

A blue-tinted background featuring a church interior with arches and columns. At the top, a water droplet is shown falling into a pool of water, creating ripples. The text is overlaid on this background.

TOGETHER AT BAPTISM

PARENT PREPARATION
PROGRAM GUIDE

INTRODUCTION

This leader's guide offers eighteen, 15–20 minute modules that can be used with the *Together at Baptism* booklet in a parent formation program. It helps you, the parish leader, to assist parents preparing for the Baptism of a child. These highly adaptable modules will help parents think and pray about their own faith and lead them to a deeper understanding of what it means to pass that faith along to their child through the Sacrament of Baptism.

You should arrange and adapt the eighteen modules to whatever format best meets the needs of your parish community. For example, these modules can be presented during a half-day retreat of 4–6 hours or at two or three meetings of about 2 hours each). If you want or need to offer a shorter program, use the eleven modules marked with this water symbol. These modules contain primary content and are strongly recommended for use with all parents. Additionally, modules 12–14 can be shortened and combined if necessary to further focus the presentation. Choose from the prayer suggestions included in module 1 to begin each session and from module 17 to end each session. These prayer options can also be used at appropriate times during longer sessions, such as during a half-day retreat.

Preliminaries

Attend to the following as you plan your program.

- Choose a meeting space conducive to adult faith formation and take care to make it a welcoming environment for all participants. If children are attending with their parents, be sure the space is childproof, safe, and comfortable.
- Adjust your presentation to meet the varying needs of the participants.
 - Consider the parenting experience of those who will participate and tailor your presentations to address their specific circumstances.
 - *Are parents attending before or after the birth of their child?*
 - *Are any of the children adopted?*
 - *Are there older siblings?*
 - *Are there other family members who might be attending with or instead of the parents?*
- Be sensitive to each participant's marital status and attentive to various religious backgrounds.
 - *Are any of the participants unmarried, separated, or divorced?*
 - *Are there blended families participating?*
 - *Are both parents Catholic?*
 - *Are both Christians?*
 - *Is this an interfaith marriage?*
- Keep in mind that a child's Baptism is often an occasion for parents to return to the practice of the faith. Baptism preparation is a privileged opportunity to welcome families into the parish community.

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INTRODUCTION

- Consider whether others might wish to participate in these sessions (godparents, grandparents, other family members, or interested parishioners) and extend an invitation to them.
- Ask participants to read pertinent pages in the *Together at Baptism* booklet prior to each session. Also be prepared to summarize the content in case they do not. Allow time for participants to ask questions and perhaps review the relevant content when you meet.

Hints for Facilitators

- Allow plenty of time for greeting participants, getting beverages or snacks, and making appropriate introductions. These simple gestures of hospitality help pave the way for more fruitful conversations.
- Be respectful of the announced schedule for your session(s). Schedule time for breaks if planning a longer session.
- Moments of silence are a normal part of group discussion. When asking questions to the group, pause and allow sufficient time for participants to prepare a thoughtful response.
- Give all a chance to participate as they wish. Ask direct questions and invite, but never force, a response.
- Check in frequently and ask for feedback during (and after) your sessions and adjust your presentation accordingly.

MODULE 1: OPENING PRAYER

Step One

Prepare a prayer center in your meeting space, covering a table with a cloth and placing on the table a candle, a cross or crucifix, and a Bible. Welcome participants and give an overview of the plans for Baptism preparation. Invite each person to introduce him or herself and to tell the group something about the child to be baptized and other family members.

Step Two

Choose from these prayer options to begin this and each of your sessions. If you use a scripture reading, keep in mind that many people will prefer to have a copy of it in front of them, especially if you choose the second option below.

