

# Sacraments Elders

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The United Church of Canada  
L'Église Unie du Canada

Sacraments Elders (October 2016)



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The United Church of Canada  
L'Église Unie du Canada  
3250 Bloor St. West, Suite 300  
Toronto, Ontario  
Canada M8X 2Y4  
1-800-268-3781  
[www.united-church.ca](http://www.united-church.ca)



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## **About This Resource**

This resource contains

- policies and procedures that must be followed
- further resources that provide information, guidance, and advice, which you are encouraged but not required to follow

This resource expands on the policy found under Pastoral Relations, Sections I.2.4 and I.2.5.2 b of *The Manual*. Please refer to the current edition.

There are no substantive changes from the August 2013 edition of this resource.

## Introduction

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Thank you for responding to your congregation's invitation to prepare to be a sacraments elder. Your congregation has identified in you the skills and spiritual gifts that will help your congregation celebrate the sacraments—baptism and communion—in the same way Christians have for centuries.

This resource provides a basic introduction to the sacraments in The United Church of Canada and to the role of a sacraments elder. It is a guide for you and your mentor as you prepare to preside at the sacraments in your congregation. The policies and procedures for becoming a sacraments elder are also included.

In putting together this update of the United Church's 2008 *Sacraments Elder Workbook*, a valuable resource has been *Celebrate God's Presence: A Book of Service for The United Church of Canada* (UCPH, 2000). Also referenced were *This United Church of Ours* by member Ralph Milton (Wood Lake Books, 2000), whose practical and humorous writing style make for a very readable, easy-to-understand book about this church's traditions, and *A Guide to Sunday Worship in The United Church of Canada* (The United Church of Canada, 1988; out of print), a traditional introduction to worship.

## Living Out God's Mission in the World

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The policies and procedures of The United Church of Canada exist to support the church in living out God's mission in the world. Some congregations do not regularly celebrate the sacraments because no licensed minister is available to preside. The sacraments elder policies and procedures are one way of ensuring that each congregation can celebrate its sacramental life: by licensing lay members of the United Church to administer the sacraments within their own congregation.

## Policies and Procedures

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The policies about licences to administer the sacraments may be found under Pastoral Relations, Section I.2.4 in *The Manual*. The policy about sacraments elders may be found under Pastoral Relations, paragraph (c) of Section I.2.4.1. The policy about pastoral charge supervisors and the sacraments may be found under Pastoral Relations, Section I.2.5.2 b.

This section of the sacraments elder resource includes additional policies and procedures that must be followed.

This section applies to a layperson who

- (a) is a member of The United Church of Canada;
- (b) has been recommended by the governing body of their pastoral charge to be licensed as a sacraments elder;
- (c) is willing to take a course of preparation to be licensed; and
- (d) is willing to become a member of the governing body of their pastoral charge once licensed.

A **sacraments elder** is a full member of a pastoral charge who has been licensed by the Conference to administer the sacraments within their pastoral charge, which is without a settled or appointed member of the order of ministry or designated lay minister.

The process set out below must be followed.

1. The presbytery identifies, or the pastoral charge self-identifies to the presbytery, the need for a sacraments elder.
2. The presbytery confirms that the pastoral charge has a pastoral charge supervisor, who is responsible for ensuring that the sacraments are administered.
3. The pastoral charge recommends a layperson who would be suitable for licensing as a sacraments elder.
4. The presbytery assesses the applicant, considering formation and accountability.
5. The presbytery requires the applicant to take a preparation course that is appropriate to their background and experience.
6. When the preparation course is completed, the presbytery reassesses formation and accountability, and is responsible for making a recommendation to the Conference for a licence.
7. The Conference may grant a licence for a 12-month term, renewable at the request of the presbytery.
8. The sacraments elder becomes a member of the governing body of the pastoral charge.
9. The licence automatically ends with the appointment or call of a member of the order of ministry or the appointment of a designated lay minister to the pastoral charge.

# Mentorship and Ongoing Support

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The process set out below has been provided by the General Council to support the preparation of sacraments elders. You are encouraged but not required to follow it.

The preparation course for sacraments elders is a mentorship program that pairs the recommended lay member with a mentor who has studied sacramental theology and is able to help the lay member reflect theologically on the readings and discussion questions in this resource. This reflection through mentorship should take three to five meetings.

To assist in the assessment of the potential sacraments elder, the presbytery may request from the mentor a recommendation on the lay member's suitability.

After the Conference decides to issue the licence to administer sacraments, the presbytery, together with the pastoral charge, offers a service of recognition for the sacraments elder. This service takes place in the sacraments elder's home congregation as part of a regular worship service. A liturgy for the service of recognition is included in this resource (see pages 41–44). *Celebrate God's Presence Pocket Service Edition: Sacraments Elder* (The United Church of Canada, 2008) contains a certificate to be completed by the presbytery and presented to the sacraments elder during the service of recognition. The service and the certificate are meant to honour the sacraments elder and the new covenant relationship.

Ongoing support should be provided to sacraments elders. It is the role of the governing body of the pastoral charge to decide when and how the sacraments are administered within the pastoral charge. And presbyteries are encouraged to provide ongoing educational and peer support to sacraments elders.

Sacraments elders are only licensed to preside at sacraments in the pastoral charge where they are a member. The role is voluntary; in other words, there is no fee for service. Sacraments elders are not expected to lead the whole worship service, although they may participate in other parts of the service if they wish.

## The Mentor's Responsibility

Being invited to serve as a mentor is a privilege that carries with it the responsibility of discernment. This includes working through the readings and questions for reflection included in this resource with the potential sacraments elder, sharing the suggested resources, and providing guidance in practising the sacraments.

The mentor's responsibility is to the presbytery, which will need to know when the prospective sacraments elder is ready for licensing. The following questions may be considered in discerning readiness:

- Can the potential sacraments elder reflect theologically?
- Does the person understand the sacraments elder's role in the congregation?
- Is the potential sacraments elder comfortable speaking with other people about the sacraments?
- Is the person ready to preside over the sacraments?

# Sacraments in The United Church of Canada

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The term “sacrament” describes worship moments in which we draw closer to God through specific words and actions. When we are genuinely open to them, sacraments enable us to experience our faith more deeply, especially spiritually and emotionally. Classically defined by the great theologians of the ages, a sacrament is an “outward sign of inward grace.” It is a visible symbol of something we believe in and hold to be an inner truth and, more than that, an inner spiritual reality.

## Jesus and the Sacraments

The United Church of Canada celebrates and recognizes two sacraments: baptism and communion. Many of our ecumenical partner churches recognize more than two. For example, the Roman Catholic Church recognizes seven: baptism, communion, anointing of the sick, marriage, holy orders, confirmation, and confession (also called penance or reconciliation). During the Protestant Reformation, the reformers rejected five of these as sacraments, though they saw their pastoral and ritual value. Jesus himself asks us to do baptism and communion.

Moreover, Jesus participated in both. He was baptized by John the Baptist and instituted communion in the Last Supper before his crucifixion on Good Friday. Baptism has a long tradition in Jewish history as a cleansing and renewal rite. Christianity builds on this ancient foundation. What Christians call “the Last Supper” began during Jesus’ final Passover meal—a meal tradition that goes back to the earliest of times, when Moses freed the captive Hebrews from Egypt and led them into the promised land.

The sacrament of baptism is a specific combination of words, actions, gestures, and participation, and is almost always called by that name. Some may call it a christening, the ancient Anglo-Saxon word for baptism. Similarly, what we call communion may also be called the eucharist or the Last Supper, both in our churches and in other denominations.

## Covenant

“Covenant” is a word that is used often in the church, as it has been used throughout church history in ancient biblical and in New Testament times.

In our society today, we often speak of and enter into contracts with others. A contract is an agreement between equals that clearly outlines the expectations, terms, and length or deadlines of a particular project. If the contract is broken, clear legal penalties apply.

In contrast, a covenant is a bond between two unequal parties—God and us—each pledging to do something largely out of love—rather than out of clearly understood particularities—for the



other. While God always keeps God's side of the covenant, people frequently do not. Yet, God's covenant always remains in effect with no prescribed limits or penalties. As Ralph Milton writes in *This United Church of Ours*:

God's covenant begins as a one-way promise. Over and over again in the Bible, God says in a variety of ways, "I love you. I promise that I always will. Whether you love me back or not."

There are lots of examples of covenants in the Bible: God and Noah (Gen. 9:9–17), God and Abraham and Sarah (Gen. 17:1–15), Moses and God (Ex. 6:2–8), David and God (2 Sam. 7:8–16), Jesus and the apostles (Mk. 14:24, Lk. 22:20). Paul then expands the covenant Jesus made with the apostles to all of us, saying God and all God's people are now in a new covenant relationship with God, a new covenant that began during Jesus' Last Supper and is enacted through his death and resurrection (1 Cor. 11:25; Heb. 9:15 and 13:20–21).

Through the sacraments of baptism and communion, God's ancient promises thus become a covenant extending to us in our faith journey and uniting us with all of God's people throughout history. We freely choose to enter that covenant or not because of God's gracious love. And we freely choose to re-enter or reaffirm it at any time in our lives because of God's gracious love.

