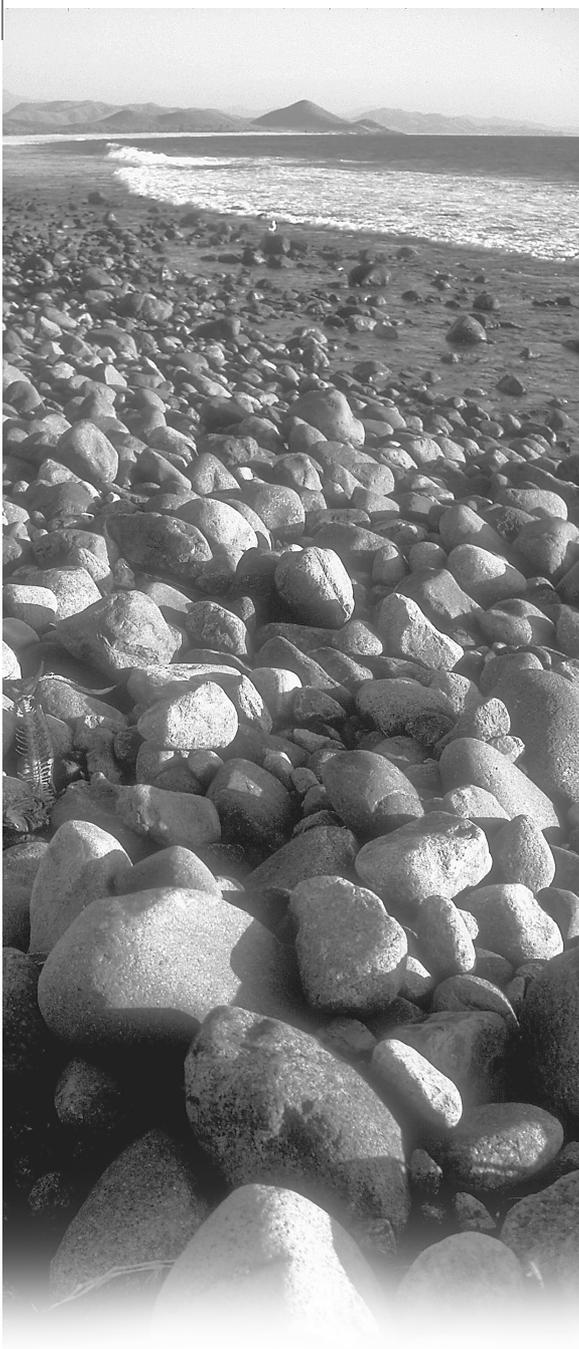


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I Believe: Living the Creed

PLAN THE SESSION

Celebrant: Do you believe in God the Father?

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

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

*People: I believe in Jesus Christ, his only Son,
our Lord.*

*He was conceived by the power of the
Holy Spirit*

and born of the Virgin Mary.

*He 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,

and is seated at the right hand of the Father.

*He will come again to judge the living
and the dead.*

Celebrant: Do you believe in God the Holy Spirit?

*People: I believe in the Holy Spirit,
the holy catholic Church,
the forgiveness of sins,
the resurrection of the body,
and the life everlasting.*



To Bring

- a floating candle (or a regular candle), a bowl for water and matches
- the opening line of a psalm, handwritten at the top of a piece of paper
- index cards
- copies of the Trinitarian intersecting circles (see p. 21)
- pens and pencils

- a Bible
- copies of *The Book of Common Prayer* (encourage participants to bring their own)
- copies of *The Hymnal 1982* (if closing with a hymn rather than a canticle)
- approximately twice as many stones as there are participants
- a watch or clock

Optional:

- a second bowl for water and either cloth or paper towels

Matters of Time

Single session: If you have a single session to cover this chapter, use as an opening service one of the appropriate short Daily Devotions beginning on page 137 in *The Book of Common Prayer*. Try not to feel rushed. Don't give up the brief period of silence which follows the communal psalm.

