

Belong: The Meaning of Baptism in The United Methodist Church

Lesson Plan

Dynamic: Participants' lives serve as the main curriculum. The focus should be on group dynamics with a lead learner. The other tools supplement the group's growth.

Session 1: Introduction to Baptism

Objectives:

- Build connections with one another as baptized believers to foster community and shared faith.
- Explore the theological and biblical foundations of baptism as an initiation into the church family in the United Methodist tradition.

Preparation for Facilitators:

- Review the video content, Foundation booklet (*The Meaning of Baptism in The United Methodist Church – Foundations*), Participant guide ([*The Meaning of Baptism in The United Methodist Church – Participant Guide*](#)), lesson plans, and other materials on Baptism.
- As a lead learner, be prepared to share personal reflections or stories about Baptism.
- Ensure a welcoming environment for sharing personal experiences.
- Print out Covenant Guidelines examples
- Gather index cards, pens, and a bowl or basket

Video Content (5-10 mins):

- *Our Stories of Baptism*

Reading Assignment:

- Leaders: Read pages 1-3 in [*The Meaning of Baptism in The United Methodist Church – Foundations*](#)

Session Outline (90 minutes - adaptable)

Welcome and Opening Prayer (10 minutes)

1. Welcome participants and open with a prayer.
2. Briefly introduce the session's objectives.

Icebreaker Activity: "Baptism Stories" (20 minutes)

- Objective: Help participants get to know one another and create a sense of community.
- Materials Needed: Index cards, pens, and a bowl or basket.

Instructions:

- **Step 1:** Distribute one index card and pen to each participant.

- **Step 2:** Ask participants to write a brief response to one of the following prompts (write prompts on a whiteboard or flip chart):
 - "Share a memorable Baptism experience (yours or someone else's)."
 - "What do you hope to learn about Baptism in this course?"
- **Step 3:** Collect the index cards in a bowl or basket.
- **Step 4:** Mix the cards and redistribute them, ensuring no one receives their own card.
- **Step 5:** Participants read the card they received aloud and try to guess who wrote it.
- **Step 6:** After the correct participant is identified, that person will share a little more about the response if they feel comfortable.

Facilitator Tip: Encourage a supportive and respectful atmosphere. Make sure everyone has a chance to participate, but don't pressure anyone to share more than they are comfortable with.

Covenant Agreement (10 minutes)

Use one of the covenants or create your own covenant from "[Courageous Conversations: Sample Guidelines](#)."

Have enough copies of the covenant for each participant. Read and discuss the covenant with the group.

- The covenant should include, at a minimum, confidentiality requirements and expectations for the participants.
- Encourage buy-in from participants by asking for their input.

Facilitator Tip: Encourage buy-in for the covenant by asking participants what else might be needed or included in the covenant.

Video Content (10 minutes)

Watch the video, *Our Stories of Baptism*.

Video Reflection (20 minutes)

- What did you hear that has you wondering or curious?
- What did you learn from the video?

Facilitator tip: Ensure each participant has a chance to speak. Be comfortable with silence. Allow time for reflection.

Activity: Micro-Group Breakout (15 minutes)

- Objective: Help participants name their questions. Ensure that future sessions respond to their questions.
- Materials Needed: Index cards, pens, and a bowl or basket.

Instructions:

- **Step 1:** Distribute one index card and pen to each participant.
- **Step 2:** Ask groups to write as many questions about Baptism as they can in five minutes.
- **Step 3:** Ask groups to star, underline, or highlight their top two questions.
- **Step 4:** Make a “parking lot” to post all the questions.
- **Step 5:** Have participants read other groups’ questions.

Facilitator Tip: Keep the “parking lot” questions visible for each session and point out when/if you get to the questions in other sessions.

Session 1 Wrap-Up: (5 minutes)

- Summarize key points discussed.
 - Reflect on the questions asked in the “parking lot” section.
- Reading assignment: Read pages 1 to top of page 7 in the Participant guide.
- Encourage participants to consider their Baptismal identity throughout the week.
- Closing prayer.

Session 2: Baptism as an Identity Marker for Our Lives**Objectives:**

- Understand Baptism as a core identity marker that shapes who we are as children of God and members of the church.
- Explore the connection between Baptism and grace, deepening participants' understanding of prevenient, justifying, and sanctifying grace in the Methodist tradition.
- Reflect on Baptism's lifelong impact. Consider how it initiates us into the church and continues to shape our faith journey.

