

BAPTISM

**Helping your children to get
the most from life**

LEADER'S GUIDE

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INTRODUCTION

This course is designed to prepare parents bringing their children to be baptised and follows the Rite of Baptism. It explains the words, symbols, questions and actions that have been passed down to us from the earliest days of the Church. It will give parents and godparents a better understanding of what they are undertaking when a child is baptised and will help and equip them in their role of developing the spiritual life of the child.

This course is flexible and can be run in various ways to fit in with the different models that dioceses and parishes currently use for their sacramental preparation courses.

- It can be run by priests, catechists or lay people in a parish or school.
- It could be used with a large group in a hall.
- It could be used with a couple or a small group in a home.

Some dioceses recommend that each parish has a Baptism preparation group of catechists who, working closely with the parish priest, visit young parents before the Baptism and continue to do so afterwards. This material could work well in an intimate situation such as this or in a larger meeting in a parish hall.

The course is divided into 12 different sections. After each section a question appears on the screen. We recommend that you pause the talk at these points and ask the parents to discuss their thoughts and feelings on what they have just heard. The questions will help to stimulate discussion.

The course has been designed to run over two sessions, but this can be extended to any number of weeks by using the natural breaks in the talks. All the sections in the course last approximately 40 minutes in total so both could, if necessary, be run over one session, but this would mean reducing the amount of discussion time.

We have tried to include the role of godparents in this course and suggest that parents invite the prospective godparents to attend with them. This would give them a better understanding of Baptism and the responsibilities it holds. Whether they attend or not we recommend giving them a copy of the Godparent Booklet.

There is also a Parents booklet. Both these booklets are available from goodnewsbooks.co.uk.

2. PREPARATION

Who will run the course?

Most parishes have a team of catechists who run Baptism courses, ideally this could be supplemented by a team of parents who are active in the parish with young children of their own. These parents could be responsible for the hospitality on the course and would provide friendship and support for the baptismal parents in the future. You may want to consider including a mixed marriage couple (i.e. one being a non-Catholic) on the team who both support the Church. This will be a true reflection of many couples who bring their children for Baptism and can be a good example of working together within the faith. This team, of possibly two or three couples, could alternate attendance to make sure that there is no strain on babysitting.

It is a good idea for the team to meet before you start the course to pray for the course and those who are attending. Consider what each of them will be doing during the sessions; welcoming, serving refreshments, stopping and starting the talk etc. Ensure that you make it clear to the team that they will not be expected to answer questions that they might struggle with, but will share in the discussion and help make those who come to feel relaxed and welcomed.

The practicalities

Discuss with your parish priest and the team whether you will run the course, as it was designed, over one or two sessions, or whether it would be better for your parish to use a different format.

Consider carefully what time you run the course. Remember that parents will have bedtime to contend with if they have small children!

Ensure people know what time the session is due to finish so that babysitters can be booked appropriately.

We recommend that as the course leader you familiarise yourself with the course content and the additional material available within this pack.

Check List

Organise a team
Allocate tasks
Consider timing
content

Get together to pray
Plan how many sessions
Familiarise yourself with the course

3. RUNNING THE COURSE

It is best to hold your course in a venue that will enable people to feel relaxed and at home. Other than going to Mass on Sunday some of the parents may not have had any faith formation since they were children, so hospitality is very important to make them feel at ease. Also, there may be non-Catholic spouses and some parents coming back to church after an absence, who may feel vulnerable and nervous about attending.

Running the course in a team member's home may be the best way to create a welcoming and relaxed atmosphere. However, if there is a large number attending this might be impractical so you may need to use the parish hall. If this is the case, try to set up the room to look as attractive as possible. We would recommend setting it up 'café style', with guests sitting round small tables with tablecloths, flowers and candles. Refreshments should be served, these could include tea and coffee with biscuits or wine or beer with nibbles if you feel this is more appropriate. This style will get away from the feel of a classroom environment (rows of chairs facing the front!) and will be a surprise for many, particularly those who may not have attended anything like this at church before.

Ensure that the room is warm enough (cold halls can be a real turn off) and remember the room temperature is especially important if parents have to bring young babies with them.

You may want to play music in the background as people arrive. Attention to detail, even with small things, can really have an impact on people.

