CELEBRATING THE BAPTISMAL COVENANT: A COMBINED ORDER FOR BAPTISM, PROFESSION OF FAITH, AND REAFFIRMATION OF FAITH

In the Reformed Church in America, the board of elders considers requests for baptism and receives people into the life and mission of the congregation (Book of Church Order, Chapter 1, Part I, Article 5, Secs. 1 and 2). Reception of confessing members is based on a candidate’s profession of faith, a reaffirmation of such a profession, or a previous profession in another Christian congregation (BCO, Chapter 1, Part I, Article 5, Sec. 2b). While there are various orders for baptism for different members of the covenantal community, there is only one sacrament of baptism.

This order is anchored in and builds upon the RCA Order for the Sacrament of Baptism. The order integrates the varied components of receiving confessing members into a congregation: those persons seeking adult baptism, those baptized as infants and making initial profession of faith, those reaffirming faith, and those transferring from another Christian church. The order also provides for the baptism of children. For the purposes of this liturgy, the term “parent” refers to parents or guardians.

Part I of this order may be used by the elders. Part II is for use in celebration with the congregation.

PART I: WITH THE ELDERS

At the meeting of the elders, the presiding minister of Word and sacrament or the presiding elder presents each person by name. The promises of God may then be spoken as found in one or more of these passages of Scripture: John 1:12-13; Acts 2:39; Galatians 3:27-28; Ephesians 2:10; Ephesians 4:4-6; Romans 6:3-4; Romans 10:9-11; 1 Corinthians 12:2-13, 27; 1 Peter 2:9.

This or a similar prayer may be offered:

O Lord, you have loved us first,
you call us by name,
you bless us with your presence, and
you lead us into your future.

We are grateful for your promises to us, and
we ask you to empower these disciples
as they make their promises to you,
that they may walk in your grace and
faithfully live for you all their days.

Through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

FAITH SHARING

The elders may engage in a conversation with the people concerning their acceptance of the Christian faith and the sincerity of their desire to live as confessing members of the congregation. This conversation may be guided by the following questions. If personal credos (written faith statements) have been prepared, they may be presented at this time.

THE QUESTIONS

The minister or presiding elder may ask the following questions:

Friends in Christ, whatever our journey to this point
we remember that in baptism
God claims us and
seals us to show that we belong to Jesus Christ;
God forgives us and frees us from sin and death;
God unites us to Jesus in his death and resurrection; makes us members of the church, the body of Christ; and empowers us by the Spirit to join Christ’s mission in the world.

You have come now before God and the church to profess your faith in Christ.

The following questions are written for unison response. If individual responses are desired, the minister or presiding elder may ask all of the questions, and then address each person, asking, “What is your response?” All persons seeking membership or requesting baptism are asked these questions.

Do you believe in one God: Father, Son, and Holy Spirit; and do you confess Jesus Christ as your Savior and Lord?

I do.

Do you accept the Scriptures of the Old and New Testaments as the only rule for faith and life?

I do.

Do you acknowledge that you are a sinner, forgiven only through the death and resurrection of Christ on your behalf?

I do.

Do you, relying on the grace of God, promise to confess Christ publicly before others, to serve Christ daily, and to walk in Jesus’ way?

I do.

Do you promise to exhibit the joy of new life in Christ; to share fully in the life of the church; to be faithful in worship and service; and to offer your prayers and gifts?

I do.

Do you promise to accept the spiritual guidance of the church; to walk in a spirit of Christian love with this congregation; and to seek those things which make for unity, purity, and peace?

I do.

BLESSING

Be assured that as you declare your faith, God will be faithful to strengthen you, and to renew you by the Holy Spirit, that you may grow in grace and knowledge, and may keep your promises faithfully all your days.

The meeting shall conclude with prayer and may include all joining in the Lord’s Prayer.
PART II: BEFORE THE CONGREGATION

The public celebration of baptism, profession of faith, reaffirmation of faith, or reception from another congregation is ordinarily celebrated during worship on the Lord’s Day. It is appropriately celebrated following the reading and proclamation of the Word.

The congregation is encouraged to make generous, visible, audible use of water throughout this liturgy where appropriate.

If the liturgical practice of the congregation includes use of a paschal candle, it is lighted before the service begins.

