

Frequently Asked Questions about Godparents

Who can be a godparent?

Godparents are generally expected to be:

- ❖ Over the age of 16
- ❖ Confirmed
- ❖ A family member or friend

Baptism requires at least one Catholic godparent. A Christian from another denomination may also serve as a witness.

Adults who are not Christian are not appropriate choices for godparents because the role of godparents is to be another adult witness to the Christian faith.

What is the main role of a godparent?

Primarily, a godparent's role is to make God's love real to the child, and to be another adult who takes an active interest in helping the child grow in relationship with God. Being a godparent does not presume sainthood, but does assume a willingness to grow in love and support of the child.

The godparent will need to be intentional to maintain a close relationship with his or her godchild. Find some ideas for this below.

What does the godparent do at the baptismal ceremony?

The godparents will stand with the parents and publicly acknowledge their commitment to support them in raising their child in the faith. With the parents, they will trace the sign of the cross on the child's forehead.

During the baptism itself, the godparents may or may not hold the child. (This can be decided ahead of time with the parents.) The godparents may light the baptismal candle and/or present the white garment to the child. The details vary slightly from parish to parish, but the priest or deacon will lead the godparents through it when the time comes.



What is the most important thing you can do? Be for this child and his or her parents someone special, someone who cares enough to be part of an important ritual of welcome into the faith, someone whose presence means more than presents, someone this child's—your godchild's—parents can trust, can turn to, can be honest with, can count on no matter what else is going on in the world. That, more than all the ceremonies in the world, characterizes the faith of baptism and the sense of true godparenting.

—Tom Sheridan, *The Gift of Godparents*

Are the godparents expected to give a gift(s)?

Someone can be a fantastic godparent without ever giving a single physical gift. However, if the godparents want to give gifts related to their role here are some ideas:

- ❖ **Water-related toys** like bath or pool toys, bubble bath, or swimsuits—because having fun with water is an easy way to informally remember the child's baptism.
- ❖ **A children's Bible** that is age appropriate, or will be soon (an adult Bible may just gather dust for many years). For suggestions, see GrowingUpCatholic.com/bibles.
- ❖ **Prayer or other religious books**, which can be found by perusing a local religious bookstore. Find suggestions for children's prayer books at: GrowingUpCatholic.com/prayer.
- ❖ **Activities** can also be great gifts, especially for older children. See some other ideas below.



What if a godparent can't be present at the baptismal ceremony?

A family member or friend can stand in at the ceremony as a proxy for the absent godparent, but the godparent's name will appear on the baptismal certificate.

If the child's parents die, will the godparents automatically become the child's legal guardian?

No, being a godparent has no legal connection to guardianship. If the parents want to name the godparents as the legal guardians in case of their death, they should discuss this ahead of time, get consent, and express it in a will.

How can I be a great godparent after the baptism?

There are, of course, many ways to do this, but here are some ideas to get you started:

- ❖ **Celebrate the child's baptism anniversary with him or her each year.** This can be a very special time of year for you to connect (put the recurring date in your phone or calendar now!). If possible, arranging to do something special with the child on this day can become a nice tradition. You might share your memories of the baptism, and show them pictures or videos. You may give water-related gifts or activities (e.g. water park or swimming). Or just do something else special and fun. If you want to regularly give gifts, giving on this anniversary rather than Christmas or a birthday will make it really stand out.
- ❖ **Be a good example.** The way you live your life will make a bigger impression

than what you say. This doesn't mean that you have to lead a perfect life (none of us do). But be attentive to what your actions say to your godchild. Especially be sure to pray and nurture your own spiritual life.

- ❖ **Share your faith.** You have a unique role in your godchild's life. Don't be afraid to talk to him or her about God and your personal faith. Your role isn't so much to teach the details of the faith, but to share your experience of what faith means in your life. Talk about how you pray and how being Catholic/Christian affects the decisions you make in your life.
- ❖ **Be a good listener and mentor.** You have the opportunity to be a very meaningful adult in your godchild's life as they grow up. Your godchild may feel comfortable enough to share things with you that s/he doesn't want to share with his or her parents. Listen carefully and be loving in response.
- ❖ **Support the parents in being the best parents they can be.** Offers to babysit will not only help you bond with your godchild, but can be a huge gift to the parents and their relationship.
- ❖ **Pray for your godchild.** Remember to keep your godchild in your prayers as he or she grows older, and pray that you can do your best as a godparent!

How can I learn more?

There are some wonderful books for godparents that will help you go a little deeper and give you more ideas. We recommend *The Gift of Godparents: A Handbook for Godparents* by Tom Sheridan, available for purchase at PastoralCenter.com.

