



The Sacrament of Baptism:
A Resource for Clergy and Church
Educators

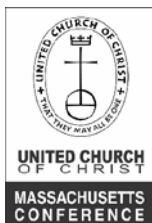
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Acknowledgements

As the former Director of Resource Ministry for the Massachusetts Conference of the United Church of Christ I had the opportunity to speak with many clergy and lay people seeking a wide variety of resources. A common request was for materials which teach the sacraments of Baptism and Communion. I created this Baptism resource in response to that need. These materials explain the sacrament of Baptism within the context of the United Church of Christ, offer a model of Baptism education for parents and young children, make suggestions for ways in which to include the entire congregation in the practice of Baptism and also offer suggestions for additional resources for clergy, church educators and lay people.

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The Sacrament of Baptism

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Additional Resources contained in this packet:

Our Baby's Being Baptized by Marilyn Perry

Your Child's Baptism by Ron Cole-Turner

(Additional copies of these two resources are available for purchase from United Church Resources 1-800-537-3394 or www.unitedchurchpress.com)

"Connections: The Newsletter for Christian Educators in the Massachusetts Conference United Church of Christ," Spring 2005 - Issue on Ministering to Our Youngest Church Members

Baptism: A Practice of Faith in the United Church of Christ



"Repent and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ...."

—Acts 2:38

"For in Christ Jesus you are all children of God through faith. As many of you as were baptized into Christ Jesus have clothed yourself with Christ. There is no longer Jew or Greek, there is no longer slave or free, there is no longer male and female; for all of you are one in Christ Jesus."

—Galatians 3:26-28

What does Baptism signify?

The sacrament of baptism is an outward and visible sign of the grace of God. Through baptism a person is joined with the universal church, the body of Christ. In baptism, God works in us the power of forgiveness, the renewal of the spirit, and the knowledge of the call to be God's people always.

How does Baptism take place?

Baptism with water and the Holy Spirit is the sign and seal of our common discipleship. Since baptism is God's gift, the Holy Spirit is called to be upon the water and those being baptized. The act of baptism also marks the beginning of new life of discipleship with Christ, the human response to that gift.

Why is water used?

Water is an essential element of baptism. Water is a prominent symbol of cleansing and life in the Bible—the water of creation, the great flood, the liberation of Israel through the sea, the water of Mary's womb, the baptism of Jesus in the Jordan River, the woman at the well, and Jesus' washing of the feet of the disciples. That is why water is visibly present in the service. In the United Church of Christ, the mode of baptism is a matter of choice. Some traditions use sprinkling, some pouring, and some immersion.

Who is baptized in the UCC?

Infants, children, youth and adults. For infants and children, as well as for youth and adults who have never been baptized before, baptism marks their acceptance into the care of Christ's church, the sign and seal of God's grace and forgiveness, and the beginning of their Christian faith and life.

Is Re-baptism necessary?

The United Church of Christ recognizes the validity of all baptisms; therefore there is no need for re-baptism. If there is a question about whether baptism has taken place, a conditional phrase may be added as a person is baptized, such as "if you are not already baptized." It is a well-accepted practice, however, for people to renew their baptismal vows in a service of

baptismal renewal, such as the Order for Renewal of Baptism in the UCC Book of Worship. On page 25 of this resource find an order or worship for the renewal of baptismal vows.

Is there a special time for Baptism?

Baptism is a personal celebration in the lives of the individual candidates and their families. It is also a celebration within the local church family and a recognition of its commitment. For this reason, baptism is celebrated in the presence of the community gathered for worship. If circumstances require baptism to take place outside of corporate worship, members of the local church, if possible, may participate in the ceremony with the pastor. In urgent circumstances, such as imminent death, any Christian may perform the baptism.

When should a person be baptized?

Baptism may take place at any worship service where the community is gathered. In the early Christian church, the season of Lent was used as the final period for the preparation of candidates. In the scriptures that are read during the seasons from Advent up to Easter, there are many texts that teach the faith and point toward baptism. In the early church, the candidates were baptized together at the Vigil of Easter (the pre-dawn Easter service). Some local churches still perform baptisms at this service, or on Pentecost Sunday, and also baptize throughout the year.

Are sponsors present?

Parents, in consultation with the pastor, may choose sponsors or Godparents for infants and young children who are to be baptized. Other candidates for baptism may also be given this opportunity to have sponsors. At the time of the baptismal service, the sponsors, who accompany the candidates and present them for baptism, may make promises identical to the promises of the parents concerning their role.

What words are used?

The [Book of Worship](#) of the United Church of Christ provides an Order for Baptism and orders for Affirmation of Baptism. The recognition of our baptism by the ecumenical church is important to us, and the Book of Worship encourages the use of language recognized in most Christian churches: "I baptize you in the name of the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit." Feminine images for God may surround these words to enrich understandings and offer balance.

This information came from the United Church of Christ website at www.ucc.org/worship/baptism.htm, and was reprinted with permission. To purchase brochures containing this information contact United Church Press at www.unitedchurchpress.com or call 1-800-537-3394.





**Welcoming a New Life into the Community of Faith:
A Baptism Education Model**

***Pastor:** Do you, who witness and celebrate this sacrament, promise your love, support, and care to the one about to be baptized, as they live and grow in Christ?*

***People:** We promise our love, support, and care.*

- From United Church of Christ Book of Worship

In the United Church of Christ, the congregation promises to support the one being baptized, and, in the case of infant and child baptisms, to support the parent(s) as well. Preparation for baptism provides an opportunity for the parents of a child being baptized to meet with the pastor to discuss baptism and to set a date for the event. Through this meeting and the act of baptism itself, a relationship is forged with the minister.

To reinforce the congregation's role in the baptism, we suggest the following baptismal education model. In this model members of the congregation are encouraged to participate in the baptism preparation and the ceremony of baptism. In this way, the newly baptized are welcomed fully into the community of faith.

The following may be adapted and offered monthly, quarterly, biannually, according to the size of your congregation and the frequency of baptisms. Prior to implementing this program, it is suggested that this model be offered with slight modifications for the entire congregation. This will help families who have previously baptized children to more fully understand how the congregation can be more supportive in living out the vows of baptism.

Baptismal Preparation Class

Please note: Participants in this meeting will vary depending upon church size and staff size.

1. Who is invited to attend?

- the Pastor(s)
- a Deacon (or spiritual leader)
- the Church Educator/Director of Children's Ministries
- the Chair of the Christian Education Committee
- a couple of parents (if possible with children of similar age)
- an older member of the congregation
- the parent(s) of the child(ren) to be baptized.
- If there are to be sponsors/godparents it would be appropriate for them to be present as well.