Check that the TV and laptop are working before people arrive. With a large group sitting round tables some may need to move their chairs to see the screen but the discussions will take place around the tables, so ensure that everyone can see and hear those around the tables with ease.

Check List

Consider and plan:

The venue	Hospitality	Refreshments
Heating	Music	Technical details (TV & Laptop)

4. LEADING THE SESSIONS

Introduce yourself and the team to the parents. In a small group also introduce all the guests to each other. In a large group allow time at the beginning for people around tables to introduce themselves to one another. We suggest that guests are introduced by their first name only (this may avoid any problems if couples are not married) and their relationship to the baby to be baptised e.g. I'm Graham and I'm the father of Megan, I'm Julie and I'm the godmother of Megan. Explain that the aim of the course is to give them an understanding of Baptism for their child. However, it is also so that they can meet others who will share in the celebration and to get to know other parents within the parish community. Welcome especially those parents who are not Catholic, and thank them for coming. Acknowledge that some parents will have older children and have been through Baptism preparation before, but that your hope is that this course will be an enjoyable refresher. If any godparents are attending thank them particularly for coming and explain that the course will help them to understand their role better.

Some of the guests, particularly those who are not Catholic, may be worried that they will have to answer difficult questions and that there will be a presumption of understanding and level of faith. It would be a good idea to assure them early on that they will not have to answer difficult questions but will be asked to share their own thoughts and feelings at various times during the course.

It is important to make sure the guests know that the course will be following the Rite of Baptism. You might find it useful to give the participants a copy of the Rite so the link to each section can be made as you go through the course.

Do be aware that not all guests will understand some of our Catholic terms and expressions. Non-Catholic spouses and even some Catholics may feel excluded if they are not comfortable with certain words or explanations. Always strive to be inclusive. Invite them to ask if they are not sure what an expression means and assure them that they will probably not be the only one who does not understand.

Explain that there will be times to pause and discuss what you have seen and heard in the talks and to ask any questions. Make it clear that if you cannot answer the question you will find out the answer and come back to them. If this happens you could refer to your parish priest or the Catechism of the Catholic Church. To help you we have included some relevant quotes on Baptism in Appendix 1 of this Leader's Guide. Once you have asked the group a question allow time for them to think before responding. Do not be afraid of silence. Many people need time to think and you will find as they spend time together they will grow in confidence and be more at ease with each other.

Always start and end each session with a short prayer. Start by asking for God's blessing on the session and for the guidance of the Holy Spirit on all the sharing. At the end you may have time for a short liturgy or just say a prayer of thanks. You might like to include a prayer for each child being baptised by name and perhaps the parents too.

5. SECTIONS WITHIN THE COURSE

To help you facilitate the course, listed below are the different sections and the questions that appear on the screen. We have included some ideas that you may like to use. We do recommend however, that you watch the course beforehand as you may wish to supplement the suggested questions with additional ones. This is particularly important if godparents are attending as you may need to draw them into the discussion times.

Session 1:

Section 1 - The best for your child

Question - Why are you baptising your child?

Section 2 - Naming your child

Question - Why have you chosen your child's name?

Section 3 - The Sign of the Cross

Question - Why do you want your child to belong to the Church?

Section 4 - Hearing God's Word

Question - What words do you want your child to hear from God?

You may want to begin by reading out the Bible passage about Jesus' Baptism.
(Mark Chapter 1 Verses 9-11)

Section 5 - Prayers of Intercession

Question - What do you pray for your child?

You could introduce a time of intercession at the end.

Section 6 - Freedom and Anointing

Question - How will faith in God help your child in life?

Section 7 - Professing your Faith

Question - What difference can faith make in your life?

This section should lead to a discussion where parents start to explore their own faith.

Section 8 - Baptised into Christ

Question - Have you thought of Baptism this way before?

Section 9 - Chrism and the White Garment

Question - What kind of adult do you want your child to become?

Section 10 - The Lighted Candle

Question - How can you and the godparents help your child's faith to grow?

Section 11 - The Lord's Prayer

Question - How can you help your child to pray?

You may want to end by saying the Lord's Prayer together

Section 12 - The Blessing

Question - What help do you need from God?

