

When the Cement is Wet

Six Keys to Evangelizing Baptismal Ministry

There is no more important ministry for a parish to over-haul and *radically* reimagine...if it seeks to attract and accompany young families and grow as a renewing community of faith...than Baptismal Ministry. This means being intentional as a parish from the phone call seeking Baptism through to (hopefully) registration for kindergarten or first grade in the school or parish faith formation. **The cement is wet here at Baptism and in these early years.** Not at First Eucharist and certainly not Confirmation.

1. Understand Baptismal Ministry (before, during and after Baptism) as a primary opportunity to evangelize and foster *conversion* in parents and other family members.

Design every aspect of the ministry upon this primary principle and with missionary intentionality. And pray down the Holy Spirit who brings conversion.



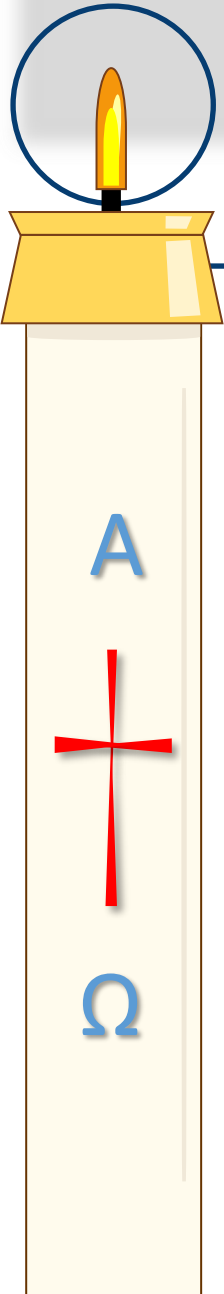
2. Focus on team building and team formation.

Baptismal Ministry should not be seen as the ministry of any particular person(s). It is the ministry of the entire parish community! There are many gifts and charisms present in the people of your parish. And there are a variety of roles needed on any Baptismal Ministry Team. Examples: A single mother on the team should help the ministry be sensitive to the needs of new single moms. You will want people gifted in hospitality and small group facilitation. Who are parishioners gifted with being able to share their own faith journey in a way that will resonate with these parents and evoke a faith response in them? Are there parishioners who can effectively offer a kerygmatic explanation of faith in Jesus Christ that is understandable and attractive...and connect it to Baptism? Find the right mix of gifted people, form them well, empower them as a team and position them for success.

3. Build different tracks; consider requiring participation at more than one session.

There should be one track for first-time parents and at least one different track for others. For example, one track might focus more on core elements of our faith and the baptismal rite itself; one more on things like Catholic parenting and what the parish has to offer families. However, any track should be heavily eucharistic in its focus (as we are hoping to form these young adults to hunger for Jesus in all the ways experienced at the Liturgy of the Eucharist) and designed to foster relationship-building to the community of faith.

Parishes should also consider providing more than one session to parents presenting a child for Baptism, whether additional sessions are required or not. Requiring two quality gathered experiences for parents of a child being baptized gives the parish a better chance of establishing a real relationship with a family, which is a key goal of this ministry. And don't feel timid about asking more of these parents seeking Baptism. Baptism is so theologically significant *and* our best pastoral opportunity with young families!



"There is a pressing need to frame everything in terms of evangelization, as the fundamental principle that guides ecclesial activity as a whole."

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4. Never call them classes or meetings.

Create more of an *evening/morning of formation* or a *retreat* experience and frame it as such. Mix in strong relational interactions with some time for reflective quiet. Get them talking about themselves (and amongst themselves) and be active, caring listeners. Utilize faith witnessing from team member parishioners. Begin any theological input at the place of their lived experience and provide a core, kerygmatic message of Catholic faith that can speak to their lives as *relevant* good news. Don't skimp on the hospitality and humor. Our joy in Christ should radiate. There should be an extravagance in a parish's welcome of a family and/or a new member into its midst. It is a *big* deal to be celebrated!

5. Give families an absolutely tremendous experience of Baptism itself.

Let the sacrament and the community evangelize! Again, generous hospitality and joy should mark the posture of the parish throughout. This is more of a challenge at baptisms performed after Mass rather than during Mass. Suggestions for non-Mass baptisms include: Ask the family to attend the prior Mass (where they will be welcomed warmly, seated up front and given mention during the Mass). Mass-goers are invited to remain for the baptism after Mass. Members of the Baptismal Ministry Team warmly accompany the family/families throughout the experience. At least some baptisms each month should be celebrated during Mass. This has a positive formational impact on the parish community.



6. Develop follow-up ministry for families between Baptism and the school years.

There are countless ways to accomplish this, such as having regular and outreaching communication, assigning a mentoring family for ongoing accompaniment and support, offering Children's Liturgy of the Word, and growing a ministry for mothers. These are *the* key years that will help to determine what kind of relationship the family will have with your parish and with the Church. The future religious identity of these families is likely at stake during this period. Consider the window for Baptismal Ministry to be wide open from 0-5 years of age!

What are the outcomes, the fruitfulness of your parish's Baptismal Ministry? If the ministry is badly languishing (or worse) do not try to merely tweak it. Better to deconstruct it entirely and start from scratch with a vision drawn from New Evangelization and designed for New Pentecost. And this likely means investing in the ministry. This is a ministry of fostering conversion and discipleship, and *nothing* about it should feel like "hoop-jumping".

Where should a parish begin to reimagine and redesign itself in pursuit of evangelizing pastoral renewal? Simple. Start at the beginning. Baptism.

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