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PART I: PREPARATION

Why Baptize This Child?

GATHER

As people arrive for the preparatory session, greet them warmly, and if it is a group session, ask them to make out name tags—even for the baby. Deciding where to put the name tag (on the baby, on a blanket, on the carrier) can end up being an ice-breaker. A name tag is also a good way to help remember the baby’s name, and godparents are often friends or family members from away, so even a small group will likely contain strangers. Be sure that you, too, wear a name tag.

Once everyone has arrived and is settled, light any candles you have, and open with prayer:

O God, you have taught us through your blessed Son that whoever receives a little child in the name of Christ receives Christ himself: We give you thanks for the blessing you have bestowed upon this family (these families) in giving them a child. Confirm their joy by a lively sense of your presence with them, and give them calm strength and patient wisdom as they seek to bring this child to love all that is true and noble, just and pure, lovable and gracious, excellent and admirable, following the example of our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ. Amen.

ACTIVITIES

Why Baptize?

Pass out an index card to each participant. In their journals, parents and godparents have already confronted the basic question of “why baptize this child” in two different entries:

You hold this journal in your hands because you have begun the process of preparing for your child’s or godchild’s baptism. You have said “yes” to the promptings of your own heart and/or to the encouragement of friends or relatives. Baptism used to be a societal norm, something that was automatically “done” to a child. In the early years of this new millennium, however, saying yes to baptism is a different, deeper choice.

Spend some time pondering what led you to seek Holy Baptism for your child, or, if you are to be a godparent, what led you to accept that role.

Priest and professor John Westerhoff writes that, "It is God who is the prior actor in Baptism, an action to which we can only respond." In other words, according to Westerhoff, no matter what other reasons you might name, one reason that you have engaged in this preparatory process is that God invited you and, on behalf of the child, you said yes. With that thought in mind, what stands out as specific moments or significant events in which you sensed God's presence or God's action in your life, moving you toward this place in your journey, this choice for your child or godchild?

Since they have already thought and written about what has led them to seek baptism for this child, ask them to copy or paraphrase their answers onto the index cards. Collect and shuffle the cards, then either write their responses on newsprint or a blackboard, or simply read the responses aloud. See if they are able to identify who gave the other answers, and allow them time to talk about their own.

With a single family, this can be done simply through conversation about what they wrote, but if godparents are there, too, you might consider using the cards. Index cards are small and non-threatening and very useful in initiating discussion.

What Does Baptism Mean to You?

If you have time, once you have elicited responses and allowed conversation around those responses, ask the parents and godparents about their own experiences of baptism, using questions Presiding Bishop Frank Griswold suggested in "The Journey of Growing up into Christ:"

How old were you when you were baptized?

What were the circumstances?

How are you, with the Spirit's help, able to discern ways that Christ has been formed in you since your baptism?

What does baptism mean to you, as a baptized person?

As you close out discussion of why they have chosen to have this child baptized, consider reading aloud the following excerpt from their journal:

In our secular culture, a question that you are likely to encounter from friends or family not connected with the Church is why you are offering your child for adoption by God into the Christian family. Why does it matter that you raise this child to know and love God? Ellen Charry answers by saying that “knowing and loving God is the mechanism of choice for forming excellence of character and promoting genuine happiness.” In other words, knowing and loving God is good for us; it makes us better, stronger people—and it makes people genuinely happy. Prayers from the Baptismal service acknowledge this: “Give [this child] an inquiring and discerning heart, a spirit to know and to love you, and the gift of joy and wonder in all your works.”

By saying yes to baptism for your child or godchild, you offer life and hope and courage and joy. And you promise to help along the way.

