

2

Unifying Waters

EXODUS 14:10-31



GOAL

Children experience the church as God's family and as their extended family and invite others into the family.

- A** Art
- AM** Active/Movement
- C** Conversation
- D** Drama
- F** Food
- G** Game
- M** Music
- NS** Nature/Science
- QC** Quiet/Contemplative
- S** Service
- T** Technology
- X** Extra Prep

Note: bit.ly addresses are case-sensitive.



PRAYER

Lord, thank you for my family.
Thank you for my church family.
Help me to invite others into this special family. Amen.

THIS SESSION

In this session, children explore the unifying power of baptismal water in creating a new family, a family beyond flesh and blood, a spiritual family they are part of wherever they go, a family set apart from others to worship God.

THE BIBLE STORY

The exodus from Egypt is a kind of creation story: God's creation of the covenant community as "a priestly kingdom and a holy nation" (Exodus 19:6). The Lord calls the people out of bondage and claims them as chosen and beloved, set apart for a holy purpose in the world. Similarly, baptism is the creation of the church (in Greek, *ekklesia*, meaning "called-out") as a new people, a covenant community. The people of God are transformed by their passage through the waters. As 1 Peter states, echoing the prophets: "Once you were not a people, but now you are God's people" (1 Peter 2:10). We might say, once we were not a family but through the water of baptism, we become a family, God's family.

CONNECTIONS WITH CHILDREN

Young children are invited to see themselves as part of God's family. Understanding what it means to belong to people who do not live with you, let alone to the church universal, may be a difficult concept for young children to grasp, but the foundation for understanding can be laid by introducing language and modeling respect for their place in God's family.

SESSION PREPARATION

- "In Baptism I Belong to God's Family" (p. 18): Gather old church directories. If you choose, do an internet image search for pictures of "biblical people" and people from church history. Print and cut out pictures.
- "What Is a Family?" (p. 18): Obtain *Families, Families, Families* by Suzanne Lang (Random House Books for Young Readers, 2015) or use the YouTube video "Families, Families, Families Read Aloud" (bit.ly/FMFamiliesBook, 2:39).

Depending on the options you choose:

- "God's Family Welcomes All" (p. 20): Obtain *This Is the Church* by Sarah Raymond Cunningham (Beaming Books, 2020) or use the YouTube video "VBS@Home Storytime—This Is the Church by Sarah Raymond Cunningham" (bit.ly/FMThisIsTheChurch, 3:41).
- "Welcoming New Family Members" (p. 20): Gather supplies such as old mugs; hard candies, tea bags, or other treats; cellophane wrapping, ribbon, and church brochures.
- "Caring for God's Family" (p. 21): Gather nursery toys to be washed.



GETTING STARTED

- Card-stock copies of Resource Page 1
- Old church picture directories
- Pictures of biblical people and people in church history (optional)
- Glue sticks
- Scissors
- Crayons, markers



Turn this activity into a meaningful bulletin board for the church. When a person is baptized, add their picture to the collage.

- Bowl of water (preferably a clear bowl)
- Small table

IN BAPTISM I BELONG TO GOD'S FAMILY A X

As the children enter, greet them by name, and welcome them into the space. Invite them to make a collage of pictures of different people in the big, wide church family. Show the children the old church picture directories and the pictures you have gathered of biblical characters and people from church history, if you have them. Tell the children that, whether they know these people or not, they are all part of God's family.

Have the children draw a picture of themselves in the center frame on their copy of Resource Page 1 and then cut out and glue pictures from the directories and pictures you have provided onto their papers. Have the children write their name under their own picture.

WATERS OF BAPTISM

Place a bowl of water on a small table where the children can sit in a circle or semicircle around it. Gather the children by chanting:

I have some good news, good news.

I have some good news. Come sit with me.

As each child comes to the area, invite them to dip their fingers in the water. As they do, say to each child, “(Name), through the waters of baptism, God loves you and calls you God’s own beloved child.”



