



Baptism: Beginning the Faith Journey



Introduction

Congratulations on the birth of your child and thank you for your interest in the sacrament of baptism. The following is an attempt to explain baptism so that those requesting it for their children or themselves, may have an understanding of its meaning and the way it is practised in The United Church of Canada and in the Parkminster congregation. As you consider Baptism at Parkminster here are some of the values we affirm as we seek to interpret and live out the Christian tradition;

- Parkminster United's theology, or our understanding of God, is evolving. We are rooted in the Christian tradition but we bring into the faith conversation learnings from science, and historical and social analysis. For many of us the bible is not to be taken literally as an inerrant record of God's teachings. Rather the bible is seen as the witness of people to the work and presence of God in their lives and communities. In order to understand and be moved by scripture we need to understand the people who wrote it and the times in which it was written. We ask deep questions and are prepared to live with those questions as we search for understanding and a deeper engagement with God and life.
- Parkminster United understands that everyone is on a spiritual journey with the Holy, and that we are not all at the same place on that journey. We honour each individual search for God, the sacred, and for meaning.
- Parkminster is an inclusive and welcoming congregation who values difference and appreciates the gifts that accompany difference.
- Parkminster United is an affirming congregation. This means that there is a wide welcome of LGBTQ+ people and the expectation that each will participate in the life of Parkminster as fully as they wish.
- Parkminster United is a community whose members care for one another.
- Parkminster United Church commits to living a life of loving influence in the world, both in its neighbourhood and globally.

What Is Baptism?

Baptism is one of the two Sacraments recognized by The United Church of Canada. The other Sacrament is Holy Communion or The Lord's Supper. A sacrament is a symbolic act that we participate in and that communicates something God has done for us.

For the child, being baptized is the beginning of a faith journey that should evolve and change with maturity and last a lifetime. Thus baptism should be seen as an initiation into a process rather than just a single, once in a lifetime act.

Baptism declares a sense of belonging – a reminder that we are not just individuals or even members of a nuclear family, but that we belong to the *whole family of faith we call the church*. Baptism is the sacrament of blessing and welcome. By baptism, a person, no matter what age, becomes a member of the faith community and The United Church of Canada. Later, in their teens typically, a child explores the vows their parents/guardians made for them in the process of confirmation and can then decide to join the church as an adult if they choose.

Baptism uses water as a symbolic cleansing that signifies the acceptance of new life within the church family. The sacrament of baptism is the single rite of initiation into the Christian community,

the church. The United Church offers baptism to all ages. We believe the gift of God's love doesn't depend on our ability to understand it, so we baptize people as infants right up through adulthood. Baptism is not a requirement for God's love. We believe people who die without baptism are in no way condemned, lost, or damned.

With children, instruction is given to parents or sponsors to equip them for the child's Christian nurture. During the ceremony, everyone in the congregation pledges support for the child and his or her parents.

Baptism in the United Church is recognized by all denominations of the Christian church that practise infant baptism. Similarly, if people have already been baptized in another church, the United Church recognizes their baptism and welcomes them as Christians. A congregation, when it engages with parents who wish to present a child for baptism, acts for the wider Church, not just itself. A baptized person becomes a member of the Holy Catholic or Universal Church. In United Church tradition, such a membership is held within a local congregation.

An often-overlooked meaning of baptism is that baptism means entering into the ministry of Jesus. Christians are people who seek through their personal lives and through their life together in the church, to be faithful followers of Jesus. In it's broadest sense this means to love as Jesus loved. As we engage in worship, study and reflect on our own lives we work out what that means in our own particular context.

Who Is Baptism For?

In the case of children, Baptism is for the children of those parents, one or both of whom have been baptized and confirmed in a Christian denomination. If this is not the case, this is the first thing for you to consider. Preparation for adult baptism or confirmation is available and one of the Ministers would be most happy to discuss this with you. Now might be the time for you to do some deep thinking about your own faith journey and you relationship to the church.

Being baptized in the United Church means that your child is welcomed into the church community. It is important that if you want your child to be baptised that you also intend to be a part of the church community. Why not try coming to church for a while and see if this is really what you want for your family. When you see what we are like and what we are about, you might find you like it and us. If you are not interested in being a part of the church, it would be better to wait and let your child decide later for him or herself. If you are not sure about baptism but want the birth of your child recognized in the church before God there is an alternative.

Baby Blessing

Baby blessings are intended for families who want to mark the birth of a child but who, at present, choose not to participate regularly in the common life of the church. Sometimes, this choice is made because the parent(s) want to gather with family and friends, but are not personally ready for church commitment. And, sometimes it is grandparents or other family who are eager for the blessing of new life, and the parent(s) don't want to disappoint.

