

# **Leader's Guide to Baptism in The United Methodist Church DVD #6294**

## **Introduction/Overview**

*Baptism in The United Methodist Church* is the perfect teaching aid about the sacrament of Baptism in The United Methodist Church. It consists of five sessions:

### **Session One**

Appropriate for all ages, this session presents reflections on the meaning of baptism as it is lived out each day.

### **Session Two**

For adults, this section gives an overview of baptism by today's top scholars and church leaders.

### **Session Three**

For adults, this session focuses on the liturgy and meaning of Christian baptism.

### **Session Four**

For youth ages 12 to 18, this section is ideal for confirmation classes, small groups and retreats

### **Session Five**

For children ages 8 to 11, use this section in Sunday school classes, evening programs or other special gathering times.

## **Before Showing the DVD**

1. Preview each DVD session and look over the discussion questions and/or activities for that session.
2. Try out the DVD player and TV to be sure they're in good working order and have the DVD menu displayed on the TV screen at the beginning of the each class or gathering.
3. Make sure you have the appropriate resources/materials needed for each session. Examples include copies of *The United Methodist Hymnal*, Bibles, and so forth.

## **Session 1: Baptism: Personal Stories (All ages)**

Session 1 pulls together a variety of people from different backgrounds relating their stories about why baptism is a powerful experience. The video is a wonderful reminder that when our church family participates in a baptism, we are reminded of God's grace, our connection to the Church throughout time, and our calling to follow Jesus Christ.

Sometimes we forget the importance of remembering. To remember an event, a word spoken, a promise made is not simply a sentimental action. It is an important theological idea. God tells Noah, "I will remember my covenant that is between me and you and every living creature..." God instructs Moses, "Remember that you were slaves in Egypt." The thief on the cross speaks for so many of us when he said to Jesus, "remember me." Remembering is a powerful part of claiming our true identity as disciples of Christ. God remembers, so should we.

When we tell stories about our own baptism or baptisms we have seen in church, we remember and celebrate our connection to God through Jesus Christ.

### **Before Viewing the DVD**

- Invite members of your group to share, as appropriate and as their comfort level allows, stories of their own baptisms. Some might have memories of their own baptism. Others will be able to relate what they have been told by others about their baptism as an infant. Be sure to make it clear there is no requirement to speak. Keep in mind that some people may not have been baptized yet and may feel uncomfortable about others knowing that.
- What are some of the physical objects that people keep to remind them of their baptisms? Does anyone have a photo, video, certificates, hand-written stories, etc., of that day in their life?

### **After Viewing the DVD**

#### Adults & Youth

- Did you see any methods of baptism in the video that were new to you?
- Both of the bishops that spoke began their journeys of faith in other denominations before becoming United Methodist. Have you seen baptisms performed in other Christian denominations? What were the best parts of how those congregations performed the sacrament?
- The pastor in the video talks about the importance of supporting infants that are baptized in their congregation. What are ways our congregation could support infants following their baptism? How can our congregation support the parents/grandparents/godparents of the infants?

- Support and accountability are something all Christians need. What are ways our congregation could support youth and adults following their baptism?
- The statements made in the video might have encouraged some who did not share about their own baptism earlier to be more open to sharing now. Give another opportunity for people to share about their own baptism—again, without any pressure to do so.
- Hand out copies of *The United Methodist Hymnal*. Have the group turn to pages 604-611 and look over the hymns found there. What images of God do you see in these baptismal hymns? Can you find descriptions (physical or theological) of what happens in a baptism? Are there other hymns or songs that would be appropriate for singing before or after a baptism? (Other suggested hymns may be found in *The United Methodist Book of Worship*, pages 84-85.)

### Children

- What are some of the different ways people in the video performed a baptism? Did you see anything in the video that reminded you of how our church family baptizes?
- Some of the people in the video were baptized as babies. Some of them were baptized as adults. Have you ever seen a baby baptized?
- The pastor in the video talks about how the people in church need to help babies grow up to know about Jesus and love God. Think about that! The babies in our congregation will grow up to look at all of you as the “big kids.” You will set an example for them. How do you think the children of our church should act so the babies will have a good role model for knowing Jesus and loving God?
- Sing a variety of children’s songs together, including some songs that are just fun. (“Jesus Loves Me,” “Jesus Loves the Little Children,” “Row, Row, Row, Your Boat,” “Happy Birthday,” etc.). After each, ask, “Would that be a good song to sing before or after a baptism?” Why or why not? Then ask “Can you think of any songs that would be good to sing for a baptism?”
- If you were going to write a song about baptism, what would you want to make sure the song said?

