



Belonging

Baptism in the Family of God

90-MINUTE SESSION

Leader's Guide



West Chester, Pennsylvania

Introduction

Thank you for your ministry! Baptismal preparation is such an important time in the lives of young families. There is joy, excitement, sleep deprivation, and for many new parents, a new perspective on their faith. Undoubtedly, the occasion of their child's baptism brings many parents back into full participation in the life of the Church. For these parents, the experience of baptismal preparation can be an impactful and lasting formation experience. Here are some things to keep in mind:

- Roll-out the welcome mat! Baptismal preparation should be an encounter with a vibrant community that radiates the love of Christ. The attitude of leaders can help bring young parents who are on the fringes of the Church into full, conscious, and active participation. This might start with smiling faces and a good cup of coffee.
- New parents have a lot going on. They are probably getting much less sleep than they used to get, and baptism prep needs to be in touch with the realities of new parenthood.
- This process should be both reflective and engaging. Simply delivering required information is usually ineffective. Consider ways to help parents grow in their relationship with God, the Church, each other, and their child, while also helping them to grow in their understanding of the Faith.
- If we love the children of our parish, we need to serve and empower their parents. This approach begins with the process you are undergoing now. The Catholic Faith will be imparted effectively if you fan the flame of faith in the parents who are with their children from the beginning. Love the parents that you encounter, even if they walk in the door half-heartedly and with a less than full understanding of what they are undertaking. Their best hope, in this moment, is you.

About *Belonging*

Through the sacrament of Baptism, each of us has been brought into the family of God. We *belong* to God, to his Church, and to one another. A goal of baptismal preparation is to make this an authentic experience and commitment for new parents. How we welcome, mentor, and provide a space for real connection can move us toward that goal.

The *Belonging* Parent Guide is divided into four parts that can be tailored to several different session lengths. This guide describes a ninety-minute seminar. The simple format includes dynamic videos, clear instruction, and reflection through the Parent Guide, as well as several opportunities for new parents to pause, reflect, and respond to the material at home following the session. Reflection and conversation go a long way in deepening the commitment that brought new families to the Church to have their children baptized.

Belonging includes resources that can be offered to couples beyond the session. This guide seeks to provide you with a roadmap for your session. Know that the work you are doing in your parish is a great service to the Church. Ascension is committed to serving and equipping you in your labors in the Lord's vineyard.

Considerations for Your Session

1. Video

The use of *Belonging's* video resources can go a long way in engaging parents in the experience. Consider lighting, sound quality, and Internet connection (if you will be streaming the video). Since technological glitches can hinder the overall experience, ensure that all media resources are prepared in advance and functioning.

2. Parent Guide

In a ninety-minute session, much of your time will be spent on presentation, with limited time for reflection and interaction. Be sure to show parents how to engage with the Parent Guide at home as they continue to prepare for their child's baptism.

3. Mentoring Interaction

The Parent Guide is designed to be highly interactive, so we have included plenty of space for reflection and response. Keep in mind that offering parents opportunities for reflection and discussion is a key part of successful sacramental preparation. Resist the temptation to simply "cover material." Engaging the questions and prompts in the Parent Guide will make the experience personal, meaningful, and impactful for parents.

4. Pacing and Timing

There is both an art and a science to making your session work in the allotted time slot. Sharing and reflecting can vary the length needed. (Refer to the "Ninety-Minute Session Format" breakdown below.) You can choose to subdivide and keep time for each reflection or open up a larger period for parents to work through the text, questions, and reflections of each section at their own pace. Here are some tips:

- Set a timer for each step
- Remind parents that this session is designed to open up further reflection and discussion at home and anything that they do not get to during the session can continue at home
- If you notice parents who seem to trail off, seek to interact with them

5. Reading and Presenting

The Parent Guide is designed to serve as an interactive tool throughout the seminar and beyond. As a practical matter, consider whether you will:

- read the text verbatim to participants
- sum-up the text in your own words
- have participants read the text on their own

The best approach will depend on several factors, which include the following: the schedule, your comfort level in presenting, and the size of the seminar. The Parent Guide has been developed to work as a conversational “script” for leaders, a guide to organize presentation and elaboration, and a source for further reading beyond the seminar. The Parent Guide helps leaders who present the text in their own words to be concise and to stay on topic. It also helps parents reading on their own, who should find the narrative clear and easy to follow.

6. Consider Your Own Particular Situation and Setting

The session format presented below is designed to help you to provide a powerful experience of baptismal preparation in your parish. With that goal in mind, feel free to make any adjustments needed for your situation and setting. If you decide that another video or activity would be more helpful than the one listed, then use it. The session format below is simply a guide to help you to design your session.

