



THIS IS
Your
BAPTISMAL
Liturg y

*A Resource for Understanding
The United Methodist
Ritual of Holy Baptism*

1. The pastor makes the following statement to the congregation:

Brothers and sisters in Christ:
Through the Sacrament of Baptism we are
initiated into Christ's holy Church.
We are incorporated into God's mighty acts
of salvation and given new birth through
water and the Spirit.
All this is God's gift, offered to us without price.

2. If there are confirmations or reaffirmations, the pastor continues:

Through confirmation,
and through the reaffirmation of our faith,
we renew the covenant declared at our baptism,
acknowledge what God is doing for us,
and affirm our commitment to Christ's holy Church.

INTRODUCTION TO THE SERVICE

Section 1. GOD'S GRACIOUS GIFT.

Baptism is entry into the Church. The use of the biblical term *covenant* links baptism and its related services to the work of God on behalf of God's people. A covenant is a two-sided agreement involving promises and responsibilities of both parties. In the Hebrew Bible, the story is told of God's covenant relationship with the Hebrew people. The sign sealing that covenant is circumcision. In the New Testament, meaning New Covenant, the story is about Jesus Christ and the covenant that his life, death, and resurrection establish between God and the Christian Church. In baptism, we are initiated into the community of God's covenant people – the body of Christ. Baptism is the sign of the New Covenant, the divine promise applied to the life of each of us.¹

It is “through water and the Spirit” that we enter into new spiritual life in relationship to God in Christ. In The Articles of Religion, John Wesley asserted that, “Baptism is not only a sign of profession and mark of difference whereby Christians are distinguished from others that are not baptized; but it is also a sign of regeneration or the new birth. The baptism of young children is to be retained in the church.”² Baptism of an infant powerfully portrays the utter dependence which all of us have on God. The sacrament is the sign of God's promise of ongoing grace, offering continual forgiveness and transformation throughout our lives. We do not receive all of the benefits of baptism at once; this is particularly obvious when infants are baptized. At whatever age it is received, baptism demonstrates our inclusion in the covenant with God and our access to the divine grace that claims, sustains, and saves us.

Section 2. OUR RESPONSE TO GOD'S GRACE.

Without God having acted first, we would be unable to move toward God. The good news is that in Jesus Christ, God has acted to make salvation possible. What God offers us must be accepted in repentance and faith. Confirmation and reaffirmation are our responses of commitment, profession of faith, and rededication.³

¹ The Services of the Baptismal Covenant are found on pages 32-54 of *The United Methodist Hymnal*. We will look specifically at The Baptismal Covenant I, because it is the most comprehensive service.

² *The Book of Discipline*, 2000, p. 63.

³ See *By Water and the Spirit: Making Connections for Identity and Ministry* by Gayle Carlton Felton (Discipleship Resources, 1998), pages 1-26. This is the study edition of the church's official interpretive document on baptism adopted by the 1996 General Conference.

3. *A representative of the congregation presents the candidates with the appropriate statements:*

I present *Name(s)* for baptism.

I present *Name(s)* for confirmation.

I present *Name(s)* to reaffirm their faith.

I present *Name(s)* who come(s) to this congregation from
_____ Church.

4. *The pastor addresses parents or other sponsors and those candidates who can answer for themselves:*

On behalf of the whole Church,

I ask you:

Do you renounce the spiritual
forces of wickedness, reject the
evil powers of this world, and
repent of your sin?

I do.

Do you accept the freedom and power God gives you
to resist evil, injustice, and
oppression
in whatever forms they present
themselves?

I do.

Do you confess Jesus Christ as your Savior,
put your whole trust in his grace,
and promise to serve him as
your Lord,
in union with the Church which
Christ has opened
to people of all ages, nations,
and races?

I do.

PRESENTATION OF CANDIDATES

Section 3. THE COMMUNITY CALLS US BY NAME.

Since we become members of the church in baptism, it is appropriate that a lay member of the congregation represents the covenant community. The uniqueness of each of us is recognized as we are called by name and presented to the congregation, perhaps with brief introductory comments.

RENUNCIATION OF SIN AND PROFESSION OF FAITH

Section 4. WE DECLARE OUR INTENTIONS TO BE CHRISTIANS.

