



Rites of Initiation

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Introduction

Baptism is the sacrament through which we are united with Christ and his people. But this union is achieved through a process of conversion, formation, enlightenment and incorporation that takes time — time for the Spirit to work in the individual and through the ministry of the whole people of God. The celebration of baptism is the climax of this process; but if initiation consists merely of this ritual celebration, the union is unlikely to be fruitful.

The Christian community needs to support and guide this process of conversion; and the ancient tradition of the catechumenate provides some valuable insights to shape this ministry. A catechumenal process for our time will be different from that of the early Church, but the resemblance will be the recognition of *thresholds* that all Inquirers cross on their journey of faith as they come to terms with the questions raised by baptism into the way of Christ.

Baptism itself is the final threshold; but preliminary thresholds, when celebrated together with the community of faith, mark out distinct periods of formation, bringing one period of the journey into sufficient focus and clarity that a new period can begin. The Rite of Welcome marks the passage from inquiry into the commitment to be an *Apprentice* or *Hearer* of the word of God (what traditionally is called a *catechumen*). The Rite of Calling marks the passage from being an *Apprentice* into being a *Candidate* for baptism. Baptism marks the passage from intense preparation into the time of discovery of one's new sacramental identity.

Infant baptism is an extension of the normal practice of baptizing “those who can answer for themselves”; it assumes that those who answer for them will reaffirm their own baptismal covenant. The church must therefore assist them in doing so authentically, providing whatever formation is necessary to support them. The following rites make provision for adapting to this form of ministry to families.

The Rites of Welcome and Calling are intended for use within the principle gathering of the Lord’s people on the Lord’s Day (Baptism is normally celebrated on one of the baptismal festivals). Becoming a Christian is not a private thing. Through the celebration of these threshold moments, the whole congregation is empowered to share in the ministry of formation, and the coordination of this ministry with the Church Year marks the convergence of the individual’s journey with the journey of God’s people.

Music

Music can play an important role in amplifying (and in implementing) these catechumenal rites. By providing opportunities to respond musically to what is happening in the rites, short musical acclamations enable congregational participation and ownership. While music has been written specifically for the rites,¹ it is also

¹E.g., the two volume *Who Calls You By Name*, GIA Publications, 1991 by David Haas.

possible to use a verse of a hymn or a song refrain.² Musicians have a critical role determining what music will be appropriate and accessible for their parish.

Sponsors

A sponsor's primary role is one of hospitality, interpreting the community to the newcomer, and the newcomer to the community. Apprentices may request personal acquaintances as sponsors, but it is essential that the principle sponsor be carefully chosen from the parish in order to enable full integration of the Apprentice into the congregation. Potential parish sponsors may be encouraged by the assurance that, in the end, it is not programming skill or theological savvy that will entice seekers into the life-changing waters, but rather, the genuine warmth of authentic relationships built on risk and trust.

Sponsors walk alongside Apprentices in the unfolding journey of faith, drawing them into relationship, and into increasing confidence in the stories of Christ, in personal and corporate prayer, and in the life of service to others. Sponsors give the gift of time and attention, listening for the presenting needs of Apprentices and enticing them deeper and deeper into the life of the community as it gathers in liturgy, mutual support, and discernment of the Spirit's leading.

The Apprentice's gifts are celebrated as a holy offering which adds a new texture to the community's particular identity. While modelling dimensions of the communal life for the Apprentice, the sponsor articulates the Apprentice's unique contribution to the community. Thus, the whole congregation, deeply engaged in the story of the new life emerging from within, cannot fail to see the importance of its own role in supporting it.

It is crucial that sponsors feel empowered to share their own experience of God. Such sharing models language that enables Apprentices to express their own feelings, challenges and questions. Sponsors must be assured that candidly sharing their spiritual struggles and discoveries is far more effective than pretending to have all the answers. Walking with another person in the journey of faith almost inevitably leads to growth as much for the sponsor as for the Apprentice, and those who recruit sponsors must remain alert to the ongoing conversion of both parties, and indeed, the ongoing conversion of the parish as a whole. Theological content is important, but

²Besides hymns from the Christian Initiation section, here are a few suggestions from *Common Praise*:

- 10 We, the Lord's People
- 39 You are God's Work of Art
- 86 More Than We Can Ask or Imagine
- 281 Who Are These Like Stars Appearing
- 308 Jubilate Deo
- 312 Sing a New Song unto the Lord (refrain)
- 418 Draw the Circle Wide
- 377 To the Name of our Salvation
- 486 Love Divine (any of the 3 verses)
- 529 God, My Hope on You Is Founded
- 548 Eye Has Not Seen, Ear Has Not Heard
- 600 You Call Us Out

Two other pieces are worth noting. In the Rite of Welcome, the song "I Will Change Your Name" (words and music by D.J. Butler, Mercy Publishing, 1987) immediately after the Calling to be an Apprentice gives the congregation words to support the ones being welcomed. The refrain of David Haas's "You Are Mine" (*Gather Comprehensive* 649, LTP) provides similar support right after the Calling, and illuminates the action of Enrollment of Names. The affirming words of the text of both songs are written in God's own voice.

will naturally develop as questions arise for both sponsor and Apprentice in their shared exploration. Leaders of the baptismal preparation process can watch for those opportunities. The Apprentices, watching and listening as their sponsors pray with them, explore the meaning of the Word, and serve the needy, will discover that theology is taking shape in practical ways, coming to life before their eyes. The first concern for Apprentices is not knowledge, but relationship.

