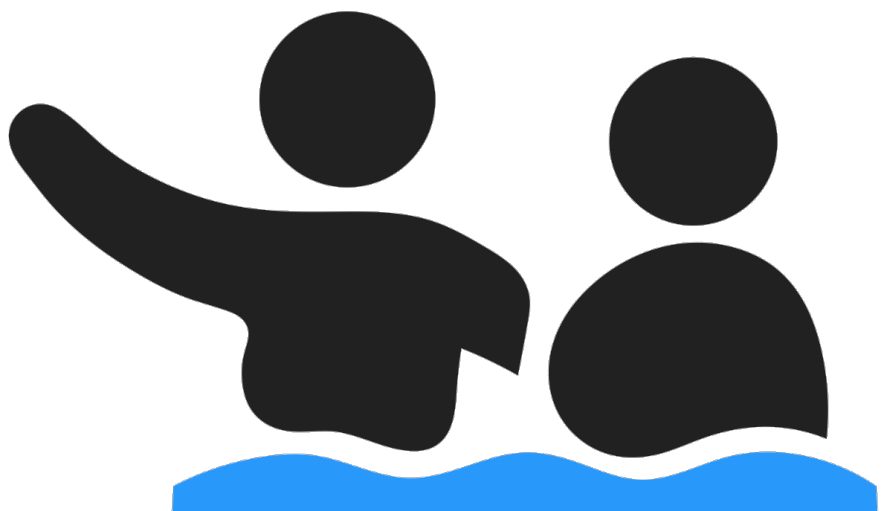


# **Baptism for** **Missional Disciples**

preparing to preside at a service of baptism  
in the United Reformed Church



Produced by the Mission & Discipleship Committee  
of the North Western Synod of the United Reformed Church

Text © Lawrence Moore

for further resources contact [lawrence.moore@nwsynod.org.uk](mailto:lawrence.moore@nwsynod.org.uk)

Booklet Design: Mike Walsh 2017

a **Missional Discipleship** resource, helping local churches in

**Walking**  
the **Way**  
Living the life of Jesus today

# Contents

ONE:	<b>Thinking about the sacraments</b> Sacraments in the life of the URC	p3
TWO:	<b>The Introduction</b> What is happening at baptism?	p8
THREE:	<b>The Promises</b> What commitments are being made?	p16
FOUR:	<b>The Preparation Visit</b> Preparation is everything	p22
FIVE:	<b>The Service</b> Putting it all together	p23



## Chapter ONE:

**Thinking about the sacraments****The start of the journey**

Baptism is the way that the Christian church welcomes people into the life of discipleship (following Jesus) and membership of the church. Whether it is done by completely immersing the candidate in water or “sprinkling” them, it is done in obedient response to Jesus’ command and as a commitment to life-long following. Baptism “in the name of the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit” (the Trinitarian formula) signifies that baptism draws people into relationship with the very Life of God, as well as the shared life and faith of the believing community, the church.

**Sacrament and ordinance**

You will hear baptism described as both a “sacrament” and an “ordinance”. In the United Reformed Church, it is both.

*Ordinance* emphasises *obedience*: Jesus commanded the church to baptise disciples (Matthew 28:19), so baptism is the obedient response of both the church and individual disciples. For some Christian churches, it has no greater (or lesser) significance: Jesus commanded it, so we do it because we are his followers.



► *What are the different ways in which you have seen baptism administered?*

*Sacrament* says, "There's something more going on: when we baptise someone, God is present and active, imparting grace". Baptism is therefore a symbolic picture of something that God is doing through the act of baptism itself. It says, first of all, that God is somehow present in the water, and secondly that God is actively doing something that is best pictured by the action of applying the water to the candidate in the context of making public promises and commitments. Exactly what that is and how it works has been the cause of bitter disagreement through church history - even of wars! Whatever answer you want to give to those questions, to call baptism a sacrament is to acknowledge, with St Augustine, that it is *"an outward, visible sign of an inward, invisible grace"*. Put differently: it is the Word made visible - the gospel in action.

## **Sacraments belong to the whole Christian church**



Baptism is one of the two sacraments celebrated within the United Reformed Church. The other one is Communion. Many people are uneasy with the notion of sacraments. The idea that God works specially through religious ceremonies and physical things (water, bread and wine) sounds uncomfortably like superstition and magic.

