



Celebration of Baptism

Westmoreland Congregational United Church of Christ
Bethesda, Maryland

Foundational Understanding of Baptism

In accordance with the teaching of Jesus and with the practice prevailing among Christians, the United Church of Christ recognizes two sacraments: Baptism and Communion.

—from the Preamble to the Constitution of the United Church of Christ

"Repent and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ...."

—from the Acts of the Apostles, Chapter 2, verse 38

"For in Christ Jesus you are all children of God through faith. As many of you as were baptized into Christ Jesus have clothed yourself with Christ. There is no longer Jew or Greek, there is no longer slave or free, there is no longer male and female; for all of you are one in Christ Jesus."

—from the Apostle Paul's Letter to the Galatians, Chapter 3, verses 26-28

"It shall be our aim to bring joy to little children, instruction and high ideals to youth, inspiration to men and women in the midst of life, and comfort to those in life's later years; and to labor together for the betterment of humankind. Our fellowship shall not be dependent upon identity of theological opinion, or of outward circumstance, or of denominational name, but shall grow from a common loyalty to Jesus; a common passion to serve the world; and a common purpose to do justly, to love kindness, and to walk humbly with God. Our ideal is a church of the open mind, the warm heart, the aspiring soul, and the social vision, which ever seeks to express, in all the ways of life, the mind and spirit of Jesus.

—from the Westmoreland Declaration of Purpose, guiding words adopted in the early 1900s



What does baptism signify?

A sacrament is an outward sign or symbol of the grace of God. Through baptism a person is joined with the universal church, the body of Christ, the community of God's grace. Baptism reminds us of 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 is both practical and mysterious. We baptize with water and with the Holy Spirit as 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 a prominent symbol of cleansing and life in the Bible—the water of creation, the great flood, the liberation of the tribe of Israel from oppression through the sea, the water of Mary's womb, the baptism of Jesus in the Jordan River, the woman at the well, and Jesus' washing of the feet of the disciples.



Water is also used in the rituals of other religions—the *mikvah* in Judaism, the *wudu* in Islam, the ritual washing in the Ganges in Hinduism; water is used in Buddhist funeral rituals and in Native American new moon ceremonies.

Water connects us to creation, to our religious tradition, and to each other. Water is vital for life. That is why water is visibly present in the service.

In the United Church of Christ, the mode of baptism is a matter of choice. Some traditions use sprinkling, some pouring, and some immersion. At Westmoreland we tend to use sprinkling—a small amount of water placed on the forehead in the sign of a cross.

Who is baptized in the UCC?

Infants, children, youth, and adults may be baptized.

For infants and children, as well as for youth and adults who have never been baptized before, baptism marks their acceptance into the care of Christ's church, the sign and seal of God's grace and forgiveness, and the beginning of their Christian faith and life lived in community.

At Westmoreland, baptism is a congregational celebration. The waters of baptism are open to all, but we strongly encourage families and candidates for baptism to be active members or participants in the life of the church. The Westmoreland sanctuary is a lovely room and the congregation is a welcoming group—both of which may make for fleeting photographic and emotional settings; however, baptism is more meaningful for candidates and families who intend to be an active participants in the life of the community.

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. (The UCC Book of Worship includes a service for the Order for Renewal of Baptism in the UCC Book of Worship).

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 corporate 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.

When should a person be baptized?

Baptism may take place at any worship service where the community is gathered. In the early Christian church, the season of Lent was used as a time of preparation of candidates, and candidates were baptized together at the Vigil of Easter (the pre-dawn service on Easter morning). Some local churches still perform baptisms at this service, or on Pentecost Sunday, and also baptize throughout the year. Some churches choose not to celebrate baptisms during the seasons of Advent or Lent. At Westmoreland, we gladly celebrate baptism at any corporate worship service during the year.

Are sponsors (or Godparents) present?

Parents, in consultation with the pastor, may choose sponsors or Godparents for infants and young children who are to be baptized. Other candidates (youth and adults) for baptism may also be given the 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 words are used?

At Westmoreland we typically use words that are adapted from The Book of Worship of the United Church of Christ. The Book of Worship, in keeping with the UCC's ecumenical commitments, encourages the use of language recognized in most Christian churches: "I baptize you in the name of the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit." At Westmoreland we tend to use the phrase, "I baptize you in the name of the Creator, the Christ, and the Holy Spirit," as a way of expressing broader, more inclusive understanding of God.



Families or a baptismal candidate may have prayers, readings, hymns or other traditions that are meaningful. Family members, sponsors or Godparents for infants and young children and other candidates (youth and adults) may talk to the pastor about including those in the service.

Traditional Order of Service for an Infant or Child at Westmoreland

Adapted from the UCC Book of Worship

CELEBRATION OF BAPTISM OF [Child's Name, Child of Parent's(s) Name(s)]

Introduction and Presentation of the Child and Family

Scripture Reading: Mark 10:13-16

Affirmations of the Family (Parents, Sponsors, Perhaps Other Family Members)

One: Do you desire [CHILD NAME] to be baptized into the faith and family of Jesus Christ?

