



GODPARENTS

1. What is required of a godparent?

Canon law talks about two types of godparents: “sponsors” and “witnesses.” A sponsor is a Catholic, and a witness is a baptized Christian of another denomination. This distinction is made since a witness cannot be expected to assist in raising a Catholic child in the Catholic faith. The child must have at least one sponsor as a godparent.

Canon law lists a number of necessary qualities for the sponsor:

- The parents of the child to be baptized (or the adult to be baptized) must appoint the sponsor.
- The sponsor should be at least sixteen years of age, unless there is a good reason for choosing someone under this age. The Church wants to be sure to provide a role model who is mature and resolved to practice the Catholic faith.
- For this same reason, the sponsor must be a fully initiated Catholic. He or she must have received the sacraments of Baptism, Holy Communion and Confirmation. He or she must live a life in keeping with the faith and moral teachings of the Church.
- The sponsor cannot be a parent of the child, since parents have their own special role.

Canon law does not list qualities for witnesses, but it would seem that similar expectations exist. Witnesses need to be baptized, be of an appropriate age, practice the Christian faith, and live a life that is in keeping with the faith and moral teachings of the Church.

2. I can only find one godparent for my child. Is that OK?

It is customary for people to choose two godparents for their children. When we think of godparents, a godfather and a godmother come to mind. The law, however, states, “In so far as possible, a person being baptized is to be assigned a sponsor” (canon 872), and, “One sponsor, male or female, is sufficient” (canon 873). If there is only one godparent for the baptism, this person must be a Catholic.

The law permits two sponsors, "one of each sex" (canon 873), but it does not provide the option of having more than two. The priest or deacon performing the baptism does not have to acknowledge more than two sponsors, one male and one female. Some cultures have the practice of designating more than two godparents. While this is fine, only two will be recorded in the baptismal register.

3. Can a Catholic be a godparent in the baptism of a Protestant?

Since a Protestant can be a godparent in a Catholic baptism, Church law permits a Catholic to be a godparent at the baptism of a Protestant.

A Catholic invited to be a godparent to a Protestant acts only as a witness to the baptism. Such a distinction is made because a Catholic cannot help direct someone in the ways of a Protestant denomination but can merely be a witness to the Christian faith. In light of this, the Catholic witness to a Protestant baptism should ensure that the other godparent is a member of the Protestant denomination in which the baptism takes place and decline the invitation if no such person is designated.

The Catholic Church shares much more in common with Orthodox Churches than with Protestant denominations. The Orthodox Churches have validly ordained priests and bishops and, like Catholics, observe seven sacraments. In light of these similarities, Orthodox people can act as sponsors in the baptism of a Catholic and vice versa.



(Taken from: Pete Vere & Michael Trueman, "*Surprised by Canon Law: 150 Questions Catholics Ask About Canon Law*" – August 15, 2004, p. 68-70)