That concern is only emphasised by the fact that we restrict the performance of the sacraments to particular people - Ministers of Word and Sacraments, and authorised elders - and insist that they are trained before they can preside.

All of the sixteenth century Reformers wrestled with the question, “How do we recognise the true church?” They wanted the church to be constituted by the gospel, not by institutional organisation: if it was possible for the visible church (the Church of Rome) to be in error, how might we know when the visible church was truly the faithful, authentic expression of the church of Jesus Christ? Calvin’s answer was this:

*“Wherever we see the Word of God purely preached and heard,  
and the sacraments administered according to Christ's institution,  
there, it is not to be doubted, a church of God exists.”*

When we ordain ministers of Word and Sacraments, we ordain them to the ministry of the whole Christian church, not just our own denomination. Baptism and Communion are not only key services in the life of the local church, they are also the way in which each local United Reformed Church affirms that it is part of the whole Christian church across the world and throughout the ages, and participates in its life and faith. For this reason, it is important that the person presiding is recognised by our ecumenical partners as a fellow minister within the wider Christian church.

That is why it is our norm to have an ordained minister presiding at Communion and administering baptism: they do so on behalf of the whole Christian church. Our ordained ministers represent the United Reformed Church to the wider Christian family, and the whole Christian church to the United Reformed Church.

This is why we lay such stress on the training and authorisation of ordained elders to preside when an ordained Minister of Word and Sacraments can’t be present. When you baptise someone, you do so on behalf of the whole Christian church, not just the URC, and certainly not on behalf of your local church only.



## Jesus, the original sacrament

Sacraments, as we have just seen, raise important questions of church order that are important for our role in the wider Christian church; but what of the notion of sacraments themselves? Why would God act particularly through water, bread and wine, rather than anything else?

The connection is obviously to do with the life of Jesus, “the original sacrament”, as recorded in the gospels. Matthew tells us that Jesus is Emmanuel - “God with us”. John calls Jesus “the Word made flesh”. All the gospels, in different ways, invite us to consider Jesus not simply as a man of God, but as God among us as a man. To encounter Jesus was to encounter God at work in the world, to discover that God is in the business of saving the world. In the

gospel stories, when people met Jesus, saving things happened: people were healed or set free, or restored to their communities, or forgiven.



► *In what ways do you find it helpful to think of Jesus as “the original sacrament”? In what ways does it shape your view of sacraments?*

That is the basis of sacraments: God doesn't keep at a distance, but comes to share our world in physical things in order to save us, just as God did in Jesus.

But why water, bread and wine (Baptism and Communion) in particular? It is because these connect us to the key saving moments in God's mission through Jesus. Jesus' baptism is the point at which all of his life becomes focussed on his mission. From this moment on, he will live as a child of God to "do God's will on earth as it is in heaven". That is how baptised Christians commit themselves to live their lives.

Communion connects us again and again to Easter as the direct consequence of the life and mission of Jesus. The deep mystery is that God's salvation doesn't come through conquest, but through death and resurrection. The transformation of this world into the Kingdom of God is born out of the resurrection of Jesus' new life on Easter Sunday. We are promised healing for our brokenness (the bread) and forgiveness (the wine). We find our lives, not by avoiding the consequences of

living like Jesus, but because God is the one who raises the dead (see Mark 8:34-35).

The sacraments are the ways in which God continues to be present with us as we live the life of Jesus today, shapes our lives as individual and communal disciples of Jesus, and nourishes us for the journey.



## **The Introduction:** what is happening at baptism?

### **Sign, symbol and sacrament**

Let's look more closely at the Introduction to the Baptism Service in the URC Service Book (2003) in order to discover what is happening at baptism. It is helpful to look at it in terms of *sign, symbol* and *sacrament*.