The Catechesis Team

The leadership of baptismal preparation is best undertaken by a team composed of pastoral staff and committed members of the congregation (including sponsors) which can provide encouragement and support for new sponsors. Many new sponsors are aware of a rich, personal relationship with God, but have had little experience in articulating it. Since most people learn best by seeing and doing, leadership team members can be paired with new sponsors to model skills which may be tested in a safe environment. Hearing a leader's story of faith will help new sponsors recognize God's presence in their own lives, and make it easier to tell their stories. It also gives them first-hand experience at what they will be inviting Apprentices to do. As leaders pray with sponsors, they in turn will be encouraged to pray more confidently with Apprentices. Once the process has begun, it will be helpful to gather the sponsors together occasionally, to draw out their experiences, successes and struggles, and to provide support and resources for any questions that have emerged.

Most members of the body of Christ already possess the ability to effectively nurture Apprentices, but many feel inadequate. They must be assured that, using their gifts of love, the Spirit will work to help Apprentices find their own role in the redemption that God brings to the world.

Welcoming Inquirers or Families as Apprentices

Introduction

Who is it for? The Acts of Apostles portrays a pattern in which evangelizing is something more than “inviting people to church.” Invariably, new people are drawn into the community of Christ’s followers only after they have been met on their own ground. When we expect people to meet us on *our* ground, we are then tempted to distort the liturgy into a form of evangelism (or worse, into a form of entertainment). But if we have met people on their own terms, this Rite of Welcome constitutes the crossing of a threshold in the relationship. Thus the Welcoming of Inquirers or Families to be Apprentices assumes that there has already been an informal (ie, non-liturgical) relationship with them as Inquirers. Those who are ready to pursue their quest within the life of the Church and in the light of the gospel may then be encouraged to become Apprentices, and be welcomed on their journey using this rite or an adaptation of it.

When to do it. This Rite of Welcome may be used at any time in the year within a principal Sunday service. Although any number of Inquirers may be welcomed on one occasion, no attempt should be made to fit their welcome into some preconceived seasonal schedule. The spirit of the gospel entails beginning with the agenda of those we seek to serve, rather than our own agenda. They may be welcomed as Apprentices whenever they are ready, rather than waiting for some pre-conceived occasion that fits the church’s agenda.

For those not able to answer for themselves. While the catechumenate is framed for adult Candidates, it is customary that baptism is sought for infants or young children. We need to recognize this as a daring extension of the offer of baptism that is appropriate only under very special conditions: when the parents or guardians of the child are committed to modelling and sharing our communal life in Christ. Still, it is important that we take the personal convictions of parents seriously, not rejecting their request outright on the grounds of non-involvement, but equally not putting them into the position of making vows for their children that they cannot make for themselves. Consequently, when babies and infants are to be baptized, catechesis must be for the parents, to revisit and renew their own baptismal covenant and receive guidance and encouragement in modelling the Christian life for their child. We must be prepared to start with them wherever they are.

Potential Obstacles. The church has an unfortunate heritage of teaching that baptism is the only way to ensure entry into heaven. Some adults, and (more commonly) parents seeking baptism for a young child, may be concerned about the death of someone unbaptized. They will need to be assured of God’s love for all people, baptized or not, and that baptism has an altogether different purpose than “insurance.”

Parents may feel obliged to schedule the baptism to accommodate travelling grandparents and other relatives. It is important, however, to help them recognize baptism as adoption into the household of God, the new family of the child. The restoration of “baptismal festivals” is one of the ways we draw new members into the unfolding drama of our shared Christian story.

Some families, with a christening robe that has been passed from generation to generation, may be concerned that their baby will outgrow the gown, and they will resist a catechumenal process of any length. In fact, from ancient times, the baptismal gown has been an important symbol. However, it will be helpful to remind parents that the gown is not an end in itself, but symbolizes what St Paul describes as “putting on Christ”, and represents the faith that we are passing on. Still, there are ways to use the family gown, such as leaving it undone, or simply presenting it to the child (as white robes may be presented to adults).

Dates are an issue for many people and especially for parents of young children who may be dealing with many time constraints and, particularly if there is a new baby, varying degrees of sleep deprivation. They tend to want a clear time-line. Though they may feel that “short and sweet” will be more manageable, taking a longer time

allows them to approach preparation for the baptism of their child as a spiritual exercise that enables them to renew and deepen their relationship with God, a relationship they will model for their child. These rites give shape to this more careful, thoughtful and enriching process.

An unfortunate consequence of the Church's minimalist approach to baptism in recent generations is that Inquirers may come to us with expectations that have been shaped by an understanding of baptism as a peripheral family event rather than a life-changing process of initiation into the body of Christ. Other factors contribute to this trivialization of the sacrament, such as sending baptized children away during the Sunday service and insisting that the baptized be confirmed before allowing them to receive communion — actions which can compromise their sense of belonging as full members. Catechesis teams must be prepared to apologize for the negligence of the Church in teaching what baptism really means, as they invite Inquirers into a new understanding of baptism as the beginning of an intimate and transforming relationship with Christ which marks them as his own forever.