Two sessions: If you have two sessions for this chapter, spend the first introducing the community-building activities, the second more specifically on the creed. (Put that bluntly, it sounds appalling to "cover" what one believes about the Trinity in one or two weeks; clearly this is the work of a lifetime.) If you have two sessions, consider using one of the complete Morning, Noonday or Evening Prayer services in *The Book of Common Prayer* rather than the shorter devotions.

The Session(s) at a Glance

Gather

- select stones
- light the candle
- optional: "wash" stones
- set the stones
- compose the communal psalm
- share the appropriate service from *The Book of Common Prayer*
- read the psalm
- maintain short silence

Activities

- focus on the Apostles' Creed from Baptismal Covenant
- pass out journals

Closing

- pray for participants
- sing chosen hymn or recite chosen canticle
- retrieve stones
- exchange peace
- blow out candle

Leader's Reflection

The Baptismal Covenant, on which this program is based, begins with the Apostles' Creed: "I believe..." As you prepare for this first session, think about your own experience with both belief and doubt, with what has kept you not only in the Church, but willing to share your faith with this group of people who will soon become your own.

I'm reminded of the fox telling the Little Prince that we are responsible—forever—for what we have tamed. While you are neither "taming" nor even necessarily "training" the participants in your group, as you nurture their growth in faith and fellowship you will inevitably become part of one another's journeys. You will all become responsible one for the other.

Use the space below to record some of your most vivid memories of belief and doubt:

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Of those memories, what do you feel most comfortable sharing with the participants in your program? What might be most helpful to people who are preparing to renew their Baptismal Covenants? What do you wish someone had shared with you when you undertook this same journey?

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Be Tender to Yourself

Be sure to submit a prayer request asking the congregation to pray for you as well as for the participants in your program. (See the suggested prayer on page 15 of the Introduction.) Allow yourself to feel God's gratitude for this work you do. Remember that you are a child of God, infinitely loved and precious. No matter how each session goes, God is at work among you, and all will be well. Remember that you are working with people who have already been "sealed by the Holy Spirit in Baptism and marked as Christ's own forever," who are already part of your own extended family of Christians.

What are your biggest fears or biggest hopes as you face this opening session? Write them below, and offer them to God.

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Before the Session

Note: The suggestions below look frighteningly long. That’s because it’s your *first* session. Experience suggests that the most awkwardness you’re likely to encounter in leading a group would come during a first session, when you run out of activities, but have plenty of time left on the clock! You’ll have more to prepare and plan for this session than for following ones, but nothing here is complicated. Really. Most of the suggestions are designed to get participants involved, to help you retreat to the background.

First pick an appropriate hymn or canticle for closing the sessions. Since I’m so tone deaf that my own children wouldn’t let me sing lullabies, being asked to choose a hymn always terrifies me. The prayer book has a lovely and extensive selection of canticles, seven of them between pages 47 and 53, with fourteen more on pages 85-95. If you, too, are musically challenged, either ask another volunteer to lead the closing hymn or pick a canticle to say rather than a hymn to sing.

Plan on using the same hymn or canticle for every session. This repetition helps establish a rhythm and ultimately a community.

Second prepare for the communal psalm that the participants will compose during this session by choosing a verse from a psalm and hand-writing it at the top of a piece of paper. If you can’t think of a particular verse, some to consider include:

