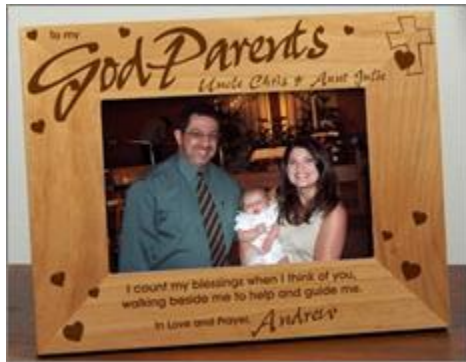


WANTED: GODPARENT

Read the Job Description!



How should parents choose a Godparent for their child? And who should agree to be a Godparent? Most people know that a Godparent should be a good, reliable person; someone who is close to the child or young person he or she is sponsoring, and will “be there” for that child throughout life. Absolutely! But this is only the very beginning! We often say to parents and Godparents that “Godparent” is not an honorary title—it’s a *job description*, which has qualifications and requirements. So what’s the job?

Church law states that a *Sponsor* (the technical name for a Godparent) for Baptism must first be a confirmed Catholic (because Confirmation signifies a commitment to the Catholic faith) who has received the Eucharist and is at least 16 years of age. In addition, a Sponsor must be “leading a life in harmony with the faith and the role to be undertaken.” (*Code of Canon Law*, §874) This is a very important qualification, but what exactly does it mean?

Contrary to a popular but untrue myth, the role of a Godparent is *not* to take care of the child if something happens to the parents; although they may sometimes *also* fulfill this role. The *job* of a Godparent is as simple and as challenging as this: **to be an**

exemplary model and teacher of practicing Catholic Christian faith. So someone who is chosen as a Godparent needs to be ready, willing and able to do this. He or she must be a person who leads “a life in harmony with the faith” by following Christ in his or her words and actions, by being an active, churchgoing member of a faith community, and by intentionally modeling and teaching his or her Godchild what it means to be a practicing Catholic Christian. *This makes sense.* A Godparent couldn’t credibly teach someone else what he or she doesn’t believe or practice. This is why it’s so important to thoughtfully consider the choice of a Godparent and to choose wisely. The right Godparent can make a vital difference in developing the child’s healthy relationship to God and the faith community.

Knowing all this then places an awesome responsibility on parents as they consider the choice of Godparents for their children, and also on those who have been asked to serve as Godparents. Even though the qualification of “leading a life in harmony with the faith and the role to be undertaken” is clear and binding for Catholic parents and Godparents, it is often misunderstood or not taken seriously. It’s the responsibility of every Pastor, out of care and concern for the faith development of the children in his parish, to determine to the best of his ability that those who serve as Godparents understand what their job is, and are ready, willing and able to take it on.

Often a parish will require that a prospective Godparent sign a form stating that he or she meets the requirements and understands the responsibilities he or she is taking on. But sometimes parents, not realizing what the role of a Godparent really

is, ask friends or relatives who are not engaged in their faith to serve as Godparents. Two common issues are that potential Godparents may not be registered or active member of parishes, or might be Catholics whose marriages have not been blessed by the Church. These are both examples of one or more aspects of their lives not being “in harmony with the faith.”

We do not ask perfection of Godparents, yet at the same time we cannot take these responsibilities too lightly. Sometimes, if a person has not been making faith a priority, being asked to serve as a Godparent is just the “nudge” he or she needs to re-connect with and re-focus on the role of Christian faith in his or her life. At St. Bernard’s we gently invite those who are in these situations to consider their next step in the Catholic faith so that they can honestly fulfill the responsibilities of the job they are being asked to do. Our hope is that all who are honored with the title of “Godparent” will consider more deeply the vital role they play in making a faith relationship with God and the Church a positive one for Godchild and Godparent alike!

Sometimes people are surprised – or even annoyed - that someone who is Jewish or Muslim but is a really good person cannot serve as a Godparent. But if you think about it, this is kind of a “no-brainer:” If the job of a Godparent is to be an exemplary model of practicing Catholic Christian faith, then the job cannot be fulfilled by a Jew or a Muslim, or a Hindu or an atheist, no matter how good a person he or she is. At the Baptism ceremony, the Godparents proudly make a profession of faith in God as Father, Son and Holy Spirit, and in the Church of Jesus Christ, and pledge to share that faith with their Godchild. Obviously, someone who is not a Christian cannot in good conscience do this. Friends and family

members who do not share our Christian faith, or who are not practicing their Christian faith, can and should be invited to be teachers and role models in the lives of our children in other ways, and even to share their faith tradition (if they have one) with our children.



What about friends and family members who share our Christian faith but are not Catholic? If a child is being baptized and raised Catholic, then the Godparent must obviously *be* Catholic so he or she can model for this *Catholic* child what it means to be specifically a *Catholic* Christian. If the family wishes, they may also ask a practicing baptized Christian who is not Catholic to act as a Christian Witness to the Baptism in addition to the Catholic Sponsor. This person has the job of witnessing Christian values and teaching the child about Christ and the Church.

(Note: Only one Godparent – a Catholic - is required, although there may be two. If there are two Godparents, one may be a Christian who is not Catholic. And if there are two, one must be male and one must be female, so as to reflect the reality of natural, biological parenthood.)

As more and more people are becoming increasingly disconnected from the Catholic Church, parishes are being forced to more closely examine those who are asked to take on the job of Godparent. So, before asking someone to act as a Godparent, or before accepting the

responsibility of being a Godparent and “signing off” to declare oneself “ready, willing and able,” parents and prospective Godparents need to ask:

- ✓ Is the person a confirmed Catholic at least 16 years of age who receives the Eucharist regularly?
- ✓ Does the person attend Mass on Sundays and Holy Days and participate in the life of his or her faith community in other ways?
- ✓ Does the person strive always to live out his or her Catholic faith in word and deed in every aspect of his or her life? (e.g., does he or she uphold and live Christian values of joy, compassion, service, forgiveness, justice, sacrifice for the sake of others, etc.; is he or she married in the Catholic Church, etc.)

A good question to ask: *Does everyone who knows this person know that he or she is a committed, practicing Catholic?* If not, is this person ready, willing and able to commit to moving in that direction? If a parent or Godparent can answer “yes,” then this person is an obvious good choice.

Parents want only the best they can give for their children. Spiritually, that means they want their children to have a good, strong, healthy and joyful experience of God, Jesus, the Holy Spirit, and the community of faith. Whether you are a parent or Godparent, give the children awaiting Baptism a really good Baptism gift: Committed Christian Godparents who will show them and teach them what Christian faith, hope and love is all about!