



becoming a Godparent or Sponsor



Being initiated into the Catholic Church can be a daunting task. Fortunately, you don't have to do it alone.

What are Sponsors and Godparents?

When someone is being baptised or confirmed, the Catholic Church gives them a gift of one of her precious members – a godparent or sponsor.

The terms 'godparent' and 'sponsor' have very similar meanings and roles and can even be the same person; they are spiritual companions to the person being baptised or confirmed. That is, they provide support through prayer, example, and by being a physical presence in the lives of the one being baptised or confirmed.

What is the difference between a Godparent and a Sponsor?

That answer depends on the person that needs one:

1. AT A CHILD'S BAPTISM

In asking the church for their child to be baptised, parents accept the responsibility of training the child in the practice of the faith. And, because baptism is a community celebration, they will ask a trusted family or friend from the faith community who will support the parents in bringing up the child in the Catholic faith.

A godparent is not an honorary title but a permanent job description. Along with the parents, godparents will be an invaluable member of the child's faith journey; they will be firm in their commitment and generous in their love for God and their neighbours.

According to Canon Law (874), to be a **godparent**, you must:

- be chosen by the parents, and
- be at least 16 years of age, and
- be a Catholic who has been confirmed and has received the Eucharist, and
- live their faith in accordance with the teachings of the Catholic Church, and
- not be the father or mother of the one being baptised

At the child's baptism, the godparent/s will be asked, *'Are you ready to help the parents of this child in their duty as Christian parents?'* This question deserves great consideration and reflection. It will be thoughtful and earnest advocates that sincerely answer that question with the response, *'We are.'*



2. AT A CHILD'S CONFIRMATION

The sacrament of confirmation affirms our baptismal grace; it deepens our relationship with God, with our faith community, and it strengthens us as disciples.

A candidate who is preparing to celebrate this sacrament will ask a trusted family, friend or respected member of the Catholic community to be their sponsor. We highly encourage a child's godparent to be their sponsor for confirmation.

You should be prepared to devote - at least - a full liturgical year to the faith formation of the candidate.

To be a confirmation **sponsor**, you must:

- be chosen by the candidate, and
- be at least 16 years of age, and
- be a Catholic who has been confirmed and has received the Eucharist, and
- live your faith as a Catholic, and
- not be the father or mother of the one being confirmed, and
- be prepared to support the candidate in their ongoing faith journey.



3. AT AN ADULT'S BAPTISM AND/OR CONFIRMATION

When an adult responds to a Call for conversion, they would be introduced to the RCIA process. Among its many purposes, the Rite of Christian Initiation of Adults (RCIA) is the process by which an adult becomes a Catholic.

However, because this is such an important decision, the Church bestows on them a gift of one of its own cherished members. This member is a **sponsor** and they will hold this position until the Rite of Election - held on the first Sunday of Lent.

'Sponsors are persons who have known and assisted the candidates and stand as witnesses to the candidates' moral character, faith, and intention.'

- (RCIA, Introduction, 10)

To be an RCIA sponsor, you must:

- be chosen by the candidate, and
- be at least 16 years of age, and
- be a Catholic who has been confirmed and has received the Eucharist, and
- live your faith as a Catholic, and
- not be the father or mother of the one being confirmed.

The **godparent** will exercise their ministry publicly for the first time at the Rite of Election.

What does a Godparent or Sponsor do?

Fortunately for us, godparents and sponsors do not need to know all that there is to know about being a Catholic.

The most important role that you can do as a sponsor or godparent, is to be a spiritual friend to the candidate - the one that is being baptised or confirmed. But what does that look like?

As a godparent or sponsor, you will help the one being baptised or confirmed to:

*'...turn more readily to God in prayer, to bear witness to the faith,
in all things to keep their hopes set on Christ,
to follow supernatural inspiration in their deeds,
and to practise love of neighbour, even at the cost of self-renunciation.'*

RCIA 75.2

PRAYER: The first thing godparents and sponsors alike can do is pray.

- Pray for your candidate, pray for yourself, pray for those in need.
- Allow your candidate to watch you pray, or invite them to pray with you.

WITNESS: This one may be a bit difficult as it requires you to talk about your faith.

- Talk to your candidate about the sign of the cross and what it means to you in your life.
- Share a book that has helped you on your faith journey.
- Be joyful! Speak lovingly about your faith, use positive language when discussing your faith, the Church, and its people.

