



A GUIDE TO BAPTISM AT SOUTHWEST UNITED CHURCH

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Bringing Your Child for Baptism

Baptism, a Greek word meaning "to immerse", is the rite of initiation into the Christian Church. Most Christians agree that the water used for baptism is a symbol and that the quantity used is therefore not important. Children are usually baptized by aspersion or the sprinkling of a small amount of water over them, rather than by the complete immersion. Adults are sometimes baptized in lakes and other large bodies of water.

Baptisms are performed in the presence of a community of faith gathered for worship.

Welcoming a child into God's family

Baptism is a serious decision involving people beyond the circle of the immediate family. Promises will be spoken, prayers said and a commitment of love celebrated.

Hereunder are words to reflect upon

"Through baptism, I enter into God's family. Whatever happens to any one of the family affects the others. We celebrate, we laugh, and we cry together; we offer each other advice, courage and assistance. Because no two of its members are alike, each family has its own way of living and its own traditions. What joy there is when a new child arrives!

The church is a group whose members are as close as brothers and sisters; it is a family united by a common faith. Each person is unique, but we share the same parent: God, who loves us and whom we love.

The celebration of baptism is the welcoming of a new member into the family of God. Just as with a birth, this is an occasion of great joy for members of the Church".

Resource: Judith Bricault, Baptized for Life, p.8

Prayer: God of Life,
 Who wills new life to be through love created:
 Born a child, in human family,
 Shaped in your image, this little child we bring.
 With glad thanksgiving before you now we sing.

Voices United # 446, Margaret Joyce Dickin, 1967

Conditional and Unconditional Love

God's love is unconditional. Throughout the stories of the Bible can be seen the affirming, eternal love of God. Covenant love is a love beyond emotion through which God initiates a mutually binding relationship with us. It is a love that becomes an act of the will. We

are loved as we are, regardless of what we become. Grace is ours even before we are able to respond and discover faith! The truth of this becomes clear as we love our children, whatever their behaviour. We provide for their needs, nurture them and are always there when they need us. Does this love not arise from a deep sense of purpose and commitment, rather than simply from an emotional attachment?

Celebrating baptism focuses on God's love for the child, the same covenant love of relationship celebrated throughout the history of the people of God. As adults surround this child with faith and love, God offers us this same love and grace.

Baptism is a Christian Sacrament

Sacrament is the term many Christian traditions use to refer to their sacred practices. Most Christians agree that there are two primary sacraments: baptism and the Lord's Supper, both of which are practised by Christians at the instruction of Jesus. These are the only two sacraments celebrated in the United Church of Canada.

Sometimes the Apostle's Creed is used at baptism where parents are of different church denominations. This creed reminds us that baptism is the rite of initiation for all Christians, regardless of denomination. The creed uses the word "catholic" which means universal and is often confused with the name the Roman Catholic Church. When children are baptized, they become members of the "catholic" church. Regardless of the denomination, baptism is universally performed in the name of the triune God, or in the name of the Father, and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit.

Baptism is a call to follow Jesus

Jesus called his disciples saying "Come, follow me!" (Matthew 4: 19). To baptize a child is to state publicly one's belief in God, in Christ and in God's Holy Spirit. Following in the way of Christ in one's private and public life is not for the weak of heart. It is demanding to live out the Gospel message.

Baptism is a sign of new life, a sign of being "born of the spirit and water" (John 3:5). Through baptism, we identify with Jesus' life, death and resurrection. This new life begins when a child is baptized and is realized when that child stands before a congregation to profess his or her own faith. That moment is called confirmation and completes baptism.

Preparation for baptism

Before considering baptism, it is important to examine where you are in your understanding of faith. Faith is less about a destination or final outcome and more about a journey that leads us into a deeper relationship with God and with Jesus Christ.

The Celebration of Baptism

The United Church liturgical resource entitled *Celebrate God's Presence* (p. 325) offers the following structure for celebrating baptism:

- Statement of Purpose
- Presentation of Candidate(s)
- Profession of Faith and Promises
- Congregational Commitment
- Affirmation of Faith
- Prayer and Thanksgiving and the Pouring of Water
- The Act of Baptism: Baptism in the name of the Triune God
- Blessing
- Optional:
 - Marking with the sign of the Cross
 - Laying on of hands
 - Other Symbolic actions – lighting of a candle, presentation of a Bible, clothing in a new garment or Baptismal stole

Hymns are a means of enhancing the service and many baptismal hymns can be found in the Voices United hymnbook (see pages 441-445).

