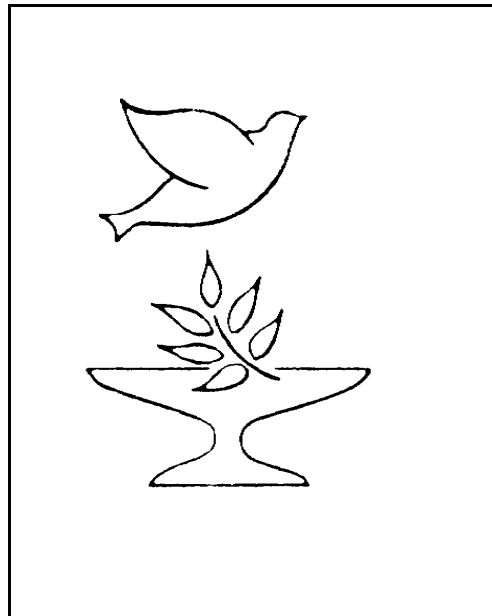


**NAMING
and
DEDICATION**



**A Service for Parents
and
Children**

**Unitarian Church of Edmonton
10804 119 Street NW
Edmonton, AB T5H 3P2
780-454-8073
chadmin@uce.ca**

What Is A Naming Ceremony?

Coming as it does close to the beginning of a new life, the Unitarian ceremony of naming and dedication parallels similar observances to be found in most forms of religion. For many people, the most familiar of these will be the traditional Christian practice of baptism or christening. These terms have sometimes been loosely applied to the Unitarian ceremony as well.

Such ceremonies have usually expressed thanksgiving for the newborn, and recognition of the child by name. But there are significant differences between Unitarian observances and those that have developed in some other religious contexts. Unitarians have never accepted the idea that children are “born in sin”, or that the newborn comes into our care in any state other than that of purity. Nor is there any suggestion, in a Unitarian ceremony, that the child is being committed to accepted specific beliefs, or becoming a member of a particular religious organization.

This is in accordance with the Unitarian view that each individual must be helped to develop an authentic religion of his or her own, and to make a personal decision at a mature age as to whether or not to become a

member of an organized religious body. Needless to add, this development is assisted by attention to the child’s spiritual growth. Religious education at an informal level within the family can be supplemented by more formal religious education of a kind that will focus upon the varied responses to life’s more important questions that have come both from the ongoing traditions of world religions.

These historic religions have arisen because we humans are social beings and need the support of a wider community. If such a community is dedicated to personal freedom, it will proceed by ways of sharing and discussion rather than by indoctrination. This is the type of religious community Unitarians aim to provide, though they certainly do not claim any monopoly in this. They do not feel that any religious group possesses special privileges which make membership in it indispensable to the well-being and prospects of human beings as they grow and develop.

The ceremony of naming and dedication therefore stands as a symbol of the child’s relationship to a nurturing community, expressing itself in wider and wider circles of inclusiveness.

There is the small circle of the family from which the parents bring the child. There is the circle of the church, a community which in its dedication to exploring and practicing the highest values provides the context for the naming ceremony. These and other such circles are microcosms of the human community as a whole. Within this setting the child is recognized by the name through which he or she is acknowledged a unique human personality. At the same time, those who participate in the ceremony pledge their efforts towards assisting the highest and fullest development of that personality (and, in a broader sense, that of all children).

The symbolic use of water is found in many religious traditions. Water is one of the traditional "four elements", and is usually a symbol of mystery and purity. The use of it in this ceremony marks a unity of spirit with all who aspire to higher levels of living, together with a recognition of the essential purity of the small child. The optional additional symbol of a rosebud, as used in many Unitarian ceremonies, signifies the beauty of life's unfolding.

While this ceremony will most frequently be used for infants in the first few months of their lives, it can be adapted for use with older children. These will

increasingly be able to take an active role, beginning with the ability to state their own name rather than having this done by a parent.

The Unitarian Church provides this service without charge where parents or grandparents are members of the congregation.

Sometimes requests for a ceremony are received from families with no such connection, and in line with its polity of serving the wider community as well as its own members, the church will meet such requests wherever feasible. In this situation, since the participants are not supporting the church financially in the way its members are doing, a charge will be made. Information with regard to current fees may be obtained from the church office.

The wording of the ceremony can vary according to circumstances, and the person officiating is always prepared to discuss this with the participants in advance. The wording which follows is that normally used.



Ceremony of Naming and Dedication

Opening Words

Welcome to earth, my Child!
We time-worn folk renew
Ourselves at your enchanted spring,
As though we all begin
Again in you. C. Day Lewis

To the Congregation:

The ceremony in which we now share expresses the feelings and needs of today; yet, it is also ancient and timeless. In all parts of the world and from the most distant days of which history bears record, parents have brought their children at an early age to a place of worship, sharing their own thanksgiving and dedication with the wider community.



Traditionally, the element of water has been used as a symbol, for all life has arisen from the waters, and it is through water that life is sustained as it flows forward like a river. Traditionally, also, this is a time to recognize the child by name, for it is by our names that each one of us is acknowledged as an individual, a unique and separate person with a life and dignity of his or her own. This is a public celebration, shared by parents, friends and all who have assembled here, to mark the fact that all of us have a responsibility for the care and nurture of all children. It is our task to work for a world of peace and justice in which they may have the freedom to grow and find fulfillment. It is our task to share with them our ideals, our reverences, our hopes, and to help them develop their own. It is our task to learn from them the zest and wonder in life with which all children come into this world, and which we too often lose in later life.

