

Contents

Background

Rites on the Way: Approaching Baptism

Seasonal patterns of initiation for those who can answer for themselves

Baptism

Approaching the baptism of children

Frequently asked questions concerning baptism

The use of oil in initiation and understandings of confirmation

Confirmation

Rites of Affirmation: Appropriating Baptism

Reconciliation and Restoration: Recovering Baptism

Michael Vasey

This Commentary draws on the Report to the House of Bishops On the Way: Towards an Integrated Approach to Christian Initiation (Church House Publishing, 1995) and on reports by the Liturgical Commission and the General Synod's Revision Committee on the Initiation Services.

Background

The rediscovery of baptism

Over the last hundred years Christians have been involved in the rediscovery of the meaning of baptism. Before this, baptism was generally treated as a sort of birth rite within a Christian society. Where there was controversy it often reflected other anxieties – such as the nature of salvation, the importance of personal faith, or a desire to clarify the boundaries of the Church in a more sceptical culture – rather than an appreciation of the theological importance of baptism itself. Various factors have contributed to a revival of baptismal theology: overseas mission, patristic and biblical study, the changing social context of the Church, to name but some.

The World Council of Churches' Lima report *Baptism, Eucharist and Ministry* (Faith and Order Paper No. 111, 1982) shows that baptism continues to be an area of controversy and division, but provides eloquent testimony to the theological richness that the churches are now finding in this sacrament. There was a tendency to see baptism as an isolated moment in the individual Christian life and as the gateway to the eucharist, itself

the one proper sacramental focus of the Christian life. Increasingly baptism is seen as a sacrament of significance in its own right that points Christians to their true identity, character and calling within the body of Christ. Paul repeatedly refers his hearers back to baptism not simply as a reminder of their conversion but as a way of bringing home to them what it is to be in Christ (*On the Way: Towards an Integrated Approach to Christian Initiation* (Church House Publishing, 1995), pages 63-64: paras 4.41–4.42).

Towards an integrated approach to Christian initiation

The report *On the Way* identified the need to reintegrate baptismal practice both with a congregation's commitment to the mission of God in the world and with the individual candidate's journey to faith and his or her primary formation in the Christian life. It proposed the following framework as a check list against which the Church can evaluate its approach to Christian initiation.

Five elements of Christian initiation

1 Church – Initiation calls the Church:

- ¶ to see itself as a baptized people
- ¶ to welcome and learn from the enquirer
- ¶ to be active in mission and service
- ¶ to expect the anointing of the Holy Spirit
- ¶ to walk with those seeking faith
- ¶ to stand with the despised and oppressed
- ¶ to look for the unity of God's people

2 Welcome – Enquirers need a welcome:

- ¶ that is personal
- ¶ that is public
- ¶ that accepts their starting point
- ¶ that expects the presence of God in their lives
- ¶ that is willing to travel with them at their pace

3 Prayer – Initiation involves prayer:

- ¶ for enquirer and Church
- ¶ to discern the presence of God
- ¶ to open up to the grace of God
- ¶ to support the process of change
- ¶ to discover the moments of decision
- ¶ to receive and recognize the gifts of God

4 The Way – Discipleship means learning:

- ¶ to worship with the Church
- ¶ to grow in prayer
- ¶ to listen to the Scriptures
- ¶ to serve our neighbour

5 Goal – The goal of initiation is:

- ¶ relationship with God the Holy Trinity
- ¶ life and worship with the Church
- ¶ service and witness in the world

On the Way also proposed that rites to support the spiritual journey of individuals and enable the church community to support and learn from their journey should be made available for optional use. During the years in which such rites were prepared, catechetical courses such as the Alpha and Emmaus Courses grew in prominence, and the formation of its members in their adult discipleship is now understood to be central to the Church's development and mission.

The ministry of the bishop in initiation

In an episcopally ordered church the bishop is the chief minister of the whole process of Christian initiation and is integral to its practice. This finds expression in a number of features of current practice: the requirement of episcopal confirmation (Canons B 27 and B 15A); the canonical requirement that the bishop be given notice of an adult baptism (Canon B 24.2); and the final say resting with the bishop over a refusal to baptize an infant (Canon B 22.2) and over any attempt to bar a baptized person from receiving communion (Canon B 16) (*On the Way*, page 107: para. 7.5).

The bishop is charged with focusing the mission and unity of the Church: as such he has a particular responsibility to keep the way open for enquirers, to oversee their proper formation in the Christian way, and to ensure that they take their rightful place within the wider fellowship of the Church. The purpose of the bishop's ministry in initiation is to enable the whole process so that the journey of those coming to faith is protected and affirmed. The focus of initiation is not the needs of the Church or the bishop; it is about the joyful entry into full Christian life of the person coming to faith (*On the Way*, page 107: para. 7.7).

The bishop's role requires the bishop, either himself or through others, to guide the Church in initiation:

- ¶ in focusing the mission and unity of the Church
- ¶ in teaching the faith
- ¶ in protecting and providing for the enquirer
- ¶ in affirming and praying for those coming to faith
- ¶ in recognizing the decision of faith.

Parish policies on initiation

Parishes and congregations need to have a clear and developing grasp of their approach to Christian initiation. This implies the involvement of the PCC (or equivalent) and wider church fellowship, not simply an initiative by the clergy. What is more, such parish policies and approaches must have regard for those particular concerns which are embodied in the bishop's oversight of initiation. This means that each parish would need to identify and own its approach to the welcome and formation of new believers. These approaches should be worked out in appropriate dialogue with the bishop and should cover:

- ¶ the welcome, formation and sacramental initiation of adult enquirers
- ¶ an appropriate pattern for responding to requests by non-churchgoing parents for their children's baptism
- ¶ an appropriate pattern for the admission to communion of baptized children
- ¶ provision (where appropriate) marking the entry into adulthood of young people growing up within the Church (*On the Way*, pages 110-111: para. 8.2).

Story, journey and the Way

In Acts 9.1–31 Paul's conversion is not complete with the dramatic religious experience described in verses 3–9. It reaches its conclusion with verse 19, after the church in Damascus has played its part in the welcome and incorporation of the new believer. The figure of Ananias and the unnamed disciples of verse 19 are integral to the story. The flow of the narrative includes five elements without which Paul's initiation ~~would~~ have

been defective: welcome, spiritual discernment, prayer, baptism, and incorporation into the community of the Church.

The passage also indicates the importance of stories and storytelling in Christian experience and therefore in Christian initiation. The story of Paul's conversion is told three times in Acts. Christian initiation cannot be reduced to doctrinal and moral instruction or liturgical rites; it must include the narrative of rounded human experience. Christian formation must allow an individual's story to be heard and to find its place within the unfolding story of faith in the Church and in the Scriptures. There must be appropriate space in the processes surrounding baptism for the telling and retelling of human stories.

It is while Paul is on the road that he meets the risen Christ. 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 (*On the Way*, pages 18-20: para. 2.2).

In this story of Paul's conversion the first Christians were known as the Way (Acts 9.2 – cf. 18.25,26; 19.9,23; 22.4; 24.14,22). As a name for life in the Christian Church, the term Way draws together three important dimensions of Christian discipleship: movement, integration and pattern. This last provides an important complement to the open-endedness of the idea of journey. Much New Testament church life and instruction was about establishing appropriate patterns in the believing and living of Christian communities and individuals. In the New Testament the Greek word *tupos* (pattern, example, imprint) points to this important dimension of Christian formation (cf. Romans 6.17; Philippians 3.17; 1 Timothy 1.16; 4.12; 2 Timothy 1.13; Titus 2.7). The idea of communicating a shape to Christian gathering, believing and living occurs much more widely than the term itself. Satisfactory approaches to Christian initiation need to reflect the dimensions of open-endedness, integration and patterning that are present in the idea of the Way (*On the Way*, page 20: para. 2.3).

A theological framework

In preparing these services and additional supporting rites the Liturgical Commission had before it the following biblical framework, believing that baptism involves:

- ¶ *separation* from this world – that is, the world alienated from God, and
- ¶ *reception* into a universal community centred on God, within which
- ¶ his children can *grow* into the fullness of the pattern of Christ, and
- ¶ a community whose *mission* is to serve God's Spirit in redeeming the world.

