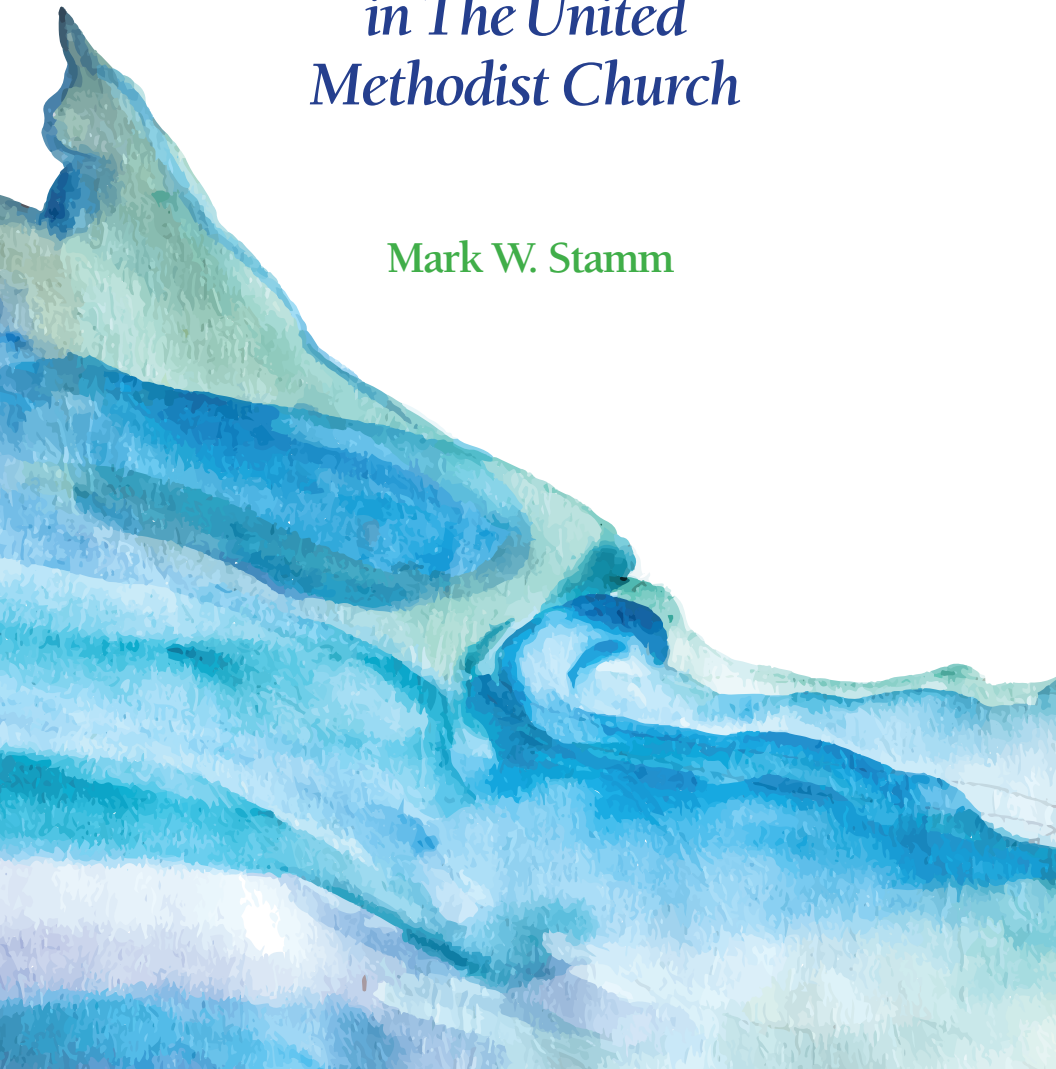


THE MEANING OF  
*Baptism*

*in The United  
Methodist Church*

Mark W. Stamm



THE  
MEANING OF  
BAPTISM

*in*

*The United Methodist Church*

By Mark W. Stamm



---

## TABLE OF CONTENTS

---

Introduction.....	4
Baptism: Some Biblical Roots .....	7
Baptism: The Way of Salvation & The Missional Trajectory .....	11
Stepping into the Living Water: On the Ritual Practice of Baptism.....	14
Making your List: Preparation for the Baptismal Service with an Eye toward the Formative Goal .....	15
Forming Sacramental Imagination: On the Ritual Use of the Water.....	18
Whose Baptism Is It? On the Various Roles in the Service.....	21
What Comes Next? Clues from History and our Rubrics.....	25
Frequently Asked Questions About a United Methodist Practice of Baptism.....	27
For Further Reading.....	36



---

## INTRODUCTION

---

How do we understand what United Methodists are doing in baptism? The introduction to “The Baptismal Covenant I” points the way. The pastor or deacon says,

*Brothers and sisters in Christ:  
Through the Sacrament of Baptism  
we are initiated into Christ’s Holy Church  
We are incorporated into God’s mighty acts of salvation  
and given new birth through water and the Spirit.  
All this is God’s gift, offered to us without price.<sup>1</sup>*

Through baptism, we are born anew by the free gift of God and placed within this family called church. As with most families, we inherit a narrative, in this case God’s mighty acts narrated in scripture. The narrative we inherit is not only one of the past, but one into which we are now invited, and the Spirit empowers us to embody it in our own lives, here and now. Through baptism, we become part of that unfolding narrative of God’s grace.

---

1 *The United Methodist Book of Worship* (Nashville: The United Methodist Publishing House, 1992), 87.  
(For changes to the ritual mandated by the 2008 General Conference, see “New Membership Vows and Ritual (Revised and Corrected)” [www.umcdiscipleship.org/worship/membership-christian-initiation/new-membership-vows-and-ritual-revised-and-corrected](http://www.umcdiscipleship.org/worship/membership-christian-initiation/new-membership-vows-and-ritual-revised-and-corrected) Accessed August 15, 2016.)

Although we say, “all of this is God’s gift” that does not mean there is nothing left for us to do, nothing expected of us. One of the greatest gifts we can offer to those we love is the opportunity to do something significant, and perhaps even more, the opportunity to accompany us on such tasks. So it is with God. With that in mind, in the baptismal covenant the church gives us three questions to help us grow in a lifetime of discipleship.

*On behalf of the whole Church, I ask you:  
Do you renounce the spiritual forces of wickedness,  
reject the evil powers of this world,  
and repent of your sin?<sup>2</sup>*

*Do you accept the freedom and power God gives you  
to resist evil, injustice, and oppression  
in whatever forms they present themselves?<sup>3</sup>*

*Do you confess Jesus Christ as your Savior,  
put your whole trust in his grace,  
and promise to serve him as your Lord,  
in union with the Church, which Christ has opened  
to people of all ages, nations, and races?<sup>4</sup>*

To each question, baptismal candidates and/or their sponsors respond, “I do.” Our response is not merely for that service on that day. It is a first response to a lifetime of cooperating with God’s saving and sanctifying grace. That is why we return to these questions at confirmation, at congregational or individual reaffirmations of the baptismal covenant, and, as *The Book of Discipline* mandates, each time a person unites with the church by profession of faith, including those who transfer their membership from other denominations.<sup>5</sup>

---

2 UMBOW, 88.

3 Ibid.

4 Ibid.

5 *The Book of Discipline of The United Methodist Church*, 2016 (Nashville: The United Methodist Publishing House, 2016), paragraph 217, page 157 and paragraph 225, p. 160.

