

Six Keys to Evangelizing Baptismal Ministry

1. **Perceive baptismal ministry (before, during and after Baptism) as an opportunity to evangelize and foster conversion.** Design every aspect of this ministry upon this primary principle and with great intentionality.
2. **Focus on team building and team formation.** There are many gifts and charisms present in the people of your parish and many and varied roles 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'll 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 from them? Are there parishioners who can effectively frame a kerymatic explanation of faith in Jesus Christ that is attractive and understandable...and connect it to Baptism? Find your gifted people, form them well and position them for ministry success, within the team.
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, one more on things like Catholic parenting and what the parish has to offer the family. However, any track should be heavily eucharistic in its focus and designed to foster relationship-building to the community of faith. Parishes should 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...more so than just one.
4. **Never call them classes or meetings.** Create more of a *day of formation/retreat* experience and frame it as such. Mix in strong relational interactions with some time for reflective quiet. Start any formational piece at the place of their lived experience and provide a core, kerymatic 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 a Mass rather than during a Mass. Suggestions include: Invite/strongly encourage the family to attend the prior Mass (where they will be welcomed warmly and perhaps seated up front); 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.

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, 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!

There is no more important ministry for a parish to over-haul and *radically* reimagine...if it seeks to attract active young families and grow as a renewing community of faith...than Baptismal Ministry. This means from the phone call to the parish through to (hopefully) registration for kindergarten or first grade in the school or parish faith formation. The cement is wet here at Baptism. Not at First Eucharist, certainly not Confirmation. (If your parish's Baptismal Ministry is badly languishing...or worse...do not try to merely tweak it. Better to deconstruct it entirely and start from scratch.)

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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