Preparation for Facilitators:

- Review the video content, pages 1-7 in the Participant guide, and pages 4-8 in the foundations booklet.
- Prepare examples of how Baptism shapes our identity as children of God.
- Prepare to discuss the connections between grace and Baptism in The United Methodist Church.
- Gather index cards, pens, and a bowl or basket.

Video Content

- *What Is Baptism?* video

Reading Assignment:

- Leaders: Read pages 4-8 in the Foundations booklet.
- Participants: Read pages 1-7 (top of page) in the Participant guide.

Session Outline (90 minutes - adaptable)

Welcome and Opening Prayer (10 minutes)

- Welcome participants and open with a prayer.
- Briefly introduce the session's objectives.

Icebreaker Activity: "Understanding Grace" (20 minutes)

- Objective: Help participants get to know one another and grow in their understanding of grace.
- Materials Needed: Index cards, pens, and a bowl or basket.

Instructions:

- **Step 1:** Divide into three groups.
- **Step 2:** Distribute one index card and pen to each group.
- **Step 3:** Ask each group to write a brief response to the following prompt (write the prompt on a whiteboard or flip chart):
 - What do you already know about the Methodist understanding of grace?
- **Step 4:** Assign each group one experience (FYI - they are not "types" of grace) – prevenient, justifying, sanctifying grace.
- **Step 5:** Distribute another index card to each group.
- **Step 6:** Ask each group to write a brief response to the following prompts (write prompts on a whiteboard or flip chart):
 - Define the assigned experience of grace in fewer than ten words.
- **Step 7:** Have the groups share their responses.
- **Step 8:** Have the groups talk about how each experience of grace is connected to the other experiences. For example, "How does prevenient grace lead to justifying grace?" "What is the distinction between justifying grace and sanctifying grace?"

Facilitator Tip: Encourage a supportive and respectful atmosphere. Try to make the experience a time of learning, encouraging participants to adopt a posture of curiosity.

Video Content (10 minutes).

Watch the video, *What Is Baptism?*.

Video Reflection (10-15 minutes)

- What did you hear that has you wondering or curious?
- What did you learn from the video?

Facilitator tip: Ensure each participant has a chance to speak. Be comfortable with silence. Allow time for reflection.

Discussion Prompts:

1. Playtime. Let's imagine a Baptism scene. It can be in your current church, a previous church, or perhaps another location. What do you see? What do you smell? Where is God's presence in this scene? Where is the congregation? Who is in the congregation? What is God doing? What is the congregation doing? What is happening to the person being baptized? What is happening to the congregation? What promises are they making? What will the impact of this Baptism be in a hundred years?
2. We understand grace as a free gift and empowerment for following God's teachings. As United Methodists, we talk about *prevenient* grace (grace that comes before our awareness), *justifying* grace (what God does for us), and *sanctifying* grace (what God does in us). Baptism is a response to God's call, even as we experience grace in the act of Baptism. How, then, might we understand the relationship between the free gift of God's grace and the act of Baptism as the initiation into the family of God?
3. We experience initiation rituals in many places—membership clubs, rotary clubs, Lions' clubs, and professional organizations. How does Baptism initiate us into the church family? What are the requirements, privileges, and opportunities for the baptized and for the baptized community?

Session 2 Wrap-Up:

- Summarize key points and share visual representations.
- Encourage participants to consider their Baptismal identity throughout the week.
- Encourage participants who are using the workbook to continue using it.
- Reading Assignment: Read the middle of page 7 through page 18 in the participant guide.
- Closing Prayer.

Session 3: Living as a Baptized United Methodist Christian

Objectives:

- Understand the life-giving nature of Christian tradition, distinguishing it from traditionalism.
- Explore the practical implications of living out Baptismal promises, connecting them to everyday discipleship and community life.
- Reflect on Baptism as both a personal and communal act, deepening participants' awareness of how Baptism connects them to the broader family of the baptized.

Preparation for Facilitators:

- Review the video content and the reading assignments in the Participant guide and Foundations booklet.
- Prepare to discuss practical ways to live out Baptismal promises.

