

Spontaneous Baptisms

Introduction

Due to the overwhelming success of our spontaneous baptisms we decided to capture everything we did with the event to help other churches considering this amazing experience. It was very taxing, but one of the most rewarding things we have done as a church.

To help you understand what we did, here's a quick overview of who we were when we did the event. Elevation Church began February 5th, 2006. Pastor Steven Furtick and a team of 8 families sold their homes believing that God will do some amazing things when we trust him and following his leading. That first Sunday 121 people gathered for our first worship experience. Amazing growth followed over the next 14 months growing to almost 2,000 people worshipping between our two campuses, Elevation Providence and Elevation Union. The second campus, Elevation Union is a video campus that we started with 33 days of lead time and launched Easter Sunday of 2007. We have developed a pattern of undertaking audacious things. Our first "Elevation Egg Drop" was planned in 19 days. It was an over the top Easter event in our second month of ministry where we dropped thousands of eggs from a helicopter as an outreach to the community. It was an amazing success with over 2,500 showing up for the event.

As you read the material, keep in mind we are an extremely aggressive church continually asking what's next and truly believing each thing will produce a harvest as we walk in faith.

Getting Started

This two week spontaneous baptism experience was part of a 5 week sermon series called "Deep". The central theme of the series is that the deep things of the faith are not the confusing issues people debate, but rather obedience to the simple truths of scripture. Week one focused on dispelling the religious tradition of infant baptism and calling people to go public with their personal faith in Jesus Christ. The central verse was Acts 8:36 focusing on Philip and the Ethiopian eunuch. The invitation was strong and encouraged people to obey the simple command of scripture to be baptized. Pastor Furtick brought his mother in and baptized her, she grew up in a religious tradition with infant baptism and she wanted to go public in her faith. This moving example helped break down obstacles allowing many to respond to the invitation. It certainly didn't hurt that it was mother's day.

Week two focused on how pride can keep people from walking in obedience. The central scripture was 2 Kings 5:11-14. It's not a passage on baptism, but rather how the pride of a man keeps him from doing things that he thinks are beneath him, Naaman wanted God's thing his way. The sermon ended with Pastor Furtick telling the story one of our key leaders at the church and how pride had kept him from being baptized. He is an extremely successful businessman that loved the first few visits to Elevation until he found out that we required baptism for membership. He strongly disagreed, saying that God knew his heart and that he had been a Christian for a long time. The sermon ended with the man coming up and being baptized. Pastor Furtick went directly into the invitation and called people to respond.

Removing Excuses

A big part of helping people respond to the invitation is diffusing the excuses. The most obvious excuse is "I don't have anything to wear." We took care of that by providing all the clothes they need. We also had everything they would use to put themselves back together. It was a long list of grooming and hygiene supplies (see attached supplies list) that Pastor Furtick read from stage (see attached talking points). We had hair dryers, hair spray, brushes and anything they would need to get ready. The addition of Pastor Furtick's mother being baptized removed the religious tradition excuse and the baptism of the successful businessman who didn't want to be baptized dealt head on with the pride issue.

Flow and Changing Rooms

When looking at our facility we did not have an abundance of unused rooms in proximity to the auditorium. Additionally because we have 3 worship experiences we needed to have separate dry and wet areas. To reduce congestion and confusion we ended up using 4 total rooms for changing, separate "dry" and "wet" rooms for women and separate "dry" and "wet" rooms for men. It allowed us to have dry changing areas where people changed into baptismal clothes and separate wet changing rooms where people could change back into their street clothes after baptism

Flow (see the attached flow diagram before continuing)

Front stage

- As Pastor Furtick ended his sermon he instructed people to move from their seats and come forward. They had a total of 5 minutes, one song, to move. 12-15 volunteers were positioned at the front stage directing folks out a side auditorium exit into a hallway. When the bulk of people passed 10-12 of the volunteers followed the people and 2 or 3 were left in place until the song ended.