The parish clergy are absolutely crucial to developing the catechumenate. Their commitment to seekers, and their enthusiasm for sharing Good News, will inspire parishes to change current baptismal practices. However, when the primary model for ministry is pastoral care alone, the institution will naturally exist primarily for the support of its own members. In that model, anything unfamiliar or difficult may produce reactions which threaten the harmony of the parish and the security of the clergy. The catechumenate requires the Church to refocus its energy on those outside itself, particularly on the many people with spiritual questions. Parishes that have developed a catechumenal process have found new life in the strong commitment of their newest members, as well as in the spiritual maturing of parishioners directly involved in the process.

Clergy especially need to be at the forefront of this change, and this will require not only sensitivity but also conviction and courage. Working with even one or two respected leaders of the congregation who are committed to renewing the Church will provide the support necessary to face negativity with confidence and faith. This team will pray together, working to discern the Spirit's movement within the parish.

Clergy may be overwhelmed by the immensity of implementing the catechumenate, assuming that it should be introduced fully formed. In fact, that would be an impossible task! What follows should be considered a model toward which parishes can begin to work. In practical terms, the catechumenate will be easier and more effectively developed gradually, in measured steps, in a way that best evolves in your parish. Three initial steps will facilitate implementation. First, begin to celebrate all baptisms publicly, within the Gathering of the Faithful (see the *Book of Alternative Services*, p 146). Second, introduce parish sponsors, who may initially simply offer the congregation's hospitality to Inquirers. Third, introduce the pre-baptismal rites. These rites themselves can inspire enthusiasm for welcoming newcomers, and encourage all members to share in the joy of preparing for baptism.

Presentation

The one being welcomed may be brought by the sponsor to the entrance of the gathering, rather than being seated before the service.³ After the opening greeting, the presider goes out to greet them. Members of the gathering accompany the presider, or all turn toward the place of welcome. The presider expresses the delight of the Church in receiving those who are drawn to the story of Jesus and the life of faith and encourages the members of the congregation to remember their own journey in faith.

The presider then invites the sponsor to introduce the Inquirer. The introduction includes these words,

I present *N*
(or *N* the son/daughter of *N* and *N*)
who wishes (or who wish their child)
to follow the way of Christ.

*The presider asks of the Inquirer, or of the parents who speak on behalf of a young child,
What do you seek (for your child)?⁴*

(The Inquirer, or one of the parents, makes a response that has been prepared in conversation with the sponsor during the time of inquiry.)

³Beginning the ritual at the entrance means that the members of the congregation (or its representatives) make the first move in welcoming a newcomer. It also gives symbolic weight to the act of crossing the threshold. In accompanying the presider members of the congregation demonstrate that they are not mere spectators but desire to encourage the Inquirer toward the way of Christ. The logistics of this will depend on the details of the local setting, and require adapting. This is a kind of welcome in which children may have a special ministry. If microphones are used by the worship leaders, it is desirable for the newcomers and sponsors to have them as well. If the one being welcomed is a child of members of the worshipping community, it may be more appropriate that the family begin among the assembly rather than at the door.

⁴True evangelizing begins where people are, encouraging them to know themselves so they may embrace God's love for them. It takes their concerns and longings seriously and helps awaken them to the deeper hunger of their lives. So a newcomer begins by articulating some deeper longing to the gathered community, encouraging all the faithful to remember their own desires which motivated them on their spiritual journey. Of all the various elements of the catechumenate, this has often been the easiest to introduce in parishes because it opens up the congregation to the myriad ways in which God invites people into community.

"What do you seek?" is the same question Jesus put to would-be disciples, the question he asked the blind man at Jericho, the question we all must face if our religion is to be more than the impulse to measure up to some external expectations of us. It is the question we will want to ask if we trust the stirring of the Spirit.

By way of pastoral preparation for this presentation and welcome, Inquirers may be assisted in coming to a clear sense of what they most deeply desire of God. Out of this experience they may then formulate true responses to the two questions of the rite. The answers to these questions will be given more confidently, and with more conviction, if they have already been heard and affirmed by the sponsors. This also provides an opportunity to make clear that if “baptism” is the Inquirer’s initial answer, the question must be explored more deeply: “What do you seek from God in a baptized life?”

Presider

What do you ask of this community?

Answer

(Again, the response will be something prepared in conversation with the sponsor during the time of inquiry.)

The presider replies as follows, or in some similar words, adapting the reply to the answer given.

God gives the light of life
to everyone who comes into the world,
so that those who seek may truly find,
and may live in God's joy for ever.
You have followed that light;
you have come
to seek the face of the Lord.
Are you ready to share with us
in the Church's worship of God
and service to the poor,
and in seeking to know the way of Christ?⁵

Answer

I am.

OR, if there are only parents presenting a child, the presider replies as follows, adapting the reply to the answer given.

God gives the light of life
to everyone who comes into the world,
so that those who seek may truly find,
and may live in God's joy for ever.
You have followed that light,
which has drawn you (back)
into the fellowship of the Holy Spirit.
Will you re-examine the covenant made in your baptism
and seek the help of God and the support of this community
in embracing that covenant?

Answer

I will.

