

## Dear Parents,

As you prepare for your child's baptism you are probably thinking quite a bit about who to ask to serve as the godparents. This short article will help guide you along that decision-making process.

Choosing godparents for your child can be a difficult decision. There are a number of questions which are likely on your mind. Who is eligible? What are the requirements? And even more basically: What is a godparent supposed to do?

Often we hear it said that godparents are supposed to care for a child if anything happens to the parents. In reality, however, the role of the godparent is different and, quite frankly, more active and influential.

The day of your child's baptism is a major occasion. Choosing godparents is not a decision that should be made lightly. You may want to choose someone to honor them or to thank them for being by your side. Perhaps someone was particularly helpful to you during your pregnancy and you want to give them some significant ceremonial role at the baptism. Perhaps you want to honor your sibling or long-time friend. Perhaps a friend was upset that they were not 'picked' to be first child's godparent and you just want to make them happy this time around. While all of these motives are clearly well intentioned and genuinely honorable, your choice of godparents must be motivated by something deeper.

We said that the role of the godparent is different and more active than most people think. Indeed, godparents serve a special role in the baptism of a child, but also in the life of that child going forward. Godparents are the representatives of the Catholic Christian community, the Church. Godparents are responsible for assisting you, parents, in raising your child in the faith. Godparents must exhibit in their lives a dedication to Jesus Christ, to the Church, and to the faith. They are to assist you in raising your child in the faith so that your child may profess that same faith as an adult.

Understanding what Baptism is and does helps us to understand what godparents are. Baptism gives your child a name and a new status and place in the life of Christ. Baptism opens the doors to eternal life and the promises of our Lord, Jesus Christ.

Once we consider the awesome nature of what happens in Baptism we can see why the Catechism of the Catholic Church states: “For the grace of Baptism to unfold, the parents’ help is important. So too is the role of the *godfather* and *godmother*, who must be firm believers, able and ready to help the newly baptized – child or adult – on the road of Christian life.” (CCC 1255) The work of a godparent is real work and not simply an honor.

Rather than choosing someone as a godparent to give them honor or to thank them for some service or gift, you should look for those in your life to truly live the faith. Those who do not live the faith can hardly assist you in passing faith and belief on to your child. Those who do not exhibit a dedication to the Church and to Christ in their lives really cannot be examples to your child of what it means to be a disciple of the Lord. There are, doubtless, many good people in your life who you may wish to honor or thank, but the role of godparent is a serious one which can only be filled by men and women of faith who are dedicated to walking with you and your child for years to come. If you wanted to learn how to play the piano you would hardly turn to someone who hadn’t touched the instrument in twenty years. If you wanted to learn how to paint you wouldn’t turn to someone who had never touched a paintbrush.

In our world it is not uncommon for young couples to not know many people who truly live their faith. If this is a problem you face, fear not! The Church knows that this is a common problem and wishes to assist you in celebrating your child’s baptism without stress or worry. The Church only requires one godparent. If you know a good couple, but only one is a faithful Catholic (say, for example, the husband is a Methodist), you could ask the Catholic to be a godparent and the other spouse to serve as a witness to the baptism. The non-Catholic can, of course, be an excellent example for your child, but only a practicing Catholic can give witness to the specific beliefs and ideals held out by the Church.

If, after long thought, you cannot come up with anyone who would be a suitable godparent for your child, feel free to contact the parish office. The priests, deacons, and other staff of St. Mark Church have occasionally served as godparents for the children of the parish. They would consider this a great honor and responsibility.

To summarize, here are the basic guidelines to selecting godparents for your child.

A godparent must be:

- 1) At least 16 years of age (for the sake of maturity)
- 2) Have been fully initiated into the Church themselves (specifically, they must have been baptized, have received their first communion, and have been confirmed.)
- 3) Be someone other than the parents or legal guardians of the child to be baptized.
- 4) Be living the Catholic faith (specifically, attendance at Mass on Sundays and Holy Days, fidelity to the teachings of the Church, be in a marriage recognized by the Church)
- 5) If you choose two godparents, one must be a man, the other a woman as they are to be true 'parents' to your child in the ways of faith.
- 6) You may have a non-Catholic assist at the Baptism as a witness, but they do not serve as a godparent in the way that a Catholic does.

All of this may seem like a great deal of fuss, but when we look at what Baptism is and what it does we begin to appreciate why the Church requires what she does. Your child is about to experience what is perhaps the most important moment in their life, baptism into the life of Christ and entrance into the family of the Church. The Church wishes to equip you and your child as best as possible. Faith-filled godparents are a safeguard which will assist your child in learning the faith, living the faith, and opening their hearts to the love and mercy of God. May you choose godparents with attention, prayer, and concern for the precious spiritual life of your child.



## Dear Godparents,

*Choosing a godparent is serious business – serving as a godparent is even more challenging.*

*Being asked to serve as a godparent is a great honor, but at the same time, it is a very serious matter.*

Being chosen to be a godparent says something very important about how you are perceived and valued by the parents of this child.