Separation: The 'world' in the New Testament sense fails to 'give God glory' (Romans 1.21) and is thus subject to forces other than God, a condition manifest in idolatry. This social blindness and estrangement is the root sin of which actual sins are symptoms. Sin and righteousness are primarily terms of relationship from which corresponding attitudes and acts derive.

Reception: The root remedy for sin is therefore the creating of relationship in a community centred on God with a new pattern of life. For their right growth new human beings need to be grafted in from the start.

This separation and reception are expressed in the New Testament by a rich variety of overlapping metaphors. In these metaphors God's action is primary; so, for example, repentance (change of heart and direction) is seen not as human achievement (Jeremiah 13.23) but as response to God's gracious initiative. Images of drastic change can be taken as picturing a moment or event and are complemented by the journey motif. Exodus leads on to Sinai and the giving of a new covenant and torah; Easter is followed by Pentecost and the Holy Spirit as God's law internalized as promised by Jeremiah (31.31–4); the Church as the new Israel of God, his army marching to the promised land through the desert of testing, but with guidance and provision for the journey (1 Corinthians 10.1–13), and with spiritual armour for Christ's soldiers and servants (Ephesians 6.10–18; 2 Timothy 2.3–5,15).

Growth and transformation: Thus reception into the community is the beginning of a journey of growth into the pattern of Christ, learning obedience through testing and temptation, just as Jesus' baptism was followed by a period of adjustment and testing (cf Hebrews 5.8,9). This journey will pass through different stages of maturity and responsibility; there will be crises, reversals and renewals which it may sometimes be appropriate to acknowledge and support in a public way.

Mission: God's purpose in bringing members of the community to full growth (the stature of Christ, Ephesians 4.13) is through them to establish his rule over the world ('the kingdom of God') and bring the world to perfection. The goal can be seen both as this-worldly and social ('a new heaven and a new earth') with responsibility for the social order, and as other-worldly and individual, entry into the life of the world to come, of which the Holy Spirit is foretaste and pledge (Romans 8.23; 2 Corinthians 1.22; Hebrews 6.5). This is what the Greek Fathers called sharing in the divine nature (2 Peter 1.4; cf 2 Corinthians 8.9), and Irenaeus expresses as 'he became man that we might become God', a process which begins at baptism. Baptism can thus be seen as the beginning (Greek *arche*), which holds within itself its goal (Greek *telos*), as already given but not yet worked out. This may help to see how 'moment' includes within itself 'process', and points beyond space-time to the eternal, the resurrection reality which is in time and beyond it. It also shows how entry into the new community is also entry into the life of the Trinity, putting on Christ who in his baptism was acknowledged as Son by the Father and indwelt by the Spirit.

This baptismal framework is communicated in Scripture through a rich tapestry of imagery. Some images cover part of the process; others provide an interpretative picture for the whole. All have a claim to be reflected within any liturgy of baptism; some need to be highlighted either in the preparation for baptism or in reflection after the celebration of baptism.

Church context

liberation liberation

Exodus

1 Corinthians 10.1-4

rescue from the power of darkness and sin

Colossians 1.12-14

Revelation 1.5

new creation new creation

Galatians 6.15

2 Corinthians 5.17

Isaiah 51.9-11

liberation from Babylon as a new exodus, defeating the dragon of chaos *Genesis 1.2*

new birth 'from above'

John 3.3ff

1 Peter 1.12

James 1.18

reconciliation removal of enmity

Romans 5.6-11

2 Corinthians

5.18 - 6.2

illumination illumination

2 Corinthians 4.4-6

Genesis 1.3

opening of eyes, ears, hearts and minds

Ephesians 1.18

Hebrews 6.4

John 9

recognition receiving the name of Christ

James 2.7

Isaiah 43.1

cleansing washing

Ephesians 5.26

Hebrews 10.22

Titus 3.5

removal of defilement

Romans 3.25

1 John 2.2; 4.10

stripping putting off the old human

Colossians 3.9

the Christian analogue to circumcision

Colossians 2.11

dying drowning, burial

Romans 6.3ff

Colossians 2.11

participation in Christ's 'exodus'

Luke 9.31

the ordeal foreshadowed in his own baptism

Luke 12.50

Mark 10.38

resurrection into newness of life

Romans 6.4ff

Colossians 2; 12;

3.1ff

building as living stones into a new temple/community

1 Corinthians 3.9ff Ephesians 2.19-21

1 Peter 2.4ff

In framing one basic liturgy for the baptism of both infants and those who can answer for themselves, the Church is declaring that:

¶ God's prevenient grace is central (Romans 5.6–8). Baptism is seen as acted evangelism, proclaiming in Christ's death and resurrection God's victory over the world powers of chaos and darkness to establish the new creation.

¶ A renewed and Christ-centred understanding of covenant is important. Baptism is the outward sign and ritual mark of incorporation into the people of the New Covenant, sealed by Christ's death. God gives the covenant (Exodus 19.3–6; Jeremiah 31.31–34; 1 Corinthians 11.25; 2 Corinthians 3.6); it carries unfolding obligations, but these are the response to God's grace, made possible by his Spirit.

¶ There is a social aspect of baptism alongside the purely individual. Baptism establishes a corporate belonging, delineating the new world and community and the radical difference between the old and the new. This points to a strengthening of the baptismal affirmations and renunciations. (There is an interesting example from the proposed Ecumenical Baptismal Liturgy of Sri Lanka: 'Do you renounce being ruled by the desires of this world, the flesh and Satan, particularly the snare of pride, the love and worship of money, the power of violence?')

¶ The liturgy of baptism needs to recognize that coming to faith in Christ involves a personal and social process (what the International Anglican Liturgical Consultation, meeting in Toronto in 1991, called the 'catechumenal process') (*Christian Initiation in the Anglican Communion: The Toronto Statement 'Walk in the Newness of Life. The Findings of the Fourth International Anglican Liturgical Consultation'*, ed. D. R. Holeton (Grove Worship Series no.118: Bramcote, 1991), page 12, section 2, para.14.2). This is spelt out in *On the Way*: pre-baptismal preparation both for candidates and their families and for the community into which they will be baptized; continuing post-baptismal formation, opening hearts and minds to the pattern centred on Christ crucified, a reversal of this world's ideas and values; and rites to mark stages on the way, so that they may be appropriated within the community. Infant baptism is open to objection if this process is not clearly signalled (Cf *On the Way*, pages 88-89: para. 5.38).

Other elements of Christian life follow on from baptism. Growth and mission both require catechesis: induction into the whole of Christian living – worship, prayer, doctrine, ethics, witness and service. In the pattern inherited from the sixteenth century this has normally been expressed by baptism, then a period of instruction leading to confirmation with preparation for Holy Communion and for ministry as part of the royal

priesthood. Recent years have seen the emergence of other patterns and the acceptance of a measure of diversity, as discussed in *On the Way* (pages 64, 81-83, 90-96).

Whatever pattern is followed, the equipping of God's people for the work of ministry (Ephesians 4.12) will require continuing ministerial formation for all. This will bring ongoing discovery of what was done in baptism and of the new identity, and lead to continual putting on Christ and taking up the cross – learning to see weakness, suffering and failure as the place of redemption, glory and victory. It will welcome the new stages on the journey as the unfolding of God's baptismal covenant and promise. Some of these stages need distinct recognition beyond Confirmation and Holy Communion, for example:

- ¶ *affirmation of baptismal faith* in case of lapse, or fresh experience and commitment
- ¶ *reconciliation and restoration* (confession, penance) in case of straying or fall
- ¶ *healing* if inhibited by weakness of mind, body or will
- ¶ *deliverance* if enslaved by habit, addiction or 'evil spirits'
- ¶ *preparation for death*, at the end of one's personal journey in this life, with death seen as the completion of dying with Christ to 'this world'.

The services have been drafted to take account of the fluid understanding of Confirmation in the Anglican Communion and the developing practices in the Church of England surrounding the admission of the baptized to communion.