⁵The catechumenal process makes a fundamental assumption that God has always been active in the life of Inquirers (indeed, of all people). Everyone who inquires about baptism has been called, encouraged, unsettled, or wooed by God. Before they are formally welcomed as Apprentices, their sponsors help them reflect on that experience and articulate how God has been present to them.

The question, "Are you ready . . ." articulates the minimal terms of the covenant which the person enters as an Apprentice.

Question Are you ready to seek God's face
by sharing with your child and with us
in the Church's worship of God
and service to the poor,
and in seeking to know the way of Christ?

Answer **I am.**

To the sponsor and congregation the presider says,
Dear friends in Christ,
will you care for N (and *his/her* family),
and support *him/her/them*
by prayer and by example?⁶

People **We will.**

Presider Will you help *him/her/them* to grow
in the knowledge and love of God
and of God's Son, Jesus Christ our Lord?

People **We will.**

Presider Will you share with N,
as God gives you opportunity,
*your own experience of life in Christ?*⁷

People **We will.**

Thanksgiving and Signing

The presider prays for the Inquirer, saying,

God of steadfast love,
on behalf of this our friend N (OR on behalf of the family of N)
we offer thanks and praise to you
for the experience of your guiding presence
which has brought *him/her/them* to this day.
Help us to serve *him/her/them* faithfully

⁶It is essential that this covenant with an Apprentice be mutual and shared by a community that is eager to do its part.

⁷The communal life of a parish can grow in richness and vitality as the congregation welcomes and supports those who are becoming fellow members of the faith community, celebrating the gifts they bring. In order to make these commitments, it is important that members of the congregation have opportunities to explore the meaning of their own baptism, and find practical ways of supporting those who come among us. It is through the stories that we share that we find meaning and order in our own lives, within the larger drama of God's story.

with the kindness you have shown us,
and to accept with joy
all the gifts of grace *he/she/they* bring(s).
Together may we offer ourselves in your service,
seeking your kingdom
and the honour of your holy name;
through Jesus Christ our Lord. **Amen.**⁸

The sponsor marks each part of the body with the sign of the cross while the presider says,

- † *N, receive the cross of Christ on your forehead,
as a sign of his great love for you.*
- † *Receive the cross on your ears,
that you may hear the Gospel of Christ.*
- † *Receive the cross on your lips,
that you may respond to the word of God.*
- † *Receive the cross on your eyes,
that your way may be illumined by the light of Christ.*
- † *Receive the cross on your hands,
that the mercy of God may be known in all your work.*
- † *Receive the cross on your feet,
that you may follow where Christ leads the way.*
- † *Receive the cross on your shoulders,
that you may bear the gentle yoke of Christ.*
- † *Receive the cross on your heart,
that Christ may dwell in you by faith.*⁹

⁸The prayer of thanksgiving, “God of steadfast love...”, makes explicit the awareness that all this has taken place in the presence of a delighted Father who has run out into the road to embrace a returning son or daughter/child. Every newcomer enriches and changes the community, and our response is thanksgiving.

⁹It is important that an Inquirer knows that the way of the cross is the path Christians take in all that they do. The signing with the cross is a dual act of sanctification and remembrance: we recall the utter profanity of the cross as an instrument of defilement and death, and the sacredness of the crucifixion as the beginning of the transfiguration of all things. In a moment of tender intimacy, the Inquirer is invited to share our path, receive life in all its fullness, and face the evil of the world with no more defence than trust in God.

It is desirable (but not necessary) that the sponsor touch the Inquirer when making the sign of the cross. If there are a number of Inquirers being welcomed, all can be signed at the same time, each by a sponsor, while the presider speaks the meaning of the action.

Calling to be an Apprentice¹⁰

Then the presider says to him/her (or to the parents),

God's word is like bread to our hearts;
we cannot live without it.
God's word is like rain
that comes down upon the earth;
it brings forth fruit in our lives.
Come now and share with us
in hearing the word of the Lord.

The sponsor accompanies the Apprentice who now takes a place among the people. A suitable hymn may be sung during this procession.¹¹

The service continues with the Collect of the Day and the Proclamation of the Word.

Handing on the Gospel

After the reading of the Gospel, or before the Calling to be an Apprentice, the Apprentice may be presented with a copy of the Bible by the sponsor.¹² The sponsor, or another minister, says,

N, receive the good news; take hold on eternal life.
May you always find in Jesus Christ a true friend.

¹⁰This edition of the catechumenal rites uses the term *Apprentice* for what is traditionally called a catechumen, primarily because the role of learning in co-operation with a skilled mentor in apprenticeship is easily understood culturally. The primary activity of a catechumenal Apprentice is to learn to hear God's word. Another possible (and more literal) English equivalent of catechumen is *Hearer*. *Catechumen* comes from ancient Greek *kata* (=down, against, reflected back, answering to, alongside of, each to each), + *ēkhein* (to sound/ring); hence, to echo. It is hoped that the good news of Jesus will ring a chord in the experience and longing of the Apprentice. Catechesis always involves a question/answer format, as opposed to lecturing — a mutual hearing by which the Spirit inspires both the Inquirer and members of the Church. This Calling to be Apprentices (or Hearers) is therefore placed before the ritual Proclamation of the Word. Clearly this Rite of Welcome expects the proclamation that follows to be joyful, intelligent and thoughtfully presented. The challenge is to make our ritual proclamation something worthy of serious attention. The BAS has clearly issued the same challenge by extending the title "proclamation" to include the ritual of public scripture reading. Beyond any attending ceremonial (e.g., processing the book during the initial entrance to the room, maintaining an auspicious place for scripture readings, use of candles or incense etc.), the most important dimension of proclamation is the active participation of the congregation.

