

BAPTISM

1. WHAT IS BAPTISM?

Baptism is an outward sign of our new life in Christ. Through this sacrament we are initiated into Christ's holy Church, incorporated into God's mighty acts of salvation, and given new birth through water and the Spirit. Baptism is the free gift of God's grace. In Baptism God claims us as a citizen.

2. WHY DO WE BAPTIZE?

We Baptize in response to God's grace to all God's children, and in response to the command of Christ.

3. WHO MAY ADMINISTER BAPTISM?

Normally only ordained elders may administer the sacrament of Baptism, (deacons and local pastors may administer the sacrament within the charge to which they are appointed). However, in usual circumstances other baptized Christians may administer Baptism.

4. WHO IS A CANDIDATE FOR BAPTISM?

Any one who desires to be initiated into the Christian faith is a candidate for Baptism. This includes infants and small children whose parents, guardians, or sponsors desire them to be initiated into the Christian faith and life. It is desired that one or more parents be members of a Christian church or that sponsors who are members will assume the baptismal vows to rear the child in conformity to the Word of God and in the fellowship of the church.

5. WHY DO SOME DENOMINATIONS PRACTICE ONLY "BELIEVERS" BAPTISM?

Some Denominations require an explicit confession of faith on the part of the person seeking baptism, and generally consider baptism a symbol of conversion and full church membership.

6. SHOULD BAPTISM BE REPEATED?

No. Since baptism is understood as an act of God, its repetition would call into question God's faithfulness and promise when the sacrament was first administered. Persons who request "re-baptism" should be encouraged, rather, to renew their baptismal covenant in a service of worship.

7. HOW IS BAPTISM ADMINISTERED?

United Methodist administer baptism in one of three historic ways: by sprinkling, by pouring or by immersion. The choice is the individual's.

8. WHAT IS "CHRISTENING"?

To "christen" is to name; thus christening is only that segment of the baptismal service when the individual (usually an infant) is named publicly. There has never been a service of "christening" in the Methodist tradition, which did not include baptism. "Christening" is usually folk language for baptism.

9. MAY BAPTISM BE ADMINISTERED PRIVATELY?

In normal circumstances, baptism should be administered in the presence of the worshiping congregation. However, in unusual and extraordinary circumstances the sacrament may be administered privately. In those instances, some representatives of the congregation should be present, if possible, and public announcement made to the congregation at the earliest opportunity.

10. WHAT IS THE PASTOR'S RESPONSIBILITY IN COUNSELING/TEACHING ABOUT BAPTISM?

The pastor is personally responsible for teaching, counseling, and instructing candidates for baptism.

HOLY COMMUNION/ THE LORD'S SUPPER

1. WHAT IS COMMUNION/ THE LORD'S SUPPER?

Holy Communion, or the Lord's Supper, is the nurturing sacrament of the church. In response to the command of Christ at the Last Supper, "Do this in remembrance of me," the church has celebrated this sacrament. It has historically and traditionally been the central act of Christian worship.

2. WHY DO WE CELEBRATE THE LORD'S SUPPER?

The church celebrates the Lord's Supper as an act of thanksgiving for all the saving acts of God, especially the life, death, and resurrection and ascension of Christ and in anticipation of Christ's coming in final victory.

3. WHO MAY ADMINISTER THE LORD'S SUPPER?

Only ordained ministers (elders) may administer the sacrament under ordinary circumstances. However, deacons and local pastors may administer the sacrament in the charge to which they are appointed only. The ordained minister must preside at the celebration (pray the Great Thanksgiving/Prayer of Consecration, break the bread, and bless the cup); lay persons may assist in the distribution of the elements to the people.

4. WHAT ARE THE ELEMENTS USED IN COMMUNION?

Bread and wine are the scriptural and traditional elements used in the Holy Communion. Most congregations use common bread. "The pure, unfermented juice of the grape shall be used."

5. HOW MAY THE ELEMENTS BE ADMINISTERED TO THE PEOPLE?

Traditional United Methodist practice is to deliver the elements into the hands of the people as they kneel at the chancel; but the elements may also be given to the people as they stand at the chancel or while seated in the pew. (Handicapped persons and others unable to kneel or stand should be served in the pew.) Persons who administer the elements are encouraged to make the act of giving as personal as possible, by touching the hands of the receiver and calling the person's name.

