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## CELEBRATING HOLY BAPTISM

The service of Holy Baptism in the *Lutheran Book of Worship* assists congregations in enlarging and enhancing the place of Baptism in the faith and life of each member. The sacrament is no mere appendage to the service nor an intrusion into it but is itself the focus of the service. The service of Holy Baptism has several parts which together constitute the fullness of the sacrament of initiation into the community of faith: presentation, thanksgiving, renunciation, profession of faith, baptism with water, laying on of hands and signation, and welcome into the congregation. To understand the intention of this rich celebration one must understand the broad outlines of the development of baptismal practice.

### THE DEVELOPMENT OF BAPTISMAL PRACTICE

After his sermon on Pentecost St. Peter called for repentance and faith in Jesus Christ.<sup>1</sup> He urged his hearers to accept Baptism and assured them that they would receive the gift of the Holy Spirit. These moments—proclamation, repentance and faith, Baptism, life in the Spirit—were fundamental to the emerging pattern created by the apostles and their successors for the incorporation of converts into Christ and his people, the church. The inquirer passed through an extensive period of moral, biblical, and theological instruction. Repentance and

conversion were the goal of this preparatory period, called the catechumenate. The instruction was reinforced by exorcism and by the prayers of the church.

In the Western church the final, more intensive preparation for Baptism most commonly occurred during the weeks before Easter. At the vigil of Easter the candidates renounced the forces arrayed against God and themselves, and professed the faith of the church. Their three-fold confession of God—Father, Son, and Holy Spirit—is the antecedent of the baptismal creed, called the Apostles' Creed. Baptism, even if not always by immersion, suggested the biblical images of the Exodus, passing through the sea, cleansing, and new birth.

An integral part of the baptismal rite was the laying on of hands frequently associated with chrismation (anointing with oil). The laying on of hands is the ritual expression of the coming of the Holy Spirit so prominent in the accounts of new Christians in the book of Acts. The anointing linked the candidate with Christ, the Anointed One, in the power of the Holy Spirit.<sup>2</sup> It is not certain whether the anointing was part of the rite from the beginning, but it became customary at one or more points in the baptismal liturgy.

The celebration of Baptism culminated in the Holy Communion, when, for the first time, the newly baptized shared in the holy meal of God's people.

This sacramental pattern of incorporation into the body of Christ—catechumenate, Baptism, confirmation, Eucharist—was maintained in the Western church for nearly a thousand years. Its coincidence with the Easter celebration of Jesus' death and resurrection seemed particularly appropriate. The Exodus of the Israelites was seen as prefiguring Baptism: Easter is the church's Passover. Jesus himself links his death at Passover to Baptism: "I have a baptism to be baptized with. . . ."<sup>3</sup>

Moreover, Baptism was viewed not only as sharing in God's deliverance of his people; it was seen also as anticipation of the future consummation. Baptism was the Spirit's seal in preparation for that day,<sup>4</sup> and the Eucharist was understood as anticipation of the victory banquet of the Lamb to be shared by all his saints. Easter, as the dramatic focus of all these themes—creation, fall, redemption; death, resurrection, consummation—was the ideal time to immerse the Christian in God's saving work, to make these new children of God even now beneficiaries of God's gifts and assure them of participation in the final and complete fulfillment of God's promises.

In territories where Christianity had become established, the Baptism of converts gradually gave way to the Baptism of infants. Though Baptism of

infants born within the Christian fellowship had been seen as the exceptional application of the church's ritual of initiation, it came to be regarded as the normal practice and the Baptism of converts became the exception. The result was that the pattern of entrance was altered: Baptism, catechumenate, Eucharist.

Another change occurred in the role of the bishop (the one who presided over the church in a given area). He had been the usual minister of Baptism, but the increasing size of the church eventually made that impossible. Thus the presbyters (priests/pastors) were given authority to baptize. In those places where the Roman liturgy was in use, however, the laying on of hands and anointing remained the special duty of the bishop, who retained this much of a connection with the Baptism of everyone in his diocese. As a result, parts of an earlier baptismal rite became separated by several years and a new pattern emerged: Baptism in infancy, confirmation later. Baptism and first communion became separated because of practical considerations and also because the developing doctrine of transubstantiation led Western Christians to question the propriety of infant communion (although the practice was retained in the Eastern churches).

In the Middle Ages, then, both the increasing tendency toward infant Baptism and a eucharistic discipline appropriate to the doctrine of transubstantiation broke the original ritual unity of Christian initiation. Baptism, confirmation (laying on of hands), and first communion became separated events, and the pattern prevailed to modern times.

The Lutheran churches gradually settled into the medieval pattern except where converts were concerned. The laying on of hands in confirmation was seldom understood sacramentally, however, since the Holy Spirit was understood to be given in Baptism although an appropriate gesture was missing. But confirmation was still understood as the gateway to first communion. These latter two events generally came about the time of puberty, and were preceded by intensive catechetical training.

The needs of the Lutheran churches in North America in the twentieth century are different from those in the sixteenth century. The reformers believed that their people were surfeited with symbols and ceremony. Indeed Luther thought that the central action of Baptism was clouded by secondary ceremonies, most of which he discarded in his second revision of the baptismal rite in 1526.<sup>5</sup> He did, however, retain his earlier *Sintflutgebet* (Flood Prayer) with its rich biblical evocations.<sup>6</sup> A shorter ritual helps to focus attention on the main outline of the rite, but following the Reformation tendency, the Lutheran rite was diminished during succeeding centuries. The rite had become too barren. A richer ceremonial was

needed to demonstrate the biblical, theological, and liturgical importance of Baptism.

### TOWARD A MORE RESPONSIBLE PRACTICE

As the church becomes less of a cultural influence, an increasing number of adults are among the baptismal candidates. It can no longer be assumed that practically everyone is baptized in infancy. The mobility of the population and the pluralistic nature of American Christianity have been felt in the lessening of denominational loyalties. As Christians grow in their sense of the nature of the church, they grow in sensitivity to the problem of indiscriminate Baptism of infants. They do not question infant Baptism as such, for it is a treasured symbol of grace in our midst, but many favor a more responsible practice.<sup>7</sup>

The *Lutheran Book of Worship* seeks to set forth the church's fullest, richest baptismal theology. It seeks to overcome a questionable dichotomy between the Baptism of infants and the Baptism of adults by providing one baptismal liturgy for use with candidates of all ages. Elements which were separated during the Middle Ages are reunited in order to restore a unified rite of initiation.

### BAPTISM FESTIVALS

In order to unfold the centrality of Baptism for the entire life in Christ and its fundamental importance in the church and its connection with the fellowship of the Lord's Table, congregations should consider designating certain Sundays during the year for the celebration of Holy Baptism. The rhythm of the congregation's work will suggest which days should be chosen as baptismal festivals, although for historical and theological reasons some days are especially appropriate. Easter Eve and Pentecost are the ancient days for Baptism in the Western church. If the Easter Vigil is not celebrated, Easter Day or the Second Sunday of Easter may be an alternate. The Third Sunday in Advent, which focuses on the ministry of John the Baptist; the Baptism of Our Lord (the First Sunday after the Epiphany); and All Saints' Day (or All Saints' Sunday) also commend themselves. In the course of a year four or five festivals should suffice in most parishes and may result in a cross-section of adults, children and infants as candidates.

Baptismal festivals should heighten the celebration since Baptism then becomes a focus of the lessons, hymns, and sermon. Planning must be done with great care, according to the service the dignity it deserves. Announcing the schedule in advance will not only facilitate planning, but will enable the programs of education, preaching, instruction, and counseling to be coordinated with the baptismal days.

