

Belonging

Baptism in the Family of God

ONLINE CERTIFICATION COURSE FOLLOW-UP

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.

This Leader's Guide will prescribe a sixty-minute mentorship session to follow the completion of the *Belonging: Baptism in the Family of God* Online Certification Course. 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

Just a reminder that parents have watched video Sessions 1-6, as well as "The Role of Godparents" and "The Rite of Baptism." Since they have this familiarity, you can refer to the videos during your conversations. You can also encourage parents to re-watch any of the videos within the *Belonging: Baptism in the Family of God* Online Certification Course. Parents' access to these materials are not restricted.

2. The Session Guide

The Session Guide is divided into four parts. Each part focuses on a different area of Baptism preparation. If you cannot cover all the parts, please remember to mention them and ask parents to explore the Guide on their own.

3. Belonging Program Components

The *Belonging* program components consist of the Session Guide, Parent's Guide, and DVD. If you are not offering the Parent's Guide, you could recommend it to couples who are interested in learning more about Baptism and the Domestic Church. Parents also have a pdf copy of the Parent's Guide embedded within their Online Certification Course. Visit ascensionpress.com for more information.

4. 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. Engaging the questions and prompts in the Session Guide will make the experience personal, meaningful, and impactful for parents. The parents have already had time to engage with the material in the Online Certification Course. Use the time that you have with them to move deeper into discussion—as well as to make the parents feel like they *belong* to your parish family.

5. 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 Post Online Certification Course 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.

6. 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.

7. 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.

60-Minute Post-Online Certification Course Session Format

Step 1: Plan your session

- Make sure that there is hospitality set-up if your session is being held in person.
- Ensure that parents are welcomed and introduced to the leader(s) who will be facilitating the session.
- Make sure that parents have access to the Session Guide.

Step 2: Introduction & Prayer *(13 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.
 - Explain that the purpose of the session is to help them to reflect more deeply and personally on the meaning of baptism as a follow up to their online certification experience. The Belonging Session Guide will provide several questions connected back to the program along with some text to refresh their memories.
 - You may opt, as you begin, to give parents a chance to reflect on their overall experience with the online portion of Belonging. You can ask a general question about their *Belonging* experience so far (“How did it go?” or “What did you think?”).
- 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: Parts I-IV *(40 minutes, about 10 minutes for each)*

- Take ten minutes to address the questions posed in each section of the Session Guide. If the conversation is lively, you may not get to every question. Don’t worry if this is the case.
 - You may opt to pose the questions and give parents a few moments to think and jot down responses or, if you get a sense that they are immediately ready to discuss, you could opt to keep the conversation continuous. (This may vary based on the tone and personality of the parents you are working with).

Step 4: Conclusion *(5 minutes)*

- At the end of the session, make sure that parents know about concrete things they can get involved in at your parish.
- Ask if there are any questions.
- Close in a simple prayer.