### **For More Information/Additional Resources**

*The Book of Discipline* (The United Methodist Publishing House, 2004) See paragraph 60 Basic Christian Affirmations; paragraph 62, articles XVI and XVII; and paragraph 106 The Ministry of All Christians.

*The United Methodist Book of Worship* (The United Methodist Publishing House, 1992) See the introduction to Services of The Baptismal Covenant, pages 81-84.

## **Session 2: Why Do We Baptize? (Adults)**

Session 2 presents an overview of baptism from a theological and historical perspective. Scholars will explore topics such as John Wesley's understanding of baptism, the implications of our covenant relationship with God, recent developments in baptismal liturgy, and the three approved methods of baptism: sprinkling, pouring, and immersion.

Examining baptism is like looking at a multi-faceted diamond. To appreciate the beauty of the sacrament, we must study it from many different angles. One way of doing this is to examine the various images that scripture uses to explain the power of baptism. Your group will be asked to look up these scriptural references and then reflect on their meaning for our lives today in light of the DVD presentations.

### **Before Viewing the DVD**

- Many people try to limit baptism's meaning to one single powerful image that has great significance in their life. While there may be a particular image that is incredibly powerful for us, we should open our minds to all that scripture teaches, not just our favorite parts. For example, "forgiveness of sin" is one of the most recognizable images of baptism. Read Luke 3:21-22 about John baptizing Jesus. We believe Jesus was without sin, so obviously baptism is about more than forgiveness of sins. Examine Acts 19:1-7 about the need to expand our understanding beyond John's baptism of repentance.
- Have your group try to brainstorm some of the other images of baptism found in scripture. You might ask, "Growing up, what were you taught baptism meant?"
- Ask different people to look up the following verses and have them read the passages aloud. See if the group can come up with a word or phrase that sums up an image of baptism found in the selected reading:
  - John 3:5-8 (new birth)
  - 1 Corinthians 12:12-13 (reception of the Holy Spirit)
  - Ephesians 4:4-6 (a sign of Church unity)
  - Acts 2:38-39 (forgiveness of sins)
  - Romans 6:1-11 (connection to Jesus' death and resurrection)
  - Colossians 2:11-12 (replaced circumcision as sign of initiation)
  - Isaiah 55:1 (quenches spiritual thirst)
  - Jeremiah 31:31-34 (a New Covenant God will make)
  - 2 Corinthians 5:17-21 (a new creation)
  - Matthew 28:19 (a sign of the Lordship of Jesus)
  - Acts 22:16 (washing away sin)
- As you watch the video, listen for these and other images of baptism the speakers will use.

## After Viewing the DVD

- Does anyone have any questions regarding something you heard or saw in the video?
- Consider each of the images of baptism and what they teach us...

### New Birth

- This is really a rather shocking image if you think about it. Is birth easy on the baby? What changes in their world? In a world where we sometimes make a relationship with Christ sound easy, what does this image teach us?
- A birth signals massive changes for a baby. Is that true for the newly baptized? What truths about faith would we want children to know as they grow up?
- How would it change our view of adult baptism if we believed the person was starting over in life? If you were given a new beginning, a fresh start in your life, what would you do?
- Read Colossians 3:9-14. New birth assumes a new life will follow. John Wesley believed salvation as a process that took place over many years. Do you agree? If you have been baptized, can you look back and see progress? Can you put any of the lessons you have learned into words? What are the qualities you think God would like to see you grow into as you continue down your spiritual journey?

### Reception of the Holy Spirit

- Read Titus 3:4-7. Where do you feel God's presence most? During what activity?
- Like all the relationships in our lives, for a relationship with the Holy Spirit to grow we must invest time and energy. Are there practical ways you could increase the amount of time you are spending with God? Are you spending the time necessary to have a good relationship?
- Acts 2 talks about the Holy Spirit being poured out on people—as opposed to being a rarer event in the Old Covenant. Do you think it is possible that we have been so blessed by the Holy Spirit that we have grown accustomed to that presence and take it for granted?