Rites on the Way: Approaching Baptism

Introduction

Baptism is the sacramental beginning of the Christian life. The baptism of Jesus made visible the presence of God among us and revealed the coming kingdom of God. For Jesus, his baptism represented not simply a beginning; it was a consecration to God's way of salvation. Therefore for Christians today baptism is more than a beginning; it is a mark of ownership and a sign of our calling, a sign to be recalled at each stage of our journey of faith. For those of us who have been baptized, Rites on the Way give an opportunity to continue to explore as a community the riches of baptism, freely given to us through Jesus Christ. Those who are exploring the Way of Christ for the first time set their feet on a path that leads to salvation.

Essential to Christian formation is the appropriation of patterns of belief, prayer and behaviour that give structure and coherence to the Christian life. This is part of what the earliest Christians recognized when they called themselves The Way. In John's Gospel, Jesus describes himself as 'the Way, the Truth and the Life' (John 14.6). The Way points to Jesus as the model of what humans are created to be. It recognizes that, through his life, death and resurrection, Jesus has redeemed us. It declares that Christianity offers a pattern of living made possible through the sharing life and love of God the Holy Trinity.

Discipleship means pursuing a way of life, so for new disciples there are patterns of worship and belonging to be learned, values and priorities to be reviewed, patterns of prayer and of service to be established. Discipleship involves learning to be at home in the Church and to be a sign of God's kingdom in the world. Although this Way is open to all, it is not always easy; yet we do not journey alone. Jesus the fellow traveller, often unrecognized, makes himself known to us on our journey (Luke 24.13–35). The Bible, the sacred writings that open God's ways to us, shows us wisdom and leads us to salvation through faith in Jesus Christ (2 Timothy 3.15). And it is the privilege and calling of the Church as the people of God to welcome and support those who are learning the Way, to pray for them and to walk with them. New disciples are a sign to the Church of its own calling, and a challenge for the Church to re-examine and renew its own discipleship. It should welcome them as examples and teachers, and be willing to share with them the Way that we are all discovering.

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. They offer a framework to help new disciples find their feet in our shared Christian life. They are also offered as aids for all God's people to help explore the identity and calling that are ours in Christ. They complement the other Initiation services.

The texts draw to a considerable extent on material from other churches – especially services from other Anglican churches and the Roman Catholic *Rite for the Christian Initiation of Adults* (RCIA). The RCIA material has needed adaptation for the Church of England context, however, not least because it makes provision only for unbaptized candidates and assumes that baptisms take place only at Easter.

Using Rites on the Way

These rites follow a journey of spiritual exploration leading to a commitment to Jesus Christ. The journey starts with an initial but formal contact with the Christian community, whether by a family asking for baptism for their baby, or by children or adults who can answer for themselves seeking greater involvement in the Church. The journey might or might not lead to a formal rite of initiation, but each rite seeks to affirm and acknowledge the life stages through which we pass as we grow in our understanding of God. Most importantly, the rites for a family or for an individual each begin with welcome and an appreciation of all that the new disciples bring of their faith thus far. Each rite also involves the Church making a commitment to accompany those who have been welcomed on the Way of Christ as they deepen their commitment to Christ and to the Christian community. The journey continues even after a rite of initiation, as the community continues to work out together the meaning of Christian belonging and the imperative to share the good news of the kingdom of God with others.

Different routes are provided for initiation according to the situation. The clergy and those who support people seeking initiation in the Christian community will need to work with the new disciple in discerning the proper pattern of initiation for each individual:

- ¶ an adult baptized as a baby but not episcopally confirmed will probably receive a Welcome and after some months (or maybe even more than a year), be ready for the Call, with confirmation following some weeks later;
- ¶ those already episcopally confirmed may, following the Call, be seeking to affirm their baptismal faith;
- ¶ those episcopally confirmed in a church which is not in communion with the Church of England may be re-affirming their faith in the context

of being received into the Church of England.

When an active member of a non-Anglican church which is not in communion with the Church of England is to be episcopally confirmed or (if already episcopally confirmed) received into the Church of England, much of the catechetical process will be neither necessary nor appropriate. There may, however, be a need for some preparation which involves familiarization with aspects of the Anglican tradition; the amount and nature of such preparation will vary according to the individual and also the church from which they come. In this context, it may also be appropriate for some of the Rites on the Way to be used.

The *Welcome of Those Preparing for the Baptism of Children* may be used whether or not there has been a Thanksgiving for the Gift of a Child – in a baptism preparation group, in a home or in the main Sunday service, as appropriate. This short rite is both an encouragement and a promise to the family that they are welcome in the Church and that it offers them and their child support on their journey of faith. Godparents and sponsors may be commissioned during this rite.

The *Welcome of Disciples on the Way of Faith* marks the beginning of the formal journey of faith for new disciples who can answer for themselves. It is not intended for initial enquirers so much as for those who want to commit themselves to continuing the journey. This rite recognizes a changing relationship between the community and the individual, and involves the shared decision by the Church and a new disciple that the latter is ready to proceed to a period of commitment to the community and to study of the Way. No one should be required to be welcomed as a new disciple, nor should pressure be put on them to continue towards initiation, should they wish to withdraw.

The Welcome recognizes that disciples are moving into a new relationship with the church community. The congregation should be encouraged to support and pray for them, and to see them as examples of Christian discipleship from whom they can learn and grow themselves. The disciple on the Way of Christ should agree with the minister on a member of the Church to be their companion and supporter, and to act as their sponsor. Godparents and sponsors may be commissioned during this rite.

Exploring the Christian faith and living the life of the baptized involves meeting the living Christ among his people, in personal prayer, in the proclamation of the Scriptures, and in the service of others. Those who are welcomed as disciples in the Way of Christ should therefore meet regularly, if possible as a group, to explore the Way of Christ with those who are designated as guides and teachers. *Affirmation of the Christian Way* complements such exploration, and the Resources may also be useful in that context.

At some time, the disciple may be ready for the *Call and Celebration of the Decision to be Baptized or Confirmed, or to Affirm Baptismal Faith*. The Call is intended for those who wish to continue on the Way, following a period of exploration and regular involvement in the Christian community. It marks the beginning of a period of more intense preparation for the rite of initiation. The role of the sponsors in discernment should not be underestimated. Through prayer and listening, they have made the journey of faith with the new disciples to this point of commitment, and their continuing support and wisdom will help both the candidates and the congregation grow in the Way.

For the new disciple, this period marks the transition from learning about the life of Jesus to formation in the Christian life and learning about the faith, worship and witness of the Church. Traditionally, those preparing for initiation are given the Apostles' Creed on the Third Sunday of Lent

and the Lord's Prayer on the Fifth Sunday of Lent. *On the Way* proposed that all Christians should be encouraged to make these four texts their own, in order to give fuller shape to their discipleship: Jesus' Summary of the Law, the Lord's Prayer, the Apostles' Creed, and the Beatitudes. The *Presentation of the Four Texts* offers liturgical provision for the handing over of these core texts in the study group and/or in church. *Prayers in Preparation for Baptism* may be useful as Christian initiation becomes imminent.

Leading people in worship is leading people into mystery, into the unknown and yet the familiar; this spiritual activity is much more than getting the words or the sections in the right order. The primary object in the careful planning and leading of the service is the spiritual direction which enables the whole congregation to come into the presence of God to give him glory, and then to go out energized for mission. It is entirely appropriate that the leaders of these rites share with the new disciples and their sponsors in the planning and leading of these services. Participation in the preparation of worship and inclusion in its leadership will be valuable in helping those who are still learning about Christian worship to understand and own it.

Seasonal patterns of initiation for those who can answer for themselves

Rites on the Way support a journey of faith which in some ways mirrors the story of Jesus as it is told by the Christian community through the seasons. It is therefore appropriate to use the seasons to enhance the sense of journey and of the climax to that journey which is already firmly within the historical understanding of the faith.

(i) The journey of faith with initiation at Easter

Lent, Holy Week and Easter, in which the Church celebrates the mystery of Christ's death and resurrection, are traditionally associated with Christian initiation. The focus throughout Lent on penitence, prayer, study and self-denial has its roots in the time of final preparation for baptism. The following is a possible pattern for liturgical celebration of the journey of faith through Lent, Holy Week and Easter.

