

## **Church of the Visitation Guidelines for Godparent Eligibility for Baptism**

When the time for an infant baptism arrives, it is also the time for the parents to select the godparents. This is a matter of tremendous spiritual importance, and the parents should use a number of spiritual criteria to make their choice.

According to canon law, it is the duty and privilege of Catholic parents to pass on the gift of faith to their newly baptized child, and likewise, it is the duty and privilege of godparents to assist the parents with this all-important task. A person cannot give what he or she does not have. Therefore, the single most important factor is whether the person is an active, practicing Catholic.

### **Godparent Requirements: (*As stated in Canon 874*)**

1. Godparents must be practicing Catholics who are at least 16 years of age and must have received the Sacraments of Baptism, Eucharist, and Confirmation. A recent copy of their Confirmation Certificate must be provided to Church of the Visitation.
2. Godparents must be firm believers. A firm believer is someone who has faith and trust in God, is a disciple of Jesus, is a member of the Church, belongs to a parish, prays regularly, attends Mass, is a frequent recipient of the sacraments, attempts to conform his or her life to the Gospel, is growing in virtue, gives good example and is a loving, generous and caring person. The godparent's faith needs not be perfect, but it must be a priority and active.
3. May not be the parent of the child being baptized.
4. If married, the godparent must be married in the Catholic Church or had their marriage blessed by the Catholic Church (civil ceremony will not suffice). The two godparents do not have to be married to one another.
5. Anyone bound by a canonical penalty may not serve as a godparent.
6. Godparents must complete a Godparent Eligibility Form (attached). The form must be signed by their parish pastor indicating that they are registered parishioners, practicing Catholics and are qualified to serve as a godparent. This must be submitted to the parish office when scheduling the baptism.
7. Godparents are required to attend a Baptism Instruction Class, either at Church of the Visitation or at their own parish. Certificate of Completion must be submitted to the parish office prior to the date of baptism.

## Frequently Asked Questions:

1. ***Why does the Church have these requirements?*** The role of godparent is significant. During the celebration of the Sacrament of Baptism, the godparents make a promise to assist the parents of the child in fulfilling their responsibility of forming the child in the Catholic faith (see Canon 872). In order to fulfill this promise, the godparent must themselves be living the Catholic faith and their lifestyle must be in keeping with the teachings of the Church. Simply put, you can't sponsor someone for Baptism if you are not yourself in full communion with the Church and the teachings of the Church.
2. ***How many godparents should there be?*** Church law only requires you to have one godparent; however, it has been tradition to have two. Only two names will be recorded in the church records.
3. ***What gender should the godparent be?*** If you choose only one godparent, you are free to choose a male or a female. However, if you wish to have two godparents, there must be one male and one female. Two godparents of the same gender are not allowed (see Canon 873).
4. ***Can the same godparents have responsibility for more than one child in the same family?*** Yes, as long as they take seriously their responsibility and intention to help the children grow in faith.
5. ***Can a divorced person be a godparent in the Catholic Church?*** Divorce by itself does not disqualify a person from being a sponsor. Being divorced and remarried outside the Church (without an annulment) would disqualify a person.
6. ***Can a non-Catholic serve as a godparent?*** A baptized, non-Catholic may serve as an "official witness" to the baptism, only if there is a proper Catholic sponsor who fully meets all requirements of a godparent (see above). The non-Catholic who is selected as a witness should be an active and participating member of his/her church community. Non-baptized persons may not serve as witnesses or godparents. During the baptism, a non-Catholic witness may perform all the parts of the ceremony that a godparent does. His or her name will be entered into the Sacrament Record Book as an "official witness," together with the name of the godparent.
7. ***What is the difference between a godparent and a witness?*** Witness is the term mentioned in the Code of Canon Law. Canon (Church) Law describes a witness as "A baptized person who belongs to a non-Catholic ecclesial community." A godparent is a confirmed, practicing Catholic in good standing with the Church.
8. ***Can someone serve as godparent by proxy (stand-in) if the godparent is unable to participate in the baptism ceremony?*** If a godparent cannot attend the baptism ceremony, a proxy can stand in the place of the missing godparent. The name of that person will be entered as "proxy" in the Sacramental Record Book, along with the name of the missing godparent.