### A Sign of Church Unity

- Read 1 Corinthians 12:13. With all the differences among denominations, what aspects of baptism are a unifying force in the church around the world? What aspects are not as unifying as Jesus would prefer?
- Every family has rules and expectations by which they live. Some of these rules are healthy (we all share in the chores), and others are not. If baptism means we are incorporated into a new, large Church family (the family of God) what “rules” should we adopt for our family?

### Forgiveness of Sin

- Think back to a time when you experienced grace (unearned love and merit) in your life? Who was it that showed you grace? How did they express this to you?
- What are the words and actions that we can use that will help people experience forgiveness? What words and actions hinder people from hearing that message?

### Connection to Jesus' Death and Resurrection

- Read Mark 10:35-38. What parts of our lives need to die in baptism?
- There are three widely used methods of baptism: pouring water over the head, immersion under water, and sprinkling water on the head with laying on of hands. Each method draws on the power of biblical images. Pouring water over a head reminds us of Acts 2 where the Holy Spirit is poured out. Immersion is an excellent means of symbolically connecting baptism to death and resurrection. Immersion is a reenactment of lowering someone into a grave and raising them up in resurrection. Sprinkling is really an action of laying hands on someone, as noted in 2 Timothy 1:3-7. What do you see as the positives and negatives of each method?

### Replaced Circumcision as the Sign of Initiation

- Read Matthew 19:13-15. What benefit do children receive from being told throughout their lives they are valuable because they are children of God? What is the world telling them about themselves? Who has their attention more often?
- Infants don't do anything for the parents before they are loved. Healthy, loving parents naturally love their children. With that in mind, why is infant baptism the perfect example of grace? Why do so many of us feel that we have to earn God's love before we are baptized or worthy of our baptism?

### Quenches Spiritual Thirst

- Read John 4:1-14. When was the last time you were really thirsty? Have you had times in your life when you were that "thirsty" for God?
- Revelation 21:5-7. What are the qualities of heaven that people long to experience? Does the meaning of baptism have anything to say to our longings?

### New Covenant with God

- Read Genesis 17:1-14 and Galatians 3:23-29. Compare the Old Covenant sign of initiation and God's love (circumcision) to baptism, the New Covenant sign of initiation and God's love. Who was circumcised? How did the New Covenant broaden the expression of God's love? Who can be baptized? Read Ephesians 2:11-22 in this light.

### A New Creation

- Read Genesis 1:1-2. The first creation began with the Holy Spirit sweeping across the waters of chaos, bringing light into darkness. Are there parts of our lives in chaos that need to be re-created by the presence of the Holy Spirit?
- Children don't burst from the womb fully mature. In the same way, when we are a new creation in Christ, we continue to grow into our salvation. Would you consider yourself a spiritual infant, child, teenager, young adult, or fully-grown adult? Why?

### A Sign of the Lordship of Jesus

- Read Matthew 28:16-20. Jesus' great commission to the church makes a connection between baptism and teaching people to obey Jesus' teaching. What does this say to us about the importance for people to attend worship and study following their baptism?
- What areas of your life have you not let the waters touch and bring under the Lordship of Christ?

### Washing Away Sin

- Read 1 Peter 3:17-22. (Note: this verse is often used as a basis for the belief that Jesus descended to hell to proclaim salvation to those people who have not had a chance to hear it. The ecumenical version of the Apostles' Creed, #882, references this belief.) The image of having sin washed away through baptism is easy for most to understand. Do you feel clean and forgiven? Are there actions or attitudes we can identify that prevent us from experiencing forgiveness? Can you think of just one step to take that would move you to a better place?

### **For More Information/Additional Resources**

*Baptism, Eucharist and Ministry* (faith and order paper). World Council of Churches, 1982. ISBN 978-8254-0709-7

*By Water and the Spirit: Making Connections for Identity and Ministry* by Gayle Carlton Felton (Discipleship Resources, 1998). This is the study edition of the church's official interpretive document on baptism adopted by the 1996 General Conference.

[http://www.gbod.org/worship/articles/water\\_spirit/life.html](http://www.gbod.org/worship/articles/water_spirit/life.html)

John Wesley, "A Treatise on Baptism," *The Works of John Wesley* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing House, n.d.), vol. X.

