

United In Faith Christian Church

Policy Manual



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Introduction

This document enumerating some of the doctrinal beliefs of United In Faith Christian is *not* intended as a theological treatise. Select topics are presented here for the sake of further clarifying the reasons that we have the policies we do, and some of the ways those policies affect the community life of our congregation. In other words, our beliefs determine our actions.

Nor is this document intended to determine which churches/denominations/religious groups we consider ourselves to be in communion with, or not in communion with. Rather, this document lays out a few of our “rules of life”, describing some aspects of the faith and practices specifically. We do not assume to be correct on all accounts, but this document represents the best joint effort of the eldership to determine the will of God for Christian practice.

Should we be wrong on any counts, we trust God's grace will cover us. By living the convictions we see described in Scripture (some of which are enumerated in this document), the elders of UIFC believe that we will be able to stand before the Lord on the day of judgment with clear consciences. It is our hope and desire that we do the will of the Lord as best as we are able. No more and no less.

Consider this document to not only be a list of policy and beliefs, but also an invitation to join us as we pursue Jesus. Belief and action are at the core of the Christian life, so we ask that you would believe and act with us!

Sincerely,
United In Faith Elder Team (2024)

What We Believe

Bible

- We believe that the Bible is true, God's word, humankind's guide, and is the final authority on Christian beliefs. We believe that the Bible consists of 66 individual books common to the Protestant Canon, and these books alone are considered "Scripture". (2 Tim 3:16-17, Eph 6:17). We believe that the Bible requires effort to interpret, but that all believers may be enabled by the Holy Spirit and by study to understand the message of Scripture. It is the Universal Church's responsibility to grant individuals access to the Spiritual and temporal resources necessary to understand the Holy Scriptures.

One God in Three Persons

- We believe there is one God, eternally existent in three persons: the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. These three persons are co-equal and co-eternal, and each possess all the attributes of God, and are of the same nature and substance, yet distinct in personhood. God is the creator and sustainer of the universe and everything in it. As such, he is the rightful ruler of all. (Deut 6:4, Luke 3:22, Matt 28:19)

Salvation

- We believe that salvation is a free gift of God. However, gifts must be accepted. As such it is normative for an individual to have to respond to God both with belief, and with a willingness to submit to Jesus. Baptism is the first step of obedience when an individual decides to follow Jesus. (1 Thess 4:17, Acts 8:36) (refer to "Salvation" document for more information)

Return of Jesus

- We believe that Jesus (the Son) will return, resurrect and judge the dead, restore the earth, and God will live among us forever. This is the great hope of Christianity. May the day come soon! (1 Thess 4:17, Revelation 21)

Prayer

- We believe that prayer is necessary, and is the primary way we communicate with and commune with God. Such confident communication with the Lord is possible because of Jesus' sacrifice. (Eph 6:18-20, 1 Thessalonians 5:16-18, Hebrews 4:14-16)

Salvation

We believe a person is saved by God's grace. No one can earn God's salvation (Eph 2:8). However grace, as with any gift, must be accepted in order to come into one's possession.

Accepting the free gift of grace is associated with:

- 1) Believing and accepting Jesus as one's leader, master, and King (John 3:16, Acts 16:31, Rom 10:9-10)
- 2) A decision to stop living one's own way, apart from God. i.e. to "repent from sin" (Luke 13:3, Acts 2:38, Acts 17:30)
- 3) Public profession that Jesus is King (Matt 10:32, Rom 10:9-10)

- 4) To work, serve, and grow following conversion (Phil 2:12, 1 Pet 1:17; 2:2; and 4:10)

Following the decision to follow Jesus, the expected first step of obedience is to perform the sacrament of Baptism (see “Baptism” for more information).

Baptism

What is Baptism?

Baptism is a practice from the earliest days of the Christian movement (Matt 28:19, Acts 2:38-41) wherein a person who has come to faith in Jesus is ceremonially immersed in water by another believer “in the name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit” (Matt 28:19) as a symbol of their joining in Jesus’ death and birth into new life (Rom 6:1-5)

Is it required?

Baptism is an expected response to salvation. While we refuse to put ourselves in the seat of God and claim we know with certainty who is saved and who is not, we do believe that baptism is required for full obedience to God (as baptism is commanded by our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ).

As such, baptism is necessary to serve in leadership capacities at UIFC, and is an expected part of the Christian life. However, attendees are not required to be baptized (although it is strongly encouraged!).

How is it performed?