¹¹The processional cross should lead the procession. The Apprentice and sponsor may be preceded by the paschal candle as a sign of the light that illuminates all people and leads us to the knowledge of God. The procession symbolizes the shared pilgrimage of disciples.

¹²Presentation of a copy of the bible, if included, must not overshadow the ritual of Proclamation of the Word, which is the real "handing on of the good news."

Petitions for Apprentices may be included in the Prayers of the People: that they may be confirmed in their desire to seek God, that the wounds of sin may be healed in them, that their vision may be enlarged to encompass all the joys of God's kingdom, and that the community may be faithful in its care for them.

Calling Apprentices to be Baptismal Candidates

Introduction

Who is it for? Apprentices who have tested and confirmed their desire to enter the Baptismal Covenant, and whose calling is attested by their sponsors and catechists, may be formally called to be baptismal Candidates in this manner. While sponsors and catechists help in this discernment, it is important to recognize that election is the work of God (not in the modern sense of being chosen by popular vote, but rather a calling out to participate in the divine plan for the world). Thus the popular view of baptism as a way to achieve security is reversed, and the risk entailed in accepting a divine vocation and mission is revealed.

The most serious question this rite raises is: By what authority does a congregation pass judgement on the acceptability of Candidates for baptism? (The issue arises specifically in the question put to the sponsor, "Do you believe that the time has come for these our friends to take the gentle yoke of Christ within the covenant of Holy Baptism?")

How is a community to exercise this discernment without violating the freedom of the Spirit? When Saul of Tarsus attempted to join the church in Jerusalem, the Christians there very nearly rejected him as unacceptable. They needed to be reminded that it was their inescapable calling to welcome him, however unsavoury his record, simply on the grounds that he had finally begun to listen to the gospel, and to identify himself with it. So today, anyone called upon to exercise discernment regarding potential baptismal Candidates must understand that this does not mean passing judgement upon their lives, but attesting to signs of the Spirit's enlivening work within them. Have they been hearers of the word? Have they heard the *call* of God? Have they made some discernible response to it? Do they look forward to the life described by this covenant? Do they want to be part of this community of faith?

Unlike the Rite of Welcome, this rite is framed in the plural; now Apprentices enter the time of the Church, rather than being dealt with on their own individual timetables. All who are ready, therefore, will be chosen together. Of course, all the current Apprentices will not necessarily be presented, since a rite of passage should not be automatic.

When to do it. Pastoral preparation for this rite needs to include opportunities for Apprentices (or their parents) to clarify with their sponsors the meaning for their own lives of the Baptismal Covenant. This rite marks the climax of catechumenal formation, challenging both Candidate and community to mutual commitment, and to trust in the great promise and to face the high challenge symbolized by the Baptismal Covenant. It thus marks the beginning of a period of preparation for baptism, as distinct from the preceding period of preparation for the Christian life in general.

If the baptism is to be celebrated at Easter, this rite would normally occur on the first Sunday of Lent. For a Pentecost baptism, this rite might most appropriately occur on the Sunday after Easter Day; for All Saints', on a Sunday near the beginning of September; and for The Baptism of the Lord, on the First Sunday of Advent. In any case, enough time needs to be kept for intentional spiritual preparation; a week or two before the baptism would hardly be sufficient.

The Rite of Calling should be used within a principal Sunday service, before the Prayers of the People. It takes a section of the Presentation and Examination from the Baptismal Rite and makes of it a separate event.

On the First Sunday of Lent, immediately before the Prayers of the People, the presider begins:

Dear friends in Christ,
every year at the time of the Christian Passover,
we celebrate our redemption
through the death and resurrection of our Lord Jesus Christ.
Among us stand Apprentices who hope to share for the first time
in this great celebration through the sacrament of Holy Baptism.
Lent is the time for their final preparation;
they will need the help of God's Spirit
who purifies and enlightens us;
they will need our care and encouragement
as we accompany them in this journey of faith.¹³

OR at other times of the year,

Dear friends in Christ,
among us stand Apprentices who hope to share with us
in our celebration of *Pentecost /The Baptism of the Lord /All Saints'*
through the sacrament of Holy Baptism.
This is the time for their final preparation;
they will need the help of God's Spirit
who purifies and enlightens us;
they will need our care and encouragement
as we accompany them in this journey of faith.

The presider continues:

For some time now
N and N (and/or the parents of N and N)
have shared with us in hearing the word of the Lord;
they have sought to know the way of Christ
(*themselves, and for their children*).
Now, let us testify concerning them (*and/or their children*)
that they are truly called and rightly chosen
for Holy Baptism.¹⁴

¹³The first paragraph (used only if Apprentices are being called to baptism at the beginning of Lent) can serve as a summons to all to recognize the renewed character of Lent within our tradition: a time of preparation for the renewal of the covenant of our baptism in the Paschal Feast. The following paragraph acts as an alternative when baptism is to occur at one of the other great baptismal festivals.