- Pray one of the Responsorial Psalms found on pages 82–84 of *Together at Baptism*. Conclude by praying the “Glory Be.”
- Proclaim one of the scripture readings found on pages 74–81 or 86–94 of *Together at Baptism*. Invite participants to respond to God’s Word by speaking aloud a word or phrase that has particular meaning for them. Conclude by praying the Lord’s Prayer.
- Pray a Litany of Saints following the text found on page 29 of *Together at Baptism*. If possible, you may want to include the patron saint names of group participants or of the children to be baptized. This is a good option to begin module 6: *Called by Name*. You can also find various versions of a Litany of Saints with a quick Internet search.
- Offer a spontaneous prayer of thanksgiving and blessing for these parents and the children who will be baptized.
- Pray an appropriate prayer chosen from a book such as *Catholic Household Blessings & Prayers* (USCCB), *Prayers for the Domestic Church* (Ave Maria Press), or *The Notre Dame Book of Prayer* (Ave Maria Press).

MODULE 2: WELCOME AND INTRODUCTIONS

Step One

Invite the participants to share one or two ways in which their lives (routines, behaviors, household activities) have been changed by welcoming their child. Then ask: how have you been changed emotionally, physically, and spiritually by the experience of becoming a parent? If you have participants who have been parenting for some years, ask them to try to recall the changes that took place or continue to occur.

Step Two

If you have not already done so, distribute copies of *Together at Baptism* to each family. Summarize the content found on pages 1–4 of *Together at Baptism*, noting the following key points.

- Welcoming a child is a moment of grace in your family life and the beginning of a lifelong journey of discovering the richness of God's grace in your lives.
- As a parent, you have the privilege of raising your child to know God's love and of leading your son or daughter to live as part of the community of the Church. Your presence here in preparation for your child's Baptism is an expression of your desire to accept the responsibilities of this task.
- God and the Church are with you on this journey and members of the parish are eager to welcome your child through the Sacrament of Baptism. In these sessions, you will learn how to participate fully in the celebration of Baptism and hopefully will help you appreciate more fully how the grace of your own Baptism can strengthen you as you raise your child.

MODULE 3: EXPERIENCES OF BAPTISM

Step One

Invite participants to describe their experiences of the celebration of Baptism using one of the following options:

- If any participants were baptized as older children or adults, ask them to share their memories of the celebration. Ask those baptized as infants to share any stories others have told them about their Baptisms.
- Ask participants to describe an experience of attending a Baptism, perhaps at a Sunday Mass in the parish, or the Baptism of a family member or friend in another parish.

Step Two

Use these experiences to identify key elements of the *Order of Baptism* and draw connections between participants' experiences and plans for the parish celebration of the Baptism of their children. (See pages 6–8 of *Together at Baptism*.)

Step Three

Invite participants to respond to the questions on page 8 of *Together at Baptism*.

What reasons do you have for wanting your child baptized in the Catholic Church?

In your own words, what do you believe Baptism means?

MODULE 4: THE CHURCH AND ROLES IN BAPTISM

Step One

Ask participants to name people they are expecting to attend their child's Baptism. Discuss why these people, and many others, are taking an interest in their son or daughter's well being.

Step Two

Then ask participants to describe the plans they are making for their child's Baptism. Observe that the Church is also preparing to welcome these children into the Body of Christ through the Sacrament of Baptism. Name some of the people who are involved in planning for the Sacrament of Baptism in your parish and describe their roles. Summarize the content found on pages 9 and 10 of *Together at Baptism*, noting the following key points:

- At Baptism, your child will become a child of God and a member of God's People, the Church. All who are baptized are united to one another as brothers and sisters in Christ.
- Baptism is most appropriately celebrated during Sunday Mass, when the parish community gathers to celebrate the Eucharist. Baptism is the first of three Sacraments of Initiation—Baptism, Confirmation, and Eucharist—by which we become full members of the Church. Baptism reaches its fulfillment when the baptized person shares fully in the Eucharist by receiving Holy Communion.
- Many people have important roles to play in the celebration of the Sacrament of Baptism.
 - **Parents:** As their child's first catechists, parents accept the responsibility to raise their child in the faith. They ask for the help of the Church and renew their own Baptismal promises during the celebration, demonstrating their own commitment to the faith.
 - **Godparents:** One godparent is required, but it is common to have two. They promise to assist parents in forming the child in the faith. Discuss expectations and requirements for godparents, referring to the information found on pages 2-3 and 17-19 of *Together at Baptism*.
 - **A Priest or Deacon:** An ordained minister of the Church administers the Sacrament of Baptism except in rare instances when another person may baptize a child in danger of death. In the celebration of Baptism, the priest or deacon represents both Christ and the Church.
 - **Other Liturgical Ministers:** These might include greeters or ushers, servers, lectors, musicians, a choir and cantor, and Eucharistic ministers.
 - **The Gathered Community:** This might include only family and close friends or a large group of parishioners if Baptism takes place at a Sunday Mass. In many places the parish hosts a reception afterwards for families whose children have been welcomed through Baptism.