The term from which we derive “baptism” (*baptizo*, a Biblical Greek term) refers to the total immersion of a person in water (as in Matt 28:19 & Acts 2:38). As such, we practice baptism by immersion, understanding this to be the Bible’s intention. We do not accept sprinkling as full obedience to Jesus.

As such, those who are sprinkled must be baptized by immersion before taking on a leadership role. Additionally, baptisms in near-Christian groups including non-trinitarian churches and The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-Day Saints (and others, at Elder discretion) are not considered to be acts in full obedience, and individuals will be asked to be re-baptized before engaging in leadership roles at UIFC.

Baptisms may be deemed to be not in full obedience due to doctrinal or practical error, and re-baptism required for leadership roles at the discretion of the Eldership.

Do certain words have to be said?

While there is nothing magical about the words that are said, and variations are permissible, all baptisms should be performed “in the name of Father, Son, and Holy Spirit”

At UIFC we will use the phrase “I baptize you in the name of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit for the forgiveness of your sins” (Matt 28:19, Acts 2:38). There are other acceptable variations on this formula which may be used by our brothers and sisters in other traditions.

Who can perform a baptism?

Following in the Biblical tradition, any believer can perform a baptism. If the baptizer is found to be in mortal unrepentant sin, or renounces their faith, any baptisms performed by that individual are still considered efficacious.

Who can be baptized?

Anyone who professes a faith in Jesus, and a willingness to submit their lives to God may be baptized. (Acts 8:36)

Can someone be re-baptized?

Yes. If a follower of Jesus feels prompted to, they may be rebaptized. This may be suggested by the Elders if they become aware that a brother or sister was baptized in ways that are firmly outside of the biblical model.

Should the original baptism be within the biblical model, it is considered efficacious, and rebaptism is purely a matter of personal devotion, not necessary to hold leadership at UIFC, nor to be in full obedience to Christ.

Rebaptism should not be done lightly, and the elders or pastors of UIFC may refuse to perform a baptism or rebaptism if they believe in good faith that the sacrament is being requested flippantly, or that the individual requesting the baptism is not capable of making the free-will decision to be baptized.

Communion

What is Communion?

Communion is an ancient Christian practice instituted by God himself incarnate as Jesus of Nazareth (Mark 14:22-15, Luke 22:18-20, 1 Cor 11:23-25). It consists of the consumption of bread and wine (or grape juice, or similar mediums) as symbolic reminders of Jesus' sacrifice for our sins, which binds us together as brothers and sisters and allows us to receive the free gift of salvation.

What do we use in Communion?

UIFC practices communion with crackers, communion wafers, or bread pieces, and grape juice. Other mediums are acceptable as well.

Is Communion necessary for salvation?

UIFC does not hold a firm stance on the need for communion for salvation. Nonetheless John 6:51 makes it clear that participation in communion is expected from every Christian.

Is Communion literally Jesus' body and blood?

No. It is only symbolic. UIFC acknowledges and respectfully disagrees with our brothers and sisters who hold to the doctrine known as "transubstantiation".

Who can take Communion?

Any believer in Jesus is permitted to participate in Communion at UIFC.

However, an individual who is disbarred from fellowship with UIFC as the result of grave unrepentant sin will not be permitted to participate in Communion at UIFC until public repentance is shown, and they are restored to fellowship by the Elders.

Who can serve Communion?

Anyone who can take communion at UIFC can also serve communion. Individuals who desire to give communion meditations must be approved by an Elder or the Senior Minister.

Tongues and Miraculous Gifts of the Spirit

By "Miraculous Gifts of the Spirit" we refer to any activity of God, through an individual, which is outside the normal operation of the universe in ways that defy natural law or explanation including miraculous healings, speaking in unknown languages ("speaking in tongues"), etc.

UIFC believes that such miracles are possible with the intervention of God, however such miracles have no regular place in the Sunday morning gathering at UIFC, for the sake of orderliness of worship. If miraculous gifts are ever to be practiced, it must be orderly, with permission from the Elders, with interpretation if necessary (1 Corinthians 14:26-33). In such gatherings wherein an Elder is not present, the ministry leader presiding over the event or gathering is empowered to decide if the practice of the gift is appropriate or not.

Public practice of a miraculous gift, particularly tongues, at a Church function without permission from a recognized church leader is strongly discouraged. Repeated practices may result in church discipline (Matt 18:15-20, Hebrews 13:17).

Polity and Structure

United In Faith Christian Church practices Elder Governance.

