**Small Group Study**

*Use or adapt these small groups studies for your church during or after the Water & Roots worship series.*

**Week 1**

**"Remember Your Baptism"**

"Remember your baptism and be thankful." For some, the act of remembering their baptism is a challenge. They know they were baptized as an infant or small child but they don't have any details. The story of their baptism does not play into their faith journey. What about you? Do you know the story of your baptism?

I was baptized when I was two weeks old along with about 10 other babies. So, it is fair to say that I do not have a first-hand recollection of the experience. However, my baptism story was something that shaped my faith journey- especially as a child.

My parents were founding members of their church. They had just moved from the city into the sprawling suburbs. There were literally hundreds of young families pouring into this area. The church was growing in leaps and bounds. For this reason, there was always a baptism taking place at their church. After a few months the pastor was speaking to the women's club and commented that he was disappointed that no one had named their daughter after the church. (When I look back this is a seemingly strange request – but I digress) My mother offered that if she would have a girl – she would name her in honor of the church – and so Ed and Sara's first daughter would not be named Marie Elena as planned instead she would be Regina.

Now there is a reason why I know this story very well. Each year when I was in grade school the pastor who baptized me would share the story I just told. When I was in early elementary it made me feel special, later it was embarrassing, and then much later it became a part of my call to ministry story.

Tell the story of your own baptism, where did it happen, who was there, how did this frame your faith story?

Did you ever have an opportunity to reaffirm your baptism? At a worship service? Confirmation? A baptism you were involved in?

This January, all the local churches in the Greater New Jersey Annual Conference are invited to take part in a celebration of baptism. On this Sunday, thousands of United Methodists will set aside time to "remember their baptism and be thankful". As part of the preparation for this celebration we will consider over the next few weeks the Sacrament of Baptism.

*Why baptism?* Baptism is part of the biblical narrative.

Although there is no explicit mention of baptism in the Old Testament, there were important occasions where water is the means to bring about new life. We are reminded of these during the blessing of the baptismal waters.

*“When nothing existed but chaos, you swept across the dark waters and brought forth light. In the days of Noah you saved those on the ark through water. After the flood you set in the clouds a rainbow. When you saw your people as slaves in Egypt, you led them to freedom through the sea. Their children you brought through the Jordan to the land which you promised.”[[1]](#endnote-1)*

Baptism however is a practice when Jesus comes into his ministry.

“*In the fullness of time you sent Jesus, nurtured in the water of a womb .He was baptized by John and anointed by your Spirit. He called his disciples to share in the baptism of his death and resurrection and to make disciples of all nations.”[[2]](#endnote-2)*

Water is an essential element of life, 71% of the Earth’s surface is water, 60% of our bodies are made up of water. Water is life. Share how water has been a symbol of life to you.

*What did Jesus do?*

In the Lectionary reading for January 7, 2018, Mark’s account of Jesus’ baptism is one of the readings. Baptism marks the beginning and the end of Jesus’ ministry in the New Testament. Jesus is baptized at the start of his ministry and then he directs his followers to baptize at the close of his ministry.

Mark 1:4-11, Luke 3:15-22, John 1: 19-51, Mat 3:13-17

Mat 28:1-20, Mark 16:9-20, Acts 2: 37-47

Read over these various accounts of baptism. What are some of the common words and themes that come through? What are the striking differences? Keep a list of your thoughts – next week when we read the Baptism liturgy consider how the scripture has influenced our practices.

“Baptism means everything that water means: cleansing, birth, power, refreshment, life, death…. Everybody knows what it means to be thirsty, to be born again, to drown, or to be dirty[[3]](#endnote-3)”

How does your baptism reflect these attributes?

Sometimes we wish as adults that we had been given the choice to be baptized, more than likely the experience of baptism. As UM we believe in only one baptism, but recognize that reaffirming and remembering our baptism should be done throughout our faith journey.

Just as we are only born once, the celebration of our birthdays recognizes the significance of that day. In the same way we need to reconnect with our baptism and the promises made either by us or on our behalf.

When you consider your baptism are you thankful and why? How might the reaffirmation of your baptismal vows allow you to experience something new?