The first vow recognizes and renounces evil in all its forms – cosmic, systemic, and personal. The second asserts that God enables us to be victorious over evil and obligates us to work actively to oppose sin in the social order in which we live. In the third vow, we affirm our commitment to Christ. As human beings we are born into a world in which evil is real, pervasive, and inescapable by our own efforts (original sin). The Christian Church is a community that has said “no” to sin and been freed to say “yes” to Christ. We acknowledge that the authentic Church of Christ is inclusive of all persons.⁴ When parents and sponsors reaffirm these vows, they speak for themselves, not on behalf of their children.

⁴ These vows fulfill the requirements of *The Book of Discipline*, 2000, ¶ 216.1-3.

5. *The pastor addresses parents or other sponsors of candidates not able to answer for themselves:*

Will you nurture *these children (persons)*
in Christ's holy Church,
that by your teaching and example they may be guided
to accept God's grace for *themselves*,
to profess *their* faith openly,
and to lead a Christian life?

I will.

6. *The pastor addresses candidates who can answer for themselves:*

According to the grace given to you,
will you remain *faithful members* of Christ's holy Church
and serve as Christ's *representatives* in the world?

I will.

SECTIONS 5 - 9. THE CHURCH RESPONDS.

In these sections of the ritual, the church responds to those who declare their intention to become Christians. In expanding concentric circles, the community of faith surrounds them with support and embraces them in Christian fellowship.

Section 5. PROMISES OF PARENTS AND SPONSORS.

Baptized children are included in the church, but must be shaped into Christians. As parents and sponsors, we take responsibility to teach and exemplify the Christian faith, to see that children stay within the nurture of the church, and to guide them toward personal commitment to Christian discipleship. This is why the baptism of infants and young children is to be practiced only when their parents or sponsors are believing Christians and when there is commitment that these children will be brought up with intentional Christian education and formation in church and home.

Section 6. PROMISES OF ADULTS WHO HAVE EXPERIENCED GRACE.

Adults respond by pledging to be faithful church members and to represent Christ in their lives in the world.⁵ It is appropriate, but not essential, for them to give personal testimony of the Christian experience which has brought them to take this step. Since they are professing their own faith, no separate service of confirmation is needed. We are unable to fulfill these responsibilities without dependence on the continuing gift of God's grace.

⁵ This pledge fulfills the requirement of *The Book of Discipline*, 2000, ¶ 216.4.

7. *If those who have answered for themselves have sponsors, the pastor addresses the sponsors:*

Will you who sponsor *these candidates*
support and encourage *them* in *their* Christian life?

I will.

8. *The pastor addresses the congregation, and the congregation responds:*

Do you, as Christ's body, the Church,
reaffirm both your rejection of sin
and your commitment to Christ?

We do.

Will you nurture one another in the Christian faith and life and
include *these persons* now before you in your care?

**With God's help we will proclaim the good news
and live according to the example of Christ.**

**We will surround *these persons*
with a community of love and forgiveness,
that *they* may grow in *their* trust of God,
and be found faithful in *their* service to others.**

**We will pray for *them*,
that *they* may be true disciples
who walk in the way that leads to life.**

Section 7. PROMISES OF SPONSORS FOR ADULTS.

The use of sponsors is one way the church takes responsibility for nurturing new Christians in the faith. No matter how strong our commitment to Christ, we can greatly benefit from the guidance and example of mentors and companions.

Section 8. PROMISES OF THE CONGREGATION.

Christianity is lived out not in isolation, but in community with other Christians. The congregation reaffirms its own faith and commitment, then promises to nurture, teach, and support those whose commitments are being affirmed. We need mutual nurturing, by both proclamation and example. We grow in faith, service, and discipleship within a community of love and forgiveness.

9. *The pastor addresses all, and the congregation joins the candidates and their parents and sponsors in responding:*

Let us join together in professing the Christian faith as contained
in the Scriptures of the Old and New Testaments.

Do you believe in God the Father?

**I believe in God, the Father Almighty,
creator of heaven and earth.**

Do you believe in Jesus Christ?

**I believe in Jesus Christ, his only Son, our Lord,
[who was conceived by the Holy Spirit,
born of the Virgin Mary,
suffered under Pontius Pilate,
was crucified, died, and was buried;
he descended to the dead.
On the third day he rose again;
he ascended into heaven,
is seated at the right hand of the Father,
and will come again to judge the
living and the dead.]**

Do you believe in the Holy Spirit?

**I believe in the Holy Spirit,
[the holy catholic* church,
the communion of saints,
the forgiveness of sins,
the resurrection of the body,
and the life everlasting.]**

Section 9. PROCLAMATION IN ACCORD WITH THE UNIVERSAL AND HISTORIC CHURCH OF JESUS CHRIST.

