**The Sacrament of Baptism**

*Baptism by water in the name of the Holy Trinity
is the means by which we are received, at any age,
into the covenanted community of the church.
It is the ritual that signifies our rebirth in faith
and cleansing by the power of God.
Baptism signifies the nurturing, sustaining,
and transforming power of God’s love
and our grateful response to that grace.*

 *~From* [*A Song of Faith*](https://www.united-church.ca/community-faith/welcome-united-church-canada/song-faith)

Baptism is a symbolic action that signifies the new life God gives us as we join the church community. 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. With children, instruction is given to parents or sponsors to equip them for the child's Christian nurture. During the ceremony, which usually takes place as part of a regular worship service, everyone in the congregation pledges support for the child and their parents.

Baptism is not a requirement for God's love. We believe people who die without baptism are in no way condemned, lost, or damned.

Baptism in the United Church is recognized by all denominations of the Christian church that practice infant baptism. Similarly, if someone has already been baptized in another church at any age, the United Church recognizes their baptism and welcomes them as Christians.

**What Baptism Is and Is Not**

Perhaps we should begin by stating what Baptism is not: Baptism is not a magical incantation which makes God love the person being baptized. According to everything that Christians believe, the person being baptized is created by God and is already loved by God

Baptism is not a guarantee that we will go to heaven. Since God loves us and wants only the best for us, it is God’s will that we inherit eternal life. Baptism is a sign of what God has already done and a reminder that salvation is a gift offered to all. Baptism is a celebration of what is really true, no matter what we do: God knows us. God loves us. God has already saved us.

In Infant Baptism, we acknowledge that our responsibility includes the spiritual nurture and development of our children. They will learn about God as we share our faith with them through family life and by being a part of a church community.

Infant Baptism is a partnership of God and parents working together for the sake of the child. And there is also another partner – the congregation! According to the Bible and the learnings of Christian history through the ages, the grace of God is experienced in community. Jesus said that we would feel His presence “when two or more gather together.” The Holy Spirit was received by the first disciples when “they were together in one place.” Like it or not, Christianity is based on an experience of God which happens when people get together.

For us, the community is the local church. Accordingly, the Service of Baptism provides for promises to be made by both parents and the congregation. While the parents promise to provide a Christian home where the child will experience the love of God on a daily basis through their care and the example of their faith, the congregation promises to provide a community in which the child is safe and where he/she will experience the love of God through the leadership and example of every church member.

As parents and as members of the congregation, we may not always keep these promises, but they are nevertheless made with solemn intention because we know that the spiritual health and happiness of our children depends on us! And for their sake, we must be willing to work together, to support each other, and to hold each other accountable for the promises which we have made.

**What is Required of Me?**

We ask these questions during the sacrament of baptism:

Do you affirm your faith in God, your desire to follow the ways of Jesus Christ, and your willingness to be led by the Holy Spirit?

Will you do your best to raise your child in the community of the church, here, and at home teaching them the truths and the duties of the faith, and encouraging them to seek Confirmation, so that together you might grow in your faith?

The decision to share faith with our children is as natural as wanting the best food, health care or education for them. The promises of Baptism are based on the assumption that we want to share with our children the faith in God which is so important to us.

Although you will find your own ways to keep these promises, we can agree that they require a willingness to make God a part of your home, to provide an environment which is truly safe, and to be a family that is part of the church family.

Of course, the decision to be confirmed will ultimately be made by the child. However, we accept responsibility as parents to help our children understand the importance of this decision and that it is one which they, not the parents, must make. In Rosedale United Church, the confirmation programme for teenagers begins in Grade Nine. Parents are expected to encourage participation in the programme but, in the end, the decision whether to be confirmed is made by each teen without pressure.

**Do I have to be a Church Member?**

The short answer is No.

To best follow up the promises you’ll make, you will have an ongoing relationship with a community of faith, but we’d rather you take the step of membership into the congregation based on being ready to take part in things here.

If you are not a member of Rosedale United Church and you have decided that you want your family to belong to the faith community, it is easy to arrange for your membership. The important thing is your decision that ***your child belong to a family which belongs to this church family***.