2. What is the role of each of these people at the meeting?

- **Pastor(s):** Will share theological reflections regarding the purpose and role of baptism in the life of the individual and in the life of the congregation.
- **Deacon:** Will assist with the baptism and will be responsible for the family on the day of the baptism.
- **The Church Educator:** Will share information regarding the role of parents and the role of the congregation in raising the child in the Christian faith.
- **The Chair of the Christian Education Committee:** Will share information regarding the church nursery, the Sunday school curriculum, and other fellowship events.
- **Parents:** Will share their experience of raising a child in the Christian faith and in the church. During the months which follow the parents will make contact with the family and invite them to events at the church.
- **Older member of the congregation:** Our faith communities are made up of people across generations. The older member of the congregation is there to welcome the family and to share information about the life of the congregation.

Class Outline:

You will need name tags, markers, forms to be completed, and refreshments.

1. Arrival:

- As people arrive have each person put on a name tag

2. Prayer:

- Start the meeting with a moment of prayer

3. Introductions:
 - Go around the room and have everyone introduce themselves describing their role at the church.
4. Discuss the meaning of baptism
 - Have each person share where, when and how old they were when they were baptized.
 - The Pastor will talk about the theology of baptism, the significance baptism within the congregational settings, and answer any questions the family may have.
 - The Pastor will review the questions asked of parents during the baptism.
 - The other people present may share with the parents their thoughts and reflections about the sacrament of Baptism.
5. Discuss the role of parents as faith educators
 - The Church Educator may share with the parent's information and resources about faith formation and the role of the congregation in this process.
6. Discuss programs at the church which nurture children and families
 - The Christian Educator may share information regarding the church nursery, the Sunday school program and fellowship events at the church which nurture children and families.
 - Any of the other people present may share their thoughts and reflections as well.
7. Community Building and Sharing Our Stories
 - Invite all the participants to share:
 - stories and reflections of the ways in which children participate in the life of the congregation.
 - their experiences of raising children in the Christian faith;
 - the ways in which they live out baptismal promises; and
 - the joys of participation in congregational life.
8. Review the Baptism Ceremony
 - Review with the family the logistics of the baptismal ceremony.
 - Review the words that will be shared during the baptism.
 - Remind the family to arrive one-half hour before the service and assure them that the Deacon will be present to shepherd them through the experience.

The Pastor may close with a prayer and a word of thanks for all those who have been in attendance.

The Day of Baptism

1. Ask the Deacon to greet the family and any guests at a previously agreed upon place in the church.
2. Have members of the congregation participate in the baptism. The parents and older member of the congregation present at the baptismal class can present and pour the water used in baptism.

3. During the baptism the pastor may share some information about the child: perhaps why he/she was given their name, an anecdote from the day they were born, hopes or dreams for the child, etc.
4. The Pastor, Deacon or some designated member of the congregation may walk the child through the church following the baptism as a means of introducing the child to the faith family. Consider singing, "Blessed Be The Tie That Binds" or "Child of Blessing, Child of Promise" or some other baptismal hymn.
5. Give the family a gift or token of remembrance to mark this day. (See the information on baptismal boxes in section 4 of this resource)

Following the Baptism

1. Have one of the parents who participated in the Baptismal preparation meeting follow up with the family and invite them to church events.
2. Send a baptismal anniversary card to the one who was baptized.
3. Have the Christian Educator or the Chair of the Christian Education Committee; invite the child to be part of the Sunday school program.
4. Invite the parents to be part of classes which offer faith education.

Baptism is certainly a personal celebration, but it is also a celebration of the entire faith community.



You Are Much-Loved: A Baptism Class for Young Children (ages 3 and older)

For whom is this class taught?

This class may be offered to young children to explain the sacrament of baptism. Parents may also participate in the class if they choose.

What will I need?

Name tags

Markers

a long piece of blue cloth (4 yards or longer)

4 large bowls of water

2-3 dolls which can get wet

a dove (made of paper or stuffed animal)

blue ribbons or blue streamers

towels or paper towels

baptismal font

Where should the class be taught?

The class should be taught in the sanctuary where the baptism will take place. If a child is apprehensive about the baptism experience it is good for them to be in the space where they will be baptized.

Prior to the class:

If applicable, place the baptismal font where it will be during the baptism. Drape the long piece of blue cloth across the chancel. The cloth represents the River Jordan. Fill the bowls with water and place them on either side of the blue cloth. Have towels available for spills and for drying off later. Place dolls in the pew closest to the baptismal font.

The Class: (words in italics are said by the teacher/leader)

Greeting:

Greet children as they arrive for the class. Invite them to put on a name tag. Have them sit along the River. Once everyone is there start the class with a brief centering prayer.

Leader: *"Creating God we feel your presence with us in this sanctuary. Hold us as we learn about your life giving water, your son Jesus and the sacred act of baptism which reminds us of your never ending love. Amen."*

Why Are We Here Today?

Leader: *"On the day of your baptism we will celebrate the fact that you are part of God's family and part of this church family. Baptism is a sacred moment and celebration. That is why we call it a "sacrament." That's another way of saying "sacred moment." During the baptism we will let the whole church know that God loves you more than you could ever imagine. During our class today we will talk a little bit about water, about water stories in the Bible, about Jesus and about God. We will practice baptizing some dolls. We will get ready for your special baptism day when the water will symbolize and remind us what we already know, that you are a much-loved child of God."*

The Importance of Water to All Creation

Leader: *"Reach over and touch the water."*

(Leader invites the children to feel the water. Allow enough time for each child to place his/her hand in the water.)

"Water is very important to people. What do we do with water?" (Solicit answers)

"We drink it, we take a bath in it, and we play in it, we need it to live. What else needs water to live?"

(Solicit answers)

"Water is very important to all creation. Creation is everything that God has made. Just like you and me, animals and plants drink and are washed in water. Rain water washes and cools our planet Earth. All of creation needs water because water keeps us alive. That is why we use water during our baptism service. The water reminds us that God's love gives us life and that God's love supports us. Through our baptism we join God's church family. Our church family will support us and love us throughout our lives. Touch the water again. We will use water to baptize you on your special baptism day."

(Give each child a chance to touch the water again.)

Water in the Bible

Leader: *"Water is such an important part of God's creation that it is often mentioned in the Bible."*

(Some of the stories which might be mentioned...talk about a few of the following.)

- The creation story (Genesis 1:1-2:9),
- Noah and the great flood (Genesis 6:8-9:29),
- Moses and the parting of the Red Sea (Exodus 14:1-15:27),
- The baptism of Jesus in the River Jordan (Matthew 3:1-17, Mark 1:1-11, Luke 3:2-22 and John 1:19-36),
- Jesus calms the seas (Mark 4:35-41),
- The woman at the well (John 4:5-30, 39-42),
- Jesus washes the feet of the disciples (John 13:1-20), etc.

