

# Baptism Policy



**Trinity United Church**  
**North Bay, Ontario**



# Congratulations On Your Decision To Seek Baptism

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We welcome your request to have Trinity United Church host your baptism or the baptism of someone you love. It is our hope that this celebration will be the beginning of a new and deeper relationship with God and the Christian church. With that in mind, and with a desire to be of help in your planning, we have put together this booklet which contains relevant information that you may require. It has been prepared to assist you in your planning and to help you discern whether now is the time for baptism and if Trinity is the appropriate venue.

## Our Beliefs About Baptism

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**We believe** that baptism is a gift of God through which promises are made by those being baptized, their families, their friends, and the whole congregation. It is the beginning of a faith journey.

**We believe** that baptism involves Christian commitment. It is the first step in a lifelong journey that needs companions. As such, it should take place in a church community where you feel comfortable pursuing your faith—where people will support you, nurture you, pray for you, and give you the courage to follow Jesus.

**We believe** that a service of baptism is a sacrament and an important religious ceremony—it is not a social occasion with a religious touch. In particular, infant baptism has sometimes become a social event that looks good in the baby's photo album. At Trinity, however, we believe that parents are doing much more with baptism. They are acknowledging that their child is a gift from God.

**We believe** that the promises made at the service are central to the baptism. In these promises, parents, family, and the entire congregation pledge their support and prayers. While any of the baptized may later decide to break from these pledges, we nonetheless believe that the promises made at baptism represent both an act of faith and a serious covenant with lifelong intention.

United Churches are not bound to preside over baptisms upon request. The matter of your baptism is prayerfully considered in light of this policy. Those for whom Christian faith is not significant should not seek baptism.

# The Meaning of Baptism

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The word “*baptism*” is related to two Greek words. One means “*to dip or draw water,*” the other means “*to cause to die by drowning.*” These twin meanings are deep and rich with significance. Various traditions suggest that through baptism we:

- are reborn through water and the Holy Spirit
- join with Jesus in his death and resurrection as we pass through the water
- become members of Christ’s body
- become disciples of Jesus
- become part of the church family
- experience forgiveness and renewal through God’s grace

Baptism is a universal rite. There is no such thing as “*United Church baptism,*” “*Roman Catholic baptism,*” or “*Lutheran baptism.*” Most Christian denominations share a sacramental tradition of baptism (including water and the use of the historic Trinitarian formula) making us together disciples of the one Jesus, despite any differences in how we practice the sacrament.

## Why Baptism?

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At different times and stages in life, people have various reasons why they pursue baptism. For many, it is a strong family expectation. Some may do it because they want to more fully belong to a church they have long attended. Others may feel that they’ve been missing something in not belonging to a church, or that they want to bring their child into a rich religious tradition, and a wider family of faith. We hope that you will take the rite seriously, and sincerely seek a sense of spiritual rootedness for you and your family.

## Child Baptism

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Some churches approve only of adult baptism. We at Trinity definitely support adult baptism, but we also belong to a tradition which proudly baptizes infants and children, too. We know that in biblical times it was common practice to baptize new believers and their children. Early church leaders continued this tradition.

Personal (*adult*) faith became an issue in baptism during the reformation of the 16th century. However, we consider children to be full members of God’s kingdom and of Jesus’

family. We affirm this fact in their baptism, and this is underscored by the child's unmerited and passive reception of God's grace and love.

We affirm childhood baptism as the beginning of a faith journey which may later include confirmation (a series of classes on what it means to be Christian) and ensuing full church membership.

## The Promises

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At Trinity, the traditional vows of baptism (made by the person being baptized, or by the parents on their behalf) are usually phrased as follows:

Desiring the freedom of new life in Christ, do you promise to resist evil and to live in love and justice?

**We do, by the grace of God.**

Do you profess your faith in one God, Source of Love, in Jesus Christ, Love incarnate, and in the Holy Spirit, Love's power?

**We do, by the grace of God.**

Will you join with your sisters and brothers the world over in the ministry of Jesus Christ?

**We will, God being our strength.**

Will you nurture your family in the Christian life, growing in faith, hope, and love?

**We will, God being our strength.**

The first three questions are traditional baptismal questions phrased in contemporary language. Assenting to those questions suggests that the faith of the one baptised is in keeping with traditional Christian reliance on Jesus, the Trinity, and membership in the Christian Church. The fourth and final question is typically only asked in the case of child baptism, to ensure that the parents or sponsors intend to bring their child up in a Christian way. In response to the vows of those being baptized, the congregation vows to prayerfully support you in an environment where meaningful spiritual nurture can happen. We usually join together in "A New Creed," which is a declaration of Christian faith specific to the United Church of Canada.

# Commonly Asked Questions

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## **How soon should I have a child baptized?**

People can be baptized at any age, once prepared. In the case of children or infants, because the child's faith is proclaimed by the parents, we celebrate the baptism once parents feel fully prepared for the service. While Sunday church services are the appropriate venue for baptism, situations of serious illness may entail a baptism in another location without delay.

## **Are Godparents important?**

While not as common as they were in the past, godparents or other family members and friends who will play a key role in the faith-life of the one being baptized are encouraged to take part. It should be noted that godparents are not a substitute for legally-appointed guardians (appointed in case something should happen to the parents). That is an important matter for your legal will.

## **What if our family is not completely comfortable with Christian baptism?**

It may be that only one parent, a single parent, another family member, or a guardian sponsors a child's baptism. This is fine. In some cases, a less involved parent or guardian may wish to stand with the family, even if they do not make the vows involved.

## **Do unbaptized children go to heaven?**

Some people may still believe that unbaptized children do not go to heaven. Today, very few theologians would argue that this is true, regardless of their denominational affiliation. We would do well to remind ourselves, as well, that the sacrament is not in itself a "ticket to heaven." Instead, it is our way of celebrating and confirming the saving and loving presence of God in the ongoing faith journey.

## **How much does a baptism cost?**

There is no charge for a baptism. Like God's grace, it is freely given. During all regular services of worship, there is an opportunity to make a gracious free-will offering to support our ministry to this community.

## **What about photographs?**

Pictures can be a valued memento of this important life event. However, because of the sanctity of the sacrament, please refrain from taking pictures during the service. Our minister and other participants will be available to pose for pictures after the service.

## How do we prove we are baptized?

The church keeps careful records about baptism. On baptism, you will be provided with a certificate. While we can later provide you with a letter confirming your baptism, your certificate itself cannot be re-issued—so please treat it with care.

## Expectations

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**Church Attendance:** Your church attendance previous to the baptism is expected, and will enable you to meet members of the congregation and become comfortable and relaxed in the church. It is certainly expected that the baptism will be part of an ongoing commitment to a church community. We try to keep connected with our families, and hope that you will make the same effort.

**Pre-Baptism Consultation:** A baptism at Trinity United Church involves the expectation that you will meet with our minister to share ideas about baptism, and walk through the service.

## The Next Step

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While we at Trinity do not require that you have a concept of baptism which exactly mirrors ours, we ask that your feelings and expectations are in essential agreement with ours. If you choose to have a baptism at Trinity, please obtain a Baptism Form, which relays vital legal and record-keeping information to us. On its return, we will contact you about further details.

***We believe God is calling Trinity United Church to:  
Reach out and serve the wider community and the world  
Nurture spirituality in people of all ages  
Be a safe, open, welcoming, inclusive community of faith***

*Thank you for inquiring with us about baptism. We wish God's richest blessings for you and your family.*