Congregations should proceed with great sensitivity to the anxieties such a program may initially arouse. Lutheran parents generally seek Baptism soon after their children are born, and this eagerness for the sacrament should not be diminished. Continued teaching and pre-baptismal counseling which emphasize Baptism as the entrance into the community of God's people rather than insurance against damnation are necessary in this reorientation.<sup>8</sup>

The baptismal schedule should avoid both too great a frequency, which would discourage proper preparation, and too infrequent a celebration, which might unduly delay the Baptism of infants and more mature candidates who desire admission to Holy Communion.

## TIME AND PLACE

**T**he liturgy of Holy Baptism is not just for the candidates themselves. It is also for those who have been baptized and who now pray for those about to join their company. It is an act of worship by the entire assembly, and the celebration of Baptism should revitalize all who participate in it.

The baptismal liturgy is normally celebrated at the regular service of the congregation. Usually this will mean Sunday morning, since Baptism is an act of the whole church. When there is a Baptism, the assembled fellowship commits itself to the new member and receives the new member into its midst. They are also reminded of their own Baptism and its seminal function in the life of the congregation. All this is blunted if the congregation is absent. Where people truly understand and appreciate Baptism, they will eagerly share in the coming of life and salvation to others. When Baptism does not take place at the regular Sunday service, the congregation might still be invited and at least a few representatives could be present.

Placing the Paschal candle near the font after the ceremonies of Easter witnesses to the connection between Jesus' death and resurrection and baptismal death and resurrection. It further connects subsequent baptis-

mal festivals with the Easter Vigil. Lighting the Paschal candle for baptisms testifies further to the paschal character of Baptism. Banners and other pieces of art may be placed near the font to heighten the festive character of the sacrament.

### SPONSORS

Each candidate, child or adult, should be presented for Baptism by one or more adult sponsors who are practicing Christians, mature in faith and piety. The sponsor represents in a specific way the congregation's desire to nurture those about to be born into the Christian family. Although the mobility of the population can create difficulties for the faithful discharge of the sponsor's responsibilities, especially where young children are concerned, this office continues to commend itself both symbolically and practically.

The primary sponsors of children are their parents, but additional sponsors may be chosen. They should be encouraged to remain close to the family of the child, just as the congregation should maintain close ties with baptized children. Parents obviously will exercise primary responsibility in the nurture of their children by the quality of family relationships, the development of a vital devotional life, and by direct teaching of God's word. But the sponsor can support the parents and cooperate in the task, giving it a dimension broader than the individual family. Because of their mutual responsibility, both parents and sponsors should participate in the baptismal liturgy.

Sponsors are not only for young children. When one enters the church, one passes from one community to another, from one world to another. Mature Christians can be helpful in that transition and can help integrate the new members into the various dimensions of the life of the parish. Too often new members are, in effect, deserted after being received into the congregation. Sponsors can help build a lifelong relationship that will benefit the candidate, the sponsors, and the congregation as a whole. Candidates may choose sponsors themselves or they may ask the congregation to make the choice.

### THE LITURGY OF HOLY BAPTISM

Normally, Baptism is celebrated within the service of Holy Communion. On Sundays for which the color is green, the appointed propers for Baptism (Prayer of the Day, Psalm, Lessons) would

be used. On other Sundays, even if they are designated as baptismal festivals (e.g. Baptism of our Lord, Pentecost, All Saints), the propers of the Sunday are used. On such days the Prayer of the Day for Holy Baptism might be said after the Prayer of the Day for the Sunday as a "memorial collect"<sup>9</sup> or it might be used when the procession reaches the font, just before the address as a "station collect."<sup>10</sup>

The font should be carefully prepared before the service. If the water is not circulating in the font, it should be in a ewer, ready to be poured into the font at the Thanksgiving. If the font has a cover, it should be removed. Napkins or towels should be laid either on the edge of the font or on a small table or shelf nearby, together with the shell, the oil, and the baptismal candles (if they are to be used).

#### HOLY BAPTISM: THE PRESENTATION AND ADDRESS

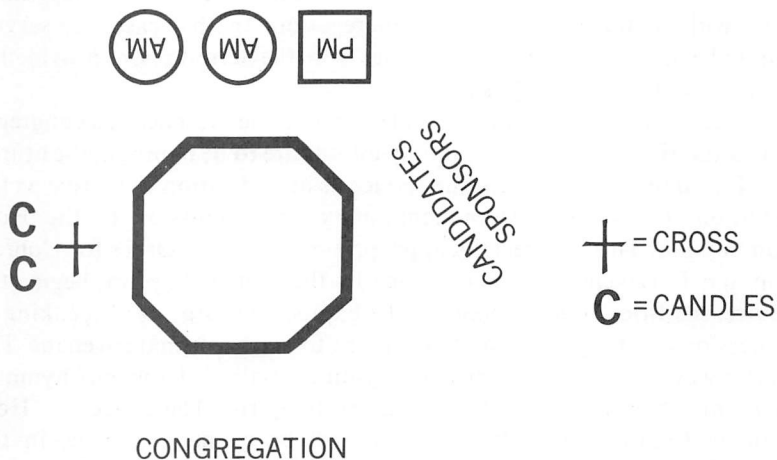
On rare occasions, it may be necessary to use the baptismal liturgy alone as a separate service, as when a Baptism is done without the presence of a congregation. In that case, the service should begin with one or more readings from the Scriptures, as provided in the propers for Holy Baptism.

Normally, however, Baptism is celebrated in the presence of a congregation at the Holy Communion. If only infants are to be baptized, the liturgy for Holy Baptism may begin the service as an indication of its role as the initiation into the Christian community and admission to the Holy Communion. This is especially appropriate if the Brief Order for Confession and Forgiveness is usually done by the font. If Baptism begins the service, the Brief Order is omitted, the baptismal liturgy itself speaking of confession and forgiveness and our return to our baptismal covenant. The service would then begin: Entrance Hymn or Psalm (a baptismal hymn or psalm or a hymn of invocation of the Holy Spirit), The Grace . . . , Holy Baptism (omitting the Peace, which will be exchanged later, in the Eucharist), the Hymn of Praise (Glory to God in the highest or Worthy is Christ), Prayer of the Day, and the rest of the liturgy of the Word and of the Eucharist.

If, however, there are candidates besides infants or other than infants, Holy Baptism follows the sermon and the hymn of the day, since the older candidates can participate in the Liturgy of the Word and listen to the lessons and sermon in preparation for their Baptism. When this is done, the creed is not said after the hymn since it is part of the baptismal liturgy and

the use of two creeds in the service (even if they were different—Nicene and Apostles’) would be an unnecessary duplication.

The Hymn of the Day becomes in effect a processional hymn as the baptismal group goes to the font. It may be a formal procession led by cross (and candles), especially if the font is some distance from the altar, or the assembling at the font may take place more informally. When the congregation is not large and where there is sufficient space in the baptismal area, the congregation, especially children, should join the baptismal group around the font. The congregation is more than an audience of spectators. The congregation represents the whole church of God into which the candidates are to be baptized. Even when the font is close to the altar, it is helpful to have the processional cross taken to the place of Baptism to add to the focus on the baptismal space. Those at the font should arrange themselves so that as much of the action as possible may be seen by the congregation.



#### AT THE BAPTISM

If the font is located so that it is not visible to the congregation, the first part of the baptismal liturgy may be conducted in an area of the chancel, and the ministers and the baptismal group would go to the font for the



Thanksgiving over the water (“Holy God, mighty Lord, gracious Father” — *LBW*, Min. Ed., p. 309 #9).