### **Reflection and discussion questions:**

1. Think about the times you have participated in the sacraments. What difference have they made in your life?
2. Why are you willing to be a sacraments elder?

## Basis of Union and A Song of Faith

The Basis of Union is the founding document—the covenant, if you will—under which the Presbyterian, Congregational, Methodist, and Local Union churches became The United Church of Canada in 1925. Each denomination brought its own theology and understanding of sacraments to the new denomination, so the Basis of Union had to wrestle with these differences and reach a common understanding. Here is that understanding:

2.16 Article XVI. *Of the Sacraments.* We acknowledge two sacraments, Baptism and the Lord's Supper, which were instituted by Christ, to be of perpetual obligation as signs and seals of the covenant ratified in His precious blood, as a means of grace, by which, working in us, He doth not only quicken but also strengthen and comfort our faith in Him, and as ordinances through the observance of which His Church is to confess her Lord and be visibly distinguished from the rest of the world.

Although the language is old-fashioned, it still speaks the truth about what we mean when we talk about sacraments in the United Church. The sacraments are given to us by Christ, sharing who he is and who we are called to be. They are gifts of God's grace, strengthening our spirits, deepening our commitment to God, and empowering us to live faithfully as disciples in the world today. The sacraments are entrusted to Christ's church for the sake of all.

In 2006, General Council approved a statement of faith called A Song of Faith that uses more contemporary language to describe worship and sacrament:

We offer worship  
as an outpouring of gratitude and awe  
and a practice of opening ourselves  
to God's still, small voice of comfort,  
to God's rushing whirlwind of challenge.  
Through word, music, art, and sacrament,  
in community and in solitude,  
God changes our lives, our relationships, and our world.  
We sing with trust.

.....

In company with the churches  
of the Reformed and Methodist traditions,  
we celebrate two sacraments as gifts of Christ:  
baptism and holy communion.  
In these sacraments the ordinary things of life  
—water, bread, wine—  
point beyond themselves to God and God's love,  
teaching us to be alert  
to the sacred in the midst of life.

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.

Carrying a vision of creation healed and restored,  
we welcome all in the name of Christ.  
Invited to the table where none shall go hungry,  
we gather as Christ's guests and friends.  
In holy communion  
we are commissioned to feed as we have been fed,  
forgive as we have been forgiven,  
love as we have been loved.  
The open table speaks of the shining promise  
of barriers broken and creation healed.  
In the communion meal, wine poured out and bread broken,  
we remember Jesus.  
We remember not only the promise but also the price that he paid  
for who he was,  
for what he did and said,  
and for the world's brokenness.  
We taste the mystery of God's great love for us,  
and are renewed in faith and hope.

Both the Basis of Union and A Song of Faith seek to capture what we understand about sacraments. And both statements are imperfect because ultimately sacraments are what the church calls "holy mysteries," things we know and believe yet still can't explain or ever describe completely. Love is like that, whether between people or between God and God's people. So are Christ's sacraments.

### **Reflection and Discussion Questions**

1. Underline the phrases in A Song of Faith that appeal to or challenge you. Note why they appeal to or challenge you, and discuss them with your mentor.
2. Describe a time when you felt deeply moved by something. How was that experience similar to a sacrament? How was it different from a sacrament?
3. Describe in your own words why we celebrate sacraments in our church.

# Baptism

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## Theological History and Background

Baptism is Christianity's foundational rite, in which we recognize the gift of new life in an infant, youth, or adult as they become a new person in Christ. In baptism we celebrate a new life not just in the material sense of a new individual in our midst but also in welcoming and incorporating that person into the whole community of faith. It is the “official” act of becoming part of the Body of Christ.

The traditions of baptism go back long before Christianity. Jesus himself was baptized by John the Baptizer, who had been baptizing people in a tradition of cleansing and “rebirthing” that had existed for centuries. John didn't baptize Jesus into the Christian church but was using this ancient cleansing ritual. Water was then and continues to be the key symbol of baptism.

Baptism has five core meanings:

- forgiveness of sin (dying to our old life)
- second birth (rising to new life)
- a unique coming of the Holy Spirit into the life of the baptized
- union with Christ
- incorporation into the church

Over the centuries, one or more of these meanings has sometimes dominated, but the full meaning of baptism involves all five. Water carries these meanings within itself: cleansing, refreshing, giving life, flowing within all, and sustaining life. Water is essential to all creation.

In the Basis of Union, the founders of our denomination summed up our beliefs about baptism as follows:

2.16.1 Baptism with water into the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit is the sacrament by which are signified and sealed our union to Christ and participation in the blessings of the new covenant. The proper subjects of baptism are believers and infants presented by their parents or guardians in the Christian faith. In the latter case the parents or guardians should train up their children in the nurture and admonition of the Lord and should expect that their children will, by the operation of the Holy Spirit, receive the benefits which the sacrament is designed and fitted to convey. The Church is under the most solemn obligation to provide for their Christian instruction.

When we are baptized “into the church,” it really means into the Body of Christ—the community of believers who follow Jesus. As such, we become members of the whole church, not just of

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our congregation or even our denomination. Often people are surprised when, on the baptism certificate, they read that they or their child are becoming a member of the “holy catholic church.” This isn’t a reference to the Roman Catholic Church but to the whole, universal church that transcends denominations, countries, ethnicities, and theologies—the church of Jesus Christ; “catholic” means universal.

Because baptismal membership is universal and not denominational, we recognize other denominations’ baptism practices as valid. This is possible because The United Church of Canada is part of a significant agreement with important worldwide implications for us all. So, a person who has moved between congregations or between denominations that are part of this agreement has no need to be “rebaptized” because all agree on the same meaning of baptism and how it takes place. We’ll discuss this ecumenical agreement again in “Words Spoken at the Moment of Baptism” on the next page.

## Why People Request Baptism

The understanding that people have around baptism varies widely. Often the desire to be baptized, or to have a child baptized, is a choice to be publicly named and welcomed into the Christian community. As a result, baptism responds to both an individual and communal request. Individually, the person, or guardian on a child’s behalf, wishes to publicly self-identify as Christian. Communally, the congregation wishes to publicly accept, nurture, and support the baptized person as a member of the Christian community.

Baptism of a child happens in a faith community and involves the commitments and beliefs of the parents and of the faith community to both the newly baptized and to God. It involves bringing the child into the community as a member, and everyone—parents and community—committing to support and nurture the child’s spiritual growth. Since an infant has no understanding of what’s going on, and a child has limited understanding, the emphasis here is on the faith community and the parents or sponsors. When a person is of an age to have a reasonable understanding of the sacrament and the promises being made, it is the person being baptized who makes the commitment.

## Baptism and Confirmation

In The United Church of Canada, baptism—infant or adult—is the sole rite of initiation into membership in the Christian community. Confirmation and profession of faith—the rites where one makes one’s own commitment of faith through Christian formation and education—are the rites of initiation into membership of The United Church of Canada. Confirmation and profession of faith are properly understood as a Christian person assuming the responsibilities of the promises made at baptism.

## Preparing Parents and New Members for Baptism

Before a baptism takes place, it is important for the sacraments elder and other elders of the church to meet with the parents or adults seeking baptism and membership. The purpose is to discuss the meaning of the questions and promises or vows that will be used in the service and the implications of those promises or vows for the rest of the parents' or adults' lives. This is not meant to be a lengthy theology course, but a brief opportunity (one or two evenings) for all to share and learn about their faith. It is a time to get to know the family and to help prepare them for the service. This time together should be a time of fellowship that includes sharing the meaning of the sacrament, its implications, and its responsibilities for all. The resources listed on pages 45–47 may be helpful in planning for these discussions.

If the candidates for baptism live far away and are, for example, returning to their “home” church for the sacrament, it is likely that a United Church near their home offers a baptism preparation time and would welcome them into it, knowing their baptism will take place in your church. In this case, the candidates would become or promise to become active participants in the church near their home before and after baptism.

## Words Spoken at the Moment of Baptism

In 1975, the members of PLURA (Presbyterian, Lutheran, United, Roman Catholic, and Anglican churches) signed an ecumenical agreement acknowledging the historic and common value of the “matter of baptism” (water) and its “form” (the traditional Trinitarian formula of Father, Son, and Holy Spirit), and granting mutual recognition for baptism performed under these signs in each denomination. In keeping with this ecumenical agreement, and the instruction of the 30th General Council (1984) and a ruling in 2000 by General Council, this traditional naming of the Trinity must be used at the actual moment of baptism.

In our denomination, this agreement and ruling led to much discussion about the words spoken by the presider at the moment of baptism. The alternative expressions of the Trinitarian formula, such as “in the name of God Creator, Christ, and Spirit,” may be added as a blessing following the use of the historic formula. *Celebrate God's Presence* provides a variety of inclusive blessings that may be used faithfully.

Baptisms that do not follow the ecumenical agreement and our denomination's ruling are not valid. They are a breach of trust between those seeking baptism and the presider, between the presider and the congregation, and between our denomination and our partners in the agreement who believe and recognize our baptisms as one of theirs.

## Profession of Faith/Baptismal Beliefs and Promises

The baptism service begins with a formal introduction of those seeking the sacrament, an introduction made on behalf of the congregation's governing body. Then those introduced make the promises and commitments. There may be sponsors or godparents who also make promises

to keep a caring eye on the person being baptized, with special attention to that person's spiritual and religious education and nourishment.