Video Content (10-15 mins)

- *Our Tradition of Baptism* video

Reading Assignment:

- Leaders: Read pages 9-20 in the Foundations booklet.
- Participants: Read pages 7-18 in the Participant guide.

Session Outline (90 minutes - adaptable)**Welcome and Opening Prayer (10 minutes)**

- Welcome participants and open with a prayer.
- Briefly introduce the session's objectives.

Opening Activity – Traditions**Discuss:**

- What meaningful traditions did you have growing up?
- What traditions have you heard of or experienced that conflicted with your understanding of baptism?
- How can traditions be life-giving? How can we tell when following traditions turns into just "going through the motions"?
- Church historian Jaroslav Pelikan once said: "Tradition is the living faith of the dead; traditionalism is the dead faith of the living. And, I suppose I should add, it is traditionalism that gives tradition such a bad name."¹ Do you find this is true? Why or why not?

Video Content (10 minutes)

Watch the video, *Our Tradition of Baptism*

Video Reflection (10-15 minutes)

- What did you hear that makes you wonder or curious?
- What did you learn from the video?
- How would intentional preparation before Baptism be helpful?
- Facilitator tip: Ensure each participant has a chance to speak. Be comfortable with silence. Allow time for reflection.

¹ Jaroslav Pelikan, [*The Vindication of Tradition: The 1983 Jefferson Lecture in the Humanities*](#) (Yale University Press, 1986).

Discussion:

Have a few people in the group (preferably those with different Bible translations) read Mark 1:9-11. Then discuss the following questions as a group.

1. How is Baptism a ritual or practice for initiation into the family of God?
2. How might this common experience with water, repentance, and a profession of faith connect us to other baptized believers?

Have a few people in the group (preferably those with different Bible translations), read Romans 6:1-4. Then discuss the following questions as a group.

1. What does it mean to be baptized into "Christ's death"?
2. How does Baptism mark both a death and a new life experience?

Discuss the following questions as a group. Allow time for silent reflection. Encourage participants to think beyond their immediate responses.

1. How is Baptism a communal act as well as a response by the individual being baptized? How is the individual response strengthened by the presence and active participation of the community in the baptism?
2. How might the community that surrounds us in our Baptism nurture our ongoing discipleship growth?
3. How do you understand the reasons United Methodists affirm Baptism for infants and children?

Session 3 Wrap-Up:

- Summarize key points and present the Baptismal Covenant.
- Encourage participants to consider their baptismal identity throughout the week.
- Encourage participants who are using the workbook to continue using it.
- Reading assignment: Read pages 19-28 in the participant guide.
- Closing Prayer.

Session 4: Baptismal Liturgy in The United Methodist Church

Objective:

- Understand the meaning and purpose of our Baptismal liturgy, recognizing it as a prayerful expression of *becoming, belonging, and believing*.
- Explore how the words of the liturgy shape our understanding of Baptism and how they inform our lives as disciples of Jesus Christ.
- Reflect on the significance of Baptism and be able to articulate its meaning within the United Methodist tradition.

Preparation for Facilitators:

- Review the video content and the reading assignments in the Participant guide and Foundations booklet.
- Find a prayer to use during the activity.

Video Content (10 mins):

- *Our Liturgy of Baptism* video

Reading Assignment:

- Leaders: Read pages 21-29 in the Foundations booklet.
- Participants: Read pages 7-18 in the Participant guide.

Session Outline (90 minutes - adaptable)**Welcome and Opening Prayer (10 minutes)**

- Welcome participants and open with a prayer.
- Briefly introduce the session's objectives.

Opening Activity – Liturgy MadLibs

This activity invites participants to engage with a familiar liturgy from a new perspective by turning that liturgy into a MadLib—in this case, a prayer with missing words that participants will fill in without seeing or hearing the prayer itself.

To begin, ask participants to come up with words that fit the prompts in the list below. Pro-tip: Write the word(s) down in each slot here and then transfer them to the prayer after you have gathered all the missing words. Try to keep all answers to one word whenever possible. For those that need more than one word, encourage participants to be concise.