"Water was important to each of these people from our Bible, just as water is important to each of us."

Act out Jesus being baptized in the River Jordan

Leader:

- *"Let's spend just a little bit of time talking about when Jesus was baptized. We'll do that by acting out the story of Jesus' baptism in the River Jordan.*
- *For our story I will need:*
 - *one person to play the part of John the Baptist, (offer the child a simple biblical costume perhaps with fur or a simple prop)*
 - *one person to play the part of one being baptized, (offer the child a simple white shirt)*
 - *one person to play the part of Jesus (offer the child a simple biblical costume such as a robe or head covering)*
 - *one person to be the Holy Spirit (give the child dove to carry).*
 - *Some of you can hold pieces of blue ribbon and be the waves in the river.*
 - *The rest of us can be fish in the water watching what is going on. (teach these children to 'swim' like fish imitating a fish movement, or offer them a cutout fish to hold)*
 - *Let's pretend that this blue cloth is the River Jordan.*
- *(Have all the fish and the waves sit on the blue cloth. Have John stand on one side of the River and Jesus stand a little over to the side. The Holy Spirit, holding a paper or stuffed animal dove should also be standing to the side. Actors will pantomime the action while the Leader reads the story.)*
- *John a scruffy looking man with a bushy beard, clothes made of camel skin, loved eating locust and honey.*
- *He lived out in the wilderness and felt called by God to preach.*
- *People would come from far away to hear him share his good news.*
- *"Change your ways," he would tell people. "Be kind to one another, share what you have, tell God you are sorry for the wrong you have done. Live a more Godly life."*

- *After he had said these things he would walk with people out in to the River Jordan, dunk the people into the water and tell them as they arose that they were baptized to a new life of goodness and love.*
- *One day Jesus came along and asked John to baptize him.*
- *John was shocked and surprised because he knew that Jesus was the one who would show people a new way to live a Godly life. John did not feel good enough to baptize Jesus.*
- *But Jesus insisted saying that this is what God wanted.*
- *So John baptized Jesus in the River Jordan.*
- *As Jesus came up out of the water, the heavens were parted and the Holy Spirit in the form of a dove descended on him and Jesus heard the voice of God saying, "This is my Son, my much-loved, with whom I am well pleased."*
- *This is the story of the baptism of Jesus."*

(The story can be acted out more than once if the children are interested in playing various roles.)

Practice baptizing dolls

(With the class, stand around the baptismal font and place a small amount of water in the bowl.)

Leader: *"Come stand with me around our baptismal font.*

We are going to practice baptism by pretending to baptize these dolls. (Invite each child to go and get one of the dolls.)

Watch what I do and then you'll all have a turn. Remember that baptism is a gentle and loving moment. That is why we use the most gentle and most loving touch that we are able.

*Baptism is also a time when our name is shared with the congregation. Take a moment and decide what name you would give your doll. Watch me as I do a pretend baptism. I hold my doll and using her proper name, I say, "Lucy Ann, I baptize you in the name of the Father, Son and the Holy Spirit.**

(*Note to educator: The recognition of our baptism by the ecumenical church is important to us, and the Book of Worship encourages the use of language recognized in most Christian churches: "I baptize you in the name of the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit." Feminine images for God may surround these words to enrich understandings and offer balance. i.e. "I baptize you in the name of the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit, one God, mother of us all.")

Now you give it a try."

(Give ample time for each child to baptize as many times as they like.)

Review what will happen at the baptism (this portion of the class may be omitted if the class is for children who have been previously baptized).

Leader: *"I think it is important we go over what will happen on your special baptism day. (Review with the child how they will be invited to come forward, where they will stand, what will be said, and the actions which will take place. This may help to calm the fears of any children who are feeling apprehensive.)"*

That is what will happen on your special baptism day. Do you have any questions?"

(Take a few moments to respond to any questions which the children may have.)

Conclusion

Leader:

"We learned a lot today.

We learned that water is one of the most important parts of God's creation. We learned that we use water to show God's love during our baptism ceremony.

We learned that just as water was important to people in the Bible it is important to us today as well.

We learned about the day when Jesus was baptized.

We learned about what will happen on the day we will be baptized.

We even learned how to baptize.

But most importantly we learned that each of us is a much-loved child of God and much-loved part of this church and that God loves and supports us more than we could ever imagine."

Closing Prayer:

Leader: "Let us pray. Loving God, thank you, for being with us today as we sat along the pretend banks of the River Jordan. Thank you for your water which gives everything life. Thank you for John the Baptist's story in the Bible. Thank you for Jesus who shows us the way to live. Thank you for our church that will always love and care for us. In Christ's name we pray. Amen."

Distribution of Class Certificates:

Hand out certificates to the participants at the conclusion of the class.
(See the sample certificate in packet.)

The Baptism Box:

A gift to one being baptized from those who have been baptized

The Baptism Box is a great way to link infants and children being baptized to others in the congregation who have already been baptized. This project could also serve as a great educational tool for youth in confirmation. You may also consider offering this option as a project for one of your Sunday School classes, a men's group or women's fellowship.

What is a Baptism Box?

A Baptism Box is a box given to the newly baptized on the day of baptism. It contains items which welcome the child into the family of faith, offers tools to parents to be faith educators and holds mementos from the special event.



Who makes the Baptism Box?

The box is put together by an individual or group. They can decorate the box, collect all the items and put it all together. One of the most important components of the box is a letter to one being baptized from the one who prepared the box.

Contents of the Box:

- *Letter from the minister*

This is a letter written by the minister(s) of the church and given to the child on the day of their baptism. The letter is to be opened on the child's twelfth birthday. It reminds children of what took place at their baptism and invites them to confirm their baptismal promises by participation in a confirmation program. (A sample letter can be found in the packet.)

- *Letter from a confirmand*

In the letter the confirmand will offer an explanation of baptism and will discuss the reasons for deciding to confirm one's baptismal promises. (A sample letter can be found in the packet. If you do not have confirmands create the boxes, the letter may be adapted.)

- *Baptismal certificate*

This is the certificate the church issues. Baptismal certificates with the logo of the United Church of Christ can be purchased at United Church resources (www.unitedchurchpress.com)

- *Baptismal candle*

A candle may be given to the family as a symbol of the light of Christ. The candle is meant to be lit on each baptismal anniversary as a reminder that on this day he/she became a child of the light. (Baptismal candles could also be created by other individuals or groups to expand the number of people connected to the individual baptism.)

- *Information for parents about the role of parents as faith educators*

See suggested bibliography

- *Card from Sunday school*

This card, made by a child, would invite the newly baptized child to be part of the Sunday school program.

