

On Baptism

Lambeth United Church ~ London, Ontario

Revised November 2011

Thank you for approaching Lambeth United Church concerning baptism. As a congregation within the United Church of Canada we want to administer the Sacrament of Baptism in a manner that is faithful to the doctrine and practice of the United Church and in a manner that is meaningful to the people of the church.

There are two parts to this policy. The latter part is the actual words used in the administration of baptism for children in our worship service. This part describes the general outline as to how Lambeth United Church administers the sacrament of Baptism. As with all United Churches, Lambeth operates under The Manual of the United Church of Canada which is the church law of the United Church.

This paper is an attempt to explain it all in plain English. Baptism is the sacrament by which we enter the family of God. What we trust is happening as we perform the visible sign is that God is adopting your child into the church - into the Christian family. In the United Church we conduct the sacrament in public worship so that the church family is there to welcome a new brother or sister in Christ.

The one exception to administering baptism in public worship is the emergency where a child's life is in crisis. In that situation, out of a sense of pastoral concern for people, the church will baptize quickly at the bedside.

In order to be open to people who seek baptism for their child, Lambeth United never says a flat "no". However, in order to be true to our United Church doctrine and church law, certain requirements must be met by parents and the church.

For a child to be baptized, at least one parent or guardian **should** be a member in good standing of Lambeth United Church. That means that, at least one parent, is an attending, supporting person. In effect, what we expect is that persons who wish children baptized in Lambeth United Church have a relationship with the congregation. That is, they attend, or are members, and support the ministry of Christ in this place.

The concern here is that by baptism a child enters the family of God, the church. That entry into the family has to be "for real" or we make a mockery of the questions and promises. Parents and/or sponsors promise to provide Christian homes, a Christian environment, in which to raise their child. They promise to raise the child in the faith and to urge the child to seek confirmation so that when the child comes of age he or she will want to be part of the life and work of the church. The church promises to support the parents. The church meets her obligation by providing a children's time in the worship service, providing Sunday School, providing mid-week groups like Junior Choir, and supporting church camping in the summer.

The church members cannot fulfil their promise to God unless the parents ensure that both parent and child are part of the worship and life of the church. That is why the formal church law insists on "membership in good standing" for the person or persons assuming responsibility for the child's Christian upbringing in the church family. While we attempt to provide grace, we must also acknowledge that we are responsible to the church and to God for all our actions.

If you are not a member in good standing and there is no one who is a member in good standing who can act as a sponsor, then we offer you a means by which you can fulfil the requirements.

We ask that you become a part of the church life. This activity provides you with time to decide whether you want to be a part of the Lambeth United Church family. It also provides time to meet and get to know people in the congregation who can act as sponsors, and then, if you commit yourself to membership classes, you can then assume responsibility for your child at the end of that period of instruction. These demands may seem a burden, but really the Worship Committee and the Church Council, which is responsible for the proper administration of the sacrament, are simply asking of both parents and church that baptism be treated seriously. Because we cannot look into the hearts and minds of people, and because no one in authority wants to sit in judgment, we have set these objective criteria for both church and parents to meet.

If you wish to wait until you can fulfil the requirements on your own, and have established an on-going relationship with this congregation and not be dependent on others, we respect that decision. We want to assure you that your child is not, therefore, rejected by God or by the church. Baptized or not, God welcomes all children.

Occasionally, persons who have been part of the congregation, and who have moved a fair distance away have wished their children baptized with family and friends around in what they still consider their 'home' congregation. To accommodate this need, the worship committee has consented to these events by requesting that the parents of the child provide the name of a congregation in the area where they now live, to whom notification of the baptism can be sent. This congregation would know the family beforehand, and would be willing to provide the necessary Pastoral Care, and Spiritual nourishment that all growing minds need. Coming 'home' for a baptism, when you have no relationship with any church is not a good idea. As mentioned, it is a public act, a profession of faith, and must be treated with the utmost of respect.

The normal practice of preparation for baptism would be that the parents/guardians would meet with the minister to go over this policy and to arrange a specific date. The baptism would then be considered by the worship committee. Dates for baptism are set by the worship committee in conjunction with the Church council.

It is also the thought of the worship committee that to keep the baptism a meaningful part of the worship service, that the usual practice will be that no more than four children are baptised on any given Sunday.

Here is a copy of the actual portion of the service used in baptism.

If you have further questions, then please arrange to meet with the minister to discuss them.

Order for Baptism

Please note to your friends that the taking of flash pictures during the sacrament is prohibited.

The parents will come forward when asked and stand at the foot of the steps.

Today we celebrate the sacrament of Baptism which is one of two Holy Ordinances of the United Church of Canada. These parents have come to the church asking baptism of their children

The persons to be baptized today are: X

When people became Christians in the early church, they were baptized as Jesus was: that is, they went down under the water and came up again. Although this is still possible and is done in the United Church, our practice of font and water is the same in it's meaning. The old way of life ends and a new relationship with God begins. In our tradition, baptism stands for the new life God gives us through Jesus. It proclaims that God has made us members of this community in Christ. It is a chance for parents to express their faith in God.

Today, God is calling to these children: The parents are beginning the response. The response will continue as long as they live in a house of faith.

Since a young child may not understand what is being done, today the parents act on their behalf. It is the parents that are making the vows and the church, and the families are promising to help them. It is our hope and prayer that when these children have reached the age of maturity they will choose to confirm their faith and stand as one with God's people. To this end, a candle is lighted from the Christ candle and given to the parents. This candle is to be lit each year on the child's birthday to remind the child and the parents of the promises made today.

Questions:

You have brought your child to Lambeth United Church in hopes of a baptism, before this gathered group, tell us all, do you believe in God and in God's love?

A: We do.

Do you believe that God has been made known to the world in Jesus of Nazareth, who

lived and died and lives forever?

A: We do.

Do you believe that God by the Holy Spirit is active in the world to direct and strengthen you?

A: We do.

As your child grows, through all the difficulties of life and all the pains and joys of becoming an adult, will you do your best to provide a Christian home for this child? Will you help your child learn of God, be with this community of Christ's people, and to seek a full faith when he or she reaches an age of understanding?

A: We will!

*Congregation will be asked to stand.

Do you, the relatives gathered of these children, the friends and members of this community of Jesus Christ, accept these children offered here for baptism today, and will you help these parents and all parents and children under your care?

A: We will God being our Helper!

Let us pray in silence for the gift of God's spirit...

The parent(s) will bring the child up onto the platform and stand to the right side of the communion table with the baptismal font between them and the minister.

What is the name of this child?

A: The name of this child is.....

I baptize you in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit,. Amen.

The child is then introduced to the congregation.

The Baptism Candles and certificates are presented to the parents.

Following the baptism itself, the parent(s) will take the child and once more stand at the foot of the steps until after the post-baptism prayer is said.

Post Baptism prayer:

God of our mothers and of our fathers, in joy we praise and we honour you, we thank you and give glory to your name. For the love which has made us and which supports us, for the ongoing presence of the Holy spirit in all our lives we are eternally grateful.

For your gift of life embodied in this child we thank you. For this sacrament by which they are received into the church community we honour you. Bless these children and their parents this day we ask. Keep them in love and truth as they grow in grace through the years. Keep us also, that as we have promised to help we will be faithful all our years. For we ask it in Jesus name. Amen.