

## Christian Initiation

# Common Worship

*Church House Publishing*

**Christian Initiation**

Published by Church House Publishing  
Church House  
Great Smith Street  
London SW1P 3NZ

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Index © *Meg Davies 2006*

First published 2006

ISBN 0 7151 2102 2

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Printed and bound in the EU  
for Cambridge University Press  
on 55gsm Primapages Ivory

Typeset in Gill Sans by John Morgan studio  
Designed by Derek Birdsall RDI and John Morgan

1	Authorization
3	Introduction
<b>15</b>	<b>Rites on the Way: Approaching Baptism</b>
15	Contents
<b>16</b>	<b>Thanksgiving for the Gift of a Child</b>
<b>29</b>	<b>Rites Supporting Disciples on the Way of Christ</b>
29	Contents
<b>59</b>	<b>Baptism and Confirmation</b>
59	Contents
<b>60</b>	<b>Holy Baptism</b>
<b>102</b>	<b>Emergency Baptism</b>
<b>106</b>	<b>Holy Baptism and Confirmation</b>
<b>132</b>	<b>Celebration of Baptism and Confirmation within a Vigil Service</b>
<b>150</b>	<b>Seasonal Provisions</b>
<b>166</b>	<b>Supplementary Texts</b>
<b>181</b>	<b>Rites of Affirmation: Appropriating Baptism</b>
181	Contents
<b>182</b>	<b>Celebration after an Initiation Service outside the Parish</b>
<b>184</b>	<b>Thanksgiving for Holy Baptism</b>
<b>188</b>	<b>Admission of the Baptized to Communion</b>
<b>193</b>	<b>A Form for the Corporate Renewal of Baptismal Vows</b>
<b>197</b>	<b>Affirmation of Baptismal Faith</b>
<b>211</b>	<b>Reception into the Communion of the Church of England</b>

**227 Reconciliation and Restoration: Recovering Baptism**

227 Contents

**228 A Corporate Service of Penitence**

**266 The Reconciliation of a Penitent**

The Reconciliation of a Penitent: Form One **274**

The Reconciliation of a Penitent: Form Two **281**

**290 A Celebration of Wholeness and Healing**

310 General Rules

311 Authorization Details

**313 Commentary**

314 Contents

357 Copyright Information

358 Acknowledgements and Sources

362 Index of Biblical References

366 General Index

## ¶ Authorization

*Common Worship: Christian Initiation* comprises

¶ alternative services and other material authorized for use until further resolution of the General Synod;

¶ material commended by the House of Bishops; and

¶ an Absolution taken from *The Book of Common Prayer*, with minor variations allowable under Canon B 5.

For details, see page 311.

Canon B 3 provides that decisions as to which of the authorized services are to be used (other than occasional offices) shall be taken jointly by the incumbent and the parochial church council. In the case of occasional offices (other than Confirmation and Ordination), the decision is to be made by the minister conducting the service, subject to the right of any of the persons concerned to object beforehand to the form of service proposed.

# Introduction

These services are part of the new generation of liturgical provision in the Church of England called *Common Worship* and intended to serve the Church in its primary tasks of worship and mission.

Some of them have been published already:

- ¶ the central services of Baptism, Confirmation, Affirmation of Baptismal Faith and Reception into the Communion of the Church of England in an interim edition in 1998;
- ¶ Thanksgiving for the Gift of a Child and A Celebration of Wholeness and Healing in *Common Worship: Pastoral Services* in 2000; and
- ¶ Thanksgiving for Holy Baptism and A Form for the Corporate Renewal of Baptismal Vows in *Common Worship: Services and Prayers for the Church of England*, also in 2000.

Others are new:

- ¶ Rites Supporting Disciples on the Way of Christ;
- ¶ Celebration of Christian Initiation within a Vigil Service;
- ¶ Celebration after an Initiation Service outside the Parish; Thanksgiving for Holy Baptism; Admission of the Baptized to Communion; and
- ¶ Reconciliation and Restoration.

They are published together in this volume because they all derive their significance in the life of the Christian community from the central importance of baptism. The underlying theology of these rites is influenced by a rediscovery of the importance and meaning of baptism which is common to many churches. They owe their shape both to a new appreciation of the ancient practice of the Church, reflected for example in *The Book of Common Prayer*, and also to fresh thinking about the nature of baptism as expressing the identity and call of the Christian community today. An important part of the preparatory work was done by a working party drawn from the Board of Mission, the Board of Education and the Liturgical Commission which in 1995 produced a report to the House of Bishops entitled *On the Way: Towards an Integrated Approach to Christian Initiation* (Church House Publishing, 1995). The thinking and recommendations of that report have significantly shaped these services.