First, the parents are asked whether they really want their child to be a member of the Christian church. They are then asked whether they believe in God (and, in some congregations, whether they renounce evil), whether they are committed to living out the Christian faith themselves, and, in the case of infant baptism, whether they will provide a Christian home and encourage their child to grow in faith and commitment to Jesus and the church. Individuals being baptized who are of an age to make such commitments speak on their own behalf. *Celebrate God's Presence* contains alternative forms of the beliefs and the promises, but the fundamentals are the same.

Once these commitments are made before God and God's people, the congregation responds by committing, as individuals and as a community, to support and nurture those being baptized. In this way, the whole congregation shares the role of sponsor or godparents. Because of this mutual commitment, it is important that baptism take place in the context of the faith community.

## The Covenant of Baptism

As initiation into the church, the Body of Christ, baptism is an act of welcoming, blessing, and belonging. Baptism is also a celebration of God's initiative and our response. It is God's "Yes" to us, and our "Yes" to God. It is a sign of the Divine-human covenant of love flowing from God's unmerited grace and pouring out in our lives of gratitude and commitment to God.

As described in *Celebrate God's Presence* (page 321), the covenant of baptism thus recalls the fullness of God's grace throughout the story of salvation

in creation and in exodus, in wilderness and in exile, in birth and in death. In his baptism, Jesus received the Holy Spirit and was declared God's beloved, he opened himself to repentance and forgiveness, and marked a new beginning in his ministry. In our baptism we are similarly claimed, called, and commissioned....

[Thus] our baptismal identity is both individual and communal. Baptism honours the diversity of individuals and challenges us to be a community of equals.

*As many of you as were baptized into Christ  
have clothed yourselves with Christ.  
There is no longer Jew or Greek,  
there is no longer slave or free,  
there is no longer male and female;  
for all of you are one in Christ Jesus.  
(Galatians 3:27–28)*

## Baptism in Extraordinary or Urgent Circumstances

*Celebrate God's Presence* (page 324) gives this guidance about baptism in extraordinary or urgent circumstances:

All persons are loved by God whether or not they are baptized. In extraordinary pastoral circumstances it may be appropriate to celebrate a baptism apart from Sunday worship. In such circumstances, it is within the historical practice of the Christian Church for anyone to baptize another by pouring water on the candidate, saying: "N., I baptize you in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit."

It is important that such baptisms be followed by suitable pastoral care, communal recognition, certification, and recognition.

## The Congregation's Baptismal Policy

Some congregations have a policy of baptizing children only if the parents or sponsors are full members of the congregation. Other congregations look for people's interest in community and faith, and provide encouragement and nurture. Still other congregations have a very welcoming approach in which anyone who expresses interest may be baptized. What is important is that the congregation or governing body has an understanding of baptism as a sacred rite of initiation into the Body of Christ. Included in that understanding is the ministry of hospitality that anticipates the best intentions of those seeking the sacraments to keep the promises they make during baptism.

Ministers, sacraments elders, and governing bodies of pastoral charges need to clarify their respective roles in making the decision on a request for baptism. *The Manual* is clear that it is the governing body's responsibility to set the baptismal policy for the congregation. Yet too often, in practice, the decision is left to the minister. As part of a community process, however, it is not only policy but also good practice for the governing body to take ownership of the decision.

In The United Church of Canada, the governing body of the pastoral charge is responsible not only for establishing a baptismal policy but also for overseeing its administration and celebration, and for maintaining a baptismal roll as well as a membership roll, both of which are distinct from the congregation's family phone list.

Making the decision about which requests for baptism are to be accepted is delicate. At the heart of the question is the commitment to and understanding of the beliefs and promises. At the end of the day, we can only accept the commitment and understanding of the applicants in good faith, whether they are the parents of a child or individuals speaking on their own behalf. Conversations with those seeking baptism are the best way to get a good sense of what they feel baptism means to them. But responsibly educating them, the governing body, and the congregation is also important.



The required details for preparation for the sacrament need to be decided by the governing body and outlined in the congregation's baptismal policy, a policy that is then lived out by the sacraments elder as a sacred trust.

## Overview of the Order of Service for the Sacrament of Baptism

Statement of Purpose  
 Presentation of Candidates  
 Profession of Faith and Promises/Vows  
 Congregational Commitment  
 Affirmation of Faith (*optional*)  
 Prayer of Thanksgiving and the Pouring of Water  
 The Act of Baptism  
     Baptism in the Name of the Triune God  
 Other Symbolic Actions  
     Lighting of a Candle  
     Presentation of a Bible  
     Clothing in a New Garment or Baptismal Stole  
 Declaration and Congregational Welcome  
 Blessing

*Celebrate God's Presence* (pages 326–57) offers a wide variety of resources for each part of baptism, in English and in French. The older *Service Book* (1969; pages 37–74) offers two services of baptism for children and two for adults.

The above order of service and some of the text that follows come from *Celebrate God's Presence* (these excerpts are indicated as *CGP*).

## The Celebration of Baptism

### Statement of Purpose

While you and those seeking baptism are very mindful of what is about to happen in the worship service, the congregation is not necessarily as prepared. The Statement of Purpose summarizes what baptism means and prepares everyone for it. It is appropriate to deliver the Statement of Purpose standing near the baptismal font, facing the congregation. An example follows.

The sacrament of baptism  
 proclaims and celebrates the grace of God.

By water and the Spirit,  
 we are called, claimed, and commissioned:  
 we are called God's own,  
 welcomed as children of God;  
 we are claimed by Christ,

united with Christ,  
united with one another and the Christian community  
of every time and place;  
we are commissioned to Christ's ministry  
of love, peace, and justice,  
and strengthened by the Holy Spirit  
for the work of the church in the world.

(CGP, pages 326, 328)

Just before or just after this statement is given, warmly invite the candidates, assisting elders (who may be called committee members in your congregation), sponsors, and any others (e.g., nieces and nephews, young cousins, Sunday school members) to gather at the font with you.

### **Presentation of Candidates**

In a small congregation where everyone knows everyone, this part may feel very unnecessary, but it is in the public declaration that the governing body completes its responsibilities as far as the congregation's baptismal policy is concerned.

The wording of this presentation needs to convey the faithful aspect as well as a joyful recognition of the candidates. Usually a member of the governing body or a worship elder or worship committee member presents the candidates.

On behalf of the congregation of *N.* United Church,  
I present the following persons  
for initiation into the body of Christ through baptism:  
*N. [and N.].*

*For infants and younger children add: child of N.*

*Some brief background information about each candidate may be provided, along with information as to their sponsor(s), mentor(s), and godparent(s).*

(CGP, page 330, alt.)

### **Profession of Faith and Promises**

There are two distinct parts here: a statement of belief from the parents or candidates, and a set of promises made by them that are the results of their (and our) beliefs. These beliefs and promises come as answers to questions the presider asks.

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, by the grace of God.**

(CGP, page 332, based on A New Creed)

Will you follow the way of Jesus Christ?

**I will, God being my helper.**

(CGP, page 334)

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

**I will, God being my helper.**

(CGP, page 334, based on A New Creed, alt.)

Godparents or sponsors may also make a promise:

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

**I will, God being my helper.**

(CGP, page 336)

## Congregational Commitment

The congregation responds to the Profession of Faith (Beliefs) and Promises by stating their support for the newly baptized individuals. The congregation may be invited to stand at this point and thus emphasize their role in this sacrament.

We have heard the will of *this/these* person(s).  
We receive *N.*, [and *N.*] in Christ's name,  
as we ourselves have been received.  
We all belong to the one household of faith in Jesus Christ.  
Will you support these *N.*, [and *N.*]  
with constant love, wholesome example,  
Christian teaching, and faithful prayer?

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

(CGP, page 340, Betty Lynn Schwab)

## Affirmation of Faith

This is a celebratory response to the belief and promises just proclaimed by all. It is optional but worthwhile for all to join together in a brief statement of their commonly held faith: A New Creed or another ecumenical creed such as the Apostles' Creed. See *Voices United*, pages 918–27. (For further discussion of the Affirmation of Faith, see pages 23–24 of this resource.)

## Prayer of Thanksgiving and the Pouring of Water

When people find themselves in the company of fellow believers, there is cause for joy and a natural outpouring of thanksgiving to God. This may include a thanksgiving for the gift of faith shared and for our desire to be part of the Body of Christ.

The thanksgiving then moves to focus on the water. Water may be poured before or after this prayer. It is appropriate to include a moment of silence for the congregants to pray, each in their own way, for the gifts of the Spirit upon all they are about to do now.

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.**

*[A moment of reverent silence.]*

*(CGP, page 342)*

## **The Act of Baptism**

### **Baptism in the Name of the Triune God**

It is customary to ask the parents the given names of their child.

This is the moment when the sacraments elder anoints those seeking baptism with water three times, making the sign of the cross each time while pronouncing each part of the Trinitarian formula.

*There are no legitimate alternatives to this formula in this part of the sacrament. Using any other form is a breach of trust within the church.*

N.,  
I baptize you,  
*or* we baptize you,  
*or* you are baptized,

in the name of the Father,  
and of the Son,  
and of the Holy Spirit.