¹⁴The words about being "called" and "chosen" are not meant to suggest that there are any who are not called, but to acknowledge the need for discernment in recognizing God's call — of responding to the voice of the Good Shepherd — against the clamour of tradition, family, community or culture. It is the integrity of *this* response that allows individuals to recognize that they are truly called and rightly chosen.

Commendation

The Apprentices who are to be commended are brought by their sponsors to stand facing the congregation.

Adults and Older Children:

Those able to answer for themselves are presented by their sponsors as follows:

Sponsor I commend N as a Candidate for Holy Baptism.¹⁵

The presider asks each Candidate when presented,

Candidate Do you desire to be baptized?
I do.¹⁶

Presider For some time now you have been testing and confirming this desire to enter the baptismal covenant. Are you ready to answer the call of Christ?¹⁷

Candidate I am.

When all have been presented, the presider asks the sponsors,

Sponsor Do you believe that the time has come for *these our friends* to take the gentle yoke of Christ within the covenant of Holy Baptism?¹⁸
I do, as God is my witness.

¹⁵This commendation may be made with confidence when sponsors have had opportunity to guide and encourage Apprentices during the initial time of exploration of the Christian way, practice of Christian life skills and discernment of their readiness to embrace the challenge of being actively committed Christians.

¹⁶Adult Apprentices may be given the opportunity to amplify their own response to the question, "Do you desire to be baptized?" and so to share with their new found family of faith something of their sense of discovery, or of anticipation, or the nature of the decision they have made.

¹⁷There is a difference between the recognition of God's call to enter the Christian covenant and the experience of participation in Christ's death and resurrection, through which those being baptized actually do enter the covenant. There is a distinct change of agenda here, from a timetable determined by the needs of the individual to the rhythm of life of the Christian community, to the dimension of "Church time".

¹⁸This question ("Do you believe that the time has come...") assumes a direct personal knowledge of the potential Candidates who, by this point, should be well known, by sight at least, to the congregation. Sponsors may be given the option to add personal testimony in corroboration of their response. It should be noted that this is *not* a question of the Candidates' *worthiness*, or the credibility of their performance or conformity. Rather, the issue is *readiness* to enter this very specific covenant — to pass through this particular narrow door.

Infants and Younger Children:

Then those unable to answer for themselves are presented individually by their sponsors as follows:

Sponsor **I commend N as a Candidate for Holy Baptism.**

The presider asks the parent(s),

For some time now you have been confirming your own baptismal commitment as you prepare to bring your child into the baptismal covenant. Are you ready to answer again the call of Christ?

Answer **I am.**

The presider asks the sponsor to testify on behalf of the parents,

Do you believe that the time has come for *this family* to confirm their Christian commitment so that their child may enter the covenant of Holy Baptism?

Sponsor **I do, as God is my witness.**

When all have been presented, the presider asks the parents and sponsors,

Presider Will you be responsible for seeing that the child you present is nurtured in the faith and life of the Christian community?¹⁹

Answer **I will, with God's help.**

Presider Will you by your prayers and witness help this child to grow into the full stature of Christ?

Answer **I will, with God's help.**

¹⁹During catechesis, parents and sponsors have undertaken to strengthen their faith, through questioning, study and prayer, in recognition of their responsibilities for the primary nurture of the faith of this child. Because the Church is going to ask parents to undertake the spiritual formation of their children, it is incumbent upon the Church to provide appropriate resources. While many churches offer Sunday School, this question implies that the primary form of Christian nurture will be at home. Workshops on faith development for parents, celebrating ecclesiastical seasons at home, print and Internet resources (for both adults and children), and small peer groups, are all possible means to give parents the skills and support they will need in order to accomplish this important ministry.

All Candidates:

The people stand. The presider may then ask the sponsors and the congregation,

Brothers and sisters, will you accompany *these* our friends through the coming days of spiritual preparation?²⁰

People **We will.**

Presider Will you watch and pray with them as they pass over from death to life through the waters of baptism?²¹

People **We will.**

Calling to Baptism and Enrollment of Names

The presider then turns to the Candidates and, taking each one by the hand, says,

N and N, God has chosen you
for baptism into our Lord Jesus Christ.
Be assured that God is faithful
to those who are called.²²

The presider then says,

Let the names of these Candidates now be entered in the book,
in joyful anticipation of their baptism
at the Paschal Vigil (or Pentecost/The Baptism of the Lord/All Saints).

*Here each sponsor may enter in the Baptismal Register (or in a specially designated book) the name of the Candidate he or she has presented, reading the name aloud.*²³

²⁰Through the companionship and hospitality extended by the congregation, Candidates are more fully integrated into the life of the parish by the time of their baptism. The willingness of the congregation to be open to share personal experiences will set the stage for those seeking baptism to fully explore their call to the Christian life.

²¹The question challenges the congregation to recognize in the Candidates the Christ with whom, like the disciples in Gethsemane, we are called to watch and pray. From this point the congregation remembers the Candidates (and their parents) in the Prayers of the People.

²²This moment is the culmination of a long period of soul searching, and brings with it a joy and anticipation which may be celebrated with embraces and a suitable hymn or song. (See footnote 2.)

²³It is preferable that the Candidates' names be written into the Baptismal Register. If this seems inappropriate ("What if they decide not to be baptized?"), then this Rite of Calling may very likely be premature. In the event that names are written into another book, it should be of significant size to signify its importance and permanence. It is possible, for example, to purchase a commercially available *Book of the Elect*.

