



COME TO THE WATER
Participant's Guide

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These materials were compiled by Stephanie Huisman, an RCA pastor serving at Dundee Presbyterian Church in Omaha, Nebraska.

Week 1: *Laying Foundations*

QUIZ: True or False

- T F 1. True Christian baptism is always done in the name of the Triune God—Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.
- T F 2. It doesn't matter where our baptism takes place.
- T F 3. Baptism is one of the three sacraments celebrated by the Reformed Church in America.
- T F 4. There is actually little difference between baby dedication and infant baptism.
- T F 5. The congregation makes the promise to nurture the faith of the person being baptized in the Reformed Church liturgy.
- T F 6. A sacrament is a visible sign and seal of our being part of God's family.
- T F 7. In the Reformed Church, baptism can be done by immersion or sprinkling.
- T F 8. Baptism is a singular action and something to be continuously lived into.
- T F 9. Reformed theology teaches that a person is saved by virtue of their baptism.
- T F 10. Some people are not baptized as infants.

CONVERSATION

What is a sacrament, anyway?

1. In the Reformed tradition we celebrate two sacraments, instituted by Christ in the New Testament: _____ and _____.
2. They lead us to know the world _____.
3. They are *sacramentum*, meaning _____.
4. They are visible _____ and _____ of the grace we have received from God.
5. God gave us these sacraments as an _____ to our _____.

Okay, but we are here to learn about baptism...

Read Luke 3:1-22.

Reflect:

What happens when Jesus is baptized?

Does it relate to what happens to us when we are baptized?

What exactly is happening in baptism? Or, is anything actually happening in baptism?

In baptism God promises by grace alone:
to forgive our sins;
to adopt us into the Body of Christ, the Church;
to send the Holy Spirit daily to renew and cleanse us;
and to resurrect us to eternal life.

Through baptism Christ calls us to new obedience:
to love and trust God completely;
to forsake the evil of the world; and
to live a new and holy life (RCA Order for the Sacrament of Baptism).

Let's take this apart a little; it is dense, dense, dense!

1. In baptism God promises by _____ to forgive our sins (1 Corinthians 6:11).
2. In baptism we are _____ with Christ unto death that we might _____ with him (Romans 6:3-4).
3. ...and so that we might walk in _____.

The evidence that we see in our own lives is tenuous, often disappointing, and frequently slow. We wish we could die to the old self more decisively. We wish we could rise to Christ more victoriously. But in spite of what we often judge to be failures on this, God does not reject us or even judge us. The Holy Spirit is patient and persistent. We die and rise in Christ in our baptism and we continue to die and rise in Christ in our life of faith. Baptism does not depend on faith so much as it calls forth faith and a life of faith.

—Dr. James Brownson

It sounds like baptism is an individual thing. Why have I heard talk about "covenant?" And why does the pastor introduce the baptized person as a member of the family?

1. Baptism is the mark of _____ as well as _____ faith.
2. Children are part of the special relationship which God maintains with his people through what the Bible calls a _____. In a covenant God says: "I will be your God and you will be my people."
3. God's covenant promises are passed through the faith of the _____.
4. To be baptized is to be incorporated into the body of Christ and through the body of Christ to become _____ for whom the Redeemer died and rose again.

APPLICATION

Reflect on these thoughts and jot down your responses.

Have you been baptized? What does your baptism mean to you? Did you learn anything while talking together that has changed what your baptism means to you?

What promise does God give in baptism?

What expectation does our baptism carry?

Think about the experiences your child will have as a member of your family and of the family of this congregation. What will these experiences teach your child about himself or herself? About God? About the world?

Week 2: *Living Faithfully into Our Baptism*

CONVERSATION

Practices for Faith Formation:

1. Prayer: Conversation along the way
2. Discipleship: Commitment to involvement at church
3. Forgiveness: Modeling the faith received
4. Celebrate: Baptism anniversaries

APPLICATION

Read the baptismal liturgy in the back of this participant's guide. Choose one part to share with the group next week which is especially meaningful to your family.

Discuss the following questions as a family:

When you think of water, what do you think of?

Why do you think water is used for baptisms?

How much water should be used?

Read these Bible stories as a family and talk about the significance of water in each story. You may even choose to revisit the opening discussion questions in light of these passages.