If it is not appropriate for either parent to become a member of Rosedale United Church, the minister will discuss with you how you might plan to follow through on the promises made during the ceremony in a meaningful way.

**What if We’re a Same-Sex Family?**

Rosedale United Church is proud and privileged to baptize children of same-sex couples.  We welcome persons of all sexual orientations and gender identities to celebrate life passages in this community.

**What About God-Parents?**

In the United Church of Canada, every member of the congregation becomes your child’s God-Parent. This is in fact what we promise when children are baptized –

….to receive this child in Christ’s name, even as we were once received, and to support him/her with constant love, wholesome example, Christian teaching and faithful prayer.

As well, you may choose to establish a special relationship with others who will have particular responsibility for your child. If so, you are encouraged to have them stand with you during the Service.

**What About a Private Service?**

Since Baptism is about your child’s relationship with the community of faith, the Service of Baptism normally occurs during a regular Sunday morning service where the whole congregation can participate. In some extraordinary cases, arrangements may be made for Services of Baptism to be held at another time and/or place. In such cases, member of the church’s Session (elders) will be present to represent the congregation.

**What if I Don’t Live in Toronto?**

Sometimes, although they are living in another community, parents wish to have the Service of Baptism in Rosedale United Church where grandparents and others may attend. In such a case, the people of Rosedale act as representatives of the congregation which will be the church family of the child. During the service, the minister will announce the name of the congregation for which the Baptism is being celebrated.

It is necessary that the parents have a relationship with that ‘new’ church family before the Baptism takes place. In most cases, instruction about Baptism is provided by the minister who will be the family’s pastor.

**What Happens in the Service of Baptism?**

First, the parents may sit where you choose. Since you will be called to the chancel, it is better not to sit in the balcony. If you wish, arrangements may be made in advance for seats to be reserved for you and your family. Just let us have an approximate number and inform those in your group that they should identify themselves to the ushers when they arrive.

The Baptism ceremony occurs early in the service, before the children go out to Sunday School. This allows all children to be reminded of the importance of their place in the church. It also allows you to leave restless little ones in the care of the Nursery for the rest of the service.

The minister, joined by the Clerk of Session and one of the baptised children of the congregation, will call you forward. Move onto the chancel and stand with other families facing the congregation. The minister begins the Baptism by reminding everyone of its meaning. Then, the questions are asked of the parents. Answer as directed altogether. Then, the congregation is asked to accept its responsibility. After a prayer, the children are taken one at a time for Baptism with water.

The minister will take the child from the parent who is holding him/her and return the child to the parent who reaches for him/her. If the child is unhappy about being taken by the minister, the parents may hold him/her and move to the font (which holds the water). There is no reason for making the experience a bad one for the child!

A candle is lit for each child Baptized. It is symbolic of our belief that the Light which is Jesus is reflected in the life of every person who belongs to Him. Therefore, the Light of Christ shines a little brighter because your child has been Baptized.

You will also be handed a small hand-knitted baptism blanket, or ‘prayer blanket’. It has been made by a member of the congregation, and brought forward in the congregation as part of our offerings.

The Clerk of Session will hand you the Certificate and a ‘keepsake’ box for the candle. While the congregation sings a hymn, you return to your seats. For the sake of the child, you are encouraged to take advantage of the Nursery facilities provided. Check the Certificate and notify the Church Office immediately if any of the information is incorrect.

**Are Photographs Allowed?**

Although we ask that photographers not disrupt the worship by taking pictures during the Baptism Ceremony, you are certainly welcome to do so following the service. If you wish, the minister will be happy to join you for pictures as soon as possible after the end of the service.

Arrangements may be made for the service to be videotaped. As long as no additional lighting is used, video cameras may be operated during the service. Those operating video cameras should remain in their seats or, if they prefer, they can be accommodated in the Sanctuary Control Room.

**So, the Decision is Yours!**

The people of Rosedale are anxious to share in the Baptism of your child and to include you within the fellowship of our congregation. We pray that you will decide to make your family a part of our church family.

But the decision is yours!