### **Introduction to the Baptism Service**

*The Lord is here.*

**His Spirit is with us.**

*Jesus Christ came that we might have life*

**and have it in all its fullness.**

*In John's Gospel we read that Jesus said to Nicodemus:*

*'no one can enter the kingdom of God  
without being born of water and Spirit.'*

*John 3:5*

*God loves us even before we come to love God ourselves.  
Though we cannot understand such love, God invites us in  
baptism to accept it with the openness and trust of a child.*

*In the waters of baptism, God sets us as a seal upon his heart,  
for his love in Christ is stronger than death.*

*Christ's journey from death to resurrection is the pattern of  
our lives, in union with him. Jesus himself was baptized by  
John in the Jordan. His baptism found fulfilment in the cross,  
where he gave himself for the life of the world.*

*Paul writes:*

*'Do you not know that all of us who have been baptized into Christ Jesus  
were baptized into his death? Therefore we have been buried with Christ  
by baptism into death, so that, just as Christ was raised from the dead  
by the glory of the Father, so we too might walk in newness of life.'*

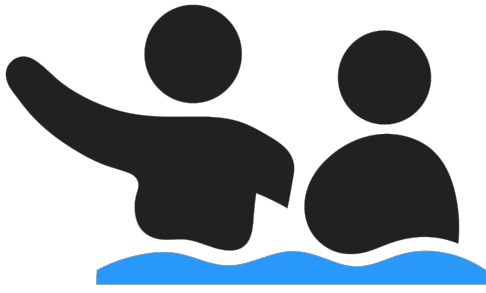
*Romans 6: 3-4*



## 1. Baptism as SIGN

Baptism is a sign that points to our commitment to follow Jesus, both as an individual and as a member of the community of disciples, the church.

- ▶ Baptism connects us to Jesus as beloved children of God. We share in his relationship to God as we share in his baptism.
- ▶ Baptism connects us to Jesus' mission. Jesus is baptised at the outset of his ministry and mission. He puts his old life and priorities aside in order to share in God's mission of transforming the world into the Kingdom of God. We do the same as we commit ourselves to following Jesus.
- ▶ Baptism is a sign of our obedience to *Jesus' command* in Matthew 28: 19-20. It is a sign of our obedience to *God's call*, as it was for Jesus. It is a sign of *our life-long commitment to obedient following*, wherever that takes us and at whatever cost, just as it was for Jesus.
- ▶ Baptism is a sign that we share in the life and faith of the Christian church - the community of Jesus-followers that was born on the day of Pentecost through the Holy Spirit and extends across the world.
- ▶ *Make a note of any thoughts or questions that occur to you as you work through these sections.*



## 2. Baptism as SYMBOL

Baptism is an enacted drama or symbolic picture of salvation as we have seen. The Introduction picks out four images of salvation that it symbolises:

- ▶ Dying and rising with Jesus: baptism of older members by total immersion is a vivid picture of dying to the old life of rebellion and disobedience and rising to a new life as children of God - a life shaped by obedient following of Jesus. This is what Jesus terms, “being born again”.
- ▶ Washing away our sin: John the Baptist baptised people as a sign that they wanted to wash away their sinful lives in order to be clean and ready for God’s appearance. Baptism symbolises the washing away of the old life and being made clean by God in order to live differently from now on.
- ▶ Brought into the covenant of grace: Jewish baby boys were circumcised as a sign and symbol that they were members of the community of Israel, to whom God had made promises of belonging and salvation. Baptism replaces circumcision as the sign of the New Covenant, which is why it is appropriate to baptise infants.
- ▶ Receiving the Holy Spirit: Just as the Spirit descended on Jesus at his baptism and empowered him for his mission, so are we.



- ▶ *These are different symbols for salvation. Which do you find most helpful, and why? Which might be most important to emphasise when preparing your next candidate for baptism?*



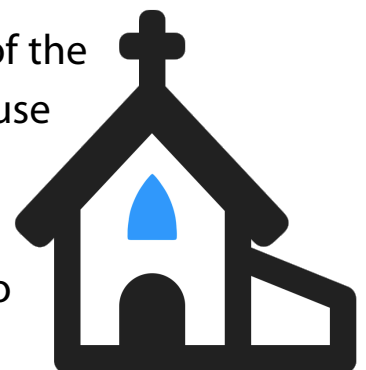
### 3. Baptism as SACRAMENT

Baptism in the United Reformed Church is both a sacrament of the whole Christian church and a sacrament of salvation.