Noah's ark (Genesis 6:5-9:17)

Woman at the well (John 4:1-26)

Foot washing (John 13:1-15)

Jesus' baptism (Mark 1:9-11)

After reflecting on this together, have each member of the family *write a short poem or draw a picture* celebrating the significance of the waters of baptism. No one needs to be an artist; the object is to express understanding and engage our hearts as well as our minds.

Finally, *choose a song* that you would like sung at the baptism. This could be a song that has been meaningful for your faith journey, a song that is a prayer you have for your child, or simply a baptism song. The hymnal *Sing! A New Creation* has a number of songs to choose from.

Week 3: *Planning for the Baptism Day*

CONVERSATION

APPLICATION

Memorize the responses you will be making during the sacrament! Yes, you heard me! They have been marked in your copy of the liturgy.

Appendix: Order for the Sacrament of Baptism

PREPARATION

The minister addresses the congregation:

Hear the words of our Lord Jesus Christ:

All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me.
Go therefore and make disciples of all nations,
baptizing them in the name of the Father
and of the Son
and of the Holy Spirit,
and teaching them to obey everything that I have commanded you.
And remember, I am with you always, to the end of the age.

Matthew 28:18-20

The minister continues, using one or more of the following:

Hear also these words from Holy Scripture:

There is one body and one Spirit,
just as you were called to the one hope of your calling,
one Lord, one faith, one baptism,
one God and Father of all,
who is above all and through all and in all.

Ephesians 4:4-6

Or

As many of you as were baptized into Christ
have clothed yourselves with Christ.
There is no longer Jew or Greek,
there is no longer slave or free,
there is no longer male and female;
for all of you are one in Christ Jesus.

Galatians 3:27-28

Or

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 him 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

Or

But to all who received him,
who believed in his name,
he gave power to become children of God,
who were born, not of blood or of the will of the flesh
or of the will of man, but of God.

John 1:12-13

Or

I will establish my covenant between me and you,
and your offspring after you throughout their generations,
for an everlasting covenant,
to be God to you and to your offspring after you.

Genesis 17:7

Or

And if you belong to Christ,
then you are Abraham's offspring,
heirs according to the promise.

Galatians 3:29

Or

For the promise is for you, for your children,
and for all who are far away,
everyone whom the Lord our God calls to him.

Acts 2:39

The minister continues:

Baptism is the sign and seal of God's promises to this covenant people.
In baptism God promises by grace alone:
to forgive our sins;
to adopt us into the Body of Christ, the Church;
to send the Holy Spirit daily to renew and cleanse us;
and to resurrect us to eternal life.

This promise is made visible in the water of baptism.

Water is poured into the font at this time.

Water cleanses;
purifies;
refreshes;
sustains:
Jesus Christ is living water.

Through baptism Christ calls us to new obedience:
to love and trust God completely;
to forsake the evil of the world; and
to live a new and holy life.

Yet, when we fall into sin, we must not despair of God's mercy,
nor continue in sin,
for baptism is the sign and seal
of God's eternal covenant of grace with us.

PRESENTATION

An elder presents the adult candidates or the parents of children for baptism:

On behalf of the Board of Elders
I present (*using full names*)
[who bring their *child/children*]
to receive the sacrament of baptism.

PROFESSION OF FAITH

The minister addresses the parents or candidates:

Beloved of God,
you stand before us [having brought *this child/these children*]
to receive the sacrament of baptism.
I ask you, therefore, before God and Christ's church
to reject evil,
to profess your faith in Christ Jesus,
and to confess the faith of the church.
Do you renounce sin and the power of evil
in your life and in the world?

I renounce them.

Who is your Lord and Savior?

Jesus Christ is my Lord and Savior.

At the baptism of adults:

Will you be a faithful member of this congregation,
and through worship and service
seek to advance God's purposes here and throughout the world?

I will, and I ask God to help me.

At the baptism of infants or young children:

Do you promise
to instruct *this child/these children*
in the truth of God's word,
in the way of salvation through Jesus Christ;
to pray for *them*, to teach *them* to pray;
and to train *them* in Christ's way by your example,
through worship, and
in the nurture of the church?

I do, and I ask God to help me.