HOPE: It is a pleasure to share this role.

- Be hopeful about your faith journey and share that hope with your candidate.
- If you've had doubts in your faith, be prepared to discuss that with your candidate but don't dwell on it; instead, use your experience as an example of how much trust you have in God, and in his mercy.

BELIEVE THAT THE HOLY SPIRIT CAN WORK IN MANY AND VARIED WAYS: Every Catholic has a good Holy Spirit story.

- Speak about the Spirit to your candidate; speak about how it feels for you, when you have felt the Holy Spirit, where the Spirit has touched you most, your sense of how the Spirit moves you.
- Talk to them of the many glories that God has given us.

PRACTISE LOVE OF NEIGHBOUR: This can be either very easy to do, or very difficult.

- Show your candidate how to love your neighbour, particularly by inviting them to pray for people who are difficult to love. Pray that others will grow in their love for God and his people.
- Pray for people who are our global neighbours, or contribute to a charitable cause together.

Myths about Godparents and Sponsors

Unfortunately, there are many myths or misunderstandings concerning what godparents and sponsors are and what they do.

MYTH 1: It's just an honorary title.

It may be quite an honour to be asked to be a godparent or a sponsor, but it's much more than an honorary title. It's a job! You need to be actively involved in the faith formation of the candidate.

MYTH 2: When the parents die, the child is taken care of by the godparent.

Godparents are under no moral or legal obligation to become adoptive or foster parents to the child.

MYTH 3: A godparent or sponsor needs to be related to the candidate.

A godparent or a sponsor needs to be someone who will be a good guide and mentor to the candidate. A sponsor can be the same person as the godparent, but they don't have to be. And parents cannot be a godparent or sponsor to their child; your child already has you, they are already living with you, and you would make yourself available to share your faith with your child. But sometimes a candidate will need someone else that they can turn towards to ask questions of the Church or of their faith. It's a good thing – in fact, *it's great!* – to have as many people as possible to share your faith with.

MYTH 4: It's rude to turn down an offer to be a godparent or sponsor

Being a godparent or sponsor is not a decision that you should make lightly. It is a wise person who seriously discerns if they are prepared and available to accept the responsibility of the role.

MYTH 5: To be a good godparent or sponsor, you have to know all about the Catholic Church.

You do not need to be a scripture teacher to be either a godparent or a sponsor. In fact, it's best to admit that none of us know all there is to know about the Catholic Church. And that's a good thing!

More important than knowing all the prayers, information, history, culture and teachings of the Catholic Church, is a willingness to live a life filled with Christ; to pray earnestly, to love unapologetically, and to joyfully share your faith with others.

MYTH 6: Girls choose a female sponsor and boys choose a male.

Godparents or sponsors can be of any gender, regardless of the gender of the candidate.

MYTH 7: If the godparent isn't at the celebration, you can have a proxy

A godparent or sponsor really needs to be someone who will take an *active* role in the faith formation of the candidate. They need to be present in the candidate's life. It would not be a good idea to choose someone who lives very far away from the candidate, someone transient in your life, or casual friends who you see seldom.

If the godparent or sponsor will not be able to make it to the ceremony, but is otherwise accessible to the candidate, then that godparent/sponsor may appoint a proxy; someone to stand in at the ceremony until such time as the godparent/sponsor can arrive to fulfil their responsibility. Reasons for absence must be serious, however ie: if there is a medical emergency, or if they have been called away urgently.

MYTH 8: You don't have to be a Catholic to be a godparent or sponsor.

Actually, you do.

When choosing a godparent or sponsor, you really need to ask someone who has similar ideas as you, someone who supports your methods of raising children, of practicing your faith and of living your lives. Again, they don't need to know everything about being a Catholic but they should be prepared to walk with you in your faith journey.

Other friends and family who are willing to do this - but are not themselves baptised and confirmed in a Catholic Church - are called 'witnesses' and their names will be included in the baptismal certificate. This includes anyone who has been baptised in another Christian denomination.

MYTH 9: Once you're baptised, you can change your godparent.

No.

A godparent is a lifelong role. It is appropriate to choose the godparent to be the sponsor at Confirmation, but if this is not possible, a different person may be appointed.

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