When the candidates, sponsors, parents, and ministers have assembled at the font, a minister, who may be an assisting minister, gives the opening statement about the nature of Baptism, focusing on the Easter dimension of rebirth and the gift of the Spirit, as well as the growth in grace of the baptized.<sup>11</sup>

Sponsors present each candidate—even adults—to the presiding minister for Baptism. As each candidate is presented, the Christian name(s) and the surname may both be used. Elsewhere in the rite, only the Christian names are used. Surnames are omitted because this is an entrance into a larger reality which transcends “family.” When infants are baptized, the presentation and responses may be said by one of the parents. It is more desirable for the parents rather than the sponsors to do this, since, because of the mobility of the population, the sponsors may not always be able to remain geographically close to the children. Those candidates who are of an age to answer for themselves acknowledge their desire to be baptized in response to the question, which is asked by the presiding minister rather than by an assisting minister. The presiding minister then lays the obligation of support on the sponsors (and parents). The promises here and elsewhere in the baptismal service are plural on the assumption that there will be several baptismal candidates at the stated baptismal festivals.

## HOLY BAPTISM: THE PRAYERS

If Holy Baptism is celebrated within the Holy Communion following the sermon and hymn of the day, the prayers of intercession are said at this point. They should follow the scope of the prayers in the liturgy of Holy Communion, for all these areas are the concern of the church, but the prayers must also contain special reference to those about to be baptized. The model prayer on page 188 of the Ministers Edition should not be used word for word every time. It is a guide to those who lead the prayers as they write their own specific prayers for each occasion.

If Holy Baptism is celebrated as a preparatory service to the Holy Communion, replacing the Brief Order for Confession and Forgiveness, the prayers of intercession are said in the usual place in the Eucharist after the sermon and hymn of the day. The creed, having been confessed earlier, is omitted.

If Baptism is celebrated as a separate service, the Prayer of the Day for the occasion of Holy Baptism (page 188) is said at this point instead of the prayers of intercession to keep the service brief.

The intercessions are led by an assisting minister.

### HOLY BAPTISM: THE THANKSGIVING

If the presentation and address have been made in the chancel area, a hymn or psalm is sung after the prayers as the ministers and the baptismal group go to the font.

At the font, the presiding minister begins the Thanksgiving for Baptism. The preface versicles omit the verse

Lift up your hearts:

*We lift them to the Lord,*

since ancient practice limited these lines to the Great Thanksgiving at the Eucharist, which was the most joyful act of praise. At other times, such as at Baptism or at the thanksgiving over the palms on Passion Sunday the preface was

The Lord be with you.

*And also with you.*

Let us give thanks to the Lord our God.

*It is right to give him thanks and praise.*

Otherwise, the preface versicles and the opening of the Thanksgiving as well as the structure of the prayer (moving from the Father to the Son to the Holy Spirit and concluding with a trinitarian doxology) are all designed to parallel the Eucharistic Prayer of Thanksgiving in the Holy Communion. The parallels underscore the importance of the Sacrament of Baptism.

If the font is not already filled with water (as in a font with a circulating system) and if it is not especially large (as in a font made for immersion), the font is filled with water poured from a ewer. This may be done just before the preface verses or it may be done by a server as the Thanksgiving for Baptism is said so that the sound and the sight of water being poured will enhance the words of the prayer.

The world that God created is the means of communion between himself and humanity. Because of sin, however, the creation is no longer of itself capable of sustaining that communion. The invocation of the Spirit in the Thanksgiving acknowledges that it is by the power of God's promise

that water can be the sign of the sacrament. As Luther says in the *Small Catechism*:

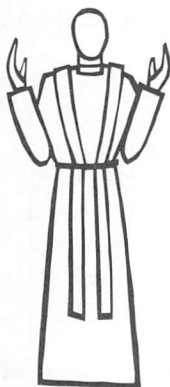
It is not the water that produces these effects, but the Word of God connected with the water, and our faith which relies on the Word of God connected with the water. For without the Word of God the water is merely water and no Baptism. But when connected with the Word of God it is a Baptism, that is, a gracious water of life and a washing of regeneration in the Holy Spirit, as St. Paul wrote to Titus (3:5-8). . . .<sup>12</sup>

And when Luther speaks of the Word of God he is speaking of what others have meant by the Holy Spirit—the dynamic, life-giving power of God.

The prayer of thanksgiving over the water uses the same materials Luther drew upon for the Flood Prayer in his own revision of the baptismal liturgy. This style of prayer has been somewhat unfamiliar to Lutherans and may seem to some to be “telling God what he already knows.” It is, however, rooted in Jewish prayers of thanksgiving, which regularly recount before God his acts of grace and love. One surely cannot limit prayers to what God is not aware of, for he knows our needs before we ask him.<sup>13</sup> Moreover, the prayers of the liturgy, like all the parts of worship, are not capable of a simple, schematic diagram of what is said to God and what is said to the congregation. Prayer and proclamation are not entirely distinct actions. In recounting before God his great acts of old, a congregation reminds itself again of the outline of sacred history and gives thanks for it at the same time, setting this occasion of Baptism in the large context of the biblical record of God’s creative acts with water and the Spirit and life.<sup>14</sup> In prayer we praise God and we renew our faith as we draw upon the bond God established with us in our Baptism.

The posture of the presiding minister for this prayer is the same as for the Eucharistic Prayer of Thanksgiving (Illustrations, p. 178). At the words in the prayer “baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit” it has been traditional for the presiding minister to trace a cross in the water with the hand suggesting the four directions of the compass from which the church is to make disciples of all nations.

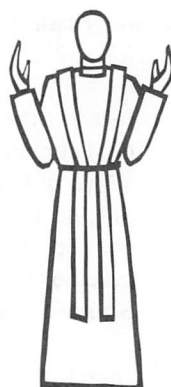
The minister of the sacrament should not be afraid to wet the hands in the baptismal water. Such contact with the baptismal element is as natural here as it is in the Eucharist in which the minister picks up the bread and holds the chalice during the words of institution. Putting one’s hand in the water is a way of making physical contact with the whole history of God’s



The Lord be with you.



Let us give thanks  
to the Lord our God.



Holy God, mighty Lord,  
gracious Father . . .

#### THE THANKSGIVING

work with water which is summarized in the prayer.

At the words “pour out your Holy Spirit,” the presiding minister spreads the hands over the font as the Spirit of God is invoked upon the water and thus upon all who are there baptized.



#### THE INVOCATION OF THE SPIRIT

The gesture recalls the laying on of hands at baptism and ordination, a traditional sign of the bestowal of the Spirit. To those who object that the Holy Spirit can be invoked upon people but not upon things, one can only

point to Genesis 1:2 when at creation the Spirit of God swept like a wind over the face of the water, and order, creation, and life were brought forth. Many pastors, however, would probably prefer to omit this gesture. The text of the prayer is careful to avoid making a direct relationship between the Holy Spirit and the water.

### HOLY BAPTISM: RENUNCIATION AND PROFESSION

**T**he renunciation and the profession of faith is led by the presiding minister.

It is a good idea to divide the renunciation (of Satan and all that that figure represents) into three questions to parallel the three articles of the creed:

Do you renounce all the forces of evil? *I do.*

Do you renounce the devil? *I do.*

Do you renounce all his empty promises? *I do.*

Evil is thus rejected in order to make room for the affirmation of God; they are the two sides of one action.<sup>15</sup> In the ancient church this was a dramatic time: the candidate, facing the west and the setting sun, renounced all the forces of darkness, and then turned toward the east and the rising sun (Son) and professed faith in God. Imaginative leaders of worship might be able to find ways of continuing in their use of the baptismal space this dramatic renunciation and profession.

