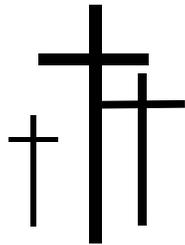


The
Sacrament of
CHRISTIAN BAPTISM

A Workbook for Parents and Sponsors



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Congratulations!

Your interest in Baptism suggests that you are not only blessed with the privilege of sharing your life with a child, you recognize that you have a responsibility to nurture the spiritual development of this new life. The people of Eastminster United Church congratulate you and offer to support you in this most important undertaking.

The purpose of this *workbook* is to help you understand the meaning of Baptism and, in particular, what would be the implications for you if you decide to have your child Baptized. We want you to understand before going any further that the decision is **yours** to make. The people of Eastminster have already decided that they want to welcome your child. Children have a very special place in the life of our church family and we take great delight in every opportunity to receive a child by Baptism in the name of Jesus Christ. However, as much as we want to welcome your child, this is a decision which only you can make. **You** have to decide if you are ready to accept your responsibility as Christian parents or sponsors.

You may have contacted other churches and felt like you were 'turned down.' Try to understand that each church has its own regulations about Baptism but all are based in the fundamental belief that Baptism is the *rite of initiation* in Christian community. Consequently, it is impossible to separate the sacrament from your own relationship with the church. You may feel that your child was *rejected* because you do not go to church. In fact, since your child's relationship with the church depends on you, whether your child is accepted by this or any church really depends on **you**.

The purpose of this *workbook* is to help you understand the meaning of Baptism so that you can then decide whether **you** are ready to make this decision for the sake of your child. We hope that you will choose to say **YES**, but we cannot take away your responsibility to decide.

Whatever your decision, the people of Eastminster Church pray that God will always bless you and your child with every good thing.

***The
decision
is yours
to make!***

What is Baptism?

Some people brought their children to Jesus for Him to place His hands on them. The disciples saw them and scolded them for doing so, but Jesus called the children to Him and said, 'Let the children come to me and do not stop them, because the Kingdom of God belongs to such as these. Remember this! Whoever does not receive the Kingdom of God like a child will never enter it.'

(Luke 18:15-17)

Perhaps we should begin by stating what Baptism is **not!** Baptism is **not** a magical incantation which makes God love your child. According to everything that we Christians believe, your child was created by God and is already loved by God, no matter what you decide about his/her Baptism.

***Baptism
is NOT a
ticket to
heaven***

Baptism is **not** a guarantee that your child will go to heaven. Since God loves your child and wants only the best for him/her, it is God's will that your child *inherit eternal life*. His/her salvation has already been accomplished by God in the saving act of Jesus Christ on the cross. Baptism is a sign of what God has already done and a reminder that salvation is a gift offered to all. Eventually, all of us decide for ourselves whether to accept the gift of salvation. That's a decision which your child will someday make for him/herself. For now, Baptism is a celebration of what is already true, no matter what you do: God knows your child. God loves your child. God has already saved your child.

Baptism is also an acknowledgement that, no matter how much God loves our children, we control how much they experience the benefits of that love. We know that children are entrusted, by God and by society, to the care of their parents. There may be lots of good food for our children, but we decide what they eat. There may be lots of good books available to them, but we decide what they read. This *control* diminishes as they grow older, but we cannot deny the responsibility which belongs to all of us who are parents.

In Baptism, we acknowledge that our responsibility includes the spiritual nurture and development of our children. They will learn about God only if we share our faith with them through family devotions and by taking them to Church and Sunday School. No matter how much God loves them, *we* decide how much they will benefit from the love of God.

Therefore, Baptism is first and foremost an opportunity for Christian parents to make certain promises which are vital to the spiritual well-being of our children.

Baptism is a partnership of God and parents working together for the sake of the child. 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 the 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.

***Baptism
is a set of
solemn
promises***

What is required of me?

It's simple! First, you've got to profess faith in Jesus Christ. Unless you believe what a Christian believes about God and our relationship with God, presenting your child for Baptism makes no sense!

Second, you should be willing to do your duty as Christian parents. In the Service of Baptism, this duty is defined by three questions:

Will you bring up your child in the knowledge and love of God, teaching him/her the truths and duties of the Christian faith?

Will you make a Christian home for your child, so fashioning your lives that he/she will come to know Christ as Saviour and Lord?

Will you encourage your child to seek confirmation so he/she may be strengthened in faith by the Holy Spirit, nurtured at the table of the Lord and then go on to serve God faithfully in his/her own life?

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 Eastminster Church, the confirmation programme for teenagers begins at 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 **YES**. That's because of what we believe about church membership.

The church consists of individuals who share a faith in God and a belief that God is revealed to us in the person of Jesus Christ. That is, the church is just a group of people who have this one thing in common: a relationship with Christ as Saviour and Lord. The formalities of church membership are simply a reflection of the fact that we share the belief that Jesus Christ is our contact with God and that we have chosen to practise that faith in the context of this particular church family. That's why the 'rules' of the United Church require that at least one of the parents be members of the congregation.

If you are not a member of Eastminster Church and you have decided that you want your family to belong to this 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 Eastminster Church, it is possible for a *sponsor* to present the child for Baptism. In this case, the sponsor is a member of the congregation who agrees to accept responsibility to work with the parents for the spiritual development and needs of the child.

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, members of the church's Session (elders) will be present to represent the congregation.

What if I don't live in Belleville?

Sometimes, although they are living in another community, parents wish to have the Service of Baptism in Eastminster Church where grandparents and others may attend. In such a case, the people of Eastminster 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.

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*Baptism is
the sacrament in which
by the cleansing with water in the name of God,
Creator, Saviour and Holy Spirit,
we are received into the Church of Christ
and are engaged to be wholly and always His.*

(from The Catechism of The United Church of Canada)

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 the Co-ordinator of the Sunday School Nursery Department, will call you forward. Move onto the chancel and stand with other families facing the congregation. (It's painless - honest!) 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.

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 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.

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So,

the decision is yours!

The people of Eastminster 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!

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