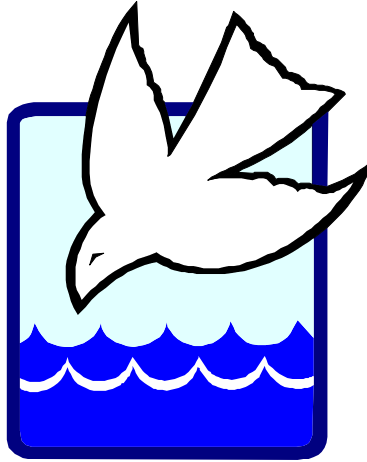


Preparing For The Sacrament Of

BAPTISM



Ste-Geneviève United Church

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“ A CHURCH FAMILY TO COME HOME TO! ”

Baptism with water is a symbolic washing that represents God's power to cleanse and forgive. It is a ceremony that has been used in many different ways and with a variety of meanings in the Christian tradition.

Jesus himself, the first disciples, and most early Christians were baptized as adults. It was a ceremony in which the person turned from sin (his/her alienation from God) and made a promise of fresh obedience to God. The method was usually immersion in a river.

As time went on, the Church began to baptise children along with their parents – in the belief that God's forgiveness and love would come to the children from the very beginning of their lives through their upbringing in a Christian home. During this time, it also became common to sprinkle or pour water instead of having total immersion – especially for children, elderly people, and the sick – and to some extent, on account of the weather.

Later on, there was a period when people postponed baptism as long as possible – like Emperor Constantine. He became a Christian, but put off actual baptism until he was on his deathbed in the belief that if all his sin was forgiven at baptism it would be better to delay it until there was little chance of much more sin! This practice was widespread for a time and, of course, was open to much abuse.

Eventually, the Church began to baptise captives of war and even whole nations that were made “Christian” by decree of their sovereign ruler overnight! The Church was so sure that baptism would help a person in the after-life, that it was prepared to baptise people without requiring any real decision about God – in the hope that, as time went on, the necessary teaching and understanding would eventually be supplied. It became standard practice to

baptise everyone in “Christian” countries. In many cases, this became a mere formality with its specific Christian meaning lost in other traditions.

The Church developed a belief in what is called “original sin” – that, somehow, the guilt of Adam’s first disobedience was shared by everyone born since, and that baptism was the means of overcoming this “Original sin”. So it became important to baptise every baby as soon as possible, especially if there was any danger that the baby might die. At first, it was held that those who died without having been baptised went to Hell. This was later softened to explain that the spirits of non-baptised babies might go into “limbo” – a place that was in Heaven, but where these unfortunate spirits would never experience God’s glory and presence. As a result of this doctrine, the reason for baptism became fear.

About 400 years ago, with the invention of the printing press, the beginning of widespread education, and the recovery of much ancient knowledge, Christians began to read the Bible, early Christian writings and history for the first time (for centuries prior to this, only a few people could read and most religious literature was produced in hand-written Latin). There came about a great split in the Church as Christians differed about the meaning of this new information, and the churches that we call “Protestant” broke away from the Roman Catholic Church. To this day there continues to be disagreement among Christians about the meaning and significance of baptism (even between and within many Protestant denominations). The Roman Catholic Church still believes that baptism overcomes original sin, and attempts to have babies baptized as soon as possible – sometimes, in the case of a new-born whose life is in danger, right at the hospital (and even by a nurse or doctor if a priest is not available in time).

The Baptist churches (also Mennonite and Pentecostal) interpret the concept of “original sin” in a different manner. They see original sin not so much as a guilt inherited from Adam, but rather as a fact of experience. Everyone begins at a very early stage to do wrong even when they know better. To be a person seems to mean that we are sinful – and yet, at the same time, we are not really accountable for our wrongdoing until we are old enough to understand. In these churches, baptism is never administered to children. In fact, these churches do not recognise infant baptism by any church as being valid. They believe that baptism is for adults who want and choose to be Christians for themselves out of their own convictions. If a person from any Christian tradition which practices infant baptism chooses to become a Baptist, Mennonite, Pentecostal, etc. he/she would have to be baptized as an adult (regardless of having already been baptized during childhood).