Ninety-Minute Session Format

STEP 1: Plan your session

- Have hospitality set-up in advance
- Consider having some inspirational music playing quietly in the background
- Welcome parents and introduce the leaders of the session
- Distribute a copy of the Parent Guide to each parent

STEP 2: Introduction and Prayer (6 minutes)

- Invite parents to open the Parent Guide and read the “Introduction” on pages 4-5

Option #1 – Read the “Introduction,” pausing to personalize the message with any comments you feel inspired to share

Option #2 – Ask parents to read the “Introduction” and briefly skim the Parent Guide to get an overall view of its contents. Then offer your own introduction to the session with:

- some words of welcome

- a brief description of *Belonging*
- a brief word about Baptism and the meaning of the parents' own baptisms
- Ask parents to turn to the “Prayers for Catholic Families” section beginning on page 129 of the Parent Guide. Note that they might be familiar with some of these important Catholic prayers—and that all will be helpful to them in their faith lives. Then, ask everyone to make the Sign of the Cross and pray the Nicene Creed (on page 131) to call to mind the Faith into which their child will be baptized. After the Creed, conclude the opening prayer with an Our Father and the Sign of the Cross.

STEP 3: Help parents to understand the meaning of Baptism (25 minutes)

- Show Video Segment 1, “What’s in a Name?” (7:27)
- Point-out that the text found in the Parent Guide on page 10, “A Name and A Story,” supports the content of the video and invite parents to answer the Pause and Reflect questions about names found on pages 11 and 12 (5 minutes)
- Read “A Family Story” on page 14 and “Our Common Story” on page 18. Encourage parents to Pause and Reflect on their own family story and hope for the future by responding to the questions on pages 15 through 21 (7 minutes)
- Read “Why Baptism?” and “What Does it Mean to be a Child of God?” on pages 23-24 and ask parents to respond to the Pause and Reflect questions and prompts on pages 25-27 (7 minutes)

STEP 4: Help parents to understand the rite of Baptism (20 minutes)

- View the “Rite of Baptism” Video and invite parents to work through the guide after the session at home.
- Briefly have parents turn to “Part II,” page 28, in their guides and suggest that this part of the guide is for home study. Refer to the “Four Important Actions During the Rite of Baptism” on page 31, as well as “Parts of the Rite” on pages 52–54, which will familiarize parents with the parts of the baptismal rite. Tell them that there is a video that accompanies this part of the guide that you will share with them after the session as a reminder.

OR

- Invite parents to work through Part II of the Parent Guide, pages 28–55, by reading and responding to the questions (20 minutes)
- Refer to the “Four Important Actions During the Rite of Baptism” on page 31, as well as “Parts of the Rite” on pages 52–54, which will familiarize parents with the parts of the Baptismal Rite. Tell parents that there is a video that accompanies this part of the guide that you will share with them after the session as a reminder (20 minutes)
 - » If you have your study setup for online registration at ascensionpress.com, you can register your parents to view the videos online and encourage them to watch the Rite of Baptism video at home. Visit ascensionpress.com for more information.

STEP 5: Bring parents into a deeper understanding of their role in Baptism (30 minutes)

Option A

- Recommend to parents that they read “What Do Parents Say and Do During the Baptismal Rite” at home on pages 59-61, so that they are prepared for the ceremony
- Invite parents to read “The Role of Godparents” on pages 62-63 and encourage them to respond to the questions and write letters to their child’s godparents at home after the session
- Show Video Segment 5, “Real Change” (19 minutes)
- Give parents a few moments to consider and respond to Fr. Mike’s question, “What is one gift that you want your child to have for the rest of his or her life?” Allow time for them to review and begin their responses to the three sections for “The Promises Parents Make” on pages 68-82 and “The Family as the Domestic Church” on pages 87-91. Recommend that they continue reading at home (10 minutes)

Option B

- Have parents turn to “Role of Parents” on page 58 in the Parent Guide and read through the text. Then take a few minutes to review the actual responses and actions required of parents within “What Do Parents Say and Do During the Baptismal Rite” on pages 59-61 (10 minutes)
- Using pages 62-64, explain “The Role of Godparents” and recommend that they read through pages 65-67 at home (5 minutes)
- Using pages 68-82 in the Parent Guide, “The Promises Parent’s Make,” take a few moments to explain the three responsibilities of Catholic parenthood and then give parents time to work through the rest of the text and reflections in Part III. Assure them that this may only get them started and that they can continue at home (15 minutes)

STEP 6: Help parents to grow in a deeper understanding of Christian parenthood beyond baptism. (Propose that parents address this part of the guide after the session, at home)

- Have parents turn to Part IV “Raising a Young Catholic” starting on page 92 in their guides and note that this part of the Parent Guide is designed to help new parents grow in their vision of Christian parenthood beyond Baptism. Point out the seven particular ideas and recommend that parents set aside some time to work through Part IV in the coming weeks and note that it can also be a great resource for the future.

STEP 7: Video Reminder

- If you have your study setup for online registration at ascensionpress.com, you can register your parents to view the videos online. Visit ascensionpress.com for more information.