## The contents in outline

This book contains four major groups of services:

### *Rites on the Way: Approaching Baptism*

This group begins with Thanksgiving for the Gift of a Child and the Welcome of Those Preparing for the Baptism of Children, and then goes on to provide liturgical material to mark five key stages in the catechumenate process leading to the baptism of those old enough to answer for themselves. This material is designed to enable nurturing communities to support and encourage those young people and adults who are formally exploring the Christian faith and preparing for baptism.

### *Baptism and Confirmation*

First in this group comes a single rite of Holy Baptism for both adults and children, together with outlines allowing for use in different circumstances (the options given are not exhaustive and other variations which comply with the rubrics and Notes are of course possible). A joint rite for Baptism and Confirmation follows. Outlines indicate how the service is ordered when there are no baptisms or when it does not form part of a celebration of Holy Communion. New here is a suggested presentation of Baptism and Confirmation within a Vigil Service during the most significant seasons for Christian initiation. The seasonal material and supplementary texts include responsive prayers and suggested readings.

### *Rites of Affirmation: Appropriating Baptism*

These essentially pastoral provisions enable both individuals and communities to appropriate to themselves the defining role of baptism through offering an act of thanksgiving for the sacrament or through re-affirmation of commitment to the baptismal life at key points in the Christian year. A short rite for the Admission of the Baptized to Communion is also included. Services of Affirmation of Baptismal Faith and Reception into the Communion of the Church of England recognize that a person's spiritual journey does not always fall into one pattern and enable adults to renew their baptismal commitment.

### *Reconciliation and Restoration: Recovering Baptism*

These services provide individuals with routes back into the full baptismal life of the Christian community after separation through sin or as a result of sickness. Reconciliation and Restoration are presented in such a manner that they may be celebrated in a variety of ways, publicly in the community of faith or privately with individuals. Placing this material alongside the Wholeness and Healing provision locates reconciliation firmly within the broad context of the renewal of the baptismal covenant and the prayer of the Church for healing and restoration.

The book concludes with a more detailed commentary on the material, together with answers to frequently asked questions.

## Approaching the services of initiation

It is important to come to these services with a fresh mind, putting aside the approaches which conditioned thinking while *The Alternative Service Book 1980* was in use. The authorized texts and the commended liturgical provision alongside them need to be seen not primarily as legal regulation but rather as a guide to a coherent celebration of the rite.

The canonical expectation (Canon B 21) is that baptism takes place within the course of public worship on Sunday. Within that, there are many possibilities, and these services provide structures for baptism and associated celebrations of stages on the way to baptism and along the continuing Christian journey to take place in various contexts. These might include not only the regular celebration of Holy Communion or A Service of the Word, but also a significant celebration of Baptism as the main service of the day.

Baptism as the culmination of an accompanied journey of exploration and enquiry (the catechumenate model) is increasingly the pattern for parish strategies for mission and evangelism. The new Rites on the Way preface the authorized Initiation Services and provide liturgical material both to mark the stages in this journey and to assist in the appropriation of the patterns of belief, prayer and behaviour which characterize the baptismal life. The extended period of preparation for baptism implied by this model is most easily and appropriately celebrated by the whole community when

placed within particular seasonal sections of the cycle of the Christian year. These favoured times for baptism – Epiphany / Baptism of Christ, Easter / Pentecost and All Saints’ tide – are provided with special liturgical resources and the commentary at the end of this volume shows how the stages of preparation for initiation can best be fitted into the weeks leading up to each great baptismal celebration.

### *Understanding the dramatic flow*

In a service of Baptism (or of Baptism and Confirmation) the Church proclaims what God has done for his people in Christ and offers us a way of entering that movement from darkness to light, from death to life, from being self-centred to being God-centred. This dramatic movement is at the heart of the service and needs to be brought out in the way it is presented, not just by reading out a series of texts. Sometimes the rich biblical imagery of the texts will resonate with people’s experience, but the heart of the celebration of baptism – what really matters to those who may not pick up the verbal nuances – is what is done.