The effect of the figure of the devil has been varied throughout Christian history. Just when it seems to be no longer necessary, indeed an archaic superstition, a new outbreak of violence (e.g. Nazism) or devil worship (e.g. the early 1970s) restores the relevance of the symbol.

The candidates, having rejected evil, the evil one, and all his empty promises, turn and profess the faith of the church as summarized in the ancient baptismal creed. This creed, contrary to an amusing old tradition,<sup>16</sup> was not composed by the apostles but is a summary of the apostolic teaching. The Latin text upon which the English translation is based first appeared in documents of the eighth century, but it is clearly related to texts of earlier origin.<sup>17</sup>

The rejection of evil and the profession of faith in the triune God is primarily the declaration of the candidates for Baptism. Especially when only infants are baptized, the entire congregation should join in the renunciation and profession, speaking for the whole church. When the candidates can speak for themselves, the words might better be said by

them alone. This is their time to renounce evil and to profess the Christian faith publicly and boldly.

At only one point in the *Lutheran Book of Worship* were any of the texts of the International Consultation on English texts altered. The newer translation of the Apostles' Creed has "He descended to the dead." It is a difficult line to interpret, some seeing it as an assertion that Jesus died, others understanding it to be the beginning of his proclamation of victory to the souls of the dead, others thinking that it has to do with Jesus' battle with Satan which guaranteed the deliverance of the saints. All of these ideas have to do with the dead, hence the translation "he descended to the dead."

Some Lutherans, however, see the loss of the word "hell" as a confessional issue, and on the basis of the *Formula of Concord*, Epitome, Article IX, "Christ's Descent into Hell," insist that the word be retained. Therefore in the *Lutheran Book of Worship* "he descended into hell" has been substituted for "he descended to the dead"; the latter version being listed as an alternate reading. But "he descended to the dead" is preferred because it is consistent with the wording used by other English-speaking Christians.

It may be that the alternate text will come to be regularly substituted for the traditional text. (In many places "catholic", an alternate reading provided by the *Service Book and Hymnal*, came to be substituted for "Christian" in the description of the church in the Apostles' and Nicene Creeds.) Pastors should teach their people to use the new text in its integrity and thus to explore the meaning of this obscure phrase.

## HOLY BAPTISM: THE WASHING

If there are many candidates, the presiding minister (or an assisting minister) may direct the congregation to sit down. Ordinarily, however, they should remain standing for the administration of the sacrament as a mark of respect for what is happening.

The presiding minister gives the book to an assisting minister or to a server to hold during the administration of the baptisms so that both hands will be free.

The presiding minister may ask the name of each person before each Baptism. In older liturgies this was a fixed part of the service: "How shall this child be named?" was the question in the *Service Book and Hymnal*. It was a remnant of the "christening," which was the giving of a Christian name. But since nearly all candidates now have been called by their names for weeks or even years before their Baptism, the liturgical question has lost

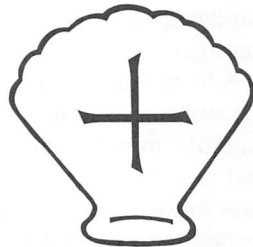
its point. The practical value remains, however, for the minister may need to be reminded of the name of the candidate being baptized. If there are several candidates being baptized, the minister should ask their names so that no mistakes be made at this central point of the baptismal liturgy. Getting the names right is more than a matter of courtesy here; as in ancient and biblical times people today attach great importance to the giving of names.<sup>18</sup> Only the Christian name(s), the name(s) given in Baptism and by which one is known to God, are used in the administration of Holy Baptism. Thus “Mary Elizabeth Ann is baptized . . .” and not “Mary Elizabeth Ann Johnson is baptized . . .” This is the most important use of the individual name in the whole liturgy (that is, in this whole body of the liturgy of the church). The giving of the “Christian name” and its use here reflects the death-resurrection motif of Baptism. The new name is a sign of the new birth and of the new life. This taking of a new name had more immediate significance in ancient times when people turned from paganism, embraced Christianity, and took a new name to show not just their new faith but their new life. The importance of the name nonetheless remains powerful still.

The presiding minister then baptizes each candidate. Two forms are suggested: pouring and immersion. Mere sprinkling—not to mention touching the candidate’s head with a damp finger—is undesirable and should be avoided. The amount of water used does not of course affect the validity of the sacrament, but an ample quantity of water should be used to show symbolically the washing of Baptism. Baptism by pouring has been the usual practice of Western Christians for many centuries. The minister may choose to use a baptismal shell to pour the water to insure the use of a generous quantity of water. Congregations near the sea might choose to use a sea shell (perhaps painted with a blue or a red cross.) The minister,



CONVEX SIDE

A BAPTISMAL SHELL



CONCAVE SIDE

however, might choose to use a cupped hand to pour the water as a way of making direct contact with the baptismal water.

It is not necessary for the presiding minister to hold infants while baptizing them. The arms of the church can just as effectively be shown by the embrace of a parent or sponsor. Whoever holds the infant should be instructed to hold the child's head over the font for the Baptism so the water can wash over the child's head and fall back into the font.

For older candidates, especially generous amounts of water should be used so that it runs over their heads and perhaps even onto their clothing. If a puddle is left on the floor of the baptismal space when the sacred washing is done, that can help show the nature of the baptismal symbol. A towel should be provided for each candidate.

Baptism by immersion is a practice at least as ancient as pouring and has great symbolic impact. Most liturgical Christians know the practice only through representations of the Baptism of Jesus by John, but interest in immersion is growing among many denominations and is recognized by the *Lutheran Book of Worship* as an acceptable practice. Most Lutheran church buildings have no facilities for immersion, but that can be remedied in remodeling programs or by an imaginative use of temporary means.

Infants are immersed by dipping them unclothed in water up to their chins. (The ministers should not be surprised if the infant should foul the water while this is taking place.)

Three methods have been used for older children and adults. The most ancient form required the candidate to stand in water of moderate depth with the head inclined forward. The minister, standing at the side of the font or standing in the water with the candidate pours water upon the candidate's head so that the excess falls back into the font.

Another form requires the candidate to kneel in the water. The minister, standing near the candidate but not necessarily in the water, raises the person's clasped hands to protect the nose and mouth and with the other hand helps the person to incline the head and shoulders into the water and out again.

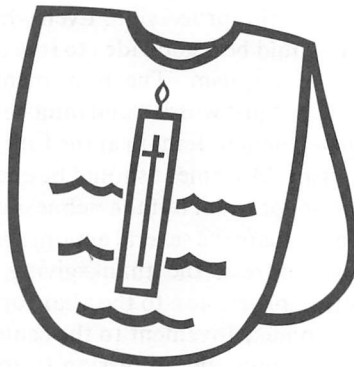
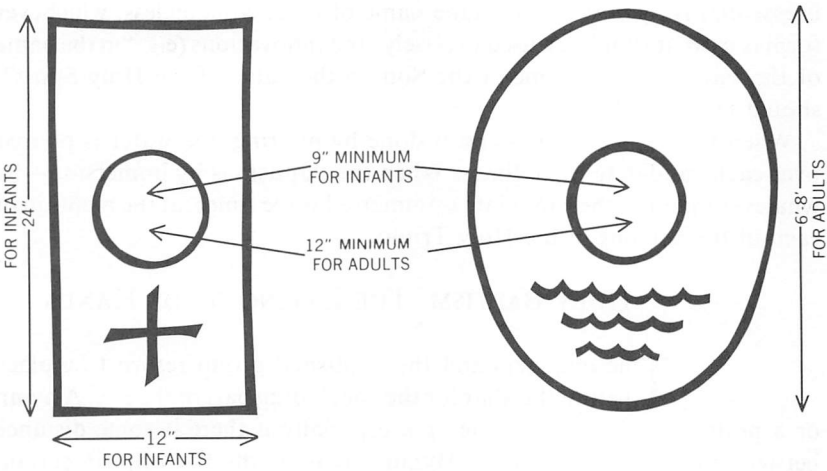
A form common in the Baptist groups requires both the candidate and the minister to stand in the water, the minister a little to the rear. With one hand the minister raises the candidate's clasped hands to protect the nose and mouth. The minister places the forearm across the candidate's upper back and shoulders, lowering the person backwards into the water and then raising the person up again.

