

**Leader's Guide for**  
***EXPLORING THE SACRAMENT OF BAPTISM***  
**Baptism: Sacrament of Belonging**

**ORIENTATION AND BACKGROUND**

The youth of today live more with symbols than ideas. Just listening to their music, their speech leads us to discover a wealth of highly charged images and to realize that any proclamation of faith aimed at affecting their lives cannot afford to ignore such language. It is a form of expression, we should note, that closely resembles the symbolic discourse of Scripture and the use of gesture in liturgy. Symbol is, above all, the language of film, where its purpose is not primarily analytical nor explanatory, but evocative. And it is just this power to evoke attitudes and invite action that can put the student in touch with the Christian mystery in its deepest, experimental aspect.

This interplay of the everyday and the symbolic is reflected repeatedly in Christ's use of parables, and it is upon this model that *Baptism: Sacrament of Belonging* is patterned.

A parable is a simple narrative, containing a hidden meaning and arousing the curiosity of the audience to uncover the religious or moral significance of the story. In interpreting a parable, it is important to remember that it is *not* an allegory, with every detail corresponding to the reality described. Rather, a parable builds principally upon one basic point of comparison, without reference to what may be implied by every related detail.

In *Baptism: Sacrament of Belonging*, the one specific point of analogy basic to the film and the sacrament is best explained by this excerpt from Bernard Cooke's *Christian Sacraments and Christian Personality*:

"Baptism signifies the individual's initiation into this Christian community, this faith-society. There is the external action by which the baptized indicates his desire to share in the communal life of the group, and by which the group signifies its reception of the individual into its midst."

**CONTENT**

**Synopsis**

Based on a *true* incident about a destitute boy in Mexico, this *parable* depicts both the beginning and culmination of the journey of faith. Scarred by fire and homeless, Alfredo is drawn by the warmth and

love he sees among the children of the “Hacienda,” a community of Little Brothers and Sisters. He seeks out the “father” of these children and asks to join them. The padre, torn by the wish to help Alfredo and the need to assure his acceptance by the other children, puts the decision to the entire group. “Tu eres me hermano” (You are my brother) is the greeting which welcomes Alfredo into his new family—a welcome bright with music and fireworks.

## **DISCUSSION**

### **Before screening the film**

1. If you are using the film to initiate a study of Baptism, it would be profitable to examine the basic elements of this sacrament with the class before they view the film; i.e., Baptism is a sacrament (an encounter with the risen Christ) signifying:
  - a) entry into the People of God
  - b) redemption from the power of evil
  - c) communication of life
  - d) a call to Christian witness
  - e) the free acceptance of this call
2. It might be helpful to consider with the students what a parable is (see p. 1) and to have them examine an example or two from the Gospels in order to draw up their own descriptive definition of a parable.
3. Of the three orientations for discussion questions—information, interpretation, application to personal experience—the first, or informative, question works well when posed to the student as “something to think about” while viewing the film.

Examples:

- a) What does the beginning of the film tell you about Alfredo and his life?
- b) What things in the film tell you that the children are really a family?
- c) What story does the film tell you?

### **After screening the film**

Drawing out the students’ questions is one way of continuing the experience of the film, or you may wish to explore the general thought questions already cited, or pose some of the following points for interpretation and application.

*For younger children*

1. You may want to use very direct questions about their impressions, such as
  - What do you think Alfredo was looking for?

- What did Alfredo do when he was in front of the cross? Was he praying? What other times do you think he was praying?
- What did you see about Alfredo?

NOTE: Naturally, Alfredo's scars will make a keen impression on younger children. It's a good idea to let them talk out their feelings about this. Eventually, it would be possible to point out that *belonging* means being loved for *who* we are, not for how we look or what we do.

2. "Think-to-yourself" questions also work well with younger audiences; for example:

- Does this make you think of anything that has happened to you?
- Can you remember a time when you really felt loved and wanted?
- Do you know what it means to belong?

*For older students*

1. These questions are somewhat more indirect and conceptual. Your quicker students may be able to see the comparison between Alfredo's scars and the wound of Original Sin; i.e., he is not personally responsible for the cause of his wound. Nor does his acceptance into the group remove his scars. But *belonging*, like the grace of Baptism, does help Alfredo to live with his wound.

- What do the crucifix, the closing doors, the barred windows say about Alfredo's feelings as he begins his journey?
- Can you describe what Alfredo might have been thinking as he waited for Father Wasson to talk things over with the children? Would you say that his thought could be described as prayer? What is prayer?
- Why was it important that Father Wasson's welcome of Alfredo be accepted by all the children? How is Alfredo's great desire to join the Little Brothers and Sisters, and their acceptance of him, an example of Baptism as a "covenant of faith?"

NOTE: You may wish to explore the Old Testament paradigms of Baptism-as-a-covenant in God's calling of Abraham and the prophets, and in the anointing of kings.

- How does the film picture Alfredo's new life with the Little Brothers and Sisters? Is this a good way to show what it means to belong to God's family and to have Christ as our brother? If you want to show people that you are a member of God's family and a brother with Christ, what can you do?
- In what way does Alfredo's journey have an ending? In what way does it lead him to a new beginning? Is this the way faith works in our lives?

NOTE: You may wish to refer to the Old Testament paradigm of faith-as-a-journey in *Exodus*.

- Images of light (candles, fireworks) are seen several times in the film. Do these suggest any

special meaning in our lives for Baptism and the gift of faith? It might be well to call attention to the absence in the film of the most familiar symbol of Baptism—water; and to ask the students, as they view the film for the second time, to watch for any images that suggest the same things about Baptism as the symbol of water does; i.e., life, refreshment, renewal, etc.

