

II. Affirming Faith, Making Promises

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The day of baptism

Many promises are made at baptism:

- God welcomes your child and promises to love him or her unconditionally.
- Parents confess their personal faith and promise to live out this faith in every aspect of their lives and relationships.
- The congregation promises to assist, encourage, and pray for the child and parents. Although faith is personal, it is expressed and shared in community of faith.

The promises made at a baptism are similar to the vows spoken at a wedding: both express the ideals we would live. As is the case with most ideals, we can never live up to them perfectly. Wedding vows and baptismal promises are reminders of how we would live our lives; they remind us where we began and enable us see how far we've come. They keep us humble. Remember the promise of the One who meets us in our journey, giving us courage as we strive to live the ideals of love and grace.

As you consider the baptismal promises you will be struck by the seriousness of the commitment you are being asked to make. No promise should be taken lightly. Fortunately, you are not alone, for God, your family, members of the congregation, and your minister all walk with you. On the day of your child's baptism, we all confess our faith in God using either the ancient third century Apostles' Creed or the more contemporary New Creed of the United Church.

Read both of these confessions and ask yourself:

- What words best express my belief in God?
- Am I comfortable promising to follow the way, teaching and example of Jesus?
- Does one of these encapsulate better my faith?

The Apostles' Creed

I believe in God, the Father almighty,
creator of heaven and earth.

I believe in Jesus Christ, God's only Son, our Lord,
who was conceived by the Holy Spirit,
born of the Virgin Mary,
suffered under Pontius Pilate,
was crucified, died, and was buried;
he descended to the dead.
On the third day he rose again;
he ascended into heaven,
he is seated at the right hand of the Father,
and he will come to judge the living and the dead.

I believe in the Holy Spirit,
the holy catholic Church, the communion of saints,
the forgiveness of sins, the resurrection of the body,
and the life everlasting. Amen.

Le Symbole des Apôtres

Je crois en Dieu, le Père tout-puissant,
créateur du ciel et de la terre.

Je crois en Jésus Christ, son Fils unique, notre Seigneur,
qui a été conçu du Saint-Esprit,
est né de la vierge Marie,
a souffert sous Ponce Pilate,
a été crucifié, est mort, et a été enseveli,
est descendu aux enfers,
le troisième jour est ressuscité des morts,
est monté aux cieux,
est assis à la droite de Dieu le Père tout-puissant
d'où il viendra juger les vivants et les morts.

Je crois en l'Esprit Saint
à la sainte Église catholique, à la communion des saints,
à la rémission des péchés, à la résurrection de la chair,
et à la vie éternelle. Amen.

The new creed of the United Church was initially written in the 1960s and has been modified over the years.

A New Creed

We are not alone,
we live in God's world.

We believe in God;
who has created and is creating,
who has come in Jesus,
the Word made flesh,
to reconcile and make new,
who works in us and others
by the Spirit.

We trust in God.

We are called to be the Church:
to celebrate God's presence,
to live with respect in Creation,
to love and serve others,
to seek justice and resist evil,
to proclaim Jesus, crucified and risen,
our judge and hope.

In life, in death,
in life beyond death,
God is with us.

We are not alone.

Thanks be to God. Amen

Confession de foi de l'église unie du Canada

Nous ne sommes pas seuls
nous vivons dans le monde que Dieu a créé.

Nous croyons en Dieu
qui a créé et qui continue à créer,
qui est venu en Jésus,
Parole faite chair,
pour réconcilier et renouveler,
qui travaille en nous et parmi nous
par son Esprit.

Nous avons confiance en lui.

Nous sommes appelés à constituer l'Église:
pour célébrer la présence de Dieu,
pour vivre avec respect dans la création,
pour aimer et servir les autres,
pour rechercher la justice et résister au mal,
pour proclamer Jésus, crucifié et ressuscité,
notre juge et notre espérance.

Dans la vie, dans la mort,
et dans la vie au-delà de la mort,
Dieu est avec nous.

Nous ne sommes pas seuls.

Grâces soient rendues à Dieu.