Hallway

- 20+ volunteers were lining the hallway as the people passed by. Our volunteers were loudly celebrating with the people. It was a great atmosphere and a huge encouragement to those who moved from their seats.
- The hallway volunteers were a versatile group helping people move to and from the "dry" changing rooms as well as from the hallway to side stage.
- All the hallway volunteers had a clipboard, sharpie marker, name tags and name cards.
- Most of the hallway volunteers moved with the crowd into the changing area to help:
 1. Give people a bag of clothing corresponding with the t-shirt size
 2. Begin writing names on name tags and name cards
 3. Direct people back into the hallway after changing
- After the people were changed we moved them back into the hallway. Before they went side stage each person had the following:
 1. Name tag on their upper left chest
 2. Name card with first and last name printed on the card (see attached card)

Side Stage

- (3) volunteers helped the people form a line and made sure that each person had a name tag and name card.
- Each person being baptized was handed a white wash cloth that would be placed over their mouth and nose when they were baptized.

Stage

- (2) ushers helping people in the tank
- (2) ushers helping people out of the tank
- (1) usher taking name cards from the person announcing names
- (1) person announcing names
- Pastor Furtick in the baptistery performing the baptisms
- (1) person taking wet wash clothes from Pastor Furtick
- (2) ushers placing towels over shoulders
- (2) usher controlling water spillage in the hallways
- As people came to be baptized they handed their name card to the person announcing names. The name was announced as the person was about to be baptized.

Back Stage People

- (3) volunteers giving people flip flops and an extra towel
- Directing people down the hallway to the locker room escort area

Locker Room Escorts

- (4) volunteers were assigned to this specific task, but the hallway people helped this team as well.
- Assisted with people completing the baptisms information form (see attached)

Determining the Pace of the Baptisms

We had two hallway volunteers assigned to counting the number of people who responded during each worship experience. That information was passed along to the people on stage so they could determine the pace of the baptisms. We controlled the pace through how we placed people getting into the baptistery. On one side of the baptistery there were steps leading up to the tank than steps leading down into the water. The pattern repeated on the other side with steps leading out of the water and steps back down to the stage. It allowed people walk in one side and out the other which made flow a breeze. We controlled the pace with how we placed people. If we had more than 50 who were ready to be baptized we had one person in the water and the next one at the top of the steps. This pattern allowed us to baptize 84 people in an 18 minute time span. If we had less than 50 we put one person in the water and the next one on the outside the tank standing on the stage.

Changing Rooms

We used the two closest rooms to the auditorium as dry changing areas. We utilized the school's band room for the women's dry changing area. It had a small locker room area where we were able to section off 8 individual changing stations. They were small, but provided a fair amount of privacy so ladies could rapidly change. The men changed in the choir room that provided 4 individual changing areas. Since many men are used to a locker room, many ended up changing in the middle of the room. All changing rooms had signs placed on all doors. (see attached signs)

Each of the dry changing rooms was prepared ahead of time so as people entered they could rapidly change. When a person entered the room they were asked what size t-shirt they wear and were given a brown grocery bag with the corresponding sized t-shirt, shorts, underwear and sports bra. Additionally, there was a zip lock bag for valuables and a pony tail holder in the bag as well. The sports bras and pony tail holders were placed only in the women's bags. People changed into the baptismal clothes and placed their street clothes back in the bag. We placed name tags on the bags so that after they were changed the individual's name was written on the name tag. After people changed they placed their labeled bag back into the hallway where they would return to pick it up after they were baptized.

Wet changing areas were the athletic locker rooms in an adjoining building. The rooms were staged with all the supplies necessary for a person to get changed back into their street clothes. (See the attached list of supplies)

Highs Moments and Unplanned Events

A major high was seeing the number of people that responded during the first worship experience the first Sunday. It was incredible seeing 50+ people get out of their seats and come forward. The ripple effect of that many coming forward let us quickly know that we didn't have enough supplies to make it through the day. So we had to improvise and gather the wet shorts, t-shirts and towels from the first worship experience run them through the high school's dryers. Thank God, it all worked out as had barely enough to get through the day.