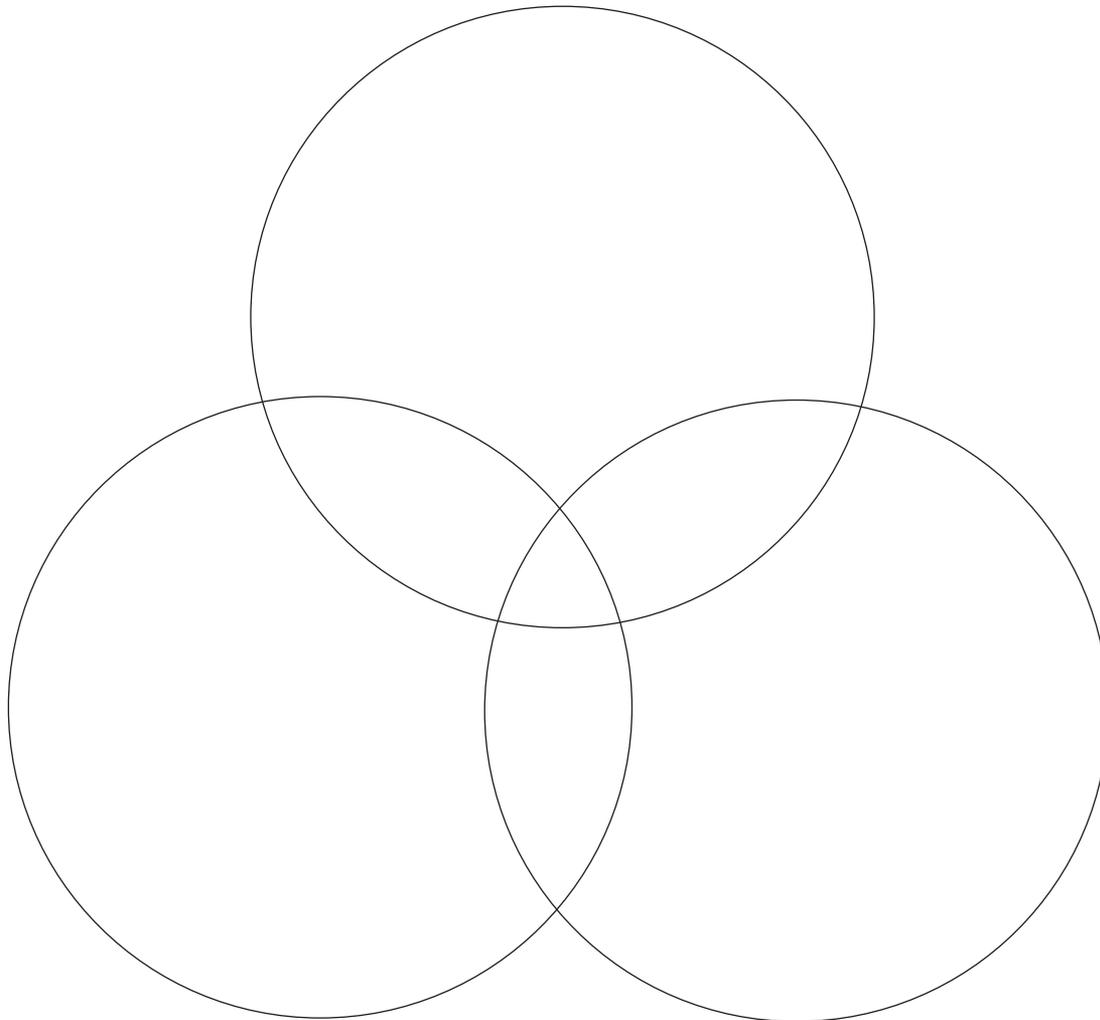
- 16:7 *I will bless the Lord who gives me counsel; my heart teaches me night after night.*
- 25:4 *Lead me in your truth and teach me, for you are the God of my salvation; in you have I trusted all the day long.*
- 42:1 *As the deer longs for the water-brooks, so longs my soul for you, O God.*
- 62:1 *For God alone my soul in silence waits; from the Lord comes my salvation.*
- 63:1 *O God, you are my God; eagerly I seek you; my soul thirsts for you, my flesh faints for you, as in a barren and dry land where there is no water.*
- 71:17 *O God, you have taught me since I was young, and to this day I tell of your wonderful works.*

What you will do during the actual session is to pass the paper on which you have written the verse to the person on your left. That person will then compose a verse to follow. When finished, he or she should fold the top of the paper over so the next participant can see only the newly written verse.

The paper will travel around the room, with each participant adding a single verse based just on the one preceding, folding it so only the new verse shows, and passing it on. In this way, each participant becomes co-author of the communal psalm.