When we proclaim our faith using the Apostles' Creed, we are linked with Christians of every place and time. Part of the oldest tradition of the Church, this Creed has been used in baptisms throughout the Christian centuries.⁶

Baptized infants, parents and sponsors, believing adults, the local congregation, and the Body of Christ are brought together to affirm our Christian faith and to celebrate the love with which God has claimed us to be God's own people.

⁶ This fulfills the requirement of *The Book of Discipline*, 2000, ¶ 216.7. The question and answer format is in accord with Church tradition. This version of the Creed is the modern ecumenical translation, used by both Roman Catholics and Protestants.

10. *If there are baptisms, or if water is to be used for reaffirmation, the water may be poured into the font at this time, and the following prayer offered:*

The Lord be with you.

And also with you.

Let us pray.

Eternal Father:

When nothing existed but chaos,
you swept across the dark waters
and brought forth light.

In the days of Noah

you saved those on the ark through water.
After the flood you set in the clouds a rainbow.
When you saw your people as slaves in Egypt,
you led them to freedom through the sea.
Their children you brought through the Jordan
to the land which you promised.

Sing to the Lord, all the earth.

Tell of God's mercy each day.

In the fullness of time you sent Jesus,
nurtured in the water of a womb.
He was baptized by John and anointed by your Spirit.
He called his disciples
to share in the baptism of his death and resurrection
and to make disciples of all nations.

**Declare his works to the nations,
his glory among all the people.**

Pour out your Holy Spirit,
to bless this gift of water and *those* who *receive* it,
to wash away *their* sin
and clothe *them* in righteousness
throughout *their* lives,
that, dying and being raised with Christ,
they may share in his final victory.

**All praise to you, Eternal Father,
through your Son Jesus Christ,
who with you and the Holy Spirit
lives and reigns for ever. Amen.**

THANKSGIVING OVER THE WATER

Section 10. GOD'S USE OF WATER IN SALVATION.

This prayer is comparable to the Great Thanksgiving prayed over the elements of bread and wine in Holy Communion. God's mighty acts of salvation through water are celebrated – Creation, Flood, Exodus, and the greatest of all, the coming of Jesus Christ. At the conclusion, the Holy Spirit is invoked to bless and use the water, in anticipation that God will act again, even now. The pouring of water into the font, seen and heard by all in the congregation, calls forth joyous spoken or sung responses, as the whole worshipping community praises God.

11. *As each candidate is baptized, the pastor says:*

Name, I baptize you in the name of the Father, and of the Son,
and of the Holy Spirit. **Amen.**

*Immediately after the administration of the water, the pastor,
and others if desired, place hands on the head of each
candidate, as the pastor says to each:*

The Holy Spirit work within you,
that being born through water and the Spirit,
you may be a faithful disciple of Jesus Christ.
Amen.

*When all candidates have been baptized, the pastor invites the
congregation to welcome them:*

Now it is our joy to welcome our new *sisters and brothers* in Christ.

**Through baptism
you are incorporated by the Holy Spirit
into God's new creation
and made to share in Christ's royal priesthood.
We are all one in Christ Jesus.
With joy and thanksgiving we welcome you
as *members* of the family of Christ.**

BAPTISM WITH LAYING ON OF HANDS

Section 11. THE ACT OF BAPTISM WITH WATER AND THE SPIRIT.

Methodism has always allowed persons to choose sprinkling, pouring, or immersion as the mode of their or their children's baptism. All three modes have been used since New Testament times and each has its particular symbolism. Only the given names, not the surnames, are spoken as new members are initiated into the family of the church. Water is administered in the name of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit in accord with Matthew 28:19.

Baptism is by water and the Holy Spirit. Laying on of hands is an ancient action of the Church indicating the receiving of the Holy Spirit. Family members, including baptized children, and sponsors are invited to participate. The response of "Amen" here and elsewhere in the ritual is the congregation's affirmation of what has been done and said. Several other meaningful symbolic actions may be used at this point in the service.⁷

In the words of welcome, the congregation expresses its joy that new members have joined the community of faith and its unity with them as Christian disciples. Baptism is recognized as the work of the Holy Spirit through which we are spiritually made new and commissioned into Christian service.

