Rites for Affirming Baptism

With Simple Words and Acts

At Woodland Hills United Church of Christ, Woodland Hills, California, the pastor often follows sermons with a simple invitation to the congregation to reaffirm their baptism. This invites persons to integrate the meaning of their baptism into their daily lives.

A hymn may be sung as people come forward. She suggested using words such as the following she used after a sermon on the baptism of Jesus (Luke 3:7–22):

“I invite you to come forward to this baptismal font. Place your hands in the water. Touch your forehead or face with the water of life—remembering that you belong to God and you are beloved.”

A similar invitation sometimes happens at the close of a service. The font is close to the door where people leave the worship space. Words, such as the following, are then offered: “I invite you to remember your baptism as you go into the world. Place your hands in the water of life as you leave this place. Remember that you belong to God and you are beloved. Leave with confidence and compassion.”

A simple idea for baptismal renewal is to invite the congregation into greater participation in the baptism of others. Before or during a service of baptism say words such as these to the congregation, “Let us remember with joy our baptism, as we celebrate this sacrament.”

An Opening Rite around a Baptismal Basin or Font

The following prayer begins where the Christian traditionally begins—at our baptism. It may function both as a Call to Worship and a time of affirming baptism. Persons are invited to gather around a baptismal basin, font, or pool. Before beginning, the leader dips a hand deep into the water and lifts it high so that, as it falls again, it splashes.

Invitation to the Water

One:  
Come, come to the water.  
Come, you who are thirsty.  
Come to the water.  
For the mighty acts of God are known to us through water.  
Water, that primordial pool of creation over which the Spirit hovered.  
Water, that cleansed the whole earth for new beginnings, new growth.  
Water, that divided so slaves could walk to freedom on dry ground.  
Water, our bath, our tomb, and our womb.  
Water, by which we are adopted as daughters and sons of the Most High.  
Come to the water and give thanks to God whose mighty acts are known to through water.

(As the congregation comes to the water, they or the choir may sing a hymn such as “Wade in the Water” or “Jesus Loves Me,” or one such as “Take Me to the Water,” #322, TNCH. “Pour Out Your Spirit” from the Sing Prayer, Sing Praise! songbook might also be used. During the following prayer and after, the congregation continues humming the tune.)

And so we pray:
Blessed are you God, who divides the waters so plants and beasts of sea and sky and plain could thrive, who draws us from the water in birth and rebirth, who claims us with a love from which nothing can separate us. Blessed are you, Holy One.

Come now, God, and send your Spirit among us, trouble for us this water of memory and imagination. Send your Spirit to enliven our praise, to strengthen our hands, to guide us in work and play, in service and love, to assure us once more and again of your love.

And all God’s people say: Amen.

Sisters and brothers, mark again yourselves with water, to remember your baptism, to know once again that you are claimed by God forever. There is no reason any longer to be afraid. The Spirit moves among us. Let us worship and praise God!

(The leader touches the water and splashes self and encourages the people to do the same. Another joyous song is sung as people move to their places for worship to continue.)

Confirmation and a Congregation’s Remembering and Affirming Baptism

Rather than a distinctive confirmation ritual, this celebration may be used by young people who want to declare a deepening of their faith. It may also be used by other youth and adults or by the entire congregation to reaffirm their baptism.

In the life of a congregation, such an affirmation is especially appropriate for the first Sunday after Epiphany/Baptism of Jesus, first Sundays of the New Year, first Sunday following Easter, or on Pentecost Sunday. The liturgy is adapted from “Service of Water” found in the “Order for the Great Vigil of Easter” found in Book of Worship. If the service is to include baptisms as well as affirmations of baptism, note references to Book of Worship (pages 129–44).

The liturgy works well immediately following a sermon and before Holy Communion.

Invitation

One: Dear friends, on this day of re-creation we recall all God’s saving acts through water. We remember Christ’s baptism, and we claim and remember our own.

People: We gather at this font of living water to celebrate God’s ever-flowing redeeming grace. We long to draw ever deeper from the well of God’s mercy.

We celebrate the Spirit with us—refreshing, renewing, making us one.
Affirmation of Faith

(All who are able may stand. The following traditional questions or a full creed or statement of faith may be used. The questions are addressed to the entire congregation.)

One: Do you reaffirm your renunciation of evil and renew your commitment to Jesus Christ?

People: I do.

One: Do you believe in God?

People: I believe in God, the creator of heaven and earth.

One: Do you believe in Jesus Christ?

People: I believe in Jesus Christ, the only one begotten of God before all worlds.

One: Do you believe in the Holy Spirit?

People: I believe in God, the Holy Spirit.

One: Will you continue in the apostles’ teaching and community, in the breaking of bread, and in prayer?

People: I will, with God’s help.

One: Let us pray.

People: In this and all we do, keep us faithful to our Savior Jesus Christ, forever and ever. Amen.

Blessing of Water

One: Let us pray:

We thank you, God, for the gift of creation called forth by your saving Word. Before the world had shape and form, your Spirit moved over the waters. Out of the waters of the deep, you formed the firmament and brought forth the earth to sustain all life. In the time of Noah you washed the earth with the waters of the flood, and your ark of salvation bore a new beginning. In the time of Moses, Aaron, and Miriam, your people Israel passed through the Red Sea waters from slavery to freedom and crossed the flowing Jordan to enter the promised land. In the fullness of time you sent Jesus Christ who was nurtured in the water of Mary’s womb. Jesus was baptized by John in the water of the Jordan, became living water to a woman at the Samaritan well, washed the feet of the disciples, and sent them forth to baptize all nations by water and the Holy Spirit.
One: Bless by your Holy Spirit, gracious God, this water that by it we may be reminded of our baptism into Jesus Christ and that by the power of your Holy Spirit we may be kept faithful until you receive us at last in your eternal home.

People: Glory to you, eternal God, the one who was and is, and shall always be, world without end. Amen.

(If there are candidates for baptism, follow the “Act of Baptism” through the “Prayer for the Baptized” found in Book of Worship, pages 143–44.)

The Congregation Remembers Baptism

One: Eternal God, you have come to us in Jesus Christ, given us a new birth by water and the Holy Spirit, and forgiven all our sins, bless us now with the grace we need to fulfill what we have promised. Keep us faithful to our Savior Jesus Christ, forever and ever. Amen.

(If used for a confirmation liturgy, young people may be invited forward and introduced at this time. Then one by one, they may reach into the basin and put water on their forehead as the pastor/sponsor says the following: “Remember your baptism and be thankful.” Each confirmand responds: “Amen.”)

Following this act of remembering, individual blessings may be offered for each young person. Pastors, parents, friends, or sponsors might rest their hands on the confirmand’s head as a blessing is offered: “By the gift of your Spirit, O God, strengthen and hold (name.) Bless him/her that he/she may be faithful all his/her life. Amen.” The entire congregation may then be invited to remember their own baptisms using the following procedure.

(If used when a congregation remembers their baptisms, pastors or liturgists may sprinkle the congregation with water from the baptismal font or a basin of water. Sometimes sprigs of an evergreen tree are used. As water is sprinkled, the liturgist uses words such as: “Remember your baptism and be thankful.” Persons respond: “Amen.” Or the congregation may be invited to come forward, as they are able, to dip their fingers into the water, put water on their forehead, or bless each other with water from the font and then return. They are invited forward with the words: “Remember your baptism and be thankful. The people respond: “Amen.” A hymn of celebration may follow.)