**Amen.**

*(CGP, page 346)*

### **Blessing**

Here the sacraments elder may add an additional blessing using any other Trinitarian phrasing. This is an entirely optional addition to the formula used in the act of baptism above.

May the blessing of God, Source of Love,  
 Jesus Christ, Love incarnate,  
 and the Holy Spirit, Love's power,  
 be with you today and always.

**Amen.**

(CGP, page 348, based on a blessing by Peter Wyatt)

### Marking with the Sign of the Cross

If the Act of Baptism does not incorporate marking with the sign of the cross, it may be done at this moment using water or oil (usually olive oil) or simply the presider's thumb.

N., child of God, from this day forward,  
 you bear the sign of Jesus Christ.

**Amen.**

(CGP, page 348)

*A pastoral phrase may be added:* for you are now one of Christ's beloved.

### Laying on of Hands

In the Act of Baptism for a consenting youth or adult, or as desired for an infant, the parents, sponsors, godparents, or others who are significant in the spiritual journey of the candidate, together with the sacraments elder and any assistants, lay their hands on the head of the candidate as the presider or the whole congregation speaks words of confirmation/reaffirmation to the candidate.

N., 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.

**Amen.**

(CGP, page 350)

### Other Symbolic Actions

Any local customs of the congregation may be enacted now, such as lighting a candle, presenting a Bible, or clothing the baptized person in a new garment or baptismal stole. The baptism certificate may also be given at this moment. These gestures may be done in silence or with words such as the following:

*For a candle:*

N., let your light shine before others,  
 that they may see your good works,  
 and give glory to God.

**Amen.**

(CGP, page 352, from *United Methodist Book of Worship*)

*For a Bible:*

Receive this book, our Holy Scriptures,  
and hear what the Spirit is saying to you and to the Church.

*(CGP, page 352)*

*For a stole:*

Receive this stole as a sign of  
the royal priesthood of all believers  
of which you are now a part.

Alternatively, these actions may take place after the Declaration and Congregational Welcome,  
followed by a kiss of peace on the newly baptized head (2 Cor. 13:12).

## **Declaration and Congregational Welcome**

This is the official public recognition of the newly baptized person as one of the Body of Christ.  
It is suitably delivered by the sacraments elder standing in the midst of the congregation.

In the name of Jesus Christ,  
[I declare that today] *N.* (and *N.*) *has/have* been received  
into the holy catholic church, the body of Christ in the world.

*(CGP, page 354)*

The congregation joyfully responds to the Declaration in a variety of ways:

*Singing:*

*The Hebrew Benediction* (Voices United 965) or  
“*May God Who Creates You*” (Voices United 454),  
or another suitable verse of hymn or chant

*Saying:*

Into the household of faith,  
we welcome you with joy and thanksgiving.

**We are members of the Body of Christ.**

**We are inheritors of God’s promise.**

**In the name of Christ, we welcome you.**

*(CGP, page 354)*

*or*

**We receive into our midst *N.*,  
one of Christ’s own, baptized this day.**

## Blessing

The baptismal part of a worship service ends at this point, and the worship service continues. This part of the service may be marked by a final blessing upon all or with the conclusion of a baptismal hymn, if the baptism began with the singing of a baptismal hymn as the parents and candidates came forward.

This is the moment when all return to their places, and the lid (if any) is replaced on the font by the assisting elder or sacraments elder, who then returns to their seat.

The grace of Christ attend you,  
the love of God surround you,  
the Holy Spirit keep you.

**Amen.**

*(CGP, page 356)*

## Baptism Certificates

After the Act of Baptism, a certificate is presented to the newly baptized infant (or parents) and the infant's name is entered on the baptismal roll of the church. It is important for you to know who fills out the baptism certificate, and for you to sign it and to know who keeps the baptismal roll up to date. This roll is separate from the membership roll.

When adults are baptized, they are confirmed into the membership of The United Church of Canada at the same time, and their names are added to the membership roll. The adult certificate is different from the child's.

These certificates are important and may well be called for at a future date—when the baptized person is getting married, for example. If the individual loses the certificate, the entry in the baptismal roll is the only proof that they were baptized.

The baptismal and membership rolls are also important for official church records and statistics. Handle the rolls carefully because privacy laws apply to them. For example, if a record of baptism is requested because the certificate has been lost, the entire page of the baptismal roll cannot be duplicated beyond the entry specific to the individual who is inquiring.

## A Pastoral Note on the Affirmation of Faith

Each time baptism takes place, it offers everyone in the congregation an opportunity of grace to renew their own faith through the section of the service called the Affirmation of Faith. This refers to all reciting A New Creed or another creed of the Christian church. It may be the reciting of the congregation's mission statement, if appropriate.

Such a reaffirmation can be a very powerful moment for worshippers who have recently lost a loved one, are dealing with serious illness, or are facing major changes in their lives. Throughout

life, joys and challenges help to deepen faith. A renewal of faith is a natural response to a fresh experience of God's grace. It may also simply be a moment in which the congregation is reminded of the touchstones of faith and so renews their commitment to God, God's church, and God's people.

See *Celebrate God's Presence*, pages 358–68, for a service of renewal of baptismal faith.

## Some Practical Considerations

### Visibility

A sacrament, by definition, is a visible and physical event. So when celebrating baptism or the renewal of baptismal faith, make sure the font is clearly visible and central, if possible.

The use of water may be emphasized by pouring a generous amount of water into the font from a pitcher held high so all can see. Use *warm* water and lots of it. God's love is generous, so be generous with the symbol of new birth and do not worry about things getting a bit wet (including books or papers); they will dry out.

### Make Sure Everyone Can Celebrate

- A baptism should be a *happy* celebration for you and all the people involved.
- If an infant cries all the way through the service, that's OK. Go ahead with the service anyway. If a child feels more comfortable with their parents, let the parents hold them.
- Think of ways children and others who are present can be involved in the ceremony. A sibling or godparent of an infant being baptized might pour the water. Alternatively, a teen or adult being baptized might be invited to pour the water and find this particularly meaningful.
- Do not be afraid of the noise and splashing; these help appeal to our senses.
- Ensure a stool is near the font for an older child to stand on rather than being held. It is important that they can see the water and you, and that the congregation can easily see all that is happening.
- When adults are being baptized, it is traditional for them to kneel by the font. A kneeling stool should be provided and a hand offered to help them kneel and stand again. Kneeling, however, is not required. Inquire ahead of time whether candidates are physically able and comfortable to kneel.

### Welcome

- In the Declaration and Congregational Welcome, welcome the newly baptized person into the congregation by walking with the person down the aisle into the congregation. This is a powerful enactment of the fact that the newly baptized person is now received by the faith community.



- Alternatively, in some churches, a full member of the congregation comes forward and receives the baby or child from you and carries or walks them into the congregation's midst. This makes the declaration a visible event and enacts the spiritual change that comes to us through baptism.
- Prompted by the printed order of service, the congregation may respond in song or speech (see page 22 of this resource).
- An adult candidate may be warmly welcomed by handshakes from you and assisting elders. A hymn chorus or a round of applause is celebratory as well.
- Welcoming a new person into the family of faith is an occasion for rejoicing; do not be bashful about celebrating with warmth and enthusiasm!

### Other Considerations

- Because baptism is an act of worship, you may need to gracefully explain that photographs are not appropriate during the service but are most welcome immediately after worship concludes, when any of the moments of baptism can be joyfully recreated. This is usually a part of the governing body's policy.
- If newly baptized individuals live in the area where the faith community lives, it is vital for the visiting elders of the congregation to establish pastoral contact with them to nurture Christian fellowship and faith and to demonstrate the congregation's support and concern for them.

### Reflection and Discussion Questions

1. Why is baptism so memorable and meaningful?
2. The placement of the baptism liturgy varies according to a congregation's context. Historically, the baptism liturgy follows the sermon as a response to the word read and proclaimed. Discuss where the baptism liturgy is typically placed in your order of service. What practical and pastoral considerations influenced this decision?
3. What are your congregation's traditions and policies on baptism? Do you feel these answer the questions you may be asked by people seeking baptism? If your congregation does not have a baptismal policy, who decides who will or will not be baptized? A sacraments elder cannot make this decision.
4. When pronouncing the Trinitarian formula in the Act of Baptism, you are given the choice to say "I baptize you..." "we baptize you..." or "you are baptized in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit" (see page 20 of this resource).

Which of these three options do you prefer: I, we, or you? Why? Give a reason why each of the other options is also a faithful word.

# Communion

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## Theological and Historical Background

Empowered by their experience of the risen Christ, the early church met weekly for the proclamation of the Word and the breaking of the bread. Many Christian churches follow that tradition of Word and Sacrament (a service of preaching and communion) every week. Most United Churches celebrate communion less frequently; some congregations do it monthly, others quarterly, and others on specific dates of the liturgical (church) calendar.

Congregations that celebrate the Last Supper weekly view communion as a regular meal that nourishes the members frequently in their spiritual lives, just as our daily meals at home nourish our bodies and minds for daily living. Those denominations that partake in the Last Supper quarterly or less than weekly view communion as a special meal, like a family's Christmas or Easter dinner. What is common among all congregations is that each re-enacts Jesus' Last Supper with care and attention to each detail; with the same hopes and fears, limited understandings, and aspirations as the disciples had.

