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Authorization

Common Worship: Christian Initiation comprises

- alternative services and other material authorized for use until further resolution of the General Synod;
- material commended by the House of Bishops; and
- an Absolution taken from The Book of Common Prayer, with minor variations allowable under Canon B 5.

For details, see page 311.

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

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

Some of them have been published already:

- the central services of Baptism, Confirmation, Affirmation of Baptismal Faith and Reception into the Communion of the Church of England in an interim edition in 1998;
- Thanksgiving for the Gift of a Child and A Celebration of Wholeness and Healing in Common Worship: Pastoral Services in 2000; and

Others are new:

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

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

This book contains four major groups of services:

Rites on the Way: Approaching Baptism

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

Baptism and Confirmation

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

Rites of Affirmation: Appropriating Baptism

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

Reconciliation and Restoration: Recovering Baptism

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

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

Approaching the services of initiation

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

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

Baptism as the culmination of an accompanied journey of exploration and enquiry (the catechumenate model) is increasingly the pattern for parish strategies for mission and evangelism. The new Rites on the Way preface the authorized Initiation Services and provide liturgical material both to mark the stages in this journey and to assist in the appropriation of the patterns of belief, prayer and behaviour which characterize the baptismal life. The extended period of preparation for baptism implied by this model is most easily and appropriately celebrated by the whole community when
What is the new life like? It is a life directed and empowered by the Spirit, who overshadowed Jesus as he came up from the waters of baptism. As candidates emerge from the waters, they may be clothed — putting on Christ — and anointed as a sign of their belonging with all the baptized in the royal priesthood of God's holy people. At this point in the service, they may hear a commission or charge to live out the baptized life. They then take their place in the Church through participation in the prayers of intercession and in the action of the Eucharist.

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

Planning the service

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

Once this timing and the underlying structures of the rites are clear, attention must be given to the practical questions surrounding the action. It is necessary to give careful and imaginative thought to the setting and to the use of appropriate music and symbol. The generosity and transforming character of the gospel of Jesus Christ need to be clear in the way the service is laid out and celebrated.
Those who have prepared these services have paid particular attention to a call from the Anglican Communion to reintegrate mission and sacramental practice:

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

International Anglican Liturgical Consultation, Toronto 1991

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

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

Journey, story, pattern

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

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

Closely related to journey is the importance in human and Christian experience of story. It is significant that the story of Paul’s conversion is told three times in the book of Acts: Christian formation must allow an individual’s story to be heard and to find its place within the unfolding story of faith as it appears in the Church and in the Scriptures.
the authorized Baptism and Confirmation provision clearly places them in a theological and pastoral context which cannot be ignored in their celebration. The rites offer ways in which the Christian's fundamental relationship with God – created in his image (Genesis 1.26) – that is shown forth in baptism can be restored when marred either by physical illness or disorder or by the breakdown of relationship with other people, with the created order, or with God.

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

Planning and presenting the services

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