An ancient method of administering both elements together is called "intinction," and may be used. In this administration, the persons may commune by intinction kneeling at the chancel or standing. The method may be used to serve the people as they pass serving stations in procession, also.

6. WHO MAY RECEIVE COMMUNION?

All baptized and professing Christians may receive communion. However, Methodists have never practiced "closed communion" and generally administer the sacrament to all who came to be served.

7. MAY COMMUNION BE ADMINISTERED PRIVATELY?

Communion may be administered privately to persons who are sick, confined to their homes, in jails, prisons, etc. Pastors are encouraged to administer the sacraments regularly and frequently to these sick and confined members of the congregation, and when possible ask some members of the congregation to accompany them to the homes of such persons.

The private service of communion in a public service is, however, forbidden. All persons present in a public service shall be invited to receive the communion at weddings, funerals, baptisms, ordinations, etc.

MINISTERIAL GARB AND VESTMENTS (From Office of the Bishop)

1. WHAT IS A STOLE?

A stole is a long, narrow band worn around the neck and shoulders and falling in front. It is a symbol of ordination worn by clergy while officiating in a service, sometimes thought to signify the yoke of Christ, and also representing the shepherding role of the minister. Its color corresponds to the colors of the church year and is usually adorned with some symbol of the faith. The yoke, which is worn by members of the choir, is sometimes mistakenly referred to as a "stole".

2. WHO MAY WEAR A STOLE? WHY?

Only ELDERS and DEACONS IN FULL CONNECTION may wear the Stole, a sign of ordination. (Elder's stole is yoked at neck and hangs straight down from shoulders; Full Deacon's stole is worn over left shoulder and fastened under the right arm.) PM/Deacon 92 Discipline on elder track or PM Deacon on Deacon in Full Connection track and local pastors may not wear stoles. Diaconal ministers may wear a stole when engaged in the leadership of worship.

3. WHAT IS A CLERGY COLLAR?

A clergy collar is a stiff white collar worn by clergy persons as a universal and accepted mark of ministerial office. In recent years, the collar has been attached to shirts; but traditionally it has been attached to a Rabat.

4. WHO MAY WEAR A CLERGY COLLAR/SHIRT?

Only ordained ministers should wear clergy collars/shirts, as it generally is associated with the ministerial offices. However, since the collar is not actually a vestment, it may be worn by local pastors while engaged in acts of ministry in those settings where identification is important, such as in a hospital or institutional ministry. Black is the traditional color for clergy rabats (vests) and shirts, although a variety of colors are now offered. Traditionally bishops only wear the color purple.

5. WHAT IS A VESTMENT?

Vestments, worn by persons in the leadership of worship, are designed to stress the office/function of leaders and not the person of the leader. Since Old Testament times vestments have been worn by persons leading worship. Clergy, choir, acolytes, crucifers, servers, lay readers, organist, directors, etc may wear appropriate vestments.

6. WHAT TYPES OF VESTMENTS MAY BE WORN BY CLERGY IN THE LEADERSHIP OF WORSHIP?

The most common vestment worn by clergy in the Protestant church is a garment patterned after the academic gown. It is generally black, but is also available in white gray, navy, etc.

The alb (a long white vestment), one of the oldest and most basic church vestments, is rapidly becoming an accepted ecumenical vestment for all clergy.

A few United Methodist clergy wear a cassock (a long fitted robe, usually black) and surplice (an over garment of white) in the leadership of worship.

Some clergy, especially in England, wears bands, attached to the clergy collar, in the pulpit. They are small white tabs worn in the front of the neck. The chasuble (a poncho-like outer garment worn over an alb) is worn by some clergy in the celebration of The Lord's Supper. It should not be worn except when the communion is celebrated. The color of the chasuble should correspond to the season of the church year and may be adorned with symbols or orphrey bandings.

All of the above vestments (academic gown, alb, cassock and surplice, and chasuble) may be worn by clergy with stoles and clergy collars in the leadership of worship. Non-ordained persons may wear the basic academic robe or alb, but without a stole.

7. WHAT TYPES OF VESTMENTS MAY BE WORN BY LAY PERSONS IN THE LEADERSHIP OF WORSHIP?

Gowns and robes, patterned after academic garb, may be worn by any person in the leadership of worship: choir, acolytes, crucifers, servers, lay readers, organists, directors, etc.

Albs and cassock and surplice may be worn by lay persons leading worship.

Stoles, clergy collars, bands and chasuble should only be worn by ordained clergy persons.

