



Spotlight on Crestwood #30

Baptism Sunday

"God is..."
 "Jesus is..."
 "The Church is..."
 "We (Christians) are..."

The youth being baptized this past Sunday collectively wrote the call to worship using those prompts.

"God is...our creator, a leader, forgiving and giving. . .

Our barefoot minister. Thunderous applause. Sniffing congregational noses buried in tissues. What a Sunday service it was as eleven children rose from holy waters, baptized into a Christian life they were challenged to live the best they could.



Their baptisms were the culmination of several months of creative meetings, discussions, and involvement of the youngsters with the whole church family. If I had been exposed to a baptism such as this, perhaps I wouldn't have had to wait so many years to fully understand the power of this symbolic gesture.

Three other members of the pastor's class will be immersed in weeks to come.

Over his years at Crestwood, Rev. Wilcoxson has developed an intensive, interesting, and involved program leading up to the baptism of these young people. This year, they ranged from 5th graders (about age 11) through a high school junior. I caught onto what was happening only in bits and pieces, and suspect not everyone knows the intricate journey these young people took. It seemed like an appropriate Spotlight article.

It wasn't long after I heard the pastor's class was beginning when I realized there were parts of the process I didn't know a thing about. I had been attending Rev. Wilcoxson's Sunday afternoon discussion groups. He occasionally showed up looking a bit worn for the wear, coming to our group straight from his pastor's class with the children. One week he came in laughing, telling us how much he loved his time with them. "I couldn't keep up with them and all their questions," he said. "They were really sugared up!"

For six weeks he met with them. No lectures, he said, only questions and discussions as the kids explored Christianity. They had a "Chalice of Awesomeness" which the young people kept filled with anonymous questions that the group explored in conversation. Rev. Wilcoxson's goal was to help kids learn how to ask questions, because doubt and questioning is part of faith, he explained. They talked, they laughed, they had a scavenger hunt through the church.

That was only a piece of the procedure leading up to the baptism. Each child was matched by the minister to a mentor who is an elder in our church. For six weeks, the young person and the mentor met together and got to know one another. Together they read the book of Mark, using a study guide to direct their discussions.

Lucy Wells has been a mentor for many years. She says each time the experience is completely different as the youngsters are very different. It is always rewarding, she adds. The mentor/mentee encounters vary each time to match the needs and busy schedules of everyone. They might meet in their homes, at Panera's, at church, in a park on a warm day. The relationships forged together often last through the years, and Lucy spoke of the pride she feels as she watches her mentees grow into adulthood, often still active at Crestwood.

In their time together, the paired couple devises a service project. Rev. Wilcoxson says the service component is important because faith is lived out in service. This Sunday two bins were already overflowing with pet food and supplies, helping Peyton Caudill-Gurwell aid the animals at the Lexington

Humane Society. Julie Blackburn is maintaining our book blessing box for children (next to the food Blessing Box). Anyone with donations of children's books or activity books can leave them in the Giving Lane.

Other activities include cleaning a creek bank and planting trees, painting cards for members of Crestwood who are unable to get to church anymore, and starting a food service project at a school. Keep your eyes open for requests of items for the Ronald McDonald house.

The young people's involvement does not stop there. The children and their mentors met with the Elders a week ago where they were introduced and their projects discussed.

Well-prepared spiritually, everyone was ready for Baptism Sunday. The details behind the scene were intricate. Towels were draped along the hall leading from the Baptismal pool. Each youngster was dressed in a robe with light-colored clothes underneath. They gathered with their mentors. Ward Ransdell was in place behind the scenes to take pictures as each person was immersed. Doug Wilkinson handed out towels as they left the Baptistry, and Annetta Carter and Sice Shanklin made sure each youngster found their way to their clothes.

I talked with one mother, JoAnn Mudd, before the service. She said she was feeling excited, nervous, and proud. As the baptisms began, parents and other family members took turns coming to the front to watch as their youngster took this large step into Christianity. Upon Rev. Wilcoxson's urging, each youngster stepped into the water, answered questions asked of them, and was dunked under the water. As each emerged from the pool, the congregation burst into loud applause, congratulating them on this big step in their lives.

Each youngster was assigned a different restroom or office where they went afterwards, shivering, dripping and wrapped in towels. Their clothes and hairdryers were waiting for them there. Rev. Wilcoxson found his dry clothes and had shoes on when next seen by the congregation.

The group returned to the sanctuary in time for communion (the first for many) which they took with their mentors.

As with all things involving church, there was the inevitable reception with food and congratulations afterwards in Fellowship Hall.

I did not expect to be so touched or emotional as I didn't know any of the children personally. But like others, my throat tightened up, tears welled in my eyes. Family members near me sniffled audibly and someone shoved a tissue in the hand of a parent going forward. This months-long process was intricate, well planned, and oh, so meaningful.

And like all important things within the church, the children were led forward through the efforts of many loving hands.

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If there is some area of the church you would like to know more about, please share your ideas with me. Let's explore together. [Gaye Holman@bellsouth.net](mailto:Gaye.Holman@bellsouth.net)



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