How to use the Parents & Godparents Booklets

Booklets have been produced to accompany the course for the parents and godparents. We suggest that a copy of the Parent Booklet is given to each set of parents at the end of the course and they are offered one or two of the Godparent Booklets if the godparents are not present.

Explain that these will help the godparents to understand their role and the meaning of Baptism. There is space to personalise these with the baby's name and the date and place of Baptism.

6. WAYS THE COURSE CAN BE USED

- You might consider running the course regularly for those who have not yet had their babies so that pregnant mums (and dads!) can meet and support one another and prepare for the Baptism before their babies are born. This will also give them a better understanding of the importance of the name and the role that godparents undertake before they have to choose them.
- The course can be run in a home with a small group of people. When run this way it is a good idea for one of the team to continue to contact and possibly meet up with the parents after the Baptism.
- You may want to use this course or sections of it as a refresher for parents whose children are starting preparation for their First Holy Communion and sacrament of Reconciliation.
- If godparents don't attend the course you could invite the parents to go through the course again with the godparents in their own home by lending them the course. This may be a very good way to empower parents to reach out and share their faith with their friends and relations.
- You could invite parents who have already been through the Baptism preparation and have a second or subsequent baby to come and help with the hospitality and befriending as a refresher for their Baptism preparation.
- This course or sections within it can be used in schools to help older children get a better understand of what Baptism is all about.

7. FOLLOW ON

For many guests attending the course this may be the first time since childhood that they have thought about their faith and what it means to them. Therefore it is important to encourage them to continue in their faith development. This is also a great opportunity to draw them more deeply into the life of the parish. Have relevant details available such as contacts with “Mother and Toddler” groups, details of nurseries and primary schools, the times of children’s liturgy etc.

We suggest that after a suitable period of time (say every three months) you invite the Baptism parents (and any godparents who have attended) to a social to meet with the other parents and the team. Representatives of any relevant parish groups could also be invited.

This would be a great opportunity to promote a follow-on course to help strengthen their own faith. The CaFE OnDemand website includes details of many suitable short courses. The Alpha Course is also used by some parishes as a helpful next step of faith.

A non-Catholic spouse who has attended the course may be interested in joining the Catholic Church, so make sure that you are aware of when the RCIA (Rite of Christian Initiation of Adults) programme or its equivalent is running and who in the parish should be contacted.

Quotes on Baptism from the Catechism of the Catholic Church

The Catechism of the Catholic Church contains many references to the sacrament of Baptism. We have selected a few of these to help you get a deeper understanding of the Church teaching and would encourage you to read the section on Baptism in the chapter on the seven sacraments of the Church. The numbers in bold refer to the paragraph numbers in the Catechism.

BAPTISM – RAISED TO NEW LIFE IN CHRIST

628 Baptism, the original and full sign of which is immersion, efficaciously signifies the descent into the tomb by the Christian who dies to sin with Christ in order to live a new life. "We were buried therefore with him by Baptism into death, so that as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, we too might walk in newness of life."

ON THE NEED TO UNDERSTAND RITE OF BAPTISM:

1234 The meaning and grace of the sacrament of Baptism are clearly seen in the rites of its celebration. By following the gestures and words of this celebration with attentive participation, the faithful are initiated into the riches this sacrament signifies and actually brings about in each newly baptized person.

WE BELIEVE IN ONE BAPTISM FOR THE FORGIVENESS OF SINS – THE NICENE CREED

985 Baptism is the first and chief sacrament of the forgiveness of sins: it unites us to Christ, who died and rose, and gives us the Holy Spirit.

BAPTISM – GATEWAY TO LIFE IN THE SPIRIT

1213 Holy Baptism is the basis of the whole Christian life, the gateway to life in the Spirit (*vitae spiritualis ianua*), and the door which gives access to the other sacraments. Through Baptism we are freed from sin and reborn as sons of God; we become members of Christ, are incorporated into the Church and made sharers in her mission: "Baptism is the sacrament of regeneration through water in the word."

THE MOTHER'S BLESSING

1245 The solemn blessing concludes the celebration of Baptism. At the Baptism of newborns the blessing of the mother occupies a special place.