### **FURTHER EXPERIENCES**

1. Have each student make a drawing or a collage of pictures from magazines that express what “belonging” means to him. These could be combined into a classroom mural titled “Baptism, Sacrament of Belonging.”
2. Ask each student to decorate a candle to show what the light of faith means in our lives. Then, on a special day, have a celebration in which students comment upon and interpret together the meaning of their candles.
3. Students might enjoy writing a “next episode” or a sequel for the film, showing how Alfredo grows as a person because of his new life of acceptance and love.

Leader’s Guide written by: Corinne Hart, Ph.D.

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For use with:

*Baptism: Sacrament of Belonging* on VHS (7100V) and on DVD (D7100).

NOTE: This guide can be printed and cut down in size to be stored with the DVD version of this video program. Simply cut ¾ inch from each side of the page for a guide that, when folded, can be placed inside of the DVD case or attached to the DVD or VHS case.

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**Leader's Guide for**  
***BAPTISM: SACRAMENT OF BELONGING***  
**Godparent Gussie**

**STORYLINE**

*Godparent Gussie* is really a history lesson—a survey of the development of the Church's rites of initiation, undertaken through the use of humorous animation intercut with reflective commentary by Fr. Tony Scannell. But for all its factual content, *Godparent Gussie* is no less a drama, a *story*: Here are 20 centuries of growth and change, the marks of a living community. Women and men whose names may be forgotten shaped that growth and change; their story is our story, our family history as Christians.

The use of animation and humor in *Godparent Gussie* serves a vital purpose. Our history isn't a dry collection of dusty documents as lists of dates; it's full of color and the quiriness of human nature. If *Godparent Gussie* exaggerates, it's not meant as mockery, but as loving whimsy. The stories we remember best in our own family history are those which make us laugh together. The same is true of the Church, protected as it is by God's Spirit, who keeps us from taking ourselves too seriously.

**RELIGIOUS PERSPECTIVE**

We are one Church, blessed by a marvelous diversity. This is especially true when we come to the sacraments of initiation, the means by which we enter into community. Some of us—in fact, a great many of us—were brought into this community as infants, guided by our parents' faith. Later in life, we grapple with what this means. Others come to Baptism as adults, with a greater personal motivation, but no less struggle. Sometimes, when the struggle seems enormous, we wonder if there isn't an easier way, a simple common denominator for choosing our faith and making it public.

*Godparent Gussie* is that voice inside each of us, who wants to know what all this is about. It may seem, at times, as though the Church's stress on ritual and tradition is out-of-balance. How important is it, we wonder, to know how things were done *then*? Or we may, when viewing with wariness the implementation in our parishes of the new Rite of Christian Initiation of Adults, feel a pang of jealousy: How come all this fuss over "converts," when we cradle Catholics are taken for granted?

The answers lie in our past, but they plant seeds for our future. Knowing where we came from helps us see more clearly where we are. And when, as with the development of ritual, our past includes change

and turmoil and growth, we can learn from it something very special about our faith.

What we believe, who we are as believers, cannot be packaged neatly in a bundle of facts, handed out, and marked by intellectual assent alone. Believing, for us, is a process, a journey of faith. We mark that journey with signposts and symbols and celebrations, just as we mark human growth with birthdays and anniversaries.

We are a “liturgical” community—what we believe, we celebrate publicly in song and prayer and gesture. And nowhere do we “splurge” more gloriously in our celebration than in the moment of welcoming others, through the sacraments of initiation. Knowing how this came about, seeing how we as Church have consistently committed ourselves to that kind of celebrating, can only make us richer.

### **TIPS FOR THE LEADER**

1. Let this experience happen as naturally as possible. If it is a new experience for your group to discuss with a film, ease into it gradually and give participants plenty of encouragement to share their insights without putting them on the spot.
2. Preview this film experience and become familiar with the stories and your own responses to the questions presented by Father Anthony. If you are willing to share your responses, viewers will be encouraged to be more open with theirs. When you are previewing, make a note of additional questions you might want to pose to your group.
3. The *Procedure* and *Activities* printed in the following pages are simply suggestions; feel free to adapt them or ignore them altogether when they don't fit the circumstances. But it is good to remember that, even though this film does come with its own built-in commentator and directions for group sharing, the responsibility for creating an atmosphere of learning and dialogue is still yours. No film should ever be shown “cold,” without introduction or follow-up.

### **A SUGGESTED PROCEDURE**

1. Divide the group into smaller teams of three or four people. Ask each team to imagine that they are beginning a new Church. Give each group a brief time to plan how they will initiate new members into their Church. (Team members may draw upon their knowledge of the sacraments of initiation or on any experience they have with initiation practices in clubs, etc.)
2. Spend a few moments sharing the teams' models of initiation.
3. Ask the group to keep these models in mind as you show *Godparent Gussie*. At appropriate points, pause to discuss points raised by Fr. Tony.

NOTE: You may wish to ask participants to take notes based on the review frames which appear throughout the film.

4. Take time to discuss further questions raised by the group.
5. Take some time to compare the teams' initiation models with the Church's developing approach to initiation.

#### **FURTHER DISCUSSION POINTERS**

1. How much of the material in *Godparent Gussie* was new to you? Did you find anything surprising?
2. How does it make you feel to know that Church practice and ritual are constantly involved in a process of change and growth?
3. How does the way in which your parish community celebrates the sacraments of initiation reflect its overall faith life? What changes might be made to help the reflection be more accurate?

#### **OTHER USES**

- with parish ministry teams, in combination with a study of the existing rites of initiation
- as a total parish resource, especially when implementing the Rite of Christian Initiation of Adults
- with young people, in the study of Church history
- with liturgy planners, studying the history and development of ritual
- for theological renewal programs with older Catholics

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