MODULE 4: THE CHURCH AND ROLES IN BAPTISM

Step Three

Invite participants to respond to the questions on page 10 of *Together at Baptism*.

What part did your family play in your childhood faith development?

What do you recall about your parish community growing up?

How did it help shape your faith?

MODULE 5: SACRAMENTS OF INITIATION

Step One

Discuss ways people are welcomed into our homes using the questions on page 12 of *Together at Baptism*. Summarize the content found on page 11, discussing the ways in which the community of the Church expresses welcome in the Sacrament of Baptism, and how Baptism is a “doorway” to the other sacraments.

Step Two

Ask participants to name the seven sacraments and try to ensure that all have a basic understanding of the sacraments. Then discuss the Sacraments of Initiation, showing how Baptism is related to the Sacraments of Confirmation and Eucharist. Be sure that participants know when children in your parish prepare for First Holy Communion and the Sacrament of Confirmation. Encourage parents to request these sacraments for their child at the appropriate times.

MODULE 6: SACRAMENTS OF INITIATION

Step One

Observe that “What is your baby’s name?” is often among the first questions new parents are asked. Note that this very question is asked at the beginning of the *Order of Baptism*. Distribute paper and markers, and ask participants to write their child’s full name in the center of the paper. Then invite participants to think about the meaning or significance of the name they have chosen for their child and add to the paper words or images that they associate with the name. Allow quiet time to work on this, then invite participants to tell the group about the significance and meaning of their child’s name.

Step Two

Observe that our names are an important part of our identity and can also show our connectedness to others. Offer examples from what you have heard from the participants, such as naming a child after another family member or sharing a common last name. The names we give our children can also connect them to the Church, the Communion of Saints. Use the text on pages 15–16 and 29–30 of *Together at Baptism* to discuss the meaning and importance of the Communion of Saints and our call to holiness.

Step Three

Show an image of the Cross and observe that this, too, is an important symbol of our identity as Christians. In the *Order of Baptism*, the priest or deacon will trace the Sign of the Cross on the child’s forehead and invite parents and godparents to do the same. Use the text on pages 20–22 of *Together at Baptism* to elaborate on the meaning and significance of this signing with the Cross.

MODULE 7: “WHAT DO YOU ASK OF THE CHURCH?”

Step One

Refer to pages 13-14 of *Together at Baptism* as you observe that God gives the gift of faith at Baptism. Note that Baptism celebrates the beginning of their child’s relationship with the Church and many people share a role in nurturing the gift of faith. Ask participants to identify ways in which their own faith has been nurtured within the Church community. Encourage them to identify people and life experiences that have significantly affected them by nurturing the gift of faith given at their own Baptism. When conversation seems to have finished, offer a spontaneous prayer of thanksgiving for the ways in which the gift of faith has been nurtured in the lives of these participants.

Step Two

Ask participants what help they might look for from the Church community as they raise their child and seek to nurture their child’s faith. Identify any parish ministries that correspond to these expressed needs and name any other opportunities that exist for parents to connect with the parish community. If possible, provide a list of these opportunities to participants so that they can keep it for future reference.

MODULE 8: PARENTING, THE FAITH DIMENSION

Step One

Refer to pages 17–19 of *Together at Baptism* as you describe the responsibility parents accept at Baptism to “train [their child] in the practice of the faith.” Allow time for participants to reflect on the first question on page 19 and then invite participants to offer responses.