The Candidates may remain together before the congregation; and the presider invites the congregation to pray, in these or similar words:

Let us pray for these persons
whom God has called, and for ourselves,
that together we may come to share
the joys of Easter.²⁴

If the baptism is to be celebrated at some time other than Easter, the following invitation may be used instead:

Let us pray for these persons
whom God has called, and for ourselves,
that together we may come to share
the new life God has promised.

Prayer over the Candidates

The Candidates kneel, and each sponsor may place a hand upon the shoulder of the one being sponsored; infants and younger children may be held in arms.

The presider, with hands stretched out over the Candidates, says,

God of love and power,
your purpose is to bring all creation
within your saving embrace.
Unite to your Son these whom you have chosen,
and bring them through the water of Baptism
to the banquet of salvation.
May they share with all your people
the perfect freedom of your service
as they bear witness to your grace;
through Jesus Christ our Lord. **Amen.**

The Candidates then return to their places.

²⁴The invitation to pray for the Candidates marks the beginning of the period of Candidacy. This is a moment of great solemnity, signified by the gesture of the sponsors.

The Prayers of the People

A deacon, or other appointed person leads the Prayers of the People. During this period of preparation, Candidates will be named each Lord's Day in the Prayers of the People. One or more of the following petitions may be adapted for use in the prayers:

We pray for N and N who are preparing for Baptism:

- A that in coming to a knowledge of the power of sin,
they may truly repent and be truly healed;
- B that they may be protected from all worldly illusions
and given courage to accept the challenge of the Christian way;
- C that being delivered from all fear,
their lives may be enriched with love for others;
- D that being established in God's love,
they may know their worth and become good stewards of the gift of life.

The following collect may be used to conclude the prayers on the day Candidates are enrolled:

Gracious Father,
grant that all who are baptized into Jesus Christ your Son
may be cleansed from every evil,
commit their lives to you,
and share in the eternal priesthood of Christ our Lord;
for to him, to you, and to the Holy Spirit
belong all glory and blessing,
now and for ever. **Amen.**

The service continues with the Confession, or the Peace.

Holy Baptism

Introduction

Who is it for? “Baptism is the sign of new life in Christ. Baptism unites Christ with his people. That union is both individual and corporate. Christians are, it is true, baptized one by one, but to be a Christian is to be part of a new creation which rises from the dark waters of Christ’s death into the dawn of his risen life. Christians are not just baptized individuals; they are a new humanity.” (*BAS*, p 146)

The catechumenate provides a period of mentoring in the way of Christ and the opportunity for Apprentices to weigh the meaning of the baptismal covenant in order that they and the community of faith together may discern a readiness to enter this new humanity. The following adaptation of the *BAS* Rite of Holy Baptism is intended for celebration with those who have already been publicly called to be baptismal Candidates on an earlier occasion, using the Rite of Calling.

When to do it. “The celebration of...Holy Baptism requires careful preparation by both the community and the Candidates. The service should take place when a congregation gathers for the principal Sunday eucharist, ideally on days that are particularly appropriate for baptism — Easter (especially at the Vigil), Pentecost, All Saints, the Baptism of the Lord — and when the bishop is present.” (*BAS*, p 146)

Pastoral preparation for the Rite of Baptism needs to include opportunities for Candidates to discern what it will mean for them to renounce evil and turn to Christ as Saviour and Lord. They need to be encouraged to discover all that God has in store for them in the gift of baptism. Traditionally the focus for this discernment process has been the Prayers for Deliverance within the liturgy on the third, fourth and fifth Sundays of Lent. Whether or not such public acts of prayer take place, it is important that Candidates be provided an opportunity to discern and name the evils that inhibit us from answering God’s call and rob us of the freedom of God’s service.

It is also desirable for Candidates and sponsors to keep a vigil of prayer, or make a retreat (of which the Great Vigil of Easter may be the climax). This is a time for recalling, in the spirit of thanksgiving and expectancy, their journey thus far in the catechumenate within the larger journey of God with the people of God.

Enriching the celebration. Nothing that follows is intended to compromise the *BAS* form of the rite. The Presentation (*BAS* p 153) is not to be omitted; rather, it may be moved to an earlier occasion as part of Rite of Calling in order to strengthen the role of the community in the celebration. The following adaptation does, however, suggest ways to enrich the rite, developing the implicit drama of the rite in two ways. It suggests using movement to articulate the relation between the Examination of the Candidates (the Act of Repentance, *BAS* p 154) and the Celebration of Baptism (*BAS* p 156 ff). And it suggests expanding the gift-giving ceremony that follows the baptismal act (*BAS* p 160).

The order for Holy Baptism is found in the Book of Alternative Services, p 151.

When the Presentation (BAS, p 153) has already been made on an earlier occasion, the presider says these or similar words,

Sisters and brothers in Christ,
at the beginning of Lent,
(or at the beginning of Advent, or [on specified occasion],)
N and N responded to God's call
and were enrolled as Candidates for Holy Baptism.
Now the hour has come for *these* our friends
to follow Christ through the dark waters of his death
into the dawn of his risen life.
As we witness this great work of the Spirit,
I call upon you to remember your own baptism
and to welcome *these persons*
into the household of God.²⁵

The service continues with the Examination of the Candidates (the Act of Repentance), beginning from the top of p 154.

