

April 22, 2009

Dear Monsignors, Fathers, Deacons, and other Workers in the Lord's vineyard,

I am aware that it is "Confirmation Season," and this is just a reminder of the criteria for and importance of the role of Sponsors in the sacrament. Secondly, allow me to recall the criteria which applies to those those who are Godparents for Baptism.

I know these can be delicate situations pastorally, and it is always a good practice to make these criteria clear to people from the beginning; to avoid as much as possible misunderstandings and hurt feelings. **Please also refer to our *Diocesan Policy Book*.**

► **Godparents for Baptism:** This is a technical term in Church Law.

► "It is the Catholic understanding that godparents, in a liturgical and canonical sense, should themselves be members of the Church or ecclesial Community in which the baptism is being celebrated. They do not merely undertake a responsibility for the Christian education of the person being baptized (or confirmed) as a relation or friend; they are also there as representatives of a community of faith, standing as guarantees of the candidate's faith and desire for ecclesial communion." (Pontifical Council for Promoting Christian Unity, *Directory for the Application of Principles and Norms on Ecumenism*, 1993)

► Each person to be baptized must have at least one Catholic godparent. Only Catholics, Eastern-Rite Catholics, and Eastern Orthodox Christians may serve as official godparents (if Orthodox, there must still be one Catholic godparent). If there are to be two Catholic godparents, one must be male and the other female. (*Code of Canon Law*, c. 873) "Each child may have a godfather (*patrinus*) and a godmother (*matrina*)." (*Rite of Baptism for Children*, Introduction, no. 6). This means there are **not** to be two godmothers or godfathers.

► A baptized member of a non-Catholic ecclesial community, may serve as witness to baptism, but only together with a Catholic godparent. (*Directory on Ecumenism*, #98, c. 874.2) These are then recorded as 'Christian witness' to the baptism.

► Further criteria include the following: (c. 874 §1)

► Be a fully initiated Catholic (being confirmed and receiving Eucharist) at least 16 years old, who actively lives the faith, not be bound by any canonical penalty; and not be the father or mother of the one to be baptized.

► **Confirmation Sponsors:** Each person to be confirmed is to have a sponsor.

► "The sponsor is to take care that the confirmed person behaves as a true witness of Christ and faithfully fulfills the obligations inherent in this sacrament." (c. 892)

► To perform the function of sponsor, a person must fulfill the conditions mentioned for godparents for baptism. (c. 893 §1).

► Our *Diocesan Policy Book* states: "this sponsor or representative **MUST BE A FAITHFUL AND ACTIVE CATHOLIC.**" (emphasis in original)

► It is desirable, though not required, to choose as sponsor the one who was godparent at baptism. (c. 893 §2).

Again, I hope this is a reminder of things already known, and a helpful summary to those who approach these pastoral matters with real folks in parishes.

Sincerely yours in Christ,

*Fr. August L. Gothman*