As we engage these vows over time, we should ask more specific questions like, “Where do we see evil and injustice manifested, even within our community, and how do we resist it?” Evil often comes subtly, not dressed in a red suit and carrying a pitchfork. We should keep asking, “What does confessing Jesus Christ as Savior and serving him as Lord look like in our local context?,” and “How can I ‘accept the freedom and power God gives’ better than I do now?” Again, these questions can shape a lifetime of discernment and faithful discipleship. I have discussed these baptismal vows and some of their implications in a companion booklet within this series, *Our Membership Vows in The United Methodist Church*, and I commend it to you.<sup>6</sup>

---

6 Mark W. Stamm, *Our Membership Vows in The United Methodist Church* (Nashville, Tennessee: Discipleship Resources, 2014). Available for download at <http://www.umcdiscipleship.org/resources/our-membership-vows-in-the-united-methodist-church> Accessed June 13, 2016.



---

## BAPTISM: SOME BIBLICAL ROOTS

---

The first Christian baptisms took place on the Day of Pentecost. The disciples “were all together in one place” awaiting “the promise of the Father” (Acts 1:4, 2:1). That promise was fulfilled when the Spirit was poured out upon them that day. Filled with the Spirit, the disciples proclaimed the Gospel in many languages, so all those present “(heard) them speaking about God’s mighty deeds of power” (2:11). This manifestation both amazed and perplexed those who heard and saw it, to the point that some thought that the disciples were drunk. Not that, insisted Peter. Rather, the God of Israel was at work in their midst, the same God who had acted in the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ. “Therefore,” he said, “let the entire house of Israel know with certainty that God has made him both Lord and Messiah, this Jesus whom you crucified” (Acts. 2:36, NRSV). Troubled by this word, Peter’s listeners asked, “Brothers, what should we do?” and he responded by calling them to baptism (Acts 2:37-38). Specifically, he told them,

*Repent, and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ so that your sins may be forgiven; and you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit. For the promise is for you, for your children, and for all who are far away, everyone whom the Lord our God calls to him.*  
(Acts 2:38-39, NRSV)



In Peter's call to baptism at Pentecost, we see a pattern of basic actions common to the other accounts of baptism throughout the book of Acts.<sup>7</sup>

First is the call to repent. Translated from the Greek verb *metanoein*, it means to change one's mindset, one's consciousness. It's more than feeling remorse or even changing one's ideas. It means to make a turn from one way of life to another. One might describe it as a 180-degree turn away from sin, evil, and all that diminishes life and toward the reign of God.

Second comes the water bath for the forgiveness of sins (Acts 2:38). While we have no way of knowing exactly how the water was administered, our word baptize is directly borrowed (transliterated) from the Greek *baptizo*, which means, literally, to dip or to plunge.<sup>8</sup> At the least, the word suggests generous use of water. Another ancient source, *The Didache*, called for baptism to be done in cold "living water," that is, flowing water, although if that were not available, other uses of water were permitted. Even in that late first or early second century context, it appears that a variety of modes was acceptable.<sup>9</sup>

Third was the promise that those baptized would "receive the gift of the Holy Spirit." That promise was made not only to those present, but also to their children and to "all who are far away, everyone whom the Lord our God calls to him" (Acts 2:38b-39). As we read further in Acts, sometimes the Spirit was given prior to baptism (e.g., Acts 10:44-48), sometimes following it (e.g., Acts 19: 1-7). Given the freedom of the Spirit, there is no absolute order here. Let it suffice to say that baptism places one in the community where the Holy Spirit dwells richly.

---

7 See also Acts 8:26-40, 9:10-19, 10:1-48, 16:11-15, and 16:25-34.

8 Arndt, William F. and F. Wilbur Gingrich, *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature*. (Chicago and London: The University of Chicago Press, 1957, 1979), 131.

9 The Teaching of the Twelve Apostles, Commonly Called The Didache," Cyril C. Richardson, translator and editor, *Early Christian Fathers* (New York: Collier Books, 1970), 7:1-4, p. 174.

What shall we make of this promise to the children? It is the language of covenant. In Hebraic understanding, a promise made to a family leader always applies to the children as well (see Genesis 12: 1-3, 17:1-14). We have here the foundations of a theology that would not only allow for the baptism of children, but might actually expect it. This was not a new theology, but rather one that the people of the covenant had known and practiced since Abraham. While there is no *direct* New Testament witness to the baptism of children, similar covenantal assumptions are witnessed in the household baptisms, in which conversion of the head of household led to the baptism of all those in the house, which could have included infants and small children (Acts 16:11-15, 25-34). Some Christian groups disagree with the line of interpretation that I am describing here, but significant early third century witnesses suggest that the baptism of children was occurring well before that time,<sup>10</sup> meaning that at least some early Christians came to a similar conclusion. However, there is simply no definitive way to prove or disprove that some (or many) first century Christians presented their children for baptism.

As for those of us who continue to build on the witness of the apostles and first Christians (Ephesians 2:20), matters of sacramental practice—such as whether or not we baptize children—are properly discerned within churches, and the various branches of the church have come to differing conclusions. To be clear, however, individual pastors or congregations do not decide such questions. Denominations do that. As for our branch of the church, United Methodists have maintained our practice of baptizing infants, children, and others who cannot answer for themselves and have benefitted from it in ways we can only begin to understand.

Within The United Methodist Church, as well as for ecumenical conversations, it may help us to consider that *all* persons who

---

10 Ibid., *The Apostolic Tradition*, 112. See references to the baptism of “the small children.”

See also *Tertullian’s Homily on Baptism*, Ernest Evans, translator and editor (London: SPCK, 1964), 18, pp. 37 and 39. Tertullian opposed the baptism of children, but his opposition proves existence of the practice.

emerge from the font—whether fifty days old or fifty years old, are babes in Christ, newborn Christians in need of the community’s support and nurture (see John 3:1-7, etc.). Conversely, our Anabaptist and Baptist sisters and brothers help remind us that mature discipleship is the goal of all baptismal practice. (We agree with them on that goal. If you wish to explore our practice of baptizing children more fully see *Baptism, Understanding God’s Gift* by L. Edward and Sara Webb Phillips.<sup>11</sup>)

The conclusion of the Pentecost story is dramatic: “And that day about three thousand persons were added” (Acts 2:41, NRSV). When I recount this story to my students, I often pause here and facetiously say, “And then they all went home and said, ‘what a wonderful and transforming religious experience that was!’” When they’re paying attention, they protest, saying, “That’s not what happened at all,” and they are correct. Those first Christians became a new community, one that “devoted themselves to the apostles’ teaching and fellowship, to the breaking of bread and the prayers” (Acts. 2:42). Theirs was a community in which the work of the Spirit was manifest. They cared for one another, sharing their lives on multiple levels, and that sharing overflowed, drawing others into their fellowship. The remainder of Acts provides the continued narrative of that overflow and by the grace of God received in baptism, we continue writing new chapters. One finds here a missional dynamic that we will explore in the next section.