The very last baptism for the two weeks was probably the most memorable baptism and it was not planned. A man in his early 30's that had been in an accident several years earlier that left him with cognitive deficits and a left leg amputated just below the hip came forward. As he approached the tank without his prosthetic leg he had to be carried into the baptistery by two fully clothed ushers. If anyone in the room had an excuse not to be baptized it was this man. As the crowd watched his obedience to the simple command of baptism they were moved to tears and their feet as a thunderous round of applause broke out.

We had a wireless boom mic set-up in front of the tank which allowed whoever was baptizing to speak to the crowd. An unplanned situation occurred when an individual who was about to be baptized decided to give a personal testimony bashing his previous religion. Although it lasted a few seconds, it seemed like an eternity. He was quickly diffused, put under the water and sent out of the tank. It was something we didn't anticipate on the front end.

Training and Set-up

The Saturday before the first week of baptisms was vital to the success of the event. We brought in the 50+ volunteers for 2 hours of prep and training. We prepared all the brown grocery bags we thought we would use the following day. There were packed with the same size t-shirt, shorts, underwear, sports bras and pony tail holders. The men's bags did not include sports bras and pony tail holders. The bags were labeled according to the size and the bags were put in the corresponding men's or women's dry changing room.

Following setting everything up, we moved into about an hour of training. We began by giving everyone a schematic of the flow (see attached) and began in the auditorium. The first 10 minutes were vision casting connecting the dots. We made the connection between what they were doing and the people that would be sitting in the seats the following morning. Recruiting for the baptisms was pitched as an opportunity to be a part of a significant experience and never as a need. We capitalized on the event by recruiting 15 high capacity individuals that had not plugged in the life of the church. Every one of them walked away amazed and sold out for the church. At the time of writing this blog, 12 are already signed up in a volunteer capacity. Don't miss the opportunity to maximize the chance to get some new high level people involved in your church.

After the vision casting we distributed the Baptism Volunteer Training materials (see attached) and proceeded to walk everyone through the entire process. It was extremely effective in volunteer crosspollination. Most volunteers pulled double duty and sought out ways to make the process even more efficient.

Tracking an Immediate Number

We used the name cards as our way of having an accurate immediate count of baptisms. Everyone baptized had to have a name card and only one name per card was allowed. The person taking the cards on stage kept a running total by numbering each card in the upper right hand corner.

Baptism tank and set-up

We set-up the entire school the day before to remove the stress from Sunday morning as well as allowing ample time for the water in the baptistery to warm. We purchased a full size baptistery, model #6, from www.churchpools.com. It is large, but the size on stage was over the top and the ability to enter from one side and exit out the other flowed very nicely. We also purchased a heater from the same company that was plugged in over night and the water was a comfortable temperature the next morning. Large black shag rugs were put under the tank to soak up spillage and all the walk ways were lined with carpet runner. We purchased a 150 foot roll from Lowe's that was 3 feet wide and dark grey in color. All the walk areas side stage was lined with rope lighting making it obvious where the traffic needed to go.

A Few on Deck

Because of the rapid turn around time we had 4 people ready to be baptized for each worship experience. When Pastor Furtick finished his prayer those folks were already dressed and came directly side stage to be baptized. It was astonishing because it seems like a short time, but a line of people were changed and ready as the baptisms begin.

Questions

As you go along please feel free to send your questions to Assimilation Pastor Larry Brey .
lbrey@elevationchurch.org. Please rip off the material and make it better. The only thing we want in return is for you to share the stories and the celebrations.

Spontaneous Baptisms - Volunteer Training

Adequate training of our volunteers was essential to the success of this undertaking. Without their hands and hearts there's no way we could have pulled it off. You cannot spend enough time on the front end training...it's equally important to talk about the people and the heart behind the event as it is to talk about the "x's" and "o's".

Area **Responsibilities**

Front Stage - Direct the flow of traffic to the side auditorium doors

1. Begin moving forward and get into position during Pastor Futick's (PF) prayer at the end of his sermon. Make sure you are in a "deep" t-shirt with a name tag.
2. As people come down front direct them toward the side exit door.
3. Smile and clap showing people you are excited they came down

Side Doors - Direct people out the doors and into the hallway

1. Begin moving forward and get into position during Pastor Futick's (PF) prayer at the end of his sermon. Make sure you are in a "deep" t-shirt with a name tag.
2. Act as human door props so people can go through the doors.
3. Smile and clap showing people you are excited they came down

Hallway - Direct people to the dry changing area to change clothes, back to the hallway and onto to the stage. This utility team floats between the hallway, changing rooms and helps gather info after baptisms.