PREPARATION

The minister addresses the congregation from the font:

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

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

And/or John 1:12-13; Acts 2:39; Galatians 3:27-28; Ephesians 2:10; Romans 6:3-4;
Romans 10:9-11; 1 Corinthians 12:2-13, 27; 1 Peter 2:9

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 may be 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 shall present the candidates using the following statements as appropriate.

The elders of (name of congregation) have welcomed these persons who appeared before them and made profession of their Christian faith. We ask them now to declare their faith before God and Christ’s church, that we may rejoice together and welcome them as brothers and sisters in Christ.

The presider is encouraged to address the congregation at this point in her/his own words, inviting them to witness and to participate in the following celebration as a way to remember their own baptisms, to renew their commitment to Jesus, to pray for the Holy Spirit moving in their lives, and to follow Christ in mission in the world.

Candidates shall come forward as their names are read. The following introductions may be used as appropriate:

A. Baptized, professing members being received from another congregation:

NN/s is/are received from (church name and location).

B. Baptized and professing members reaffirming their faith:

NN/s (using full name/s) come/s before us to publicly reaffirm her/his/their faith.

C. Previously baptized members of a Christian church making profession of faith:

NN/s (using full name/s) has/have been baptized into the body of Christ. In making public profession of faith she/he/they affirm/s the meaning of her/his/their baptism.

D. Profession of faith and sacrament of baptism:

NN/s (using full name/s) come/s before us to make public profession of her/his/their faith and to receive the sacrament of baptism.

E. Children presented for the sacrament of baptism:

NN/s (using full name/s) come/s before us to present her/his/their daughter(s)/son(s), NN/s (using full name/s), to receive the sacrament of baptism.

PROFESSION OF FAITH

The minister addresses the candidates and, if children are being baptized, parents:

Beloved of God,
I ask you 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.

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.

If children are being baptized the parents are asked:

Do you promise
to instruct these children/this child
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 is asked to rise in order to make their promises. 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 minister or elder addresses the candidates:

Do you promise
to accept the spiritual guidance of the church,
to walk in a spirit of Christian love with this congregation, and
to seek those things that make for unity, purity, and peace?

I do.

The congregation and the candidates shall join in confessing the faith in the words of the Apostles’ Creed. The questions may be omitted.
Do you believe in God the Father?

I believe in God, the Father almighty, creator of heaven and earth.

Do you believe in Jesus Christ, the Son of God?

I believe in Jesus Christ, God’s only Son, our Lord, who was conceived by the Holy Spirit, born of the Virgin Mary, suffered under Pontius Pilate, was crucified, died, and was buried; he descended to the dead. On the third day he rose again; he ascended into heaven, he is seated at the right hand of the Father, and he will come to judge the living and the dead.

Do you believe in God the Holy Spirit?

I believe in the Holy Spirit, 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. If a candidate or candidates are to be baptized, the minister continues. Otherwise proceed to “The Baptismal Covenant.”

PRAYER OF THANKSGIVING

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, forgives us, 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,
are being renewed by power of the Holy Spirit, and
united to Christ in mission.

The minister may touch the water.

Send your Holy Spirit, we pray,
on these here baptized (minister may prefer to use the names of the candidates),
that this water may be a spring gushing up to eternal life.
Wash away their sin,
raise them to new life, and
graft them to the body of Christ.

Pour out your Holy Spirit upon them, that they may have
wisdom to discern their gifts,
strength to obey your will,
and joy in answering your call.

To you, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, One God,
be all praise, honor, and glory, now and forever. Amen.

THE BAPTISMAL COVENANT

The following sections—both words and actions—are to be used as appropriate:

A. Baptized, professing members being received from another congregation:

Standing at the font the minister addresses the person professing faith. If the person is able, she or he
is invited to kneel. The candidate may touch the water before kneeling.

The minister may mark the sign of the cross on the forehead with a gesture or using oil, saying to
each:

N (Christian name only, no surname), remember that you are baptized.
You are sealed by the Holy Spirit,
marked as God’s own forever, and
called to follow Christ in mission.

The minister continues by laying hands on the head of each candidate, offering one of the following
prayers of blessing.