When Baptism is by immersion, provision must be made for the candidate to change into dry clothing. Symbolic white garments may be



presented by the congregation. These may be rectangular or circular gowns with an opening in the center for the head. (Be sure the opening is big enough to go easily over a large head.) Symbols of Baptism and the faith may be added.

Gowns resembling academic or choir robes should be avoided.



BAPTISMAL GARMENTS

Two baptismal formulas are provided—the traditional Western formula which stresses the role of the baptizing minister as agent of God (“I baptize you . . .”) and the traditional Eastern formula which stresses the action of God in the sacrament (“*N.* is baptized . . .”). Ministers should consider using each formula at various times so that both the role of the minister and the role of God be stressed in the baptismal practice of the congregation. The formulas should, of course, never be mixed in one service. If both forms are used at various times, the pastor can teach the congregation that it is not one set of words—a kind of magical formula—that makes the Baptism but the Word and Spirit of God connected with the water. All that is essential is the use of the triune name of God. Nonetheless, whichever form is used, it should be used precisely, and innovations (e.g. “in the name of the Father, in the name of the Son, in the name of the Holy Spirit”) should be avoided.

When the baptismal washing is done by pouring, the water is poured over each candidate three times. When the Baptism is by immersion—by whatever manner, the candidate is immersed three times, at the mention of each of the persons of the Holy Trinity.

### HOLY BAPTISM: THE LAYING ON OF HANDS

The ministers and the baptismal group return to a place before the altar for the concluding part of the rite. A hymn or a psalm may be sung as they go, especially if there is some distance between the font and the altar. Hymns invoking the Holy Spirit, certain Easter hymns, “At the Lamb’s high feast we sing,” “I bind unto myself today,” are appropriate to this procession. Even when the font and altar are close to each other, it would be a good idea to sing a brief psalm or hymn to separate the actions of Baptism. The movement is important (liturgy implies movement and not just words), and ministers should seldom follow the rubric which allows them to remain at the font for the concluding part of the liturgy of Baptism. Movement should be encouraged, for it helps to show not only the nature of ritual but the richness of what happens in Holy Baptism. It helps to punctuate the several actions: procession to the font for the presentation and address, the thanksgiving, the renunciation and profession, the Baptism, procession to the altar for the laying on of hands, the signation, the welcome. Movement to the center, to the altar indicates entrance into the community and admission to the Lord’s Table.

At a place before the altar, the Holy Spirit is invoked upon those who have just been baptized. The inclusion in this service of the laying on of

hands with the prayer for the gift of the Holy Spirit signals a return to the liturgical fullness of the ancient church that was lost when confirmation became a separate rite. Sponsors or parents holding infants remain standing. Others who have just been baptized kneel at the altar rail, a prayer desk, or on cushions on a chancel step.

An assisting minister or server holds the presiding minister's book so that the minister can lay *both* hands on the head of each of the baptized while praying for the Holy Spirit. One hand is not enough. Both hands are used for the invocation of the Spirit, according to ancient practice, as a dramatic sign of the pouring out of the Spirit of God and of the presiding minister's entire attention being focused on what is being done. Both hands are free during Baptism; both hands are free during the Great Thanksgiving (or the Verba) of the Holy Communion; both hands should be free for the invocation of the Spirit.<sup>19</sup>

If the number of candidates is large, the presiding minister may lay both hands on the head of each in turn as the prayer is said. (The minister does not lay hands on two heads at once—one hand per head. Attention should be undivided.) The minister will then be able to lay hands on about eight candidates as the prayer is said—one at each new phrase. The prayer is then said again as the minister lays hands on the next candidates. Unless the number of candidates is especially large—more than 12 to 16—the presiding minister should consider saying the prayer for each candidate. The prayer is not long and each candidate deserves careful liturgical attention.

## HOLY BAPTISM: SEALING

**T**he sign of the cross marks the Christian as united to the Crucified. The seal of ownership is traced on the forehead; each one is marked with the indelible seal of the new Lord.

*N.*, child of God, you have been sealed by the Holy Spirit and marked with the cross of Christ forever.

Each one is made a child of God by the washing in the baptismal water, sealed by the Spirit with the laying on of hands, and marked now with the cross of Christ. Yet these are not three separate actions exactly nor one action with embellishments. It is one rich action of initiation. Signing each candidate with the cross is a principal part of the rite for Baptism, traceable to its beginnings in the ancient church. Tertullian (160?-230?) says:

In all our travels and movements, in all our coming in and going out, in putting on our shoes, at the bath, at the table, in lighting

our candles, in lying down, in sitting down, whatever employment occupies us, we mark our forehead with the sign of the cross.<sup>20</sup>

Other uses of the sign of the cross—at the beginning of the Brief Order for Confession and Forgiveness or in private devotion or at a benediction—become acknowledgements and affirmations of Baptism. The Presiding Minister with the thumb traces a cross on the forehead of each of the baptized and for each one says the complete formula, “*N.*, child of God . . . forever.” The baptized (or the parent or sponsor of an infant) responds “Amen.” The cross is traced on the forehead because this apparently was the most ancient practice, as Tertullian testifies. The larger sign of the cross made from forehead to breast to shoulders was a later development.

According to a custom of long standing in the church the cross may be traced in oil on the forehead. At an early time, perhaps to demonstrate physically the New Testament’s description of Jesus as the Christ (the Greek equivalent for the Hebrew *anointed* by God) and also the conviction that the Christian is anointed with the Holy Spirit, the church began to anoint the baptized with oil. The seal of the Spirit is a sign for the future, a promise of the eschatological kingdom.<sup>21</sup> The material used for this anointing is olive oil or another vegetable oil into which is often mixed a fragrant oil such as that of balsam. The oil is stored in a small cruet or bowl. It is applied with the thumb, a small cloth, or a bit of cotton.

Even when the Baptism is not by immersion, a white garment may be given to each of the baptized, calling attention to the robe of righteousness which God provides: “Baptized into union with him you have all put on Christ as a garment.”<sup>22</sup> When this garment is given, a representative of the congregation may say, “Put on this robe, for in Baptism you have been clothed in the righteousness of Christ, who calls you to his great feast.”<sup>23</sup> The words, however, need not be said; the giving of the garment itself is sufficient. Words need not always accompany every liturgical action, and not every movement need be made verbally explicit.

A candle, which is lighted from the Paschal candle to show the connection between Baptism and Easter, may be given by a representative of the congregation to each of the baptized (or to the parent or sponsor of a young child). The candle should be white and be decorated if at all only with a symbol of Baptism or of the Christian life. For safety the candle should be extinguished prior to the peace. The baptismal candle is then taken home, and lighted at each anniversary of the person’s Baptism as a reminder of the glory and the obligation which Baptism bestows.

## HOLY BAPTISM: WELCOME

After the sealing (and the giving of the robe and candle) a representative of the congregation presents those who have been baptized to the universal priesthood of service and proclamation of the praise of God. Then the congregation welcomes them into their fellowship. The emphasis of the welcome falls on the witness of service in the kingdom.

