

Choosing a Sponsor (Godparent)

Having made the decision to bring your child to the Church for the Sacrament of Baptism, you are now faced with another decision, the choice of your child's godparents.

Traditionally, we identify the sponsor of a child for baptism as the godparent — godmother or godfather, but the technical term remains "sponsor."

According to the Code of Canon Law, "Insofar as possible, one to be baptized is to be given a sponsor who is to assist an adult in Christian initiation, or, together with the parents, to present an infant at the baptism, and who will help the baptized to lead a Christian life in harmony with baptism, and to fulfill faithfully the obligations connected with it" (No. 872). This statement clearly reflects the historical roots of the role of sponsor.

To be a sponsor, a person must be chosen by the person to be baptized, or by the parents or guardians of a child, or, in their absence, by the pastor or minister of the sacrament. The sponsor must not only have the intention of being a sponsor but also meet proper qualifications. The sponsor must have completed his sixteenth year unless the Bishop has established another age for sponsorship, or the pastor or minister judges that a just cause warrants an exception to the rule. He must be a Catholic who has received the sacraments of holy Eucharist and confirmation, and "leads a life in harmony with the faith and the role to be undertaken." Moreover, the sponsor cannot be impeded by some canonical penalty. Ideally, this sponsor at baptism should also be the sponsor for confirmation. Note that the mother and father of the child cannot serve as sponsors. Also note that these are the same requirements for confirmation sponsors. (Cf. Code of Canon Law, No. 874.1).

Strictly speaking, a person only needs one sponsor for baptism — male or female, but may have two sponsors, one male and one female. Here the Code of Canon Law wants to eliminate the practice of having numerous sponsors, as has occurred in some cultures (No. 873). Also, in the case of an emergency, such as imminent death, no sponsor is needed.

Here we should pause to clarify who qualifies as a Catholic godparent. A Catholic who does not practice the faith by regularly attending Mass or who is in an invalid marriage disqualifies himself from being a godparent. Moreover, if a person is Catholic but antagonistic to the faith, i.e. has the attitude "I am a Catholic but..." and would not be a good example and witness to the faith also disqualifies himself. If a person is not striving to fulfill his own obligations of baptism and confirmation, he will not fulfill the responsibilities of helping another to do so.

For more information, please contact our office.