"The New Birth" John Wesley' Sermons #45. <http://gbgm-umc.org/umw/wesley/serm-045.stm>

Stookey, L.H. *Baptism: Christ's Act in the Church*. Nashville: Abingdon, 1982. ISBN 978-0-687-02364-6

### **Session 3: How Do We Baptize? (Adults)**

One of the most important tools for learning about baptism is the liturgy our congregations use when we participate in the sacrament. In Session 3, our experts explore the words proclaimed and actions performed during a baptism.

However, as is so often the case, the best learning will take place when the conversation begun on the DVD continues in the gathered community. You will move through *The Baptismal Covenant I* found on pages 33-39 of *The United Methodist Hymnal*, stopping at significant points to allow for questions and reflections on the liturgy.

#### **Before Viewing the DVD**

Have a bowl of water available somewhere in the room. Do not give out copies of *The United Methodist Hymnal* before viewing the DVD. Rather, reflect on these questions:

- Think about the last baptism you saw in your church. What actions took place? What words were spoken?
- God uses simple, common elements of creation like water, oil, bread and wine to be a sign of grace and love rather than precious jewels or rare treasures. What do you think we should learn from that?

#### **After Viewing the DVD**

Hand out the hymnals and have everyone turn to page 33. Let group members know they will be exploring the power and meaning of the liturgy by working their way through the sections of the service. Be sure and ask if anyone has any questions about a section before turning to the questions below. These are intended to spark your imagination and the thoughts of your group.

##### Section 1

“initiated into Christ’s holy Church”

Think about all the people to whom we are connected through baptism. Name some significant individuals or groups that are part of our connection. (Don’t forget that our connection extends not only around the world, and through different denominations, but backward and forward through time!)

“incorporated into God’s mighty acts of salvation”

What are the biblical stories that come to mind when you hear “God’s mighty acts of salvation?” What acts of God might we include that have taken place since the biblical story ended? What acts in our local church? In your individual life?

“new birth through water and the Spirit”

Does our church emphasize the power and presence of the Holy Spirit too little, just the right amount, or too much?

“God’s gift, offered to us without price”

We know that we cannot earn salvation (Galatians 2:15-21) and the love of God, but many of us keep trying to do so. Think about times you have given a gift to someone. How do you want them to receive it? Are you good at receiving unearned gifts? If we try to earn God’s love, what are we saying to God?

#### Section 4

“Do you renounce the spiritual forces...”

Notice that this question identifies that evil must be renounced at three levels: the spiritual, worldly, and personal realms. Can you give examples of each? Do you think these statements about evil are too harshly worded? What does it mean to us that baptism assumes we have power to reject and renounce such evil?

“Do you accept the freedom and power...”

What is the difference between renouncing or rejecting evil in the first question and accepting freedom and power to resist evil, injustice, and oppression? What are some of the forms that evil, injustice, and oppression take?

“Do you confess Jesus Christ...”

Read Romans 10:9-10. Our words matter! What we confess matters! What are the words and actions that must be included in our lives if we take our confession of Christ seriously? What words and actions must be excluded?

“put your whole trust...”

Is this a goal we seek or a requirement God sets? What difference does it make if we see trust as a goal verses a requirement?

“promise to serve him...”

What does Jesus’ life teach us about the type of service our Lord is looking for? (You may want to have the group read Luke 22:24-27 and John 13:1-17.)

“in union with..”

Baptism is the great equalizer. Read Ephesians 4:4-6. What are we saying about baptism when Christians discriminate among people?

#### Section 5

What is our responsibility to children after we participate in their baptism? What is our responsibility to adults after we participate in their baptism? How does our culture’s desire for privacy make this difficult?

What baptisms have you seen in your life? How are you doing at praying for those people?

### Section 6

If we took seriously the statement that we are Christ's representatives in the world, how would our words and attitudes change? Are there jobs we would refuse to take?

### Section 7

Does our church use sponsors for baptism? What would be a good job description for a sponsor?

### Section 8

How seriously do you and others in our congregation take this vow? If we took it completely seriously, what would need to change in our congregation?

### Section 10

As a group, identify each of the biblical stories that are referenced in this prayer.