YouTube Tie-in

This popular scene from the Disney movie Lion King sheds a light on the celebration of baptism. The animal kingdom gathers to celebrate this moment when God’s divine presence marks us and sets us apart for service.

<https://youtu.be/TYsvH9cj66M>

In the reaffirmation of baptism, we are reminded of who we are. Just as the cub Simba loses sight of his place in the animal kingdom, we too can forget our identity as a child of God.

<https://youtu.be/K_OMPrqhA_4>

Singing the Songs of Baptism:

*“Take Me to the Water”* <https://youtu.be/_7h_ZWV4JTY?list=RDQMrvAbxEY708A>

*"Come to the Water"* <https://youtu.be/9X0fBn8-SwY>

**Week 2**

**Renewal of Baptismal Vows: Where God’s grace is met by our Amen.**

Throughout the history of the church, new Christian’s have made vows at the time of Baptism. They have consisted of the rejection of all that is evil and the profession of faith and devotion to Christ.

We will now look more deeply at the promises that were made by or on our behalf during our baptism. We will once again affirm these promises, not as mere ritual, but as an opportunity to once again accept for ourselves the grace God freely offers in the Sacrament of Baptism.

After looking at each promise consider how you can we relate to them today both on a personal level and as the church?

*Do you renounce the spiritual forces of wickedness, reject the evil powers of this world, and repent of your sin?*

In life there is evil, there is an ongoing battle in both this world and in the spiritual realms. Baptism reminds us that we need Jesus, his forgiveness and grace. As we celebrate the new life offered in baptism we cast off the things that separate us from God’s love. This has been our human condition since the beginning. Read the Genesis 3 account and consider how it relates to this vow.

Take a moment and be thankful for the forgiveness offered in baptism.

*Do you accept the freedom and power God gives you to resist evil, injustice, and oppression in whatever forms they present themselves?*

Following his baptism, Jesus flees to the wilderness. During this time he encounters temptation. After his time in the wilderness, Jesus announces that he has been chosen to preach the good news to the poor, proclaim freedom to the prisoner, and set the burdened free.[[4]](#endnote-4) The presence of Jesus and the power of the Holy Spirit in our lives gives us the means to resist personal temptation. For the believer this is also a challenge to fight evil, injustice and oppression in the world. Baptism calls us into the work of Jesus to take part in works for justice.

Take a moment and consider how God has called you through your baptism to fight evil, injustice and oppression?

*Do you confess Jesus Christ as your Savior, put your whole trust in his grace, and promise to serve him as your Lord, in union with the Church which Christ has opened to people of all ages, nations, and races?*

In baptism we profess our belief in Jesus and promise of free and complete grace.

“Baptism is at the heart of the gospel of grace and at the core of the church’s mission. When we baptize we say what we understand as Christians about ourselves and our community: that we are loved into being by God, lost because of sin, but redeemed and saved in Jesus Christ to live new lives in anticipation of his coming again in glory. Baptism is an expression of God’s love for the world, and the effects of baptism also express God’s grace. As baptized people of God, we therefore respond with praise and thanksgiving, praying that God’s will be done in our own lives”[[5]](#endnote-5)

“We your people stand before you,

Water-washed and Spirit-born.

By your grace, our lives we offer.

Re-create us; God, transform![[6]](#endnote-6)”

How has baptism been a means of God’s transforming grace for you? In what other ways do you see this same grace evident in your life and the life of the church?

YouTube Tie-in

Coming through the water is a theme of many bible stories. Our baptism liturgy recounts the redemption of God's people while traversing water. In the Truman Show the main character, Truman's life is a television show. When Truman tries to break away from this scenario he is paralyzed by a fear, this scene is a his show down with the powers of evil and oppression in his life.

<https://youtu.be/u-ApxFOpl28>

Singing the Songs of Baptism:

*"Siempre Te Amaré"* <https://youtu.be/eDlF5edXq4g>

*This I Believe (The Creed) - Hillsong Worship* <https://youtu.be/uuDI-sk2nJU>

**Week 3**

**Welcome to the Family**

As a local pastor I was especially honored for the opportunity to baptize. Over the years I searched for ways to better connect the one being baptized and the congregation. How could we to see Jesus in this ritual? How could we be more connected to one another? Often, I would invite the congregation to hold hands, a sign of their unity with the family that had come forward for baptism, as well as a symbol of their coming together as the family of God.