Parents: We do.

One: Will you, in time, encourage [CHILD NAME] to discover the freedom of new life in Christ and to know Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior, Friend and Companion?

Parents: We will, with the help of God.

One: Will you, by word and example, demonstrate to [CHILD NAME] your faith by doing your best to love God and to love other people, to follow in the ways of Jesus, to resist oppression and evil, to seek grace, justice, and peace in the world?

Parents: We will, with the help of God.

One: Will you, as best you are able, seek to grow with [CHILD NAME] in the Christian faith and to be a faithful member of the church of Jesus Christ, celebrating the presence of Christ and furthering the mission of Christ in the world?

Parents: We will, with the help of God.

Congregational Assent

One: Do you, who witness and celebrate this sacrament, promise your love, support, and care to [CHILD NAME], about to be baptized, as he/she lives and grows in the Christ-Life?

All: We promise our love, support, and care.

Act of Baptism

The pastor or celebrant makes the sign of a cross with water on the child's head.

Prayer of Dedication

The pastor or other person offers a prayer of blessing and dedication for the child and family.

Presentation of Baptismal Certificate

For a youth or teenager who is choosing to be baptized, the Affirmations of the Family (above) are re-phrased as affirmations of the candidate.

It is the custom at Westmoreland to celebrate baptism during the Time for Children so that younger Westmorelanders may gather around to experience the joy of the baptismal moment.



Optional Order of Service for Baptism at Westmoreland

This baptismal liturgy offers broader, more inclusive language.

CELEBRATION OF BAPTISM

Introduction and Presentation of the Child and Family

Affirmations of the Congregation

One: Do you dedicate yourselves to [Child's Name]?

Congregation: We are prepared. We dedicate our minds and hearts to this child and to her/his parent/s.

One: Will you strive to love and cherish them in times of struggle as well as gladness?

Parents: We will love and cherish them always.

One: We acknowledge the Divine Spark within each child.

Parents: May we be worthy guardians of this young life. May we build a community and world in which he/she will grow old surrounded by beauty, embraced by love, and cradled in arms of peace.

From the writing of Robert Eller-Isaacs

Affirmations of the Parents

One: Your children are not your children. They are the sons and daughters of Life's longing for itself.

Parents: May we love this child into the fullness of Life.

One: They come through you but not from you,
And though they are with you yet they belong not to you.

Parents: May we cherish all that s/he bring to our lives and to the world.

One: You may give them your love but not your thoughts,
For they have their own thoughts.
You may house their bodies but not their souls,
For their souls dwell in the house of tomorrow,
which you cannot visit, not even in your dreams.

Parents: We promise to nurture his/her mind, his/her body and his/her soul.

One: You may strive to be like them,
but seek not to make them like you.
For life goes not backward nor carries with yesterday.

Parents: We will strive to live with grace and forgiveness, with patience and with hope.

One: You are the bows from which your children
as living arrows are sent forth.
The Archer sees the mark upon the path of the infinite,
and bends you with might that the arrows may go swift and far.

Parents: We pray that our bending in the Archer's hand be for gladness.

adapted from Kahlil Gibran "The Prophet"

Congregational Blessing

One: Hail the day on which this child, ____, was born.

All: Rejoice! Let us all sing and praise the parents who share this child with us!

One: Greet this day with joy!

All: Our hearts our glad.

Adapted from the Masai people

Act of Baptism

Prayer of Dedication



Celebration of Baptism

Information Sheet for Baptism of a Child

Date of Baptism _____ Officiant: _____

Name of Child _____

Nickname of Child _____

(What child is to be called? For instance, Marisol Guierrez-Smith may go by Mari.)

Birthdate of Child: _____

City & State of Birthplace: _____

Parent(s) Name(s): _____

Address _____

Phone Number(s) _____

Names that parents are called: _____

(For instance, Angela Smith and Peter Parker Guierrez III may go by Angie and Trip.)

Names of Siblings: _____

Scripture Suggestions

Typically, Mark 10:13-16 is used in baptisms at Westmoreland. If you have another scripture that you would like to include in the baptismal service, please explain in a few words why that scripture is important to you and why it would be fitting for this service

Hymn Suggestions

Typically the hymns and other music for a service at Westmoreland are picked by the Music Director to create a consistent theme through the entire service. If you have hymn suggestions for the service, please describe in a few words why that music is important to you and would be fitting for a baptismal service.

Why do you want your child to be baptized at Westmoreland?

Your answer will not be used in the service or made public in any way. And your reasons may be far longer than the space here allows. However, baptism is an important spiritual experience that deserves serious thought. Please use the space below to offer your thoughts on why you are choosing this baptismal experience for your child.

Please complete this form and return it to the church office.

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Westmoreland Congregational United Church of Christ

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*If you would like to have a child baptized
or if you are a teenager or adult who has never been baptized and would like to talk about being baptized,
please contact our minister.*