

On Godparents

The fine English word “Godparents” refers to the sponsors who assist the parents of a newly baptized or confirmed Catholic. Their role does not cease after the sacraments are conferred. Rather, their role only begins with the sacraments. To be a sponsor for someone being baptized, here are the basic requirements from the Code of Canon Law:

1. I must instruct both the parents and sponsors as to the duties required of them. That’s the purpose of this insert. I do not foresee special classes for this, but instead will rely on the pulpit and the bulletin insert to accomplish this.
2. The parents, sponsors and the pastor are to see to it that the names used for Baptism and Confirmation are not foreign to the Christian mentality. In other words, the name of a saint (Ann or Mary) or of a mystery (Grace or Hope) are in keeping with the Faith. While there is nothing preventing the invention of a name (I met a lady in a store who’s name was Bric), such a name would be inappropriate for a sacrament.
3. A sponsor should be at least seventeen years old, though exceptions can be made by the pastor, for a just cause. The sponsor should be already confirmed, and leading a good Catholic life. He cannot be the father or mother of the recipient of the sacrament.

To be a sponsor for someone being confirmed, here are the requirements of the Law:

1. The sponsor should be present at the Confirmation, and to see to it that the confirmed person acts as a true witness to Christ, and faithfully fulfills the obligations connected with this sacrament.
2. The same requirement to be a sponsor (see #'s 2 and 3 above) for Baptism applies to Confirmation.

It is foreseen that one of the sponsors of Baptism be the sponsor for Confirmation, though this is not required.

It is foreseen that the whole community helps the parents and sponsors in their duties, at least by prayer. The names of the baptized and confirmed should be published in the bulletin, so that the faithful can pray for them.

Long after the sacraments are conferred, the sponsors should pray on a regular basis for their charges. On the anniversary of the Baptism or

Confirmation, the sponsors should remember the event by a letter or phone call, with encouragement to further knowledge of catechism or scripture, or with a gift such as a book (maybe the life of a saint) or a medal, or having a Mass said for their charges.

St. Peter said, “As newborn infants, desire the rational milk without guile.” (I Pet. 2.2) So everyone needs nurses and teachers when they are young. The practice of having sponsors is very ancient in the Church, and is summed up perfectly by St. Denis: “It occurred to our divine leaders (the apostles) and they in their wisdom ordained that infants should be introduced (into the Church) in this holy manner, that their natural parents should deliver them to the care of some one well skilled in divine things, as to a master under whom, as a spiritual father and guardian of his salvation in holiness, the child should lead the remainder of his life.” (De Eccl. Hier. c.7)

Speaking in the person of the sponsor he says: “I promise, by my constant exhortations to induce this child, when he comes to a knowledge of religion, to renounce every thing opposed (to his Christian calling) and to profess and perform the sacred promises which he now makes.” (ibid.c.50)

St. Augustine also says: “I most especially admonish you, men and women, who have acquired godchildren through Baptism, to consider that you stood as sureties before God, for those whom you received at the sacred font.” (Grat.p.3) He says further, “They ought to admonish them to observe chastity, love justice, cling to charity; and above all they should teach them the Creed, the Lord’s Prayer, the Ten Commandments, and the rudiments of the Christian religion.”

God grant all the Godparents of our parish every grace to fulfill their duties with justice, charity and perseverance.