



## **Watery Beginnings: *The Journey with Children and Youth in Worship***

By: The Rev. Dr. Larry Kochendorfer

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We are a pilgrim community of memory and vision, of watery beginnings and of journeying together - the infant, the youth, the adult, the aged. How do we live - on the other side of the water so to speak - as pilgrims together? Who are we?

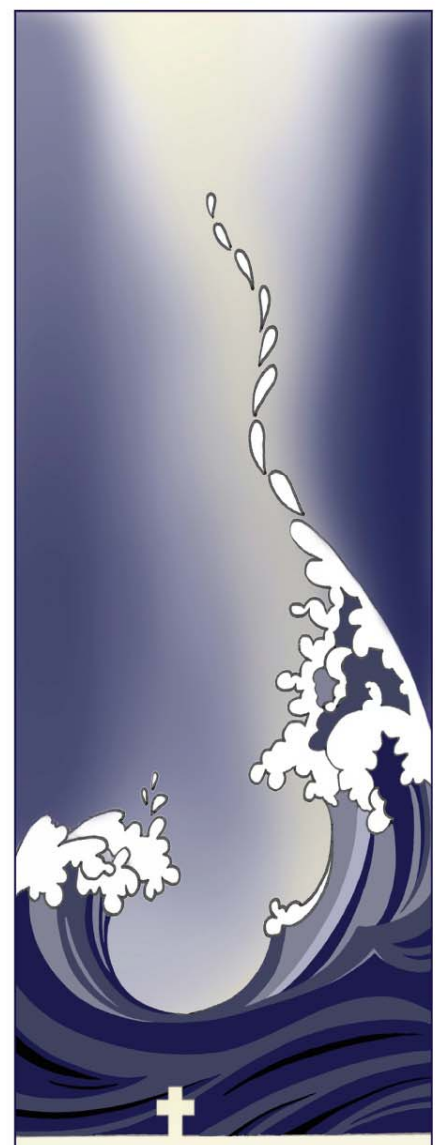
From a Christian perspective the answer is easy, though not easily understood nor lived out. We are baptized! We have been drowned and raised to new life, we have been adopted into a family - the church - we have been given the name Christian, have been signed with the cross and claimed as Christ's own forever. We have been re-created in the image of God. We are saints. We are persons of worth. We are lovable, loved, and capable of loving. We are partners with God, stewards of God's creation, entrusted with the Good News of God's saving work in Jesus Christ.

Baptism tells us who and whose we are. Our baptism provides us with a picture of who we really are and a picture of the world as God intends it to be. Throughout our lives we are to strive to live into that baptism.

### **A Rich Baptismal Practice:**

How is baptism practiced in our faith communities? Is there conversation, catechesis, preparation prior to a baptism? Is baptism an integral part of the Sunday liturgy or tacked on as a seeming afterthought? Even worse, is it reduced to a private family affair removed from the regular worship of the assembly? Following are several possibilities for a rich baptismal practice.

Ensure that the baptismal font is visible and central in worship - suggest that the presider stand next to the font during the confession and forgiveness, or the thanksgiving for baptism. If possible during the season of Lent and Easter, you might place the font filled with water and the paschal candle near the entrance to the sanctuary so that worshippers must walk by it. Perhaps for a time during the season of Lent, prior to the confession, ask a child or youth to pour water into the baptismal bowl so that all can hear the sound of running water. *(Continued)* ▶



Use ample amounts of water at a baptism, and seek in planning worship to make each baptism as participatory as possible. Gather the children around the font. Have a child pour water into the baptismal bowl prior to the Flood Prayer over the water. Have a child present the baptismal candle or other gifts. Prior to the words of welcome to the newly baptized, kneel with the infant or have the baptized kneel with the children and have the assembly sing "Jesus Loves Me", inserting the name or names of the baptized into the refrain.

When the newly baptized is welcomed by the assembly, begin a practice of having a worshipper hold the infant, or stand with the youth or adult in the midst of the assembly. Ensure that over time, a variety of ages - male and female - serve in this way. There is nothing quite like a teenager or a child holding an infant in their arms in the middle of the assembly!

At a worship service which includes a baptism, distribute cards to those who would like to draw a picture or write a letter to the newly baptized. These could be gathered and presented following the baptism.

Encourage the confirmation students, while focusing on the Sacrament of Baptism, to prepare baptismal bowls which can be presented as a gift to the baptized, along with instructions and ideas about using the bowl in one's home.

During the season of Epiphany, gather the community of faith for an evening of learning and creating baptismal candles for the next year.

