

The Sacrament of Christian Baptism



A Workbook for Parents

Caledon East United Church

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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 Caledon East United Church, Caledon 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 implication 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 Caledon East United Church 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”. Please try to understand that each church has its own regulations and Baptism, but all are based on 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 Caledon East United Church pray that God will always bless you and your child with every good thing.

What is Baptism?

People brought babies to Jesus, hoping he might touch them. When the disciples saw it, they shooed them off. Jesus called them back. "Let these children alone. Don't get between them and me. These children are the Kingdom's pride and joy. Mark this: Unless you accept God's kingdom in the simplicity of a child, you'll never get in." (Luke 18: 15-17 "The Message")

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 guarantee that you child will go to heaven. Since God loves your child and wants only the best for him/her, it is God's will that you 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 you 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.

Baptism is also an acknowledgment that, no matter how much God loves our Children, how much they experience the benefits of that love depends on us. 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 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 learning 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! 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?

It's really not complicated. First, you must 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 fulfill your responsibility as Christian parents. In the celebration of the sacrament, this responsibility is defined in one question with two parts:

Will you endeavour to show your child the Christian life and to grow with your child in faith through participation in this community of Christ's people?

The decision to share 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 is one, which they not the parents, must make. Parents are expected to encourage participation in the program but, in the end, the decision whether to be confirmed is made by each person without pressure.

**Must I be a church member
to have my child baptized?**

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 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 practice that faith in the context of this particular church family. The 'rules' of the United Church require that at least one of the parents be a member of the congregation, or

that the child to be Baptized be sponsored by someone within the congregation.

If you are not a member of Caledon East United Church, Caledon, and you have decided that you want your family to belong to this faith community, it is easy to arrange for your membership.

If, for whatever reason, it is not appropriate for either parent to become a member of Caledon East United Church, it is possible for the congregation to act as a sponsor. In this case the congregation 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:

As a baptized and baptizing church, do you commit yourselves to support and nurture these persons within a community which worships God, resists evil and seeks justice?

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 of Baptism.

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 worship time where the whole congregation can participate. In some extraordinary cases, arrangements may be made for Service of Baptism to be held at another time and/or place.

What if I don't live in Caledon?

Sometimes, although they are living in another community, parents wish to have the Service of Baptism in Caledon East United Church, Caledon where grandparents/parents and others may attend. In such a case, the people of Caledon East United Church act as representatives of the congregation which will be the *church family* of the child.

It is, of course, helpful and hopeful that the parents have a relationship with the other church family before the Baptism takes place.

What happens in the Service of Baptism?

The Baptism ceremony occurs early in the worship time, 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 worship time.

The family names will be called out, and parents and God-parents will stand to respond to the vows together. Following that, the family units will be called forward individually to the Baptismal Font. The officiating minister will ask the child's name (either parent or both can respond) and take the child from the parent holding him/her.

If the child is unhappy about being taken by the minister, the parent 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 (or the parent!) Following the baptism, the child is introduced to the congregation and returned to the other parent.

You will receive a Baptismal Certificate and candle, and then return to your seat. The next family will then be invited to participate similarly. For the sake of the child, please feel free to make use of the Nursery facilities provided. Check the Certificate and notify the Church Office immediately if any of the information recorded is incorrect.

Are photographs or videotaping allowed?

We ask that photographers and videographers not disrupt the worship by engaging in photography during the Baptism ceremony. However, you are certainly welcome to do so following the worship. If you wish, the minister will be happy to join you for pictures as soon as possible following the completion of the worship time. At no time during the worship do we want to contend with people moving about with flashes and lights.



So ...

The decision is yours!

The people of Caledon East United Church, Caledon 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!

