

CANONICAL GUIDELINES FOR THE SELECTION OF A GODPARENT AND CHRISTIAN WITNESS

The significance of a Godparent at the Sacrament of Baptism requires that the parent(s) consider very seriously the faith and religious practice of the person proposed for this role. The sources for accessing the qualifications for the role of Godparent are *The Code of Canon Law* (1983) and *The Catechism of the Catholic Church* (1994) promulgated by His Holiness, John-Paul II. Pastors, assistant pastors, pastoral assistants and directors of religious education should provide an appropriate catechesis in the preparation programs for the Sacraments of Initiation. The following guidelines are provided to answer the usual questions that arise when parents or candidates are discerning a person for these roles.

GODPARENT FOR BAPTISM

- The canonical guidelines for selecting a Godparent (*patrinus*) are found in cann. 872-874. A person to be baptized needs only **one** Godparent. If the tradition of having two is desired, the person or their parent(s) may choose a man and a woman. Two Godparents of the same sex is not permitted.
- The mother or the father may **not** be a Godparent. The role of Godparent is to assist the parent(s) in the training of the faith. The roles are distinct and not to be mixed.
- A Godparent is a Catholic in good standing, that is, living the Gospel message in their daily personal lives. They should practice the faith regularly. They are to be at least sixteen years of age, have the proper aptitude and intention to assume this role, and have received the Sacrament of Confirmation.
- Catholics married outside the Church, or Catholics who choose to cohabitate outside of the Sacrament of Marriage are not permitted to be Godparents due to their irregular lifestyle.
- Any Catholic who is not living according to the doctrinal and moral teaching of the Church should not be asked to serve in this important role as Godparent.

CHRISTIAN WITNESS FOR BAPTISM

- Any Catholic, who has abandoned the faith, even if they now are active members in another Christian Church or community, may **not** serve as a Godparent or as a Christian Witness. They have separated themselves from the Church and cannot serve even as a witness.
- A Christian Witness is a validly baptized non-Catholic who practices their faith in Christ in a visible and sincere manner.

Godparent for Confirmation

The Code of Canon Law (1983) uses *patrinus* for the role of Godparent for Baptism and Confirmation (c. 892-893). Accordingly, the requirements to be a Godparent for Confirmation are exactly the same for the Sacrament of Baptism. The following guidelines, therefore, are presented for this sacrament:

- Parents may **not** serve as a Godparent for Confirmation. The ideal is that the Godparent at Baptism also serves this role at the Sacrament of Confirmation. Any Catholic may be named provided they fulfill all the requirements listed for a Godparent for Baptism.
- Godparents must be at least sixteen years of age, practicing the Catholic faith, and fully initiated in the Catholic Church.
- Non-Catholics, former Catholics, and members of Churches not in union with Rome may not serve as Godparents for Confirmation. Members of the Orthodox Churches, because of the lack of unity among the Churches, may not serve as a Godparent for Confirmation. A Christian Witness is never permitted at the Sacrament of Confirmation.
- Pastors and directors of religious education should recommend a Godparent in situations where a qualified Godparent is needed.

This guideline is effective immediately in the Diocese of Providence. Further questions or concerns should be presented and discussed with either the Vicar for Canonical Affairs or the Chancellor.