) and agree with what it says about the significance of baptism, although there are varying opinions represented on our elder board as to whether only believers should be baptized or if infants of believers should also be baptized. (The Heidelberg Catechism is *for* infant baptism.)

The Heidelberg Catechism says this:

Q. 66 What are the sacraments [Baptism and the Lord's Supper]?

A. The sacraments are holy, visible signs and seals.

They were instituted by God
so that by their use
he might the more fully declare and seal to us
the promise of the gospel.

And this is the promise:
that God graciously grants us
forgiveness of sins and everlasting life
because of the one sacrifice of Christ
accomplished on the cross

Q. 69 How does holy baptism
signify and seal to you
that the one sacrifice of Christ on the cross
benefits you?

A. In this way:
Christ instituted this outward washing
and with it gave the promise that,
as surely as water washes away
the dirt from the body,
so certainly his blood and Spirit
wash away the impurity of my soul,
that is, all my sins.

Because United Church attendees come from many different religious backgrounds, we honor a multitude of theological opinions regarding the sacrament. Specifically, we honor infant baptism as well as believer's baptism. We also baptize by way of immersion, pouring or sprinkling, depending on the desire and conscience of the one being baptized or of the parents (in the case of infant baptism.) We do not believe that baptism saves a person from their sins. To understand why, keep reading:

In the study book *The Promised One, Seeing Jesus in Genesis*, author Nancy Guthrie summarizes differing views on baptism this way: “Many faithful churches see a connection between Old Testament circumcision and New Testament covenant sign of baptism, and therefore, just as infants were circumcised in OT times as a sign of God’s promise to save, infants are baptized in the NT church as an act of faith in the promises of God.” (178)

Guthrie continues, “Likewise, many faithful churches do not connect Old Testament circumcision and New Testament baptism in the same way, pointing out that infants are nowhere specifically mentioned in the New Testament as being baptized. These churches hold to believer’s baptism in which those who come to faith in Christ are baptized as a sign of new life in Christ, identifying with Christ’s death and resurrection, and marking one as wholly belonging to Christ. Those who hold to believer’s baptism see it as a spiritual circumcision of the heart, signifying regeneration, faith and union with Christ. In this view, baptism functions first as a statement or sign of the *fulfillment of that promise* in the life of one who has personally trusted Christ. By immersion, believer’s baptism pictures one’s union with Christ’s death and resurrection in cleansing of sin and newness of life.” (179)

Both views agree that baptism is a sign and seal of the new covenant we have in Christ, inaugurated by his death and resurrection from the dead. It is a symbol of spiritual regeneration, cleansing and repentance from sin. (179)

Therefore, at United Church we will baptize infants, children and new converts to Christianity, not as a saving work in itself, but as the covenantal sign of God’s promises to save His people **or** as a sign of regeneration and repentance in faith in Christ’s power to save the individual. ***We do not believe that baptism is a saving work in itself***, for the scriptures clearly state, “for it is by grace that you have been saved through faith, and that not of yourself; it is the gift of God, not of works- so that no one may boast.” [Ephesians 2:8] Additionally, we honor the historical traditions of immersion, sprinkling or pouring, depending on the informed decision of the person being baptized or of their parents, in the case of infant baptism. We also acknowledge the validity of infant baptism in a Christian church (including the Roman Catholic church) as a valid administration of the covenant of baptism, but will honor a new convert’s desire to be baptized again if he/she so desires after receiving pastoral council on the subject.

We would encourage you to deepen your understanding on the Biblical basis of baptism by searching the scriptures. Particularly, Acts 2:38; 22:16, Eph. 5:26, Colossians 2:12, Titus 3:5-7; and Heb. 10:22, as well as the Old Testament account of the covenant enacted through circumcision between God and the household of Abraham in Genesis 17.