

BAPTISM AND ITS PLACE IN THE CFUH COMMUNITY

Our Governing Document states “We believe that **Water baptism** publicly expresses faith in Jesus and initiation into the community of God’s people.” So what in practice does this mean and how do we practice baptism?

What is baptism?

Water baptism is the primary marker for a person to express their commitment to following Jesus. It signals a change of allegiance in the person’s life, as they no longer seek to live for themselves but instead surrender to the exclusive and life-long claims of Jesus, as Lord.

The symbolism of baptism powerfully communicates what it means to be a follower of Jesus. The action of going under water is symbolic of being washed clean and of dying to one’s old way of life. People can only become followers of Jesus as they allow God to deal with their independence, pride and selfishness. The water in which people are submerged, symbolizes this cleansing process.

The coming out of the water symbolizes the new life the person has been given. They now belong to Christ, energized by the Holy Spirit, dependent on the Father, to live this new life.

(Note: Jesus’ final instructions to his disciples in Matthew 28: 18-20 helped the early church to understand the important role of baptism in disciple-making. Some key passages of Scripture that help us make sense of the meaning of baptism are Romans 6: 1-11 and 1 Peter 3: 21-22.)

Commitment to a group of fellow Jesus-followers

The act of baptism is more than just an individual expressing their allegiance to Jesus Christ. Integral to it is also a communal dimension which involves the person committing themselves to a group of fellow Jesus-followers. In other words, saying “Yes” to Jesus is also saying “Yes” to a group of his followers. The two are intimately connected.

Making baptism a significant occasion

Because of the importance of the change that baptism represents, we believe that it should be celebrated in a way that reflects its significance. We often use the analogy of marriage to illustrate this. Couples getting married usually put enormous energy into making the wedding ceremony an occasion that marks their commitment to each other for life. This often includes:

- Pre-marriage preparation
- Special clothes
- Important symbolism (such as the rings, giving away of the bride etc)
- Specially prepared vows of commitment
- Invitations to all the important people in their lives to share the day with them
- All this culminating in a special meal of celebration

The significance of the change in the couple's life is matched by the effort and attention to making the ceremony memorable and life-changing.

So it should be with baptism.

When should some get baptized?

We encourage young people growing up in the church to wait until they and their adult mentors (parents, other significant role models etc) are satisfied that the decision to follow Jesus is one they have personally fully owned and embraced. While no age is mandated (in recognition of the reality that everyone is different) our experience is that for most this occurs in the young adult phase of life.

We encourage people who have come to faith without familial experience of Christianity, to seek baptism as soon as they are prepared to embrace the exclusive, life-long claims of Jesus on their life, and are able to appreciate baptism's significance and live out this commitment amongst us.

What preparation for baptism is recommended?

Thoroughgoing preparation for baptism is encouraged – generally in the form of a small group or one-on-one preparation series such as *Preparing to Promise*. Ordinarily this should take several weeks and be sufficiently in advance of the baptism date to allow for a careful consideration of the step without the mounting pressure of the day.

Preparation is viewed as much more than just obtaining information and knowledge about baptism. Prayerful and thoughtful discernment of readiness, motives, and potential obstacles to wholeheartedly expressing allegiance to Jesus, are all an important part of the preparation.

Where should baptisms occur?

There's no set place or time that we determine for baptisms to be practiced. For some it may be appropriate to be baptized in a Sunday morning meeting while for others a separate place and time might be best.

Wherever the baptism takes place, it should form the primary reason for gathering together. And it needs to be open to the whole CFUH community (though the celebratory meal afterwards doesn't need to be).

Are there any critical factors in organizing baptisms?

Invitations: All the significant people in a person's life should be invited to the occasion.

Personal stories: One of the most important parts of the ceremony is the person sharing something of their story of how they have come to this point of commitment and what it means for them. Given that we don't encourage a "sermon" in our baptism services, this sharing is particularly important – both for the person and for those gathered. It needs to be well prepared.

Celebratory meal: Baptism is a celebration and so we encourage those getting baptized to arrange an appropriate meal after the ceremony, for them to gather with all the significant people in their life.

Who should undertake the baptisms?

Baptisms are a church family affair and so it is good to involve various people within the family in the preparation, planning and running of the ceremony – particularly those who are most connected with the person getting baptized.

However, because the person getting baptized and the church family are making mutual commitments to each other in living out the vows, baptisms need to be overseen by a church elder/s. This does not mean that the elders have to do the baptizing, but it does require an elder or elders to be involved in the planning and leading of the event.

If I am thinking of taking the step of baptism, what should I do?

Those who are considering getting baptized should contact either the church office or one of the leaders. They will work through with the person the best process of considering and preparing for such a step.