Rather than promise to raise the child in a faith community, Parkminster offers a Baby Blessing as an alternative. The parents are not asked to make the same kind of vows about participation in the church, and the congregation makes no vows on behalf of the child. This is one way the

congregation can meet a family's needs and be inclusive. Baby Blessings can be held on a Sunday morning at a worship service or in the home. They use water as the blessing, but not as baptism into a congregation.

The actual ceremony is planned by the parent(s)/guardian(s) and the minister. The expectation is that the family would reimburse the minister for planning and conducting the blessing in the home. There is no fee for a blessing or baptism during Sunday worship.

What Will Happen If I Request Baptism

One of our Ministers will meet with you and your family so that we can get to know each other better, to talk about your faith journey, your hopes for your child(ren), to discuss any questions and to talk about possible dates. If you are new to Parkminster the Minister will encourage you to attend worship over a period of time so that you can better decide if Parkminster is the faith community for your child(ren). At Parkminster it is the Membership and Pastoral Care Committee that ultimately passes a motion (on the Minister's recommendation) approving the baptism of your child(ren).

What About The Baptismal Service?

In United Church tradition baptism is a sacrament and is an integral part of the church's life and worship. The United Church also emphasizes that baptism is about committing to a community of faith. In the service you make certain commitments to the community and the community makes certain commitments to you, therefore except in extenuating or emergency circumstances baptism takes place during Sunday morning worship.

What Will I Be Asked In The Baptismal Service?

In the case of children, the parents act on their child's behalf. The questions you will be asked are as follows:

Do you entrust your life to God, Source of love;
To Jesus the Christ, love incarnate;
And to the Holy Spirit, love's power.
I do, by the grace of God.

Trusting in God alone and the path walked by Jesus,
will you turn from the forces of evil, and renounce their power?
Will you seek justice and witness to God's love for all creation?
I will, God being my helper.

Will you join
with your brothers and sisters in this congregation
to share in the life, work, and ministry of Jesus?
I will, God being my helper.

Will you pray for..., encourage him/her by your words and actions,
and walk with him/her in the way of Jesus?
I will, God being my helper.

A Note on Faith, Belief and Trust

Belief does not mean you never have any doubt. God is mystery and we all have doubts. To believe is to trust. That is why the first commitment uses the word “trust” instead of “believe”, “when it comes to your life and the life of your child where do you put your trust?” The Christian response is to put our trust in the God we’ve come to know in Jesus and in the power of the ever-present Spirit. Saying you “trust” does not mean what you believe about God, Jesus and the Holy Spirit will never change. We are human, we grow, we learn, life experiences cause us to re-think what we once thought were certainties. One way to think of the life of faith is as a journey. By saying you “trust” you commit to a journey with God as revealed in the Christian tradition.

The first three questions have to do with your faith. The fourth question has to do with how you will put that faith into action in your home and in relation to your child. It is hoped that your home will be one where the faith, which we have been discussing, is held and with God’s help lived. It is a home where God’s love is put into concrete reality. It is a home where children are taught the content of the Christian faith, where the Bible is read and prayers are heard. A Christian family is also a worshipping, church going family. We need to learn from, to be strengthened and encouraged by our community of faith.

Responsibility of the Congregation

The congregation then makes a commitment to your child and your family by saying the following;
Let us pledge to (name) and his/her family our support and care.

As a baptized and baptizing people,
we commit ourselves to support and uphold you
within the community of faith.

May God grant us all the grace to live out our baptism.

Amen.

God Parents

God Parents are not part of the United Church tradition. In some traditions, God Parents are people who take special vows with respect to supporting the child and nurturing him/her in the faith. In the United Church, the congregation takes this responsibility. However, should parents wish to name persons in this role, they are welcome and will be included in the service.

What about Parents From Out of Town?

Sometimes parents want to celebrate baptism in their home town after having moved away. The usual practice is to have children baptized in the congregation where the parents attend church. This is the congregation that must accept responsibility for the child. However, we do understand the feelings that are involved. Young families today are mobile and may not feel “at home” in the community where they live.

In cases such as this, parents will be first asked to make contact with the minister of a local United Church congregation explaining the situation and requesting to meet with the minister to be prepared for the baptism. The minister should then contact one of the Ministers at Parkminster,

indicating his or her and the congregation's support for the baptism. In this way our congregation can act on behalf of the other congregations.

Some Question For You To Think About

1. What are the reasons that underlie your request for baptism?
2. Are you seeking baptism out of social or family pressure or as a response to what you know and understand of God and God's love?
3. Do you want you and your children to live in relationship to God in Jesus Christ as part of a church community?
4. Will you, with God's help, live the faith you will confess and the promises you will make?

Conclusion

All of the above is offered as a way to open conversation and an invitation to dialogue. Please bring your questions, your doubts, your hopes, your fears into a meeting with one of our Ministers. We look forward to hearing from you