

Choosing Godparents in the Roman Catholic Church

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The General Introduction to the *Rite of Christian Initiation of Adults* says this of godparents: “In the baptism of children, as well, godparents are to be present in order to represent both the expanded spiritual family of the one to be baptized and the role of the Church as a mother. As occasion offers, godparents help the parents so that children will come to profess the faith and live up to it” (General Introduction, #8).

What is important here? First, there is to be at least one godparent, and perhaps two, as the

parents desire and as local custom suggests. Second, the godparents are to be present at the rite so that they can make their commitment publicly. Third, the Church continues to understand that the bond between the godparent and the family is very close and asks that the godparent not only be ready to help the parents in the Christian formation of their child, when appropriate, but that the godparent also be a source of guidance, support, and inspiration to the child on his or her journey toward God.



Finally, the godparents speak not only for themselves but also for the Church.

In deciding on a godparent or godparents, then, you have some important directions set for you by this brief paragraph from the ritual. There is everything to suggest that it is a serious responsibility to choose well; it is a decision worth much thought, prayer, and discussion. When you have decided, it is appropriate that you tell the godparent-to-be what led you to your decision. It is a great honor, but it is also a great responsibility.

You are looking, certainly, for a mature member of the Catholic Church, one who has received the sacraments of initiation—Baptism, Confirmation, and Eucharist. You are looking for someone who can share with you the task of handing on the faith, someone whose life demonstrates that faith in both great and small ways in everyday living. You are looking for someone you can call on for help. You are looking for someone who knows that being a Catholic has to do with regular attendance at Mass, with prayer, with justice toward the poor, with kindness for friends and strangers, and even with many things that are not so popular or common in our society. And you are looking for someone who is willing to have a special relationship with your child, a relationship that will include sharing faith with the child and enjoying the child's own developing faith and gifts.

Remember, you will select your child's godparents, but it is not you they represent at the Baptism and thereafter. They represent the Church. The Church, as the body of Christ, is the worldwide



assembly of all baptized persons, living and dead. That Baptism, shared among all members of the Church, is now offered to your child. We ask one another to take Baptism very seriously. We ask that you be prepared to speak honestly when you say that you understand and will do all that Baptism implies as this child grows up. When you ask people to be godparents, you are asking that they witness this promise of ours for the entire Church. More than that, you are asking that they bring the Church to life, that they embody the Church—at the Baptism liturgy and always afterward in the life of the child. That is what it means that godparents “represent Mother Church” at the Baptism.

All of this is not to say that a godparent cannot be a relative or close friend. The godparents most certainly can be relatives if they can answer to the qualities we have been discussing.

So enjoy this time to consider the possibilities. Talk it over with each other. Consider what will happen if you end up living far away from the godparents. Would this person continue to take an interest in your child, pray for the child, and be a presence in the child's life?

When you have decided and your godparents-to-be have accepted, you may wish to ask them to be more a part of the Baptism by making the baptismal garment or by selecting and buying a beautiful candle. It may become your custom in the years to come to invite them to your home on the anniversary of the child's Baptism for a special celebration of a most important event.

May you choose joyfully and well!