⁷ The sign of the cross may be traced upon the forehead as an indication of the seal of baptism. If oil is used, the identity of Christians as a royal priesthood is emphasized. New clothing, as a symbol of putting on Christ, may be presented. A baptismal candle may be given as a reminder that Christians are to let their light be seen. The candle will be especially meaningful if it is used in the home on anniversaries of the baptism. Pastors should prepare and present a certificate of baptism either at this point or later. (See *The United Methodist Book of Worship*, pages 91-92.)

12. Here water may be used symbolically in ways that cannot be interpreted as baptism, as the pastor says:

Remember your baptism and be thankful. **Amen.**

As the pastor, and others if desired, place hands on the head of each person being confirmed or reaffirming faith, the pastor says to each:

Name, the Holy Spirit work within you,
that having been born through water and the Spirit,
you may live as a faithful disciple of Jesus Christ.

Amen.

CONFIRMATION OR REAFFIRMATION OF FAITH

Sections 12, 13. REAFFIRMING OUR FAITH AND COMMITMENT.

As Christians, we repeatedly need to repent of our sin, reaffirm our faith, and renew our vows. For those who are baptized as infants, the service of confirmation is their first reaffirmation of their baptism. Other opportunities for reaffirmation are available throughout our lives. Every service of baptism and confirmation offers us another chance for recommitment as we inwardly repeat the vows that we have already taken.

Water used in services of confirmation and reaffirmation makes visible the connection between these services and baptism. The water may be used in a variety of ways in order to remind Christians of their baptism without appearing to repeat the sacrament. It can be simply seen and heard, or touched, or used to make the sign of the cross, or sprinkled toward the congregation.

“Remembering” our baptism is recalling and reclaiming the meaning of baptism and the divine grace that continues at work in our lives. It does not mean being able to recall the specific event mentally or emotionally.

Section 12. CONFIRMATION AND PROFESSION OF FAITH.

When our baptized children are able to profess the Christian faith for themselves, they participate in the service of confirmation. They publicly take the vows of Renunciation of Sin and Profession of Faith. Confirmation includes three aspects: a) God confirms the divine promise to those who were too young to grasp what God was doing in their baptism, b) they respond by professing their own acceptance of the grace they have received and their own faith in Christ, c) the Church, as represented by this congregation, confirms the commitments they make.

Confirmation includes the laying on of hands which, unlike baptism, is a repeatable action. The words said by the pastor are the same as those following baptism, except for a change in the tense of the verb to indicate that spiritual rebirth has already taken place.

13. *When there is a congregational reaffirmation of the Baptismal Covenant, water may be used symbolically in ways that cannot be interpreted as baptism, as the pastor says:*

Remember your baptism and be thankful.

Amen.

14. *If there are persons coming into membership in The United Methodist Church from other denominations who have not yet been presented, they may be presented at this time.*

The pastor addresses all those transferring their membership into The United Methodist Church, together with those who, through baptism or confirmation, have just professed their own faith:

As *members* of Christ's universal church,
will you be loyal to Christ through
The United Methodist Church, and do all in your power to
strengthen its ministries?

I will.

15. *If there are persons joining this congregation from other United Methodist congregations who have not yet been presented, they may be presented at this time.*

The pastor addresses all those transferring membership into the congregation together with those who, through baptism or confirmation, have just professed their own faith:

As *members* of this congregation,
will you faithfully participate in its ministries
by your prayers, your presence,
your gifts, your service and your witness?

I will.

Section 13. THE MEMBERS OF THE CONGREGATION REAFFIRM THEIR FAITH.

Confirmation is not the last occasion for reaffirming our faith. Throughout our lives, we need to participate in individual and corporate services of reaffirmation.⁸ In the Wesleyan understanding of salvation and in our own lives, our relationship to God is dynamic rather than static. The sacrament of baptism never needs to be repeated because it is the covenantal sign of God's gracious act. Indeed, quite literally, baptism cannot be repeated. Once we have been claimed by God's love, adopted by God's grace, and initiated by God into the Body of Christ, God never fails to remain faithful to the divine side of the covenant. It is the human side of the covenant which is neglected, even broken. Our journeys of faith are not a steadily ascending march to spiritual heights, but a back and forth, up and down, process. We need intentional opportunities to renew our trust in Christ and recommit ourselves to Christian discipleship.⁹

Sections 14, 15. RECEPTION INTO THE UNITED METHODIST CHURCH AND THE LOCAL CONGREGATION.