Dedication

To the Parents:

To you, as parents, let me say this: in presenting your child/children at this service, you invite us all to share with you in your joy and to support you in your dedication, as you undertake to help with love and guidance the fullest unfolding of the personality/personalities of the child/children entrusted to your care.

That undertaking will not always be an easy one. The time may come when you may be called upon to sacrifice ambitions, deny yourselves pleasure, set aside dreams, in order that the child may tread the more surely the onward path of life. You accept this service to another with whose life your lives are intertwined will be the richer and fuller in consequence.

Do you now promise that by example and affection no less than by precept, you will to the best of your ability help this child/these children to an appreciation of truth and beauty, of uprightness of character and love?

Response: We do

To the Sponsors: Do you as Sponsors/God parents pledge to support the parents as they raise this child/these children entrusted to their care.

Response: We do

To the Grandparents:

You are this child's grandparents. You also have a tender and solemn duty. Will you share with this child as much of your wisdom as he/she may come to need? Do you pledge to continue to support the parents with your love and understanding, to nurture and love this child?

Response: We do.

To the Grandparents: As you love your grandchildren, remember also your love for your own child, and for your child's spouse. Respect them for the choices they have made; support them in their work as parents, assist them so far as you are able, and above all trust them to do well the work that you have in your own time also done. At the same time, rejoice in the special, sacred relationship that exists in love between grandparent and grandchild.

Naming

What name have you given this child?

(Or for an older child: What is your name?)

_____, with this water, source and symbol of life, we express the dedication in which we all share.

May the blessings of an understanding heart, strength and integrity of purpose, and love received and given be yours and remain with you as you go forward into ever fuller life.

Alternate Naming

As we touch you with this water, _____, may you:

(Officiant dips flower in water and anoints)

(Eyes) Open your eyes to the beauty found in every person

(Ears) Tune your ears to the singing and the sighing

(Mouth) Sing in your pleasures and your pains

(Heart) Give all of your love, and accept joyfully from others

(Hands) Take pleasure from the work of these hands

(Feet) Walk gently upon the earth with respect for the interdependent web of all existence of which we are a part.

We pray that _____ will bear her name with pride and that he/she will bring joy and honor to it and to all that love her/him.

Readings

Your children are not your children,
They are the sons and daughters of Life's longing for itself.
They come through you but not from you,
And though they are with you yet they belong

You may give them your love but not your thoughts,
For they have their own thoughts.
You may house their bodies but not their souls,
For their souls dwell in the house of tomorrow,
which you cannot visit, not even in your dreams.
You may strive to be like them,
but seek not to make them like you,
For life goes not backward nor tarries with yesterday.

You are the bows from which your children
as living arrows are sent forth.
The Archer sees the mark upon the path of the infinite,
and he bends you with his might that his might
that his arrows may go swift and far.

Let your bending in the Archer's hand be for gladness,
For even as he loves the arrow that flies,
so he loves also the bow that is stable.

(by Kahlil Gibran)

In a house which becomes a home,
one will pass down and another take up
the heritage of mind and heart,
of laughter and tears, deeds and reflections.

Love, like a well loaded ship,
Crosses the Gulf between the generations.

Therefore we do not neglect
the ceremonies of our passage:
when we wed, when we die,
when we are blessed with a child,

when we depart and when we return,
when we plant and when we harvest.

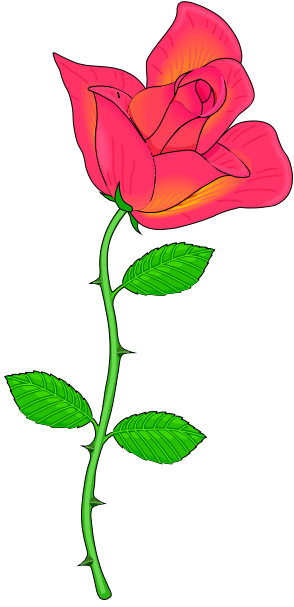
It is our trust to bring up our children,
nor do we expect that some other will hand them
the heritage that is ours and theirs.

If our knowledge and ideals
are born to them by others,
they will lose all of ourselves
that is wordless and full of wonder.

Let us build memories in our children,
lest they drag out joyless lives,
lest they let treasures be lost
because no one has given them the keys.

It is not by things that we live,
but by the meanings of things.
So we need to transmit the passwords
from generation to generation.

(By Antoine de St. Exupery)



Rosebud Ceremony(Optional)

We give the child a flower, which symbolizes the beauty of life. It is not for us to open the bud into a blossom, but we can give ti the nurture that will enable it to unfold. No flower grows alone, apart from the soil in which it lives. So too, no child grows alone.

May the flower then be a reminder of the beauty of fulfillment, and of the reward which comes from love and understanding, from teaching and example.

Conclusion

Prayer

Our hearts are uplifted with joy and gratitude surging from the inmost depths of our being, as we celebrate the mystery of life ever renewed which brings us the gift of children. To joy we add our dedication, as we remember that they will live in the world that we are making. We seek the grace to love them wisely, giving them our strength and guarding them against our weakness. We would help them find their own fulfillment and pass into their keeping the torch of life, its flame burning the more brightly through our aspirations and efforts.

Benediction

We are blessed with the presence of

and her/his renewal of our human family. Let us carry the joy of her/his presence deep in our hearts to support us as we return to the world.
Amen.