Hands would reach across pews connecting the senior saints of the congregation as well as guests of the one being baptized. Each person recognizing that they held a place in this child, teen or adult's life as part of the family. We are never alone in baptism, instead we encourage one another in community.

Later, as the parents proudly walked their child down the aisle I reminded the congregation that they each were called take part in the faith formation of the newly baptized person. Maybe directly as a nursery worker, Sunday School teacher, or a youth advisor, maybe indirectly by cleaning the church, and giving generously. They might be called to support a child’s parent. No matter what the task all was to be done in love.

In the act of baptism the church comes alongside the person being baptized and their family. The congregants promise to nurture one another in Christian faith and life. They pledge to be a community of love and forgiveness. They covenant to pray for the faith of the newly baptized person.

In the United Methodist Church, people of all ages are welcomed into God’s family of grace through baptism. Just as Jesus welcomed children into the kingdom of God we welcome them too. “Let the little children come to me, and do not stop them; for it is to such as these that the kingdom of heaven belongs.[[7]](#endnote-7)”

In baptism the family makes a covenant to raise their child to love God. At the same time the congregation also makes a covenant of care. Baptism is not a single act, done in isolation instead it is the beginning of a lifelong journey with Christ alongside the community we call church. For this reason United Methodist baptize in a public gathering. This practice of gathering together to pray, support, challenge and teach one another has its foundations in our baptism pledges as a church.

The pastor addresses the congregation: “Will you nurture one another in the Christian faith and life and include these persons now before you in your care?”

The congregation then affirms that their promise.

“With God’s help we will proclaim the good news and live according to the example of Christ. We will surround these persons with a community of love and forgiveness, that they may grow in their trust of God, and be found faithful in their service to others. We will pray for them, that they may be true disciples who walk in the way that leads to life.[[8]](#endnote-8)”

How do we come alongside those who have been baptized in our church?

How might you use the upcoming reaffirmation of baptism to celebrate the connections you have made in baptism?

As a church how do we foster a culture of care to all of those God has placed in our care. How can we help foster their dreams. Offer a listening ear and an open mind to their new ideas. Will we be a steadfast presence no matter what paths their loves take?

How might you re-commit to the members of this small group to surround each other with love, forgiveness and grace.

YouTube Tie-in

Long before the Tuohy family officially becomes “Big Mike’s” legal guardians their love for him as a son has been present. This clip points to the public acclamation in baptism of being named for Christ, claimed as a member of God’s family. In the past children were given their name at the time of their baptism, in other traditions they choose a new name when they reaffirm their baptism in Confirmation. Although we do not name a child during baptism, we do identify each person by name during the baptism liturgy.

<https://youtu.be/zWPTsuXE4vI>

Singing the Songs of Baptism:

*"Shall We Gather At The River."* <https://youtu.be/am12g1pjwgo>

*“Borning Cry”* <https://youtu.be/FSIjIpkVrk0>

*Other Resources:* (The United Methodist Hymnal, 605)” By Water and the Spirit: A United Methodist Understanding of Baptism, <http://www.umc.org/what-we-believe/by-water-and-the-spirit-a-united-methodist-understanding-of-baptism> ,

Board of Discipleship: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=26aXO-7L0Gg>

Chuck Knows: <https://youtu.be/ABCKyffq7Wo>

1. The Baptismal Covenant IV [↑](#endnote-ref-1)
2. The Baptismal Covenant IV [↑](#endnote-ref-2)
3. Will Willimon, A Guide To Preaching And Leading Worship.http://willimon.blogspot.com/2007/03/worship-acts-of-love.html [↑](#endnote-ref-3)
4. Luke 4:16-21 [↑](#endnote-ref-4)
5. By Water And The Spirit: A United Methodist Understanding Of Baptism, umc.com [↑](#endnote-ref-5)
6. Ruth Duck, “Wash, O God, Our Sons And Daughters. [↑](#endnote-ref-6)
7. Mat 19:14 [↑](#endnote-ref-7)
8. The Baptismal Covenant I [↑](#endnote-ref-8)