#### A sacrament of the whole Christian church

The United Reformed Church recognises that baptism belongs to the whole Christian church. Unlike some denominations, it recognises the validity of the baptismal practices of all the mainstream churches. Four things follow:

- ▶ The United Reformed Church baptises both infants and adult believers because both forms are practised within the Christian church. Its ecumenical conviction is that to do differently would be to “unchurch” other Christians who practised a different form of baptism. It is not willing to do so.
- ▶ Due to this conviction, the United Reformed Church does not permit re-baptism. Baptism is once-only, and even if a person does not regard an earlier baptism as valid the United Reformed Church should not re-baptise them. God was present at baptism and is faithful, even if we were not.
- ▶ Baptism takes place within a service of worship. It is a public event in the life of the church. Anyone who wishes may attend. You cannot agree to hold a private family baptism.
- ▶ Baptism admits the candidate into membership of the whole Christian church (the body of Christ), because it is a commitment to follow Jesus as a member of the community of disciples. In this sense, baptism is the point at which it is meaningful to talk about someone “becoming a Christian”.





## **A sacrament of salvation**

Baptism is a sacrament of grace (the word literally means, “mercy-love”) and salvation. The theological term for this is “baptismal regeneration”. Let’s look at three key texts:

### **Romans 6: 3-8**

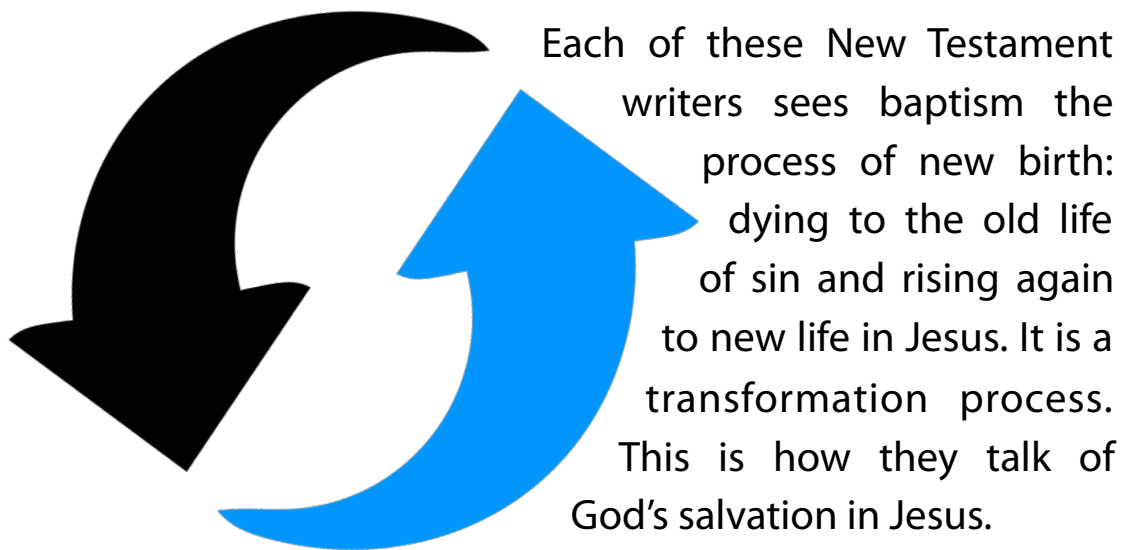
This is one of the oldest Christian writings in the New Testament, written before the gospels. Paul sees baptism as the picture of dying and rising with Jesus - sharing in his crucifixion and resurrection. We are buried with Christ by baptism (going down under the water) and raised to new life with him (coming up out of the water). Our old life is dead; we are “freed from sin”. We now “live with Christ”, which means “living for God” (v10). In the early church, candidates stripped naked for baptism to symbolise dying to their old life; as they came up out of the water, they were clothed in a white robe to symbolise their new life and commitment to living for God.

### **John 3: 3-7**

Jesus, in John’s gospel, tells Nicodemus that a person needs to be “born again/born from above” (v3). The new birth happens through “water and the Spirit” (baptism). The image is different from Paul’s metaphor of crucifixion and resurrection but it expresses the same conviction: we die to the old life and are given new life in Jesus. Note that John links “being born again” with baptism, rather than with the notion of “accepting Jesus as my personal saviour”, or consenting to a set of doctrinal statements. The point is the same, though: new birth is the image Jesus uses for salvation.

