

Child Dedication & Naming Ceremonies

For members, friends and staff of the
Unitarian Congregation of Saskatoon
www.ucsaskatoon.org



Three children dedicated by their parents in the Unitarian Congregation of Saskatoon in 2007. The service included elements of music, water, and basket weaving.

Each night a child is born is a holy night—
A time for singing
A time for wondering,
A time for worshipping.

— Sophia Lyon Fahs

In this brochure, the word “parents” includes single and adoptive parents and same-sex couples. “Child” may include multiple children from the same family or from more than one family.

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✝ What is a child dedication ceremony?

A child dedication ceremony – often referred to as a child naming and dedication ceremony – is one of the rites of passage commonly celebrated in our denomination, together with coming of age ceremonies, weddings and services of commitment, divorce ceremonies, funerals and memorial services. These are all ways of celebrating important transitions in life.

The child dedication ceremony may fill a role similar to that of baptism or christening in Christian churches, but the emphasis is usually on the family and the community.

✝ What are the goals?

- To celebrate the presence or arrival of a child in the family with hope and joy
- To celebrate an older child's involvement or welcome into the congregation
- To introduce the child to the congregation
- To recognize the friends and family who will contribute to raising this child
- To give the congregation an opportunity to commit itself to support of the child and family
- Optionally, to celebrate the child's name and to explain its significance to everyone

✝ Who are the participants?

- Always:
- The infants or children being dedicated – from one or more families
 - The parent or parents
 - Siblings of the child or children being dedicated
 - One or more representatives of the congregation:
Minister, Lay Chaplain, or a volunteer chosen to help with the ceremony
 - The congregation, adults and children
- Optional:
- Grandparents
 - Godparents or other friends of the parents
 - Musicians or other people who contribute to the event

✝ What is the content of the event?

The ceremony is a joyous event often incorporating music, gesture, movement, symbolic objects, and words (see front cover). It includes these elements:

- An introduction of the child (or children) to the congregation
- A commitment by the parents to bring up the child in this community and in accord with their values
- A commitment by the congregation to support the parents and care for the child
- An affirmation of the individuality and dignity of the child

Various scripts exist but many parents find it more rewarding to help develop their own ceremony (see “How is it organized?” below).

Typically a child dedication ceremony for one child takes 5 or 10 minutes. If children from more than one family are being dedicated together, it might take up to 15 minutes altogether.

✝ When does it happen?

A child naming and dedication ceremony usually takes place as part of a Sunday service in our congregation. It can happen almost any time: when a child is born or adopted, or some time after the family joins the congregation, at the time of a visit from faraway relatives, or on a special occasion for the family. If the ceremony is to be part of a Sunday service, the date has to be arranged at least two months in advance.

✝ How is it organized?

There is a range of possibilities depending on parents' preferences and the number of different families involved in a particular ceremony. Most parents prefer one of the middle options (number 2, 3 or 4 below), but if several families are involved then option 4 or 5 works best.

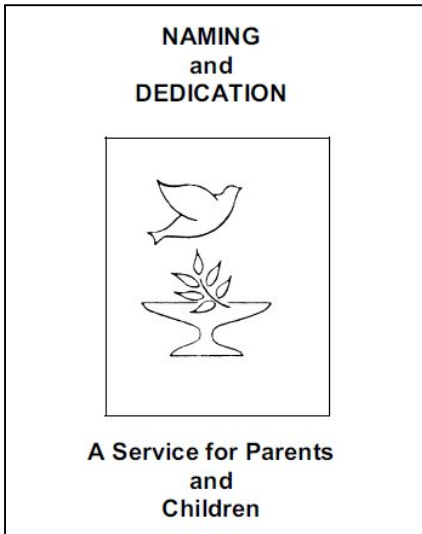
The word "leader" here means a person who represents the congregation: it might be the minister, lay chaplain, director of religious education, or an experienced volunteer.

1. Parents organize and present the ceremony entirely by themselves.
2. Parents organize and present the ceremony with consultation and support from a leader.
3. Parents and leader organize and present the ceremony jointly, with each contributing part of the plans and materials.
4. Leader organizes and presents the ceremony with input from the parents on words, music, or other elements.
5. Leader organizes and presents the ceremony and the parents follow instructions.

Typically a full script is created, incorporating the words, music, and stage directions for all those involved. For ceremonies that are conducted as part of Sunday services, a section is also created for the order of service. Ideally there is a rehearsal to ensure that all involved know their parts.

To arrange a child dedication ceremony, contact the UCS Office, the Lay Chaplain, or the Director of Religious Education.

✝ **Appendices:** Child dedication resources for parents, lay chaplains and volunteer leaders



From Unitarian Church of Edmonton

Naming and dedication: A service for parents and children (PDF, 8 pp, 260 KB)

Includes a sample ceremony

www.uce.ca/programs/2007naming.pdf

From Canadian Unitarian Council
www.cuc.ca/ceremonies/child.htm

The image shows a page from the Canadian Unitarian Council website. At the top left is the logo of the Canadian Unitarian Council, which consists of a stylized maple leaf. To the right of the logo, the text "CANADIAN UNITARIAN COUNCIL" is written in a sans-serif font. Below this, the tagline "Growing Vital Religious Communities In Canada" is displayed. The main content area is divided into two sections. On the left, the text "Child Namings and Blessings" is written in a bold, sans-serif font. On the right is a black and white photograph showing a man in a white shirt and a woman in a patterned dress standing next to a young child, who is holding a candle. Below the photograph, there is a short paragraph of text: "What a thrill it is to help families welcome a new arrival and to formally recognize the friends and family who will contribute to raising this child with you. We encourage the active inclusion of siblings and any others who will be important in this child's life. We will help you create a service of hope and joy that honours your values and provides a vision for the future."

