



BAPTISM

We are pleased that you have enquired about baptism for your child. We understand how important it is to express the thanks and happiness you feel for the new life that has arrived in your home (broken sleep excepted!).

Baptism is also important for the Christian church, and we want to share with you how baptism is understood in the Uniting Church. This leaflet is intended to play a part in this sharing.

What is baptism?

Christian baptism is a sacrament of initiation into, and belonging to the Christian community—the church. It is a response to the love of God we know in Jesus Christ. From earliest times in the life of the Christian church people entering the Christian life have been baptized by water as a personal initiation into the Christian faith and faith community. However, baptism is not just an event; it is the starting point of a Christian journey for life.

It is helpful to note that Baptism, as a sacrament of initiation and belonging, is more than a naming ceremony (often called ‘Christening’). Baptism is not some form of ‘spiritual insurance policy’ or a religious ‘ticket to heaven’. In the Uniting Church we have a small serviced called ‘A Service of Thanksgiving for the Gift of a Child’. Some people find this service helpful when they are not yet ready to make the commitment involved in baptism. Some choose this small service as an initial act of thanksgiving soon after a child is born and later request that their child be baptised. This service is not normally offered as an either/or possibility but in a both/and situation. We are happy to explain this service to parents.

In the Basis of Union of the Uniting Church in Australia (our most important statement about who we are and what we believe), there is a sentence that reads: **“The Uniting Church will baptize those who confess the Christian faith, and children who are presented for baptism and for whose instruction and nourishment in the faith the Church takes responsibility”** (BU, para 7).

In any meaningful relationship there are responsibilities and commitments. This is true also for Baptism and belonging to the Christian church.

Parent(s) are asked to declare their own Christian faith and promise to help their child to understand and grow in the same faith. This assumes participation in the life of the Christian church. The baptism and participation of a child in the life of the church presumes the baptism and participation of the parent(s). The meaning of the baptism of a child is derived from the baptism of one or both of the parents. Parents who have not been baptized are encouraged to consider seeking baptism themselves. We are happy to discuss this with them.

The Church, represented by the local Congregation, promises to play its part in support of the parents and to provide opportunity for participation in its life, learning, nurture, of the child and the child’s family.

A Request for Baptism is taken seriously by the church, and is usually referred to the minister in the first instance. A number of steps take place before a baptism occurs. The date of the baptism is discussed with the parent(s), but needs to take into account the events taking place in the worship of the church, and the appropriateness of the seasons of the Christian calendar. There are some times in the year when baptisms are particularly significant (such as the Sundays immediately after Easter).

The following steps are given as a guide to how a request for baptism will be considered:

Step One: The Minister will meet with the parent(s) and provide some initial information, including this leaflet. It is usual to provide a copy of the 'Service of Baptism' (and sometimes 'A Service of Thanksgiving for the Gift of a Child') to assist parents in their consideration. The parent(s) and family are encouraged to participate in the life of the local church.

Step Two: There is sometimes a period of preparation, usually with the Minister but an Elder of the congregation may also assist in this. This is aimed at assisting people to meaningfully participate in the 'Service of Baptism' and understand the commitment being made in this service—by the parents and the Church.

Step Three: The parents provide the details required for the request to be taken to the Elders or Church Council for approval.

Step Four: The date is agreed upon for the baptism and an Elder is appointed to take part in the service and to provide pastoral care and support for the child and the family. Except in most unusual situations (such as the serious illness of a child) baptism **takes place within the Sunday morning worship of the Congregation.**

Over the centuries it has become a custom for **Godparents** or Sponsors to be appointed. This is not presumed, nor is it essential. Within the Uniting Church it is understood that the Church takes responsibility for this role. However, if parents do chose one or more Godparent(s), it is expected that they be active, Baptized members of a Christian church.

Contact details

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