Other items which may be included: Children's book explaining baptism, Children's Bible Storybook. *The Day I Was Baptized* by Pam Lucas and Hal Harrison available from United Church Resources.

To be placed in the box by the family following the baptism:

(The Baptism Box can become a keeper of mementos for the family. The family could be encouraged to place in the box items from the baptism and then as the child grows other items which have been an important part of the child's faith development.)

A copy of the Baptismal day Order of Worship

Small vial of the baptismal water

Photos/video/DVD of the baptism

Clothing the child wore

And more...

How the box could be constructed:

The box can be very simple or could be made of elaborate materials. A decorated shoe-box could be very nice. Some churches may have carpenters in the congregation who would be willing to craft a box from wood. The Youth and Family Institute on its website offers instructions for creating a "faith chest" of wood.

(http://www.youthandfamilyinstitute.org/pdf/faithchest_plans.pdf) The box needs to be of sturdy enough construction that it will remain intact for many years to come.

Sample Letter from Confirmand

Dear Little One:

Today was a special day in your life. You probably won't remember much of it. Your parents dressed you in a cute outfit and stood in front of the church while the minister placed on your head the waters of baptism. After that the minister walked you around the church and introduced you to your new faith family. I was sitting in the fourth row from the front (my family always sits there). I waved to you. You probably don't remember that either!

I am writing this letter to help you understand what baptism is all about and to encourage you at some time to consider confirming the baptismal promises made for you. I am in the process of doing just that, I'm in confirmation.

Baptism is a great welcoming. It is the church's way of saying we're glad you are a part of our church family. It is the church's way of saying you are a child of God and part of God's family. Baptism reminds us we are children of God and nothing, absolutely nothing can separate us from God.

In our church we celebrate two sacraments (that's a special way of saying "sacred moment"). Baptism is one of those sacred moments when in front of everybody your parents promised to raise you in the Christian faith and the church promised to help as well. So welcome to the family.

I was baptized long ago as well. Right now I am in the process of going through confirmation where we will all say "yes" to the promises our parents made for us long ago. At first I wasn't sure if I wanted to do this. I thought it might be boring. But you know it's really been great. I've learned a lot. Made new friends and understand more what it means to be a follower of Jesus. I hope at some point in life you will also want to be confirmed.

So, that's all I have to say - except for one more WELCOME to you. See you around the church!

Your friend and sister in Christ -

Mary

Sample Letter from Minister(s) to be given to child on 12th birthday

(The letter can be adjusted to reflect gender of child and family configuration.)

Date

Dear (name of child):

Today your mother and father came to church bringing with them a fine baby girl. It was our very great privilege to baptize you in the name of God, our Creator. Your parents, in this way, and in their vows, dedicated you to God, giving thanks for your life that has so much enriched their lives. They have promised to help you grow and understand the Christian faith and way of life. The congregation also warmly welcomed you into the family of faith and promised to help you and your parents raise you in the Christian faith.

Now you are no longer a baby girl, but a young woman of twelve years of age. Up until now, your parents have been making decisions for you. From now on, you will be increasingly making these decisions for yourself.

The most important decision you will ever make is about the kind of life you are going to live. Nobody will be able to do this for you. We hope that you will decide to live the Christian way of life: practicing the Golden Rule, treating all persons as your equals and never permitting prejudice and greed to take root in your soul. Be a Christian in all your relationships. If you will make this kind of decision and always live by it, your life will have a beauty and purpose that can come to you in no other way.

We hope you have reached a point in your life where you will consider confirming the baptismal promises made for you many years ago. We invite you to be in contact with (name of Church) and tell us about your life's pilgrimage so far. In return we hope you will allow us to be in touch with you regarding the confirmation program and the rich experience it can be for you.

May God's blessing and loving care be with you in the years that lie ahead.

In Peace and with Joy,

Minister

Minister

ORDER FOR BAPTISM

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<http://www.ucc.org/worship/tcnh/baptism.pdf>

Water in adequate supply may be in the baptistry, a font, a bowl, or a pitcher, depending upon local custom. If it is the practice of the local church to use a paschal candle, it may stand near the place of baptism and be lighted.

INVITATION

The pastor and others who will lead the baptismal service may invite those who desire baptism for themselves or their children to come to the place where baptism will be celebrated. They may go out into the congregation to escort the candidates to the place for baptism. The invitation may be given informally, in words that reflect the growing relationship between the local church and the candidates. As an expression of a special ministry of hospitality to children to be baptized, all children present may be invited to stand near children who are to be baptized. A baptismal hymn may be sung.

WELCOME

The pastor and people may introduce the baptismal service, using one of these statements or similar words.

Option A:

PASTOR: Members and friends in Christ, we gather now to celebrate the gift of grace in the sacrament of baptism.

PEOPLE: **There is one body and one Spirit. There is one hope in God's call to us.**

PASTOR: There is one Lord, one faith, one baptism, one God and Creator of us all

Option B:

PASTOR: Dear friends, as we come to this font of living water, let us recall the meaning of baptism. For just as the body is one and has many members, and all the members of the body, though many, are one body, so it is with Christ.

PEOPLE: **For by one Spirit we were all baptized into one body—Jews or Greeks, slaves or free—and all were made to drink of one Spirit.**

PASTOR: Now you are the body of Christ and individually members of it.

Option C:(for use when children are baptized)

PASTOR: They were bringing children to Jesus that Jesus might touch them; and the disciples rebuked them. But when Jesus saw it, Jesus was indignant, and said to them,

PEOPLE: **"Let the children come to me, do not hinder them; for to such belongs the realm of God. Truly, I say to you, whoever does not receive the realm of God like a child shall not enter it."**

PASTOR: And Jesus took them in his arms and blessed them, laying his hands upon them.

ADDRESS

The pastor may address those gathered, using one of these options or other words based on scripture.

Option A:

PASTOR: Jesus came to John to be baptized by him. But John tried to make him change his mind. "I ought to be baptized by you," John said, "yet you have come to me!"

PEOPLE: Jesus said, "Let it be so for now. For in this way, we shall do all that God requires." So John agreed.

PASTOR: As soon as Jesus was baptized, he came up out of the water. Then heaven was opened to him, and he saw the Spirit of God coming down like a dove and lighting on him.

PEOPLE: Then a voice said from heaven, "This is my own dear Son, with whom I am well pleased."

PASTOR: At another time Jesus said: Go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit.

Option B:

PASTOR: Jesus said: Unless we are born anew, we cannot see the reign of God; unless we are born of water and the Spirit, we cannot enter God's new order. Paul the apostle said: All of us who have been baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into Christ's death. We were buried therefore with Christ by baptism into death, so that as Christ was raised from the dead, to the glory of God, we too might walk in newness of life.