## 1 Peter 3: 18-22

Peter sees baptism as an image of Noah's ark: being "saved through water". "Baptism now saves you", he says (v21). He goes on to explain: we're not saved by being washed clean of dirt, but what he terms, "an appeal to God for a good conscience through the resurrection of Jesus Christ". This is his term for committing to leave behind the old life and share in Jesus' new resurrection life. His image operates differently from that of Paul and John: the waters of baptism are a picture of The Flood which "drowns" the old life; Jesus, who has gone through death and has been raised, is the Ark which carries us through the drowning to the new life of resurrection.



## What are we saved from? What are we saved for?

This is a key pastoral question to explore during the preparation visit with people coming for baptism, especially non-church parents bringing their children to be baptised. This is particularly important when we suspect the family have no real intention of being involved in the life of the church. Why do they want their child baptised? What difference does it make?



► *How would you respond to someone who brings their child for baptism for these reasons?*

For some, the answer is primarily cultural: “It’s what we do in our family”. Many, though, are driven by a superstitious fear: “We want to make sure that our child doesn’t die unbaptised and go to hell”. Frequently, it may not be their own fear, but a response to “Granny insists we get the child done!”

In some churches, baptism saves us from punishment by God for Original Sin - Adam’s original “crime”, for which all human beings share guilt. The baptism service includes exorcism (casting out Satan). Baptism is therefore essentially a “passport to heaven” and a “fire insurance policy”.

This is not what we believe in the United Reformed Church about God and salvation. God’s disposition towards us is not anger, but love and a passionate, all-consuming desire to live in relationship with us. That relationship begins now, and inevitably continues after death. We live with God now and continue to do so after we die.

Salvation understood almost exclusively as “going to heaven when you die” became prominent in church history only after 313CE, when the Emperor Constantine made Christianity the official religion of the Roman Emperor. Once the church effectively “ruled the world”, it lost sight of the fact that Jesus’ Good News (gospel) was not about how to get to heaven, but about this world transformed into the Kingdom of God.



For a church whose original core membership was the poor and the marginalised (the victims of Empire), the question was how they could be saved from a life *before* death that was a living hell. And the Christian answer was, “God is bringing the Kingdom that Jesus promised!”

Salvation - “new birth” - was therefore about living in the world as a child of God. The “new life in Christ” was experiencing God’s presence, comfort and companionship here and now: “life in all its abundance” (John 10:10) in a world that human beings had made into a place of suffering, death and despair.

“Faith” meant living in hope and trust that the world belonged to God, not to Rome, and that God’s Kingdom would come as Jesus had promised. Discipleship (the life of faith) was expressed in mission: working to make the world look more like the Kingdom. Following Jesus meant making a Jesus-shaped difference in the world.

Baptism is a key opportunity to recover this missional, holistic understanding of salvation and faith, which was Jesus’ Good News for the world. It means living in the world as a child of God. That is how candidates promise to live.



- ▶ *What is the relationship for you between “the here-and-now” and “the hereafter”?*
- ▶ *To what extent does the focus on the hereafter feature in the way that you think about salvation and faith?*

## Chapter THREE

### **The Promises:** what commitments are being made?

Your task in preparing candidates for baptism is to make clear the commitments that are being entered into, so that candidates for baptism are able to make an informed decision about its appropriateness or not.

#### **The Promises:** for candidates able to respond for themselves

##### *The declaration of faith*

*[Name] ... you have come for baptism in response to the call of Christ and the leading of the Holy Spirit. Let us hear, then, in the presence of God and before us as witnesses, that you confess your faith in Christ and promise to follow him.*

*Do you believe and trust in one God, Father, Son and Holy Spirit, maker of heaven and earth, giver of life, redeemer of the world? **I do.***

*Do you repent of your sins, turn away from evil, and turn to Christ? **By God's grace, I do.***

*Do you confess Jesus Christ as your Saviour and Lord? **I do.***

*The affirmations continue after the baptism at the point of reception into the full privileges and responsibilities of membership.*