Other church denominations come somewhere between these two views. The Anglican and Lutheran churches are closer to the Roman Catholic position. *The United Church of Canada* is somewhat closer to the Baptist position – but each one is a little different. So it’s no wonder if you are a little confused!

Now, let’s look at *The United Church of Canada’s* understandings about baptism. In it there is room for some variety of method and belief, but here are some of the basic positions:

We believe that BAPTISM is only to be performed once.

We recognise the baptism rites of other churches, whether for infants or adults, as valid, and so not “re-baptise” Christians. You are baptized “in the Name of The Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit” and not in the name of one of the denominations (contrary to the understanding of many in our society).

BAPTISM is normally for infants and is seen as an acknowledgement of the reception of the newly baptized into the membership of the Body of Christ – the “Church Universal”.

In the ceremony of infant baptism, parents/guardians promise to give their child(ren) a Christian home and upbringing. But eventually each person must decide for him/herself whether to be a Christian because he/she wants to, rather than because his/her parents/guardians want him/her

to. When a person decides, as a teen or adult, to follow Christ, we use the ceremony of “Confirmation” at which time the baptismal vows taken by the parents/guardians for the infant are re-affirmed and claimed by the person him/herself. This is sometimes called “Profession of Faith” or “Joining the church”, and is usually preceded by some special classes to explore its meaning and implications for one’s life.

BAPTISM is not essential for “getting to Heaven”.

We reject the idea that God will punish a little child because of something his/her parents/guardians did not have done. Jesus taught us to think of God as more kind and good and just than the best of human parents. There is no need then for baptism in the hospital or sick room, for we trust God’s love and justice, knowing that God loves little children more than we can ever love them ourselves. That being said, we do such “emergency” baptisms, when requested, out of a pastoral concern for the needs of the family involved (such a traumatic crisis is not the time to debate theology).

BAPTISM of infants is only meaningful if their parents / guardians take Christian faith seriously.

If they do not set an example in their lives and in their home, the bare ceremony of baptism cannot be expected to accomplish much – nothing “magical” happens. Indeed, it is hypocrisy for parents/guardians to promise what they do not intend to carry out; so if you are worried about the Church being full of hypocrites, be sure your own position is honest in this regard! It is the policy of *The United Church of Canada* that, normally, at least one of the parents/guardians shall be a confirmed member of the Church in good standing. The Church will often baptise children whose parents/guardians are not confirmed, if the parents/guardians show a genuine willingness to take the Church seriously, and to consider becoming members themselves, but there is not much point in baptising children if their parents/guardians are not prepared themselves to be a Christian witness. All the children will learn from that is that it is not really important. For this reason, it is essential that the parents/guardians who wish to have children baptized consult with the Minister well ahead of time, and allow for a meeting or two before plans become definite.

BAPTISM, since it is the first step into church membership, should take place within the congregation where the parents / guardians usually worship and participate.

While there are often sentimental reasons going back to the old home town or family church, there are religious values taught in bringing your child into the circle of people who make up the church you actually attend on a regular basis and, therefore, we ask – and definitely encourage – you to follow this procedure.

(If you are attending a church elsewhere, but still have strong reasons for having the ceremony here – perhaps due to elderly and/or sick relatives in this area who would find it difficult or impossible to travel any great distance – we urge you to contact the Minister and governing council of your home church and ask them to formally request that Ste-Geneviève United Church perform the ceremony on their behalf. While we are not adamant about adhering to this policy, we ask you to seriously consider it).

GODPARENTS are not necessary.

In *The United Church of Canada*, godparents are not necessary since the whole congregation accepts responsibility for the Christian nurture of the young in their midst. If, however, you really desire to have godparents for your child, you may do so. (Please remember that if you choose godparents with the intention that they could potentially become the child’s legal guardian(s) in the event of your death, this desire must be stated in your Legal Will – the designation “godparent” from a baptism ceremony has no legal status in the courts).