Create banners, bulletins or pictures which might be projected during a baptism which represent the various baptismal images found in the scriptures:

1. Dying and rising with Christ (Romans 6)
2. New birth (John 3)
3. A cleansing bath (I Peter 3:21-22)
4. Being sealed by the Holy Spirit (II Corinthians 1:21-22; Ephesians 1:13-14)
5. Clothed in a new robe (Galatians 3:27-28; Colossians 3:9-10)
6. A passage on Noah's ark (I Peter 3:18-22)
7. Enlightenment (Ephesians 5:14)
8. Adoption (Ephesians 1:3-5; Galatians 3:25-29; Romans 8:14-17)
9. Being grafted into Christ (John 15; Romans 11:19-23)

These are only a few suggestions. Creative, meaningful ideas abound!

## **On-going Baptismal Experiences - "felt and heard"**

Several years ago we borrowed a television set to watch the Olympic Games. Our four children were quite young at the time. I was enthralled by one particular event. Who would make it to the finals? Who would be victorious? These thoughts occupied my mind and heart as I sang my nightly song to my daughter. We said our prayers and exchanged kisses and hugs. As I began to leave the room my daughter said, "Daddy, you forgot to give me the cross!" I had forgotten our nightly ritual of remembering our baptisms and the cross placed upon her forehead, along with the words, "Anna, remember you are a child of God, sealed by the Holy Spirit and marked by the cross of Christ forever." My mind and heart were distracted by worldly and temporal concerns, and so I forgot the cross. Her heart was fixed on Christ and the promises given in baptism. She remembered and wanted to both hear and feel what had eternal value.

"Humankind suffers from spiritual amnesia," writes Tom Johnson. "We simply forget the Spirit's presence and the promises we received at baptism."



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Baptismal living between “remembering and growing into” (*John Westerhoff*) incorporates regular affirmation rituals that can link us to our own individual experiences of God’s faithfulness. These rituals deepen and remind us of our bond with the faith community as a whole and its history of living as the baptized people of God.

So, to help us remember baptism in our faith communities, the following thoughts and ideas are suggested.

At various times in the church year baptismal festivals can be celebrated in which all members of the congregation are invited to join in a renewal of baptismal vows. A service of baptismal renewal reinforces how baptism is more a life-long process than a once-for-all event. A baptismal renewal, or affirmation of baptism, might take place on feast days such as the Baptism of Our Lord, the Easter Vigil, Reformation Sunday, and All Saints Sunday.

Before I was called to serve as Assistant to the Bishop of the Synod of Alberta and the Territories, I served as the pastor at Ascension Lutheran in Edmonton. It was our practice that at each baptism following the sharing of the peace, a baptismal hymn was sung while the assembly was sprinkled with water. This connects for the worshippers, the event of that baptism with their own in a visible, tangible, concrete way. Encourage a child or youth to carry the baptismal bowl, if this is possible, as the asperges takes place, or have several pine boughs available so the children can sprinkle the congregation during the singing of the hymn.

When times of learning create opportunity to teach and reflect on the gift of baptism, gather at the font for this learning, or for a time of devotions and prayer. Invite each participant to dip their finger in the water and to mark themselves with the sign of the cross, or have them mark another person while speaking words of baptismal remembrance.

Where gifts of writing abound, develop a congregational devotional resource focused on baptism and the biblical stories of water - which could be used as a fifty-day Lenten journey by the entire community. Invite children, youth or other artists to create pictures to complement the writings.

Develop brief repeatable baptismal affirmation rites for life’s milestone moments for use in the assembly or in a home. Perhaps the youth group could celebrate the earning of a participant’s driver’s license with a baptismal remembrance. Gather at the baptismal font, read

Psalm 103:1-5, 19-22 or another appropriate reading. Invite the individual(s) to make a pledge of commitment to use this new gift with responsibility and wisdom. Remind them that in baptism God promises that they are God’s child and that God will always be present with them. Affirm their baptism with water placed on their foreheads. Lay hands on the person(s) and pray for them.

Another milestone moment is the diagnosis of a chronic or life-threatening disease. Gather around the baptismal font. Read Psalm 91 or 121. Invite a time of silence. Lead a confession inviting one-word expressions or feelings (I am angry; I am afraid; I am hopeful; I am sad). Pray together remembering God’s presence. Have those present place water on their foreheads in the sign of a cross saying, “Through my baptism, I am a child of God, sealed by the Holy Spirit and marked by the cross of Christ, who will love me forever, who will never let me go, who is my true hope for abundant and everlasting life.” Offer prayers for healing and close with a benediction.