Pattern 1: Initiation at Easter

Call The First Sunday of Lent

Presentation of the Four Texts The Second, Third, Fourth and Fifth Sundays of Lent

Baptism, Confirmation (if bishop presides), Affirmation, Reception Easter Vigil or Easter Day

Thanksgiving and Sending Out Pentecost

The process of exploration is likely to be long. Certainly, it is likely that the *Welcome of Disciples on the Way of Faith*, which marks the beginning of the formal journey of faith, will happen some months before the disciple is ready to accept the Call. Thus, if initiation is planned for the Easter Vigil, the Welcome may take place in late summer or early autumn. The group of new disciples will meet regularly, and begin to explore their own

readiness for the *Call and Celebration of the Decision to be Baptized or Confirmed, or to Affirm Baptismal Faith after Christmas*. The Call marks the transition from exploration of the Way to a period of preparation for initiation. This is particularly appropriate for the First Sunday of Lent, when the whole community is focusing on penitence, prayer, study and self-denial.

Following the Call, continuing preparation for initiation may be characterized by a structured and regular focus on the Four Texts and their liturgical presentation in the context of Sunday worship. This might happen on the Second, Third, Fourth and Fifth Sundays of Lent. *Prayers in Preparation for Baptism* may be used with the study group or in the main Sunday service. During the main Sunday services in the weeks prior to initiation at Easter, the prayers of intercession should regularly include those preparing for initiation and may also reflect the journey of faith of those within the community. In Year A, the readings for Lent in the *Common Worship Lectionary* are particularly suitable for the continuing learning of the Christian community embarking on the initiation of some within the congregation.

The journey of faith culminates in the celebration of baptism, confirmation (when a bishop presides) or affirmation of baptismal faith at the Easter Vigil or on Easter Sunday. (If it is not possible for a bishop to confirm at the Easter Vigil or on Easter Sunday, it is appropriate that those who are baptized or affirm their baptismal faith at the Easter Vigil or on Easter Sunday be admitted to communion. Confirmation might then follow at Pentecost.) *Thanksgiving for Holy Baptism* (see below) follows at Pentecost, when the Commission and the Sending Out may appropriately be celebrated.

(ii) Other seasonal patterns

Although Lent, Holy Week and Easter is a particularly suitable time for rites of initiation, other appropriate seasons include Epiphany and All Saints' tide. Possible timetables for rites of initiation at Epiphany and All Saints' tide are set out in the following tables:

Pattern 2: Initiation at Epiphany / Baptism of Christ

Call The First Sunday of Advent

Presentation of the Four Texts The Second, Third, Fourth and Fifth Sundays of Advent, The First/Second Sunday of Christmas

Baptism, Confirmation (if bishop presides), Affirmation, Reception Epiphany or The Baptism of Christ

Thanksgiving and Sending Out The Conversion of St Paul (25 January) or later, as appropriate

Pattern 3: Initiation at All Saints

Call Holy Cross Day (14 September) or the nearest Sunday

Presentation of the Four Texts The last four Sundays after Trinity

Baptism, Confirmation (if bishop presides), Affirmation, Reception All Saints' Day or All Saints' Sunday

Thanksgiving and Sending Out Christ the King (The Sunday next before Advent) or later, as appropriate

Thus, the Welcome is made some months before the Call, and the Call is made at the start of Advent, or on the nearest Sunday to Holy Cross Day. This will allow time to give the Four Texts during the main acts of Sunday worship or in the group of new disciples, whichever is appropriate. Initiation is celebrated on the First Sunday of Epiphany (The Baptism of Christ), or All Saints' Sunday. When initiation is at Epiphany there is no need to make variation from the appointed readings for the day. Thanksgiving follows after a period of growth and reflection following initiation, either just before Advent, at the end of January, or at another appropriate time for the community.

When initiation is to be celebrated at All Saints' tide, attention will need to be given to the suitability of the readings in the intervening period. (For Bible Readings and Psalms at Holy Baptism, see [here](#), [here](#), [here](#) and [here](#).)

Baptism

The Baptism service is 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.

One baptism service for adults and infants

A single service makes clear that there is only one baptism which brings people into relationship with Christ and his Church. 'One Lord, one faith, one baptism' (Ephesians 4.5). This emphasis on one baptism has been a theme of the modern rediscovery of baptism; for example, the International Anglican Liturgical Consultation at Toronto in 1991 stated, 'The same rite, with only a minimum of adaptation, should be used for both those able and unable to answer for themselves' (*Christian Initiation in the Anglican Communion*, page 22, section 4, para. 4).

The very different personal circumstances of candidates for baptism could easily give the impression that the baptism of children and that of adults are fundamentally different realities. This might lead people to view the baptism of infants as less than baptism or, conversely, to regard the baptism of adults as some sort of strange aberration. For both infants and adults the service has the same inner logic, a movement from welcome and renunciation through to an identification with the people of God in their dependence on God, their profession of the saving name, and the common activities of prayer, eucharist and mission. The different life circumstances of the newly baptized find expression in the very different form that the Commission takes in each case.

Accessible language

The full and rich biblical imagery surrounding baptism and the comparative ignorance of this richness in many sections of modern society pose a major problem in the drafting of services of Christian initiation. If this tension is resolved by having two rites, one 'churchy' and one 'simple', then the Church's witness to the unity of baptism is undermined. Another common way of resolving this difficulty has been to select one biblical image, commonly that of death and resurrection, and play down other major scriptural emphases. In particular, this has meant the marginalization of many important themes associated with the baptism of Christ that are taken up in the New Testament in the feast of Pentecost: the kingdom of God, identification with the passion of Christ, coming of the Holy Spirit, incorporation into the life of the Trinity and the

mission of God in the world.

If the baptismal liturgy of the Church is to do justice to Scripture it cannot be satisfactory simply to thin down the resonance to what can be absorbed at one sitting by those unfamiliar with the many themes associated with baptism. Part of the solution must lie with new approaches to preparation and more vivid presentation of the service. In framing these services a sharp distinction has been drawn between, on the one hand, the language and phrasing that could reasonably be put into the mouth of parents, godparents, sponsors and congregation and, on the other, a richer use of biblical types and allusions in presidential texts. Some would also argue that the risk of losing people by esoteric language needs to be balanced by the danger of patronizing them by simplistic wording.

Creed or Profession of Faith

In the baptism service the creed is a congregational statement of the Church's collective belief rather than a test for the candidate. Candidates are asked to join in a congregational recitation rather than making such a full statement on their own, thereby demonstrating that they are joining, and being drawn into, a community of faith.

The caution in the rubric about only using the shorter credal affirmation when there are 'strong pastoral reasons' arises from a respect for the Anglican position that the Apostles' Creed is 'the baptismal symbol' or profession (Lambeth Quadrilateral, 1888). It is also important to avoid any impression of 'first' and 'second' class baptism, or any suggestion that some baptisms require a greater degree of commitment than others.

However, the view was taken that there are pastoral circumstances where a shorter credal affirmation is justified on grounds of the setting of the baptism and the capacity and circumstances of particular candidates, rather than as a general policy of allowing a 'lighter' option. This is not a straightforward demarcation between infants and adults; there are adults for whom a shorter affirmation might be more suitable. The form of the Alternative Profession of Faith attempts to meet the criticism that the shorter creed in *The Alternative Service Book 1980* divides the work of creation, redemption and sanctification among the separate persons of the Trinity in a way that could be conceived as modalist.

The text of the Apostles' Creed used in the service is a revised version of the modern internationally agreed ecumenical text. This was made available to its member churches by the English Language Liturgical Consultation in 1988. At a number of points the revised text sticks more closely to the original Latin than the text used in the ASB. At one point the Church of England decided not to follow the international text: where this reads in line 3 'God's only Son' the Church of England has continued with the more traditional 'his only Son' on the grounds that the reference here is to the relationship between persons of the Trinity.

The sign of the cross

The sign of the cross is normally made at the Decision. This accords with the catechumenal approach to baptism and allows the Decision to be seen as the climax of a period of spiritual preparation, where the sign of the cross is the badge of Christian discipleship, embraced after the Decision and before entering the waters of death and rebirth. The sign of the cross may be made with oil consecrated for this purpose; this

recalls the anointing of athletes before the contest (for the use of oil, see [here](#)). The signing is followed by the prayer for deliverance.