**ADULT BAPTISM is recognised and can and does
take place in *The United Church of Canada*.**

Some families either neglect to, or choose not to, or are unable to arrange infant baptism, or are not part of the Christian tradition. Some parents/guardians choose to omit it in the belief that their child should choose for him/herself at an age of discretion. If you wish to be baptised as an adult, this should take place within the congregation where you worship. The natural tendency of many such adults is to be shy about doing this in public, but this can be offset by the joy one ought to have in accepting the Christian faith as one's own, and by the boldness Christians are expected to show as they stand up for their convictions in the world. *If you cannot stand up and be baptised in front of your friends (your sisters and brothers in Christ), it will be much harder to stand up and be counted in the world for your Christian convictions!*

**BAPTISM proclaims and celebrates
the gift of God's grace in our lives!**

BAPTISM is the Sacrament of belonging!

This is a sacred moment of acknowledgement by the community, in worship, that it has been blessed with new life. The community joins the parents/guardians in embracing this wonderful gift that God has given, rejoicing with the person in the new life he/she has received through Christ Jesus.

By water and the Spirit we are called, claimed and commissioned: we are called God's own, given our identity as children of God; we are claimed by Christ, united with Christ, united with each other and the Christian community of every time and every place; we are commissioned to Christ's ministry of love, peace and justice, and strengthened by the Holy Spirit for the work of the Church in the world.

Are You Ready For BAPTISM?

The following outline of the Baptismal Liturgy includes the vows you will be asked to make. If you can make them – and mean them – then you are ready. During the pre-baptism private discussion period with the Minister (and/or with a group of other families interested in baptism), there will be an opportunity to deal with any questions you may have.

The Day of the BAPTISM SERVICE

Parents/Guardians (and Godparents, if any) will assemble, with the children to be baptised, in the Church Office 20 minutes before the Worship Service begins. They will meet with the Baptism Co-ordinator from *our Worship & Sacraments Committee* to check over the baptismal documents and to receive instructions. Shortly before the **Worship Service begins (10:30 a.m. from September to June / 9:30 a.m. during July & August)**, all will proceed into the Sanctuary with the Co-ordinator where you will be seated in a reserved section. Approximately 25 minutes into the Service, a baptismal hymn will be sung and the Co-ordinator will invite the parents/guardians and children (and Godparents) to stand at the foot of the Chancel steps around the Baptismal Font.

The Baptismal Liturgy will proceed as follows:

Statement About Baptism

(Water is then brought forward and poured into the Font)

Introduction of Children & Parents / Guardians

Scripture Passage

Profession of Faith

(Questions Minister asks of Parents/Guardians)

● In the presence of this community of faith, which represents the Body of Christ around the world, do you commit yourself to follow the way of Jesus Christ in your public and private life?

● Do you profess your faith in one God: Creator, Christ, & Spirit?

● Will you support the life and work of Christ's Church?

● Will you nurture your child, and grow together in faith?

Congregational Commitment

Affirmation of Faith (Creed of The United Church of Canada)

Prayer of Thanksgiving & Dedication of Baptismal Water

The Act of Baptism

The Minister will take the child, and ask for the Christian names, after which the Baptism ritual will be administered; followed by

Signing With the Cross & Laying On of Hands

Welcoming of the Newly Baptised Into the Family of God

Choral Benediction

Newly baptised children are brought up the steps in front of the Communion Table, facing the Choir.

(After the Choral Benediction, the families return to their seats)

REMEMBER, FOR YOUR CONVENIENCE,
THERE IS AN INFANT NURSERY AVAILABLE

There Is No Fee For A Baptism

Any donation to the Church and/or
honorarium to the Minister
is completely at your discretion

**Please DO NOT Take Any Photographs
During the Baptismal Liturgy**

**There will be a photo opportunity with the Minister and
your child after the Service if you wish to have pictures.**

**A Video Camera may be used during the Service only if
the operator can film from where he/she is sitting.**

Thank You For Your Co-operation!

Baptisms are usually scheduled for the 3rd Sunday of the month

Call to make arrangements with the Minister as soon as possible

FOR MORE INFORMATION

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