

THE SACRAMENTS

Introduction

While there is wide latitude in approach, Congregationalists traditionally have followed the classical Reformed understanding of the Sacraments. *The Savoy Declaration* of 1658 offers a succinct summary of this position.

I. Sacraments are holy Signs and Seals of the Covenant of Grace, immediately instituted by Christ, to represent him and his benefits, and to confirm our interest in him, and solemnly to engage us to the service of God in Christ, according to his Word.

II. There is in every Sacrament a spiritual relation, or sacramental union between the sign and the thing signified; whence it comes to pass that the names and effects of the one are attributed to the other.

III. The grace which is exhibited in or by the Sacrament rightly used, is not conferred by any power in them, neither doth the efficacy of a Sacrament depend upon the piety or intention of him that doth administer it, but upon the work of the Spirit, and the word of Institution, which contains together with a Precept authorizing the use thereof, a Promise of benefit to worthy receivers.

IV. There be only two Sacraments ordained by Christ our Lord in the Gospel, that is to say, Baptism and the Lord's Supper; neither of which may be dispensed by any but a minister of the Word lawfully called.

[Williston Walker, **Creeds and Platforms of Congregationalism**, p. 397-8]

The suggested orders provided here, it is hoped, follow the traditional Congregational understanding. While there is order, an attempt has been made to provide for freedom in the worship setting, another hallmark of the Way. An effort has also been made to draw on the resources of the ongoing liturgical renewal movement and the abundant scholarship it has produced.

BAPTISM

Orders for Baptism

The Sacrament of Baptism is properly celebrated within the Sunday morning worship service following the Sermon. It has been long held among us that Baptism is an `engrafting into Christ' and, therefore, there is a common and public character to Baptism. Standing in the Reformed tradition, Congregationalists understand that there is no distinction between `infant baptism' and `believer's baptism.' Regardless of age, when one is baptized he/she is baptized into the church and incorporated into the body of Christ. Howard Rice and James Huffstutler point out that baptism has the same basic meaning for all who receive it:

Baptism is something that is done to a person; no one baptizes himself or herself. Baptism is always a sign of God's grace, and no one earns or deserves baptism. People are baptized into the faith of the Church, not simply their own belief. For that reason, the Apostle's Creed is recited by the people, rather than some local or denominational confession of faith.

Baptism is the beginning of a life of faith, and the whole of life is lived in response to the grace manifested in baptism.

The order of Baptism should contain the following elements:
A welcome and presentation of the candidate(s).

The profession of faith, the `Apostles' Creed' is most appropriate here since its origins are as a Baptismal statement of faith and it can easily be put into question form for candidates or parents. An adapted form may also be used.

A thanksgiving over the water. Here the minister does not so much `bless' the water, but gives thanks to God for the gift of life represented by water and by the sacrament itself.

The act of Baptism. Baptism may be conferred by affusion (sprinkling), by pouring, or by immersion; the first two are the most common forms among Congregationalists. The Minister says the ancient formula for Baptism while water is being poured: "*Name* (first and middle, but not surname), I baptize you in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit. Amen."

The newly baptized is welcomed into the church. Following the announcement of welcome, a prayer may be offered for the one baptized, for the family, and for all who have been baptized into Christ.

A sign of peace may then be offered to the newly baptized or to the family and sponsors. The form this `peace' takes will vary according to local custom.

Sample outline of a Worship Service including Baptism:

Prelude

Call to Worship

Hymn of Praise

Prayer of Invocation

Scripture Lesson(s)

Sermon

Hymn

Sacrament of Baptism

Pastoral Prayer (can be omitted or combined into Baptismal prayer)

Offertory

Prayer of Thanksgiving/Dedication and Lord's Prayer

Hymn

Charge and Benediction

Postlude

SERVICE OF BAPTISM (A)

[derived from the *Service Book* of the United Reformed Church]

Introduction

We now celebrate the Sacrament of Baptism in which God has called Name to be a member of Christ's body. At the beginning of his ministry Jesus was baptized by John in the Jordan. The Spirit descended upon him and a voice came from heaven: "This is my beloved Son on whom my favor rests." His baptism found fulfillment in the cross where he gave himself for the life of the world. When God raised him from the dead, he said his disciples: "Full authority in heaven and earth has been committed to me. Go therefore to all nations and make them my disciples; baptize them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit; teach them to observe all that I have commanded you. I will be with you always, to the end of time." (Matthew 28:19-20)

On the day of Pentecost Peter said to the people:

"Repent and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins; and you shall receive the gift of the Holy Spirit. For the promise is to you and to your children and to all that are far off, every one whom the Lord our God calls to him." (Acts 2: 38-39)

Baptism unites us to Christ and to all that God accomplishes for all people and all time. In baptism we are buried with Christ and are raised with him to new life; our sins are washed away, and we are brought into the covenant of grace; we receive the Spirit to equip us as members of Christ's body, the Church.

The Promises [for an infant]

(*Parent's name(s)*) you have come for the baptism of your child(ren) 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 the gathered church, that you confess your faith in Christ and promise to follow him. As a church we will also make our promises.