At the start of the service, the greeting is followed by an opportunity to express thanksgiving. The Liturgy of the Word and the sermon are an opportunity to set the story of what God has done in Christ alongside our own story – to explore both the points of convergence and of difference. The presentation of the candidates and their welcome by the congregation acknowledges a shared responsibility for their growth in faith and flows naturally into a solemn renunciation of evil and the expression of the desire to follow Christ. At this stage, the candidates are identified with the believing community and reminded of the cost of discipleship by receiving the sign of the cross, the badge of the pilgrim community on the journey of faith.

In this pilgrim faith, the community journeys to the font. The candidates express their longing for the transforming grace of God’s Holy Spirit in the Prayer over the Water, and identify with the community’s profession of faith as they say the Creed together. Then, supported by the community, each candidate steps alone (or is carried) to the waters to be baptized in a lonely yet corporate embracing of Christ’s dying and rising. Alone, we pass from death to life, leaving sin and self drowned in the waters, from which we rise to a new life that is Christ’s and shared with all the baptized.

What is the new life like? It is a life directed and empowered by the Spirit, who overshadowed Jesus as he came up from the waters of baptism. As candidates emerge from the waters, they may be clothed – putting on Christ – and anointed as a sign of their belonging with all the baptized in the royal priesthood of God’s holy people. At this point in the service, they may hear a commission or charge to live out the baptized life. They then take their place in the Church through participation in the prayers of intercession and in the action of the Eucharist.

But the life of the baptized is not only what takes place in worship. It is about living out our common life in Christ in and for the community in which we are set. At the end of the service, the commission may be used if it has not been heard earlier and the newly baptized are sent out with a lighted candle, as a sign of the Church’s commitment to mission: ‘Shine as a light in the world to the glory of God the Father.’

### *Planning the service*

The first matter to be determined is the placing of an Initiation Service within the context of the cycles of celebration that make up the Christian year. This is particularly important if the ‘staged rites’ model of Rites on the Way is to be adopted. Various seasonal patterns are proposed. Pre-eminent is the classical Paschal pattern which begins the journey on the First Sunday of Lent and culminates at Easter in baptism followed by Re-affirmation and the Sending Out at Pentecost. Two other patterns are proposed: one focusing on the Epiphany and the Baptism of Christ and one on All Saints’ Day.

Once this timing and the underlying structures of the rites are clear, attention must be given to the practical questions surrounding the action. It is necessary to give careful and imaginative thought to the setting and to the use of appropriate music and symbol. The generosity and transforming character of the gospel of Jesus Christ need to be clear in the way the service is laid out and celebrated.

It is essential therefore to read not just the authorized text, but also the surrounding material:

- ¶ *Service structure* – this gives an overview of the structure and flow of the service.
- ¶ *Notes* – these set out the basic rules and understandings which govern the services. They make clear some of the possible ways the services can be used or presented.
- ¶ *Rubrics* – these explain how the action is to be carried out and indicate when choices and options are available.
- ¶ *The words of the services themselves* – spoken material has many different functions in a liturgical rite; understanding these will affect how words are spoken and presented.
- ¶ *Seasonal material, supplementary texts and resources* – these make available additional material for particular occasions, pastoral circumstances or liturgical seasons, which highlight different aspects of the rich variety of baptismal images in the Bible.
- ¶ *Outlines* – these show how the main services can be used in particular circumstances or where combined with other authorized services. Only some of these possibilities are printed out in full in this book.

## The significance of baptism for the Church

These services are influenced by older traditions reflected in *The Book of Common Prayer* as well as by continued thinking in the Church that wishes to place baptism at the heart of Christian life and mission. Three themes in particular stand out in these services.

### *Faith as process*

The celebration of baptism should not be seen in isolation from the journey to faith in Christ. This journey is itself a process of discovery and transformation within a community. A baptism service must therefore help candidate and congregation discover each other as partners within a common adventure of faith. Within this mutual journey the service has an inner logic, a movement from welcome and renunciation through to the candidate's identification with the people of God in a common faith and in shared activities of prayer, eucharist and mission.

Those who have prepared these services have paid particular attention to a call from the Anglican Communion to reintegrate mission and sacramental practice:

The journey into faith involves a process that includes awareness of God, recognition of God's work in Christ, entering into the Christian story through the scriptures, turning to Christ as Lord, incorporation into the body of Christ, nurture within the worshipping community, and being equipped and commissioned for ministry and mission within God's world. An adequate practice of baptism will recognize all these dimensions and will enable the church to play its full part in accompanying people on this journey.