The promises of baptism

The United Church liturgical resource entitled *Celebrate God's Presence* offers the following structure for celebrating baptism:

Statement of Purpose
Presentation of Candidates
Profession of Faith and Promises
Congregational Commitment
Affirmation of Faith
Prayer of Thanksgiving and the Pouring of Water

The Act of Baptism:

- Baptism in the Name of the Triune God
- Blessing
- Optional:

Marking with the Sign of the Cross Laying On of Hands

Other Symbolic Actions:

Lighting of a candle

Presentation of a Bible

Clothing in a new garment or baptismal stole

Declaration and congregational welcome and blessing

Celebrate God's Presence, United Church Publishing, 2001, p.325.

Within this structure, there is room to personalize the service according to local practices, so that it is meaningful for all. Take note of any prayers, texts or images that you would like see incorporated into the baptism, whether at the church or at a family gathering. Be creative!

Hymns are a means of enhancing the service; many baptismal hymns can be found in the *Voices United* hymnbook (see pages 441-455). Ask what music was used when your parents or grandparents were baptized; this is a wonderful way to continue a tradition. One Sunday school favourite is:

*Jesus loves the little children,
All the children of the world.
Whether yellow black or white,
They are precious in his sight,
Jesus loves the little children of the world.*

Text: C.H. Woolston, 1856-1927. Tune: George F. Root, 1820-1895.

*God has made us all a rainbow,
colors dancing round and round.
In our hair and skin or eyes,
big or little any size,
Jesus loves the little children of the world.*

Source unknown

A. Profession of faith in the Triune God

*Do you believe in one God: Father, Son, and Holy Spirit?
I do, by the grace of God.*

OR

*Do you believe in one God: Creator, Christ and Spirit?
I do*

Source unknown

OR

*Do you believe in God, who has created and is creating, who has come in Jesus, the Word made flesh, to reconcile and make new, and who works in us and others by the Spirit? **I do.***

Source: United Church, Celebrate God's Presence, p. 332

- Who is this Creator God for you?
- How does God's life flow through into this child's relationships celebrated at baptism?

B. Commitment to Seek Justice and Resist Evil

Will you follow the way of Jesus Christ, resisting oppression and evil, seeking justice and witnessing to God's love in all creation?

I will.

OR

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

I will.

Source: United Church, Celebrate God's Presence, p. 332

- What does it mean to choose life over death?
- What is evil in the context of the world we live in?
- What are the choices that make a difference in the world and honour creation instead of taking advantage of it?

C. Commitment to Follow the Way of Jesus-Christ

Will you turn to Jesus Christ and accept him as Savior and Lord?

I will, God being my helper

OR

Will you proclaim Jesus, crucified and risen, in your words and actions?

I will

OR

Will you follow the way and the example of Jesus Christ in your private and public life?

I will.

Source: United Church, Celebrate God's Presence, p. 334

- Who is Jesus to you?
- Are you a disciple of Jesus? Why?
- What did he preach and teach that captures your imagination and heart?

D. Commitment to the Mission and Ministry of the Church

Will you support the life and work of Christ's Church?

I will.

Source: Unknown

OR

Will you join with your brothers and sisters in this community of faith to celebrate God's presence, live with respect in creation, and love and serve others?

I will.

Source: United Church, Celebrate God's Presence, p. 334

- What do I know of the United Church and of the congregation into which I baptize my child?
- What makes this a safe and loving place in which to confess my faith and doubts?
- How can I stay connected to a community of faith?

E. Promises of Parents

In baptism you mark an important step in your child's journey of faith.

Will you share your faith with Name_____ (and N.), growing with him/her/them in faith, hope, and love?

I will.

OR

Will you pray for Name_____. (and N.) encourage him/her/them by your words and actions, and walk with him/her/them in the way of Jesus?

I will, God being my helper.

Source: United Church, Celebrate God's Presence, p.336

F. Participation of Godparents and Grandparents

Ideally, godparents and grandparents have a role to play in the faith development of your child. Grandparents are often the bridge between the child and the faith community and may sponsor the baptism. Their roles need to be discussed before the celebration.

- How can grandparents encourage the parents in the vows being made today?
- How will they serve as an example to help this child grow in faith?
- What do they think of these questions?

*Will you pray for this/these child/children
And take care that she/he/they may learn and live the faith?*

I will, God being my helper.

OR

Will you grow in faith with this child, trusting that, "you are not alone, you live in God's world"?

I will.