We understand God to be the head of all local churches (Col 1:18 & 1 Cor 15:28), which he entrusts to the leadership of Godly leaders which the church selects by consideration and prayer under guidance of the Holy Spirit. Primary among these leaders are the “Elders”, which consist of a number of men confirmed by the sitting Elders and confirmed by the congregation to have the character and passion required to lead God’s people. Additionally, the sitting eldership, under our bylaws, may confer eldership upon the Senior Minister with all the rights and responsibilities thereof. The selection process for Elders is outlined in our bylaws.

The Elders function as the final authority on matters of policy, doctrine, and practice at UIFC. Under a revision to the by-laws confirmed by the congregation in January, 2021, our elders also function as our legal representatives as trustees of the organization.

The Elders do not run the church alone, however, as they confer responsibility onto others (volunteers or staff) to carry out specific ministry responsibilities. The Senior Minister functions as the head of ministries and day-to-day operations (in essence, the head-of-staff-and-volunteers). Under the authority of the Senior Minister and Elders, others are granted authority and funding to lead their own teams. A number of these individuals are referred to as “ministry leaders” and those who lead one of our three core ministries are called “Reach Leaders”. These individuals are answerable to the Senior Minister, and ultimately to the Eldership.

Conflict Among Staff and Volunteers

Any conflicts between staff and/or volunteers that cannot be solved personally, will be referred to the Senior Minister. Conflicts that cannot be solved by the Senior Minister and/or conflicts with the Senior Minister (which cannot be solved personally) will be referred to the Elder in keeping with the instructions of Matthew 18.

Elder Qualifications

UIFC holds that Elders should meet the majority of the character qualifications listed in 1 Timothy 3, Titus 1, and 1 Peter 5, as well as satisfying the Scriptural qualifications for a Deacon as well. This policy will note only those qualifications and implied qualifications which UIFC’s leadership has determined require explanation or interpretation.

- 1) No Elder satisfies all qualifications all of the time, as such an elder is not disqualified from office by a singular action, unless the action is notably grave. The distinction between a trivial and grave offense will be determined by the majority vote of the remaining eldership (excluding the individual(s) who are accused of wrongdoing).
- 2) The potential Elder is to show a noteworthy precedent for Christian behavior that would qualify them for the office of Elder. As such, a new Christian, or individual who has only recently begun to display Christian character, should not be considered for the office.

- 3) Paul's lists, and Peter's description of Elders are normative but not complete. As such, an Elder is expected to display Christian character beyond what is explicitly mentioned in the aforementioned writings, in keeping with the whole counsel of Scripture.
- 4) Due to Paul's recommendation that Elders be "husband of one wife", it is understood by UIFC that Elders are to be male, as "husband" implies maleness and the New Testament makes no reference to female elders. (1 Tim 3:2)
- 5) 1 Tim 3:2 is not understood to mean that marriage is a requirement of eldership. Rather, if the elder is married, the marriage should be faithful and monogamous. Otherwise, the individual is disqualified from eldership. Unmarried men who are found to be sexually pure are permitted to be elders.
- 6) UIFC understands Paul's instruction that Elders should "lead their household well" to mean that any children that live with a potential elder should display signs of living in a well-ordered, Christian household under the influence of Godly parents, including participation in the Church. UIFC does not understand this qualification to extend to the behavior of adult children.
- 7) An Elder being able to teach implies that they must understand the gospel and the Scriptures well enough to communicate their truths to others. The elder need not be a captivating orator, but rather simply a willing and able teacher.
- 8) Elders are selected based primarily on their character, and their willingness to serve. Ability is important, but is tertiary to these other considerations.

Justice & Misconduct

UIFC is committed to providing protection and justice for anyone who is harmed by an individual in our congregation, or as a result of one of our ministries. We see this not only as a form of obedience to the government which God has placed over us (Romans 13:1-7), but also as a matter of obedience to a God who loves justice (Isaiah 61:8)

In the event that any form of sexual/financial misconduct or physical abuse/assault is alleged, UIFC will report the event to law enforcement. Our commitment to the safety and security of the congregation may lead the Elders to hire independent investigators if harmful behaviors are alleged or suspected among leadership, staff, or volunteers.

UIFC understands that Clergy are mandated to report credible evidence of harm or potential harm to children in the state of Illinois. As such, we feel it is our duty as an act of obedience to the government to disclose any such credible suspicion of child abuse. Such information should NOT be considered "private" or "privileged".

Any victims of misconduct or abuse are encouraged to alert the Eldership and local law enforcement immediately, so that there may be "nothing concealed that will not be made known and brought to light" (Luke 8:17) and so that others may be protected from potential harm.