How do the love and care you give an infant teach him or her about God?

Step Two

Ask participants to work in small groups to create a list of faith practices that they might want to share with their child. With the entire group, collect these responses and write them on a chart. Discuss the important role that parents play in establishing the practice of the faith in their family life. Observe that young children are especially receptive to ritual and parents have the opportunity to introduce many important faith practices in the early years of childhood (e.g., bedtime prayers, grace before meals, holiday traditions like praying with an Advent wreath). Refer to pages 27–28 of *Together at Baptism*, which lists a number of ideas for teaching children to pray. Observe that attending Sunday Mass each week is an especially important way we practice our faith as Catholics. Encourage participants to consider ways their family might keep Sunday as a day for rest and family.

Acknowledge that parents will need to be intentional about establishing these practices and persistent in continuing them as their children get older. Offer encouragement and assurance that the rewards for doing so are great. Suggest that today’s conversation can be the beginning of an ongoing dialogue between parents to identify what faith practices they will make a priority in their family life and how they will encourage one another to persevere with these in the years ahead. Observe that a parent’s example is the best way for a child to learn about the practice of the faith.

MODULE 9: SCRIPTURE AND THE BLESSING OF THE WATER

Step One

Highlight key points from the text on pages 23–24 of *Together at Baptism* to discuss the importance of scripture in our lives as Christians. Create several small groups and assign one of the following scripture passages to each group. Distribute Bibles and give instructions for the group to read the assigned scripture passage and discuss possible connections to the Sacrament of Baptism.

1. Creation: Genesis 1:1–2:2 (shorter form: Genesis 1:1–2)
2. Flood: Genesis 9:8–17
3. Red Sea: Exodus 14:15–15:2 (shorter form: Exodus 14:15–22)
4. Jordan River: Mark 1:9–11
5. The Cross: John 19:31–37
6. Resurrection: Matthew 28:16–20

Step Two

Call the large group back together and invite each small group to summarize their assigned scripture passage and discuss its connection to Baptism. Then introduce and read aloud the “Blessing and Invocation of God over the Baptismal Water” found on pages 37–39 of *Together at Baptism*. Refer to the text on pages 39–40 to discuss what water symbolizes in the Sacrament of Baptism.

MODULE 10: THE REALITY OF SIN

Step One

Ask participants to name some of the things they do to keep their child safe from harm (e.g., using a car seat, following a doctor's advice regarding vaccines, setting up guardrails and cushions to prevent falls). Observe that a primary responsibility of parents is to protect their children and keep them safe. Several elements of the *Order of Baptism* show the many ways that God extends his care to us and strengthens us to protect us from the harm caused by sin.

Step Two

Referring to the text on pages 31-32 and 44 of *Together at Baptism*, discuss the harm caused by sin and the reality of sin in our lives, including Original Sin and personal (actual) sin. Then ask participants to read pages 41-42 and invite responses to the questions found on page 42.

In what ways do you attend to your own continuing spiritual development?

How might you help your child grow in faith now and in the years that lie ahead?

Step Three

Describe the following parts of the *Order of Baptism*: the Prayer of Exorcism (pp. 31-32), the Anointing before Baptism (pp. 33-34), and the Renunciation of Sin and Profession of Faith (pp. 41-48). Observe that cleansing from sin is one of the primary effects of the Baptism. Note that sins committed after Baptism can be confessed and forgiven in the Sacrament of Penance, and encourage participants to go to confession before their child's Baptism.

MODULE 11: WATER, PRIMARY SYMBOL OF BAPTISM

Step One

Ask participants to offer a definition of a sacrament. If help is needed, offer the definition from the *Catechism of the Catholic Church*: “The sacraments are efficacious signs of grace, instituted by Christ and entrusted to the Church, by which divine life is dispensed to us” (CCC #1131). Take time to explain what each part of the definition means, particularly “efficacious,” which is an unfamiliar word to many people. Draw connections between how other ritual activities in our lives (bedtime routines, exchanging Christmas gifts, Thanksgiving dinners) effect or change us. Rituals, religious and otherwise, remind us who we are, what we value, and how we intend to live. By so doing, our sacramental rites (or rituals) renew and strengthen our identities as members of the Body of Christ. The sacraments deepen our bonds of commitment to one another and to God.

