

HOW SHOULD WE SELECT GODPARENTS FOR OUR CHILD?



When it comes time to baptize a child, it is also time to select the godparents. This is a major decision. It is a spiritual matter, and the choice should be based upon spiritual criteria.

There are a number of common reasons that miss the mark when some godparents are chosen.

Sometimes the choice is an effort to honor a special family member, relative or friend, with the thinking, "Since you have been so good to us, we would like to be good to you and honor you in return."

Some use social criteria: "Who would we like to be present with us for major events in our child's future, occasions like birthdays and graduations?"

Although parents usually are unwilling to admit this openly, another underlying question sometimes is: "Who is thoughtful enough to remember special occasions in my child's life and would be generous enough to give nice gifts every year for their birthday or for Christmas?"

Or, "Who would we like to raise our child if something catastrophic would happen to us?"

Able and ready to help

It is the duty of Christian parents to pass on the most precious gift of all, the gift of faith, to “bring the child up in the practice of the faith, [and to] see that the divine life which God gives them is kept safe from the poison of sin, to grow always stronger in their hearts” (Rite of Baptism for Children).

It is the duty of Christian godparents to assist the parents with this all-important task. The godparent is “able and ready to help the newly baptized . . . on the road of the Christian life” (Catechism of the Catholic Church, No. 1255). Godparents cannot give or support what they do not have. Without the gift of faith themselves, they cannot support the faith in someone else.

Therefore, at least one godparent must be a fully initiated baptized Catholic. “Fully initiated” means someone who is baptized, has received their first holy Communion and is confirmed. This is the “letter of the law” and the minimum.

The catechism states that the godfather and godmother must be “firm believers” (No. 1255). The true intent is that the godparent be an active, practicing Catholic, someone who treasures the Catholic faith, provides good example and would joyfully and eagerly be a partner with the parents in raising the child in the faith. The godparent’s faith need not be perfect or mature, but it must be valued and active.

Other criteria

The church gives a number of other specific criteria for the selection of godparents. “There is to be only one male or one female sponsor or one of each” (Canon 873). In addition, the godparent or sponsor is to be chosen by the person to be baptized if the

candidate is an adult, or chosen by the parents if the one to be baptized is an infant or child.

The godparent must have completed the 16th year of age, unless an exception is granted for just cause. Examples of "just cause" would be a person who will be turning 16 in a matter of days or weeks, or a young person who is known to demonstrate an extraordinary piety or level of maturity.

The godparent should also be someone who leads a life of faith in keeping with the function to be taken on; not be bound by any canonical penalties; and not be the father or mother of the child (see Canon 874).

Finally, "a baptized person who belongs to a non-Catholic ecclesial community is not to participate except together with a Catholic sponsor and then only as a witness of the baptism" (Canon 874.5.2). A non-Catholic may serve as a witness to the baptism, but is not officially the godparent, a role that is reserved to Catholics alone.

A godparent should be...

- a believer in Jesus Christ.
- an active member in the church.
- one who attends Mass regularly.
- a regular recipient of the sacraments.
- one who prays often.
- a loving and caring person.
- someone who gives good example.
- someone growing in the virtues.
- a spiritual partner with the parents.

A godparent should be...

- teach prayers to their godchild.
- pray with their godchild.
- pray for their godchild.
- take their godchild to church.
- do good works with their godchild.
- read and explain Bible stories to their godchild.
- help prepare their godchild for other sacraments.
- be present for the celebration of future sacraments.
- possibly serve as a Confirmation sponsor.
- assist where the parents need help.
- nurture their godchild's faith.