Having a faith conversation with old and new friends is as easy as setting the table.

FAITH FEEDS GUEST GUIDE
BAPTISM
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The FAITH FEEDS program is designed for individuals who are hungry for opportunities to talk about their faith with others who share it. Participants gather over coffee or a potluck lunch or dinner, and a host facilitates conversation using the C21 Center’s biannual magazine, C21 Resources.

The FAITH FEEDS GUIDE offers easy, step-by-step instructions for planning, as well as materials to guide the conversation. It’s as simple as deciding to host the gathering wherever your community is found and spreading the word.

All selected articles have been taken from material produced by the C21 Center.
CONVERSATION STARTERS

“For man has in his heart a law inscribed by God.... His conscience is man’s most secret core and his sanctuary.”
—The Catechism of the Catholic Church, 1776

Here are two articles to guide your FAITH FEEDS conversation. We suggest that you select one that will work best for your group, and if time permits, add in the second. In addition to the original article, you will find a relevant quotation, summary, and suggested questions for discussion. We offer these as tools for your use, but feel free to go where the Holy Spirit leads.

This guide’s theme is: Baptism
Because the Catholic Church has a strong theology of orders and a clear and distinct ordained ministry, we can easily overlook the fact that baptism is a call to ministry. All baptized Catholics have the obligation to explore the ways in which we might serve the mission of the Church. All the baptized are members of a priestly people. In a certain sense our priests who are ordained to serve the Church are really ordained to facilitate the priestly ministry of all the baptized. And, of course, the ordained are called to ministry twice; in their ordination to diaconate or priesthood, for sure, but also—usually long before—by their baptism.

One of the reasons that this connection between baptism and ministry has been overlooked for so long is that we usually baptize infants. Only later in life will they be active in the mission of the Church. We see baptism as a sacrament of initiation into the believing community, and so it is. But this community of believers is charged by God with a mission to the world. Baptism is entry into a missioned community, and just as people who join a rugby club will presumably do so in order to play rugby, so people who join the Church do so in order to participate in the mission of the Church. The Church is not just there for its members; in fact, it is more properly there for what its members can do for those who are not its members. Only when the Church as community and individuals accepts this mission, is it really, fully, the Church. Without this sense of mission it is primarily an act of communal self-congratulation.

Recognizing that the Church is a community of faith with a mission from God can be an important step in revitalizing parish communities. It depends for its effectiveness, however, on getting that message across to the great mass of parishioners. A community with a mission is not one in which a tiny mi-
ority shoulders the burden of mission on behalf of a largely passive majority. Sometimes that impression can be left with people if we think of ministry as that conducted by the ordained clergy and by the lay minister who work with them in the parish setting. But ministry goes far beyond what we usually first think of as lay ministry—education, youth ministry, spiritual formation, and so on within the parish setting. If the Church is a missioned community, then ministry is for all of us, and most of that ministry is exercised in the world around us, not within the parish confines.

There are all kinds of ways in which we can try to build ministry in our parishes, but a healthy and long-lasting approach will require at least some grounding in sacramental theology and the theology of the Church. You cannot build a culture of ministry simply on an appeal to voluntarism. People have the right to know that their personal call to minister grows out of the nature of the community to which they belong, and into which they have been baptized. So the first step, and in many ways the most difficult, is to communicate to people three key ideas: a richer understanding of baptism than most of us currently possess (including a new awareness of confirmation as the completion of baptism, the making intentional of the baptismal promises); a notion of what it means to be called a priestly people; and a sense of the Church as a missioned or missionary community. This needs to be built in a systematic way into the preaching of the community. Some parishes have also experimented with what is called a “Baptism Jubilee,” an annual renewal service at which the link between the baptismal promises and the call to ministry could be stressed.