In the church today, we continue to enact the history and hopes of a people and of God's care and concern for the world. Providing leadership at this sacrament was then, and is now, delegated to a specially trained person. This person, whether they are ordained, a designated lay minister, or a sacraments elder, presides at the table—hence the sometimes used name of presider.

Note carefully that this person presides at Jesus' table. It is not the presider's table. The table does not belong to the congregation, or the denomination, or the church. The table belongs only and ever to Jesus Christ. We are—all of us, including the presider—ever and only Christ's beloved guests:

The brokenness of our world is lifted up in the bread broken. The bloodshed of our world is remembered in the cup shared. In the gathered grain we are brought together and grounded in God's good earth. In the fruit of the vine we are united with the groaning of all creation. We do this at table to remember our identity as a covenant people of God. We receive, and are sustained as, the body and blood of Christ. This is our eucharist, this is our thanksgiving. (*Celebrate God's Presence*, page 239)

The table is entrusted to the gathered community. Since Jesus is the host (it is no coincidence that Roman Catholics refer to the bread as the host), the members of the congregations and the minister or sacraments elder are all guests. Guests don't determine who comes to someone else's dinner party. God's love for us is so great and God's hospitality is so wide that any who wish to come are warmly welcomed in our churches.

## Overview of the Order of Service for the Sacrament of Communion

The Invitation  
 The Peace of Christ  
 The Great Thanksgiving  
     Call to Give Thanks (Sursum Corda)  
     Thanksgiving (Preface)  
     The Song of Creation (Sanctus and Benedictus)  
     Remembering Jesus at Table (Institution Narrative)  
     Prayer of Self-Giving (Anamnesis-Oblation)  
     Affirmation of Memory and Hope (Memorial Acclamation)  
     Prayer for Transformation (Epiclesis)  
     Intercessions (Prayers of the People)  
     Concluding Praise (Doxology)  
     Amen  
     Prayer of Jesus  
 Fraction and Pouring  
 Invitation  
 Distribution  
 Prayer after Communion

The more detailed outline that follows and some of the text come from *Celebration God's Presence*, pages 237–302 (these excerpts are indicated as *CGP*).

## The Celebration of Communion

### The Invitation

Following the dedication of the offering by the worship leader, the sacraments elder comes forward and pronounces an Invitation to the Table. The United Church practises an open table, or what is sometimes called open communion. This means we recognize the baptismal vows of other denominations, and we welcome everyone who is baptized and committed to Christ to the table. Further, we may faithfully invite anyone who thirsts and hungers for God, the Holy, righteousness, or peace to come and feast with us.

In the name of Jesus Christ I invite all who profess him as Lord and Saviour, and are seeking to follow in his way and to live in unity one with the other, to come to his Table with reverence, faith, and thanksgiving. Eat and drink for your strengthening that you may grow in grace and be blessed with all spiritual blessings, remembering that we, although many, are one body in him.

*(Service Book for the Use of Ministers, page 8)*

or

Friends, Jesus invites us to share in this joyful feast!

**“People will come from east and west,  
from north and south,  
and take their places at the banquet  
in the kingdom of God.”** (Luke 13:29)

*(CGP, page 269, first line from Book of the Common Order of the Church of Scotland)*

## The Peace of Christ

The Peace of Christ may be shared at this point in the service if it is your congregation’s custom. Usually the shaking of hands among the members of the congregation, this part of the service enables us to enact the community and fellowship that is the Christian church.

The sacraments elder may say,

The peace of Christ be with you.

and all respond

**And also with you.**

The congregation then shares this peace among themselves in a similar manner.

## The Great Thanksgiving

This long prayer is traditionally called the Communion Prayer or Eucharistic Prayer (*eucharist* is Greek for “thanksgiving”). Examples are found in *Celebrate God’s Presence* and the *Service Book for Use of Ministers Conducting Public Worship* (The Ryerson Press, 1969; out of print). Musical settings are found in *Voices United*, pages 932–44. Important individual parts make up a longer prayer, each part having a specific purpose as follows.

### Call to Give Thanks (Sursum Corda)

The sacraments elder begins an opening dialogue that goes back to biblical times. The dialogue ends with the invitation to enter the Communion Prayer. *Sursum* means upward. *Corda* means hearts.

The Lord be with you.

**And also with you.**

Lift up your hearts.

**We lift them up to the Lord.**

Let us give thanks to the Lord our God.

**It is right to give our thanks and praise.**

[Let us pray.]

*(CGP, page 246)*

### Thanksgiving (Preface)

This prayer opens with the Thanksgiving (Preface), offering thankful praise to God. Some or all of the following thanksgivings may be included (CGP, page 241):

- for God's work in creation and in covenant history
- for the witness of the prophets
- for God's steadfast love, even when people turn away
- for the gift of Christ
- for the immediate occasion or festival
- for contemporary causes for thanksgiving

### The Song of Creation (Sanctus and Benedictus)

The congregation replies to the Preface by continuing the prayer, singing or speaking praises to God in very ancient biblical words. *Sanctus* means the affirmation of God's holiness, and *benedictus* means words of blessings.

*Sanctus*

**Holy, holy, holy Lord,  
God of power and might,  
heaven and earth are full of your glory.  
Hosanna in the highest.**

*Benedictus*

**Blessed is the one who comes in the name of the Lord.  
Hosanna in the highest.**

(CGP, page 244)

### Remembering Jesus at Table (Institution Narrative)

The prayer then continues with thankful remembering of the acts of Jesus Christ, especially when he instituted this sacrament, broke bread, and poured wine for the apostles in the upper room. The prayer may also include some of the parts that follow below, depending on the liturgical season (CGP, page 242):

- Christ's birth, life, and ministry
- Christ's healing, teaching, and gifts of wholeness and life
- Christ's death and resurrection
- Christ's presence and the promise of his coming again
- the gift of the sacrament of Communion

### **Prayer of Self-Giving (Anamnesis-Oblation)**

In this part of the prayer, we offer ourselves and our lives in faithful remembrance (*anamnesis*: to remind, recall) of Jesus' own self-giving and of his call to "Do this in remembrance of me." We also offer up (*oblation*) ourselves following his example.

As your disciples did, so we offer now ourselves to you, saying/singing:

### **Affirmation of Memory and Hope (Memorial Acclamation)**

A summary of the key events in Jesus' life is spoken or sung (*Voices United*, pages 932–44) by all.

**Christ has died,  
Christ is risen.  
Christ will come again.**

(CGP, page 245)

### **Prayer for Transformation (Epiclesis)**

The prayer continues by calling (*-kalein*) the Holy Spirit to come upon (*epi-*) the congregation and what it is doing, as upon the bread and the wine.

Together with the Institution Narrative and the Prayer of Self-Giving, for most Christians this part is the prayer's core or essence. It invites the Spirit to bring all who share in the feast into Christ's presence, to make this breaking of the bread and sharing of the cup a participation in the life of Christ, and to make us one with the risen Christ, with all God's people, and with the communion of saints.

Come, Holy Spirit, upon us and what we do here that these your gifts of bread and wine may be for us the body and blood of Christ so that we may bring life, hope, and love to all your world.

Traditionally (and from a theological or liturgical point of view), without this part of the prayer, communion is an agape (love) feast (an unconsecrated communion), over which anyone may preside.

### **Intercession (Prayers of the People)**

The prayer may now include a prayer for your community of faith or for particular people or concerns in the congregation and beyond.

### **Concluding Praise (Doxology)**

The prayer concludes where it began—with praise of God, who makes all of this sacrament possible. *Doxology* means simply "praise."

Through Christ, with Christ, and in Christ,  
in the unity of the Holy Spirit  
all glory is yours, God most holy,  
now and forever.

(CGP, page 245)

**Amen**

**Amen** is said or sung in unison.

**Prayer of Jesus**

The prayer continues with the Prayer of Jesus, spoken or sung (see *Voices United*, pages 932–44).

**Fraction and Pouring**

The bread remains unbroken and the wine unpoured until this moment.

The bread is raised before the congregation and broken (fraction) with words such as:

The Body of Christ broken out of love for you.

Then the cup is raised and wine poured into it with words such as:

The Blood of Christ shed out of love for you.

If the wine is poured before the service, the cup may simply be raised. As words in a service need to be spoken loudly enough for all to hear, it is important that these actions be clearly seen by all. Raising the bread as it is broken and holding the pitcher and cup up off the table as you pour helps everyone to see them.

**Invitation**

The sacraments elder then proclaims that all is ready and invites the congregation to receive the elements in the pews or to come forward to receive them.

These are the holy gifts of God  
for you,  
the holy people of God.  
Come now for all things are ready!

**Distribution**

See the notes on pages 36–37 of this resource.

**Prayer after Communion**

Once all have feasted at the table, the remaining elements and vessels are returned to the table. They may be covered or the lids put back on, according to the customs of your church. The sacrament concludes with a final prayer of praise and commitment.