“Pour out your Holy Spirit...”—Turn to page 10 in the hymnal and examine the section of the Great Thanksgiving that reads “Pour out your Holy Spirit on us gathered here...” What similarities do you see between these two sections?

These two prayers assume the difference between ordinary bread, wine, and water and the consecrated elements used in Holy Communion and Holy Baptism is the presence of the Holy Spirit. What does that say about those of us who are ordinary people but “consecrated” disciples of Christ?

“to wash away their sin...”

Note that the prayer asks God to use the gift of water to bring grace now (wash away sin), to offer grace throughout their spiritual journey (clothe them in righteousness throughout their lives), and to allow that grace to carry the one baptized to eternal life (they may share in his final victory). Is there one of these images that is most meaningful to you at this point in your life?

“dying and being raised with Christ...”

Medieval Christians believed that baptism was a form of training for our future physical death. What can we learn from baptism to help prepare us for our death?

### Section 11

Read 2 Timothy 1:3-7. Human touch is powerful. The importance of laying on hands in baptism is often overlooked. What symbolically is happening in this action? Whose hands are symbolically laid on?

“The Holy Spirit work within you...”

Discuss the statement, “salvation is a process as well as a singular moment.” Can you see progress in your spiritual journey?

“Through baptism you are incorporated...”

Have your group read 2 Corinthians 5:17-21, 1 Peter 2:9-10, and Ephesians 4:4-6. Take note of how the message of these passages is included in our congregational response. The word “incorporated” is related to “corporate” or “body.” How well do you think the Body of Christ is working these days? What steps could you and others in our congregation take to improve it?

“as members of the family of Christ.”

“Family” has long been an important image for the church. How would it change our relationships with one another if we took the idea of “brothers and sisters in Christ” more seriously? What are the best parts of a family reunion? What could we do to incorporate those in our worship gatherings?

### Section 12

Water evokes numerous, powerful images in us. Have everyone touch the water in the bowl. What are the images that emerge from this experience?

### **For More Information/Additional Resources**

“This is Your Baptismal Liturgy: A Resource for Understanding The United Methodist Ritual of Holy Baptism” [http://www.gbod.org/worship/articles/baptismal\\_liturgy.pdf](http://www.gbod.org/worship/articles/baptismal_liturgy.pdf)

Willimon, William. *Remember Who You Are: Baptism and the Christian Life*. Nashville: Upper Room, 1980. ISBN 978-0-8358-0399-1

## **Session 4: Baptism For Youth (Ages 12 to 18)**

Designed for youth between the ages of 12 to 18, Session 4 attempts to begin a discussion for students about the practices and meaning of baptism. The DVD will encourage them to understand their true identity as a child of God, challenge them to think theologically about church ritual, and provide thoughtful responses to some of the more common questions students have.

### **Before Viewing the DVD**

Before you view this session, have a computer with Internet access available. If that will not be possible, print the Wikipedia entry for “baptism” ([www.wikipedia.com](http://www.wikipedia.com)) for distribution. (If you don’t know how to do this, contact one of your students and have them do it for you.)

- Ask different people to look up the following verses and have them read the passages aloud. See if the group can come up with a word or phrase that sums up an image of baptism found in the selected reading:

John 3:5-8 (new birth)

1 Corinthians 2:12-13 (reception of the Holy Spirit)

Ephesians 4:4-6 (a sign of Church unity)

Acts 2:38-39 (forgiveness of sins)

Romans 6:1-11 (connection to Jesus’ death and resurrection)

Colossians 2:11-12 (replaced circumcision as sign of initiation)

Isaiah 55:1 (quenches spiritual thirst)

Jeremiah 31:31-34 (a New Covenant God will make)

2 Corinthians 5:17-21 (a new creation)

Matthew 28:19 (a sign of the Lordship of Jesus)

Acts 22:16 (washing away sin)

Write all the images of baptism on a board. Which of those meanings is most appealing to you? Most difficult to understand?

### **After Viewing the DVD**

- Does anyone have any questions regarding something they heard or saw in the video?
- The speaker says that the questions get more difficult and the answers more complex as we become more mature. Do you agree? What are some areas of life that seemed simple when you were a child, but seem really complicated now? How has your understanding of God and being a disciple grown more complex?
- Scripture says that baptism is a form of new birth, a new opportunity to begin life over with a clean slate. If you were given a new beginning, a fresh start in your life, what would you do?

