

The Role of the Sponsor/Godparent

(The following is taken from the General Introduction of the Rite of Christian Initiation, paragraphs 8-10)

8. *It is a very ancient custom of the Church that an adult is not admitted to baptism without a godparent, a member of the Christian community who will assist him at least in the final preparation for baptism and after baptism will help him persevere in the faith and in his life as a Christian.*

In the baptism of children too, the godparent should be present to be added spiritually to the immediate family of the one to be baptized and to represent Mother Church. As occasion offers, he will be ready to help the parents bring up their child to profess the faith and to show this by living it.

9. *At least in the final rites of the catechumenate and in the actual celebration of baptism, the godparent is present to testify to the faith of the adult candidate or, together with the parents, to profess the Church's faith, in which the child is being baptized.*

10. *Pastors of souls should therefore see to it that the godparent, chosen by the catechumen or by the family, is qualified to carry out his proper liturgical functions as specified in no. 9 above. The godparent should:*

- *be mature enough to undertake this responsibility,*
- *have received the three sacraments of initiation, baptism, confirmation, and the eucharist;*
- *be a member of the Catholic Church, canonically free to carry out this office. A baptized and believing Christian from a separated church or community may act as a godparent or Christian witness along with a Catholic godparent, at the request of the parents and in accordance with the norms for various ecumenical cases.*

Questions and Answers:

Can a Catholic ever be a "Christian Witness?"

No. The Catholic must meet all the requirements for Catholics, even if the other godparent is Catholic. For example, the parents have, with difficulty, decided on one sponsor who is Catholic and meets all the requirements. The second sponsor is "hard to find," and may be a Catholic who never was confirmed, or someone who has left the Church. In these cases, the Catholic cannot stand as the "Christian witness," i.e., someone who has left the Church cannot sponsor a person into the Church.

Can a Catholic be a Christian witness at a non-Catholic baptism?

Yes. Just as a baptized non-Catholic can be a witness with a Catholic at a Catholic baptism, a Catholic can be a witness with a baptized non-Catholic at a non-Catholic baptism.

Can an unbaptized person be a godparent?

No. Because the sponsor or Christian witness renews the promises made at their own baptism, an unbaptized person cannot be permitted to be the godparent.

Can a priest or deacon be a sponsor?

Yes. The former legislation requiring permission from the ordinary because of spiritual relationship is abrogated.

Can a priest or deacon be the officiant and a sponsor?

Yes. When the priest or deacon is the officiant and a sponsor, he designates a proxy for the godparent during the rite of baptism.

Can the godparents be changed at a later date?

No. Although other changes can be authorized for the baptismal register, this one is not permitted.

Can there be a proxy for the godparent?

Yes. Proxies for the godparents are acceptable when the sponsors cannot be physically present on the day of the baptism. The name of the designated sponsor is entered in the register. The name of the proxy is entered under the name of the sponsor with the remark proxy.

Can a catechumen be a sponsor?

No. Those who are unbaptized may not sponsor a person into the Catholic Church.

Requirements for Sponsors/Godparent

There may be ONE or TWO sponsors. When there are TWO sponsors, one is male (godfather) and the other female (godmother). One sponsor must be Catholic.

Requirements for the Catholic

- *at least sixteen years old and*
- *baptized and confirmed and received the Eucharist*
- *living an upright life*
- *no penalties (e.g., left the Church, etc.). Therefore, a Catholic who has left the Catholic Church cannot be a sponsor, and cannot be a "Christian witness" if they join another Christian communion.*
- *cannot be either parent*
- *"Christian Witness"*
- *be a Catholic who has been confirmed and has already received the sacrament of the Most Holy Eucharist and leads a life in harmony with the faith and the role to be undertaken;*
- *not be bound by a canonical penalty legitimately imposed or declared.*

Requirements for the Christian Witness:

- *at least sixteen years old*
- *a validly baptized Christian*
- *living an upright life*
- *cannot be either parent*
- *cannot be a Catholic who has left the Church.*
- *The notation Christian witness is placed under the name of the non-Catholic Christian witness in the baptismal register.*
- *baptized non-Catholic with Catholic sponsor*
- *the other sponsor may be a baptized Christian of a different faith. This person is a "Christian witness" (and not a "sponsor").*
- *the other witness with a Catholic sponsor may never be non-baptized. For example, Jewish or Muslim godparents are not permitted by universal church law.*
- *From the 1983 Code of Canon Law Canon 874, 1: To be admitted to the role of sponsors, a person must:*
 - *be designated by the one to be baptized, by the parents or the one who takes their place or, in their absence, by the pastor or minister and is to have the qualifications and intention of performing this role.*
 - *have completed their sixteenth year, unless a different age has been established by the diocesan bishop or it seems to the pastor or minister that an exception is to be made for a just cause.*
 - *not be the father or the mother of the one to be baptized.*