

Choosing Godparents

Your child's Baptism is a big day for your family and you want to do the right thing. Choosing godparents is a decision not to be taken lightly. Too often parents want to honor a special friend, repay a favor, or encourage a non-relative to have a closer relationship with their child. While all of these motives are well intentioned, they are not ideal. If you want to be happy about your decision, consider the following.

Above all, a godparent serves a special role for the one being baptized. Godparents are to represent the Christian Catholic community, the Church. They are to assist the child's parents in raising their child in the Catholic faith, so that the child may profess and live it as an adult.

Thus, if we remember a few basic things about Baptism – it gives a person both a new and special status as a child of God and it makes a person a member of the Body of Christ, the Church – then what you are looking for are godparents who can truly represent that Christian community. Basically, this means you want at least one active and committed Catholic. The *Catechism of the Catholic Church* states, “. . . the godfather and godmother . . . must be firm believers, able and ready to help the newly baptized child on the road of Christian life.” This is the Church's way of saying that being a godparent is truly a ministry in the Church, and not simply an honor.

In fact, the whole Church community bears some responsibility for the development and nurturing of the grace given your child at Baptism. Much of this will come later in parish religious education and even classes for you on Christian parenting.

This means that you should choose a firm believer, someone who is truly committed to the Catholic faith in which your new baby will be baptized.

Suppose that you want a certain married couple to be the godparents. The wife is truly committed to the Catholic faith in which your child will be baptized. But what about the husband who is Christian but not Catholic? The Church has a solution for this, too. Since the wife is a practicing Catholic, and a perfect choice as a godmother, she will be the officially designated *godparent*, while her husband – a great Christian and committed to his own faith – can serve as an official witness. This is fully in line with Church law. Only one godparent is necessary, although both a godfather and a godmother are preferred. So while the husband – *a Christian witness* – will set an example, it will be the wife's duty as *godmother* to share specifics of the Catholic faith.

To ensure that a godparent is capable of this, Church law also insists that this person be at least 16 years old (for maturity's sake), fully initiated (having received Baptism, Confirmation and Eucharist), be someone other than the legal parents and one who leads a life in harmony with the Church.

All this may seem like quite a bit, but the purpose is to ensure that the rich and beautiful faith of the Church is passed on to your child in the most loving and authentic way possible. Hopefully, you know by now that the task of choosing godparents is one which should be performed with much prayer, careful thought and with greatest concern for the precious spiritual life of your child.

What is a Godparent?

The role of being a godparent is a serious one. Being chosen is an honor, and says a lot about the parents' perception of you.

Being a godparent requires an investment of time and energy. So remember not to rush into anything too quickly here! Make sure that you have the time, the willingness and the faith to live out this sacred vocation.

A vocation is a calling, an appeal to live something out in your life. These parents are calling you to be something special for their child: to set an example, help teach their child about the Catholic faith, have a lifelong relationship of prayer, faith-sharing and love. Before accepting this invitation, take some time to pray and reflect on your ability to do this.

You should ask, "Can I share my faith unashamedly? Do I live close enough to really get to know my godchild? Am I an active member of my local Catholic parish?" If you are from another parish, you'll be asked for a statement from your home parish attesting to your active faith in the Church. If you're an active Catholic, getting such a statement from your pastor will be easy. If you're not, maybe you need to question your fitness to serve as a godparent at this time. But if you are able to say yes to these questions and if your faith makes you ready to accept this honorable vocation, here are a few helpful hints to assist you in being the best godparent that you can be:

- ♦ Prepare with the parents. The parents will be required to attend a Baptism preparation class to reflect on many of the things mentioned here. If you're able, you should be there too! Your willingness to be with the parents now says a lot about your willingness to be present to your godchild in the future.

- ♦ Be there on the Baptism day. Be available for the Baptism ceremony. This may even mean missing less important events. Besides saying, "We are" when the priest asks if you are ready to assist the parents in raising the child in the practice of the faith, you will have the opportunity to clothe the child in the white baptismal garment or to light the baptismal candle. Take seriously the profound yet beautiful words: "Parents and godparents, this light has been entrusted to you to be kept burning brightly." Later at a family party, you could make a toast or say a meaningful prayer for your godchild and your role in his or her life.