AND

Option A: (for baptism of infants and young children)

PASTOR: The sacrament of baptism is an outward and visible sign of the grace of God. Inasmuch as the promise of the gospel is not only to us but also to our children, baptism with water and the Holy Spirit is the mark of their acceptance into the care of Christ's church, the sign and seal of their participation in God's forgiveness, and the beginning of their growth into full Christian faith and discipleship.

Option B: (for baptism of older children, youth, and adults)

PASTOR: Baptism is the sacrament through which we are united to Jesus Christ and given part in Christ's ministry of reconciliation. Baptism is the visible sign of an invisible event: the reconciliation of people to God. It shows the death of self and the rising to a life of obedience and praise. It shows also the pouring out of the Holy Spirit on those whom God has chosen. In baptism, God works in us the power of forgiveness, the renewal of the Spirit, and the knowledge of the call to be God's people always.

This response may follow either option.

PEOPLE: This is the water of baptism. Out of this water we rise with new life, forgiven of sin and one in Christ, members of Christ's body.

QUESTIONS OF THE CANDIDATES

If there are no infants or young children to be baptized, continue with the questions for older children and adults on the next page.

Option A:

INFANTS AND YOUNG CHILDREN

These questions may be used when the candidates are unable to speak for themselves. If more than one child is to be baptized, all parents and sponsors may respond in unison.

PASTOR addressing the parent(s): Do you desire to have your child(ren) baptized into the faith and family of Jesus Christ?

PARENT(S): *I/We do.*

PASTOR addressing the parent(s) and sponsor(s), if any: Will you encourage *this child/these children* to renounce the powers of evil and to receive the freedom of new life in Christ?

PARENT(S) AND SPONSOR(S): *I/We will, with the help of God.*

PASTOR: Will you teach *this child/these children* that *he/she/they* may be led to profess Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior?

PARENT(S) AND SPONSOR(S): *I/We will, with the help of God.*

PASTOR: Do you promise, by the grace of God, to be Christ's disciple(s), to follow in the way of our Savior, to resist oppression and evil, to show love and justice, and to witness to the work and word of Jesus Christ as best you are able?

PARENT(S) AND SPONSOR(S): *I/We do, with the help of God.*

PASTOR: Do you promise, according to the grace given you, to grow with *this child/these children* in the Christian faith, to help *this child/these children* to be a faithful member/f faithful members of the church of Jesus Christ, by celebrating Christ's presence, by furthering Christ's mission in all the world, and by offering the nurture of the Christian church so that *she/he/they* may affirm *her/his/their* baptism?

PARENT(S) AND SPONSOR(S): *I/We do, with the help of God.*

If there are no older children or adults to be baptized, continue with the congregational assent.

Option B:

OLDER CHILDREN AND ADULTS

These questions may be used when the candidates are able to speak for themselves. If more than one person is to be baptized, they may respond to the questions in unison.

PASTOR addressing the candidate(s): *Name(s)*, do you desire to be baptized into the faith and family of Jesus Christ?

CANDIDATE(S): *I do.*

PASTOR *addressing the sponsor(s), if any:* Are you ready with God's help to guide and encourage *name(s)*, by counsel and example, in prayer and with love, to follow the way of Jesus Christ?

SPONSOR(S): I am.

PASTOR *addressing the candidate(s):* Do you renounce the powers of evil and desire the freedom of new life in Christ?

CANDIDATE(S): I do.

PASTOR: Do you profess Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior?

CANDIDATE(S): I do.

PASTOR: Do you promise, by the grace of God, to be Christ's disciple, to follow in the way of our Savior, to resist oppression and evil, to show love and justice, and to witness to the work and word of Jesus Christ as best you are able?

CANDIDATE(S): I promise, with the help of God.

PASTOR: Do you promise, according to the grace given you, to grow in the Christian faith and to be a faithful member of the church of Jesus Christ, celebrating Christ's presence and furthering Christ's mission in all the world?

CANDIDATE(S): I promise, with the help of God.

CONGREGATIONAL ASSENT

All may be invited to stand as the congregation is asked to make promises.

PASTOR: Jesus Christ calls us to make disciples of all nations and to offer them the gift of grace in baptism. Do you, who witness and celebrate this sacrament, promise your love, support, and care to the one(s) about to be baptized, as *he/she/they* live(s) and grow(s) in Christ?

PEOPLE: We promise our love, support, and care.

AFFIRMATION OF FAITH

All may be invited to stand. Responses are made in unison by each worshiper, including the candidate(s) for baptism.

PASTOR: Let us unite with the church in all times and places in confessing our faith in the triune God.

Option A:

PASTOR: Do you believe in God?

PEOPLE: I believe in God.

PASTOR: Do you believe in Jesus Christ?

PEOPLE: I believe in Jesus Christ.

PASTOR: Do you believe in the Holy Spirit?

PEOPLE: I believe in the Holy Spirit.

Option B:

An ancient baptismal creed, another creed, a statement of faith, or the local church covenant may be used in full or in an abbreviated version.

Note: When incorporating baptism and confirmation or reception of members, begin the Order for Baptism here.

PRAYER OF BAPTISM

The congregation may be seated. A prayer may be offered, using the pastor's own words, option A with B, or B alone.

PASTOR: Christ be with you.

PEOPLE: And also with you.

PASTOR: Let us pray.

Option A:

PASTOR: We thank you, God, for the gift of creation called forth by your saving Word. Before the world had shape and form, your Spirit moved over the waters. Out of the waters of the deep, you formed the firmament and brought forth the earth to sustain all life. In the time of Noah, you washed the earth with the waters of the flood, and your ark of salvation bore a new beginning. In the time of Moses, your people Israel passed through the Red Sea waters from slavery to freedom and crossed the flowing Jordan to enter the promised land. In the fullness of time, you sent Jesus Christ, who was nurtured in the water of Mary's womb. Jesus was baptized by John in the water of the Jordan, became living water to a woman at the Samaritan well, washed the feet of the disciples, and sent them forth to baptize all the nations by water and the Holy Spirit.

The water may be visibly poured.

Option B: (may be used alone or with option A)

PASTOR: Bless by your Holy Spirit, gracious God, this water. By your Holy Spirit save those who confess the name of Jesus Christ that sin may have no power over them. Create new life in *the one/all* baptized this day that *she/he/they* may rise in Christ. Glory to you, eternal God, the one who was, and is, and shall always be, world without end. Amen.

ACT OF BAPTISM

NAMING OF A CHILD

When a child is baptized, as each child is handed into the arms of the pastor, the parent(s) may be asked to name the child.

