



Acton Congregational Church

A Guide to The Sacraments:

Baptism and Communion

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The Sacraments

“In accordance with the teaching of our Lord and the practice prevailing among evangelical Christians, The United Church of Christ recognizes two sacraments: Baptism and the Lord’s Supper or Holy Communion.”

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

The Acton Congregational Church is a member of the United Church of Christ. We are a Protestant community, which means we observe two central sacraments. They are Baptism and the Eucharist (also called communion or the Lord’s Supper.) These practices are attributed to Jesus in the Gospels. By employing common things of the earth—water, bread, and the fruit of the vine—the sacraments are outward signs of an inward grace which have sustained Christ’s disciples for over two millennia.

Baptism

“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.”

—Galatians 3:26-28

A person is incorporated into the universal church, the body of Christ, through the sacrament of baptism. The water, words, and actions of the sacrament are visible signs that convey the Christian burial and resurrection with Jesus Christ. The invocation of the Holy Spirit upon the water and upon the candidates for baptism is an affirmation that it is God who takes the initiative in the sacrament. Baptism is both God’s act and our human response to that gift. It is a sign and seal of our discipleship. Through baptism, Christians are brought into union with Christ, with each other, and with the church in every time and place.

At Acton Congregational Church, people are typically baptized as children, but our minister also perform adult baptism. Baptism with water and the Holy Spirit is the mark of acceptance into the care of Christ’s church, the sign and seal of participation in God’s

forgiveness, and the beginning of new growth into full Christian faith and life. Young adults and adults are given instruction by our ministers and deacons in preparation for baptism. If children are too young to affirm the promises of baptism, parents or guardians may make them on their behalf. At Acton Congregational Church we ask that at least one parent or guardian be a member of our church, because the baptismal vow includes faithful participation in the local church. (In exceptional circumstances where there is no parent or guardian member to act for the child, our ministers will discuss this with the representative and respond accordingly.) This act of "proxy" on behalf of the child expresses our belief that God's gift of new life is truly a gift; it does not depend upon our understanding or will, but is offered freely even when we do not know how to ask or receive. The congregation promises to join with parents and guardians to form the faith of all children baptized among us. It is our hope and prayer that all baptized children will make a personal profession of faith through **confirmation**.

Baptism is not only a personal celebration in the lives of the individual candidates and their families, but also joy for members and friends of Acton Congregational Church as a representative of the universal church in every time and place. For this reason baptisms take place in the presence of the community of faith gathered in worship. A deacon is also present. There might be exceptional circumstances for baptism outside the sanctuary, in which case our ministers will respond accordingly. We believe that baptism in the name of the Trinity should occur only once in a person's life. Therefore, we affirm the authenticity of other Christian traditions that also baptize in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and hold firm to the promises of Christ.

Holy Communion or the Lord's Supper

"When Jesus was at table with them, he took bread, blessed and broke it, and gave it to them. Then their eyes were opened, and they recognized him."

—Luke 24:30-31

Holy Communion recalls the table fellowship Jesus shared with his disciples, and in particular the Last Supper on the night before his death, as well as his appearances to the disciples during meals following his resurrection. Throughout history these Biblical events have been central to the Church's worship life. In the sacrament of Holy Communion, also called the Lord's Supper or Eucharist (meaning

"thanksgiving"), Christians hear, taste, touch, and receive the grace of God revealed through Jesus Christ in a unique way.

Communion means many things to us. Communion is a joyous act of thanksgiving for all God has done, is doing, and will do for the redeeming of creation. It is a sacred memorial of the crucified and risen Christ, a living and effective sign of Christ's sacrifice in which Christ is truly and rightly present to those who eat and drink. Communion is an earnest prayer for the presence of the Holy Spirit to unite those who partake with the Risen Christ and with each other, and to restore creation, making all things new. It is an intimate experience of fellowship in which the whole church in every time and place is present and divisions are overcome. Communion is a hopeful sign of the promised kingdom of God marked by justice, love, and peace.

We practice open communion at Acton Congregational Church. All baptized Christians are welcome to Christ's table. However, it is not our practice to ask whether one is baptized or about one's specific convictions regarding communion. Although communion is fully meaningful only when celebrated in a Christian community by believers, we know that the gift of the sacrament is not ours but Christ's. Therefore, it is not up to us to restrict access to any person unnecessarily. In short, we welcome all to our table who seek to know our crucified and risen Lord and who seek to follow in his ways. Our hope is to honor what is holy in our common life. Our service can be found in the book of worship for the United Church of Christ.

We also welcome baptized children to the communion table, with parental discretion. Our ministers provide communion instruction at regular intervals for children in second grade and higher.

Please speak with our ministers or deacons should you have further questions about the sacraments at Acton Congregational Church.

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