The Prayer Book position after the baptism, reflecting Cranmer's experience of the late mediaeval rites, which included a number of separate signings, has sometimes led to an inappropriate use of the prayer for deliverance after baptism and has contributed to the occasional abuse of making the sign of the cross in water and regarding that as baptism.

Nevertheless, the possibility of signing with the cross after baptism is provided for, but if this is done it should follow the administration of water as a separate action and should be accompanied by the text provided at that point in the rite, 'May God, who has received you ...', not the text provided at the Signing with the Cross. If no signing takes place after the Decision, the words there are omitted, together with those beginning, 'Do not be ashamed ...'. Only the prayer, 'May almighty God deliver you ...' is used to conclude the Decision. None of these words are used after baptism.

However, it is possible to make the sign of the cross in both places. If oil of chrism (see [here](#)) is used at the prayer after baptism 'May God, who has received you ...', then this may be accompanied by the sign of the cross or by a chi-rho, signifying *Christos*, the Anointed One.

Prayer over the Water

Within the service, the main theological statement about baptism is made in the baptismal Prayer over the Water. The provision of seasonal baptismal prayers reflects the recommendation of *On the Way* that Church of England baptism services should recognize times other than Easter as appropriate for baptism. These prayers represent a conscious broadening of baptismal imagery beyond the narrowly Paschal. Although there is a strong Western tradition of Paschal emphasis, older Western rites retained a broader and more complex range of images, including that of a new birth by water and the Spirit within the new creation.

Opinions differ about the usefulness of congregational responses or refrains with these prayers; in certain circumstances their use, said or sung, can help carry forward what some experience as a lengthy text. Responsive versions of the baptismal prayer can be found [here](#).

The Baptism

The traditional Anglican rubrical preference for administration of baptism by dipping (the root meaning of the Greek *baptizo*) has been preserved. In the light of questions raised in certain ecumenical discussions about the validity of Anglican baptisms where the candidates are merely dabbed with water, the following sentence is included in Note 12 to the baptism service: 'The use of a substantial amount of water is desirable; water must at least flow on the skin of the candidate.'

Clothing

The explicit provision for clothing after baptism was prompted by three concerns:

- ¶ The practical necessity for some form of clothing to take place immediately after the increasing number of baptisms involving immersion, let

alone submersion. There is scope for making something positive out of a practical necessity.

¶ There are some places with lively family traditions of the christening gown. There is an opportunity to build on existing popular custom, particularly where infants are clothed in the christening gown after the water baptism.

¶ Accompanying clothing with text points up a vivid acting out of the biblical language about 'putting on' Christ.

Any text should be seen primarily as an accompaniment to the action. Use of this optional provision allows the momentum of the service to be sustained in a context where the need for drying and clothing can easily give rise to a hiatus. Although in many parochial contexts the need for clothing is still hardly experienced (being more frequently required in the case of adult candidates), its inclusion in the rite gives a clear signal that, on the occasions when some form of clothing is a necessity, there is opportunity to highlight its theological significance. Where there are adult baptisms by immersion, the Baptist tradition of a white towelling dressing gown offered to the newly baptized candidates may well stand for the ancient tradition of clothing in modern form.

Prayers of Intercession

A short form of the Prayers of Intercession or Prayers of the People is included in the baptism service to be used before or after the Welcome and Peace. The rationale for this inclusion is that one of the responsibilities of the newly baptized within the Church is to take their proper place, as members of the royal priesthood, in the privilege and responsibility of public intercession. There is also a danger that without such provision the service may fail to acknowledge the responsibility that all Christians have to share in God's mission to the world.

The Sending Out and the candle

The optional presentation of a lighted candle to the newly baptized has been placed at the end of the service. The decision to do this was not lightly made and followed experiment in a number of contexts. The text makes a link with the renunciation of darkness, referring back to the lighting of a candle at the Decision, but more importantly it indicates that the primary symbolism is an apostolic summons to shine in the world, which is appropriate to the Sending Out of the whole people of God.

This context has proved a fruitful position in which to use the question-and-answer Commission for the newly baptized who are able to answer for themselves ([here](#)). The Commission begins the Sending Out, and the end of the Commission may be adapted to lead directly into the blessing, as follows:

May Christ dwell in your hearts through faith,

that you may be rooted and grounded in love

and bring forth the fruit of the Spirit,

and the blessing ...

This is then followed by the Giving of a Lighted Candle and the Dismissal.

The baptism of adults and admission to communion

When adults are baptized the Canons of the Church of England (Canon B 15A) allow them to be admitted to communion when they are 'confirmed or ready and desirous to be confirmed'. This allows two practices. In the first the adult is baptized and confirmed by the bishop in the one service and so admitted to communion (at this or a subsequent service). In the second the adult is baptized in the parish (the Bishop having been notified at least a week before – Canon B 24.2) and subsequently brought to the bishop for confirmation. He or she may properly be admitted to communion at the baptism, or after confirmation.

Approaching the baptism of children

Baptism, like birth, cannot be a painless or quick experience if it is to achieve its intended purpose. Whether the baptism of young children is celebrated at the main Sunday gathering or in some other context, it requires the active participation of the Church as well as of the parents and godparents. The baptism service is designed to help this whenever baptism takes place. Baptism is more than a quick transaction performed before a disengaged, or even disapproving, regular congregation.

Why can strong feelings arise over baptism of young children?

On the Way identified a sharp clash of expectations that can occur when parents with little active church involvement bring their children for baptism:

One of the main difficulties in implementing any pastoral approach...is the severe clash of expectations that quickly arise between non-churchgoing parents and clergy or congregations. Parents may well be moved by little more than social convention or they may have profound but inarticulate feelings of their child's need of God's favour; they are likely to have very little sense of what may be expected or asked of them. Clergy and congregation are often sharply aware of the demands as well as joys of public Christian discipleship. The two groups have very different starting points and there is often, in the nature of things, too little time for the clash of expectations to be explored (*On the Way*, page 76: para. 5.24).

The report suggests three pastoral priorities for handling this clash of expectations:

- ¶ encouraging the congregation to see itself as a baptized people committed to mission;
- ¶ respectful engagement with the starting point of unchurched parents;
- ¶ the creation of space and an appropriate context in which genuine encounter and welcome can occur (*On the Way*, pages 86-87: para. 5.31).

The baptism service is intended to help manage this clash and provides a framework for a continuing relationship with the family. _____

Proxy speaking and parental faith

On the Way discussed the question of how parental faith relates to the baptism of children (*On the Way*, pages 84-90). It contrasted the absence of any explicit demand in *The Book of Common Prayer* with the requirement in *The Alternative Service Book 1980* that parents and godparents acknowledge that they speak 'for themselves and for these children' in making the baptismal renunciations and profession of faith. It identifies two issues of substance.

The first is the legitimacy of the bracketing together of the parents' and infant's baptismal profession. This risks disguising the real commitment to Christ being made on behalf of the child in the act of baptism, a matter which stands out clearly in *The Book of Common Prayer* and the tradition which precedes it, and which is focused in the ancient practice of proxy vows. There is also an objection to requiring that parents should make a personal commitment of the seriousness of a baptismal commitment at the moment when the child, and not themselves, is the focus of the service.

Secondly the report discussed whether such a requirement is to be defended on pastoral or on theological grounds. (Some have appeared to argue that only the children of believers are within God's covenant of grace.) Noting the strong New Testament insistence that membership of the people of God is not a matter of blood or racial descent and the fact that 'household' baptism appears to have included slaves and clients as well as blood relatives, it concluded that such a requirement has to be defended on pastoral grounds. It must rest on the pastoral judgement that, in this social context, the child's only chance of the meaningful Christian nurture implied by its baptism is the full involvement of a believing parent. The report noted as a basic problem with this pastoral defence that it does not take seriously the starting point of many parents, and therefore risks asking too much too soon and forcing people to make statements in the service for which they are not yet ready.