Baptism within the United Church of Canada

Although diverse, the United Church is united in the gospel of Jesus Christ. It is a mainline institution that takes a middle-of-the-road position on most issues, but it has also struggled hard to be a church for everyone, including various linguistic and cultural groups, as well as those with divergent theological perspectives. The United Church's openness to ordain women, the LGBTQ+ community and its invitation to divorcees to receive the sacraments demonstrates the church's desire to minister to all God's people.

Baptism is part of worship within a local congregation. The liturgy surrounding baptism may be adapted to the local context and is not necessarily the same for every child.

The United Church uses a well-loved and contemporary affirmation of faith called the New Creed which celebrates the diversity of relationships we live as Christians.

The Promises of Baptism

Many promises are made at baptism. God welcomes your child and loves promises to love him or her unconditionally. Parents confess their personal faith and promise to live out this faith in every aspect of their lives, home and relationships. The congregation

promises to assist, encourage and pray for the child and parents. Although faith is personal, it needs to be expressed and shared with others.

The promises made at baptism are similar to the vows spoken at a wedding: both express the ideals we would live. As is the case with most ideals, we can never live up to them perfectly. Wedding vows and baptismal promises are reminders of how we would live our lives; they remind us where we began, enable us to see how far we have come and keep us humble.

As you consider the baptismal promises, you will be struck by the seriousness of the commitment you are being asked to make. No promise should be taken lightly. Fortunately, you are not alone for God, your family members, members of the congregation and your minister all walk with you. On the day of your child's baptism, we all confess our faith in God and promise our support.

The questions you will be asked are about your faith in God and in Christ, about your determination to live out the gospel in daily life and are questions that have been asked of parents throughout the history of the Christian Church. At least one parent will need to respond with affirmation. The questions may be put to godparents or grandparents, if appropriate. Only one question will be asked from each category.

Promises of Parents

Because your baby cannot yet speak, someone must speak for him or her at baptism. Are you comfortable making the following promises in the name of your child?

Will you share your faith with _____, growing with him/her in faith, hope and love?

I will.

Or

Will you pray for _____, encourage him/her by your words and actions, and walk with him/her in the way of Jesus?

I will

Celebrate God's Presence p.336

Participation of Godparents and Grandparents

Ideally, godparents and grandparents have a role to play in the faith development of your child. Grandparents are often the bridge between the child and the faith community and may sponsor the baptism. Their roles need to be discussed before the celebration.

Will you pray for this child and take care that he/she may learn and live in the faith?

I will, God being my helper

OR

Will you grow in faith with this child, trusting that "you are not alone, you live in God's world"?

I will

Celebrate God's Presence, p.336

Promises of the Congregation

The congregation makes promises on the day of baptism and commits to surrounding the child and family with prayer, support and love. They welcome the child into the life of the church and, as he or she grows, into the worshipping community. They can only fulfill their promise if the child or the parents are present.

As SouthWest United Church, do you commit yourselves to support and nurture these persons within a community which worships God, loves and serves others, seeks justice and resists evil?

We do.

Celebrate God's Presence p.340

The signs and symbols of Baptism

Water is the most important symbol of baptism. Water cleanses and is essential to life; in many bible stories, it is a sign of God's salvation. A prayer of thanksgiving often precedes the pouring of the water, such as:

"May God's Spirit be upon us and these waters of daily use, which we now use to baptize and to welcome"

The sign of the cross is the tracing of the cross on the child's forehead and marks him or her as a follower of Christ. These words may be spoken:

*"Name _____, child of God, from this day forward you bear the sign of Jesus Christ. **Amen**"*

Laying on of hands usually follows the sign of the cross as blessing upon the child. Words such as these may be spoken:

"Name_____, the power of the Holy Spirit work within you, that being born of water and the Spirit, you may be a faithful witness of Jesus Christ."

Other symbolic actions, in accordance with local practise:

Lighting of a candle