
Duke University Chapel

Baptism Policy

February 2006 - Present

Baptism is the sacrament by which persons become part of the body of Christ. It has three dimensions. Persons are *stripped* of all that stands between them and Christ – through confessing sins. Then, following their public affirmation of faith in the God of Jesus Christ they are *washed*, which is both a cleansing and healing action and also a drowning of sin in a manner reminiscent of the drowning of the Israelites' oppressors in the Red Sea. Finally they are *clothed*, an action that commissions and empowers them for service in the Church.

As baptism represents initiation into the Body of Christ and the universal Christian Church, we ask those desiring baptism for themselves or their children to indicate which congregation you intend to join. For those who already have a home church, we ask those requesting baptism in Duke University Chapel to notify the pastor of their home church of their intention to celebrate their baptism at Duke Chapel. For those still seeking a home church, we invite you to join the Congregation at Duke University Chapel, an inter-denominational congregation within Duke Chapel, by the time of the baptism.

Those considering baptism for themselves or their children or grandchildren must be full-time Duke students, Duke graduates, members of the Congregation at Duke University Chapel, or full-time employees of Duke University/Duke University Health System. Before approaching the Chapel to make a booking, you should arrange for a minister to conduct the ceremony. The minister should preferably be from the congregation of the person making the booking, but in any event the minister must be ordained or recognized in an equivalent manner by his or her Christian denomination. The minister will expect to offer those considering baptism for themselves or their children some preparation before agreeing to do a baptism. A large font is used for baptisms in Duke University Chapel and baptism by immersion is not available.

Because baptism involves the public affirmation of faith and commissioning for service in the Church, it therefore belongs in public worship. This emphasis is modified at Duke Chapel by three factors

- the general character of the 11 a.m. Sunday service with its choral and preaching traditions and very large congregation
- the desire, at least during semesters, to keep the focus on students
- the practice in many churches of permitting 'private' baptisms outside public worship

For these reasons Duke Chapel maintains a 'mixed economy' in regard to baptisms. It offers several occasions each year when space is made available in the Sunday 11 a.m. service for baptisms to take place, and all those considering baptism for themselves or their children are encouraged to see these occasions as the regular time for such ceremonies. Typically, baptisms will be celebrated the Easter Vigil (Saturday night before Easter Sunday), Pentecost (April or May), Baptism of our Lord (January) and on All Saints' Sunday (first Sunday in November).

However this is a University Chapel, and it explicitly seeks to offer opportunities for members of the University to celebrate key moments in their lives in prayerful ways. It also recognizes the diversity of the Christian tradition. Therefore if those considering baptism for themselves or their children do not feel it would be appropriate for the ceremony to be part of a University service, they are welcome to seek to hold a baptism on another occasion.

Reservations for such ceremonies must be made through the Chapel Events Coordinator not more than one year in advance. The ceremonies should normally be conducted on Sundays following University worship, i.e. 12:30 or 1:00 p.m. Services are generally performed without music. There are several weekends during the year when baptisms may not be scheduled due to other events in the Chapel. The ceremony may take place in the Memorial Chapel. There is no charge for a baptism, although a donation (check made payable to Duke University Chapel), in recognition of the expenses incurred by the Chapel, is welcome.

A baptism is never a private matter, but a change in the identity of the person being baptized from being fundamentally an individual to being fundamentally a member of a deeper body, the body of Christ, stretching beyond the bounds of time and death, and entering the communion of saints. Therefore anyone may attend a baptism, and the Chapel is not closed to visitors during a baptism. A baptism is different from a wedding, in that a wedding is primarily a contract undertaken between two people in the presence of two witnesses, and therefore a private arrangement to which others may be invited; whereas a baptism is a covenant between the person, the Church and God, and thus a cause of celebration for the whole Church. For this reason the names of those baptized outside the main act of worship are included in prayers at the 11 a.m. service on the weekend of the ceremony.

For various reasons a family sometimes wishes to hold a thanksgiving ceremony after the birth of a child. For the reasons stated above this only becomes part of the Sunday 11 a.m. service in exceptional circumstances. However those who wish to hold such a ceremony in Duke Chapel are welcome to do so. No minister need be present, no charge is made, although again a donation would be welcome, and the Chapel is not closed for such ceremonies. No music is normally played. Ceremonies should be booked with the Events Coordinator and would normally happen on Sundays as for baptisms.

Duke Chapel
Pastor, Congregation at Duke University Chapel

919 681-9488
919 684-3917

Duke University Chapel Baptism Reservation Form

Please complete and return to: **Duke University Chapel, Box 90974, Durham, NC 27708-0974**
OR via email at: **dukechapel@duke.edu**

Name of Infant/Person to be Baptized:

Name of Parents:

Affiliation with Duke University:

Person Officiating (Clergy/Minister):

Date and Time of Baptism:

Additional Notes or Comments:

While there is no charge for a baptism, a donation (check made payable to Duke University Chapel), in recognition of the expenses incurred by the Chapel, is welcome.

Please confirm this reservation by telephone (919/681-9488) or by email (dukechapel@duke.edu) at least ten days before the date of the Baptism.

My signature below indicates that I have read and understand the Duke University Chapel Baptism Policy dated February 2006.

Signature of parent

Date

Address: _____

City/State/Zip: _____

Telephone: _____

Email: _____