Step Two

Work together as a group to list the seven sacraments: Baptism, Confirmation, Eucharist, Anointing of the Sick, Penance, Holy Orders, and Matrimony, and identify ways in which each strengthens us as Catholic Christians. Ask how each sacrament tells us who we are and how we are to live.

Step Three

Refer to the text on pages 35–40 and 49–51 of *Together at Baptism* to discuss how water is the primary symbol in the Sacrament of Baptism. Highlight that water is used in Baptism to symbolize cleansing from (or death to) sin as well as new birth. If Baptism by immersion is an option in your parish, be sure to take extra time to discuss this with participants. Finish by reading aloud Romans 6:3-5 (p. 78 of *Together at Baptism*). Discuss how Baptism is a sharing in the death and resurrection of Christ that opens to us the promise of eternal life.

MODULE 12: SACRED CHRISM

Step One

Identify the uses of various kinds of oil and discuss their importance (e.g., cooking oil for flavor, fuel oil as an energy source, baby oil or hand lotion as a moisturizer, medical anointments for healing, etc.). Refer to pages 54-55 of *Together at Baptism* to draw connections between these and the anointing with Sacred Chrism at Baptism. Be sure to discuss the difference between the pre-Baptismal anointing with the Oil of Catechumens and the post-baptismal anointing with Sacred Chrism. Observe that Sacred Chrism is also used in the Sacraments of Confirmation and Holy Orders. (If time permits, note that there is a third oil, the Oil of the Sick, which is used in the Sacrament of the Anointing of the Sick.)

Step Two

Invite participants to read the prayer offered by the celebrant at the Anointing after Baptism (p. 54 of *Together at Baptism*). Discuss how this anointing with Sacred Chrism unites us with Christ and calls us to participate fully in his mission of Christ as Priest, Prophet, and King. Allow time for participants to reflect on the question on page 55 and then invite participants to offer responses.

What are some of the ways you live the calling (anointing) you received at Baptism to share in Christ's work here on earth?

MODULE 13: THE WHITE GARMENT

Step One

Identify occasions when a person wears new or special clothing (e.g., weddings, holiday parties, First Communion, graduations). Then ask participants if plans are being made for a special gown for their child's Baptism. Refer to pages 56–57 of *Together at Baptism* to discuss the significance of the white garment that is given to the newly baptized. If applicable, show the white garment that will be given to the children in the parish celebration of the Sacrament of Baptism.

Step Two

Ask a volunteer to read aloud Galatians 3:26–28 (found on p. 80 of *Together at Baptism*). Discuss ways in which Baptism makes us a new creation and what implications this has for the choices we make and the way we live each day. Invite participants to read the prayer offered by the celebrant at the clothing with the white garment (p. 56 of *Together at Baptism*). Then discuss ways in which family members and friends can help their child live out his or her Christian dignity.

MODULE 14: LIGHTED CANDLE

Step One

Ask participants to recall an experience of being in the dark (e.g., being awakened at night by a child or sudden clash of thunder, an unexpected power outage, etc.). Invite participants to describe this experience and the difference it made to turn on a light or to light a candle. Ask a volunteer to read aloud John 8:12 (p.85 of *Together at Baptism*) and invite participants to consider what this might mean for us.

Step Two

Refer to pages 58–59 of *Together at Baptism* to make connections between the conversation in Step One and the presentation of the lighted candle in the *Order of Baptism*. Show the Baptismal candle that will be used in the parish celebration of Baptism. Describe how each Baptismal candle will be lit from the Paschal Candle, the symbol of the Light of Christ. Invite participants to read the prayer offered by the celebrant at the presentation of the lighted candle (p. 58 of *Together at Baptism*). Discuss how parents can help keep the flame of faith “burning brightly” in their child’s life.