PASTOR: By what name will your child be called?

PARENT(S): *Name* .

The pastor, administering the water by pouring, sprinkling, or immersion, says one of these.

Option A:

PASTOR: *Name*, you are baptized in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit.

PEOPLE: **Amen.**

Option B:

PASTOR: *Name*, I baptize you in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit.

PEOPLE: **Amen.**

The pastor may lay hands on the head of the baptized and say these or similar words.

PASTOR: The Holy Spirit be upon you, *name* , child of God, disciple of Christ, member of the church.

ACT OF PRAISE

A doxology or another act of praise may follow the baptism.

PRAYER FOR THE BAPTIZED

A prayer for the baptized may be said, using one of the following or the pastor's own words.

Option A:

PASTOR: We give you thanks, O Holy One, mother and father of all the faithful for *this your child/these your children* and for the grace acknowledged here today in water and the Holy Spirit. Embrace us all as sons and daughters in the one household of your love. Grant us grace to receive, nurture, and befriend *this new member/these new members* of the body of Christ.

ALL: Give to the newly baptized: strength for life's journey, courage in time of suffering, the joy of faith, the freedom of love, and the hope of new life; through Jesus Christ, who makes us one. **Amen.**

Option B: includes optional words for use when a child is baptized.

PASTOR: Let us pray for *the one/those* baptized today. Gracious God, you have filled the world with joy by giving us the gift of Jesus. Bless *this newly baptized*

person/these newly baptized people. May she/he/they be filled with joy; may he/she/they never be ashamed to confess a personal faith in you. Bless the parent(s) [and sponsor(s)] of this child/these children. May she/he/they always show her/his/their gratitude for the life you have given by loving and caring for name(s). Bless these your faithful people. Unite them in the peace of Christ and the company of the Holy Spirit.

PEOPLE: Amen.

BENEDICTION

Those leading the service may greet the newly baptized, the parents, and the sponsors informally. A lighted candle or another gift signifying discipleship may be given to each newly baptized person. The pastor, sponsors, or others may move through the congregation with the newly baptized and introduce the person(s) as a sign of entry and incorporation into the living community of faith.

PASTOR: Go in the peace of Christ.

ALL: Thanks be to God.

Those who have participated in the Order for Baptism may return to their places in the congregation.

Renewing vs. Re-Baptizing

In the United Church of Christ we recognize as valid all baptisms. Therefore if a person were baptized in another Christian church as an infant, there is no need to re-baptize the individual.

Occasionally in the life of a congregation, there may be times when baptismal vows are renewed. This may be a special time during a service of worship when all present are invited to remember and re-commit to their baptismal vows. An "Order of Renewal of Baptism" can be found in the United Church of Christ Book of Worship.

The section "Remember, Baptism," contained in this resource, is a service for the remembering and renewing of baptismal promises. This service intended for use on the first Sunday following Epiphany, on the day in which we celebrate the baptism of Jesus, was prepared by David J. Holden, minister for adult education and men's ministries and Sid Fowler, minister for worship, liturgy, and spiritual formation with the Worship and Education Ministry Team, Local Church Ministries, United Church of Christ, and is used by permission.

Remember, Baptism

A Celebration of the Baptism of Jesus and Our Baptisms
First Sunday after the Epiphany, the Baptism of Jesus

On the First Sunday after Epiphany, the church remembers the baptism of Jesus by John the Baptist as recounted in the gospels. In that story, the power of the Holy Spirit is evident at the very outset of Jesus' public life of faith. Jesus surfaces from the waters of the Jordan, the heavens open, a dove descends, and a voice from heaven declares, "You are my beloved Child; with you I am well pleased."

The word *Epiphany* comes from the Greek *epiphania*, which means manifestation or revelation and suggests a shining light. On this day, the church recalls God's manifest presence in this and the many other episodes of Jesus' life. As we reflect on Jesus' baptism, we might follow Martin Luther's advice, in his larger catechism, to consider and recall our own baptism as well. Luther did not support repeating baptism but called on us to make repeated use of our baptism. He said, "A truly Christian life is nothing else than a daily baptism once begun and ever to be continued." Whether we have been baptized or not, remember it or not, we have opportunity today to claim and rejoice in the very real ways in which God comes to light in the church and in our lives. Through baptism, God declares that we are beloved children of God. God is well pleased.

In this service, Christians are invited to "remember their baptism and be thankful." It is a time to renew the baptismal covenant. This liturgy is adapted from the "Service of Water" found in the "Order for the Great Vigil of Easter" from *Book of Worship: The United Church of Christ* (pages 238-42). If you are to include baptisms, this liturgy, at key moments, refers you also to the "Order for Baptism" also found in *Book of Worship* (pages 129-44).

Call to Worship

One: In the beginning God created.

People: **And it was good.**

One: In the present God creates.

People: **And it is good.**

One: In the future God will continue creating.

People: **And it will be good.**

One: Let us gather to worship our God.

People: **Who creates goodness in, through, and all around us. Amen.**

Hymn "Crashing Waters at Creation" TNCH 326

Unison Confession and Assurance

People: Gracious God, too often our lives reflect chaos instead of creation. Living in disorder and turmoil, we exist as though you do not. Rather than the tender hovering of your Spirit, we feel the buffeting currents of change and doubt. Have mercy on us. Blow through our lives like a mighty wind this day, clearing away the clouds of despair. Shine brightly among us, renewing our reason for hope. Rain your love upon us, creating in us a new day.

(Silent confessions)

One: This is the good news: The One who goes before us is more powerful than we are. Christ baptizes us not just with water but also with the Holy Spirit. As we receive that baptism, we become a new creation. We are forgiven. And God sees that it is good. The peace of God is yours.

Passing the Peace

(The congregation may greet each other with a sign of reconciliation and peace, such as a handshake or embrace, and they may say these or similar words.)

One: In Christ, we are a new Creation.

People: Thanks be to God!

Responsive Psalm Psalm 29 TNCH 638

Readings for the Baptism of Christ/First Sunday after Epiphany

Genesis 1:1-5

Acts 19:1-17

Hymn "What Ruler Wades through Murky Streams" TNCH 169

Gospel Reading for the Baptism of Christ/First Sunday after Epiphany

Mark 1:4-11

Sermon

Service of Water

Greeting

One: Dear friends, on this day of re-creation we recall Christ's baptism, and we claim and remember our own.

People: We gather at this font of living water to celebrate the gift of God's redeeming grace.

One: For just as the body is one and has many members and all the members of the body, though many, are one body, so it is with Christ.

People: For by one Spirit we were all baptized into one body—Jews or Greeks, slaves or free, male or female—and were all made to drink of one Spirit.

One: Now you are the body of Christ and individually members of it.