---

11 L. Edward Phillips and Sara Webb Phillips, *Baptism, Understanding God’s Gift*. (Nashville, Tennessee: Discipleship Resources, 2011)



---

## BAPTISM: THE WAY OF SALVATION & THE MISSIONAL TRAJECTORY

---

Methodists have long discussed baptism in terms of what we and other Christians call the *ordo salutis*, or “order of salvation.” The roots of a strong linkage between baptism and salvation are found in the passage that we’ve just reviewed, in which Peter addressed those who sought baptism with these words, “Save yourselves from this corrupt generation” (Acts 2:40). Thus from the beginning Christians have believed that baptism is an integral part of how God saves us.

Wesleyans have described the *ordo salutis* as God’s grace working to save us in three ways. One is “prevenient grace,” the grace that draws us toward God and is often at work in us long before we’re aware of it. The second is “justifying grace,” God’s work in which we come into right relationship with God, experiencing the forgiveness of sins and release from guilt. The third is “sanctifying grace,” God’s work in which we are made holy, that is drawn ever more deeply into the love of God, neighbor, and all creation. Some speak of baptism of children as a sacramental embodiment primarily or even only of prevenient grace. Even here, though, Wesleyan theology calls us to see baptism also as the initiatory work of justifying grace (cleansing us from sin) and with it the first flowerings of sanctifying grace. Thus, we do well to see the work of God’s saving grace not merely as a straight line from prevenient grace to justifying grace

to sanctification, but as something more circular and dynamic. Although I have been a professing Christian for many years, God continues drawing me into an ever-deeper fellowship with God and commitment to God's mission and continues to convict me of sin and offer reconciliation and forgiveness. Both prevenient and sanctifying grace, all present at baptism in varying ways, continue their work even among mature Christians

So as United Methodists consider the relationship between baptism and salvation, our theological heritage does not lead us to talk about baptism primarily as a demarcation of "who gets to go to heaven when they die." John Wesley begins his sermon, "The Scripture Way of Salvation" with these words:

*And, first, let us inquire, What is salvation? The salvation which is here spoken of is not what is frequently understood by that word, the going to heaven, eternal happiness. It is not the soul's going to paradise, termed by our Lord, "Abraham's bosom." It is not a blessing which lies on the other side death; or, as we usually speak, in the other world. The very words of the text itself put this beyond all question: "Ye are saved." It is not something at a distance: it is a present thing; a blessing which, through the free mercy of God, ye are now in possession of. Nay, the words may be rendered, and that with equal propriety, "Ye have been saved": so that the salvation which is here spoken of might be extended to the entire work of God, from the first dawning of grace in the soul, till it is consummated in glory.<sup>12</sup>*

God's work of salvation, says Wesley, is about all God does to save us, starting with and primarily in this life. Baptism, according to Wesley, is the "ordinary instrument of our justification."<sup>13</sup> The term "ordinary" means "regular" or "normal," or "most usual." It means for us that baptism is where justification begins for most of us, and that it is a

---

12 John Wesley, "The Scripture Way of Salvation" <http://www.umcmission.org/Find-Resources/John-Wesley-Sermons/Sermon-43-The-Scripture-Way-of-Salvation>. Accessed August 24, 2016.

13 John Wesley, "On Baptism," in *John Wesley*, edited by Albert C. Outler (New York: Oxford University Press, 1964), II.1, p. 321. Emphasis added.

sure and certain means of beginning God's justifying (and so sanctifying) work in us. It does not rule out that God *may* begin such work in us by other means.

The way Wesley and the Wesleyan tradition understand all of this is that baptism is the ordinary means by which God empowers us to participate in God's own life and God's mission, both in us and through us, here and now. Acts 2 already points to this, as does our claim that through baptism, "We are incorporated into God's mighty acts of salvation."<sup>14</sup> Baptism starts us on this path of becoming part of what God is doing in the world.

Starting with their baptism, the baptized begin to move ever more deeply into sanctifying grace in community with the church where we are called and empowered to resist evil and do no harm.<sup>15</sup> Word and Sacrament enable us to serve Christ as Lord, doing all the good that we can.<sup>16</sup> We take up the baptismal calling of the church to intercede for the world, and to continue to live more deeply into the mind of Christ. In the lifelong pilgrimage with the church begun in baptism, we discover again and again that our purpose in life is deeply tied up with giving ourselves in service to others. In baptism, we step into the flow of living water, and in it we experience, now, already, a foretaste of heaven.

---

14 *UMBOW*, 87.

15 "The General Rules of the Methodist Church," *The Book of Discipline of The United Methodist Church*, 2016 (Nashville: The United Methodist Publishing House, 2016), paragraph 104, pp. 78-79.

16 *Ibid.*, p. 79.



---

## STEPPING INTO THE LIVING WATER: ON THE RITUAL PRACTICE OF BAPTISM

---

Jesus told a Samaritan woman he could offer her “living water.” He said, “those who drink of the water that I will give them will never be thirsty” (John. 4:13). When we receive this living water, says Jesus, our deepest needs are satisfied. More than that, initiated into the flow of living water, we become part of God’s blessing to the world, participants in that “spring of water gushing up to eternal life” (John 4:14). Becoming a part of that gracious flow satisfies many of our deepest longings, for God created us to “give ourselves for others.”<sup>17</sup> Self-giving is at the heart of the life of the Trinity into which we are baptized. We are at once most deeply human and closest to God when we give ourselves in love.

How do we work with God to form persons in this way of life, and more to the immediate point, how do we embody these values in and around the baptismal font itself?

We start by making a list.

---

17 See the prayer after communion, “A Service of Word and Table I,” *UMBOW*, 39.

## *Making your List: Preparation for the Baptismal Service with an Eye toward the Formative Goal*

Good liturgical leaders must attend to both the details of a rite as well as the goal toward which it points us.<sup>18</sup> The goal of all Christian practice is love of God and neighbor.<sup>19</sup> The goal of baptism is initiation into the love and saving work of the Triune God made known to us in Jesus. The baptismal ritual has many moving parts. To lead it with the love it seeks to embody, good leaders make lists. We may not all agree that lists are cool, but we need them.

As a liturgist, and occasional baseball scholar<sup>20</sup>, I think lists are really cool—perhaps not as cool as Opening Day at the ballpark, but cool nonetheless. Opening Day would quickly turn chaotic without many checklists: Have the parking attendants, ushers, and first aid staff been properly trained? Have adequate supplies of peanuts, hot dogs, and programs been stocked? In like manner, the joy would be lost without a deeper sense of why one might care about Opening Day in the first place; but I digress (perhaps).