MODULE 15: LIVING THE GRACE OF BAPTISM

Step One

Invite participants to name the various ways they communicated to family and friends the news of their child's birth or adoption (e.g., phone calls, text messages, emails, paper birth announcements, Facebook messages, posts and photos, Twitter posts). Observe the various "new media" that was used for a very traditional practice of announcing good news. As Christians, we are sent to announce the Good News of God's presence in our lives. Allow time for participants to reflect on the question on page 61, and then invite participants to share their responses.

How has the experience of parenthood opened your ears, your heart,
and your mind to God's presence in your life?

Step Two

Refer to pages 60–61 of *Together at Baptism* to discuss the final part of the Rite of Baptism, the Ephphetha (prayer over the ears and mouth). Invite participants to discuss their hopes for their child, especially the ways in which the celebration of Baptism might bear fruit in their lives.

Refer to pages 64–65 of *Together at Baptism* to draw connections between Baptism and Eucharist. Offer general information about parish opportunities for a child's faith formation as well as ongoing formation for adults. You may want to make particular note of the parish's programs of preparation for the Sacraments of Confirmation and Penance, and the reception of First Holy Communion. Draw the conversation to a close by offering a spontaneous prayer for the children to be baptized, summarizing the hopes named by the participants and anticipating their eventual sharing in the Eucharist.

MODULE 16: BLESSING OF PARENTS

Step One

Invite participants to name various ways they have been supported by family and friends since becoming parents. Observe that parenting is not a job we do alone; we rely on the support of family, friends, the Church, and, most especially, God. Refer to pages 70–71 of *Together at Baptism* to consider the challenges of parenting. Allow time for participants to reflect on the questions on page 71, and then invite participants to share responses.

Who among your family and friends will you look to for support and strength in raising your child?

In what ways does your parish community offer support to parents?

How do you plan to take advantage of these offerings?

Step Two

Share information about parish outreach to families with young children, and discuss ways that families can participate fully in the life of the parish community. Encourage participants to take advantage of these opportunities, and emphasize the importance of family practice of the faith, especially Sunday Mass and praying together as family. Encourage participants to note the anniversary of their child's Baptism on their family calendar and to celebrate this day with their child each year. Direct them to the at-home prayer service, "Family Celebration for the Anniversary of Baptism" available at avemariapress.com.

MODULE 17: CLOSING PRAYER

Step One

Choose from these options for prayer to conclude each of your sessions:

- Pray prayers of petition for the children and families preparing for Baptism. Choose from the Prayer of the Faithful options found on pages 96–101 of *Together at Baptism*. Invite participants to offer petitions for their families. You may also compose your own prayers in advance.
- Play quiet music and encourage participants to write their own prayer for their child. Invite those who wish to read (all or part of) their prayers aloud. Conclude by praying together the Lord's Prayer.
- Recall that God chose that his Son, Jesus, would be born into the Holy Family. Mary and Joseph can become wonderful models for Christian parents. We can pray to them, asking them to be companions and guides in our parenting and to intercede on our behalf for God's enduring protection.
- Pray an appropriate prayer chosen from a book such as *Catholic Household Blessings & Prayers* (USCCB), *Prayers for the Domestic Church* (Ave Maria Press), or *The Notre Dame Book of Prayer* (Ave Maria Press).

MODULE 18: REHEARSAL

Step One

Bring participants to the place in your parish church where Baptism is celebrated. If at all possible, make arrangements for godparents to participate in the rehearsal as well as the parents. Using the table of contents and the description of the *Order of Baptism* on page 6 of *Together at Baptism* as guides, conduct a rehearsal so that all participants feel confident about what will be expected of them when they bring their child to receive the Sacrament of Baptism.

Step Two

Encourage any parents who have not yet done so to read *Together at Baptism* through page 71, so that they have a clear understanding of what will take place during the liturgy.