The sharing of the peace is an especially effective sign at the liturgy of Baptism. It makes clear the welcome of the congregation and calls each to a fuller showing of unity and peace.

The completion of the initiation into the Christian community is the sharing in the Eucharist. That privilege which is granted in Baptism may be exercised immediately or (as in the case of infants in most parishes) may be delayed for some months or years after the Baptism. The occasion of one's first communion is the claiming of a privilege granted as the birthright of the baptized. It is not the beginning of a new state of church membership. The occasion should not be a time of special ceremonies, dress, vows. At the appropriate time the children will simply come to the altar with their families. The pastor may speak a word of welcome in the sermon or at the time of the announcements. A section should be added to the prayers when some of the congregation participate in the Holy Communion for the first time. The *Lutheran Book of Worship* deliberately avoids emphasizing the first communion in order to exalt Baptism as the time of entrance into the church and of receiving all of the rights and privileges of that membership. Later confirmation and first communion (or vice-versa) add nothing to what is already the possession and right of the baptized children of God.

Like Baptism itself, the liturgy of Holy Baptism is a continuously unfolding process. Each act presents another facet of the church's teaching and belief. All the details of the service deserve careful attention and preparation. Their significance should be clear to the celebrating assembly lest they become empty embellishments of the service. A congregation's efforts to enrich the baptismal liturgy must be part of a larger effort to place Baptism at the center of Christian faith and life.

## CORPORATE CONFESSION AND FORGIVENESS

One makes use of one's Baptism by daily repentance and renewal. In the life of most congregations confession has meant a form at the beginning of the service without Communion and an

expanded form at the beginning of Holy Communion. The *Lutheran Book of Worship* seeks to increase the opportunities for confession in the life of the congregation in order to deepen its meaning. (Article XIII of the Apology to the Augsburg Confession recognizes Confession and Forgiveness—called “Absolution, which is the Sacrament of Repentance”—as a third sacrament in addition to Baptism and Holy Communion.) Three separate occasions are provided for: corporate confession, individual confession, and confession immediately prior to the celebration of the Holy Communion.

The service of Corporate Confession and Forgiveness (both confession and forgiveness are included in the title of these services to show both sides of the one action, like law and gospel, death and resurrection) is designed to stand by itself and is not intended to be used in connection with other services. It may be scheduled on penitential days, such as during Lent. It may also be used as part of the regular schedule of a congregation, weekly (perhaps on Fridays, the day of crucifixion) or monthly. It can serve a variety of purposes: confession of individuals in the context of corporate worship as a regular discipline to deepen the spiritual life; the reconciliation of those who are estranged from each other, such as families or factions within the congregation; the acknowledgement of sharing in corporate wrongs and corporate guilt, such as participating in repressive actions toward outcasts, lack of openness to strangers in the community, supporting industries that destroy the environment or supporting dictatorial governments.

When the service is used, care must be taken to avoid making people confess a guilt that they do not feel or manipulating people to feel a guilt that is not genuine. Even more than most services, Corporate Confession and Forgiveness must be carefully planned not by the pastors alone but in conjunction with laypeople in the parish.

Only ordained clergy preside at this service. Although it is true that any Christian may announce God’s forgiveness to another, only the pastor may exercise the Office of the Keys in the gathered congregation. It is a central part of the public ministry to which a pastor is called by a congregation and ordained by the church.

Great care must be taken in choosing the music for this service. It must be subdued and meditative in nature. Quiet prelude music may help establish a climate of reflection and prayer, but such music should not be maudlin or sentimental.

The pastor vests in alb (or surplice) and stole for this service.

If there is a small number of participants, they should be gathered near

the altar in the front pews, in the choir, or in chairs in the chancel. The service begins with everyone saying together the words of Baptism and perhaps making the sign of the cross. Christians have used the sign of the cross and the words which came to accompany it—the sign was more ancient and important than the words—as an act of invocation and blessing since very early in Christian history. Making the sign of the cross was already common in private devotion in the second century, as the quotation from Tertullian indicates (p. 185f.). It is a reminder of Baptism when we were washed in the triune name and “marked with the cross of Christ forever.” Luther in the *Small Catechism* recommends the sign of the cross to begin one’s prayers upon arising and retiring.

Two methods of making the sign of the cross are common in Christianity. In the Eastern churches the cross is traced by touching the forehead, breast, right shoulder, left shoulder. In the Western churches it is formed by touching the forehead, breast, left shoulder, right shoulder. Various words have been associated with the sign to give a verbal meaning to it. John Chrysostom says,

When, therefore, you sign yourself, think of the purpose of the cross, and quench anger and all other passions. Consider the price that has been paid for you . . . .<sup>24</sup>

At the beginning of the orders for confession and forgiveness the sign and the words tie together Baptism and the confession of sin. The act of worship begins with a remembrance of how one became a member of the community of faith. “Repentance therefore is nothing else than a return and approach to Baptism,” says Luther in the *Large Catechism*.

The congregation may say the invocation with the minister. This is not nearly as difficult to get going as one might at first suppose. The words are simple and well known. With but little instruction the congregation should be able to join the minister in saying the words. They at least respond “Amen” to the words to make it their own. The “Amen” is not sung. The basic principle is that when the minister speaks, the congregation replies by speaking. (When the minister chants, the congregation responds by singing.)

When this service is used for a specific purpose (e.g. the reconciliation of those estranged from each other) or on a special occasion (e.g. the confession of corporate sin and guilt), the minister should announce that purpose or occasion and explain briefly its connection with the service of confession.

The theme of the first hymn should be repentance, the assurance of God’s steadfast love, or another theme appropriate to the service. This hymn

establishes the tone and the context of the confession which is to follow. (See also Atonement, Invocation, Trust, Inner Life, and Mercy in the Topical Index of Hymns—Ministers Edition, pp. 472-478.)

Psalm 51 with the Gloria Patri is sung or said. The refrain antiphon is "Create in me a clean heart, O God." The Psalm may be sung to one of the tones provided in the Ministers Edition, p. 442; the antiphon may be sung to the last segment of the melody. The Psalm prayer is not used with the Psalm in this service since it is not primarily for meditation and reflection.

The lesson should be carefully chosen from those suggested to provide a biblical perspective on the situation which occasions the service. It should not be simply a standard or favorite selection.

The sermon should be a brief and relatively informal address—the smaller the congregation the more informal. The objective is to encourage and free the people for the confession to follow by a proclamation of God's grace.

For certain occasions in the life of a congregation mutual conversation and consolation is more appropriate than a sermon.<sup>25</sup> Luther in the Smalkald Articles III, 4, identifies this practice as a form of the Gospel.<sup>26</sup> The intent of this section of the service is to provide a framework for an unstructured dialog to encourage people to talk to one another to effect a reconciliation or to think through possible responses to a common problem or crisis. This conversation and consolation would be effective in cases where there is a dispute to be resolved (as for example when a family has argued over an inheritance). The quarreling family members are brought together by a desire for some kind of settlement and resolution. The pastor may be instrumental in arousing this desire but the pastor must not force people to participate in the service if they do not seriously want to restore harmony. Again, a local, national, or international crisis (as, for example, the desecration of a synagogue, the assassination of a leader, the decision of an industry to do business with a tyrannical government) might also be the occasion for a concerned group of congregants to gather to talk about the events, to weigh the nature and the extent of corporate responsibility, to consider the implications of the act, to talk out the fears that have been aroused, to consider possible responses.

The conversation might begin with a statement by the pastor of what is to be accomplished, e.g. to identify and define the problem and to search for answers to it. In the case of a family dispute, what exactly led to the rupture of relationships (be careful not to open old wounds and animosities), what exactly is wrong, what can be done about the present situation? Here a rather clear result may be identified.