**We give thanks, almighty God,  
that you have refreshed us at your table  
by granting us the presence of Jesus Christ.**

**Strengthen our faith,  
increase our love for one another,  
and send us forth into the world  
united in courage and peace,  
rejoicing in the power of the Holy Spirit;  
through Jesus Christ our Saviour. Amen.**

(CGP, page 302)

**For the bread we have eaten,  
for the wine we have tasted,  
for the life we have received,  
we thank you God.  
Grant that what we have done  
and have been given here,  
may so put its mark on us,  
that it may remain always in our hearts.  
Grant that we may grow  
in Christian love and understanding,  
and that ours may be lives of faithful action,  
in Christ's name. Amen.**

(CGP, page 302)

The Prayer after Communion marks the end of the sacraments elder's responsibility and accountability in a Sunday worship service. But the worship service continues with a Hymn of Departure, Commissioning and Blessing, Threefold Amen, and Postlude, according to the customs of your congregation.

A variety of full communion prayers are found in *Celebrate God's Presence*, pages 241–317, and in the older *Service Book*, pages 1–34.

## **Young People and Communion**

Until the 1980s, young people who were baptized as infants took their first communion after being confirmed, following a course of study with the minister or another mentor from the congregation. The idea, dating from earliest church practices, was that when baptized as infants, young people needed the opportunity to make their own commitment to the faith that their parents or sponsors spoke on their behalf at baptism.

Many congregations have re-examined this practice and now understand baptism to be the one and only admission to membership in the Christian church. Everyone who has been baptized is equal regardless of age, experience, or understanding. Each of us brings a limited understanding to communion—even the most rigorously trained theologians. Therefore everyone is welcome at Jesus' table, whether confirmed or not. Today, in many of our congregations, children come forward with their parents or Sunday school teachers to receive the elements. Some congregations have designed special certificates to mark the first time a child takes communion because it is an important step of faith.



## Some Practical Considerations

Now that we have reviewed some of the history and theology of communion and looked carefully at the eucharistic sacrament, what follows are some practical guidelines. In the celebration of Holy Communion, how the words are spoken and how the actions are done are important to those who are being served and nurtured by you.

Make sure you understand each part of the sacrament and how to do it. Your mentor may invite you to practise the whole communion section of a worship service to ensure the integrity of your presiding. If you have any questions or concerns about any part of the sacrament, talk them over with your mentor. Here are some guidelines and suggestions.

### Presiding at Communion

Each Sunday worship service usually has three main parts:

- Gathering in God's presence
- Listening to God's Word
- Responding to God's Word

Communion, like baptism, comes in the third part as one of our responses to God's good news. Sometimes the bread and wine are brought to the table during the offering time. Sometimes they are placed on the table before the service begins.

To use your hands expressively, they need to be free of holding a book or bulletin. To make this easier, the order of service of the book containing the prayers can be laid on the communion table. Propping it at an angle on a small cushion or book easel will make it easier to read.

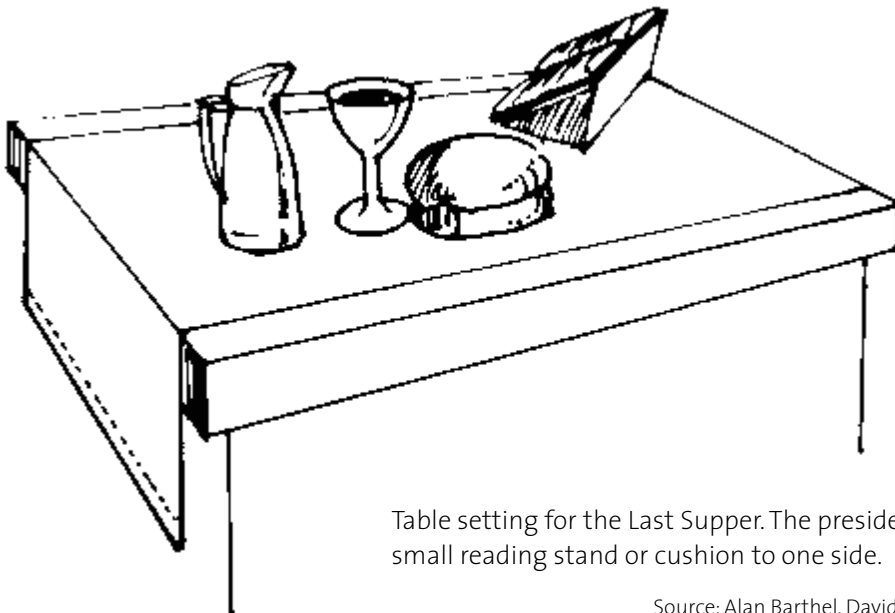


Table setting for the Last Supper. The presider's prayer book may be on a small reading stand or cushion to one side.

Source: Alan Barthel, David R. Newman, and Paul Scott Wilson,  
*A Guide to Sunday Worship in The United Church of Canada*  
(Toronto: United Church Publishing House, 1988), p. 127.

While you are presiding, be very conscious of your voice, body language, and gestures to lead the people and keep everyone focused in a prayerful moment, not on reading from their copies of the Sunday bulletin.

## **Speaking**

Ensure that your voice carries your personal assurance and commitment to Christ and the Christian faith. Make certain all can hear you. Enunciate each word clearly and pray slowly so all can absorb spiritually—not just intellectually—what you are saying.

Pray the prayer and instruct the congregation with grace and joyful enthusiasm. A great deal rides on how you preside, not on what you say, so try to relax! Be convinced about every word you pray or speak. Let your convictions and actions show your dedication through how you speak.

Be eager for this part of the worship service, just as each of the members of the early church hungered and thirsted to partake of the sacrament with one another 2,000 years ago.

During parts of the Great Thanksgiving (Communion Prayer), watch that a prayerful attitude does not suddenly become a moment of teaching addressed to the congregation instead of to God. Avoid abruptly addressing the congregation, which happens most frequently during Remembering Jesus at Table.

In general, be caring enough to ensure you are praying throughout the entire prayer. Choose the language for each part carefully—this is a time of speaking with God on behalf of everyone.

## **Standing and Sitting**

Communion is intended to engage all the participants; it is not a performance with an audience. This is more easily achieved if you help the congregants remain focused. Stand immediately behind the table, facing the people and in full view of all. Except during prayer, establish eye contact with the people to strengthen their sense of inclusion.

United Church congregations often remained seated to receive the consecrated elements. This symbolizes the coming of the grace of God to each of us in an unmerited manner. God knows where we are and comes to us out of love for us.

Some congregations stand during certain parts of the sacrament (as do many of our ecumenical family), such as for the Song of Creation or the Affirmation of Memory and Hope. Standing can be seen as an act of reverence and is an effective way for congregants to focus on the words and actions of the presider and on their own responses. They then sit for the other parts of the Great Thanksgiving. This encourages the people to follow the prayer and acknowledge with their standing and sitting which part of the prayer is now happening.

## Hands and Gestures

Hands are an essential part of how we communicate. Try to have an animated conversation with your hands firmly in your pockets—you will feel that somehow your ability to get your ideas across is really limited. Likewise, how you use your hands during the service enhances the congregation's understanding of communion.

For example, you might use the classical prayer posture known as the *orantes* when praying the prayers of communion. In this posture, the arms are extended and the elbows are bent away from the body, with fingers relaxed and palms open and facing upward. When it is the people's turn to speak, you can simply fold your hands at mid-chest level.



Orantes posture while presider speaks



Hands at rest while people respond

Source: Barthel, Newman, and Wilson, *A Guide to Sunday Worship in The United Church of Canada*, p. 124.

If desired, the people could adapt the *orantes* posture for their parts of the prayers, as art from the third to the fifth centuries indicates they used to do.

During Remembering Jesus at Table, when you say the words “took bread” and “took the cup,” having brought both your hands to the rest position, you might reach out with one or both hands and hold them over the bread and wine.

## Elements

At Jesus' last supper two millennia ago, bread and wine were the common parts of the meal. The bread and wine used for communion are often known as the elements. Everything in the communion service leads up to actually partaking of the holy meal—eating the bread and drinking the wine together as a community.

The two most common methods for taking communion are by individual communion glasses and pre-cut bread squares, or by pieces torn off a common loaf and then dipped into a common cup (intinction). White bread cuts into cubes nicely but falls apart quickly if dipped into the cup. Pita or a drier bread is good for intinction. Pita works well sliced into long, slim, triangular pieces, which help to keep congregants' fingers from getting wet in the cup (see page 39).

Some United Churches use communion wafers, as do Roman Catholics, Lutherans, and Anglicans. Wafers are readily available from church-supply stores and from UCRD (United Church Resource Distribution). Homemade bread is always a welcome gift provided the recipe results in bread that can be dipped without falling apart, if intinction is the custom of your congregation. (See page 39 for ideas on how to accommodate those on a gluten-free diet.)

If the bread is cut ahead of time, cut it into good-sized pieces so it is easy to handle and so people don't touch other pieces of bread or the wine when they receive from the cup. When using a common loaf, the server cradles the loaf in a cloth in one hand, tears a piece with the other, and then gives it to the recipient. Be certain it is a nice-sized piece for intinction and as a reminder of God's generous love.

The "wine" used for communion in United Church services is usually non-alcoholic grape juice, although some congregations do offer alcoholic wine as an alternative, as decided by the governing body.

Whatever is chosen for the bread and wine, always remember that they represent the ultimate gift of Jesus to his disciples. As a generous and loving host, he would want the best quality and freshness for his guests.