Here's my list of what we need for baptism:

- One or more candidates, a baptizing minister, and an assembly of believers.<sup>21</sup>
- A sponsor or sponsors.<sup>22</sup>
- Someone from the congregation to present the candidates.<sup>23</sup>
- A place to gather...including a font (or “living water” source) along with a place for the congregation to gather in relation to the font. One needs to think about sight lines, so that the assembly may better participate.

---

18 See Romans 10:4.

19 See John Wesley, “The Means of Grace,” *The Works of John Wesley*, Volume I, edited by Albert Outler (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1984), I.2 (p. 378), II.2 (p. 381).

20 I am a member of the North American Academy of Liturgy and the Society for American Baseball Research.

21 “Service of the Baptismal Covenant,” paragraphs 1 & 2, *UMBOW*, p. 87

22 *Ibid.*, paragraphs 5 & 7, 88

23 *Ibid.*, paragraph 2, 87



- Water, ideally plenty of it. We may also want vessels for the pouring of water (for pouring water into the font and/or over the candidate).<sup>24</sup>
- An established baptismal rite or agreed ritual form<sup>25</sup>—for United Methodists, one of the Services of the Baptismal Covenant<sup>26</sup>—so that when the ritual is completed, it is clear that a Christian baptism has occurred.

In addition, we *may* want/need

- Various assisting ministers such as deacons, musicians, and acolytes.
- Oil for anointing our newly baptized sister or brother, and a proper vessel for conveying it.<sup>27</sup>
- Towels, because some people are going to get wet, at least the candidate and the baptizing minister.
- Something to cover the floor around the font, so that those charged with caring for the church facilities won't have to worry about damage that could ensue from the generous use of water.
- Candles, certificates, and other appropriate tokens for presentation to the newly baptized and/or their sponsors. (For example, in one of the local churches that I served as pastor, the United Methodist Women's group made blankets to give to the parents of newly baptized children).<sup>28</sup>

In addition to preparations about the details of the baptismal rite itself, our Church requires instruction prior to baptism.<sup>29</sup> The pre-baptismal preparation process is more than the imparting of

24 Ibid., paragraph 10, 90-91.

25 As I argue to my students from free-church backgrounds, even their churches have established ritual forms, although the required rubrics may not be written in a book. In those cases, one may not discover where those boundaries lie until one has transgressed them.

26 *Discipline*, 2016, paragraph 1113.3. "The ritual of the Church is that contained in *The United Methodist Hymnal* (1989), *The United Methodist Book of Worship* (1992), *Mil Voces Para Celebrar: Himnario Metodista* (1996), and *Come Let Us Worship: The Korean-English United Methodist Hymnal* (2000)."

27 "Service of the Baptismal Covenant," paragraph 11a, 91

28 Ibid., paragraph 11c & d, *UMBOW*, 91

29 *Discipline*, 2016, paragraph 226.1

doctrinal statements, and more than rehearsal for the service. Pre-baptismal formation should also include discussion with sponsors about each of the baptismal vows and how they point us toward the graced and disciplined life toward which God calls the baptized community. It should also include prayers with the candidates and sponsors in the meetings for preparation, and prayers by the congregation in worship during the time of preparation in support of that aspiration. We do all of this that we may cooperate with God's grace and not impede the Spirit's work. Such expectations and aspirations do not add works to grace. Rather, the formative disciplines are themselves an expression of God's grace, part of what God is doing in and through the baptizing community. We believe grace is a mystery. It ultimately lies beyond our comprehension. We also believe grace takes an embodied shape. For us, that shape is described in the baptismal vows and in the General Rules which point us toward a life of avoiding harm, doing all the good that we can, and attending on the means of grace.<sup>30</sup>

---

30 "The General Rules of the Methodist Church," Discipline 2016, para. 104, pp. 77-80.



---

## FORMING SACRAMENTAL IMAGINATION: ON THE RITUAL USE OF THE WATER

---

On the day of a baptism, the church gathers and calls forth the candidates and their sponsors. The church examines them according to the baptismal questions noted earlier. Sponsors and candidates proclaim the Apostles Creed along with the congregation. Then follows the Thanksgiving over the Water and the administration of baptism.<sup>31</sup> When the church gathers for baptism, and does that baptism, with water, led by an authorized minister “in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit,”<sup>32</sup> we have offered baptism that will be recognized by other United Methodists and by the vast majority of Christians throughout the world. So then, when I urge generous use of water,<sup>33</sup> be assured that I have not become a Baptist. Indeed, our Catholic siblings now regularly build immersion fonts for their worship spaces, indeed are encouraged to do so for any new worship space construction. In like manner, I am not suggesting that Methodists become Catholics. When I advocate for

---

31 UMBOW, 87-91.

32 United Methodist official ritual does not authorize use of any other baptism formula.

33 See the discussion in my book *Sacraments and Discipleship, Understanding Baptism and the Lord's Supper in a United Methodist Context* (Ashland, TN: OSL Publications, 2013, originally published by Discipleship Resources in 2001), 63-66.

generous use of water in baptism, I am seeking to help form a deeper sacramental imagination among United Methodists.

To that end, consider making each baptism look more like an actual bath, and not as if we're *afraid* someone will become wet. As to the font, let it be as large as possible, even to a size that would allow for baptism by immersion. At that size, one can also use it for baptisms administered by pouring, and one can stand in it for the baptism of a child. At a minimum, your font should have a bowl large enough to accommodate a bath for a three month-old child. It should be considerably bigger than the candy dish or finger bowl sized fonts<sup>34</sup> that one sometimes sees. Why so? Consider that most of us don't use finger bowls very often, but we do bathe regularly. When the baptisms that we celebrate look more like a bath, then our daily bathing can remind us of God's gracious work that began in baptism and continues to this day.

Consider pouring the water in a manner visible to the congregation, and without musical accompaniment, so people can hear the water at play.<sup>35</sup> Take your time with this. Give all the time they need to reflect. If some of the water splashes onto the floor (remember, we've covered it), that can be good as well, reminding us that we can't control the Holy Spirit. Seeing and hearing the water at play can shape a sacramental imagination, to the point that all water reminds us of God's gracious activity in the world.

In Perkins Chapel at Southern Methodist University, our font includes a brass bowl that sounds like rain on the rooftop when water is poured into it. That sound connects me to some important memories.

The first parsonage my wife and I lived in had a cistern for its water source. We discovered this fact on the day my parents helped us move in. Not familiar with cisterns, I asked my mother, "So, what does this mean?" Before that day, a mere three months beyond my twenty-

---

34 As to the finger bowl description, I am indebted to L. Edward Phillips' discussion in *Baptism in The United Methodist Church, A Companion DVD to "By Water and the Spirit."* (Nashville, Tennessee: United Methodist Communications, 2007).

35 *UMBOW*, paragraph 10, 90.