*International Anglican Liturgical Consultation, Toronto 1991*

The renewal of baptismal practice is an integral part of mission and evangelism. In these services the whole Church is challenged to engage in generosity and seriousness with all those who are seeking new life in Jesus Christ.

Rites on the Way, Affirmation and Reception, and the new post-baptismal services surround the core rites of Baptism and Confirmation with the necessary liturgical provision to realize this vision more fully. They are designed to support the journey of both adults and children to faith in Jesus Christ within the community of the Church.

### *Journey, story, pattern*

In the spiritual formation of a new Christian there needs to be a healthy interaction between three aspects of the Christian life: *journey, story* and *the Way*.

*Journey* is a major image in the narrative of Scripture from the call of Abraham through to the itinerant ministry of Jesus and beyond. As an image of human life and of the passage to faith it allows both for the integration of faith and human experience and also for the necessity of change and development.

Closely related to journey is the importance in human and Christian experience of *story*. It is significant that the story of Paul's conversion is told three times in the book of Acts: Christian formation must allow an individual's story to be heard and to find its place within the unfolding story of faith as it appears in the Church and in the Scriptures.

Complementary to the ideas of journey and story is the theme of *the Way*. Essential to Christian formation is the appropriation of patterns of belief, prayer and behaviour that give structure and coherence to the Christian life. Christianity is a pattern for living – a way of life – and this is part of what the earliest Christians recognized when they called themselves *The Way*. The report *On the Way* gave careful attention to how patterns of life and faith are established in the life of the Christian and the Church. These services seek to recognize that journey and pattern are integral to the Christian life and need to be reflected in any approach to Christian initiation. These themes are explored more fully in the Commentary (see pages 318–319).

### *Christian identity*

Baptism is much more than a beginning to the Christian life. It expresses the identity which is ours in Jesus Christ and the shape of the life to which we are called. This has implications both for individuals who are baptized and also for the continuing life of Christian congregations. St Paul recalled Christians to an understanding of their baptism. Baptism is a reality whose meaning has to be discovered at each stage of a person's life, whether it is a young person appropriating the implication of his or her baptism in infancy, an adult making their baptism their own in all the complex developments of a human life, or a mother or father discovering Christ anew in the responsibilities of parenthood. One test of the liturgical celebration of baptism is whether, over time, it enables the whole Church to see itself as a baptized community, called to partake in the life of God and to share in the mission of God to the world.

## **Approaching the services of Reconciliation and Restoration**

We need to come to these celebrations with the same freshness of approach with which we explored the new services of Christian initiation, not least because they are undergirded by the same rediscovered theology of baptism outlined above. The publication of the new rites of Reconciliation and Restoration and the pastoral services of Wholeness and Healing in a single volume alongside

the authorized Baptism and Confirmation provision clearly places them in a theological and pastoral context which cannot be ignored in their celebration. The rites offer ways in which the Christian's fundamental relationship with God – created in his image (Genesis 1.26) – that is shown forth in baptism can be restored when marred either by physical illness or disorder or by the breakdown of relationship with other people, with the created order, or with God.

Christians have to wrestle with the reality that the accompanied journey, begun with Thanksgiving for the Gift of a Child and the celebration of Rites on the Way and continued in Baptism and Confirmation, may well have to make its way through the dark valley of suffering, sin and personal disorder. These services of Reconciliation and Restoration, seen as extensions or recapitulations of the baptismal liturgy, point to the grace of God at work drawing Christians from the darkness of sin to the new light of Christ. Healing, reconciliation and restoration flow from baptism and are integral to the gospel of Jesus Christ, signalling the way in which God in Christ overthrows in our lives the corruption of sin and death and brings to birth a new creation which is vibrant with the healing presence of his Spirit.

### *Planning and presenting the services*

As these forms of service have been shaped to recognize the links between prayer for healing and forgiveness and the wider celebration in the Church of reconciliation and renewal in the gospel of Jesus Christ, it is important that this vision is not lost when planning and presenting worship and offering ministry to those in need. For example, a procession or corporate movement to the font, if Thanksgiving for Holy Baptism is to be a part of the service, clearly expresses the theological grounding in baptism of the whole act of worship. Movement from darkness to light may be implied in the texts but can be realized in changing the lighting patterns in the building or by lighting and distributing candles. Texts come alive when presented creatively and with a sense of movement and drama.