If you have more than six participants, you might write the opening words of the psalm on separate pieces of paper so that no more than six people are working from one opening line. That way there isn't as much "dead time" for those not currently engaged in writing. Many psalms include repeated verses, so when you read the combined group effort during the session and later when you type it up, keep repeating the opening line just as it appears on the top of each paper.

Third photocopy the Trinitarian illustration for everyone.



Before the participants arrive put a table in the middle of the room, and on it place a bowl of water, the floating candle (or a regular candle), a Bible and *The Book of Common Prayer*. This can be a big seminar table that everyone can fit around, or a small table just for this centering focus. Be sure to leave space around the candle for participants to place their stones. If you are willing to allow time for participants to “wash” the stones they select, set out the second bowl of water and towel(s).

Decide on the best place to lay out the collection of stones you bring. These can be stones you pick up on a walk, inexpensive pieces of gravel, polished stones from a craft store or river stones from a garden supply place. The river stones are my personal favorite: solid and satisfying to hold, these stones have come from water like the newly baptized.

Try to have almost twice as many stones as you need so that participants feel they have a real choice as they select a stone. This also gives you extras in case some participants forget to bring their stones to later sessions. Participants (including you) will use the stones to help “build the altar” at the beginning of each session, and to carry during the time between as tactile reminders of the journey they have chosen.

Group the chairs in a circle around the table. If participants don’t yet have their own prayer books, set one on or beside each chair. If your parish has generously purchased prayer books for you to give each participant at the start of the program (which would be ideal), instead of setting them out ahead of time you may want to present the prayer books personally, either as part of the greeting or just prior to the service.

Note: Having coffee, tea, soft drinks or even water available at each session would be a hospitable touch, but if preparing and cleaning up for this feels like one more thing in your already busy schedule, don’t do it. The next chapter on Teaching, Fellowship, Bread and Prayer does ask that you bring bread, but at other sessions food or drink is entirely up to you. (Providing such items could be part of wider parish involvement.)

If you are including, as Bishop Knudsen and others strongly urge, a service component as part of the preparation for renewing baptismal vows, you will need to make arrangements ahead of time with local agencies so that each participant will have the chance to perform authentic service within the wider community. This might be a place to enlist advice and help from parishioners already involved in social action or peace and justice. (Try to involve others in the parish as much as possible; you really don’t have to do everything on your own.)

THE SESSION

Gather

As participants arrive, greet them individually. Once everyone is there, welcome them to this program, and ask them each to select a stone from the collection you brought. Explain that they will then place their stones around the lighted candle as a way to

help “build” an altar at the beginning of each session. Between sessions, they can either carry the stone with them or put it in a prominent place, whichever will serve best to remind them of their commitment to this journey.

Share with them some of the ancient history of stones in scripture, from the stone altars Abraham built, to the stone pillow on which Jacob slept when he dreamed of the ladder between earth and heaven, to Jesus as the cornerstone of the Church. If participants have seen *Schindler’s List*, they will have seen the survivors placing stones (not flowers) on Oskar Schindler’s grave; even now in Jewish cemeteries from Jerusalem to Trevese, Pennsylvania, people bring stones to place on the graves of loved ones. Suggest that they look closely at their stones so they will be able to recognize them when they retrieve them at the end of the session.

Once each participant has selected a stone, it’s your turn to choose one. After doing so, light the floating candle and place it in the bowl of water. Remind participants that what they are preparing for—whether it’s confirmation, reception or reaffirmation—is the renewal of their Baptismal Covenant, and baptism is a sacrament involving water. Use the first part of the “Thanksgiving over the Water at Baptism,” from page 306 in the prayer book:

We thank you, Almighty God, for the gift of water. Over it the Holy Spirit moved in the beginning of creation. Through it you led the children of Israel out of their bondage in Egypt into the land of promise. In it your Son Jesus received the baptism of John and was anointed by the Holy Spirit as the Messiah, the Christ, to lead us, through his death and resurrection, from the bondage of sin into everlasting life.

We thank you, Father, for the water of Baptism. In it we are buried with Christ in his death. By it we share in his resurrection. Through it we are reborn by the Holy Spirit.

