

## celebrating birth

**In the lives of all human beings** there are important events which call for a celebration. Since the earliest days of human communities the birth of children has been celebrated by parents, families and friends. In religious communities this has usually taken the form of a ceremony that bestows a name upon the child and that also recognizes that child's place in the community.

Unitarians are not bound by religious rules and customs. We can devise a ceremony to suit the individual needs and wishes of the parents and family of the child. Parents are welcome to help in planning it. The ceremony may be called a Naming Service or a Welcoming although other names may be used such as a Dedication, Blessing, Thanksgiving or Baptism. Whichever name is chosen, what is important for Unitarians is the commitment by the community as well as the parents – to offer the child love and support.

## where is the ceremony performed?

**Usually, parents or guardians** prefer the ceremony to be held in a Unitarian place of worship. This may not be appropriate, however, if there is no Unitarian community nearby or if the parents would prefer a different kind of setting. Some celebrations take place in the child's home or in a hired building such as a hotel. In good weather, they may be held in the open air, either in a garden or perhaps in a wood.

## to whom is the ceremony available?



**Unitarians enjoy the opportunity** to celebrate new life and anyone is welcome to ask for a Unitarian celebrant to devise a ceremony for their child whatever their religious, cultural and racial background. The parents will not be asked to affirm anything they do not believe nor will they be compelled to join a Unitarian congregation. No pressure will be placed on them to explain their lifestyle or home life.

## who performs the ceremony?

**The ceremony may be conducted** by a professional Unitarian minister or by a lay person. In some situations the parents themselves may wish to officiate. In such a case a Unitarian community would be pleased to offer help and advice. .

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## when are the ceremonies performed?

**The celebrant** will discuss with the parents the most appropriate time for such a ceremony to take place. Some celebrations take place during a normal Sunday service when other members of the congregation can be present. Some are conducted in a Unitarian place of worship at a different time when only the child's family are present. Child Naming or Welcoming ceremonies are customarily held on a Sunday but it is now becoming increasingly popular to hold a ceremony on a different day entirely.

## at what age should a child be presented?

**Usually,** the child will be a few weeks or a few months old. Unitarians, however, are able to devise a ceremony suitable for a child of any age.





## are godparents required?

**Godparents, or sponsors,** are not essential but may be invited if so desired. The choice of godparents, along with their gender and the number required, is a matter for agreement between the child's family and the celebrant. The child's brothers or sisters, or other family members, can also be involved in the ceremony if the parents wish.



## what happens during the ceremony?

**The form and content** will depend on discussions between the child's parents or guardians and the celebrant, but will be determined by the circumstances of the occasion. The result will be a ceremony based on the integrity of all involved, respecting the needs of the child and the child's family. It may or may not include the waters of baptism. There may also be the giving of a flower as a symbol of the growth, beauty and fragrance of life. There may be readings and prayers drawn from various sources. The resulting ceremony will be something unique to that child.

## what of any special needs?

**Unitarian celebrants** are trained to devise ceremonies to suit the distinct circumstances of those with special needs, such as a Service of Adoption. Celebrations can also be arranged for older children, and, in such situations, the children themselves may be able to participate in the preparation. For parents who belong to different religious traditions, the source material from their own traditions can be integrated to produce a ceremony respecting the integrity of all concerned.

Whatever the name of the ceremony, the focal point of the celebration should be the commitment of adults to the nurturing of the child's fullest potential. By working together with the adults concerned, the Unitarian celebrant can produce a ceremony that is unique - something of which the participants can be justly proud.



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# namings and welcomings – the unitarian way

a unitarian **information leaflet**