(When there are candidates for baptism, present them at this time. Follow the presentation with the "Questions for Candidates" and "Congregational Assent" found in Book of Worship, pages 136-39.)

Affirmation of Faith

(All who are able may stand. The following traditional questions or a full creed or statement of faith may be used. The questions are addressed to the entire congregation.)

One: Do you reaffirm your renunciation of evil and renew your commitment to Jesus Christ?

People: I do.

One: Do you believe in God?

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

One: Do you believe in Jesus Christ?

People: I believe in Jesus Christ, the only one begotten of God before all worlds.

One: Do you believe in the Holy Spirit?

People: I believe in God, the Holy Spirit.

One: Will you continue in the apostles' teaching and community, in the breaking of bread, and in prayer?

People: I will, with God's help.

One: Will you strive for justice and peace among all people, respecting the dignity of every human being?

People: I will, with God's help.

One: Let us pray.

People: In this and all we do, keep us faithful to our Savior Jesus Christ, forever and ever.

Amen.

Blessing of Water

One: Let us pray:

We thank you, God, for the gift of creation called forth by your saving Word. Before the world had shape and form, your Spirit moved over the waters. Out of the waters of the deep, you formed the firmament and brought forth the earth to sustain all life. In

the time of Noah you washed the earth with the waters of the flood, and your ark of salvation bore a new beginning. In the time of Moses and Miriam your people Israel passed through the Red Sea waters from slavery to freedom and crossed the flowing Jordan to enter the promised land. In the fullness of time you sent Jesus Christ who was nurtured in the water of Mary's womb. Jesus was baptized by John in the water of the Jordan, became living water to a woman at the Samaritan well, washed the feet of the disciples, and sent them forth to baptize all nations by water and the Holy Spirit.

(As the following words are spoken, the water may be poured into a basin or font.)

One: Bless by your Holy Spirit, gracious God, this water that by it we may be reminded of our baptism into Jesus Christ and that by the power of your Holy Spirit we may be kept faithful until you receive us at last in your eternal home.

People: Glory to you, eternal God, the one who was and is, and shall always be, world without end. Amen.

(If there are candidates for baptism, follow the "Act of Baptism" through the "Prayer for the Baptized" found in Book of Worship, pages 143-44.)

The Congregation Remembers Baptism

(All who are able and desire to renew their baptismal covenant stand. The leader prays the following prayer or similar words.)

One: Eternal God, you have come to us in Jesus Christ, given us a new birth by water and the Holy Spirit, and forgiven all our sins, Bless us now with the grace we need to fulfill what we have promised.

People: Keep us faithful to our Savior Jesus Christ, forever and ever. Amen.

(Pastors or liturgists may sprinkle the congregation with water from the baptismal font. Sometimes sprigs of an evergreen tree are used. Congregants may also be invited to come forward, as they are able, to dip their fingers into the font, put water on their forehead, or bless each other with water from the font and then return. The following words may be used during this time.)

One: Remember your baptism and be thankful.

People: Amen.

Offering

Celebration of Holy Communion TNCH 16-20

Hymn "Wonder of Wonders, Here Revealed" TNCH 328

Benediction

One: Renew in us, O God, all the gifts of baptism—strength for life's journey, courage in time of suffering, the joy of faith, the freedom of love, and the hope of new life; through Jesus Christ who makes us one. Send us in your Name, Holy One, Amen.

This worship service was prepared by David J. Holden <holdend@ucc.org>, minister for adult education and men's ministries, and Sidney D. Fowler <fowlers@ucc.org>, minister for worship, liturgy, and spiritual formation with the Worship and Education Ministry Team, Local Church Ministries. For more information about worship and liturgy in the United Church of Christ, see <www.ucc.org> or contact the Worship and Education Ministry Team, 700 Prospect Avenue East, Cleveland, Ohio 44115-1100.

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WE1802 TNCH refers to hymns or resources from *The New Century Hymnal* (Cleveland: Pilgrim Press, 1995). Similar resources may be found in other hymnals.

Bibliography and Resources on Baptism and Faith Formation

* Can be purchased from United Church Resources, 1-800-537-3394 or www.unitedchurchpress.com

Books About Baptism

Come Unto Me: Rethinking the Sacraments for Children by Elizabeth Caldwell. This book addresses the realities of congregational and familial practices of the sacrament of baptism and communion. Caldwell provides models for intentional liturgical and educational transformation, offering a holistic sacramental education model that works to integrate education and worship in the lives of church members.

Our Baby's Being Baptized by Marilyn Perry. (Attention all parents, grandparents and teachers: This story of a child's baptism, in simple clear language, will help children ages 2 to 8 understand what happens and why it's such an important ceremony.

Your Child's Baptism by Ron Cole-Turner. This booklet explains the tradition and theology of baptism in easy-to-read language.

Additional Resources for Teaching Children About Baptism

God Speaks to Us in Water Stories by Mary Ann Getty-Sullivan This beautifully illustrated book presents Bible stories concerning water, including those about Noah, the crossing of the Red Sea and the baptism of Jesus.

Touch the Water, Taste The Bread: Exploring the Sacraments with Children, Ages 3 to 5 and Grades 1 through 3 By Sharilyn Adair, Elizabeth Crocker, et. al.

Touch the Water, Taste the Bread offers three lessons on baptism and three lessons on Communion. The lessons on baptism will introduce children to the sacraments and to the Bible story about Jesus' baptism.

Videos available from the MACUCC Resource Center

Baptism of Jesus, The. In this animated version of the story Jesus begins his adult ministry and is baptized by John at the River Jordan. 30 min. Date Published: 1999.

Baptism: Sacrament of Belonging. Here is the story of Alfredo, orphaned by a fire. He wanders villages throughout Mexico seeking acceptance, and is finally welcomed at an orphanage. His story parallels baptism as the sacrament of welcome into God's family. (This is a video version of the 16mm film we formerly had). 15 min. Date Published: 1993.

Meaning of Mystery. This contains two segments: Baptism and Communion. It introduces, explains and demonstrates administration of the Sacraments from a

reformed perspective. It should help teachers, leaders, and church officers in interpreting the sacraments to the entire congregation in a variety of settings. 40 min.
Date Published: 1992.

Informational Web Sites

<http://www.ucc.org/worship/baptism.htm> This is the web site for the "Practices of Faith: Baptism" brochure from the United Church of Christ.

<http://www.wcc-coe.org/wcc/what/faith/bem3.html> This is the web site for the World Council of Churches Faith and Order Paper No. 111 on the meaning of Baptism, Eucharist and Ministry.

<http://www.ucc.org/ecumenical/85-uccresponse-bem.pdf> This is the web site for the United Church of Christ response to the World Council of Churches Faith and Order Paper No. 111.