The Liturgical Commission framed its original proposals with these considerations in mind and the matter was discussed at length by the Revision Committee at two stages in the synodical revision of the service. At an early stage the Revision Committee identified that there was an equal division of views among its members on some of the underlying issues raised by these rites and recognized that its task was to provide one service acceptable to, and able to be used by, all shades of opinion in the Church. In the event the Revision Committee accepted that the service should deal with questions to parents and godparents separately from the candidate's baptismal renunciation, and return to the classic form of a proxy decision spoken in the name of an infant candidate. There was unanimous agreement about the wording of the two questions to parents and godparents at the Presentation of the Candidates.

In framing the questions to parents and godparents, the Revision Committee was agreed that a committed Christian faith is presupposed in parents and godparents, but that in practice the extent of such faith is often limited or unarticulated. Equally, whatever text is required of parents must be spoken with integrity and without suspicion of hypocrisy; questions ought not to ask more than can realistically be expected. The rationale for the texts is that the godparental role begins at baptism and continues with the child's subsequent journey of faith. That journey is to be accomplished in the life and worship of the Church and this needs to be articulated. The rationale of the order of events in the rite now presented is that:

- ¶ there is one service of baptism for all candidates, of whatever age;
- ¶ at the Presentation of the Candidates parent(s) and sponsors must clearly express a willingness to seek baptism on behalf of candidates unable to answer for themselves and to support them in their journey of faith, including helping them take their place in the worshipping community;
- ¶ the service should recognize that the primary concern of the parent(s) is with their child and that parents' and godparents' own journey of faith should develop alongside that of child candidates within the life of the Church. While a high level of serious commitment to the child's development is required of parents and godparents of child candidates, this needs to be expressed in terms of encouragement and to recognize that baptismal sponsors are themselves still on a journey of faith which they will continue in companionship with the newly baptized;
- ¶ the decisions and affirmation of faith are made in the name of the candidates;
- ¶ after the baptism itself the implications for those supporting them in the journey of faith are appropriately spelt out;
- ¶ it is, of course, presupposed that pastoral practice secures an explanation of this rationale to the parents, godparents and sponsors in advance of the service itself.

How does the service involve the congregation?

The service involves the congregation in actively welcoming a child who comes to baptism along with his/her parents and godparents, in professing the Christian faith into which the child is baptized, and in praying for child and parents in their life together. It charges the congregation to join the parents and godparents in a common witness to Christ in the world.

How does the service involve the parents and godparents?

In welcoming the parents and godparents, the service is careful to recognize that their primary motivation is concern for the child and his/her future welfare. The parents and godparents may present a child for baptism; they ask for God's help in walking with their child 'in the way of Christ'; they may sign the child with the sign of the cross after the Decision, and may dress the child in a christening gown after baptism; they are prayed for by the whole congregation after the short charge at the Commission, and may receive a lighted candle on the child's behalf.

Frequently asked questions concerning baptism

What is the difference between a godparent and a sponsor?

The Canons of the Church of England (Canon B 23) recognize both sponsors, who support candidates for baptism, and godparents, who take on their role at the baptism of children. The baptism service recognizes both a social and a spiritual role for godparents in the lives of their

godchildren. The minister can dispense godparents from the normal requirement that a godparent should be confirmed. It is possible for a child to have additional sponsors as well as godparents who also agree to support them in their continuing journey to a mature faith.

Why is there seasonal provision?

The ancient Church of the West has traditionally associated baptism with Easter. However, other traditions in the Church have associated baptism with other times in the church year, particularly the Epiphany and the Baptism of Christ, and All Saints' tide. There are practical difficulties with trying to hold all baptisms at Easter. These services therefore provide for baptisms at any time ('General') as well as throughout Eastertide, Epiphany and All Saints' tide. The provision includes responsive forms of the Prayer over the Water; these can be used to involve the congregation, particularly by the use of a cantor and appropriate congregational music.

When may oil be used?

The use of oil is allowed for in the Notes and an explanation of the background and meaning of this practice, taken from the First Report of the Revision Committee, can be found below. Olive oil may be used to sign candidates with the cross after the Decision. The fragrant oil called chrism may be used after the baptism with the prayer after baptism but, in any case, must not be used more than once for the same person in a service. The view has been taken that chrism may be used more than once in a person's journey of faith.

Can families be baptized together?

Yes. This is provided for in Note 8 to Holy Baptism and Note 1 to Holy Baptism and Confirmation. It will probably be appropriate to use the short address from the Commission for children able to understand for themselves.

When can the shorter form of Affirmation of Faith be used?

The rubric in Holy Baptism limits the use of this form to 'strong pastoral reasons' out of a desire to honour the Anglican commitment (embodied in the 1888 Lambeth Quadrilateral) that the Apostles' Creed be regarded as the 'baptismal symbol', that is, the form of the public baptismal profession to which the Church is committed. The shorter form can be used when the Apostles' Creed is regarded for good reason as being too complicated.

When is it appropriate to use the thanksgiving prayer for a child?

This is not intended to replace the *Thanksgiving for the Gift of a Child*, which itself is best seen as a preliminary (and not an alternative) to baptism. However, it is provided for those situations when the baptism service itself needs also to acknowledge the parents' desire to thank God for the birth or adoption of a child.

What should happen when a child or adult is baptized in danger of death and then lives?

The services make provision for a public celebration that completes the welcome into the life of the Church. Note 2 to the form for Emergency Baptism makes it clear that parents 'should be assured that questions of ultimate salvation or of the provision of a Christian funeral for an infant who dies do not depend upon whether or not the child has been baptized'.

What is envisaged by 'testimony'?

This does not necessarily imply one particular style of personal presentation. The intention is that, in some circumstances, individuals may value the opportunity to give a brief personal explanation (out loud or in written form) of how they have come to faith.

The use of oil in initiation and understandings of confirmation

Oil

The liturgical use of oil should be seen as part of the prayer which is integral to baptism. It is through prayer that the people of God ask for the fullness of God's blessing on the candidate and also express the dependence of the whole baptized company on the once-for-all act of God in Christ. The wealth of imagery which the Scriptures use to describe this salvation is traditionally focused in the Prayer over the Water as well as in prayer for the candidate during the extended preparation and process of baptism. The particularities of such prayer have varied greatly in the practice of the Church and have often included the use of gesture and symbol. In addition the relationship of such prayer to the whole process of baptism has been articulated in different ways. Common gestures have included laying on of hands and the use of oil.

Note 10 to Holy Baptism ([here](#)) and Note 6 to Holy Baptism and Confirmation ([here](#)) allow for the use of oil and indicate customary places for its use. These notes briefly refer to long-standing tradition concerning the use of pure olive oil and oil scented with fragrant spices. The use of oil in Christian initiation is practised in various traditions of the Church. It was allowed for in *The Alternative Service Book 1980*, and the 'blessing of oils' is a common feature in the Maundy Thursday services of many dioceses. However, others see no place for the use of additional or supplementary symbolism in the practice of baptism. This was the view taken at the Reformation by the time of the 1552 Prayer Book, when all use of oil was abolished; some would still wish to hold to that position. These different views and practices properly exist within the Church of England and imply no change in doctrine or discipline.

The practice of using oil in association with the rite of baptism has its origin in the natural use of olive oil in Mediterranean culture and draws on rich scriptural imagery. The outward application of oil to the body had a number of distinct uses: for healing, for cleansing and as a sign of celebration. Oil was used for healing and to prepare and soften an athlete's body for the contest. It was associated with washing and was used to cleanse and protect the body. Again it functioned as a sign of blessing, empowerment and joy. The increasing use of oils for cosmetic or healing purposes in modern culture marks an interesting point of contact with older practice. These practices in biblical cultures provide the background

for the use of oil in the anointing of prophets, priests and kings. Theologically one of its most important uses, the anointing of a king, gives us the title Christ (Messiah), the anointed one. Oil made fragrant with spices (often called chrism) has therefore been used in a variety of Christian traditions as a sign of participation in the community of the Anointed One and in the royal priesthood of the Church. The Common Worship Pastoral Services make provision for anointing in the context of prayer for wholeness and healing, while the Ordination Services provide for the anointing of the newly ordained.