The following two enrichments of the rite are also commended:

*It is appropriate to locate the Examination of the Candidates (the Act of Repentance, p 154) at a place other than the font. The Candidates and their sponsors may stand at one of the entrances to the worship area with the Paschal Candle in front of them; they may turn to face out toward the "darkness" as they respond to the first three questions, and then turn toward the "light" as they respond to the question, "Do you turn to Jesus Christ...?" Following this Act of Repentance, they may be led in procession by the Paschal Candle to the font, either during the Prayers for the Candidates or the singing of a hymn.*²⁶

After the Thanksgiving over the Water, each Candidate speaks about how the Spirit has led him/her to this moment, that the whole congregation may be encouraged to renew its commitment to Christ. Then the presider invites the congregation to join the Candidates in affirming the Baptismal Covenant, saying, "Let us join with those who are committing..." (BAS, p 158).

²⁵This exhortation acknowledges (especially for the sake of visitors) that what follows is the climax of a long preparation involving both the congregation and the Candidates. If the movement suggested in the rubrics that follow has been adopted, this exhortation may appropriately precede the movement of the principal ministers to the place of the examination (Act of Repentance).

²⁶This movement has its origins in the practice of the early Church (and finds its echo in the current practice of the Eastern Orthodox Rite of Baptism).

Although the BAS rite is sometimes experienced as excessively "wordy", once these movements — movements implied by the words themselves — have been introduced, the words may be heard in all their power. An appropriate gesture that Candidates may use to accompany the act of facing the "darkness" is to hold their arms out before them, palms facing away from themselves — a gesture of "renunciation". The positioning of the Paschal Candle in this movement is important within the symbolism of the act as a whole.

After the baptism, the signing, and the prayer, "Heavenly Father, we thank you..." an expanded ceremony of gifts may follow:

The Robing, the Giving of the Light, and Other Gifts²⁷

The newly baptized may be presented with gifts by their sponsors:

After albs or other white clothes have been presented to all, one of the ministers says,

Receive the robe of righteousness
to show that you have put on Christ.

All
**Be clothed in Christ's love,
that you may stand without fear or shame
on the day of his coming.**²⁸

After the light from the Paschal Candle has been presented to all, one of the ministers says,

Receive the light of Christ,
to show that you have passed
from darkness to light.

All
**Let your light so shine before others
that they may see your good works
and glorify your Father in heaven.**²⁹

²⁷A shower of gifts upon the new Christians is a fitting welcome and a moving sign of the new life of grace which is sustained by the generous gifts of God shared among God's holy people. It is fitting for gifts to be presented by sponsors and/or other members of the congregation, including children.

²⁸Robing in white after baptism may well be the earliest post-baptismal ceremony of all, a sign of "putting on Christ" (see Galatians 3:27, and compare Colossians 3:9-10 and Ephesians 4:22-24). It is important to recover the memory that the alb is not a ministerial garment, but the white robe of the baptized, the legitimate vesture of every Christian in worship.

Candidates for baptism should be encouraged not to don the new clothes until after coming up from the water; parents of child Candidates should be urged to save the "christening gown" for this moment. If Candidates have been immersed (or water has been poured over them), they will not be able to don the new clothes until they have taken off the wet ones; for the purpose of this presentation, it is enough that the new garment be draped over the Candidate's arm (or over the arm of a sponsor).

²⁹The sign of light is the one gift suggested by the *BAS* rite. The gift of light is not the gift of a candle but the gift of the flame taken from the Paschal Candle. Thus the new Christians may appropriately light their candles from the Paschal Candle held before them.

After crosses have been hung around the necks of all, one of the ministers says,

Receive the sign of the cross
to show that you are dead to sin
and alive to God in Christ Jesus.

All

**Do not be ashamed of this Gospel,
but take up your cross daily and follow Christ.³⁰**

After a taste of milk and honey has been offered to all, one of the ministers says,

Receive the riches of your homecoming
to a land of milk and honey.

All

**Taste and see that the Lord is good.
Happy are they who trust in God.³¹**

Other symbolic gifts may be presented at this time.³² A hymn or anthem may be sung while the new Christians withdraw to put on the new clothing. When they rejoin the congregation, bells may be rung.

³⁰A pendant cross to be worn daily is a fitting gift, and one commonly offered by sponsors in some traditions. Like the gift of new clothes, it can be a sign of “putting on Christ”.

³¹Milk and honey were the legendary blessings associated by God’s people of old with their entry into the land of God’s promise. It is appropriate to link together the Christian appreciation of the new life in Christ and these ancient symbols of the blessings of God’s kingdom. Thus, a bowl of milk sweetened with honey, may be presented to each new Christian to taste; alternatively, a tray with a cup of milk and a plate of honeycomb may be offered for tasting.

³²Another way to perform these post-baptismal ceremonies is for one of the ministers to say the first part of the assigned text as the gift is presented to each of the newly baptized, and then, after all have received that gift, to use the first line of the response as the cue line for the congregation to join in, thus:

Minister Receive the riches of your homecoming
 to a land of milk and honey.

When the newly baptized have all been served, the minister says,

Taste and see that the Lord is good.
All Happy are they who trust in God.