INTRODUCING THE PRACTICE

- Families, Families, Families* by Suzanne Lang (Random House Books for Young Readers, 2015) or internet-connected device

WHAT IS A FAMILY? T C

In baptism, we are called to live as God's children in God's family, watching out for and loving one another even when the family is spread around the world and members may look different than us. We are called to create new communities where divisions of race, class, and gender are dissolved in the water of baptism. Young children relate to the word *family* based upon their own family. Help them move their understanding of family from their own to God's big, wide family.

Read *Families, Families, Families* by Suzanne Lang or show the YouTube video “Families, Families, Families Read Aloud” (bit.ly/FMFamiliesBook, 2:39). Talk together about what makes a family, the different kinds of families, and what families do together. Move the conversation to what the church is like and how it is like God's big family.



FINDING THE PRACTICE IN THE BIBLE

THROUGH THE WATERS

AM

Resource Page 2

Invite the children to stand and practice walking in place and stopping when you say “walk” and “stop.” Then have the children practice running in place and stopping in the same manner. Invite the children to walk, run, and stop when they hear those directions in the story. Comment that they should continue with each action until they hear the next one. Encourage them to listen carefully for when you emphasize a word because there will be some extra actions added as well.

Tell the children that today’s story is about a time when God delivered God’s people from slavery to freedom by crossing through the waters of a sea in a very surprising way. Read the adapted Bible story from Exodus 14:10–31 on Resource Page 2. Emphasize the words in bold font, reading through the story slowly so the children have time to respond with the movement. After a few moments of joyful dancing, invite the children to sit. Wonder together about the importance of water in this story. Talk together about how the people of God were the beginning of God’s big family that would grow and grow and someday include all of us as part of it.

Explain that when we, the people of the church, welcome people into the family of God, we baptize them. The waters of baptism unite different peoples and make them one big family of God.



FINDING THE PRACTICE ALL AROUND US

Choose one or more options.

GOD’S FAMILY STICKS TOGETHER

AM C

- Sand table for tubs of dry sand
- Small plastic containers
- Pitcher of water

Guide children in sand play. Help them explore the dry sand. Invite them to mold the sand with their hands or small containers. Ask them what is happening. Wonder why the sand isn’t holding together, why it falls apart. Help the children add some water to the sand. Again, invite them to mold the sand with their hands or the containers. Ask them why they think the sand sticks together now. Wonder how the waters of baptism hold people together.

GOD’S FAMILY IS WELCOMING

AM C

Wonder together how the children welcome people in their home. Ask them what might take place when someone comes to visit that makes people feel welcome.

Take a walking tour of your church facility with the children. Stop and point out things your church does to help people feel welcomed. Some examples might be ramps, large-print bulletins, hearing aids, signage, welcome brochures, step stools at sinks or water fountains, and so forth. At each place, wonder together how that item might make someone feel welcome in your space. Comment that welcoming people into the church family is an important part of being family.

- This Is the Church* by Sarah Raymond Cunningham (Beaming Books, 2020) or internet-connected device

GOD'S FAMILY WELCOMES ALL



Read the book *This Is the Church* by Sarah Raymond Cunningham or show the YouTube video “VBS@Home Storytime—This is the Church by Sarah Raymond Cunningham” (bit.ly/FMThisIsTheChurch, 3:41). Engage the children in conversation using the following questions:

- What was your favorite part of the story?
- What is the church?
- What are some of the things a church does?
- How is the church (the people) like a family?

Teach the children “This Is the Church” rhyme and help them form their hands to do the motions. Use the rhyme at the end of the story.



PRACTICING THE PRACTICE

Choose one or both options.

As followers of Jesus, we are united as one big family of God. Remembering the captivity of God’s people, we are called to seek liberation for all who are oppressed. Remembering the ministry of Jesus, we are called to feed, heal, teach, and welcome. Remembering the early church, we are called to create new communities where all divisions are dissolved in the water of baptism. Remembering that this work is far from finished, we commit to breaking down dividing walls in the world today. Children may practice their baptism by sharing, inviting, and loving.