In the historic Western tradition pure olive oil has been used before baptism as part of the preparation of the Christian athlete for the struggle of faith. Similarly chrism has been used in rites that follow baptism as a sign of the blessings brought by the Holy Spirit. (That this is only one possibility within the variety of historic understanding and practice is shown by an ancient Eastern tradition which only used oil before baptism but understood this use as a messianic anointing.) The long Christian tradition of prayer and the use of oil points to the appropriateness of such practices as part of Christian baptism. It also points to the dangers of over-systematizing the relationship of such prayer and action to God's activity in the whole process of baptism. Neat attempts to apportion grace to particular parts of the rite fall foul of history as well as theology. This complex tradition raises questions about the common practice of regarding the Orthodox post-baptismal anointing called 'chrismation' as a simple equivalent to the Western practice of confirmation.

Understandings of confirmation

The Western Church, and to this day the Church of England, uses the term 'confirmation' in different and often overlapping senses. It has been applied to different parts of the process of incorporation into Christ:

- ¶ *To establish or secure.* This is the earliest and non-technical sense. It is used of an action in which the Church accepts and acts on baptism. It was applied to the first receiving of communion as well as to episcopal anointing and hand-laying.
- ¶ *A post-baptismal episcopal rite.* In the ninth century this technical sense attached itself to the exclusively Western practice of a post-baptismal episcopal rite. There has been a continuing debate in the West as to whether this 'confirmation' consists of the general prayer for the sevenfold gift of the Spirit said over all the candidates or of the specific act of praying for each candidate that follows the general prayer.
- ¶ *To strengthen.* This understanding of the episcopal rite became widespread in the thirteenth century, having been applied earlier to an adult's need of strength to witness and to resist temptation, and then transferred to children as they approach adulthood.
- ¶ *To approve or recognize.* In Cranmer's rites the bishop's action is seen as signifying the Church's recognition of the personal faith nurtured in the catechetical process.
- ¶ *To ratify.* The meaning of individual or personal ratification emerges in the preface added to the confirmation service in *The Book of Common Prayer* (1662).

On the Way identifies five concerns or aspects of Christian life which in Anglicanism have come to be focused on confirmation (*On the Way*, pages

105-106: para 7.3). The report also notes that: 'In an episcopally ordered Church the bishop is the chief minister of the whole process of Christian initiation and is integral to its practice' (*On the Way*, page 107: para 7.5).

Debate continues in the Church of England about the best structures to support those who are coming to faith in Christ and about how to develop, and perhaps adapt, the Western tradition of confirmation. It is clear that the Church of England wishes to retain a role for the bishop in Christian initiation. Against this background the following provision is made in these rites:

- ¶ prayers for the candidates are provided at various points during the process of initiation;
- ¶ provision is made for the use of oil at various points where this is agreed.

The oil of chrism

The rites recognize, but do not require, the widespread practice of episcopal consecration of oil for anointing the sick, of oil for candidates preparing for baptism, and also of fragrant oil (chrism) to accompany prayer that people may enjoy the blessings and character of the messianic kingdom. The view has been taken that it is consistent with the Western tradition not to limit the use of chrism to confirmation. The use of chrism is therefore also allowed in these rites after baptism, at affirmation of baptismal faith and at reception. This does not imply either that these are confirmation in the sense in which the law and formularies of the Church of England use this term, or that the use of the oil of chrism is essential to confirmation. The use of oil may allow those involved to enter into a wealth of biblical imagery about the blessings of the messianic salvation. Simplicity and symbolic coherence require that the oil of chrism should only be applied once to an individual candidate in a particular service.

Confirmation

The practice of confirmation in the Church of England is governed by Canon B 27 and the authorized liturgical texts, and conforms to a tradition that has evolved in the Western Church. The high pastoral profile of confirmation within the mission of the Church was largely a development of the nineteenth century and, as indicated above, there is continuing debate about its precise relation to admission to communion and to the development of mature faith in those baptized in infancy. Some of these debates are summarized in *On the Way* and are closely related to questions of the role of the bishop in Christian initiation (*On the Way*, pages 63-69 and 104-109).

The confirmation service authorized in this provision follows traditional Anglican practice carefully and makes no attempt to resolve these questions. On all views confirmation derives its meaning from baptism. The structure of the confirmation services therefore conforms carefully to the baptism service and has a similar inherent logic and flow.

Rites of Affirmation: Appropriating Baptism

When baptism, confirmation, and/or affirmation of baptismal faith have been celebrated outside the parish, for example in the cathedral church

or another church within the deanery, it may be appropriate for the regular congregation to acknowledge this important transition. In this case, the *Celebration after an Initiation Service outside the Parish* should normally be included in worship on the following Sunday. The opportunity for the church community to celebrate and welcome those who have received the sacraments of initiation may also be an opportunity for testimony (see [here](#), note 2).

The *Thanksgiving for Holy Baptism*, or the *Thanksgiving for the Mission of the Church* (*Common Worship: Services and Prayers for the Church of England*, pages 54-56), should be made by the newly initiated and the regular congregation after a period of growth and reflection. These Thanksgivings focus on discipleship and mission, and on development of the individual's life and ministry within the Church and the world. This reflection on the event and process of initiation may include an opportunity for testimony, and the congregation may also want to reaffirm its commitment to mission and service within the local community. It may also be an appropriate time for the new disciples' study group to end or begin a new phase of meeting as a house group.

In 1997, the House of Bishops agreed Guidelines on the Admission of Baptized Persons to Holy Communion before Confirmation (GS Misc 488). These were intended for use with children in families which are regular in worship. *Admission of the Baptized to Communion* provides a rite for use by parishes which have the agreement of the diocesan bishop to introduce this practice.

Affirmation of Baptismal Faith

The tradition that confirmation is unrepeatable and normally administered in adolescence to those baptized in infancy has meant that significant developments in people's subsequent growth in faith go unmarked in the public life of the Church. Other Anglican churches, and also the British Joint Liturgical Group, have made liturgical provision for some of these moments. These are reflected in new provision for a public *Affirmation of Baptismal Faith*. Many people make an important step of personal commitment after they have been baptized and confirmed, and feel the need for God's grace to be acknowledged before the Church. The form prescribed gives opportunity for this to take place in public worship and relates the person's new commitment to the grace of God pledged to them in their past baptism. This form may be used at a service led by the bishop or as part of the regular worship of a parish.

This provision responds to requests for more vivid recognition of post-baptismal experiences of personal renewal and commitment. It draws on examples found elsewhere in the Anglican Communion as well as in significant ecumenical material. The possibility of candidates signing themselves with water from the font or being sprinkled with water by the bishop or president picks up practices common in some sections of the Church and enables a stronger ritual sign to be used without giving any appearance of a second baptism. If candidates use significant amounts of water with which to sign themselves (or even dip themselves), it is important to remember that however significant for the person, this is a personal reminder of the baptism that has already taken place, and that no words are used.

Reception into the Communion of the Church of England

Canon B 28 governs the reception of people into the communion of the Church of England. The interpretation of the requirement for episcopal

confirmation has become more complex in the light of the increased use of presbyteral confirmation (with episcopally consecrated chrism) in the Roman Catholic Church, the regular practice of presbyteral confirmation (without chrism) in the Nordic and Baltic churches of the Porvoo Agreement, and continuing debate about how presbyteral chrismation is to be understood in the Eastern churches. The provision made in these services makes no attempt to resolve such questions. It is provided to enable those who are judged to be episcopally confirmed to be received publicly into the communicant life of the Church of England.

The question of whether this should be celebrated publicly before the bishop or more quietly will depend on individual circumstances. Where an episcopally ordained priest is being received, the Canons require that this must be done before the bishop. The current discipline of the Church of England requires that members of the Church of England who have not been episcopally confirmed must be confirmed before they can be regarded as full communicant members of the Church of England. Members of other churches who have not been episcopally confirmed in the sense intended in Canon B 15A become communicant members of the Church of England by being confirmed by an Anglican bishop. Reception into the communion of the Church of England is for those who have been episcopally confirmed in other churches.