<http://www.elca.org/ecumenical/resources/Baptism.pdf> This is the web site for "Talking Points: The Amazing Gift of Your Baptism." This is a set of nine leaflets put together by the Evangelical Lutheran Church in American which invite conversation about baptism as it is understood in several different church bodies. This resource is intended as a conversation starter.

Books About Sharing Faith With Our Children

How Do Children Grow? Introducing Children to God, Jesus, The Bible, Prayer, Church by Delia Halverson Offering practical and effective direction for parents who want to build a foundation for faithfulness as their children grow, this book presents concrete examples and appropriate advice for introducing and reinforcing faith concepts. An excellent resource for parents who believe it is their responsibility to foster a sense of the importance of God and the church in their children's lives.

Nurturing Faith in Families: 425 Creative Ideas for Family Ministry by Jolene Roehlkepartain A family faith crisis is occurring in church-going families. Often church leaders are perplexed about the best way for their congregation to care for their families within their midst and community. Nurturing Faith in Families offers 425 creative ideas that pastors, teachers, and other leaders can use to help families grow spiritually and feel more connected to the church.

***Making a Home for Faith: Nurturing the Spiritual Life of Your Children** by Elizabeth F. Caldwell The author offers guidance to parents and caregivers who want to take an active role in the faith development of their children. Includes reflection

questions. Church leaders will also find this to be a valuable resource. This book is a good resource for a study group.

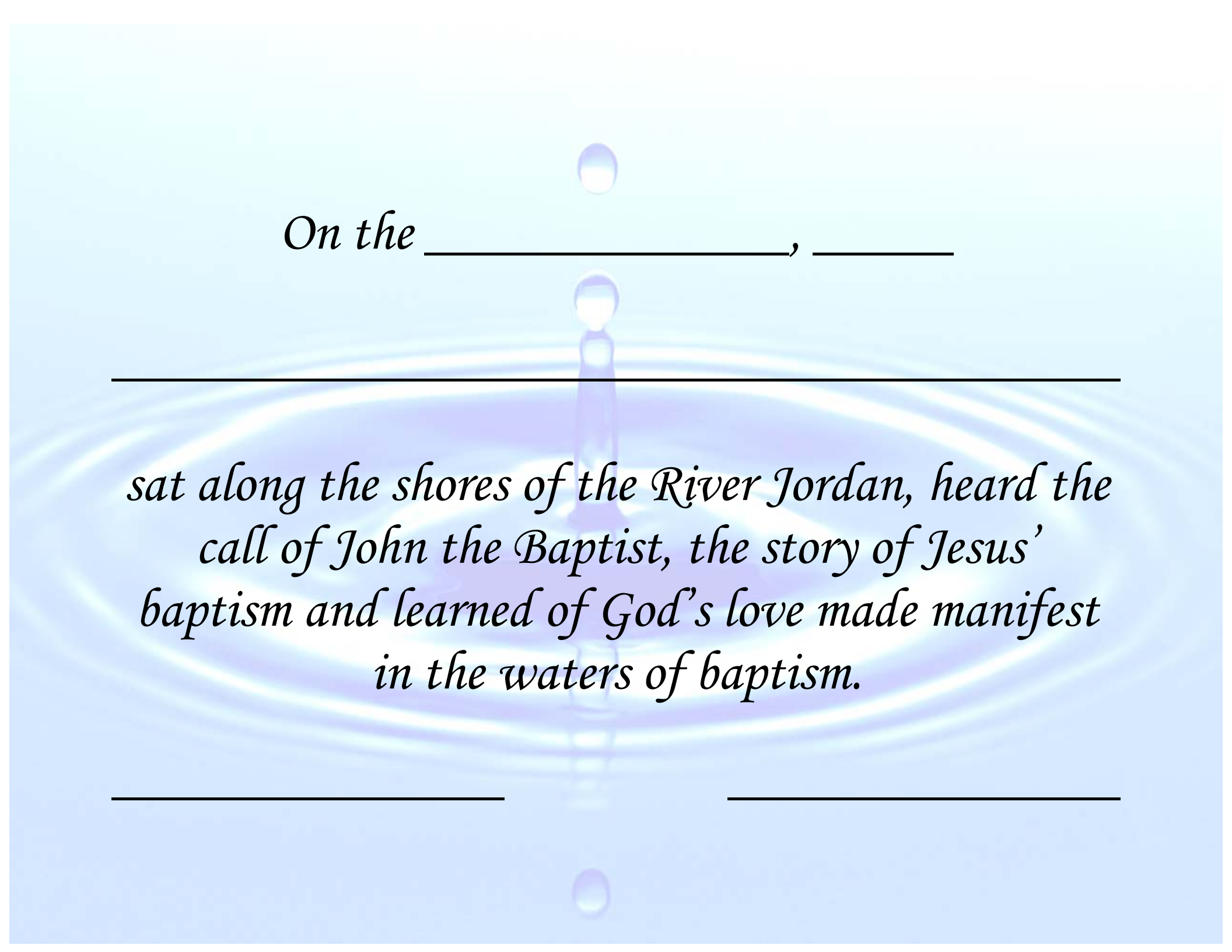
Videos About Creating Family Rituals, Experiencing Family Prayer and Worship (available from the MACUCC Resource Center)

Splashed with Promise - Learning the Language of Faith This three part video series with study guide included is for parents to view as they seek to live out baptismal promises made to children. Video 1 will help viewers to learn the importance of family in faith formation. "The flow of faith goes from heart to lips to ears." The language of faith must be spoken in the home as well as in the congregation. Includes study guide. 30 mins. Date published 2000.

Splashed with Promise - Living the Language of Faith This three part video series with study guide included is for parents to view as they seek to live out baptismal promises made to children. Video 2 shares practical ways to live out the baptismal promises in the home through caring conversations, devotional life, service, rituals and traditions. Includes study guide. 30 mins. Date published 2000.

Splashed with Promise - Passing on the Language of Faith This three part video series with study guide included is for parents to view as they seek to live out baptismal promises made to children. Video 3 shows viewers that every generation brings a gift and the importance of intergenerational ministry. Includes study guide. 30 mins. Date published 2000.

As an extension of this program, you may want to consider offering a three part series using these videos to help parents to live out baptismal promises made to children.

A water droplet is shown falling from the top center of the frame into a pool of water. The impact has created a series of concentric ripples that spread outwards. The background is a light blue gradient. The text is centered horizontally and partially overlaid by the ripples.

On the _____, _____

sat along the shores of the River Jordan, heard the call of John the Baptist, the story of Jesus' baptism and learned of God's love made manifest in the waters of baptism.