A second important requirement for promoting the baptismal call to ministry is that we not turn it into something more grandiose than it really is. There are two things to stress here. The first is that the lay ministers who work in most of our parishes are not the models for the kind of ministry to which God is calling the majority of the baptized. These lay ministers are at work within the believing community, whereas most ministry is directed beyond the Church to the world around us. Indeed, so-called ecclesial lay ministers are probably better thought of as the vanguard of the Holy Spirit, moving the Church to reconsider the role of ordination in ministry, than they are as engaging in the specific mission of the laity. And the second point to emphasize is that God calls us to particular ministries primarily in and through the actual talents that God has given us. If I am a fairly short Englishman, there is little likelihood that God has called me to express my Christian convictions through a career as a professional basketball player. If I cannot carry a tune, it is hard to make the case that the Spirit is calling me to music ministry. If I cannot preach or don’t have many “people skills,” then ordination to diaconate or priesthood most probably is not for me.

If a calling to mission is dependent on identifying one’s talents and discerning which of them could most valuably be put at the service of the Gospel, then conducting a parish inventory of skills and talents might be a useful steps in asserting the practicality of the call to ministry. The results of such a survey would be impressive for the parish community itself; through it, pastor and people would learn what a huge set of resources they have at their command. But it would be at least as important for each individual who participates in the process. It brings ministry down to earth, and it brings each of us face to face with what we can and cannot do. It shows us all that the Holy Spirit can work through a survey. And what is most important, it causes us to become much more intentional about our posture toward the mission of the Church, and reduces the change that we will—consciously or unconsciously—just leave it to others to take up the work of the Church.

All these steps—education, self-awareness, awareness of the work of the Spirit—need to be built into the life of the parish community over a significant period of time, perhaps as long as a year. People do not become intentional about the connection between baptism as a sacrament of initiation and baptism as a call to ministry until and unless they are confronted with it. Done the right way, such a process can reawaken an individual’s sense of mission, deepen her or his faith, and—undoubtedly—reanimate the entire community of faith.

Dr. Paul F. Lakeland is the Aloysius P. Kelley, S.J. Chair in Catholic Studies & Professor of Religious Studies at Fairfield University.
“This missionary mandate touches us personally: I am a mission, always; you are a mission, always; every baptized man and woman is a mission. People in love never stand still: they are drawn out of themselves: they are attracted and attract others in turn: they give themselves to others and build relationships that are life-giving.”
—Pope Francis

Summary
In this essay, professor Paul Lakeland argues that the Church must do a better job of helping the People of God to realize that the sacrament of baptism not only initiates them into a community of faith, but equips them for ministry. Lakeland says that as a Church we need to help individuals recognize the gifts and talents that God has given them and identify communities - inside or outside of the Church - who are most in need of them. Making the baptismal call to ministry more widely known, writes Lakeland, “can reawaken an individual’s sense of mission, deepen his or her faith, and—undoubtedly—reanimate the entire community of faith.”

Questions for Conversation
1. Were you aware that your own baptism not only brought you into the Catholic community but also imparted on you a call to ministry? Do you have this personal sense of mission and vocation?
2. What gifts and talents has God given you that you can use for ministry?
3. What kind of impact might a renewed sense of the baptismal call of all believers have on the Church? Would it create a different culture in the Church? Would it make the mission more effective? Why or why not?
God’s Grandeur
Gerard Manley Hopkins, SJ

The world is charged with the grandeur of God.

It will flame out, like shining from shook foil;

It gathers to a greatness, like the ooze of oil

Crushed. Why do men then now not reck his rod?

Generations have trod, have trod, have trod;

And all is seared with trade; bleared, smeared with toil;

And wears man’s smudge and shares man’s smell: the soil

Is bare now, nor can foot feel, being shod.

And for all this, nature is never spent;

There lives the dearest freshness deep down things;

And though the last lights off the black West went

Oh, morning, at the brown brink eastward, springs —

Because the Holy Ghost over the bent

World broods with warm breast and with ah! bright wings
The first line of Gerard Manley Hopkins’s poem is a fine starting point for considering the importance of sacraments and sacramentality for Catholics. The best of our Catholic tradition has always shown an immense respect for and appreciation of the goodness of God’s creation. Put simply, we don’t believe that it’s necessary to flee the world and created things to encounter God. On the contrary, it is because of the goodness of creation and especially because God chose to commit Himself irrevocably to humankind and our created world in the Incarnation, that we believe that God encounters us through what He has made. Put another way, God doesn’t communicate His life to us despite our created, physical, human condition but precisely in the midst of it.