- Baptism is supposed to be a sign of unity for those who call on Jesus as Lord. Obviously the church around the world isn't united. Why not? What are the issues that you see that keep us from acting as brothers and sisters in Christ?
- There are three widely used methods of baptism: pouring water over the head, immersion under water, and sprinkling water on the head with laying on of hands. Each method draws on the power of biblical images. Pouring water over a head reminds us of Acts 2 where the Holy Spirit is poured out. Immersion is an excellent means of symbolically connecting baptism to death and resurrection. Immersion is a reenactment of lowering someone into a grave and raising them up in resurrection. Sprinkling is really an action of laying hands on someone, as noted in 2 Timothy 1:3-7. What do you see as the positives and negatives of each method?
- Baptism teaches us our true identity. We are children of God. We are valuable because God loves us. The world has its own ways of judging people and deciding if they are valuable. According to culture, what makes someone valuable? Read Matthew 19:13-15. What difference would it make in children's lives if we taught them they were loved and valued because "you are a child of God?"
- Magic is belief that we can manipulate creation and force creation/God to do our will. As Christians, we don't believe in magic; we believe in something much more radical: that the Creator God wants to be in an honest relationship with us. Baptism is a sign of that covenant relationship. How might some people mistakenly believe baptism is magic? Does being baptized make God love you?
- Who was it you looked up to when you were a child? How are the youth in your church doing at being good loving mentors for children?
- We know that we cannot earn salvation (Galatians 2:15-21) and the love of God, but many of us keep trying to do so. Think about times you have given a gift to someone. How do you want them to receive it? Are you good at receiving unearned gifts? If we try to earn God's love, what are we saying to God?
- The baptismal liturgy asks us if we renounce evil in three spheres of life: the spiritual, worldly, and personal realms. Can you give examples of each? Do you think these statements about evil are too harshly worded? What does it mean to us that baptism assumes we have power to reject and renounce such evil?
- The liturgy also asks if we will accept freedom and power to resist evil, injustice, and oppression. What is the difference between "renouncing and rejecting evil" and "accepting freedom and power to resist evil, injustice, and oppression?" What are some of the forms that evil, injustice, and oppression take?

- If Christians took seriously the statement that we are Christ's representatives in the world, how would our words and attitudes change? How would our local church change?
- If you or your group were asked to write a sermon to be preached before a baptism service, what points do you think would be important to discuss?
- Look at the Wikipedia.com entry for baptism. Remember: this is a site that is published and edited by multiple sources, so it is not always accurate. Do they represent The United Methodist Church's belief accurately?

**For More Information/Additional Resources**

[www.wikipedia.com](http://www.wikipedia.com) on baptism

## **Session 5: Baptism for Children (Ages 8 to 11)**

Session 5 is an easy-to-understand introduction to baptism for children ages 8 to 11. For our youngest brothers and sisters in Christ, baptism can sometimes seem frightening or mysterious. This DVD provides an opportunity for children to see that baptism is no more frightening than a bath, but much more meaningful!

### **Before Viewing the DVD**

- Read the story of Jesus' baptism in Matthew 3:13-17. You might want to consider reading this from a children's Bible.
- If you are at church, take a field trip to your baptismal font or pool. Invite the children to remember a time when they saw a pastor baptizing someone. Allow them to pantomime the actions they remember the pastor performing.

### **After Viewing the DVD**

- Jesus was baptized and we get baptized today. We get to do the same thing Jesus did. Do you know if you were baptized as baby? If you were, have your parents told you anything about what happened that day?
- The DVD talks about how people who are baptized try to live the way Jesus would want us to live. How would Jesus want us to live?
- Guess how many people are in our church. How does it feel to be part of a family that big? How many Christians are there in the world? How does that feel?
- Jesus teaches us to love each other. What makes it easy to love some people? What makes it hard to love some people? Are you acting in a way that makes you easy to love?
- How do babies' parents show them love? What do you think babies should be taught about God as they grow older?
- Are there any teenagers in our church you think are really great? Did you realize that the babies that are being baptized now will look up to you one day when you are a teenager? What can you do to be good mentors, examples for them?
- God loves you! Where and when do you feel that most?