In the case of response to a traumatic event, the group would consider what has happened, what is the responsibility of the individual. In these cases there may not be a clear result obtained, there may not be a resolution of the questions which are raised. False or too-easy answers must be avoided. The method of the conversation is honesty. Those who participate in it must not be forced to say or admit more than they are prepared to do. An expected reconciliation may not be achieved. A desired resolution may not be arrived at. The result of the conversation may be less than satisfactory, but if that is as far as it can go, no more should be attempted.

When an appropriate conclusion has been arrived at or when a suitable stopping place has been reached, the pastor should apply readings from the Scriptures and/or recollections from the historical experience of the church when faced with analogous situations. The goal of the conversation is the consolation of the people: deliverance from despair, apathy, cynicism, indifference, neglect, or destructive action. At its close the pastor should summarize what has been said, what can be acknowledged by all, and how God's consolation and encouragement have been proclaimed. Silence for reflection and meditation follows.

If an admission of guilt has been made during the conversation (it need not be done in a formal manner) and if the conversation has concluded with biblical assurances of God's pardon and steadfast love, then the confession and proclamation of forgiveness should be omitted as an unnecessary duplication. The pastor must judge whether the formal confession would be repetitious and whether the declaration of forgiveness would be appropriate. The disputants may not yet have arrived at the stage where they can make a confession or where a declaration of God's forgiveness should be made to them. The pastor must use discretion and judgment. Care must be taken not to force confession or to impose a direction upon the conversation that is unnatural and even unwelcome. It may be that the conversation will end indecisively. If that is the case, the matter must be left there for another time and continued prayer and reflection be urged upon the participants.

The pastor would do well to have several hymns in mind for the hymn of praise. If the conversation has resulted in a genuine reconciliation, a hymn of thanksgiving would obviously be appropriate. If the conversation has not reached a resolution of the matter at hand, a hymn of faith, trust and guidance, or pilgrimage should be sung. (Consult the topical Index of Hymns under these headings.) The pastor will have to learn the contents of the hymnal intimately so an appropriate hymn may be suggested.

The congregation kneels when the Confession is to be made. If there are

no kneelers provided in the pews, the people could kneel at the altar rail. If the congregation is too large for that, they should sit for the confession since standing is not conducive to meditation. When the service is being used for a specific purpose or a special occasion, a confession appropriate to that situation may be prepared by those present, perhaps as a part of the conversation. The group may compose a prayer appropriate for a time of crisis, the disputants may prepare a confession themselves or if that is not possible, the congregation may prepare a prayer for guidance to show their support and concern.

The absolution is in two parts. The first part is a declaration to the entire group making confession, which may not in all cases include the whole congregation present. When the minister makes the sign of the cross over those being absolved, they may also make the sign of the cross on themselves to personalize the absolution and make it their own. They respond "Amen." Then the absolution is personalized still further, for those who desire it, by individual absolution with the laying on of hands. When the congregation is large, people may approach the altar in continuous fashion (as at the Communion), filling empty places at the rail when those who have received the laying on of hands have returned to their places. Other pastors may assist the presiding minister in the laying on of hands. Unordained assisting ministers do not participate in this action.

In cases when the pastor deems it appropriate, as when a reconciliation of the estranged has taken place, the peace may be exchanged.

When this service is held in the evening, the prayer for peace is especially appropriate. When the service is a regularly scheduled congregational service, one of the responsive prayers or the litany could be used. For these prayers the congregation should kneel or stand. If the prayers are to be more of a meditative nature, the people could sit if there are no facilities for kneeling.

The Lord's Prayer is said. The presiding minister then blesses the congregation and dismisses them in peace. There should be no closing hymn nor postludial music because such would discourage further private prayer and meditation. The pastor should be available for further counseling or for individual confessions after the service. The only music appropriate at this service is the two hymns and the singing of Psalm 51.

### INDIVIDUAL CONFESSION AND FORGIVENESS

Private confession is enjoined in the *Small Catechism*<sup>27</sup> (although this section, like the references to the sign of the cross, was often excised from editions of the catechism in recent centuries).

Luther drew upon the long-standing tradition and practice of the church for both the concept and the form of individual confession. Especially following World War II, private confession was rediscovered by many in Europe as a powerful and effective form of the church's ministry. Those with burdened consciences were grateful to find someone to listen, and the practice of individual confession has met with favor in other parts of the world as well.

Like the service of Corporate Confession and Forgiveness, this form does not substitute for the Brief Order of Confession and Forgiveness before the Holy Communion. The form is nonetheless flexible and may be modified by the pastor as particular circumstances suggest.

The form is useful for those cases when one with a troubled conscience seeks out the consolation of the church. It may also be used during counseling sessions as part of a personal conversation with the pastor. In such situations the pastor should provide for a transition from the counseling situation to the confession by moving from the pastor's study into the church or by changing the arrangement of the room (and the pastor putting on a stole). It is important to show clearly that the individual confession is not simply part of a conversation with the pastor, "talking things over," but is an act done before God, a statement of the sins one is aware of in preparation for the hearing of God's forgiveness.

To encourage the use of this form of the ministry of the church and to serve the needs of the people, it is helpful if regular times are established when the pastor is available in a designated place to hear individual confessions. Individual confession is a desirable preparation for participation in the Holy Communion, although no rule should be made requiring such preparation. Luther says in the *Small Catechism*:

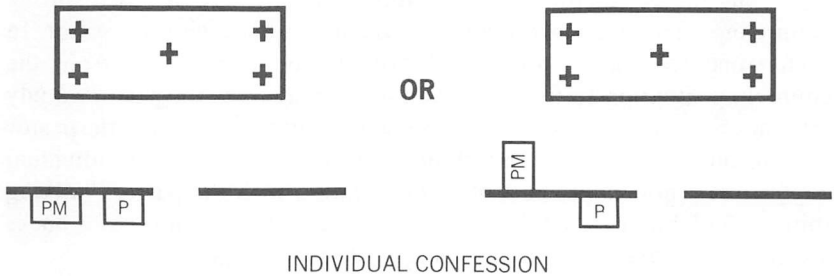
Fasting and bodily preparation are a good external discipline, but he is truly worthy and well prepared who believes these words: "for you" and "for the forgiveness of sins."<sup>28</sup>

Only the ordained ministers of the church may serve as confessors. Although the service is done in private, it is part of the exercise of the public ministry of the church and is therefore the province of those called and ordained as pastors of the church and servants of the word of God who have responsibility for the spiritual welfare of the parish.

It is an obligation not to be taken lightly. Those who hear the confessions of others should themselves be under the discipline of regular confession. Confessors should have their confessors too, to set an example for the people and so they can understand better the practice that they encourage others to participate in.

The confidentiality of the confession must under no circumstances be broken. The confession made by a penitent to a pastor is protected from disclosure by the tradition of the Christian church. The pastor must respect “the seal of the confession,” and the people need to be taught that the pastor is obliged to respect at all times the confidential nature of a confession so that they can freely open their consciences.

Individual confession may be made in the church, at or near the altar. The pastor may kneel with the penitent at the altar rail (which would be appropriate when the pastor and penitent move from counseling to confession). Or, especially when the pastor keeps regular times to hear confessions, the pastor may sit in a chair placed on the opposite side of the rail, at right angles to the kneeling penitent.



Care should be taken to insure that no one overhears or disturbs the penitent.

Appropriate vestments for the pastor, especially when keeping scheduled times for confession, are alb (or surplice) and stole.