##### *The Baptism*

*[Name], I/we\* baptize you in the name of the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit. **Amen.***

*[Name], child of God, God receives you by baptism into the one, holy, catholic and apostolic Church.*

##### *The Promises*

*When the newly-baptized is able to answer for themselves, reception into the full privileges and responsibilities of church membership follows, in the form of confirmation.*

*We are now to receive [Name] into the full privileges and responsibilities of church membership.*

*From the beginning, believers have continued in the worship and fellowship of the Church.*

*N, do you commit yourself to this life? **I do, with God's help.***

*Do you accept the gift and cost of following Christ in your daily life and work? **I do, with God's help.***

*With the whole Church, will you proclaim by word and action the good news of God in Christ?*

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

##### *Promise by the congregation*

*As a community of faith, representing the whole Church, do you welcome [Name] and promise to share with her/him what you yourselves have received, the gift of God's love revealed in Christ? **We do.***

## **The Promises:** for those bringing the child for baptism

### *The declaration of faith*

*A and B, you have come for the baptism of [Name] in response to the call of Christ and the leading of the Holy Spirit.*

*Let us hear you confess your faith in Christ.*

*Do you believe and trust in one God, Father, Son and Holy Spirit, maker of heaven and earth, giver of life, redeemer of the world?*

**I/We do.**

*Where a child is old enough to make a response, a form such as the following may be used in addition:*

*[Name], do you believe that Jesus loves you, and calls you to follow him? **I do.***

### *The Baptism*

*[Name], I/we\* baptize you in the name of the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit. **Amen.***

*[Name], child of God, God receives you by baptism into the one, holy, catholic and apostolic Church.*

### *The Promises*

*When the newly-baptized is an infant, those bringing the child for baptism make these promises.*

*From early times the Church has received the children of believers by baptism so that with help and support they may grow up in Christ, and by the grace of God serve Christ all their days.*

*This child belongs to God in Christ.*

*Tell her/him of her/his baptism that she/he may know she/he is baptized and may come to make her/his own response of faith and love.*

*Do you promise to teach [Name] the love of God*

*and bring her/him up in the life and worship of the Church?*

**I/We do with God's help.**

### *Promise by the congregation*

*As a community of faith, representing the whole Church, do you welcome [Name] and promise to share with her/him what you yourselves have received, the gift of God's love revealed in Christ?*

**We do.**

*\*As the person presiding at baptism is representing the whole church, 'I baptize' can be replaced by 'we baptize' in order to make this clear, and that the person presiding has no special powers!*



## 1. You are entering into **a solemn covenant**

You are entering into a public agreement by making declarations and vows, as solemn and as binding as marriage, a Hire Purchase Agreement, or swearing on the Bible in court to tell “the truth, the whole truth and nothing but the truth”.

- ▶ There are three parties to the covenant: the candidate (or parents/and sponsors), the congregation, and God.
- ▶ You have committed to certain responsibilities, as has the whole congregation, to live together a life of faith.
- ▶ You are entering into an ongoing family relationship with the church community. Both parties promise to nurture and maintain that relationship.



## 2. Baptism is **The Next Step in Your Relationship With God**

You declare that you come for baptism as part of an ongoing relationship with God, rather than for any social or cultural reasons, or pressure from anyone else. You declare that have “heard the call of Christ” and experienced “the leading of the Holy Spirit”.

How has that happened for you? Baptism is your obedient response to that call. It is a public declaration of that faith and the next step in your faith journey.