Reconciliation and Restoration: Recovering Baptism

These services are intended to assist the Church in its ministry of reconciliation. They set reconciliation in the broader theological context of the renewal of the baptismal covenant and of the prayer of the Church for healing and restoration.

Baptism witnesses to God's gift of salvation, in which he gathers people into the new creation in Jesus Christ. Baptism points to the way in which God in Jesus Christ is overthrowing an order of life corrupted by sin and death and bringing to birth a renewed creation, a creation alive with the healing presence of God's Spirit. Baptism is a sign of individual and corporate forgiveness and renewal within the life of the baptized. That life proclaims not only the risen power won by Christ for us in his resurrection and exaltation, but also our identification as human beings with the constraints and suffering borne by Christ in his incarnation and on the cross.

In baptism Christians are called by God to forsake a way of life characterized by sin and death and to enter into the new order of right living that has been created through the resurrection of Jesus Christ. 'We have been buried with him by baptism into death, so that, as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, we too might walk in newness of life ... So you must consider yourself dead to sin and alive to God in Christ Jesus' (Romans 6.4,11).

The Church lives in a tension between the new order made possible in Christ and the continuing reality of human sin. The First Letter of John says both 'No one born of God commits sin' (3.9) and also 'If we say we have no sin we deceive ourselves' (1.8). In baptism God proclaims to the individual and to the Church the final triumph of the new creation in the face of this pervasive reality of rebellion, disorder and alienation of human sinfulness. Many aspects of the Church's life are deeply affected by her continuing struggle against sin. In every area of the Church's life the grace of God is at work drawing Christians from the darkness of sin to the new light of Christ.

Healing is one of the images used in Scripture for the restoring and reconciling of those whose lives have been marred by sin. In many of the

healing miracles in the Gospels the Greek word *sozo* (save, heal) is used to indicate both physical healing and the deeper reconciliation brought by Christ. The figure of the suffering servant of Isaiah 52.13–53.12 foreshadows both Jesus' costly ministry of healing (Matthew 8.17) and also his redemptive bearing of human sin. 'By his wounds we have been healed' (1 Peter 2.24). This makes powerful links between human pain and vulnerability and the saving impact of Jesus' own suffering. The same interconnectedness is present where Scripture speaks of God's image in us to point to the way human life is marred and threatened by the impact of evil and is restored by the new creation in Christ (Romans 3.23; 2 Corinthians 3.18; Ephesians 2.13–16). Many Christians see healing services as occasions to seek prayer about sin and disorder in their lives. This should not imply a simple link between sickness and sin; Jesus himself warned against the direct association of disability and sin (John 9.3). The receiving of forgiveness and the act of forgiving others may open the way to healing and wholeness.

It is also apparent in Scripture that the physical, emotional, social and spiritual aspects of people's well-being are closely interconnected. Christ's work of reconciliation extends beyond the purely personal and relational to the social order and the whole creation (cf Colossians 1.15–27). A common New Testament term for sickness is 'weakness' (*asthenia*) (Luke 5.15; 13.11,12; John 5.5); it carries broad associations of powerlessness and vulnerability, including human vulnerability in the face of the dominion of sin and death (Romans 5.6; 8.3). As Christians face weakness, they receive God's grace, expressed sometimes in an experience of healing and sometimes through the strength that comes in the bearing of weakness (2 Corinthians 12.9).

The New Testament urges Christians, 'Confess your sins to one another, and pray for one another that you may be healed' (James 5.16). This exhortation finds its primary fulfilment as Christians join together in a common life of discipleship. The experience of giving and receiving forgiveness is integral to the life of any Christian fellowship. However, in the lives of individual Christians and of Christian communities there are particular moments when the reality of human sin needs to be faced, when the wounds inflicted by sin need to be healed and the wonderful gift of forgiveness received and celebrated afresh.

The Church's role in ministering forgiveness to individuals is taught in Scripture (cf. John 20.19–23; Acts 2.38). This authority finds its primary expression in the administration of baptism. It also underlies the Church's response to serious and public sin in the lives of baptized people (Matthew 18. 15–20; 1 Corinthians 5. 1–5; 2 Corinthians 2. 5–11; 1 Timothy 5.20). In exercising this authority the Church depends on the presence and discernment of the Holy Spirit. Great care needs to be taken to express the gentleness and patience of Christ (Matthew 11.25–30; 12.12–21; 18.10–14). The Church must never attempt to use this authority as a way of gaining power over or manipulating individuals.

In reaching out to sinners to reclaim them for Christ, the ministry of the Church demonstrates the ecclesial dimension of reconciliation. The Church offers to the wider community in which it is set that which it has received itself. The reconciled community becomes the reconciling community.

The resources and forms of service for Reconciliation and Restoration are intended to meet some of the situations in which the Church confronts the fact of human weakness and sin and appropriates again the new life proclaimed in baptism. The first, *A Corporate Service of Penitence*, is suitable for a diocesan, deanery or parish occasion. It may be used appropriately in the penitential seasons of Advent or Lent, or at other times of the year when Christian communities may wish to prepare for times of renewal or celebration. Two rites are provided for the reconciliation of

individual penitents. Form One follows the traditional pattern of the Western Church, while Form Two is an alternative rite for the reconciliation of individual penitents in the context of a personal renewal of the baptismal covenant.

Careful preparation, both corporately and individually, according to the circumstances, is needed before any of these services.

Much of what was said above in relation to Reconciliation and Restoration is true of the services for Wholeness and Healing. In particular, acts of healing in the Gospels are intimately related to the restoring of individuals to a place of worth within the social order (cf Mark 1.44; 5.15–20; 6.32–34; Luke 13.10–17).

Healing, reconciliation and restoration are integral to the good news of Jesus Christ. For this reason prayer for individuals, focused through laying on of hands or anointing with oil, has a proper place within the public prayer of the Church. God's gracious activity of healing is to be seen both as part of the proclaiming of the good news and as an outworking of the presence of the Spirit in the life of the Church.

Such prayer needs to be sensitive to a number of simplifications or misunderstandings. As mentioned above, it should not imply a simple link between sickness and sin. The receiving of forgiveness and the act of forgiving others may open the way to healing and wholeness. Prayer for healing and strengthening should not involve the rejection of the skills and activity of medicine, which are also part of God's faithfulness to creation (cf Ecclesiasticus 38.9–12; Psalm 147.3). Prayer for healing needs to take seriously the way in which individual sickness and vulnerability are often the result of injustice and social oppression. Equally importantly such prayer should not imply that the restoration of physical wholeness is the only way in which Christ meets human need. Healing has always to be seen against the background of the continuing anguish of an alienated world and the hidden work of the Holy Spirit bringing God's new order to birth. It is a way of partaking in God's new life that will not be complete until it includes the whole creation and the destruction of death itself.

Michael Vasey

The Reconciliation and Restoration material is based on work done by the Liturgical Commission in the early 1990s, of which the Revd Michael Vasey was the main drafter. He was also the primary drafter of *On the Way* (1995), the compiler of the Commentary in the 1998 interim edition of the Initiation Services (which formed the basis for this Commentary) and the principal drafter of *Rites on the Way: Work in Progress*. The latter was published in June 1998; Michael Vasey died at the end of that month. Since then, the Liturgical Commission has worked extensively on the material for Rites on the Way and Reconciliation and Restoration. Nonetheless, not only many of the texts but also, and more importantly, the underlying theological rationale are based on Michael Vasey's work. In presenting this material to the House of Bishops and the General Synod, the Commission paid tribute to Michael Vasey's outstanding contribution to the liturgy and worship of the Church of England. (An appreciation of that work appeared in *Michael Vasey – Liturgist and Friend*, edited by Colin Buchanan on behalf of the Group for Renewal of Worship (Grove Books Ltd, 1999). See also *Celebrating Forgiveness. An original text drafted by Michael Vasey*, ed. T. Lloyd and P. Tovey (Joint Liturgical Studies, no. 58: Cambridge, 2004).)



Related Resources



Buy the Book

[Christian Initiation is available from Church House Publishing](#)

Download the Common Worship Lectionary app



Source URL: <https://www.churchofengland.org/prayer-and-worship/worship-texts-and-resources/common-worship/christian-initiation/commentary>