Remind participants that each of them has already been baptized and reborn in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit. Each is already a stone in the foundation of faith, a living member of the Church, part of the Body of Christ. What they are doing in this program is preparing to *renew* the Baptismal Covenant. Baptism itself is forever. They are already children of God, full members of the household of faith.

Optional: If you brought the extra bowl of water and towels, this would be the appropriate time to invite participants to come forward one at a time and symbolically “wash” their chosen stones, immersing the stones in the second bowl of water and drying them on the towel(s). This activity not only reminds them of the waters of baptism; it also allows them to become more familiar with their stones so that they can reclaim them at the end of this (and every) session. Once everyone is done, proceed to the next step.

Invite each participant now to step forward, clearly say the name by which he or she was baptized, and place each stone on the table around the candle. Model this for them by doing it first, being sure to articulate your name clearly. Once you have placed your

stone, step back into the circle. Listen carefully as each participant speaks his or her name, holding each in prayer.

Once everyone is finished, sit down. Explain that they are now going to compose a communal psalm. Show them that you have written a verse from a psalm at the top of a piece of paper, and explain the procedure for completing the task. Circulate the page(s). Encourage honesty and spontaneity; no one should ponder for too long.

Having participated in this activity on separate retreats with adults and with teenagers as well as in a mixed-age Christian creative writing class, I remain awed that it works so well. If anyone is stumped or scared, remind them of Jesus' words not to worry about what to say; the Spirit will speak for them. You might also mention that some verses in the psalms are very, very short, and that's ok, too.

Once everyone has written, read their communal psalm aloud. Tell the participants that you will make copies for each of them to have for the following sessions. Congratulate them.

Now lead the participants in whichever service you have selected from *The Book of Common Prayer*. (Omit the Lord's Prayer since you will pray it after the brief period of silence.)

Once the service is over, tell them that you will read their psalm aloud one more time, and that afterwards there will be a brief period of silence. Suggest that they find a comfortable position in their chairs, that they breathe deeply, and that during the silence they focus on a line from the psalm, on the name of Jesus or on their own rhythmic breathing. Encourage them simply to rest in the presence of God.

Suggest that they close their eyes and begin conscious breathing as you read their communal psalm to them again. Then time the silence. It's easy to quit too soon; be sure to allow *at least two full minutes*. End the silence by praying the Lord's Prayer together.

Note: If you plan two sessions on this chapter, skip ahead to the Closing: pass out journals, sing or recite the chosen hymn or canticle, have each participant retrieve his or her stone and exchange the peace. At the next session, set up the table as before. (You may switch to a conventional rather than a floating candle from now on if you like.) Then place the stones, share the communal psalm (pass out copies if you have had time to prepare them), observe a period of silence and conduct the chosen service before going on to "I Believe."

Focus: I Believe

One of my seminary professors, Robert Sherman, bluntly states, "God is as real as gravity." God isn't some esoteric philosophical idea, but is instead the most deeply grounded, absolute, objective Reality. We don't have to "believe in" God for God to exist. God is. As Karl Barth explains, "*credo ut intelligam*, 'I believe in order to understand'" (*Evangelical Theology* 44)—not the reverse.

The Apostles' Creed, which forms the basis of our Baptismal Covenant, is the Church's ancient statement of belief. Both Morning and Evening Prayer services include the Apostles' Creed. Those who follow the daily offices are thereby embraced by this reminder of their deepest identity as Christians, people who have been "sealed by the Holy Spirit in Baptism and marked as Christ's own forever." Morning and evening, they focus on their faith and the Baptismal Covenant they will now renew in the sacrament of confirmation.

The creed is not so much a dogmatic formula which Christians must sign before entry into the Church as it is what Johnston calls "a summary of the community story" into which the newly baptized are welcomed (15). Participants in this program have already been baptized, already welcomed, already embraced as full members of the community of faith. They should, although some may not, already be familiar with the stories which shape the Church and which inform the creed. The Apostles' Creed contains an outline—a table of contents, if you will—of those stories.