To parents (and sponsors):

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

I do.

To parents:

Do you promise, trusting in God's grace, that by prayer and example you will teach (*Name*) the faith of the gospel and bring (*him/her*) up in the worship and life of the Church?

I do.

To sponsors:

Do you promise, trusting in God's grace, to pray and care for (*Name*) and support (*his/her*) family as you are able?

I do.

To parents (and sponsors):

And do you trust in God's mercy alone to bring you into the fullness of the life of the world to come?

I do.

To the church:

Do you, as members of Christ's body and trusting in God's grace, promise to pray for (*Name*), provide for the teaching of the gospel, and live a Christian life in the family of God?

We do.

[Proceed to the Baptismal Prayer]

The Promises

(*Name(s)*) 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 the gathered church, that you confess your faith in Christ and promise to follow him. As a church we will also make our promises.

To the candidate:

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

I do.

Do you, trusting in God's grace, repent of your sins, renounce evil, and turn to Christ?

I do.

Do you promise, trusting in God's grace, to be faithful in public and private worship, to live in the fellowship of the Church and to share in its witness?

I do.

Do you promise, by that same grace, to follow Christ and to seek to do and to bear his will all the days of your life?

I do.

And do you trust in God's mercy alone to bring you into the fullness of the life of the world to come?

I do.

To the church:

Do you, as members of Christ's body and trusting in God's grace, promise to pray for *(Name)*, provide for the teaching of the gospel, and live a Christian life in the family of God?

We do.

The Baptismal Prayer

Almighty God, through water you bring us bountiful love. In the beginning your Spirit moved over the face of the waters bringing order out of chaos; with the waters of the flood you cleansed the world, and through the Red Sea and across the Jordan you led your people to the land of promise. By the life and death of your Son and by his mighty resurrection and ascension you have given us the assurance that healing waters will flow from him for all nations.

We pray that *(Name)* who is washed in this water, may be made one with Christ in his death, cleansed from all sin and delivered from all evil.

Send your Holy Spirit upon *(Name)* for new birth in the family of your Church, and raise *(him/ her)* with Christ to full and eternal life. For all might, majesty, authority, and power are yours, now and forever. Amen.

Or

Almighty and eternal God we give you thanks for our life and salvation in Jesus your Son, who became one with us and died and rose again, so that we might have life in him., be made members of your Church and heirs of your kingdom. Be with us in the power of your Spirit, and so use this water and our obedience to Christ, that *(Name)* whom we baptize in your name, may receive the fullness of your grace and always remain in the number of your faithful people: through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

The Baptism

(Name), I baptize you in the name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. Amen.

The Lord bless you and keep you; the Lord make his face to shine upon you and be gracious unto you; the Lord lift up his countenance upon you and give you peace. Amen.
(Numbers 6:24-6)

A lighted candle may be given:

This is to show that you have received the light of Christ. Shine as a light in the world to the glory of God the Father.

To the church:

You are witnesses that *(Name)* has been received into the household of God, the one, holy, catholic, and apostolic Church. *(He/she)* belongs to a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, God's own people.

Prayer [for an infant]

Heavenly Father, we give thanks for receiving this little child by baptism into the life of your Church. Keep *(him/her)* always in your love; grant that *(he/she)* may grow strong in body and in mind; protect *(him/her)* in all dangers and temptations; and bring *(him/her)* to faith in Jesus Christ as Savior and Lord.

We ask your blessing on the parents, family, and friends of this child. Help them to surround *(him/her)* with love and security, give them grace and wisdom to teach your truth and your way. Through their love for this child may they learn to love you more and more. We commend to you their home and all the families of this gathered Church.

Grant that in our homes we may honor you and love and serve each other. Accept us as we recall our own baptism and rededicate ourselves to you; and help us to care for all who are one with us in the life of your Church; through Jesus Christ our Lord.

Laying on of Hands [for an adult]

The minister lays his/her hand on the head of the candidate and says:

(Name) the God of all grace, who has called you to Christian faith and service, confirm and strengthen you with the Holy Spirit and keep you faithful to Christ all your days. Amen.

Here the candidate may own the covenant and be received into Church membership, according to local custom.

Prayer [for an adult]

Almighty God, we give you thanks for *(Name)*, who has been baptized today, for the grace of your acceptance and the promise of resurrection. Uphold and strengthen *(him/her)* for your service and keep *(him/her)* always true to Christ.

Let your blessing rest continually upon us all so that we who have been called to enter your kingdom, may now and always be faithful; through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

SERVICE OF BAPTISM (B)

[derived from A Book of Worship for Free Churches]

The Sacrament of Baptism for Infants or Children with Sponsors

Address

Dearly beloved: Almighty God has called us into the Church, and has led us into a sure and certain faith that we belong to God and God belongs to us forever.

Our Savior called children to himself and blessed them, saying, “let the little children come to me, and do not hold them back, for of such is the kingdom of heaven.”