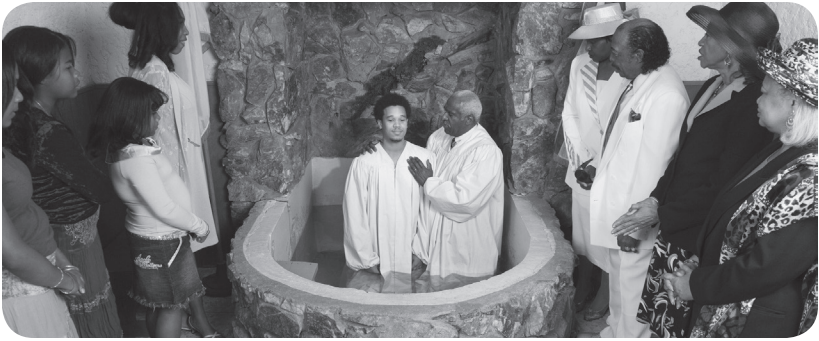
second birthday, I was like most Americans who have lived in towns and cities all of their lives. I presumed that when one turned the faucet, water simply emerged as if from a bottomless source. Hearing my question, my mother responded, “Having a cistern means, dear, that if it doesn’t rain, then you don’t have water.”

I learned that day what much of the world already knew about the relationship between rainfall and the water that we expect to use. I have learned it anew by living in north Texas, where increasing urban populations and historic drought cycles can shrink our reservoirs in frightening ways. Given those experiences, I usually find the sound of rain on the roof a deeply satisfying one, because it reminds me of God’s gracious provision, of the grace expressed in and around the baptismal font. I find myself annoyed when I hear television meteorologists and others refer to rain as “bad weather,” because usually it’s not. That’s not to dismiss the times when too much rain leads to flooding, but even flooding can be a significant reminder of God’s judgment (Genesis 6-9, Exodus 14-15), of the fact that nature, like the Spirit, is wild and ultimately beyond our control. The best we can do with nature is to discern its ways and try to cooperate—in conservation, in flood control, in all of life.

Generous use of water at the baptismal font can shape our imagination over time, doing its artwork on us much as it does on the rocks of caves and canyons. It fulfills the intent of this classic petition from *The Book of Common Prayer*: “Open, O Lord, the eyes of all people to behold thy gracious hand in all thy works, that, rejoicing in thy whole creation, they may honor thee with their substance, and be faithful stewards of thy bounty.”<sup>36</sup>

---

36 *The Book of Common Prayer* (New York: The Church Hymnal Corporation, 1979), 329.



---

## WHOSE BAPTISM IS IT? ON THE VARIOUS ROLES IN THE SERVICE

---

We betray a misunderstanding when we discuss sacraments as if they were solely the work of ordained ministers and pastors. Make no mistake, in our tradition, pastors preside at (not “over”) the sacraments. “Preside” implies other participants. “Preside at” indicates the role of the pastor is to help the whole gathered assembly do its work well. As presider, the pastor examines the candidates, leads the prayer over the water, and administers the water along with the baptismal formula.<sup>37</sup> In each of these actions, the congregation also has responses to make. The congregation is also examined and responds with a pledge of its support for the candidates. The congregation joins the candidates and sponsors to confess the Christian faith in the words of the Apostles Creed. The congregation responds within the prayer over the water at several points and offers an “Amen” at the close of the prayer. The congregation offers another Amen after the pastor speaks the baptismal formula.<sup>38</sup> So the congregation as a whole is very active in the baptismal rite.

And there is more. The Service of the Baptismal Covenant mentions several roles beyond that of the pastor. We’ve discussed some of these earlier, but will do so here in greater detail. Specifically,

---

37 *UMBOW*, paragraphs 4, 10-11, 88, 90-91.

38 *UMBOW*, paragraph 11, 91

- “A representative of the congregation presents the candidates...”<sup>39</sup>  
In the best practice, the presenter will be someone who knows the candidate (and/or the sponsors) and has helped them on their faith journey. Here we see a trajectory from the baptismal covenant that extends beyond the baptismal service itself.
- Sponsors for the candidates, both for those who cannot speak for themselves, primarily children, and for those who can do so.<sup>40</sup> These, also, should be persons who know the candidate and who support him/her on his/her faith journey.
- A deacon may lead at the introduction (¶1), in calling for the church to confess its faith (¶9), and pour the water into the font for the baptism (¶10).

Other roles are not specifically enumerated within the rite, but may be inferred. For example,

- A deacon could function as “master of ceremonies” around the font, coordinating all of the various other people and actions that need to take place there so the presiding minister can focus exclusively on leading the prayers and ritual actions of baptism.
- A cantor/song leader could lead the sung responses within the Thanksgiving Over the Water.<sup>41</sup> He/she could lead other congregational song used within the service, perhaps as persons approach the font or to celebrate a baptism just completed. Examples include “Take Me to the Water,”<sup>42</sup> “Water, River, Spirit, Grace,”<sup>43</sup> “Alleluia,”<sup>44</sup> “This is the Spirit’s Entry Now,”<sup>45</sup> and “You Have Put on Christ,”<sup>46</sup> to name but several possibilities.

---

39 UMBOW, paragraph 3, 87

40 UMBOW, paragraphs 5 & 7, 88

41 “Baptismal Covenant Musical Responses,” *The United Methodist Hymnal* (Nashville, Tennessee: The United Methodist Publishing House, 1989), 53-54.

42 African American spiritual, *Worship and Song* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 2011), 3165.

43 Thomas H. Troeger (1987), *The Faith We Sing* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 2000), 2253

44 Jerry Sinclair (1972), *UMH*, 186.

45 Thomas E. Herbranson (1972), *UMH*, 608.

46 ICCEL (1969), *UMH*, 609.

- A deacon, an acolyte, or other assisting minister could stand at the font beside the pastor, holding her/his service book so that he/she may have hands free to gesture during the Thanksgiving Over the Water.
- A deacon, an acolyte, or other assisting minister could also bring towels to the newly baptized, and also to the presider, and (if desired) bring anointing oil to the pastor.
- If the church gives new clothing, candles, or other reminders of the baptism to the newly baptized and their sponsors, representatives of the congregation could present these items.

When a local church understands these various roles and inhabits them well, they embody the priesthood of all believers<sup>47</sup> and they are better able to envision what that priesthood looks like in their work beyond the Sunday gathering. Perhaps nothing expresses this dynamic better than the rubric accompanying the pastor's prayer for the Holy Spirit:

*Immediately after the administration of the water, the pastor places hands on the candidate's head and invokes the work of the Holy Spirit. Other persons, including members of the candidate's family, may join the pastor in this action...*<sup>48</sup> (emphasis added)

Imagine fully inhabiting the intent of that rubric. Before speaking the words of the prayer, the pastor could stop and urge the congregation to join in this gesture. Those nearest the font could place a hand on the candidate, on the sponsor(s), or on the pastor. Others could lay a hand on those immediately in front of them, or they could extend a hand in blessing. Having invited all to participate in the prayer, only then would the pastor look directly at the newly baptized and say,

*The Holy Spirit work within you,  
that being born through water and the Spirit,  
you may be a faithful disciple of Jesus Christ.*<sup>49</sup>

---

47 See I Corinthians 12, especially vv. 12-13 and I Peter 2:1-10, especially vv. 9-10.

48 UMBOW, paragraph 11, 91.

49 UMBOW, paragraph 11, 91.



As noted earlier, all present would then say the “Amen.” Such fullness of congregational participation would embody the mutual responsibility that we hold for each of our brothers and sisters in Christ. If this ritual act were practiced over time, its reality might sink deeply into our bones.