1. Name for God: _____
2. Noun: _____
3. Character in the Old Testament: _____
4. Way God worked through character in #3 (keep it short): _____
5. Noun for a gift God gives us: _____
6. Water that Jesus encountered: _____
7. Something Jesus told his disciples to do: _____
8. Noun for a group of people: _____
9. Another noun for a group of people: _____
10. Noun for a gift God gives us: _____
11. Noun for a celebration: _____
12. Name for God: _____

After you have collected the words, fill them into the prayer below. Then, invite participants to listen as you read the prayer with their words filled in.

Thanksgiving over the Water (MadLibs style)

The Lord be with you.

And also with you.

Let us pray.

Eternal (1)_____:

When nothing existed but (2)_____;

you swept across the dark waters

and brought forth light.

In the days of (3)_____:

you saved your people by (4)_____:

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.

****Sing to the Lord, all the earth.**

Tell of God's (5)_____each day.

In the fullness of time, you sent Jesus,

nurtured in the water of (6)_____:

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 (7)_____:

****Declare Christ's works to the (8)_____;**

his glory among all the (9)_____:

Pour out your Holy Spirit,

to bless this gift of water and those who receive it,

to wash away their sin

and clothe them in (10)_____:

throughout their lives,
that, dying and being raised with Christ,
they may share in his final (11) :.

****All praise to you, Eternal (12) _____ ;
through your Son Jesus Christ,
who with you and the Holy Spirit
lives and reigns forever. Amen.**

Invite participants to reflect on hearing this prayer in a new way.

- What do you feel about hearing this differently?
- What worked or didn't work? And why?
- How do the words we pray in the liturgy help us understand what's happening in the action of baptism?

Video Content (10 minutes).

- Watch the video, *Our Liturgy of Baptism*.

Video Reflection (10-15 minutes)

- What did you hear that makes you wonder or curious?
- What did you learn from the video?
- Dr. Anderson described the liturgy as a threefold act of *becoming*, *belonging*, and *believing*. Which of these is most important to you now, and how do you think God is shaping that in your life?

Activity:

Read over the Baptismal Liturgy on pages 21-26 in the Participant guide. Remind participants that every part of the liturgy is a prayer. Assign one participant to read the pastor role (light font) and one person to read the role of the baptized (the person being baptized). Have everyone else read the congregational role (in bold). After the reading, discuss the following questions:

- What words or phrases caught your attention?
- What words or phrases do you have questions about or are you curious about?
- Are there any words or phrases you want to incorporate in your prayer life?

Activity:

Discuss the following questions as a group. Allow time for silent reflection. Encourage participants to think beyond their immediate responses.

- If you had to share the significance of your Baptism with a friend, what would you say?

- How do the words of the prayer in the liturgy help inform your answer?

Session 4 Wrap-Up:

- Summarize key points and highlight the liturgy as prayer.
- Encourage participants to consider their Baptismal identity throughout the week.
- Encourage participants who are using the workbook to continue using it.
- Reading assignment: Read pages 29-34 in the Participant guide.
- Closing Prayer.

Session 5: Baptism as a Call to Discipleship

Objectives

- Recognize Baptism as the foundation of the discipleship journey and understand how it initiates people into lifelong growth in discipleship to Jesus Christ.
- Explore practical ways to live out our Baptismal calling, reflecting on new commitments as disciples.
- Connect Baptism to ongoing sanctification, seeing it as the root of continued transformation and role in the body of Christ.

Preparation for Facilitators:

- Review the video content and reading assignments in the Participant guide and foundations booklet.
- Prepare to discuss the call to discipleship stemming from baptism.
- Gather the following materials: a large posterboard or whiteboard with the image of a bare tree; paper leaves or sticky notes in the shape of leaves; markers; a small bowl of water

Video Content (15 mins):

- *The Fruit of Our Baptism* video
- *Reaffirming Our Baptism* video

Reading Assignment:

- Leaders: Read pages 30-39 in the Foundations booklet.
- Participants: Read pages 29-34 in the Participant guide.

Session Outline (90 minutes – adaptable)

Welcome and Opening Prayer (10 minutes)

- Welcome participants and open with a prayer.
- Briefly introduce the session's objectives.

Opening Activity – “Baptism Tree of Discipleship”

Objective: To help participants recognize Baptism as the foundation of their discipleship journey.