CONTINUE THE JOURNEY AFTER BAPTISM

1254 For all the baptized, children or adults, faith must grow after Baptism. For this reason the Church celebrates each year at the Easter Vigil the renewal of baptismal promises. Preparation for Baptism leads only to the threshold of new life. Baptism is the source of that new life in Christ from which the entire Christian life springs forth

WHY IS BAPTISM NECESSARY?

1257 The Lord himself affirms that Baptism is necessary for salvation. He also commands his disciples to proclaim the Gospel to all nations and to baptize them. Baptism is necessary for salvation for those to whom the Gospel has been proclaimed and who have had the possibility of asking for this sacrament. The Church does not know of any means other than Baptism that assures entry into eternal beatitude; this is why she takes care not to neglect the mission she has received from the Lord to see that all who can be baptized are "reborn of water and the Spirit." God has bound salvation to the sacrament of Baptism, but he himself is not bound by his sacraments.

RE CHILDREN WHO DIED WITHOUT BEEN BAPTISED

1261 As regards children who have died without Baptism, the Church can only entrust them to the mercy of God, as she does in her funeral rites for them. Indeed, the great mercy of God who desires that all men should be saved, and Jesus' tenderness toward children which caused him to say: "Let the children come to me, do not hinder them," allow us to hope that there is a way of salvation for children who have died without Baptism. All the more urgent is the Church's call not to prevent little children coming to Christ through the gift of holy Baptism.

THE EFFECT OF BAPTISM

1262 The different effects of Baptism are signified by the perceptible elements of the sacramental rite. Immersion in water symbolizes not only death and purification, but also regeneration and renewal. Thus the two principal effects are purification from sins and new birth in the Holy Spirit.

WHAT DOES BAPTISM ACHIEVE

1267 Baptism makes us members of the Body of Christ: "Therefore . . . we are members one of another." Baptism incorporates us into the Church. From the baptismal fonts is born the one People of God of the New Covenant, which transcends all the natural or human limits of nations, cultures, races, and sexes: "For by one Spirit we were all baptized into one body."

FOR NON CATHOLIC PARENTS

1271 Baptism constitutes the foundation of communion among all Christians, including those who are not yet in full communion with the Catholic Church: "For men who believe in Christ and have been properly baptized are put in some, though imperfect, communion with the Catholic Church. Justified by faith in Baptism, [they] are incorporated into Christ; they therefore have a right to be called Christians, and with good reason are accepted as brothers by the children of the Catholic Church." "Baptism therefore constitutes the sacramental bond of unity existing among all who through it are reborn."

THE BAPTISMAL SEAL

1272 Incorporated into Christ by Baptism, the person baptized is configured to Christ. Baptism seals the Christian with the indelible spiritual mark (character) of his belonging to Christ. No sin can erase this mark, even if sin prevents Baptism from bearing the fruits of salvation. Given once for all, Baptism cannot be repeated.

BAPTISM IS BIRTH INTO A NEW LIFE IN CHRIST

1277 Baptism is birth into the new life in Christ. In accordance with the Lord's will, it is necessary for salvation, as is the Church herself, which we enter by Baptism.

FRUIT OF BAPTISM

1279 The fruit of Baptism, or baptismal grace, is a rich reality that includes forgiveness of original sin and all personal sins, birth into the new life by which man becomes an adoptive son of the Father, a member of Christ and a temple of the Holy Spirit. By this very fact the person baptized is incorporated into the Church, the Body of Christ, and made a sharer in the priesthood of Christ.

THE CHRISTIAN NAME

2165 In Baptism, the Christian receives his name in the Church. Parents, godparents, and the pastor are to see that he be given a Christian name. The patron saint provides a model of charity and the assurance of his prayer.

Quoted from the Catechism of the Catholic Church - English translation. Published by Geoffrey Chapman.

■ 1994 Geoffrey Chapman - Liberia Editrice Vaticana

APPENDIX 2

The role of godparents

In the early church godparents were the sponsors for the converts to Christianity. They would confirm that the person putting themselves forward for Baptism was genuine and then would stand beside them and help them to grow in their Christian life. When infant Baptism became the usual practice in the second century it was felt that babies too needed adults to stand beside them and support them as they grew in their faith. Initially the godparents would be the child's natural parents. From the ninth century onwards the role of godparent became one for someone close to the family but not the natural parent.