Gender Roles in the Church

The position of United In Faith Church in regard to gender roles in the church is that men and women are fully equal in value, but hold different, complementary, roles in church leadership. As a result, women can perform all the functions a man can in service, except that males alone may hold the office of Elder, including that of Senior Minister.

Roles and Authority:

- 1) Any spiritually mature member of the congregation may hold a teaching position in the church, under the authority of the Elders (both men and women).
 - a) Phoebe was a teacher and representative of Paul (Romans 16:1)
 - i) The commendation of this verse is standard in ancient letters. It indicates that the commended person was the bearer of the letter, was commissioned with the authority of the letter author (in this case, Paul), and was responsible for conveying the message of the letter, including interpreting any part of the letter that may be unclear. (cf. Terry Wilder, "Phoebe, the Letter-Carrier of Romans, and the Impact of Her Role on Biblical Theology", in *Southwestern Journal of Theology*, Vol. 56, Number 1, Fall 2013, pg. 46)
 - (1) *note: UNIFC does not endorse Dr. Wilder's position on deacons, which will be addressed next

- 2) Men and women both may be deacons (Romans 16:1)
 - a) UIFC sees a Biblical precedent for women noted for service being identified alongside males as servants (or "deacons") of the church, and being granted a title as such in recognition of their servanthood in the body of Christ and surrounding community.
 - b) Contrary to some translations, Romans 16:1 almost certainly indicates that Phoebe held the office of deacon, and was not simply reputable for being a servant. (For a more detailed treatment, please refer to *Zondervan Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament*, Vol. 6 by Frank Thielman)

- 3) Women and men are fully equal in the sight of God (Galatians 3:28)
 - a) It is important to note that this verse refers to the innate value of the individual, and the ability of all people, regardless of identity, race, gender, etc, to achieve salvation and thus membership in God's kingdom. This verse does NOT, however, speak to the issue of leadership in the church.
 - b) For more information, refer to *Zondervan Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament*, Vol 9, by Thomas Schreiner

- 4) The position of Elder is reserved for men (1 Timothy 3:1-7)
 - a) There are no examples of female elders in the New Testament

- b) This passage assumes male eldership, referring to “wives” and utilizing male pronouns in reference to elders. As such, UIFC holds that male eldership is normative in the Church.
 - c) This extends to the role of Senior Minister, as the Senior Minister may be confirmed as an elder by the presiding eldership under UIFC’s current by-laws
 - d) For more information; refer to E2: Effective Elder’s White Paper “Can Women Serve as Elders?” (available upon request)
- 5) The title of Pastor
- a) UIFC does not officially bestow the title of “pastor”, understanding elders to be pastors of the flock. Clergy in the employ of Unity In Faith Church are officially referred to as “ministers” Regardless, the informal use of the title “pastor” is both commonplace and accepted. No attempts will be made to prevent men or women from being called “pastors”, understanding that the colloquial use of the term “pastor” refers to a spiritual leader, and not necessarily one in the position of Elder.

Human Sexuality and Sexual Sin

Definition:

UIFC understands sexual immorality to encompass any activity which is sexual in nature that occurs outside the bonds of traditional Christian marriage. Traditional Christian marriage is defined as a marriage between one biological male and one biological female.

FAQ:

Can someone in sexual sin be baptised?

Yes! We all carry a number of sins and non-Christian character traits into the beginning of our relationship with God. The believer will be expected, however, to eventually repent of that sin as a part of ongoing repentance and sanctification.

Can someone in sexual sin be a member of the congregation?

Yes. However, if the sin remains public and unaddressed the individual may be made subject to Church discipline. Some sexual sins may disbar someone from membership or even attendance at UIFC (particularly those of a predatory nature). Such decisions are made on a case-by-case basis by the Elders. Furthermore, individuals who are members but remain in sin are disbarred from leadership at UIFC until repentance is shown.

Can someone in sexual sin volunteer at UIFC?

In most cases yes, but they cannot be a ministry leader, deacon, elder, or staff member. Additionally, depending on the nature of the sin the elders may forbid the individual from volunteering in certain areas, or at all. Such decisions will be made by the Elders on a case-by-case basis.

If someone has committed a sexual sin in the past, can they serve as a leader now?

After repentance is shown and the lifestyle is changed, most people can serve in various leadership roles despite past sexual sins. However, sins of a violent or predatory nature, or which were particularly harmful, public, or heinous may prevent an individual from ever serving in a leadership capacity at UIFC. Such decisions lay with the Elders.

Weddings

Where this Policy Applies:

The following requirements/guidelines have been established for weddings to be performed, either by any Minister/staff of UIFC, irrespective of location or upon property owned by UIFC regardless of the officiant.