## Distribution

If people are helping you to distribute the bread and wine, they could come forward immediately after the Prayer of Jesus or before the Call to Give Thanks.

The time when congregants are receiving the elements is commonly understood to be one of reverence and anticipation of the special meal about to be shared. It may be a time of silence, instrumental music, or quiet choir or congregational singing.

If you are using separate communion glasses (glass or disposable), each contains a small amount of wine. Each communicant is given a glass and a small portion of bread. Within this practice there are two different models, and you need to be sensitive to the custom in your congregation:

- After the elements have been blessed, you and any assisting elders take the trays of glasses and bread to the seated congregants. The trays are passed among them, each taking a cup and a piece of bread. When everyone has their cup and bread, you take the bread and eat it, signalling for all the others to do so at the same time. Similarly, you then take a cup and drink the wine, signalling for the others to do so.
- Once the elements have been blessed, you invite the congregants to come forward and receive the elements. This method requires at least one assistant. Communicants come forward, receive the bread from the first server, consume the bread, and then move to the second server to receive the wine. Then they return to their seats.

Intinction, an increasingly common practice in The United Church of Canada, is similar to the latter process. Instead of eating the bread, the communicant moves to the second server and dips the bread into a large chalice of wine, thereby consuming the bread and wine at the same

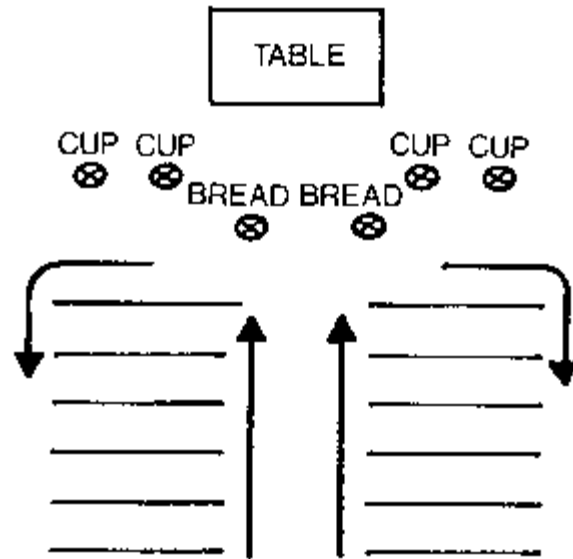
time. Intinction is an ancient practice that is used in many churches throughout the world. Symbolically, this echoes the tradition of a common cup without having everyone drink from the same cup.

Whatever the method of serving communion elements, as the recipient receives the bread the server may say, “Jesus Christ, bread of life.” As the recipient receives the wine the server may say, “Jesus Christ, the true vine.” Other, similar phrases may also be used. The recipient may reply with “Amen” or “Thanks be to God” as encouraged by the presider or printed in the bulletin.

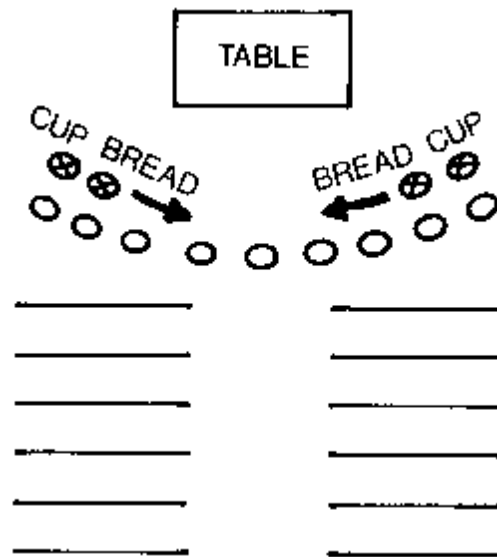
### **Order for Receiving the Elements**

Who receives communion first, who follows, and who serves whom? Practices vary from congregation to congregation, and each practice has theological and historical meaning well beyond local custom.

- In one practice, the presider takes communion first, and then serves the assistant, if there is one. Then the two serve the rest of the congregation. This models the grace of communion starting from the table and proceeding through the servers to the congregation, who then live out God’s good news in all the world.
- In another practice that uses more than one serving station, the sacraments elder joins the congregation coming forward to receive communion. Or the sacraments elder may conclude communion by serving any assistants and finally letting the assistants serve the presider last. This characterizes a servant model, where the guests are served first and the host last.
- A third practice, in which each person is both servant and a recipient, is particularly appropriate for small, intimate gatherings where all participants know one another. The participants gather in a circle around the table. The presider serves both elements to the person on the right, who, after receiving them, serves them to the person on the right. This receiving and serving goes around all the people in the circle back to the presider, who may be the first or the last recipient. This may be done in silence, perhaps with music in the background, or using the phrases mentioned above.



People coming forward to stations. A procession forms in the centre aisle and people receive at stations in front of the table, moving to either side to return to their seats by the side aisles. The presider may serve one of the elements, usually the bread. Alternatively, the presider does not serve but is seated by the table until all have communed. For larger numbers, there may be two cup servers for every bread server.



Here, the people come forward and form a curved line in front of the table. Servers bring the bread and wine to the people, starting from the outer edge and moving toward the centre. Individuals may leave as soon as they have received, leaving room for others to take their places. This approach is better in smaller gatherings.

Source: Barthel, Newman, and Wilson, *A Guide to Sunday Worship in The United Church of Canada*, p. 126.

## Health and Hygiene

Hygiene is important in communion, especially during the cold and flu season but also as a general rule.

There is widespread discussion about the relative merits and risks attached to each method of distributing the elements. Without doubt, using individual cups and separate squares of pre-cut bread is the most hygienic method, although even here handling the bread and cups needs to be carefully considered.

Intinction has come under increasing scrutiny, especially when poorly practised. The problem arises when small pieces of bread are used, the communicants' fingers get into the wine, and the bread dissolves into the wine, thereby carrying germs from the hand into the wine. The common cup has been used for centuries, and if used correctly—high-alcohol wine, a silver cup, wiped with a clean cloth and turned after each communicant—is quite sanitary. Since most United Churches use grape juice instead of wine and pottery cups, there is no disinfectant effect.

It is wise, indeed reverent, to keep the following in mind:

- Wash your hands as close to communion time as possible, and rinse them with an antibacterial hand sanitizer just before beginning your part of the service.
- If you sneeze or cough at any time during the Great Thanksgiving, use the sanitizer again, even if you use a tissue or handkerchief. Your congregation will appreciate your thoughtfulness. Although the risk of transmitting disease is small, due diligence is always in order, and the congregation won't be able to focus on communion if they are distracted by your cough or sneeze.
- Always provide gluten-free bread for members with celiac disease, or offer rice crackers and a separate cup or cups kept on a separate plate.
- Cut the pieces of bread large enough that people can pick one up easily without touching the others.
- If you will be breaking an entire loaf, it could be sliced partway or pierced with a fork ahead of time to enable a gracious breaking.
- If you use a common loaf, have only one person (you or an assistant) tear it and give a piece to each communicant so many hands don't touch it.
- When using intinction, tipping the chalice slightly toward the communicants also helps to prevent their fingers touching the wine.
- If the wine tips over, pause, acknowledge calmly to yourself that it has happened, assess whether you can simply pour more wine into the cup, and carry on. It is a good idea to always leave some wine in the pitcher or keep more nearby, even though tipping is a very rare occurrence.
- If you cannot recover the wine (if the chalice breaks or there is no more wine, for example), serve only the bread. One element is a complete communion in this instance.
- Wash all utensils, glasses, and plates well immediately after the service, and store them in a clean, dry place.
- Any remaining bread can be fed to the birds and wine can be poured in the garden.

## A Final Word

When we symbolically reenact the Last Supper in communion, we enter or re-enter that special covenant relationship God has with the people of the Word, the church. God is inviting us, and we respond freely giving all that we have and are.

Sharing communion is a means of grace—that special moment in our lives when God’s undeserved love is lavished upon us. Communion helps us stay in touch with that love.

As Ralph Milton wrote in *This United Church of Ours*:

That’s all part of the symbolism. God can take plain ordinary bread and grape juice and give them a meaning that’ll shake us to our roots. In the same way, God can take plain ordinary people, shake us to our roots and make us part of a special divine plan.

## Reflection and Discussion Questions

1. List five ideas that were new for you in this chapter.
2. What are your congregation’s communion traditions?
3. What concerns or questions do you have about presiding over communion?
4. What qualities do you feel are important for presiding over communion?
5. If someone felt unworthy of taking communion, how might you respond?



# Service of Recognition

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*The following liturgy is suggested for officially recognizing a sacraments elder in a congregation and for the congregation to covenant with that individual. The liturgy is intended to be incorporated into a regular worship service and would usually follow the proclamation of the Word as a response to the Word.*

*The chair of the governing body, and/or the chair of the worship committee may come forward, with the pastoral charge supervisor, and invite the individual being recognized to come forward to be presented to the congregation. A few words may be shared with the congregation about the process of coming to this day and the reason for this celebratory covenant.*

*Celebrate God's Presence Pocket Service Edition: Sacraments Elder (The United Church of Canada, 2008) is a special book of liturgy available for purchase through UCRD (United Church Resource Distribution) that will be presented to the sacraments elder during this service.*

## Congregational Covenant with a Sacraments Elder

### Scripture Readings

Let us hear the message of Holy Scripture:

Jesus came and said to them...