### 3. Faith for you is **a way of life**

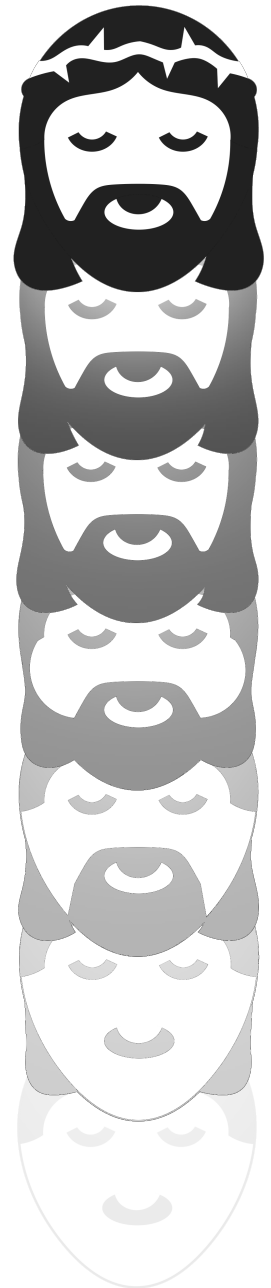
“To believe” means “to trust”. It results in commitment and action. You may believe that if you lie back in 40 fathoms of water, you will float rather than sink; faith is getting into the water and floating. Your faith is the foundation for your whole way of life, and what gives it its shape.

- ▶ To trust in God as creator and redeemer means to live in the world in a new way - as a child of God and as though God reigns. That is how Jesus lived. The new life is made possible by Jesus’ death and resurrection.
- ▶ Repenting of sins, renouncing evil and turning to Christ is a commitment to changing the way you have lived until now, and modelling life on Jesus. It shapes your home and family life, and how you bring up any children you might have.
- ▶ Worship is a part of both your public and private lives. Worship connects every part of our lives with God. Jesus was clear: how we vote, use our money and treat others - especially the neediest - is as much a part of worship as prayer, Bible study and church attendance.
- ▶ You are part of a wider family - the church. Faith is a communal affair, as well as individual. You commit yourself to being part of the life and ministry of the church. That includes discovering the Spirit-given gifts you have and using them to create and Jesus-shaped church communities.

#### 4. You are **making Jesus the model for your life**

You promise “to follow Christ and seek to do and bear his will all the days of your life”. Jesus called his disciples to follow him on his journey and share his life. Jesus was on a mission to change the world. The purpose of discipleship is to become more and more “Jesus-shaped” - more recognisably like Jesus. That means making a Jesus-shaped difference to the lives of people and communities, both as an individual disciple and as part of the community of Jesus-followers (the church).

- ▶ Baptism is about being born into a new way of living in the world. Its model is Jesus. Baptism isn’t therefore about a one-off event, but the way in which you’re committing to live your whole life. We learn what this involves over a lifetime of following Jesus.
- ▶ It’s about becoming missional rather than churchy. Following Jesus is about making a Jesus-shaped difference in the world. It is about making the world a better place - more like the Kingdom of God. The church is not meant to be a “holy huddle”, but a visible sign of what the Kingdom of God will be like. We as individuals and churches will be most recognisably like Jesus when we mirror his care for the least first. That is most visible when we become involved in the lives of people on the margins. Jesus-shaped people and churches are Good News.



- ▶ Living in this way is costly. It led Jesus to the cross. As Jesus shapes our lives, we discover how to overcome the greed, selfishness and fear that drives us to live for ourselves, and how to live for the sake of others. This isn't about becoming a doormat, but about learning to love in the way that Jesus did. We also discover something that we would never have suspected: that this is where the richest, most rewarding life is to be found.
- ▶ If that sounds daunting, we need to remember that Jesus does not expect us to get there overnight. It is a process. Jesus' disciples grew in faith, understanding and commitment through their experiences of following Jesus. It is no different for us (see *Following Jesus: the discipleship cycle*). Baptism marks for us that same process of following Jesus. It is the beginning of a new life. We live the new life following Jesus: one step at a time, one day at a time. That is all Jesus asks of us today.



- ▶ *How will you convey these commitments to a candidate for baptism? How will you convey them to parents who bring their child for baptism?*



## Chapter FOUR

### **The Preparation Visit:** preparation is everything

You should regard it as important as the service itself. Apart from establishing a relationship between the candidate or family and the church (if this is not already established), it is the opportunity to present them with the meaning and significance of baptism. If they decide, as a result of the visit, that baptism is not appropriate, you have fulfilled your role as faithfully as if they decide to proceed. Prayer should form a natural and appropriate part of your visit. There is a lot of important ground to cover in addition to any questions the candidate/family might have:

- ▶ Why is baptism being requested? This is particularly significant in the case of child baptism, in which the parents will be asked to make commitments and promises to raise their child within the life of the church. (The child, once older, can later chose to make their own promises).
- ▶ What has brought them to this point in their faith journey?
- ▶ What to expect: the content and conduct of the service.
- ▶ The meaning and significance of baptism for the life of faith, both for the candidate/family and the church.
- ▶ The content of the promises: discipleship of Jesus and participation in the life and ministry of the church.
- ▶ Is re-baptism an issue?
- ▶ In the case of a child, does the family wish to proceed with baptism, or would a Thanksgiving Service and dedication be more appropriate?