There is no legal role for godparents but the church expects them to stand with the parents in supporting the child. When the child is given the gift of new life in Baptism the godparents undertake to help them to strive for maturity in faith, love and charity. In the service they will be asked, "Are you ready to help the parents of this child in their duty as Christian parents?". By answering positively they are expected to be a friend in faith to the child who can be called on in times of doubt, confusion and questioning. That is why, along with the parents, they will be asked to profess their own faith during the Baptism service and they will be called upon to reject all that is false and contrary to the Kingdom of God. This they must do in their own name and not for the child.

1255 For the grace of Baptism to unfold, the parents' help is important. So too is the role of the godfather and godmother, who must be firm believers, able and ready to help the newly baptized - child or adult on the road of Christian life. Their task is a truly ecclesial function (officium). The whole ecclesial community bears some responsibility for the development and safeguarding of the grace given at Baptism.

Catechism of the Catholic Church

The role of godparents (sponsors)
(From the Code of Canon Law)

Can. 872. In so far as possible, a person being baptised is to be assigned a sponsor. In the case of adult Baptism, the sponsor's role is to assist the person in Christian initiation. In the case of infant Baptism, the sponsor's role is together with the parents to present the child for Baptism, and to help it live a Christian life befitting the baptised and faithfully to fulfil the duties inherent in Baptism.

Can. 873. One sponsor, male or female is sufficient, but there may be two, one of each sex.

Can. 874 To be admitted to undertake the office of sponsor, a person must:

- 1) Be appointed by the candidate for Baptism, or by the parents or whoever stands in their place, or failing these, by the parish priest, or the minister; to be appointed the person, must be suitable for this role and have the intention of fulfilling it.
- 2) Be not less than sixteen years of age, unless a different age has been stipulated by the diocesan bishop, or unless the parish priest, or the minister considers that there is a just reason for an exception to be made.
- 3) Be a Catholic, who has been confirmed and has received the blessed Eucharist, and who lives a life of faith which befits the role to be undertaken.
- 4) Not labour under a canonical penalty, whether imposed or declared.
- 5) Not be either the father or mother of the baptised.

Note: a baptised person who belongs to a non-Catholic ecclesial community may be admitted only in company with a Catholic sponsor, and then simply as a witness to the Baptism.

APPENDIX 3

Comments on Baptism by Cardinal Vincent Nichols, Archbishop of Westminster

The following are the quotes from Archbishop Vincent Nichols as used in this Baptism course.:

Wanting the best for your child:

“You’re right to have come to ask for Baptism for your child. In fact it’s the most important thing you can do and it will have great consequence: great consequences for your child who will now receive the gift of God’s grace and great consequences for your family, because you will become part of the family of the Church. There are real consequences for you as parents, because now you will have the support of the community and the presence of God’s grace in your life to share with your child the gift of faith.”

Naming Your Child:

“The naming of a child is a very important moment, because that’s the name by which the child will be known. So you’ve got to think if the name sounds silly or whether it sounds right and if it goes nicely with the surname. But much more importantly, what you’re beginning to teach the child in the choice of name, is that they have company on this journey through life and what better company to have than that of a saint or a Christian hero.”

The sign of the Cross:

“One of my nicest memories as a child, comes from the fact that every night my mother would come up to bed and she would kiss me good night and she would make the sign of the cross on my forehead. That was a sign that I was safe and it was a sign of the bond between us as well. Because I bet you didn’t know that the sign of the cross on the forehead, was derived from the fact that slaves in the Roman Empire used to be branded with the mark of their owner. So the Christians, the first followers of Christ, took that idea and made something blessed out of what had been a curse and said, “We’re happy to belong to Jesus and his sign is the sign of the cross.” My mother used it and the priest uses it in Baptism and everyone who belongs to this family of the Church, uses that sign all the time: when they begin to pray, when they go into a church, at the beginning of Mass and hopefully before they go to sleep at night.”

“Often people feel very lonely today and their lives are a bit fragmented. They don’t know where they belong. They don’t know where to go to get comfort. So it’s a great gift to come into the community of the Church and play a real part in building it up.”

