

Approved at the Leadership Team Meeting on May 15, 2013

St. Paul's United Church: Baptism Policy

“And Jesus came and said to them, ‘All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything that I have commanded you. And remember, I am with you always, to the end of the age.’”
–Matthew 28:18-20

*“Before conscious thought or action on our part,
we are born into the brokenness of this world.
Before conscious thought or action on our part,
we are surrounded by God’s redeeming love.
Baptism by water in the name of the Holy Trinity
is the means by which we are received, at any age,
into the covenanted community of the church.
It is the ritual that signifies our rebirth in faith
and cleansing by the power of God.
Baptism signifies the nurturing, sustaining,
and transforming power of God’s love
and our grateful response to that grace.”*
-A Song of Faith”

Background: We ground our understanding of baptism in the Great Commission of Christ (above) and Jesus’ own baptism in the River Jordan as described in the gospels, as well as our Reformed tradition and particular understandings of the United Church of Canada.

Guidelines for those seeking baptism:

- I. Baptism shall be celebrated as needed throughout the year. Scheduling of baptism will be at the discretion of the minister and the Leadership Team and/or the Worship and the Arts Interest Group in coordination with the parents or individual seeking baptism.
- II. Individuals seeking baptism for either themselves or their child should contact the minister to plan for education on the significance of baptism.
- III. Those presenting their children for baptism should be a member of St. Paul’s or an active adherent of the congregation. If not, a sponsor will be named to them. The sponsor will attend the baptism class with the parent/s, and/or meet with them separately to get to know them and welcome them to the church. If the parents have family members who are active in the

congregation, they may serve as sponsors for the family. Otherwise, the parents may choose the sponsor or have the Leadership Team appoint someone.

- IV. Because the community of faith gathered at a baptism promises to support the individual being baptized throughout their life of faith, baptisms of those living at a distance are not preferable. In the case where baptism is sought for a child or individual not from the Estevan area, the family should meet with the minister who will then discern with the Leadership Team the best course of action. If the baptism proceeds, the minister will help the family to be in contact with a church where they reside, and will encourage them to be a part of that church's community.
- V. Because baptism is a response to the Gospel read and proclaimed each week, and because the promises made by the congregation are so integral to this sacrament, it is most appropriate for baptism to be celebrated within regular Sunday morning corporate worship. However, the Leadership Team will consider exceptions should extenuating circumstances present themselves. In those cases, at least one or two representatives from the congregation should be present if at all possible to make promises on its behalf.

Recommendations for the Practice of the Sacrament

- I. In accordance with scripture and the United Church of Canada tradition, the minister shall baptize with water using the Trinitarian formula. We recommend also the laying on of hands with prayer for the Holy Spirit as part of the sacrament.
- II. The family of or the individual baptized should be presented with a sign of welcome into the Body of Christ and the particular congregation through a gift such as a candle and/or prayer shawl, which will also help to remind the individual of his or her baptism.

Considerations for the Congregation

- I. The congregation should be reminded regularly through education, preaching, etc. of their role in nurturing those who have been baptized, and supporting them in their faith. This can be done in informal ways such as conversation and visiting or formal ways like teaching Sunday School.
- II. The minister should provide regular opportunities for baptized persons to remember their baptism and reaffirm their faith.