

Sacred Heart Church

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Are you being asked to be a Sponsor at Baptism or Confirmation?

A call to Christian Integrity

It is the ancient custom of the Church that a candidate for Baptism and for Confirmation has a sponsor (or godparent) who represents the extended faith community of the Catholic Church into which the candidate is being initiated. The role of sponsor is not merely ceremonial, nor is it simply a social role. To be someone's sponsor is to take an important religious and spiritual place in that person's life and to promise that you will help the candidate grow to maturity in the Catholic Church. Accepting the invitation to be a sponsor implies your own commitment to practice your faith and to give daily example to adult Catholic living in our modern world.

Often people ask: "What does the Church require of a sponsor?" While there are several specific requirements for serving as a sponsor, the more basic question is not: "Will the Church allow me to be a sponsor?" -- but rather: "Can I honestly allow myself to be a sponsor?" In other words, when you are invited to be a sponsor, you must first ask yourself if your own personal integrity allows you to stand at the altar to make a public profession of faith and to affirm that you practice your faith in your daily life. Are you being true to who you say you are as a believer?

It is true that the role of sponsor does not demand that you be a canonized saint. All of us need to rely upon the mercy of God for our sins and faults. Yet the role of sponsor does call for an individual who practices the sacramental life of the Church and "lives a life in harmony with the faith," that is, attends Mass regularly and if married, was married in the Catholic Church, or with the approval of the Catholic Church. If you are an actively practicing Catholic at this point in your life, you would make a great sponsor at Baptism or Confirmation!

Many of us know situations in which someone who has stopped participating in Mass and rarely receives the sacraments is asked to be a sponsor at Baptism or Confirmation. If you are in a similar situation now, I invite you to let this invitation be a real opportunity to grow in the Holy Spirit and in your own faith commitment. You could arrange to meet with a priest or deacon, or perhaps with a family member or friend who does practice the faith, to talk about the state of your faith life as an adult. Such a prayerful conversation may be the opportunity to begin a new and more faithful living out of your faith at this point in your life. Perhaps you are really not ready to make this kind of decision. If you cannot bring yourself to a renewed practice of the faith, then by all means be honest enough to politely decline the invitation to be a sponsor at this time. **This is what is meant by a call to personal integrity.**

If I or the parish staff at Sacred Heart Parish can assist you in your discernment of your own readiness to accept the responsibilities of sponsorship in the Church, please call us at the parish office. May the Lord guide you in deciding whether or not you can honestly complete and sign the affirmations listed on the Certificate of Eligibility.

WHAT DOES IT MEAN TO BE A GODPARENT OR SPONSOR? CONSIDER THIS SPONSOR'S GUIDE

As a Godparent/Baptism sponsor, you do have specific functions. The Church describes them as the following:

- To support the parents in communicating and nurturing the faith of the child
- To support the candidate in their faith development
- To accompany the candidate, if possible, to special liturgies
- To help the child or the candidate live as a follower of Jesus

Some of the following suggestions will not be possible if you live away from the area but be creative and think of ways to be in contact with the candidate.

- Arrange opportunities to spend time with the parents of the child or the candidate himself/herself, if age appropriate, and to enjoy being together. Some of these times can relate directly to the Baptism.
- Discuss with the parents of the child or the candidate the efforts, progress and problems experienced in preparing for the reception of Baptism. Help them to review the Basic Faith concepts and see if there are any questions or concerns.
- Offer suggestions and encouragement, as they are needed.
- Arrange some time to pray together or to read a passage from Scripture together. If you live close by, make plans to participate in the Eucharist (Mass) together.
- Keep in contact with the parents of the child or your candidate either in person or on the telephone.

Take time for yourself. Put aside some time for thinking and praying. Sponsors can begin to see how they can improve the quality of their role. There are many ways to go about this. One could just spend time alone, quietly reflecting; take up a journal and attempt writing one's reflections; or talk over things with a friend. You might ask yourself:

- Can I share my faith unashamedly?
- Do I live close enough to really get to know my Godchild/Candidate?
- Am I an active member of my local Catholic parish?
- What has being asked to be a Godparent taught me about my faith this week?
- What can I do to encourage the child or candidate I am sponsoring in his/her faith life?
- What do I want to pray especially for this week?

We pray that your role as a sponsor will be an enriching one.

A sponsor must meet the following requirements:

- *Is at least 16 years old*
- *Is a Catholic who has received all the Sacraments of Initiation (Baptism, Eucharist and Confirmation)*
- *Leads a life in harmony with the faith, that is, attends Mass regularly and if married, was married in the Catholic Church or with the approval of the Catholic Church.*
- *Is not the father or mother of the candidate*

The sponsor's home parish has the right to verify that he/she is qualified to be a sponsor.