Celebration of God's Word:

“There are lots of different ways in which we have conversations. Sometimes we shout at each other, sometimes we sit over a table and talk very properly and decently and sometimes we just whisper. I don't know which way you prefer best, but there's all sorts of different ways of getting across the same message. And it's the same with God. When God wants to talk to us, sometimes he does it in quite a formal way and we've got to stand up and concentrate to listen to it and this happens when the Gospel is read to us in Church. But at other times God will just whisper in our ear.”

“When you pick up your child then I'm sure your heart is full of love for that child. Now sometimes you'll mutter sweet nothings in the child's ear, these are messages of love and at other times you'll say them very directly. And in fact as they get older you'll have to say you love them in all sorts of different ways because they won't want to hear those words. But that's just a reflection of how God deals with us. It's a true reflection, but God's love takes all that we can do best and just magnifies it so much.”

The Intercessions:

“A lovely thing my mother taught me was to understand that when a Catholic prays, more than half of their prayers are for other people. So a Catholic doesn't get absorbed in themselves when they pray, but they look around and they see who's in need, who's sick, who's facing death, who's worried, who's afraid of what might happen and they include them in their prayer. The Pope has a list on his kneeler every morning, of people for whom he's going to pray. People in his household keep that list up to date, so that when he's asked to pray for somebody, he does it. That's what we should do too. So in the ceremony there are intercessions and it's real prayer because we are drawing God's attention to the needs of others.”

Prayer of Anointing:

“As the life of your child unfolds, what they are going to live through is a whole series of separations, strangely enough. But it seems there's no growing up without separating. So after a while, the child won't be comfortable in your arms all the time. Then they won't even be comfortable in one cot or chair, they'll be all over the place. And then before you know it, they'll be off to school and then after that away from the safety of the primary school into that big secondary school. Each step brings with it so many more risks and dangers and it's when we think about those dangers that every news bulletin on the television tells us are real, then it's important we understand that God's presence is like a shield.”

Introduction:

“A great adventure begins. It’s the adventure of faith; it’s the adventure that’s written right through the pages of the bible. It’s the adventure in which we have a leader, we have company, we have a goal, we have food, we have all that we need. It’s an adventure that we’re going to share; parents and their children, priests with their people. It’s just wonderful. It is over and over again an exciting new beginning and the promise that all lies ahead.”

The Profession of Faith:

“What we believe in most of all is the person of Jesus as the one who gives us the shape and the lead in life and then gives us himself so we can put it into action. So when you say “I do, yes I do believe” then you’re giving an undertaking to live that faith at home and to let your family life be shaped by the teachings of Jesus, and be filled with the strength and grace that he will give you once you put your trust in him.”

Chrism and the White Garment:

“This Chrism reminds us that whatever particular pathway in life God wants, then it will involve a life of prayer and trying to stick to what is true and stand up for it at times. It will involve wanting to draw other people into the goodness of a life of love; an ordered life, full of love in which each can help the other to grow. So God’s got a plan and it’s our adventure to try and find what that is.”

“This white garment doesn’t just speak of a kind of innocence that a baby might have now. It speaks to us of God’s intention, God’s plan that is written into the heart of your child, which is that they will come through this journey of life, which is a struggle between good and evil, into the fullness of white garment, the fullness of light in the presence of God in heaven.”

The Lighted Candle:

“This candle is a sign of the faith, the light that comes to us from Christ. It is easily blown out, but not if we stand together. That’s why godparents are here standing alongside you the parents, and handing on this gift of faith. A small group of candles in a room can dispel the darkness totally. So the witness of faith that we give is always given together. It is impossible to live the life of faith on your own. We need to be together, to join forces so that the light of Christ will be strong.”

The Lord’s Prayer:

“Prayer is about our praise of God. It’s recognising that it’s from God that everything is given. And all we want to say, more than anything else, is thank you for this gift of life. Thank you for this day, thank you for this gift of faith. You are our Father, and in you we rejoice. Yes, we put our trust, we come for help and protection, but most of all in you we rejoice. So the ‘Our Father’ is a prayer of great praise and also a prayer that recognises that we have our needs too.”

APPENDIX 4

Ordering further copies

For further copies of the course Booklets please contact:

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