

Belonging

Baptism in the Family of God

60-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:

1. 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.
2. 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.
3. 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.
4. 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* Session Guide is divided into four parts that can be tailored to several different session lengths. This guide describes a sixty-minute seminar. The simple format includes clear instruction and reflection through the Session 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 Leader's 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. Although this session format does not include time to watch videos together, you have access to the videos if you purchase the Starter Pack. Furthermore, parents can have access to the videos as well with the purchase of the Parent's Guide or Parent's Set. Visit ascensionpress.com for more information.

2. The Session Guide

In a sixty-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 Session Guide at home as they continue to prepare for their child's baptism.

3. Mentoring interaction

Belonging is designed to be highly interactive and has lots of room 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 Session 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 "60-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 Session 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 Session 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 Session 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 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.

7. Parent’s Guide

The *Belonging* program components consist of the Session Guide, Parent’s Guide, and DVD. If you are not offering the Parent’s Guide or videos, you could recommend them to couples who are interested in learning more about Baptism and the Domestic Church. Visit ascensionpress.com for more information.

60-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 Session Guide to each parent.

Step 2: Introduction & Prayer (10 Minutes)

- Invite parents to open the Session Guide and read the “Introduction” on page 2.
 - Take some time to talk about the vision of the session.
- Ask parents to turn to “The Prayer to Open the Session” on page 1, and ask everyone to make the Sign of the Cross.
 - Ask if there are any special intentions and take your time to set a tone before leading the prayer found in the guide.
 - There are additional “Prayers for Catholic Families” on pages 16-17.

Step 3: Help parents to understand the meaning of Baptism (15 minutes)

- **Purpose:** The objective of Part I is to help parents grow in their understanding of the nature of Baptism.
 - Read “Why Should My Child be Baptized” on pages 3-4 and encourage parents to pause and reflect on the “Discussion Questions” found on page 4.
 - Read “What Does Baptism Do?” on pages 5-6 and have parents respond to the “Discussion Questions” on page 6.

Step 4: Help parents to understand the Rite of Baptism (12 minutes)

- **Purpose:** The purpose of Part II is to introduce parents to the meaning of the rite of Baptism. This will both open up a deeper understanding of the sacrament and put parents at ease with the rite itself.
 - Invite parents to briefly read through pages 6, 7, and 8 in the Session Guide.
 - Lead parents in the Discussion Questions found on the bottom of page 8.
 - Talk a bit about their actual role, what they will say and do in the Baptismal Rite.
 - Ask if parents have any questions about the specifics.

Step 5: Bring parents into a deeper understanding of their role in Baptism (12 Minutes)

- **Purpose:** The aim of Part III is to focus parents on their role in baptism and, more importantly, in the larger task of Christian parenthood beyond the Baptism itself.
 - Point out the section entitled “The Role of Parents and Godparents” found on page 11 and read through to page 12.
 - Lead the “Discussion Questions” found on page 12. The questions are ideal for couples to discuss with a bit of privacy if possible.
 - Point out “What is the Role of Godparents?” on page 13 and invite parents to respond to the “Discussion Questions” on page 13.

Step 6: Help parents to grow in a deeper understanding of Christian parenthood beyond baptism *(12 minutes)*

- **Purpose:** Preparation for Baptism does not simply happen in a sixty-minute session. Part IV, “Raising a Young Catholic,” considers the larger vision of parenthood and building a culture of Faith in the home through five simple tips.
 - Read through “What Happens After Baptism” on pages 14-15 and lead the final “Discussion Question” on page 15.
 - Be sure to talk about concrete opportunities in your parish!

Step 7: Video Reminder

- If you purchased the Parent Guide or Parent Set and 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.