- Card-stock copies of Resource Page 3
- Crayons, stickers, scissors
- Clean, old mugs
- Hard candies, tea bags, or other treats for the mugs
- Cellophane wrapping paper
- Ribbon
- Church brochures

WELCOMING NEW FAMILY MEMBERS



Invite the children to make “Welcome Mugs” for people visiting worship. Hand out card-stock copies of Resource Page 3 and read the card aloud to the children. Tell the children that, when people visit your church, the church can welcome them with a small gift and note inviting people to be part of God’s family at your church. Have the children decorate card-stock copies of Resource Page 3 with crayons and stickers. Then have them cut apart the cards. Assist with cutting as needed.

Help the children set up an assembly line with clean, old mugs; items to put in the mugs, such as hard candies, tea bags, or other small treats; church brochures; and welcome cards decorated by the children. Invite the children to assemble some treats, a brochure, and a card in each mug.

Set up a wrapping station with cellophane wrapping and ribbon. Have the children bring the mugs to the wrapping station and place the mug in the center of a large piece of cellophane wrapping. Show them how to gather up the cellophane and hold it as a helper ties a ribbon around the gathered cellophane.

Give the mugs to your greeters or the welcoming ministry of your church to give to visitors.

CARING FOR GOD'S FAMILY

AM S

Wonder together what some of the ways are that families show how they care for one another. Then wonder what might be some ways that the church family shows care for one another. Suggest to the children that there is a way they could show their care for others in the church and use water as a reminder of the waters of baptism. Tell the children that, when we see or use water, we can remember the water used in baptism to welcome us into God's family. Explain that they will use soapy water and sponges to clean toys for the children in the nursery.

Set up tubs of soapy water, sponges, and towels. Invite the children to wash and dry the toys. They may want to set up an assembly line, having some children wash and some children dry, or they may each want to wash and dry toys. Let them decide their process.

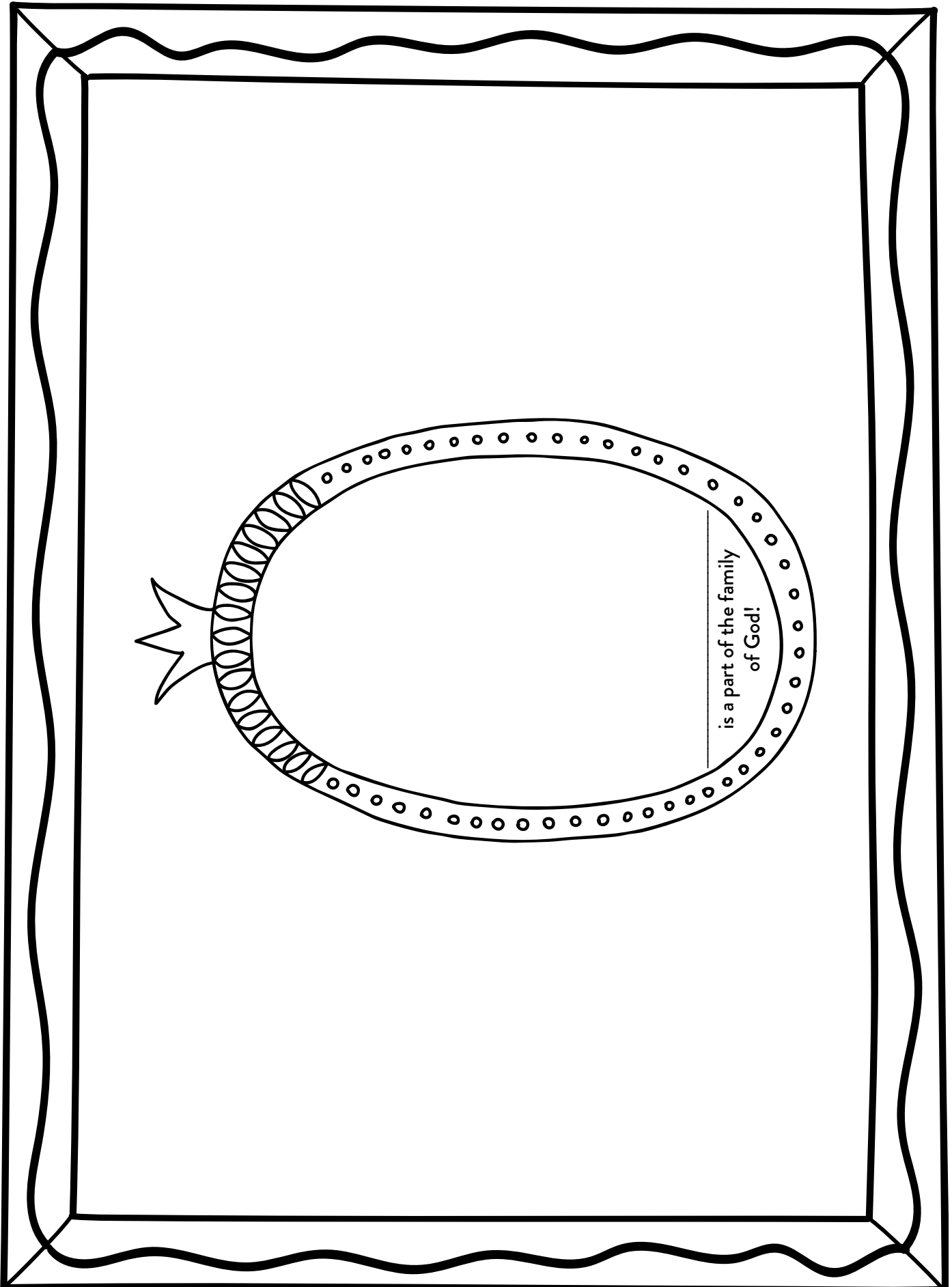
Encourage the children to think about baptism water, water that makes us God's family, when they wash hands or dishes at home.