Create moments for remembering baptism during committee meetings and at the first and/or final meeting of a church council. Gather at the font. Read scripture together. Pray. Mark one another with the sign of the cross.

During the children’s time Sunday morning, teach the assembly to mark themselves with the sign of the cross over their bodies in remembrance of their baptism. Reinforce this teaching moment over several weeks, or perhaps, during the season of Lent.

These are only a few suggestions. Remember ... creative, meaningful ideas abound.

### **Conclusion:**

As the baptized children of God, we journey knowing that baptism into Christ tells us who and whose we are. Our baptismal practice must be rich and full. Our baptismal remembrance must be on-going and both felt and heard. We journey as a pilgrim community of watery beginnings, a community of memory and vision. **A**



## ***Curating Worship Workshop: Berg and Kochendorfer - two perspectives***

**Joy Berg:** I had not heard of Mark Pierson, nor read his book. But the title for a Sunday afternoon session on “Curating Worship” intrigued me. And without any research ahead of time, I assumed I was going to hear about how to ‘care’ for worship. So that June Sunday afternoon was quite different than I expected. I found my way into the beautiful sanctuary of St. Stephen’s the Martyr amidst the smells of the incense from the morning service, and sat beside the two other Lutherans (there was a wide range of ecumenism present scattered in the pews). And for the rest of the afternoon I was stretched to think creatively and theologically.

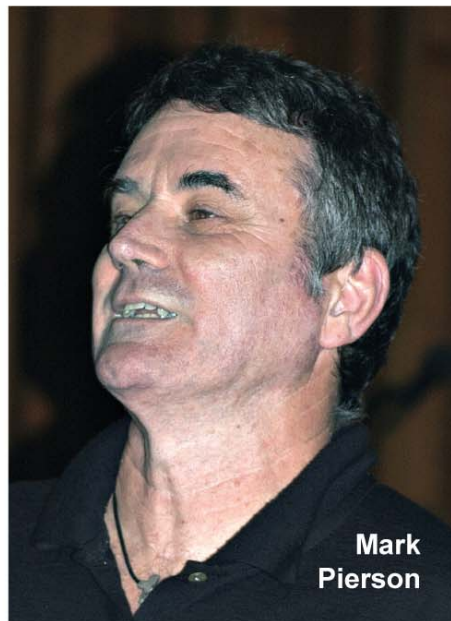
Mark talked and demonstrated (through pictures/powerpoint) on ‘installing’ the worship space with art and ideas so that the worship time captures and enlivens the senses and thoughts of the worshipper. So we saw pictures of a pile of TVs with fire being shown on it – similar to a prayer wall with candles; we saw pictures of bringing in pounds of sand to create a place for Easter to happen; we saw various ways of hanging umbrellas throughout a space to create a unique ceiling overhead. Much of this creativity centred around the use of ‘stations’ within worship, places created for people to ‘enter into’ the thought or the scripture for the day. The inventiveness and artistry was quite astounding. Always trying to underline his belief that “people need to engage with the Trinitarian community of God with heart, soul, mind, and strength”, Mark opened up an afternoon of thought-provoking ideas and creativity; his book is now on my list to read!

**Larry Kochendorfer:** It was a God moment! I had just received a copy of Mark Pierson's, *The Art of Curating Worship: Reshaping the Role of Worship Leader*, ordered through Augsburg Fortress, and the day it arrived I received an e-mail sharing that Mark Pierson would be in Edmonton for a Sunday afternoon workshop. What caught my eye...what intrigued me...was the use of the word "curating" in Pierson's title and I quickly registered for the event.

Mark Pierson, has been a pastor in the Baptist Church of New Zealand since 1982 and developed the model of worship curator more than fifteen years ago. Currently he works with World Vision, and also writes and speaks regularly on aspects of worship as art.

Pierson sees his role of pastor as a worship curator. "I am an artist," he said, "whose medium is worship." A worship curator gives overview to the worship event, provides connections within the worship service, and maintains values important to the community. A worship curator is "a maker of context for worship rather than a presenter of content," where the context becomes as important, and he suggests, more important than content. He speaks of three contexts: community worship (Sunday morning, for example), guerrilla worship (worship that takes place not in a church building but in a public space and curated with the expectation that the general public will participate along with followers of Christ), and transitional worship (everything in between the previous two contexts).

I appreciated Pierson's reflection on ecclesiology and his understanding that the church exists to sustain people in their following of Christ in the world. Learn more at: [www.clayfirecurator.org/author/markpierson](http://www.clayfirecurator.org/author/markpierson).



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