Before you rush into things, however, pray and think over the obligations that will be placed on you as a godparent. Are you willing to accept them? Do you have the time? Do you have the faith to live up to this sacred calling?

The calling to serve as a godparent is a sacred calling. Granted, you were asked by the parents of this child, but your calling really stems from God Himself. He is the one calling you to serve as a godparent.

Often we think that serving as a godparent is an honorific role. Once the baptism is over, you go home and return to your business. Sometimes we think that a godparent is there 'just in case' to help fill in for parents in their absence. Neither of these ideas is true. Godparents are called to serve as a second set of parents for this child. You will stand next to the Baptismal font with this child's parents and profess your faith and commit yourself to raising this child in that faith. Godparents are to be examples of faith and belief in the life of this child. Godparents are to be models of Christian charity and faithful dedication to Christ and His Church. From the moment of this child's baptism, you are set before him or her as an example of faith and pillar of spiritual support and encouragement. Heavy stuff, indeed!

You should reflect and ask yourself: Do I believe in Jesus Christ and His Church? Do I live my faith unashamedly? Do I live close to my godchild so that I can be a part of his or her life? Does my life reflect my faith – namely, am I active in charity; do I faithfully participate in the Mass on Sundays and Holy Days; am I living in a marriage recognized by the Church? Am I an active and faithful Catholic who can show my godchild what it means to love the Lord and live in His Church?

You will have to obtain a letter from your pastor attesting to these facts. If you are an active and faithful Catholic this should be no problem at all. If you anticipate some difficulty, perhaps you should question your ability to honestly serve as a godparent.

If you have asked yourself these questions, if you have prayed and reflected on your duties, do not be afraid. The calling to serve as a godparent is a beautiful and life-building call. The task is heavy and challenging, but also grace-filled and rewarding.

Here are a few suggestions to help you to be the best godparent to this child that you can be:

## **Preparation**

Prepare with the parents of this child. Baptism preparation classes are not just for natural parents – you are truly becoming a second parent to this child! Your willingness to prepare with these parents, to learn with these parents, and to pray with these parents says a great deal about you and your commitment to the faith.

### **The Day of the Baptism**

The priest or deacon begins the ritual of Baptism by asking the parents and godparents a series of questions:

“Parents, you have asked to have your children baptized. In doing so you are accepting the responsibility of training them in the practice of the faith. It will be your duty to bring them up to keep God’s commandments as Christ taught us, by loving God and our neighbor. Do you clearly understand what you are undertaking? Godparents, are you ready to help these parents in their duty as Christian mothers and fathers?”

By answering “We are” you confirm your role as a model of faith for this child. Even more powerfully, you will assist in placing the white garment on the child as a symbol of their new purity and identity as a child of God. You will assist in lighting their baptismal candle and the priest or deacon will say: “Parents and godparents, this light has been entrusted to you to be kept burning brightly.” Yours is a role that lasts long after the Baptismal liturgy is over. Your task begins today and lasts a lifetime.

### **Marking the Baptismal Day**

We are pretty good about remembering anniversaries and birthdays, but as a godparent you are tasked, as well, with remembering the anniversary of this child’s baptism. It is on this date that they were marked as a child of God and set aside for salvation. It is on this date that they can reflect on the great promise of eternal life that is offered to those who are faithful to the Lord. Make a photo album of this day to share with them when they are old enough. Send a card on this date reminding them that you are praying for them. Better

yet, get together on this day, take out that baptismal candle and light it saying a prayer that that light might continue to grow brighter in their heart.

### **Prayer**

Keep your godchild in your prayers. The greatest gift you can give them is the knowledge that you are praying for them and walking with them every step of their lives. Ask them to accompany you to Mass on Sundays and Holy Days – time spent with the Lord is never wasted time.

### **Walk the Way of Faith**

When your godchild is still young introduce them to children's prayers and a children's copy of the Bible.

As they grow older attend their First Holy Communion, and their Confirmation. It is beautiful custom in some countries to choose your godparent as your Confirmation sponsor.

Maintain your relationship by being present at your godchild's

wedding, ordination, or religious profession. Your prayers and example will help them to hear the voice of the Lord calling to them in their life.

As a godparent you have a duty to accompany this child in good times and in bad. You may be faced with the difficult task of challenging and confronting your godchild's parents if they begin to slip in their practice of the faith (for example, if they stop attending Mass or begin to be more faithful to their child's sports team than they are to God and His Church.) You have the duty of accompanying your godchild through their teenage years. You have the duty to discuss the vocations of marriage, priesthood, and religious life. You have the duty to assist them with the challenge of living a chaste relationship with their girl or boyfriend.

None of these duties are easy. They become more instinctive and natural for you as you practice your own faith and draw grace from the sacraments. If you have been lukewarm in your practice of the faith before now, renew your commitment to God and His Church today. Attend Mass and make sure to introduce yourself to the priest or deacon. Begin contributing to the life of the parish with your time and your resources.

Remember above all, being a godparent is more than standing up for a few minutes at a Baptism liturgy; it is the beginning of a lifetime of faith, inspiration, and care.

