



A Joyous Baptism

Tara Barber

Minister for Ministerial Support and Accountability

It was a great joy and honor to be invited to celebrate the sacrament of baptism for a sweet child and his clergy family. It's one of the things I miss most in my ministry in the national setting: the privilege of walking with families week by week, and recognizing the incredible gifts of the sacred found in the ordinary, like water in the Pacific Northwest. I was reminded of those other moments with old and young worshippers throughout my ministry, where I had been invited to share the message—in short form—known affectionately as Time with the Children.

For those unaware, these are the five longest minutes in the Sunday service (at least for the leader), where they attempt to distill a message, and keep the attention of not just the children of varying ages and attention spans, but also the adults in the pews, who also by the way are of varying ages and attention spans.

Over the years, some Sundays stand out, such as one where we celebrated the festival Sukkot (Leviticus 23) by building a Sukkah blanket fort using the choir loft's dividing wall, and talked about how God finds us, keeps us, and covers us. Other Sundays were not as successful. Like that bright Easter morning when the children were packed in on the chancel steps, eager as I handed out the brightly colored plastic eggs. Eager until they shook the eggs, and I saw those, shall we say, incredulous (dubious? disappointed?) looks as I explained that the seemingly empty eggs were actually filled with hope.

The Sunday memory that accompanied



UNITED CHURCH
OF CHRIST

me as I prepared for that baptism was the week I handed out business cards, printed with the children's first name. Beloved. Actually, I think they had a hyphenated first name, Beloved-Child-of-God. The children were surprised to learn that they all had the same first name, and I think some were glad that they didn't have to write this long hyphenated name in addition to their other given names at the top of the page at school. While they were proud to have their own business cards, I'm not sure if this message resonated with the children in the way it was touching something core in me.

But, what if it's true? It is, you know. Everyone we meet and maybe especially those we know of only by where they live carry the same first name. Everyone including and especially those who have been called by other shared names, names that condemn or diminish. Believing that we share the name Beloved-by-God changes everything. It changes how we care for ourselves and communities and world. How we care for the beloved through our actions and purchases, our votes, priorities, and commitments.

Beloved, God is filling the seemingly empty places with hope and covering you with their holy presence. May we live and love as if it is so.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

The Rev. Tara Barber serves as the Minister for Ministerial Support and Accountability for Ministerial Excellence, Support, and Authorization (MESA) in the national setting of the United Church of Christ.

LEARN ucc.org/justice

DONATE ucc.org/donate

ARCHIVE bit.ly/witness4justice

The United Church of Christ has more than 5,000 churches throughout the United States. Rooted in the Christian traditions of congregational governance and covenantal relationships, each UCC setting speaks only for itself and not on behalf of every UCC congregation. UCC members and churches are free to differ on important social issues, even as the UCC remains principally committed to unity in the midst of our diversity.