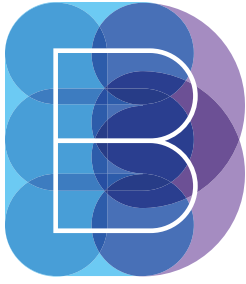
- Tubs of soapy water
- Sponges
- Towels
- Nursery toys



FOLLOWING JESUS

As the group gets ready to leave to follow Jesus in their daily lives, gather in a circle. Invite the children to bless one another by following your example. Turn to the child on your left and take their hand, saying, “(Name), you are a child of God. Go and follow God's ways.” Tell the children that it is their choice to hold a hand, place a hand on a shoulder, do an elbow bump, or have a high-five as they offer the blessing. Have the children take turns going around the circle until the blessing comes back to you and you say, “And all God's children say. . . .” Pause, and have the children say “Amen” with you.





BIBLE STORY

BASED ON EXODUS 14:10–31

Long ago, the people of God were slaves in the land of Egypt. The king, who was called the pharaoh, wanted to keep them there as slaves and build his city. The people called to God, and God heard their cries. God sent Moses to the pharaoh to tell him to let God's people go. The pharaoh refused, but finally he let God's people leave Egypt.

The people of God started **walking** out of Egypt. But then the pharaoh had second thoughts and sent his army **running** after the people. The people were **walking** until they came to the sea, and they **stopped**. But the pharaoh's army was still **running** after them. The people started **walking in circles**, not knowing what to do. The army was still **running** to catch the people and bring them back to be slaves. Moses told the people to **stop** and watch for God's plan.

God sent a cloud of darkness so the pharaoh's army could not see the people. The army started **walking in circles** because they could not see.

Then God told Moses to lift his rod over the sea. When Moses did this, God sent a mighty wind that divided the waters. God told Moses to lead the people through the waters. The people of God **walked** through the waters on dry ground to the other side.

Meanwhile, the pharaoh's army saw the people **walking** through the waters, and they started **running** after them again. But when the last of the people **walked** through, the waters came crashing down, **stopping** the army from going any further.

On that day, God saved God's people by delivering them through the waters from slavery to freedom. And God's people **danced** for joy!

