

Learn more about it . . .

For more information about baptism in The United Methodist Church, speak to a United Methodist pastor or:

- Read “By Water and the Spirit: A United Methodist Understanding of Baptism,” the report on baptism adopted by The United Methodist Church’s highest legislative body, the General Conference. The report is available for download at <http://www.gbod.org/worship>. Click on the “Sacraments” link, then on the report title.
- Go to <http://www.umc.org> or <http://www.gbod.org/worship> and enter the word *Baptism* in the search window.
- Read *Baptism: Christ’s Act in the Church* by Laurence Hull Stookey (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1982), available at 1-800-672-1789, <http://www.cokesbury.com>, or at your local Cokesbury store.

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Baptism
and
United Methodists



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Baptism is a sacrament.

The word *sacrament* comes from a Latin word for *vow* or *promise* and a Greek word for *mystery*. Sacraments are ritual practices that connect us to the mystery of God's love and grace and call us to respond in faith. While there are many ways of opening to the love and grace of God, United Methodists recognize two rituals as sacraments: baptism and Holy Communion. These are the only two practices that Jesus specifically commands in the Gospels (see Matthew 28:19-20; Luke 22:14-21). Baptism is our welcome to the family of Christ; Holy Communion sustains and nourishes us on our journey of faith.

What happens when we are baptized?

In baptism, we acknowledge and celebrate the grace of God, freely offered to us before we were even aware of it. We confess our sin, accept membership in the family of Christ, and vow to trust in and serve Jesus Christ as our Lord. Baptism is the outward and visible sign of our covenant (holy agreement) with God to accept God's gifts of freedom and power and to grow in faith through the constant efforts of the Holy Spirit and the lifelong practice of prayer, study, service, witness, and worship. In The United Methodist Church, baptism is a communal celebration; the congregation vows to nurture and support those being baptized—adults or infants. These United Methodist services are called Baptismal Covenants in recognition of the sacred nature of our holy agreements with God, as individuals and as a community of faith.

Why and how is water used at baptism?

Water cleanses and purifies. It is necessary for all life. The use of water reminds us to be

grateful for all that God has already done for us—in the waters of the Flood and the promise of the rainbow; in the escape of the Israelites from Egypt and their survival in the wilderness; and in Jesus' baptism, life, death, and resurrection—all reminders that we need to be washed and renewed, purified by God's love and by the ongoing work and power of the Holy Spirit.

Sprinkling, pouring, and immersion are all acceptable uses of water for baptism in The United Methodist Church. Whatever method is used, baptism is made in the name of "The Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit"—the Creator, Redeemer, and Sustainer of our life and faith. Then representatives of the community of faith—the pastor and perhaps parents, sponsors, and congregational leaders—lay hands on the baptized person's head and offer this powerful blessing and call to action: "The Holy Spirit work within you, that being born through water and the Spirit, you may be a faithful disciple of Jesus Christ" (from *The United Methodist Hymnal*, copyright 1989 by The United Methodist Publishing House).

At what age should someone be baptized?

In The United Methodist Church, as in many other Christian traditions, baptism may occur at any age. The practice of infant baptism is supported by biblical authority (see Acts 2:38-39; 16:15, 33). We enter this world as imperfect beings in need of salvation (that is, we need to be freed from our imperfection by God's love and power). When infants are presented for baptism, parents, sponsors, and the entire community of faith pledge to surround the children with Christian nurture and teaching as the children prepare to profess and confirm their faith for themselves (often as young teens in a service called *confirmation*). Young people and adults who have never been baptized and who wish to join the family of faith and The United Methodist Church may

profess their faith, receive instruction in the beliefs and traditions of The United Methodist Church, and be baptized into membership.

How do christening and dedication compare with baptism?

The term *christening* has sometimes been understood as a ritual for naming a child, but it is the same service as baptism. While the child's name is spoken in the Baptismal Covenant service, the focus is on the work and power of God's love. A service of *dedication* is the action a family takes on behalf of a child. It is not practiced in The United Methodist Church. *Baptism* is a celebration and acknowledgment of the loving action God has already taken and continues to take on behalf of all creation.

Can I (or should I) be re-baptized?

Baptism is recognition of God's gracious love already at work in our lives. God's grace endures, and God's promises are never broken. The United Methodist Church recognizes the baptism of most other Christian traditions.

We sometimes fail to keep our promises to God and need to renew the commitment made at our baptism. The United Methodist Church offers opportunities for reaffirmation of baptismal vows at significant crossroads of individual lives and the life of the church. These may include confirmation, entry into membership in a United Methodist congregation, marriages, funerals, celebration of the baptism of Jesus, Easter, and Pentecost. At these services, we renew our vows of love and service and are encouraged to remember our baptism and be thankful.