

Remembering why I said 'yes'

By [Diane Roth](#)

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Recently I went to an ordination. I got to be present when a new pastor made her vows, promised to be faithful, put on her stole. I was thinking about how tired I get, sometimes. I was thinking about how everyone says the church is declining, on its way out. I thought back to the weekend before.

It had been a busy Saturday at church. While preparations were underway for a large wedding in the sanctuary, I was preparing for the evening chapel service, where I was preaching and presiding.

There were also going to be three baptisms at the evening service. At the appropriate time, children, parents, and a host of godparents showed up for the pre-baptism preparation and a little bit of rehearsal. There were two brothers and a little girl, and more baptismal sponsors than I could keep track of.

I always like to begin with a conversation about the meaning of baptism in our tradition. I pass out a booklet that I like, and ask everyone to turn to a particular page, filled with scripture passages and small cartoons that illustrate all the different meanings and dimensions of baptism. I ask people to pick their favorite "picture", and we talk about why they like that particular picture. So one of the baptismal sponsors said that she really liked the picture of the ark, and we talked about how the church has imagined baptism to be like a passage on Noah's ark, being saved from the waters of chaos and death. Another person offered as his favorite picture of baptism the tree, with a branch being grafted in. Still another person really liked the image of being adopted into God's family. We talked about baptism being about both our relationship with God and our relationship with other members of God's family.

"Can you get baptized many times?" someone asked. We talked about the fact that some people do get baptized many times, but that our tradition believes that only once is necessary, that the promise lasts forever.

"Have you ever done a baptism in a river?" one of the baptism sponsors asked, a little abruptly.

"No," I admitted. "I wouldn't be against it, but I haven't had the opportunity."

"I have been reading about river baptisms," she said. "I like the imagery of flowing water, and what it means about life."

"Yes, that is great imagery," I agreed. "A healthy river has an inlet and an outlet. But most of our healthy lakes do too. You could get baptized in a lake, as long as it isn't the middle of winter."

We talked more about rivers and water and God's promises to us. I felt a thirst in the room, a curiosity, that reminded me of why I went to seminary in the first place, studying Greek and Hebrew, Pastoral Care, and Systematic Theology. It wasn't to prop up an institution, to try to get people to join a social club, to get more people to attend events.

It was about having conversations that mattered, about faith and doubt and questions, rivers, lakes and streams, where to find God. It was about breaking bread and pouring wine, putting my hands in the water and letting it run through my fingers. It was about death and life and the yearning inside each of us.

Later on, we all went to the chapel for the worship service and baptisms. The woman who had the questions volunteered to be my assistant, pouring the water into the font and holding the candles that we gave to each of the children.

I laid my hand on three small heads and prayed for them by name. And three small hands each tried to push my hand away while I was praying.

When I dipped my finger in the oil and said, "You are sealed by the Holy Spirit and marked with the cross of Christ forever," one of the fathers whispered to his little boy, "This is the best part."

After the worship service, the woman with the questions came up to me and asked me a couple more questions about baptism.

"You don't do baptisms for hire, do you?" she asked.

I shook my head no. But I would have loved the chance to have another conversation with her.

At the ordination, a new pastor heard and made promises, promised to serve Christ and Christ's people. A new pastor put on the yoke, broke the bread and said the words of life to us. And I remembered. I remembered again why I "said" yes.

Water. Wine. Questions. Promises. A river with an inlet and an outlet. Life. Yes.

*Originally posted at [Faith in Community](#)*