

Eagle Ridge United Church

Baptism Policy

Governed by: Session
Adoption Date: May 30, 2007
Modification Date: November 28, 2016

POLICY:

1. No one seriously seeking this holy sacrament of Jesus Christ will be turned away.
2. The decision to baptize someone shall in each case be made by the Session.
3. Session is open and willing to baptize any adult who has been adequately prepared for this sacrament, or any child whose parent(s) or guardian(s) have been adequately prepared for the solemn vows they must undertake.
4. For infant or child baptism, it is our preference that at least one parent has full membership in Eagle Ridge United Church, or is taking steps to become a full member within six months of the baptism.
5. Baptisms may only take place within the context of the gathered community at worship, except in cases of emergency.
6. All baptisms will be presided over by a settled minister of the congregation unless arrangements are made for another minister to co-preside.

RATIONALE:

Baptism is a holy sacrament and thus a serious commitment which requires parents of babies and children, or the adult being baptized, to make a series of solemn promises. The vows of baptism require that a person understand what Christian discipleship means. Baptism, therefore, is not to be undertaken lightly, for the sake of sentiment, superstition, or because of pressure from family members.

When someone is baptized, the congregation will also stand and make solemn promises to help nurture that person in the faith, and/or to support the parent(s) or guardian(s) in raising a child in the faith. We do not expect our congregation to make this serious promise about a child or an adult they do not know.

HOW WE UNDERSTAND BAPTISM

In all of the Christian church, baptism is a sacrament. In the Protestant tradition, baptism and Holy Communion are the only sacraments of the church. A sacrament is a ritual that has been defined as “an outward and physical sign of an inward and spiritual grace.” This means that baptism is a sign of God’s love present and working in the child or adult being baptized, and in the congregation. Because baptism is a sacrament, it is to be treated with great respect, and it is never to be entered into lightly.

Because the significance of baptism has changed in the past number of decades in our Canadian culture, it is important for us to state that in the United Church tradition we believe that God loves every person, regardless of whether they have been baptized or not. We believe that God’s love is active in every person from the beginning. God’s love

for us does not begin at baptism. This means, according to United Church beliefs, people who die without having been baptized will not be condemned, lost or damned because they have not been baptized. Baptism is not a magic charm for life.

Among other things, baptism is an act of initiation. Through baptism Christians are made part of the universal Christian church, and specifically, The United Church of Canada and Eagle Ridge congregation. In the United Church, we believe that God's love is not in any way dependent on our ability to understand it, and so we practice infant as well as adult baptism. Because little children cannot themselves make the decision to be baptized, their parent(s) or guardian(s) and the church act on their behalf. In baptism, children officially become Christians. Our hope is that they will grow in the faith and that when they are old enough to confirm that decision that was made on their behalf. Confirmation is an act through which people make public profession of faith and are accepted as full members of The United Church of Canada.

FOR CHILDREN

When a person requests that their child be baptized, we assume that God is calling not only the child, but the parent(s) into our fellowship. Therefore, our intention is to remove as many barriers to that as possible, while still maintaining the significance and integrity of the sacrament. We see this as an opportunity to assist in discovering what God has planned for their life and to help them on their spiritual journey.

When a child is baptized, the parent(s) make a vow to raise in the Christian life. Since we believe Christianity can only be lived out in the context of a Christian community, we also believe that every baptized child should be given the gift of growing up as part of a church. Thus the parent(s) should be willing to commit to raising their child in the Christian faith by bringing them to worship, giving them opportunity to learn through Sunday School, and by being an active part of the community of faith.

FOR ADULTS

When an adult is baptized, they are making a vow to live in the Christian life within the context of a Christian community. Since we believe Christianity can only be lived out in the context of a congregation, we also believe that every baptized person should be given the gift of being part of a church. The adult should be willing to commit to coming to worship, by being an active part of the community of faith and growing their faith by participating in learning opportunities offered.

WHAT CONSTITUTES “ADEQUATE PREPARATION” FOR BAPTISM?

Those who request a baptism are required to be adequately prepared which normally involves:

- a) an appointment with the Minister;
- b) regular attendance at Sunday worship;
- c) completion of an introductory course on Christianity or equivalent;
- d) completion of the “Exploring Baptism” and “Exploring Membership” courses.