Policy:

- 1) All persons to be married must be “Active Members” of UIFC for a minimum of three months prior to the date of receipt of the Wedding Application. An “Active Member” of UIFC is defined as a person who has a recorded attendance in Sunday Morning Worship of not less than 60% over the previous three months. Any person not meeting this requirement must have the written approval of the Senior Minister prior to submitting a Wedding Application.
- 2) All persons to be married are to remain “Active Members” of UIFC. If a person does not remain an “Active Member” of UIFC between the date of receipt of the Wedding Application and the date of the wedding ceremony, UIFC reserves the right to cancel the wedding ceremony. The Senior Minister or Eldership will make this determination.
- 3) All couples must complete the premarital classes offered by UIFC or premarital courses with an approved third party with a recorded attendance of not less than 80%.
- 4) UIFC and its staff will only perform weddings that are deemed likely to result in unions in alignment with Biblical views on marriage. As such, UIFC will not perform:
 - a) The wedding of a Christian to a non-Christian (2 Cor 6:14)
 - b) The wedding of two non-Christians (Mark 10:9)
 - i) UIFC understands marriage, in light of Jesus’ teachings, to be an act of God. As such, non-believers cannot participate in Christian marriage as performed by a Christian church. A wedding at UIFC is not solely a civil or legal act, but a spiritual and religious act as well.
 - c) The wedding of partners that do not align with the Biblical view of male-female marriage (due to surgery, hormone treatments, practice of non-heterosexual sexuality or declaration of gender identity) (Rom 1:26-27, Gen 5:2)
 - i) The wedding of an individual born intersex may be performed at the discretion of the elders and officiant, understanding that such a condition is a medical anomaly and not a personal sin.
 - d) The wedding of more than two people (Gen 2:24)
 - e) The wedding of individuals currently married to other individual(s), or any other form of Polygamy (Gen 2:24)

- f) The wedding of individuals in any form of abusive, coercive, or manipulative relationship (as determined by the officiant, or by the Elders) (1 Pet 3:7)
 - g) Or any other wedding that does not align with the clear Biblical precedent of male-female marriage and fidelity, as displayed in the creation order. (Gen. 2:24, 5:2)
- 5) While UIFC advises the couple to remain abstinent and not to cohabit prior to the marriage (1 Cor 7:1-3). However, the leadership of UIFC acknowledges that certain lifestyles of sexual sin may be made right in the eyes of God through marriage. Additionally, an end or temporary stay on cohabitation may cause further harm in some cases (such as when children have been born and co-parented by unmarried, cohabitating parents). As such, UIFC will perform weddings for couples that are professing Christians currently cohabiting at the discretion of the officiant.
- 6) In cases of premarital pregnancy and/or children outside of a marriage relationship, the wedding may or may not be performed, depending on the maturity of the persons involved and other considerations. The officiant will make this determination.
- 7) Divorced persons may be considered for weddings at UIFC. Divorce is Biblically permissible in the following circumstances, in which cases remarriage may be performed by UIFC:
- a) Former spouse is deceased (1 Cor 7:8-9)
 - b) Former spouse initiated divorce (1 Cor 7:10-11)
 - c) Former spouse was not a Christian and abandoned the marriage (1 Cor 7:15)
 - d) Divorce occurred because the former spouse committed adultery (Matthew 5:32)
 - e) Divorce occurred prior to conversion
- In cases of multiple divorces, each divorce will be evaluated separately. In cases where none of the previous conditions are satisfied, the marriage may not be performed. If an individual has been remarried and divorced multiple times, a remarriage may be denied by UIFC. UIFC permits the officiant to determine when a marriage is Biblically acceptable in alignment with previously stated conditions. If an individual is determined to have been divorced as a professing Christian, for non-Biblical reasons a wedding may only be approved after completion of premarital couple meetings and individual meetings with the officiant and/or other representative of UIFC if the eldership and officiant are in agreement that true repentance has been shown.
- 8) After divorce, no wedding will be performed until a suitable amount of time has passed, as determined by the best judgment of the elders.
- 9) After the death of a spouse, no wedding will be performed until a suitable period of time has passed, as determined by the best judgment of the elders.
- 10) Weddings will not be performed for any person(s) under the influence of alcohol and/or drugs (other than those prescribed by a doctor) at the time of the rehearsal and/or wedding.
- 11) Any member of the wedding party who is under the influence of alcohol and/or drugs (other than those prescribed by a doctor) at the time of the rehearsal and/or wedding will not be allowed to participate in the wedding.