“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.” (Mt. 28:19–20)

Then he took a loaf of bread,  
and when he had given thanks,  
he broke it and gave it to them,  
saying, “This is my body, which is given for you.  
Do this in remembrance of me.”  
And he did the same with the cup after supper,  
saying, “This cup that is poured out for you  
is the new covenant in my blood.” (Lk. 22:19–20)

### Statement of Purpose

Friends, we celebrate with joy  
that, like Jesus' disciples around the world,  
we may now break bread, pour wine,

and welcome one another through baptism  
here in our holy place.  
N. has been discerned by us,  
and by our presbytery,  
and has diligently prepared *himself/herself/themselves*  
to be a sacraments elder  
in and for N. United Church.  
This is a blessing, an honour, and a responsibility.  
It calls N. to celebrate Christ's sacraments  
among us, with us, and on our behalf.  
We thank N. and pray that *he/she/they* offer *his/her/their* best  
to God and to God's people here in our congregation.

### **Covenant Questions and Promises**

*To the sacraments elder:*

*Sibling/Brother/Sister* in Christ, N.,  
you have prayerfully considered  
the responsibilities of a sacraments elder,  
and discerned a call to it,  
and have expressed your willingness to serve  
Christ in this way.  
Therefore, on behalf of N. Presbytery  
I ask you these questions:

Will you serve in Christ's name,  
with utmost care and reverence,  
for the glory of God,  
and for the faithful worship and witness  
of the people of God  
in this place?

I will, God being my helper.

Do you promise to exercise this particular ministry of celebrating the sacraments  
in loving faithfulness,  
bearing witness  
to the authority of this congregation and N. Presbytery?

I will, God being my helper.

*To the congregation:*

Members of the congregation,  
you have heard the promises of N.,

who has answered God's call to  
be a sacraments elder.  
I invite you to pledge your support:

**We celebrate our partnership with you  
in the service of Jesus Christ.  
We promise to honour your ministry  
of celebrating the sacraments of baptism and communion,  
and to support you with our prayer  
and all our other ministries,  
that together we may be the Body of Christ.**

### **Laying on of Hands**

By the laying on of hands,  
the church in every age recognizes God's call  
in the lives of faithful people  
and asks the Holy Spirit  
to confer on them  
the gifts necessary for their ministry.

*The applicant may kneel (see caution on page 24) and the pastoral charge supervisor and representatives from the congregation lay their hands on the applicant's head while the supervisor continues:*

Come, Holy Spirit  
come upon *N.* now; encourage *him/her* and bless *him/her* this year  
as a sacraments elder  
at *N.* United Church. Amen.

### **Prayer**

Let us pray.

Loving God, we thank you for *N.*,  
who is responding to your presence in *his/her/their* life.  
Bless *N.* as *he/she/they* fulfills  
the liturgical and educational duties  
of a sacraments elder  
on behalf of this congregation.  
May the words of Jesus  
to baptize, to break bread, and to share the cup  
be enacted duly and faithfully here through *N.*  
and bring all of us more deeply  
into the wondrous embrace of your love.  
Amen.

## Presentation and Declaration

N.,  
on behalf of our congregation,  
I present to you this book  
for celebrating the sacraments  
which is now your ministry.  
We rejoice in your discernment and preparation,  
in your commitment and gifts.  
We recognize and affirm  
your ministry in our midst.  
Thanks be to God!

## Hymn

### Suggestions:

“I Have Called You by Your Name” (MV 121)  
“Sent Out in Jesus’ Name” (MV 212)  
“Today We Are All Called to Be Disciples” (VU 507)  
“I, the Lord of the Sea and Sky” (VU 509)

## References and Further Reading

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Resources available through United Church Resource Distribution (UCRD) or participating presbytery resource centres are indicated. UCRD also sells baptism certificates, candles, and communion supplies. A complete catalogue of church supplies and merchandise is available online at [UCRDstore.ca](http://UCRDstore.ca) or by calling 1-800-288-7365 or 416-253-5456.

Barthel, Alan, David R. Newman, and Paul Scott Wilson (ed.), *A Guide to Sunday Worship in The United Church of Canada* (Toronto: United Church Publishing House, 1988; out of print). Although dated, this book offers a brief explanation for each part of a worship service, including each part's history and modern forms.

Benjamin-Cameron, Bethe, *In the Name of Love: A Communion Resource for Congregations* (Toronto: The United Church of Canada, 2006). This booklet includes four sections: Intergenerational Event on Communion (worship and activities for a two- to four-hour event), Children and Communion (six 30-minute program sessions for ministers and leaders to choose from), A Teaching Communion (material to explain the communion service to children, including a liturgy), and Especially for Parents (ideas for talking to children and doing activities about communion at home). Available through UCRD and participating presbytery resource centres.

Bricault, Judith, *Baptisés pour la vie = Baptized for life* (Greenfield Park, QC: Comité des ministères en français de l'Église Unie du Canada, 2001).

Carter Jr., Kenneth H., *Baptism Services, Sermons and Prayers* (Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press, 2006). A brief and refreshing read complete with spiritual reflections from our sister denomination, The United Methodist Church.

*Celebrate God's Presence: A Book of Services for The United Church of Canada* (Toronto: United Church Publishing House, 2000). This service-planning resource for worship leaders offers old and new prayers from Canada and other lands. The 700 pages include comprehensive resources for weekly and daily worship, funerals, marriages, and baptism. Available through UCRD and participating presbytery resource centres.

*Celebrate God's Presence Pocket Service Edition: Sacraments Elder* (Toronto: The United Church of Canada, 2008). A book of baptism and communion liturgy designed for use by Sacraments Elders. It contains a certificate licence to be completed by the presbytery, and is intended to honour the Sacraments Elder and the new covenant relationship. Available through UCRD and participating presbytery resource centres.

Fennell, Rob, *Theological, Historical, and Contextual Considerations Regarding Presidency at the Sacraments* (Etobicoke: The United Church of Canada, Faith Formation and Education Unit, 2002).

Harding, Thomas, and Bruce Harding, *Patterns of Worship in The United Church of Canada 1925–1987*, Historical monograph (1996). This very detailed account of our worship history includes sections on the development of our two sacraments.

*In the Name of Love: A Baptism Resource for Congregations* (Toronto: The United Church of Canada, 2006). A package of baptism materials for congregations designed to be stored in a binder: print material, a DVD-ROM with text files that can be customized, a baptism video, and video interviews. Available through UCRD and participating presbytery resource centres.

*In the Name of Love: A Baptism Resource for Parents* (Toronto: The United Church of Canada, 2006). A DVD-ROM that includes a short video about baptism, video interviews, text and image files parents can adapt to commemorate their own experience, and text files with ideas for spiritual practices in the home. Available through UCRD and participating presbytery resource centres.

Kervin, William S., *The Celebration of Baptism* (R & R Pictureware, 2001). Video recording.

Kervin, William S., “The Language of Baptism: A Study of the Authorized Baptismal Liturgies of The United Church of Canada,” *Toronto Journal of Theology*, 20, no. 1, 83.

Kervin, William S, *Ordered Liberty: Readings in the History of United Church Worship* (Toronto: United Church Publishing House, 2011). Kervin draws a family tree of United Church worship by bringing together pieces from services, hymn books, faith statements, and pivotal articles. Available through UCRD and participating presbytery resource centres.

Milton, Ralph, *This United Church of Ours*, 3rd ed. (Kelowna, BC: Wood Lake Books, 2000). This immensely popular and gently informative book about our denomination is well suited to confirmation or study groups of all ages. Written with humour and lots of stories and insight.

Roman Catholic/United Church of Canada Dialogue, Catholic Church, and United Church of Canada, *In Whose Name?: The Baptismal Formula in Contemporary Culture* (Toronto: The United Church of Canada, 2001). Available online at [www.united-church.ca](http://www.united-church.ca).

Saliers, Don E., *Worship Come to Its Senses* (Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press, 1996). A brief book about the need for a sense of awe, a sense of delight, a sense of truth, and a sense of hope in every worship service.

The United Church of Canada, *Service Book for the Use of Ministers Conducting Public Worship* (Toronto: The Ryerson Press, 1969; out of print).

World Council of Churches, *Baptism, Eucharist and Ministry*, Faith and Order Paper No. 111 (Geneva: World Council of Churches, 1982). This is the official statement on the sacraments, a statement celebrated as a reflection of our global unity as churches even with our differences. This is the document that enables our denomination to recognize as valid another denomination's baptism and other denominations to recognize ours as valid. (*Note:* The United Church recognizes any Roman Catholic baptism as valid, but the Roman Catholic Church does not recognize a United Church baptism as valid.)

*Your Child's Baptism: Protestant* (Kelowna, BC: Wood Lake Books, 2000). A useful educational magazine for parents seeking baptism for their child. Simply reading this magazine (parents and Sacraments Elders together) provides a worthwhile conversation for baptism preparation. Available through UCRD and participating presbytery resource centres.



[www.united-church.ca/handbooks](http://www.united-church.ca/handbooks)