

GODPARENT & CHRISTIAN WITNESS REQUIREMENTS

According to Canon Law, you must have at least one active, confirmed Roman Catholic Godparent who is in good standing with the Church. You, as parents, may choose two Godparents. However, there can only be one female godparent and one male godparent.

If only one Godparent exists, another person **may** serve as a *Christian Witness* at the Baptism (though not required).

A *Christian Witness* simply “witnesses” the celebration of the Sacrament of Baptism.

- The *Christian Witness* is an individual, at least 16 years of age, who has been baptized into Christ in a non-Catholic Christian community.
 - A *Christian Witness*' Baptism must be recognized and approved by the Catholic Church (i.e., with the Trinitarian baptismal formula).
 - A baptized person from a non-Catholic ecclesial community may be admitted only in company with a Catholic Sponsor and simply as a witness to the baptism. [Canon # 874.2]
- The *Christian Witness* is **not** a Godparent and, therefore, does not assume the responsibilities of a godparent.
- A *Christian Witness* cannot be listed as a Godparent because their life does not witness to the practice or support of the Catholic faith to which you, as parents, are professing to your child.
- The *Christian Witness* is not listed on the baptismal certificate or record.
- The *Christian Witness* cannot be the mother or the father of the person to be baptized. [Canon Law # 874.1.5]
- The *Christian Witness* cannot be Catholic. An ex-Catholic is still a Catholic, one who is under canonical penalty, having been excommunicated, and therefore not in good standing with the Catholic Church.

If a Godparent cannot be present at the Baptism, a *proxy* can be designated to witness the Baptism rite. A *proxy* must be designated in writing by the godparent and approved by the parents. A *proxy* will need to have the same qualifications as the Godparents. They will be listed in the baptismal record as “proxies.” A *proxy* is not listed on the baptismal certificate.

Please note: if someone is baptized a Catholic and currently attests to “having left the Catholic Church,” has not yet received **all** the sacraments of Initiation [Baptism, Confirmation, Eucharist], or is not an active member of a parish, then he/she cannot be a Godparent or a *Christian Witness*.

In the following pages, please find the document outlining the “role of a Godparent” and a certificate of eligibility from their parish or Christian community.

THE ROLE OF THE GODPARENT

The principal responsibility of a godparent is to give witness to the Catholic faith by his/her words and actions. The role is, together with the parents, to present the child for baptism and help it live a Christian life befitting the baptized and faithfully fulfill the duties inherent in baptism. When called upon to profess the Catholic faith on behalf of the infant, the godparent must believe in what he/she is professing.

Is the godparent expected to be someone who attends church every Sunday? It makes sense if they do. After all, you are asking this person to assist you in bringing up your child in the Catholic faith. The church reasonably expects parents and godparents to help the child "lead a Christian life in harmony with baptism." Baptism depends on the faith of the Church, expressed by parents and godparents. Therefore, they must live what they say they believe.

After the baptism, the godparent's role begins, not just sending presents on birthdays and Christmas. Ideally, a godparent will continue to pray for their godchild; keep in touch with them and their family; give a present or a card at the baptism anniversary and each sacramental milestone in the life of the godchild; lead the child by their example towards a Christian way of life; be supportive of the godchild's parents in their role as Christian parents and primary educators of their child.

THE HISTORY OF GODPARENTS

Godparents are a tradition in the Sacrament of Baptism that goes back to the early days of the Catholic Church. In those days, conversions came in two ways. In the first instance, whole families were received into the Church through the Sacrament of Baptism after they had been instructed and prepared by a friend or someone appointed by the Church. In the second instance, individuals were instructed and prepared by a friend, or someone appointed by the Church.

During those days, the first four centuries, the Catholic Church was under intense persecution by the Roman Empire. To avoid persecution and the infiltration of pagans into the Church, every person who was received into the Church was required to have a Godparent. This Godparent performed two roles. First, they protected the Church by authenticating the sincerity of the convert. Secondly, as a catechist, they supported the person as a candidate for the Church.

During the first centuries, emphasis was placed on the baptism of adults. That all changed when the Council of Trent (1545 - 1563) affirmed that Adam's disobedience not only transfused physical death to the individuals but also that all were born afflicted with a sin that is the "death of the soul." "Because of this certainty of faith, the Church baptizes for the remission of sins even tiny infants who have not committed personal sin." (C.C.C. # 403; Council of Trent: DS 1514)

In harmony with this new Decree and in consideration of the inability of an infant to speak for himself or herself, more than ever, it became necessary to appoint a godparent who would make the Profession of Faith in the child's name. This same person would also be responsible for instructing the child in the faith as if adopted by the Christian parents to protect their child's faith.