



# Belonging

Baptism in the Family of God

## Engaging Parents in Baptismal Preparation

Not to start with bad news, but let's face it: Many of those who came up through parish religious education and Catholic schools in recent years—if they have not completely left the Church—have fallen away into nominal Catholicism. We can count on the fact that for many, the only formal contact they will have with their parish will occur at Christmas, Easter, weddings, and funerals. When they show up, it will be for about an hour, in the midst of a large crowd, on their way to another social event. They will generally be unnoticed and underwhelmed, and they will disappear back into the secular ether for several months. Eventually, they (or their children) are likely to stop coming to Mass completely.

(Hang in there. Good news follows, I promise.)

We should consider, however, that many in that group of disengaged nominal Catholics may also come to their local parish to baptize their children. While the number of baptisms per year is decreasing, many nominal Catholics still, even if for vague reasons or for the sake of calming the waters with their own parents, seek to hand on the semblance of Catholic Faith to their children. When they approach the parish for Baptism, they will most likely be looking for something that they perceive to be a ceremonial formality and will be unlikely to be up for anything that involves lots of time or investment of energy. Plus, they are new parents and are likely not sleeping much.

(Stick with me here.... It gets better.)

What if, knowing all of the above, we seize on this reality as an opportunity for deep ministry and evangelization?

What if, rather than simply jumping through administrative and ceremonial hoops, they were met with pithy, plucky, and meaningful formation that led to an encounter with Christ?

What if the lead message was, "Welcome home! You belong here"? Is it possible that, by being all things to all, we could save at least some? (1 Cor 9:22, St. Paul thought so). A parish that forms an intentional strategy for preparation for the Sacrament of Baptism is a parish that understands the ingenuity and innocence needed for the New Evangelization.

So, how can this happen? What are some concrete strategies to change the vibe from hoop-jumping, ceremonial formality to a vibrant, transformative family encounter?

## Here are some ideas:

1. **Have a sit-down conversation with everyone who is a point of contact with new parents when they seek Baptism.** Note that those who approach the parish with the “wrong attitude” are the ones who need the Gospel the most! Share the vision so that nobody hangs up the phone or walks out of the parish office feeling like they are engaging in a business transaction or stressed out by all the paperwork to be done. (Look, I hear you, parish staff. All that paperwork is absolutely important and needs to be handled. I’m simply saying that it needs to be handled in a human and inviting way, even at the cost of efficiency and even if it means extra grace in the face of rudeness, ignorance, or audacity.)
2. **Make a plan for baptismal formation that takes into account the realities that new parents face and that prepares them for parenthood,** not just for ceremonial logistics. Balance out potent formation with the fatigue and time constraints of new parents. (Full disclosure, this post is to support efforts to promote a program that is designed to do just that. [Check out what people are saying about it.](#))
3. **Feed new parents (literally) when they show up.** Consider serving a meal to new parents for any in-person events. They are new parents. Serving a meal sends a strong message of welcome. (I know ... here goes Captain Louisiana with the food again. But seriously, good food supports a good community. It’s biblical!)
4. **Make an ongoing and explicit invitation to full participation in parish life.** Start with a plan for Sunday Mass that connects new parents with other families that have young children. It doesn’t require setting up a ton of new events—it’s more about connecting young families with new relationships and support.
5. **Ensure that your parish team is establishing a relationship with new parents leading up to Baptism.** Again—it’s about belonging. (Yes, that’s even what the program is called.) A follow-up text or email congratulating them and inviting them to further participation, a quick congratulatory phone call from the pastor, a designated mentor couple that invites them to dinner, maybe a little gift from the parish.... Think about ways to grow a relationship and maybe, just maybe, you will see this family a whole lot more often than at Christmas and Easter.

Simple enough, right?!? Simple, but thinking this way could change the script for young families in your parish and be a step that leads families and future generations toward, well, heaven.

(That’s exciting! Told you I had good news.)

## Do you have questions about implementation?

Please contact Andrew, one of our parish relationship managers, at [agallavan@ascensionpress.com](mailto:agallavan@ascensionpress.com) or [schedule a call with him](#). He would be happy to answer your questions.