## Chapter FIVE

**The Service:** putting it all together

Baptism services are special moments in the life of the church. Your responsibilities on the day include the fact that the church is often full of family members and guests who are not only strangers to the congregation, but strangers to church. You need to pay careful attention to logistics, liturgy and leadership.

**1. The Logistics**

- ▶ Familiarise yourself with the baptismal arrangements of the local church. Is there a baptistry (in the case of adult baptism)? Who ensures that the font is filled with water? Is the water warm? (cold water tends to make babies cry!) Are there any local customs (eg walking around the congregation with the baby after baptism)? Who provides the baptismal candle? Is a certificate of baptism presented?
- ▶ How will you conduct the actual baptism? Sprinkling with water? Pouring on water, and if so, once or three times? Making a sign of the cross on the forehead? Is there a towel handy? Does everyone know what to expect?
- ▶ Ensure everyone has what they need. Will there be enough extra hymn books? Where will the candidate and family sit? Do they have orders of service? Does everyone know how to get to coffee after the service?
- ▶ Is there a collection during the service? Announcing this may require more explanation and care than usual, so that visitors do not feel uncomfortable or obliged to give.
- ▶ Before the service begins, you may like to remind people to turn off their mobile phones, and ask they do not take photos during the service. You may want to add you'd be happy to pose for photo's afterwards.

## **2. The Liturgy**

You pray the baptismal prayer as representative and on behalf of the whole Christian church, and then baptise the candidate. The key moment in the prayer is the calling down of the Holy Spirit - what is known as the epiklēsis. It is the presence and action of the Holy Spirit that makes baptism into a sacrament and brings about new birth:

*Blessed are you, Lord God of all creation. In your goodness you give us water to sustain our life and renew the earth. May it be for [Name] the water of new birth. Blessed be God forever. Amen.*

## **3. Your Leadership**

You need to be the safe pair of hands that will enable everyone to relax and enjoy the service - which means you need to be on top of things. Make sure that the candidate/family knows exactly what to expect and what they will be required to do. Invite them to a pre-service rehearsal, if that would be helpful. Don't be afraid to explain (briefly) aspects of the service for the benefit of people who are unused to church. Baptism is a family occasion: you need to create the atmosphere of a family gathering, in which everyone feels they have a place.

## **4. And finally ... be creative!**

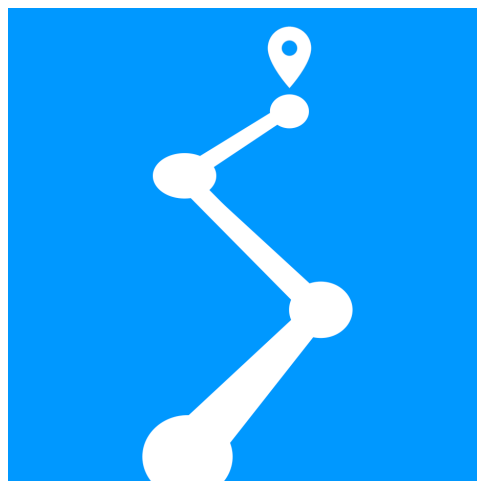
A baptism service is an occasion for joyful celebration. The Christian church has a rich tradition: feel free to plunder it with impunity in order to make the service an occasion that is momentous, nourishing, inspiring and memorable!



- ▶ *A special Order of Service, with a photo of the candidate and a paragraph from them about why they are being baptised?*
- ▶ *A bookmark or postcard with a text or challenge?*
- ▶ *Include a renewal of baptism vows?*
- ▶ *Visuals to project? Banners? Music? A water feature?*



# Discipleship



a **Missional Discipleship** resource, helping local churches in **Walking the Way**  
Living the life of Jesus today