Ask the participants to turn to page 304 in the prayer book and actually read through the whole Baptismal Covenant with them, taking the role of celebrant. Once again stress that this covenant is the core of their preparation for confirmation, reception or reaffirmation. They are already under this covenant, full members of the Church. What this program hopes to do is to help participants define more clearly what it means to be a baptized Christian, what it means to be in a covenant relationship with God, what they mean when they say, "I believe...."

The word "creed" comes from the Latin word *credere*, which translates as "what I put my heart (or my trust) in." Pass out index cards to the participants and ask them to take about 3 minutes to write a personal creed: what they put their heart, their trust in. Share an example from your own experience. What are those things that draw your heart and your trust?

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Ask participants to share what they wrote. Be willing to start with your own list of what draws your heart and your trust.

Once you have spent some time on this, point out that a creed is a kind of "mission statement." Their personal creeds should function as a kind of road map of their direction in life. Tell participants that the opening of the Baptismal Covenant is actually the Apostles' Creed, the ancient, foundational statement of Christian believing, the road map for Christians.

Show participants the Outline of Faith (“commonly called the Catechism”) beginning on page 845 at the back of the prayer book, which is essentially an extended commentary on the creeds. You may, as the rubrics suggest, pray with some of these questions and answers—not “study” or memorize them, as in past generations, but *pray* with them during the course of this program.

During this session you will pray with four of the segments. Begin with “The Creeds,” and then follow with “God the Father,” “God the Son” and “The Holy Spirit.” (Should any be interested, the Athanasian Creed is included with historical documents on page 864.) Before you begin, ask participants to take a few deep breaths, to enter into a meditative state and to pray their responses as they speak them.

Pray “The Creeds” (page 851) and then move expeditiously to “God the Father” (page 846). After those questions, and before moving on to “God the Son,” recite the following prayer:

I will give thanks unto thee, for I am fearfully and wonderfully made: marvelous are thy works, and that my soul knoweth right well... My God and my All, my beginning and my end, My sole and everlasting good, My God and my All. Amen. (Farrer 32)

Then move to “God the Son” (page 849). After praying those questions and answers, and before moving on to “The Holy Spirit,” recite the following prayer:

Lord Jesus, stay with us; be our companion in the way, kindle our hearts and awaken hope, that we may know you as you are revealed in Scripture and the breaking of bread. Grant this for the sake of your love. Amen.

Then move to “The Holy Spirit” on page 852. After those questions and answers, pray the following Orthodox prayer to the Holy Spirit. You might suggest that participants close their eyes as you pray:

Serene Light, shining in the ground of my being: Draw me to yourself; draw me past the snares of the senses, out of the mazes of the mind. Free me from symbols, words, that I may discover the Signified, the Word unspoken, in the darkness that veils the ground of my being. Amen.

As participants put away prayer books, quote Julian of Norwich’s words: “God stands nearer to us than our own souls, for he is the ground on which we stand” (161).

Point out that the creed, like the Trinity to whom they have just prayed, is in three parts. As the Rev. Dan Warren from St. Paul’s, Brunswick, Maine notes, as human beings, we are embedded in trinities. Ask participants to think for a moment about what three things give balance and stability to their lives. Pass out the paper with the three intersecting circles. Point out that the center—the place where the three circles all intersect—makes a triangle. Ask them to write their name in that central place, to represent their core self. Then they should fill each circle with one of the three things which give the most balance, stability and strength to their lives

Think about your own life: what three things are primary in terms of commitment, balance, passion? At the most basic level, most of us live in the trinity of self, family and job or school. One woman listed her trinity as: writing, relationships, God. A teen listed: friends, music, food. What is your trinity?

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After a brief time to ponder, ask participants to share their trinitarian balancing acts. How many had a hard time limiting their list to three? (Did you?) What does that say about the busyness of our lives? Ask them to reflect back on their personal creeds. Where are the overlaps between their creeds and their personal trinitaries? If there are none, should there be?