Moreover, a number of 20th-century Catholic theologians (especially Karl Rahner, S.J. and Edward Schillebeeckx, O.P.) helped us to recover the idea that in a
fundamental way Christ is the sacrament of God and that the Church is the primary sacrament of Christ in the world. It’s on this basis that we can understand the seven sacraments of the Church as genuine engagements with Christ through his Church.

Each of the individual sacraments helps us to encounter the Incarnate Lord Jesus and to enter into the effects of his saving passion, death, and resurrection in a different way. It has been said, and quite correctly I think, that we better understand the sacraments as verbs than as nouns. In other words, they are the actions of the Risen Lord transforming us more and more into His Body. This is a fine way to appreciate our participation in Christ’s returning creation back to the Father by our common participation in His priesthood. This is the Church’s fundamental priesthood, which is served by the ordained priesthood. This is why baptism which makes us a part of the common priesthood is so important.

The Catechism of the Catholic Church pointedly does not take a one-size-fits-all approach to the sacraments. Instead, it presents them in three groupings. The first is sacraments of initiation. This group includes baptism, confirmation, and the Eucharist. Note that this is the original sequence of Christian initiation, which has now been recovered in the Rite of Christian Initiation of Adults. Of course, the supreme sacrament is the culmination and high point of Christian initiation: the Holy Eucharist in which Christ gives himself to us in His body and blood. It is very helpful to understand the Eucharist as the ongoing sacrament of Christian initiation, in which we are helped to become more and more what we receive—Christ.

The Catechism goes on to treat two sacraments that heal our baptismal status when it is broken or wounded. These are the sacraments of penance and of the anointing of the sick. The experience of both of these sacraments has been significantly transformed in the wake of the liturgical reforms that followed Vatican II. Confession of sin to a priest has become rarer but perhaps more significant. Anointing of the sick is no longer “extreme unction,” the sacrament of the dying, but rather a sacrament that helps the seriously ill to encounter the healing power of Christ in the midst of his community. We now understand these sacraments in the context of pastoral care. In other words, they are ideally not so much discrete moments as they are high points of a process of Christian life.

The final two sacraments are called “sacraments at the service of communion.” Holy orders and holy matrimony, each in its own way, help to build up the Christian community by incarnating God’s service to us (holy orders) and God’s love for the world (marriage). Each of these sacraments is realized more in being lived out than simply in the ceremonies that initiate them.

All of the sacraments are many-faceted and exhibit God’s grace for us in ways that defy simple, neat definitions. In other words, the sacraments realize (make real) the graced experiences of our daily lives and by ritualizing those experiences they nourish us with further grace in a kind of blessed circle to live our lives as members of Christ’s Body, his common priesthood.

John Baldovin, SJ, is a Professor of Liturgy at Boston College’s School of Theology and Ministry.
CATHOLICS: A SACRAMENTAL PEOPLE

“The world is charged with the grandeur of God.”
—Gerard Manley Hopkins, SJ

Summary
In this piece, the Jesuit John Baldovin provides the context for every sacrament, including baptism: they are the means by which God communicates His life to us not despite our created, physical, and human condition, but precisely in the midst of it. The seven sacraments are ways in which we encounter the living God and His work of saving and redeeming us -- not only in the past but actively in our lives today. Baptism begins the process by which we share in the work of Christ’s priesthood.

Questions for Conversation
1. Baldovin says that it’s helpful to think of the sacraments as verbs and not nouns, because they are the “actions of the Risen Lord transforming us more and more into His body.” Does this resonate with you? Do you experience the ongoing grace of the sacraments you have received?
2. Baptism allows us to participate in the common priesthood of believers, meaning we can offer sacrifices in our day to day lives that facilitate the work of redemption. What opportunities do you have in your life to fulfill that call?
3. In what ways are the remaining sacraments tied to the sacrament of baptism? How do they heal, restore, or develop your initial call to discipleship and mission?
GATHERING PRAYER

Be With Us Today
St. Thomas More (1478-1535)

Father in heaven,
you have given us a mind to know you,
a will to serve you,
and a heart to love you.
Be with us today in all that we do,
so that your light may shine out in our lives.
Through Christ our Lord.

Amen.

For more information about Faith Feeds, visit bc.edu/c21faithfeeds

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