When confessions are heard at regularly appointed times, it is helpful to provide devotional aids for those waiting to make their confession. A guide to the *Lutheran Book of Worship* might be prepared, directing the penitent to appropriate prayers, psalms, and hymns. Other collections of prayers, selections from the classics of Christian devotion, and the writings of the saints are also helpful.

A copy of the *Lutheran Book of Worship* with the form for individual confession marked might be provided for the use of penitents at the altar. Or the service might be printed on a card which can be given to the penitent to follow.

When the penitent arrives at the appointed place, the pastor greets the penitent. The greeting may be informal, but it must be restrained. It is not a time for pleasantries. The pastor may speak to the penitent concerning individual confession, emphasizing the gravity of sin or the need to accept

responsibility for sin and its consequences, but the pastor should direct the penitent finally to the unfailing mercy and grace of God to all who repent and turn to him. Such remarks should not be formal in tone. The pastor may conclude the brief conversation with verses of Scripture or paraphrases of biblical texts, such as:

The Lord Jesus welcomes you. He came to call sinners, not the righteous. Have confidence in him (Luke 5:32).

The Lord does not wish the sinner to die but to turn back to him and live. Come before him with trust in his mercy (Ezekiel 33:11).

After this greeting, the penitent kneels. The penitent and pastor say the Psalm verses together. The penitent makes a confession either in the form provided or, if that is awkward, in other words, confessing those sins which are known to the penitent and which are disturbing. The *Small Catechism* directs:

Before God we should acknowledge that we are guilty of all manner of sins, even those of which we are not aware, as we do in the Lord's Prayer. Before the confessor, however, we should confess only those sins of which we have knowledge and which trouble us.<sup>29</sup>

Luther also warns against inventing sins and confessing things which do not, in fact, trouble the penitent.

The confessor may then offer admonition and comfort from the Holy Scripture. Obviously, the pastor must know the Scripture intimately to be able to draw the appropriate counsel, advice, and consolation from it. This is not the time for a lecture or a sermon. These words should be brief and should not disturb the tone and progression of the rite.

After the verses of Psalm 51, the pastor absolves the penitent, laying both hands on the penitent's head (as at Baptism). Normally, the pastor should stand for this action, since it is usually awkward to remain seated and turn in such a way as to be able to lay hands on the penitent's head.

A thanksgiving is said either in the form provided or in silence. The peace may be exchanged, the pastor and the penitent both standing.

#### BRIEF ORDER FOR CONFESSION AND FORGIVENESS

The Brief Order for Confession and Forgiveness is used, when desired, before the Holy Communion begins. It is, however, not theologically or liturgically necessary that a congregational

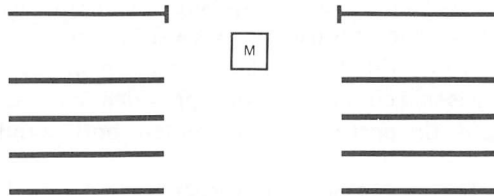
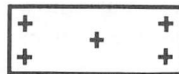
act of confession precede every celebration of the Holy Communion. The confession was not originally a part of the Eucharist and only developed in the Middle Ages with the increasing emphasis on sin and unworthiness, and then as a part of the priest's personal preparation for mass. At the Reformation the confession was given to the entire congregation.

Confession may be made in many ways, and if individual confession or corporate confession is a regular part of a congregation's life, the Brief Order may be omitted always. There is a kind of formalism that sees the Brief Order as a necessary introduction to the Holy Communion, as if those words each week were able to take care of the problem of sin. The sacrament itself is a declaration and an enactment of God's forgiveness and as Luther observed, "he is truly worthy and well prepared who believes these words: 'for you . . .'"

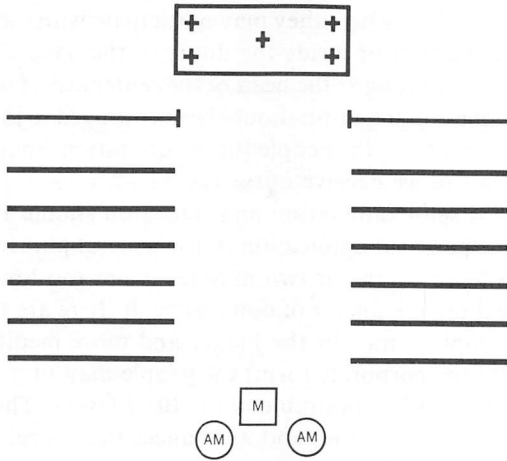
When the Brief Order is used, it could precede the Holy Communion during Lent and then be omitted during Easter to mark the different character of these seasons and services.

The Brief Order is in any case preparatory to the Holy Communion and is not a part of the Eucharist. To underscore the preparatory nature of this Brief Order, the minister (who need not be the presiding minister, but who must be ordained) should lead this service from a place outside the chancel area: by the font, from the rear of the church, or at the head of the center aisle.

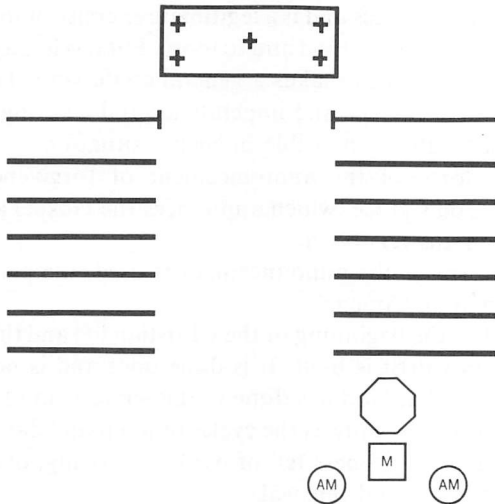
LEADING THE BRIEF ORDER



OR



**OR**



If the Brief Order is led from the rear of the church or from the font, the congregation should stand and face the minister. The ringing of the church bell (and the entrance of the minister to the place of confession) may be a

sign to the congregation to rise. Participants in the entrance procession should gather at a place where they may participate with the congregation, such as around the font or inside the doors of the nave.

The minister, if standing at the head of the center aisle, faces the altar for the invocation; the congregation should be encouraged to join in saying the words. The minister faces the people for the quotation from 1 John, "If we say we have not sin, we deceive ourselves. . . ."

The silence for self-examination and reflection should be an extended silence to enable personal application of the general phrases of the prayer that follows. Silence of one or two minutes is not too long.

All may kneel for the prayer of confession. If there are no facilities for kneeling, the people stand. In the longer and more meditative forms of confession (as in the corporate form) the people may sit if kneeling is not possible, but sitting is less desirable in the Brief Order. The minister then stands, faces the congregation, and announces their forgiveness.

The first form provided is an absolution in declarative terms which echoes but does not quite repeat the absolution from Individual Confession and Forgiveness. The Brief Order deliberately avoids a strong "I forgive you all your sins" as inappropriate to a general absolution of the entire congregation. Such a firm absolution is entirely appropriate for individual confession and forgiveness and is a legitimate exercise of the pastoral office and "power of the keys" to bind and to loose. But it is less appropriate to an entire congregation which makes a general confession. The people are in various stages of penitence and impenitence and a strong "I forgive you" may not be pastorally responsible in such a situation.

The second form of the announcement of forgiveness is a simple declaration of God's grace, which announces the Gospel and offers to the congregation an answer to sin.

Whichever form of the announcement is used, the people respond by saying (not singing) "Amen."

Baptism is thus the beginning of the Christian life and the foundation on which the life in Christ is built. It is done once and is not repeated, lest doubt be cast on what God has done in this sacrament of adoption.<sup>30</sup> But Baptism is made use of daily as the cycles of night and day, of daily prayer, of confession and forgiveness tell of dying and rising, of destruction and new life, of cleansing and renewal.