---

## WHAT COMES NEXT? CLUES FROM HISTORY AND OUR RUBRICS

---

Meaning is often revealed in context, and such is the case with baptism—that which follows it helps us understand what it means and where it can lead us. The laying on of hands with prayer, described above, is a gesture with deep biblical roots, long used to commission persons for a life of ministry (e.g., Numbers 27:18, Deuteronomy 34:9, Acts 9:17, I Timothy 4:14).<sup>50</sup> While we are accustomed to seeing it at services of ordination, it has an equally deep history in services of baptism and confirmation. United Methodist ritual, of course, posits confirmation as an extension of the Baptismal Covenant.<sup>51</sup> We may also do the laying on of hands at weddings,<sup>52</sup> and at services for commitment to various types of Christian service.<sup>53</sup> Whenever it occurs, the laying on of hands points us toward our mission, “that having been born through water and the Spirit, you may live as a faithful disciple of Jesus Christ.”<sup>54</sup> Christian vocation may take many forms, but one common to all the baptized is the call to pray for the world. As we see in Acts and in other ancient Christian texts, like the second century *First Apology*

---

50 “Laying on of Hands,” *The New Interpreter’s Dictionary of the Bible*, Volume 3 (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 2008), 615.

51 *UMBOW*, paragraph 12, 92.

52 “The Service of Christian Marriage I,” *UMBOW*, 122.

53 “An Order for Commitment to Christian Service,” *UMBOW*, 591.

54 *UMBOW*, paragraph 12c., 92.

of *Justin Martyr*, the first thing persons did after baptism was to join the community for their prayers.<sup>55</sup> Here, “what’s next?” speaks to this calling to intercede for the world with spoken prayers, and just as important, with prayers embodied in the works of our hands and feet.<sup>56</sup>

A second clue about “What’s next?” comes in the final rubric of the services of the baptismal covenant. It says,

*Services of the baptismal covenant most appropriately lead into the celebration of Holy Communion, in which the union of the new members with the body of Christ is most fully expressed. The new members, including children, may bring the bread and wine to the Lord’s table, receive first, and assist in serving.*<sup>57</sup>

Thus Holy Communion relates to baptism, and indeed is the repeatable part of the rites of Christian Initiation. This rubric should not be read as a matter of “who gets to do what...” which would, once again frame the question in terms of one’s personal benefit or power. Again, it is best to read it through a missional lens. As those who commune in and with Jesus Christ, we are called to thanksgiving, and more, to a cruciform life of service. We receive the body and blood of Christ “that we may be for the world the body of Christ, redeemed by his blood.”<sup>58</sup>

So again, baptism saves us, but not in the strictly personalized way that some may have taught or believed. Through the Baptismal Covenant and the community of faith, God draws us beyond preoccupation with our own needs and destiny, and gives us a place in God’s ongoing project of blessing the world and calling it to justice and love. More often than not, we will discover our sense of purpose and direction in life as we engage that mission with one another.

---

55 *The First Apology of Justin Martyr*, in *The Ante-Nicene Fathers, Translations of the Writings of the Fathers down to A.D. 325*, ed. Alexander Roberts and James Donaldson, vol. 1 (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, n.d.) chapter 65, p. 185.

56 For a lengthy discussion of these dynamics, see Mark W. Stamm, *Devoting Ourselves to the Prayers, A Baptismal Theology for the Church’s Intercessory Work* (Nashville, Tennessee: Discipleship Ministries, 2014).

57 “The Baptismal Covenant I,” paragraph 16. <https://www.umcdiscipleship.org/resources/the-baptismal-covenant-i>

58 *UMBOW*, 38



---

## FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS ABOUT A UNITED METHODIST PRACTICE OF BAPTISM

---

- Q. *The United Methodist Book of Discipline* calls us to instruct candidates for baptism and/or their sponsors.<sup>59</sup> How should we understand this requirement?
- A. Granted, it helps when candidates, sponsors, and the various ministers of the rite know when to come forward, where to stand, what to say and do. As with weddings, a rehearsal can be a good idea. Note, however, that in some ancient Christian contexts, the first baptism that a candidate witnessed was her or his own. I'm not advocating a return to that practice, but it suggests a broader definition for "instruct." Within the ancient catechumenate, persons prepared for baptism by deep immersion in scripture and their sponsors mentored them in the practices of Christian discipleship, helping them to receive the Word of God and live in response to it.

I am also not advocating a return to the ancient catechumenate, which could last three years or more.<sup>60</sup> We would, however, do

---

59 *Discipline*, 2016, paragraphs 216.1.a-b, and 226.1

60 Bradshaw, Johnson, and Phillips, *The Apostolic Tradition*, 17:1-2, p. 96.

well to think of instruction as Wesleyans have often done, as something more like a spiritual formation process, and less like a lecture/discussion class. In this model, pre-baptismal instruction would look more like the Methodist class meeting, which was not a class in the way contemporary people often use the term, but was, rather, an apprenticeship in Christian discipleship. Returning to the wedding analogy, note a clear difference between the wedding rehearsal and the pre-marital counseling sessions. The task of pre-marital counseling is to help the couple imagine married life together as a Christian household. In some of the best pre-marital counseling practices, that work is done among a cohort of several couples, with experienced married couples serving as mentors.

Imagine pre-baptismal formation arranged in a similar manner, perhaps during Lent looking to baptism at Easter or during Easter Season. If the congregation were large enough, several groups could be formed, perhaps one for sponsors of infant candidates and perhaps another for youth and/or adult candidates. They could read the scriptures in the light of the classic baptismal questions, for example, “How does this passage name evil, and how, then, do we hear God calling us to resist it?”<sup>61</sup> One can find United Methodist models for such formational work as well as models from sibling denominations.<sup>62</sup> Pastors and deacons would need to oversee such work, but as with Covenant Discipleship groups, the primary leadership would come from committed lay disciples.