The congregation shall rise; the minister or elder addresses the members of the congregation:

Do you promise to love, encourage, and support
these brothers and sisters
by teaching the gospel of God's love,
by being an example of Christian faith and character, and
by giving the strong support of God's family
in fellowship, prayer, and service?

We do.

The congregation and the candidates (or their parents) join in affirming the faith in the words of the Apostles' Creed.

**I believe in God, the Father almighty, maker of heaven and earth;
I believe in Jesus Christ, his only Son, our Lord;
who was conceived by the Holy Ghost,
born of the Virgin Mary,
suffered under Pontius Pilate,
was crucified, dead, and buried.
He descended into hell.
The third day he rose again from the dead.
He ascended into heaven,
and sitteth on the right hand of God the Father almighty.
From thence he shall come to judge the quick and the dead.
I believe in the Holy Ghost,
the holy catholic Church,
the communion of saints,
the forgiveness of sins,
the resurrection of the body,
and the life everlasting. Amen.**

The congregation may be seated now or following the prayer.

PRAYER OF THANKSGIVING

The minister says:

The Lord be with you.
And also with you.
Let us give thanks to the Lord our God.
It is right to give our thanks and praise.

We give you thanks, O holy and gracious God,
for the gift of water.
In the beginning of creation your Spirit moved over the waters.
In the waters of the flood you destroyed evil.
You led the children of Israel through the sea

into the freedom of the promised land.
In the river Jordan, John baptized our Lord
and your Spirit anointed him.
By his death and resurrection Jesus Christ, the Living Water,
frees us from sin and death and opens the way to life everlasting.

We thank you, O God, for the gift of baptism.
In this water you confirm to us
that we are buried with Christ in his death,
raised to share in his resurrection,
and are being renewed by the Holy Spirit.

Pour out on us your Holy Spirit,
so that those here baptized may be washed clean and receive new life.
To you be all honor and glory, dominion and power,
now and forever, through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

THE BAPTISMAL COVENANT

*The baptismal covenant shall be repeated for each person receiving baptism.
At the baptism of children, the minister may ask the parents of each child:*

What is the name of this child?

*The parents shall give the Christian name.
The minister may hold infants or small children, addressing each:*

*N (use Christian name; omit surname),
For you Jesus Christ came into the world;
for you he died and for you he conquered death;
All this he did for you, little one,
though you know nothing of it as yet.
We love because God first loved us.*

*Using Christian name/s, omitting surname, the minister shall either immerse
or pour or sprinkle water visibly and generously at the declaration of each
name of each person of the Trinity, saying:*

*N (use Christian name; omit surname),
I baptize you in the name of the Father,
and of the Son,
and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.*

*The minister may place a hand on the person's head and may mark on the
forehead the sign of the cross, saying to each:*

*N (use Christian name; omit surname), child of the covenant
in baptism, you are sealed by the Holy Spirit
and marked as Christ's own forever. Amen.*

DECLARATION, BLESSING, AND WELCOME

When all have been baptized, the minister may make the following declaration:

In the name of the Lord Jesus Christ,
the only King and Head of the Church,
this child/these children of God *is/are* now
received into the visible membership of the holy catholic Church,
engaged to confess the faith of Christ, and
to be God's faithful servant/s until life's end.

The minister shall offer the following prayer:

Let us pray.

Gracious God,
we thank you that you cleanse and renew
these your children through your grace alone.
Bless and strengthen *them* daily
with the gift of your Holy Spirit;
unfold to *them* the riches of your love,
deepening *their* faith,
keeping *them* from the power of evil
and enabling *them* to live a holy and blameless life
until your kingdom comes.

At the baptism of children:

Look with kindness upon these parents.
Let them ever rejoice in the gift you have given them.
Grant them the presence of your Holy Spirit
that they may bring up *these children*
to know you, to love you, and to serve you. **Amen.**

The congregation shall stand.

Welcome our new brothers and sisters in Christ.

**Joyfully we receive you into the body of Christ.
Join with us as we give witness in the world to the good news,
for we are all one in Christ Jesus.
Alleluia.**

The following blessing may be said or sung by the congregation while the
elders may greet the baptismal group:

**The Lord bless you and keep you;
the Lord make his face to shine upon you,
and be gracious to you;
the Lord lift up his countenance upon you,
and give you peace. Amen.**

Numbers 6:24-26