The Director of Religious Education at the Unitarian Congregation of Saskatoon keeps a file of sample ceremonies.

We Dedicate This Child

Rev. Linda Olson Peebles
Unitarian Universalist Church of Arlington, Virginia

From a UUA brochure:
permission to copy is
given by the author and
is pending from the
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We dedicate our minds and hearts to the spirit of this child.
—Shelley Jackson Denham

Unitarian Universalists believe that every child brings new life and hope into the world. We set aside a special time, called simply the Ceremony of Dedication, for the community to bless the child and celebrate the blessing of this gift of life. The ceremony does not make the life of the child sacred; we believe that life is sacred inherently. When we dedicate a child we acknowledge the truth that each child's life is sacred and hold that truth in the light of our faith.

We understand that we are all part of the interconnected web of all existence. The community is part of the fabric that holds all human life, the story of many shared lives woven into our cultures, and the saga of each individual. We are who we are, in part, because of the love and guidance and the inspiration and ideals that we receive, especially from those who parent us. And the church community has the privileged role not only of supporting the parents in the sacred task of nurturing life but also of weaving the threads of culture—history, values, arts, wisdom, visions—into a fabric that can enfold the family.

There is no “standard” UU Ceremony of Dedication, and each service may use different words and elements from family, cultural, and religious traditions. As we join together to name and dedicate the child and ourselves, the identity and values of the church community and the family give the ceremony meaning. We affirm our

commitment to nurture the child and hold the child in the fabric of community. Even a Dedication done privately, not in the context of a public UU worship service, is a ceremony of blessings given and received. We are all blessed when we welcome the child into the human family and give our blessing to the child's life as he or she begins their journey. A Ceremony of Dedication is appropriate when a new baby is born, when a child is adopted, or when a family decides to join a UU community and wishes to have its children welcomed through Dedication.

The community hopes that every child receives love and affection, guidance and nurture, so that each child may grow into the fullness of the promise of life. Mindful that such love is an honor and a responsibility, in a UU ceremony of dedication,

- we give witness to our values and our commitment to be a religious community that stands on the side of love for all creation,
- we form a covenant with the family to support them and to honor and recognize the preciousness of the child as the gift of life, entrusted to the care of both family and community,
- we affirm the dignity and individuality of the child, as we proclaim the child's unique place in the community of humankind.



The UU Community welcomes the child in love into the human community, in the spirit of humanity's oneness, and into the fellowship of life! Our UU faith community seeks to create a world filled

increasingly with love, freedom, and truth. The rite of Dedication includes the hope that the child's thoughts and actions in life will pass on to the future our heritage of freedom, service, and love, which the child receives from us.

Families covenant to accept the faith community's support as they nurture their children to grow as people who will be strong in spirit, secure in self, and outward in caring. The support of the entire community—parents, family, and congregation—is essential to the continuing unfolding of the child's life and blessing. We all accept responsibility for the child and promise to offer safety, affection, encouragement, challenge, and learning. We support the family's key role in guarding the child's life, freedom, and opportunities. Parents—and others they may include in the ceremony, such as godparents, grandparents, and siblings—join in the covenant of care and responsibility.

We honor the individual life of the child as we celebrate the miracle of the advent and the growth of the child. We see the wonder and mystery of life incarnate when we look on the

face of the child. Just as UU Dedication Ceremonies include many different words, they also can include a variety of symbols and rituals, such as:

- water, a universal symbol of blessing and life
- the laying of a minister's hand on the child's head as a sign of blessing
- holding the child for all to see or walking the child through the aisles as a ritual of introduction and welcome
- the gift of a flower, a symbol of life's beauty and the unfolding of life. If the flower is a rose, we remove the thorns, in the hope that the child's life will be filled with as few thorns as possible and that when there are thorns the child will always be surrounded by a caring community
- the gift of a book, a sign of our commitment to lifelong learning

We also ceremonially name the child, acknowledging that the child is known by this name and his or her worth and individuality are recognized.

Every person's life is nourished in the love and support we receive in community. The embrace of family love forms our dreams and hopes. The UU Ceremony of Dedication celebrates with gratitude the wonder of each child, claiming each life as sacred and giving thanks in response to the gift of the divine mystery, which dwells within us all and within the community of life.

Linda Olson Peebles is the minister of religious education at the Unitarian Universalist Church of Arlington, Virginia. She previously served the Mt. Vernon Unitarian Church in Alexandria, Virginia. A graduate of Meadville Lombard Theological School, she sits on the Unitarian Universalist Association Board of Trustees and loves to teach and minister at UU camps, conferences, and leadership schools. Her three children, now young adults, were dedicated as UU children and are still active in UU communities.