---

61 Compare *UMBOW*, paragraph 4, p. 88.

62 See “For Further Reading,” Benedict, Bushofsky *et al.*, and Edie.

Q. *If a person spontaneously responds to a public invitation to discipleship, should we baptize him or her at that time?*

A. While such baptisms may be quite dramatic, I don't think they represent best practice, and that for two primary reasons. The first, given the previous discussion, would seem obvious. Regardless of how we may understand the disciplinary requirement to instruct candidates, a few words hastily whispered between the respondent and the pastor is hardly sufficient. Given the fact that many surface-level Christian assumptions remain prevalent in American society, we can easily forget that receiving baptism involves a significant and deep commitment. To be baptized into the death of Christ (Romans 6: 3-4) requires dying to oneself, perhaps to the extent of martyrdom, and at least to the accepting of the (other) odd and difficult persons whom God welcomes into the church. When we present our children for baptism, we are volunteering them for the same challenging way of life. To borrow more language from classic marriage rites, "It is therefore not to be entered into unadvisedly."<sup>63</sup> At the very least, a private conversation should be held during which these matters may be addressed.

There is a second major concern about baptizing hastily. In the case of a relative stranger standing in the chancel, there is no way to determine whether he/she was previously baptized and no time to discuss why that matters to us. If the person were already baptized, there would be no time to discuss ritual alternatives.

So then, what should we do when persons respond to an invitation to discipleship? We should welcome them with rejoicing and pray for them. We should assign a mentor who will continue the conversation with them, perhaps leading to baptism in the not-too-distant future.

---

63 "A Service of Christian Marriage II, *UMBOW*, 129.

The advisedly/unadvisedly language is deeply rooted in the English prayerbook tradition inherited by United Methodists, dating to *The Book of Common Prayer* (1549). [http://justus.anglican.org/resources/bcp/1549/Marriage\\_1549.htm](http://justus.anglican.org/resources/bcp/1549/Marriage_1549.htm) Accessed June 23, 2016.

Q. *How is confirmation related to baptism? Is it necessary?*

A. The word “confirmation” is a relative late addition to official ritual vocabulary among American Methodists, first appearing in *The Book of Worship for Church and Home* (1964).<sup>64</sup> Although relatively new to United Methodist practice, when preliminary drafts of *By Water and the Spirit* released during the 1988-1992 quadrennium called for its removal, the proposed change met vigorous opposition. Thus, confirmation remains part of our practice, understood as “the first public affirmation of one’s acceptance of the grace in one’s baptism and the acknowledgement of one’s acceptance of that grace by faith.”<sup>65</sup> Confirmation thus becomes the means by which one first becomes a professing member in The United Methodist Church.

Note that we practice confirmation using a close variant of our post-baptismal prayer with the laying on of hands that immediately follows baptism (see earlier discussion). At confirmation, we do the same laying on of hands with this prayer,

*The Holy Spirit work within you,  
that having been born through water and the Spirit,  
you may live as a faithful disciple of Jesus Christ.*<sup>66</sup>

That follows an optional use of water done “symbolically in ways that cannot be interpreted as baptism,” as the pastor says, “Remember your baptism and be thankful.”<sup>67</sup> Thus, confirmation should be understood in relation to baptism, as a strengthening of the foundational gift of baptism.<sup>68</sup> According to our polity, then, in the strictest sense, confirmation is helpful, but necessary only as a basis for professing membership.

---

64 “The Order for Confirmation and Reception into the Church,” *The Book of Worship for Church and Home* (Nashville: The Methodist Publishing House, 1964), 12-14.

65 “By Water and the Spirit: A United Methodist Understanding of Baptism,” *The Book of Resolutions of The United Methodist Church 2016* (Nashville: The United Methodist Publishing House, 2016), 721.

66 *UMBOW*, paragraph 12, 92.

67 *Ibid.*

68 *Resolutions 2016*, 721.

Q. What does it mean to “remember your baptism and be thankful”?

A. As with all of our thinking on the sacraments, we need to move beyond individualized memories. For example, I might remember the snow delay at the Baltimore Orioles’ home opener against the Texas Rangers in early April 1985. That afternoon, the Rangers’ Charlie Hough walked eight and the Orioles’ Eddie Murray hit a game-winning two-run homer in the bottom of the eighth inning. I sat with my father in law and two colleague pastors, including the one who officiated at our wedding and baptized our first child. We wore winter coats, and I thought I might freeze. I remember that day and can reminisce about it. When, however, the church says, “Remember your baptism and be thankful,” we’re not referring to that kind of remembering. For those of us baptized during infancy, it is impossible to remember our baptism in that way.

“Remember your baptism,” then, intends to be language not of reminiscence, but rather of *anamnesis*, as in the Greek word that we translate in the phrase, “Do this in remembrance of me.”<sup>69</sup> That phrase in the gospels and the Great Thanksgiving calls us not to recall an image of the Last Supper, as if we had been there ourselves and could actually do that, but rather to remember all that God has done for us through Christ. We are able to remember this in part because we have heard the scriptures. At the Eucharist, our participation in the prayer we offer and in receiving the gifts of bread and wine make that remembrance effective for us. “Remember your baptism” should be understood in a similar manner, perhaps thinking of it along the lines of, “Remember you are baptized.” In so doing, we remember the larger story of God’s saving acts in history and the larger family into which we have been initiated by water and Spirit. For indeed, God’s gift of the one baptism<sup>70</sup> is offered to the whole world, to the church, and finally, through the church, to us as individuals.

---

69 Luke 22:19 and I Corinthians 11:24-25. See also *UMBOW*, 37-38.

70 Ephesians 4:5 and the phrase from the Nicene Creed, “We acknowledge one baptism for the forgiveness of sins.” *UMH*, 880.



**Q.** *The rubric for reaffirmation of the baptismal covenant says, “Water may be used in ways that cannot be interpreted as baptism.”<sup>71</sup> How does one follow this rubric? What is allowed and what not?*

**A.** This rubric was written to close a backdoor route to rebaptism. Why was that necessary? We should remember that sacraments are sign acts supported and interpreted by words. Both words and actions are important, but action more so. Thus, it’s dishonest, not to mention confusing, to take a person to a swimming pool—or even to the Jordan River—immerse them, and then say (perhaps with an implied wink), “It’s only a reaffirmation, because I said ‘Remember your baptism and be thankful.’” This rubric stands against this practice, essentially saying, “Don’t do a baptism and then call it something else.”

What then, *should* be done? I’ve become convinced that honoring this rubric is primarily a matter of pastoral conscience, practiced alongside commitment to continued learning about the meaning of baptism. Thus, when you and your worship planning team do your review after celebrating reaffirmation of the baptismal covenant, ask yourselves whether you have honestly kept the spirit of the rubric or whether you have essentially conducted a rebaptism, or something close to it, by another name? If you’ve been doing the latter, then stop. In the next section, I’ll discuss why we need to avoid rebaptism.

As for me, when I preside at the corporate reaffirmation of the baptismal covenant, I have decided that I will not directly apply water to individuals. That, for me, is too close to baptism. So, I do various things. In a recent service at Perkins, I played with the water a bit, and then I sprinkled some of it toward the people, not worrying if I hit some and missed others. Then, I stood aside and invited congregants to come and use the water as they saw fit. I suggested that they might touch it, perhaps making the sign of the cross on their own forehead. The point is that they controlled what they did, and after offering the Thanksgiving over the Water, I wasn’t at the center of the ritual action. They were.