You have brought your child here desiring for *(her/his)* Christian baptism. You now engage, on your part, to do those things that will show the good will and the love of the heavenly Father to *(her/him)*; that *(she/he)* may grow into the love and nurture and admonition of the Lord.

Do you promise that you will teach this child the principles of our Christian faith and that you will pray with *(her/him)* and for *(her/him)*?

Response: I do.

Minister: Do you who stand as sponsors solemnly promise to faithfully do all within your power to hold up the hands of these parents in the fulfillment of their covenant that this child be instructed in the Word of God, brought up in the nurture and admonition of the Lord, kept in communion with the church, and strengthened to live in godly manner all the days of *(her/his)* life?

Response: I/We do.

Minister: Do you, the members of this church as of the whole Church of Christ, receive this child into your love and care, and do you promise that so far as in you lies you will uphold and encourage the parents in the fulfillment of their covenant?

Response: We do.

Minister: Grant, O Lord, unto these servants of yours, the grace to perform all that they have promised you this day. And send your Holy Spirit to sanctify this child now to be baptized and committed to you in Christian faith. Amen.

Baptism

Minister: What name is given to this child?

(Name), I baptize you in the Name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

Almighty and ever-blessed Father, we give hearty thanks to you that you have numbered us among your people, and that you also call our little ones to yourself. Grant that this

child, now dedicated by our office and ministry, may be preserved according to your will all the days of *(her/his)* life. May *(she/he)* grow in grace, in wisdom, in love, in joy, in devotion to you. Lead *(her/him)* by your own Spirit, that *(her/his)* life may be well pleasing in your sight. Keep *(her/him)* now and ever under the shadow of your wing, and may *(she/he)* come at last into the fullness of that blessing which you have promised; through Jesus Christ our Lord.

Bestow the wisdom and the will to watch over *(her/him)* to those who stand as sponsors, that they may do *(her/him)* only good, to assist *(her/his)* parents as they seek to enlarge *(her/his)* understanding and open *(her/his)* heart to the persuasions of your Spirit.

Follow those who so greatly love this little one with your tender and enabling Spirit. Grant to them wisdom, patience, and strength. May the lives that they lead and the words that they speak lead this child to you; whose very Name is Love and who does all things well; through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

Now unto him who is able to keep us from falling, and to present us faultless before the presence of his glory, with exceeding joy, to the only wise God our Savior, be glory and majesty, dominion and power; through Jesus Christ, forever and ever. Amen.

AN ORDER FOR THE ADMINISTRATION OF BAPTISM TO ADULTS

Words of Institution

Jesus came and spoke to them saying, all power is given to me in heaven and on earth. Go, therefore, and teach all nations, baptizing them in the Name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit; teaching them to observe all the things I have commanded you; and know that I am with you always, even to the end of the world.

Address

Dearly beloved: the sacrament of baptism is the outward and visible sign of an inward and spiritual grace. It signifies entrance into a new life of fellowship with Jesus Christ our Lord. As you are baptized with water, so may you also be baptized with the Holy Spirit. Though the form has varied with the centuries, the essential and unchanging condition of baptism has been the faith and consecration of the believer. We welcome you as you come to make your confession of faith and to receive this sacrament of cleansing and divine fellowship, as commanded by our Lord for all believers.

Do you believe in God the Father, infinite in wisdom, goodness, and love; and in Jesus Christ, his Son our Lord and Savior; and in the Holy Spirit, who takes the things of Christ and reveals them to us?

Response: I do.

Minister: Will you strive to know the will of God as taught in the Holy Scriptures and to walk in the ways of the Lord, made known or to be made known to you?

Response: I will.

Minister: Do you confess your sins unto Almighty God, and putting your trust in God, promise, in the Lord's strength, to follow God's commandments and to walk from henceforth in God's holy ways?

Response: I do.

Minister: Do you seek to yield yourself to God, that the same Spirit which was in Jesus Christ may be in you, and that you may be Jesus' disciple not in name only, but in deed and in truth?

Response: I do.

Almighty and everlasting God, receive and sanctify with your Spirit this, your servant (*Name*), to be baptized according to your word; may (*she/he*) find in you (*her/his*) refuge, strength, wisdom, and joy. Keep (*her/him*) faithful to you all the days of (*her/his*) life that (*she/he*) may finally come to your everlasting kingdom through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

Baptism

(Name), I baptize you in the Name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

Thus says the Lord that created you: fear not for I have redeemed you; I have called you by name; you are mine. When you pass through the waters, I will be with you. For I am the Lord your God, the Holy One, your Savior.

O God, grant that the heart of your servant may be set to obey your commandments, and give unto *(her/him)*, we beseech you, the peace which the world cannot give nor take away; through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

Ascription and Benediction

Now under him who is able to keep you from falling and to present you faultless before the presence of his glory, with exceeding joy, to the only wise God our Savior, be glory and majesty, dominion and power, both now and ever. The Lord bless you and keep you; the Lord make his face shine upon you, and be gracious to you; the Lord lift up his countenance upon you, and you peace. Amen.