Materials Needed:

- A large poster or whiteboard with the image of a bare tree (trunk with branches, no leaves)
- Paper leaves (or sticky notes in the shape of leaves)
- Markers
- Small bowl of water

Step 1: Introduction (5 minutes)

Begin by explaining the relationship between Baptism and discipleship. You could say something like:

"Just like a tree grows from its roots, our journey of discipleship grows from the foundation of our baptism. Today, we'll explore how baptism initiates us into the family of God and how our discipleship continues through the work of sanctifying grace."

Step 2: Building the “Baptism Tree” (15-20 minutes)

1. Draw or display the “Baptism Tree.” In the front of the room, display the large poster or whiteboard with a tree drawn on it. The tree represents the growth that comes from our baptism, starting with the roots (baptism) and spreading through the branches (our ongoing discipleship).
2. Distribute leaves: Give each participant three paper leaves (or sticky notes shaped like leaves), and ask them to write responses to the following on each leaf:
 - Leaf 1: One word or phrase that describes what baptism means to you (e.g., “new beginning,” “God’s love,” “community,” “initiation” “repentance,” “resisting evil”).
 - Leaf 2: One way you’ve grown as a disciple since baptism (e.g., “Learning to pray,” “Serving others,” “Stronger faith,” “Freedom,” “Abundance,” “Reconciliation,” “Compassion,” “Devotion”).
 - Leaf 3: From this course, one way you feel called to continue growing as a disciple (e.g., “Share my faith,” “Trust God more,” “Serve others,” “Advocacy”).
3. Add leaves to the tree: As participants finish writing, invite them to place their leaves on the branches of the tree, symbolizing the growth that has come from their baptism.

4. Facilitate group discussion: Once the tree is full of leaves, take a moment to reflect on the tree. Ask questions like:
- What do you notice about our “Baptism Tree”?
 - How does our baptism continue to shape our discipleship?
 - In what ways do you see God continuing the work of sanctification in us and through us?

Step 3: Connection to Baptism and Discipleship (5-7 minutes)

After the discussion, bring the conversation back to the core idea: Baptism is the root of our discipleship, and our faith continues to grow from it. You could say:

"Our Baptism Tree reminds us that Baptism is not a one-time event that initiates us into a new future and way of being. Just like these leaves, we continue to grow in faith, service, and love as we follow Christ together."

Video Content (5 minutes)

Watch the video, *The Fruit of Our Baptism*

Reflection (10 minutes)

- What did you hear that you wonder about or are curious about?
- What did you learn from the video?
- What was something you heard that you’ve never thought about before?

Video Content (10 minutes)

Watch the video, *Reaffirming Our Baptism*

Reflection (10 minutes)

- What did you hear that you wonder about or are curious about?
- What did you learn from the video?
- Have you ever been part of a “Reaffirmation of Baptism” service? What was that like? If you haven’t, why might that be a significant marker in your growth as a disciple?

Activity – Parking Lot Questions

Bring back the “Parking Lot” questions from Session 1 to remind participants of the questions that they raised. Discuss the following:

- How have your questions changed since session 1?
- What additional questions would you add now?

Closing (Part 1)

Refer to the "Baptism Tree," saying: This is one tree among a forest of trees. Our church is one tree in a whole forest of other baptized Christians that support us, challenge us, and nurture us to be growing disciples. We are one part of the body of Christ. This is part of what Hebrews 12:1-2 has in mind as the "great cloud of witnesses." As United Methodists, this is also part of the privilege and responsibility of being in a connectional church that binds us together in mission as baptized Christians.

Closing (Part 2) – Remembering You Are One of the Baptized (5 minutes)

For a closing reflection, invite participants to gather around the "Baptism Tree" or remain seated and reflect on their ongoing growth as disciples. You might use a small bowl of water as a reminder of their Baptism. As you pray or share a blessing, invite participants to dip their fingers in the water to renew their Baptismal commitment symbolically.

Session 5 Wrap-Up:

- Summarize key points and highlight the ongoing nature of discipleship.
- Closing Prayer.

Closing Prayer

The God of all grace,
who has called us to eternal glory in Christ,
establish you and strengthen you
that you may live in grace and peace.²

²"Baptismal Covenant I," *United Methodist Book of Worship*, <https://www.umcdiscipleship.org/book-of-worship/the-baptismal-covenant-i>.