---

71 UMBOW, paragraph 12, 92.

Q. Why is rebaptism a problem, even a chargeable offense?<sup>72</sup> Why do we reject it?

A. Our church insists that baptism “(initiates us) into Christ’s holy Church...(incorporating) us into God’s mighty acts of salvation.”<sup>73</sup> Through it, God makes covenant with us, adopting us into the covenant people, a divine action that cannot be revoked. “By Water and the Spirit” insists,

*The claim that baptism is unrepeatable rests on the steadfast faithfulness of God. God’s initiative established the covenant of grace into which we are incorporated in baptism...We may live in neglect or defiance of that covenant, but we cannot destroy God’s love for us.*<sup>74</sup>

The church has long insisted that repentance is necessary for those who neglect the covenant with God, but not rebaptism.<sup>75</sup> God’s promise remains. Much that we do as Christians—our reading of scripture and our preaching, our praying, our hope for a just world and our pursuit of the same, and yes, all sacramental life—rests on faith in the God of covenant, that the God who has acted to save humanity will continue doing so. When Christians rebaptize, we undermine faith in such a trustworthy God.

No coherent ecclesiology allows for rebaptism, although some might object to that claim. For example, in the sixteenth century, Anabaptists (literally “rebaptizers”) made a radical departure from the received practice of baptizing children, thereby earning the scorn of both Catholics and the more moderate reformers including our Anglican forebears. It is unfair, however, to call them “rebaptizers,” for in their understanding of church, the baptism of children was no baptism at all. As we have already

---

72 *Discipline* 2016, paragraph 341.7

73 *UMBOW*, paragraph 1, 87.

74 *Resolutions* 2016, 718-19.

75 *Ibid.* See also Article XII “Of Sin After Justification,” *Discipline* 2016, paragraph 104, p. 68. Note that Methodist Article XII follows Anglican Article XVI “Of Sin After Baptism” word for word, except that in the former “justification” is substituted for “baptism.” *BCP* 1979, 870.

said, such matters are discerned within denominations, and not by individuals within them. United Methodists join the vast majority of the world's Christians when we insist on the validity of all baptisms properly administered with water in the name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. And thus, we should not rebaptize when one baptized as a child has an adult conversion experience, or for any other reason.

As we noted in our discussion of the final rubric, we do well to remember the organic link between baptism and participation in Holy Communion.<sup>76</sup> As it has been since the earliest day of the church, Holy Communion *completes* the rites of Christian Initiation and indeed, it is the repeatable part. Each time we participate in the Great Thanksgiving and receive the body and blood of Christ, we are drawn ever deeper into the grace that we first received in our baptism. Thus, with a robust practice of the Eucharist there should be less temptation to repeat baptism.

*Q. How is baptism related to other rites, like Ordination, the Service of Christian Marriage and the Service of Death and Resurrection?*

*A. Services for the Ordering of Ministry in The United Methodist Church* is the ordinal (ordination rite) of The United Methodist Church. It is used for the ordination of deacons and elders, the commissioning of persons preparing for ordination as deacons and elders, and for the consecration of bishops. Note that these services always begin with a reaffirmation of the Baptismal Covenant and recognition of our common ministry, thus asserting that all ministries, lay and ordained, are rooted in the grace and call of baptism.<sup>77</sup>

---

<sup>76</sup> UMBOW, paragraph 16, 94.

<sup>77</sup> "Services for the Ordering of Ministry in The United Methodist Church, 2013-2016, As Approved and Further Revised in Accordance with Actions of the 2012 General Conference" (Prepared by The General Board of Discipleship, The General Board of Higher Education and Ministry and The General Commission on Christian Unity and Inter-religious Concerns in collaboration with The Council of Bishops," 61.

A similar link is expressed in our service of marriage, in which the couple is charged to declare their intention

*to enter into union with each other  
through the grace of Jesus Christ,  
who calls you into union with himself  
as acknowledged in your baptism.*<sup>78</sup>

Thus, for the Christian couple, marriage is framed as an expression of discipleship rooted in a common baptismal identity.

Nowhere, however, is the link to baptismal identity made clearer than in “The Service of Death and Resurrection.” It begins with these words, spoken while the pall is placed over the coffin:

*Dying, Christ destroyed our death.  
Rising, Christ restored our life.  
Christ will come again in glory.  
As in baptism Name put on Christ,  
so in Christ may Name be clothed with glory...*<sup>79</sup>

The pall—a long, white cloth, often embroidered with a cross—intends to evoke a baptismal garment. So then, vested in baptismal garb, our deceased sister or brother is escorted into church, much as she/he would have been carried by parents or accompanied by sponsors on the day of her/his baptism. The intention is clear to those inclined to perceive it. The grace of God given to us in and through baptism draws us to church in the first place, shapes us for service throughout our lives, and in that same grace the church carries us to the grave, commending us to God “in sure and certain hope of resurrection to eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord.”<sup>80</sup>

---

78 “A Service of Christian Marriage I,” *UMBOW*, 117.

79 “A Service of Death and Resurrection,” *UMBOW*, 141.

80 *UMBOW*, 141.

---

## FOR FURTHER READING

---

Benedict, Daniel T., Jr. *Come to the Waters: Baptism and our Ministry of Welcoming Seekers and Making Disciples*. Nashville: Discipleship Resources, 1996.

Bushofsky, Dennis, Suzanne Burke, and Richard Rouse, editors. *Go Make Disciples, An Invitation to Baptismal Living*. Minneapolis: Augsburg Fortress, 2012.

Edie, Fred P. *Book, Bath, Table, and Time: Christian Worship as Source and Resource for Youth Ministry*. Cleveland: The Pilgrim Press, 2007.

Felton, Gayle Carlton. *This Gift of Water: The Practice and Theology of Baptism Among Methodists in America*. Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1992.

Johnson, Maxwell E. *The Rites of Christian Initiation, Their Evolution and Interpretation*. Collegeville, Minnesota: The Liturgical Press, 1999.

Lathrop, Gordon W. *Holy Things, A Liturgical Theology*. Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1993, 1998.

Stamm, Mark W. *Devoting Ourselves to the Prayers, A Baptismal Theology for the Church's Intercessory Work*. Nashville: Discipleship Ministries, 2014

Stamm, Mark W. *Sacraments and Discipleship, Understanding Baptism and the Lord's Supper in a United Methodist Context*. Nashville: Discipleship Resources, 2001. (Updated edition available from OSL Publications, 2013).

Stookey, Laurence Hull. *Baptism, Christ's Act in the Church*. Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1982.

---

## ABOUT THE AUTHOR

---

Mark W. Stamm earned the degree Doctor of Theology from Boston University and is Professor of Christian Worship at Perkins School of Theology, Southern Methodist University. Dr. Stamm is a United Methodist elder with membership in the North Texas Annual Conference.



**DISCIPLESHIP MINISTRIES**

The United Methodist Church

1908 Grand Avenue  
Nashville, TN 37212  
UMCdiscipleship.org  
877.899.2780

info@UMCdiscipleship.org

COM917