

# *Baptism 101: Frequently Asked Questions about Baptism at Hancock UCC*

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## **To Begin**

Along with communion, baptism is one of two sacraments celebrated at Hancock. Sacraments are regarded as gifts to us from God in order to reveal God's love for us. Baptism is a "visible sign of an invisible reality," namely the gracious love of God that makes everyone welcome in the beloved community. Baptism is also understood as a sign that God's forgiving love is of primary importance: it is more powerful than any human failing.

Put simply, baptism accomplishes two things:

- It reveals that God's forgiving love is available to all;
- It marks the beginning of a person's Christian journey.

Who is it for? It is for you, and for your children, if you desire it.

## **Some Frequently Asked Questions**

**If I am baptized at Hancock UCC, does it "count" in other churches or traditions?**

All Christian churches and denominations are coming to appreciate what the Apostle Paul wrote to the Ephesians (4:4-5):

*There is one body, and one Spirit... one Lord, one faith, one baptism, one God...*

All churches are growing in our understanding that to be baptized in the name of Christ is acceptable to all of us, regardless of the denomination in which it takes place.

If you are baptized at Hancock UCC, your baptism will be regarded as sufficient in every Protestant and Roman Catholic Church. And any one baptized in any other Christian tradition is recognized as baptized here at Hancock UCC.

**Do I have to be a member of Hancock to be baptized myself or to have my children baptized?**

The quick answer is no; church membership is not a prerequisite. Adults who have been baptized elsewhere can become members at Hancock by reaffirming their baptism, and adults not previously baptized can become members of Hancock by being baptized here. But parents who are not members can ask to have their children baptized here.

That's the short answer. The longer one is built around an important truth: that baptism is never only an individual event. Baptism is the beginning of a person's Christian faith life, and that life is inherently communal. Baptism is always meaningful for the individual, but it is essential for the community also, a reminder to us of God's gracious love. What's more, we don't believe that you can be a Christian by yourself: it takes a village of sisters and brothers, too. Because we believe that baptism is the beginning of your Christian journey because it brings you into the community, we often ask parents who are seeking baptism for their children to have become participants in the life of Hancock. You don't have to be a member, but we do ask you to be a participant. As will be seen below, at baptism the congregation will offer their promise to love and support and teach you and your children, but we can't do that if you're not participating with us. We want

you to become a part of the community, at your own pace, because we can't keep our promises to you if you aren't here. Membership isn't required, but participation is.

**What about Godparents? What are they? Do we have to name them?**

The tradition of Godparents is centuries old, and reflects the "it takes a village" understanding of raising children within the Christian faith. Godparents traditionally promise to raise the children in the faith, even if parents fail to do so.

At Hancock and in the United Church of Christ Godparents are typically called Sponsors. Sometimes parents choose sponsors, other times not. It is wholly a matter of parental choice. We welcome them if you choose to have them, but do not require them. If you choose to designate Sponsors, if possible they attend the baptism and make the same promises as the parents.

**What promises are made at the waters of baptism?**

If a person is 14 years or older, he or she makes their own promises, being old enough to decide whether or not the Christian faith is right for them. When children younger than 14 are baptized, promises are made not by the child, but by the parents and sponsors. Though there are minor differences in phrasing, the essence of the promises are the same in either case. Here they are, addressing parents and sponsors.

Leader: (Parents) , do you desire to have your child live and grow in the covenant of Jesus Christ?

**Parents: We do.**

Leader: Will you guide (name) to learn the wisdom of the prophets; doing justice, loving mercy, and walking humbly with your God?

**Parents and Godparents: We will, with the help of God.**

Leader: Will you encourage him/her to have an appreciation for the life and teachings of Jesus in concert with an appreciation for diverse religious traditions?

**Parents and Godparents: We will, with the help of God.**

Leader: Will you encourage (name) to honor the faith questions that arise through out him/her life?

**Parents and Godparents: We will, with the help of God.**

Leader: (to congregation) Jesus calls us to make disciples of others, and to offer them the gift of grace in baptism. On behalf of the Christian church in every place, do you who witness and celebrate this sacrament promise your love, support and care to (name) as he/she lives and grows in faith?

**People: We promise our love, support and care.**

You can see that the promises made are largely to be living examples and teachers of the faith to your children. You do not need to be perfect in them; the congregation agrees to help. You are invited to make them even if you are still learning what they mean. Faith is a journey, not a destination; it is always a work in progress. Nor are the promises of both parents required; one is sufficient. However, we generally do not recommend baptism if it provokes disunity in the family. Adults and children will be welcome to participate at Hancock even if baptism has not been chosen.

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