Source: United Church, Celebrate God's Presence, p.336

G. Promises of the Congregation

The congregation makes promises on the day of baptism and commits to surrounding the child and family with prayer, support and love. They welcome the child into the life of the church and, as he or she grows, into the worshipping community. They can only fulfill their promise if the child or the parents are present.

As (name) ____ United Church, do you commit yourselves to support and nurture these persons within a community which worships God, loves and serves others, seeks justice, and resists evil?

We do.

Source: United Church, Celebrate God's Presence, p. 340

The Signs and Symbols of Baptism

WATER

Water is the most important symbol of baptism. Water cleanses and is essential to life; in many bible stories, it is a sign of God's salvation.

A prayer of thanksgiving often precedes the pouring of the water:

Gracious and Holy God, we bless you for the gift of life, and, within it, the gift of water.

Over its unshaped promise your Spirit hovered at creation. By water, comes the growth of the earth. Through water, you led the children of Israel to freedom. In the waters of the Jordan your Child Jesus was baptized. Now may your Spirit be upon us and what we do, that this water may be a sign for all of new life in Christ, in whose name we pray.

Amen.

Source: United Church, Celebrate God's Presence, p.342

For further reflection:

The Water of baptism gives me new life.

WATER is a part of everyday life. It is essential to life. This symbol is found throughout Biblical history: the waters over which God's Spirit moves at the time of creation; the water gushing from the rock in the arid desert; the Living Water Jesus promised to the Samaritan woman.

But WATER can also mean death...While water quenches, refreshes, and cleans, it can also flood, submerge, and drown: the waters of the Great Flood covering the earth while bearing Noah's ark and his family to new shores; the waters of the Red Sea parting to let the people of Israel pass but closing again to swallow up the pursuing Egyptian army.

At baptism WATER represents both death to our fears and weaknesses and the beginning of our life as children of God. Baptism, either by immersion or sprinkling with water symbolizes a passage: conversion to a life renewed in Jesus Christ. The water of baptism represents all the changes in our life.

For me, water represents...

Resource: Judith Bricault, Baptized for Life, Copermif, 2001, p16.

SIGN OF THE CROSS

Some parents or godparents give a cross necklace to their baby. The tracing of the cross on the child's forehead marks him or her as a follower of Christ.

These words may be spoken:

(Name)____, child of God, from this day forward, you bear the sign of Jesus Christ. **Amen.**

Source: United Church, Celebrate God's Presence, p.348

For further reflection:

From the moment of my baptism, I bear the SIGN OF THE CROSS.

When you belong to a group, you bear that group's sign with pride, whether it be a badge, a banner, a hat, or a membership card. Bearing this sign means that you agree with the group's principles and objectives and are prepared to participate fully in the group's activities.

Jesus died for us on a cross and God raised him to life again. For this reason, the cross has become a symbol of life and transformation for Christians, like a tree that nourishes its leaves. It is the sign of Christians, of those who belong to Christ and want to follow him.

The SIGN OF THE CROSS is traced on the forehead of the person being baptized. While some people carry the cross in the form of a pendant or pin, each Christian bears the sign of the cross in his or her heart. It reminds us that we have become disciples of Christ.

For me, the cross represents ...

Resource: Judith Bricault, Baptized for Life, Copermif, 2001, p20.

LAYING ON OF HANDS

The laying on of hands usually follows the sign of the cross as a blessing upon the child. Words such as the following may be used:

(Name)_____, the power of the Holy Spirit work within you,
that being born of water and the Spirit,
you may be a faithful witness of Jesus Christ.

Source: United Church, Celebrate God's Presence. P.350

OTHER SYMBOLS

Other symbolic actions in accordance with local practices:

- Lighting of a candle;
- Presentation of a Bible or New Testament;
- Clothing the child in a new garment or baptismal stole.

BENEDICTION

A benediction such as the following may be sung after baptism:

*The Lord bless thee, and keep thee:
the Lord make his face shine upon thee,
and be gracious unto thee:
the Lord lift up his countenance upon thee,
and give thee peace. Amen (VU 965)*

OR

Arrangement: Lowell Mason
*May God who creates you give you light;
may God who sustains you make you wise;
may God who protects you give you joy,
may God who surrounds you give you peace.*

Words and music: Louise Skibsted, 1994