Baptized persons are not simply generic Christians. They are part of a particular denominational family and a particular local congregation. Therefore, the liturgy concludes with reception into both bodies. If people change denominations or transfer to different congregations, they profess their loyalty to their new church community.¹⁰

⁸ The Baptismal Covenant IV on pages 50-54 of *The United Methodist Hymnal* is a service of congregational reaffirmation.

⁹ See Felton, *By Water and the Spirit*, pages 27-42.

¹⁰ This fulfills the requirements of *The Book of Discipline*, 2000, ¶ 216.5-6.

16. *The pastor addresses the congregation:*

Members of the household of God,
I commend *these* persons to your love and care.
Do all in your power to increase *their* faith,
confirm *their* hope, and perfect *them* in love.

The congregation responds:

**We give thanks for all that God has already given you
and we welcome you in Christian love.
As members together with you
in the body of Christ
and in this congregation
of The United Methodist Church,
we renew our covenant
faithfully to participate
in the ministries of the Church
by our prayers, our presence, our
gifts, our service and our witness,
that in everything God may be glorified
through Jesus Christ.**

The pastor addresses those baptized, confirmed, or received:

The God of all grace,
who has called us to eternal glory in Christ,
establish you and strengthen you
by the power of the Holy Spirit,
that you may live in grace and peace.

Section 16. "MEMBERS TOGETHER."

The pastor reminds the congregation of their responsibilities to all who have been baptized, confirmed, or received. The congregation responds by welcoming them into the Christian Church, The United Methodist Church, and the local church.¹¹ They also pledge themselves anew to faithful participation in the congregation. Less formal expressions of welcome by lay persons are encouraged at this point or after the service. If worship continues, as recommended, with the celebration of Holy Communion, the new members of all ages are invited to partake first as a sign of hospitality.¹²

¹¹ This welcome into the three aspects of church membership includes baptized persons of all ages. It is not only in The Baptismal Covenant I, but also in The Baptismal Covenant II which is designed for use with infants and others unable to answer for themselves (*The United Methodist Hymnal*, pages 39-43).

¹² See Felton, *By Water and the Spirit*, pages 43-48.

SELECTED SCRIPTURES

UNDERGIRDING THE BAPTISMAL COVENANT I

Section 1

Genesis 17:1-14
Isaiah 55:1
Jeremiah 31:31-34
John 3:5-8
1 Corinthians 2:12-13, 27; 11:23-26
Ephesians 4:4-6, 5:25-26
Hebrews 9:11-22
Acts 2:38-39, 16:15, 33; 18:8

Section 2

John 15:16-17
Romans 4:13-25, 5:6-11, 6:1-11, 7:14-25

Section 4

Ephesians 4:22-24, 6:10-20
John 8:36
Galatians 2:19-20

Section 5

Deuteronomy 6:4-9, 20-25

Section 6

2 Corinthians 5:17-21
Ephesians 4:11-16

Section 7

Philippians 3:17, 4:8-9

Section 8

1 Corinthians 10:23-11:1, 15:1-11

Section 9

Philippians 2:5-11
Acts 2:32-33 36

Section 10

Genesis 1:2-3, 9:8-11
1 Peter 3:20
Exodus 3 and 14
Joshua 3:14-17
1 Chronicles 16:23-24
Luke 1:31, 3:21-22
Mark 1:8, 10:38
Matthew 28:19
Acts 22:16

Section 11

Acts 2:38, 8:17-19, 19:1-7, 22:16
1 Corinthians 6:11, 12:13
2 Corinthians 1:20-22, 5:17
Hebrews 10:22
1 Peter 1:9, 22-25; 2:1-10; 3:18-22
Romans 6:3-4
Colossians 2:12, 3:9-14
Joel 2:28
Acts 2:17, 19:1-7
Ezekiel 35:25-26
Matthew 5:14-16, 28:19
John 3:3-5
Titus 3:5-7
Galatians 3:27-28
Ephesians 4:4-6

Section 12

Psalms 103:17-18
Hebrews 6
1 Chronicles 16:8-18
2 Chronicles 6:12-17

Section 13

Joshua 24:14-18
Psalm 119:33-40
Deuteronomy 8:1-11
Proverbs 3:1-18
Matthew 16:24-26
Acts 2:32-33, 4:5-13, 8:26-40
2 Peter 1:3-11

Section 16

Philippians 1:3-11, 4:4-20
1 Corinthians 12-13
Romans 15:1-7
Revelation 7:3, 9-14
Ephesians 1:13-14



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