As you finish out this portion of the session, use the following prayer:

God above me, Father from whence my being descends, on whom my existence hangs, to whom I turn up my face, to whom I stretch out my hands:

God beside me, God in a [hu]man like me, Jesus Christ in the world with me, whose hand lays hold of me, presenting me, with yourself, to God:

God within me, soul of my soul, root of my will, inexhaustible fountain, Holy [Spirit]:

Threefold Love, one in yourself, unite your forces in me, come together in the citadel of my conquered heart.

You have loved me with everlasting love. Teach me to care. Amen (Farrer 23).



Focus: Journals

Pass out journals. Read through the whole opening page with them (reprinted below):

My baptismal name is _____

I was sealed by the Holy Spirit in baptism and marked as Christ's own forever
on _____ .

My sponsors/godparents were _____

I want to join in this program so that I can renew my baptismal vows. The Baptismal Covenant describes both Christian belief and Christian responsibility. By beginning this journey, I am making a mature commitment to God and to the Church.

Signature: _____

Witness: _____

Date: _____

Ask participants to write their baptismal name. Ask how many actually know the date of their baptism—and encourage those who don't to find out. Read slowly through the statement which they will sign indicating their intention to participate in this program leading to a renewal of their baptismal vows. Go around and sign as "witness." (If you have a large group that breaks into smaller groups, do this in the smaller groups, asking the group leaders or mentors to sign as witnesses.)

Then have participants turn to the next page where it says "Always remember" and in that space ask them to write as you dictate Paul's words to the Romans (8:38-39):

For I am sure that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor principalities, nor things present, nor things to come, nor powers, nor height, nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord.

Tell them to turn to these words when discouraged or troubled in any way. Stress that *nothing* can ever separate them from God's love. Nothing. They have all been sealed by the Holy Spirit in baptism and marked as Christ's own forever. Suggest that they copy these words onto a note card that they can carry in their wallets—someplace easily and always available should they need reminding of God's eternal love for them.

Point out those pages in the journal that you would like to have them encounter before the next session. (Note that beginning after the next session they will be praying for one another. This time they should pray for themselves as they begin their journey.) Give them time to flip through pages just to get a feel for the kinds of responses the journal asks of them.



Make them aware of the pages set aside for reflecting on sermons they hear during the course of their preparation. Show them the section devoted to Luke, which they will begin after the next session, and encourage them to begin thinking about their spiritual journey, written about in the final pages in their journal. Then ask them to put the journals aside and prepare for closing exercises.

If you are including a service component, this would be an appropriate time to discuss how and when it will begin, with whom they will be working and what the expectations will be. Remind them of the title of this program, the responses made to the baptismal covenant: *I will, with God's help*. The service they will do is part of their Baptismal Covenant.

Finally, ask participants to bring advertisements from magazines, newspapers and junk mail to the next session. Explain that together you will look at ways society tries to shape our beliefs.

Closing

Close this session with the prayer "For those about to be baptized or to renew their Baptismal Covenant" from page 819 of the prayer book:

O God, you prepared your disciples for the coming of your Spirit through the teaching of your Son Jesus Christ: Make the hearts and minds of your servants _____ ready to receive the blessing of the Holy Spirit, that they may be filled with his presence; through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.*

(*If you have a fairly small group, name each participant here.)

Ask them to turn to the hymn or canticle that you will be using at the end of each session. Then stand up and sing the hymn or read the canticle together.

Invite participants to retrieve their chosen stones, then step back into the circle.

Exchange the peace:

Leader: The peace of the Lord be always with you.

Participants: And also with you.

Blow out the candle.

After the Session

Looking Back, Looking Forward

Once all the participants have left, allow yourself a brief moment of reflection.

Where did you particularly feel God's grace among you during this session?

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What do you wish had happened that didn't—or what did happen that you wish hadn't?

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Offer it all to God, both the gracious and the grueling.

Be open to feel God's gratitude for your time and for your caring.

Go in peace, knowing that you have served God well.

Remember to connect with mentors this week. Is there anything you need to share with them? Is there anything helpful that they could share with you?
