

Universal Membership

There are two aspects of church membership: universal and local. Universal membership means belonging to the whole body of Christians throughout the world (and throughout history). This “universal church” is a spiritual idea, of course, not a real organization.

We become a member of the universal church by our *Baptism*. Baptism allows the community and individual to commit to grow together in faith. When we baptize infants, the parents and/or guardians of those infants make this public affirmation. When we baptize youth and adults they make their own affirmations in a ritual called *Affirmation of faith*.

If you were baptized as a baby or youth at another church, the ritual to declare your faith is called a *Re-Affirmation of Faith*. In these rituals we are publicly declaring our intention to live in Christ and practice our faith within the life and fellowship of the church. Membership Circles are offered throughout the year as opportunities for youth and adults to prepare for *Baptism* and *Affirmation of Faith* and/or *Re-affirmation*.

Universal Membership is permanent and life-long. Many Christian denominations recognize each other's Baptisms and Confirmations and in the United Church we never baptize a person a second time.

Photographs

We understand how valuable it can be to have photographs on the occasion of a baptism. While we prefer not to have pictures taken during the baptism itself, we invite families to gather at the font immediately following the worship service for photographs, which can include the minister(s).

Special Circumstances

All of the above describes our regular procedures for baptism. However, we recognize that sometimes unique circumstances call for special consideration and flexibility. Please feel free to discuss your situation with one of the ministers at any time.

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Baptism and Membership



Welcome

Everyone who chooses to live as a Christian and to practice their faith with Robertson-Wesley United Church is considered a member of our faith community. As a congregation, we celebrate together your faith, no matter where you are in the journey!

Everyone is also invited to consider committing to their faith publically. This may happen through *Baptism* (at any age) and/or becoming a formal church member through an *Affirmation of Faith* (youth and adults). These rituals happen on Sunday mornings during worship so all may witness and support each other's life passages.

The Meaning of Membership

An early follower of Jesus, Paul, calls the church the *Body of Christ*. He does so to emphasize the importance of each one of us to the collective health and wellbeing of the whole community of Christ. We endeavour to provide a sense of belonging in which each person here can safely receive and also safely offer their wonderful selves. This way, through the Spirit, we all become greater we can be alone.

We also understand our church as a “Covenant community.” *Covenant* is the Biblical way of describing a relationship in which the bond and commitment include one another and God. *Community* is when more than 2 people make a commitment to one another's well-being.

Local Membership

The second aspect of church membership is local membership (technically referred to in the United Church as full membership). This is an affirmation of our commitment to the particular congregation in which we are currently practicing our faith. This can happen in the *Re-Affirmation of Faith* ritual as well as through a transfer of membership from another congregation. When we move or if we become inactive for a long period of time (usually 3 years or more), our local membership may expire but it may be renewed at any time.

Privileges of Local (Full) Membership

At Congregational meetings, one must be a full member in order to vote on matters relating to the Ministry (e.g., calling a new minister).

A person who is interested in Ministry must be a full member for a specified period of time before they can apply to enter the Discernment Process, which is the first step in the preparation for Ordained, Diaconal or a form of lay, designated ministry.

Transfer or Reaffirmation

Members of other United Church congregations may become members of Robertson-Wesley by transfer or reaffirmation. Those who have been confirmed in other denominations may become members of Robertson-Wesley by reaffirmation. To transfer or reaffirm your membership, speak to one of the ministers at any time.

Baptism

Baptism is a celebration of life and can happen at any age. A person's wish to follow the way of Jesus or raise a child in this tradition needs the support of a faith community. We celebrate with you this moment of discernment and prayer as you ponder making this step in your own spiritual journey.

In Baptism we recall that we are acting on God's behalf: it is God who welcomes each person into the Whole Family of God, calling each person a beloved child of God, just as Jesus was proclaimed at his own baptism.

To request baptism for yourself or your child, please contact one of the ministers.

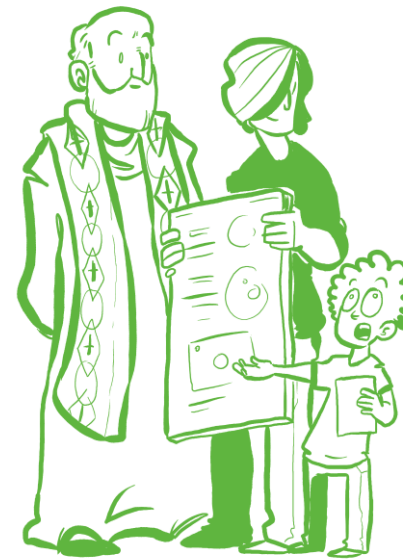
Infants and Children

Every child is a wonderful gift and we share in your excitement and hope. The expectation of a child is a time to think not only about your child's relationship with you as a family, but also your child's connection to the larger community

When you are expecting, we offer a blessing of your unborn child as a way to mark this sacred time. When your baby is born or perhaps later in their life, we celebrate the opportunity to join you in welcoming your child into the church by baptism.

Affirmations of Faith at infant baptism

Infants and children are baptized on the basis of the faith of their parents (or other care-givers). Therefore, the baptism service includes profession of faith questions for the parents, similar to those they would answer for their affirmation of faith. If parents have not been baptized or confirmed at the time of their children's baptism, we encourage them to consider taking this step for themselves in the future. We acknowledge and respect that some parents are not religious but wish to support their partner's decision. We seek to include all in the ritual so as to acknowledge this diversity.



Affirmations of Faith as youth or adult

The rituals of affirmation and re-affirmation of faith includes proclaiming our local church's mission and The *United Church of Canada's A New Creed* (see the pamphlet *Who is Robertson-Wesley* for more information).

We encourage all to participate in a membership circle or retreat in preparation for this life passage. These experiences are led by the ministers and offer an opportunity to discuss the basics of Christian faith and church life.

The purpose of the circle is to help people locate themselves on their spiritual journeys, to answer questions about Christianity and the United Church, to survey the basics of faith with attention to current developments, and to build fellowship with others at a similar place on the journey.

Circles can be a series of evenings or a weekend retreat and are offered at least once each year. There are circles for youth (age 14 and up) and for adults. Find information about dates and times through the church office, a minister or check the website (rwuc.org).

