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Talking Points on The Amazing Gift of Your Baptism is a set of nine leaflets issued by the Department for Ecumenical Affairs of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America to invite conversation about baptism as it is understood by several different church bodies. These are not intended as position papers but as discussion starters with the hope of giving insight and deepening faith as well as fostering Christian unity. These may be reprinted without permission for use in small groups and other congregational settings.

Your ideas about these topics are very welcome. To submit personal reflections or the results of a group discussion, use the accompanying Response and Evaluation form or e-mail eainfo@elca.org

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Living in God's amazing grace

Talking points on

The Amazing Gift of Your Baptism

Baptism and Healing

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“We thank you, gracious God, for the gift of water, which you have created and given to us as a sign of life. . . . Now send your Spirit upon [*this one*] who receives the water of baptism today, so that [*they*] may become a living, growing, and active member of your church, rise to new life, be led and nourished by your word and sacraments, and share in your eternal blessings.”¹

Reflection

The ocean is an amazing mystery. As I pondered writing this article, I sat seaside on one of those rare days when there was very little current. The ocean looked like glass, and gentle waves lapped the shore. Those gentle waves brought to mind baptisms of infants, of times when I had gently poured handfuls of water over the heads of sleeping babies. I remember trying not to startle them into wakefulness that led to shrieks of crying. But how amazing for both pastor and parents, to watch these bright little eyes slowly open in wonder at what was happening to them. They were fully unaware that they were entering the covenant of grace that would, as we Moravians

¹ From the Liturgy for Baptism, *Moravian Book of Worship* ©1995 Interprovincial Board of Publications and Communications, Bethlehem, Pa., p. 166.

declare in the *Moravian Liturgy for Baptism*, allow these little ones to “share in the benefits of our Lord’s redeeming work through God’s grace and the faith of parents, and of the church.”

The ocean is normally not so calm. Neither is life. On normal days the ocean waves roll, roar, crest, and fall. I have sat across from, and listened thoughtfully to, some adults who came seeking baptism. When they spoke to me of being baptized, many felt their lives had been lived outside God’s grace. Like waves of an ocean crashing in on them, their baptisms for them meant a thorough washing away of wasted time and wasted opportunities. In the midst of feelings of shame, guilt, and confusion, they came seeking forgiveness, cleansing, and healing from all that was broken in their lives. Brokenness was washed away, and the healing waters of baptism enabled them to begin life anew in Christ.

The ocean brings healing. The memory of my own baptism, and the soothing reality of water, makes me ever more aware that God uses the ebb and flow of water to heal me from the stresses and cankers of daily life. Through the water our hurts, our regrets, our transgressions of other human beings, and our broken relationships find perspective and offer healing. God tells you – even in the deepest fractures and brokenness of your life – you are a child, claimed and loved. The waters of my own baptism continue to heal and renew me.

The ocean calls us to one another, where through our baptism we are healed for the service that lay ahead. We are all as the ten lepers of Luke 17, where ten were “made clean” and healed. One of the ten saw that he was healed. He came back to Jesus to give thanksgiving. For Moravians and many other Christians, baptism is not a momentary event of healing. It is a life-long process of thankfulness and Christ-likeness. Baptism is a life-long process of healing that makes us whole in Christ. In the *Moravian Liturgy for Baptism*, there is a wonderful moment when all members of the congregation are called to remember their own baptisms:

Question – “*Those of you baptized into Christ Jesus, how were you baptized?*”

Response – “*Into his death ... so that as Christ was raised from the dead through the glorious power of God Almighty, we too might be raised to live a new life.*”

The ocean calls us into the world. Not so long ago the World Council of Churches in Geneva, Switzerland, put forth a collaborative document entitled *Baptism, Eucharist and Ministry*. This document reminds all Christians that “the need to recover baptismal unity is at the heart of the ecumenical task as it is central for the realization of genuine partnership within the Christian communities.” The point is this: if we explore our baptisms together, if we know we are called out into the world to bring healing, then imagine the kinds of healing we can truly bring together. What we cannot do alone, our baptisms call us to do together. This said, the mystery of our baptism draws Christians closer to two things at the heart of our ecumenical task: we help the world heal and heal ourselves in the same moment. May we continue along in healing.

Talking Points

- 1.) What Bible passages do you think of when you think of water? Give examples of stories that feature water in the Old Testament. What about in the New Testament?
- 2.) In Scripture water is used as a symbol of hospitality (Genesis 18:4, Luke 7:44). In what ways is hospitality healing?
- 3.) How can water be a source of healing? What does it mean to be *healed*? Can you be healed, but not *cured*?
- 4.) What things in our lives, in our communities, in our world, are in need of healing right now?
- 5.) When you think of global healing—the healing of the world—what situations come to mind? How can we as baptized children of God make a difference in those situations?