Defend, O Lord, this your servant N (Christian name only, no surname)
with your heavenly grace,
that he/she may continue yours forever, and
daily increase in your Spirit more and more,
until he/she comes to your eternal kingdom;
through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

Or

O Lord, stir up in N (Christian name only, no surname)
the gift of your Holy Spirit,
the Spirit of wisdom and understanding,
the Spirit of counsel and might,
the Spirit of knowledge and the fear of the Lord,
the Spirit of joy in your presence,
both now and forever. Amen.
Or

Father in heaven, for Jesus’ sake,
stir up in N (Christian name only, no surname)
the gift of your Holy Spirit.
Confirm her/his faith,
Guide her/his life,
Empower her/his serving,
Give her/him patience in suffering,
And bring her/him to everlasting life,
Through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

B. Baptized and professing members reaffirming their faith:

Standing at the font the minister addresses the person professing faith. If the person is able, she or he is invited to kneel. The candidate may touch the water before kneeling.

The minister may mark the sign of the cross on the forehead with a gesture or using oil saying to each:

N (Christian name only, no surname), remember that you are baptized.
You are sealed by the Holy Spirit,
marked as God’s own forever, and
called to follow Christ in mission.

The minister continues by laying hands on the head of each candidate, offering a prayer of blessing.
(Use one of the prayers of blessing offered above.)

C. Previously baptized members of a Christian church making profession of faith:

Standing at the font the minister addresses the person professing faith. If the person is able, she or he is invited to kneel. The candidate may touch the water before kneeling.

The minister may mark the sign of the cross on the forehead with a gesture or using oil saying to each:

N (Christian name only, no surname), remember that you are baptized.
You are sealed by the Holy Spirit,
marked as God’s own forever, and
called to follow Christ in mission.

The minister continues by laying hands on the head of each candidate, offering a prayer of blessing.
(Use one of the prayers of blessing offered above.)

D. Profession of faith and sacrament of baptism:

The baptismal covenant shall be repeated for each person receiving baptism.

Standing at the font the minister addresses the person professing faith. If the person is able, she or he is invited to kneel.

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

N (Christian name only, no surname), I baptize you
in the name of the Father,
and of the Son,

The minister may mark the sign of the cross on the forehead with a gesture or using oil, saying to each:

_N (Christian name only, no surname),_
in baptism, you are sealed by the Holy Spirit,
marked as Christ’s own forever, and
called to follow Christ in mission. Amen.

The minister continues by laying hands on the head of each candidate, offering a prayer of blessing. (Use one of the prayers of blessing offered above.)

E. Children presented for the sacrament of baptism:

The baptismal covenant shall be repeated for each person receiving baptism.

If children are to receive baptism, 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 (Christian name only, no surname),_
for you Jesus came into the world;
for you he died and 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/s, the minister shall immerse, pour, or sprinkle water visibly and generously at the declaration of each name of the person of the Trinity, saying:

_N (Christian name only, no surname), I baptize you_
in the name of the Father,
and of the Son,

The minister may mark the sign of the cross on the forehead with a gesture or using oil, saying to each:

_N (Christian name only, no surname), child of the covenant,_
in baptism, you are sealed by the Holy Spirit,
marked as God’s own forever, and
called to follow Christ in mission. Amen.

The minister may offer this or a similar prayer:

Gracious Lord,
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.

DECLARATION

The minister shall make the following declaration concerning those just baptized (D and E). If no one has been baptized, proceed to “Welcome.”

In the name of the Lord Jesus Christ, the only King and Head of the Church, these sisters and brothers are now received into the visible membership of the holy catholic Church, engaged to confess Christ and to be God’s faithful servant/s until life’s end.

WELCOME

The minister invites the congregation to stand in order to welcome all new members (A, B, C, D, and E):

By the Holy Spirit we who believe and are baptized receive a ministry to witness to Jesus as Savior and Lord, and to love and serve those with whom we live and work. We are ambassadors for Christ, who reconciles and makes whole. We are the salt of the earth; we are the light of the world.

The minister says:

Welcome our brothers and sisters in Christ.

An appropriate gesture of welcome or the following words may be used:

We welcome you into the body of Christ and into the mission we share. Join us in giving thanks and praise to God, And in bearing God’s creative and redeeming Word to all the world.