1. Create an atmosphere of Celebration for those being baptized as they walk toward the changing rooms.
2. Leave 2-3 hallway people in the hallway at all times, the rest of the team moves into the dry changing area to help.
3. In the changing room help
 - a. distribute and label clothing bags;
4. After people have changed clothes direct them back to the hallway with their labeled clothing bag in hand.
5. Move people to the side stage area with the following information completed:
 - a. Legible name tag and on upper LEFT chest
 - b. Legible completed Name Cards
6. After people have been baptized help fill out the "Baptism Information" card
7. Help clean it all up after the day is complete

Changing Area - Help people quickly change and move them out to the hallway as rapidly as possible

1. When people enter "welcome" them and ask them their t-shirt size.

2. Give them a bag corresponding with their t-shirt size and instruct them to put the baptism clothes on and place their street clothes back in the bag.
3. The first people going into the changing rooms have got to be people who move fast, they must be changed and out in stage in a few minutes. Pick young energetic people, not necessarily those who are there first.
4. Think of the room in terms of a NASCAR pit stop, it has to be a quick in and quick out
5. Women's bags will contain the same size:
 - a. Dark shorts
 - b. Dark t-shirt
 - c. Sports bra and underwear
 - d. Hair tie
 - e. Zip lock bag for valuables
6. Men's bags will contain the same size:
 - a. Dark shorts
 - b. Dark t-shirt
 - c. Boxers
 - d. Zip lock bag for valuables
7. Direct the people back into the hallway with their bag in hand
8. After the crowd has left, reset the room preparing for the next worship experience

Side Stage - Get people ready to go out onto the stage

1. Make sure each person has a name tag on the upper LEFT chest
2. Make sure each person has a NAME CARD with their name written legibly
3. Give them a wash cloth and instruct them to give it to Pastor Furtick
4. Work in communication with Larry regarding how many are
5. Help clean up after the day

Stage Ushers - Move people safely and effectively through the baptistery

1. (2) ushers helping people into the tank
2. (2) ushers helping people out of the tank
3. (2) ushers putting towels over shoulders
4. (1) usher taking wash cloths from Pastor
5. (1) usher taking and tracking name cards
6. (2) ushers on water spillage control
7. Sit side stage the entire worship experience and wait for the cue to go out.
8. Clean up spillage and soak up water between worship experiences

Back Hallway - Direct folks back toward the side hallway to their clothes

1. Give people a pair of flip-flops for the walk to the "wet" changing area
2. Direct people down the long hallway to their clothes
3. Make sure people walk safely

Locker Room Escorts - Escort people down to the locker rooms to change back into their street clothes

1. As people enter the hallway after being baptized, celebrate with them.

2. Assist people with completing their baptism registration form.
3. Assist people locating their clothing bag

4. Walk part of the group or the group as a whole to the locker rooms
5. Assist people as needed
 - a. People can take the t-shirt, undergarments and flops home with them
6. Place wet towels and t-shirts in large garbage bags for laundering
7. Help clean up after the day

Baptism Statistics

Here is the breakdown for the baptism statistics at our Main Campus, Elevation Providence. This reflects 2 consecutive Sunday's of baptizing with 3 worship experiences each Sunday. The reason we're not using our second campus, Elevation Union, is because at the time of writing this information they have had only one week of baptisms.