- ♦ Don't forget the Baptism day. Hopefully you will always remember your godchild's biological birthday, but don't forget this "birthday" into the Body of Christ. Make a phone call or send a card. Better yet, suggest having a get-together to honor this day each year. Bring out and light the baptismal candle, recalling the Light of Christ burning in the heart and soul of your godchild.

- ♦ Pray for your godchild. Keep your godchild in your daily prayers. The constant prayer of godparents never hurt anyone! On occasion, take time to go to Church together. The Mass, after all, is the source and summit of our faith lives.

- ♦ Share the faith that's been shared with you. When your godchild is young, introduce him or her to a children's edition of the Bible. Teach about his or her patron or name saint. Attend and offer encouragement at the child's first Communion or share your own faith story as your godchild approaches Confirmation. Continue your lifelong relationship by participating in your godchild's wedding. Remember, being a godparent is about more than an infant Baptism ceremony!



IMPORTANT Catholic Godparent: Please note – you must complete this form and take it to the parish where you are registered for signature and parish seal.

St. Ignatius Church
533 E. Jarrettsville Road, Forest Hill, MD 21050

Godparent Eligibility Statement

Baptism is a sacrament of initiation which brings a person into union with Christ as a member of the Catholic Church. A godparent represents the Catholic Church at Baptism, and then serves as a role model for the child by living a fully Christian life. Please note that godparents must themselves be baptized. Godparents must be at least 16 years of age and must have received the sacraments of Baptism, Confirmation and Eucharist. Godparents' current lifestyles should be in accord with the Catholic faith.

TO BE COMPLETED BY CATHOLIC GODPARENT

Please check all statements which apply:

My life bears witness to my readiness for this role.

_____ I am a baptized and currently practicing Catholic at least 16 years of age.

_____ I have received the sacrament of Confirmation.

_____ I believe that Jesus Christ is my Savior and Lord.

_____ I am a registered member of my parish.

_____ I regularly attend Sunday Mass.

_____ I am open to the living Word of God in sacred scripture and the Church.

_____ I try to live my life according to Gospel values, even when they conflict with the value systems of our culture and society.

_____ I intend to encourage this child in the practice of the Catholic faith by word and example.

_____ The statements I have checked above are true.

My full name (printed) _____

My signature _____

Name and location of my Parish _____

My home address: _____

Full Name of child being baptized _____

TO BE COMPLETED BY PERSONNEL AT GODPARENT'S PARISH

I verify that _____ is:

_____ a Catholic in good standing.

_____ a registered member of this parish.

Please affix parish seal here

(Official Signature)

Please return this completed form to child's parents.

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Christian Witness Eligibility Statement

Baptism is a sacrament of initiation which brings a person into union with Christ as a member of the Catholic Church. A godparent represents the Catholic Church at Baptism, and then serves as a role model for the child by living a fully Christian life.

There are usually two godparents. Only one of these, however, must be a baptized, practicing Catholic. The other must be a baptized, practicing member of another Christian denomination. While this person is referred to as a "Christian Witness" on this form, his/her role in the Baptism ceremony is the same as the godparent. Likewise, the expectation is that this Christian Witness will be a Christian role model for the child.

TO BE COMPLETED BY CHRISTIAN WITNESS

(If Catholic, please do not complete this page. Complete the reverse side instead.)

Please check all statements which apply:

My life bears witness to my readiness for this role.

_____ I am a baptized and currently practicing Christian at least 16 years of age.

_____ I believe that Jesus Christ is my Savior and Lord.

_____ I am a registered member of my local church.

_____ I regularly attend Sunday services.

_____ I am open to the living Word of God in sacred scripture and the Church.

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_____ I intend to encourage this child in the practice of the Christian faith by word and example.

_____ The statements I have checked above are true.

My full name (printed) _____

Name and Location of my Church _____

My home address: _____

Full Name of child being baptized _____

(Signature of Christian Witness)

(Today's date)

Please return this completed form to child's parents.

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Name and Location of my Church _____

My home address: _____

Full Name of child being baptized _____

(Signature of Christian Witness)

(Today's date)

Please return this completed form to child's parents.