	<u>Week One</u>	<u>Week Two</u>	<u>Totals</u>	
8:30	54	27	81	23%
10:00	71	49	120	34%
11:30	<u>84</u>	<u>70</u>	<u>154</u>	<u>43%</u>
	209 (59%)	146 (41%)	355	

*We planned for 200 at the central campus, 120 week one and 80 week two, anticipating a 60%/40% split women to men

*We baptized 355 people, 209 week one and 146 week two with the split ending up 62%/38% women to men

1. As you can see, we were accurate with regard to the breakdown of women/men. We looked at previous baptisms and recent conversion rates to determine the breakdown and numbers followed that trend for women/men

Gender and Age Distribution

<u>Age</u>	<u>Men</u>	<u>Women</u>	<u>Total</u>
12-18	53	92	145 (42%)
19-30	43	64	107 (30%)
31-40	20	35	55 (15%)
40+	<u>19</u>	<u>26</u>	<u>45 (13%)</u>
	135	220	355

*Avg age for men 24.8

*Avg age for women 24.7

*oldest person was 70

Clothing Size Breakdown

One of the more difficult aspects of the event was purchasing clothing and undergarments. We took a stab, but were way off on the sizes needed particularly for the women. The following information you may find useful in determining a starting point for your purchases.

Here's the breakdown of sizes for our baptisms:

	<u>Women</u>	<u>Men</u>
XS	18%	0
S	36%	14%
M	29%	21%
L	11%	48%
XL	4%	10%
XXL	2%	7%

*Women's clothing included: dark shorts, dark t-shirt, sports bra, underwear

*Men's clothing included: dark shorts, dark t-shirt, boxer's

Supplies List

Sunday May 20th

Preparing for Baptisms, here's what we anticipated on the front end.

200 at Providence 115 Women 85 men

110 at Union 60 Women, 50 men

Supplies List for Baptisms

- Dark colored shorts (we ordered from a t-shirt supplier)
 - Small to xxxl Women mostly s/m Men mostly m/l
 - Simple black cotton gym shorts
- Dark colored T-shirts (we ordered from a t-shirt supplier)
 - Small and Medium for Women
 - Medium Large for Men. Order/buy all men's sizes.
- Sports Bras (dispose of the undergarments or let them take them home)

Small	Med	Large	XL	XXL	
40	40	20	15	10	Providence
<u>15</u>	<u>15</u>	<u>10</u>	<u>5</u>	<u>5</u>	<u>Union</u>
55	55	30	20	15	

- Wal-Mart, Hanes brand. Any color. Sizes 32-40. Majority of 34, 36, and 38.

- Size 32
- Size 34
- Size 36
- Size 38
- Size 40

- Women's underwear (dispose of after they finish)

- Wal-Mart.

- Sizes 5 (small) to 14 (x-large). Majority 6 and 7

Small	Med	Large	XL	XXL	
40	40	20	15	10	Providence
<u>15</u>	<u>15</u>	<u>10</u>	<u>5</u>	<u>5</u>	<u>Union</u>
55	55	30	20	15	

- Men's boxers (dispose of after they finish) Majority Medium and Larges.

Men's boxers

Small	Med	Large	XL	XXL	
10	20	30	25	5	Providence

5 15 15 10 5

15 35 40 35 10

Union

- Wal-Mart.
 - Medium
 - Large
 - X-Large
- Towels (300)
 - Wal-Mart or any other discount place
 - White towels
- Wash cloths (300)
 - White wash cloths
- Makeup Remover
 - Dollar Store wipes that you can just throw away
- Combs/brushes
 - Dollar store – purchase cheap combs and brushes that will be thrown away or let them take home.
- Hair Dryers
 - Dollar store, 5 cheap hairdryers
- Hair-ties (200)
 - Dollar store hair-ties
- Lotion
 - Travel size body lotions
- Hair soap
 - Travel size hair soap
- Bar soap – Dollar store
 - Travel size bar soap
- Hair care – Dollar store
 - Hair gel
 - Hair moose
 - Hair spray
- Deodorant
 - Dollar store or wal-mart aerosol cans (men’s and women’s).
- Feminine hygiene products
 - Dollar store
- Zip lock bags for jewelry
- Flip-flop sandals (200)
 - Dollar store or wal-mart inexpensive flip-flops of various sizes
- Large address labels for bags and badges (700)
- Sharpies (40)
- Clipboards (20)
- Clear packing tape (2 rolls)
- T-shirt bags for wet clothing
- Large white plastic bags for wet towels (5 boxes)