



# St. Michael Catholic Church



## **GODPARENTING:**

**What does it mean to be a Catholic Godparent?**

August 25, 2021



## *St. Michael Catholic Church*

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Welcome and greetings in the name of Our Risen Lord Jesus Christ!

Thank you and congratulations on agreeing to assume and fulfill the role and responsibilities as a godparent to another person (e.g., a child or a catechumen in baptism or entering the RCIA process) in their faith journey.

While your responsibilities are serious, and the Church and your godchild-to-be will depend strongly on you, this can and often is, a time of prayerful, faith enrichment and rediscovering of God's presence and blessings in our daily lives.

May God bless you abundantly and afford the necessary knowledge, skills, and spiritual strength so that you may be a wonderful and inspiring Catholic godparent.

Respectfully  
Yours in Christ,

Fr. R.G. Newbury Jr.  
Pastor

# A GUIDE FOR GODPARENTS

## General Information:

Baptism, which is necessary for salvation for the Christian, is the sign and means of God's enduring love, which frees us from original sin and communicates to us a share in His divine life. Considered in itself, the gift of these blessings to infants must not be delayed. Christian instruction and the preparation for the Sacrament of Baptism are a vital concern of God's people, the Church, which hands on and nourishes the faith it has received from the Apostles.

The baptism of a baby or an adult (in the RCIA process; henceforth referred to as a "catechumen") is a wonderful occasion, and you have been asked to participate and fulfill a very important and special part in the person's life. Being a godparent is a time honored, privilege. Each child (a person under 7 years of age (the age of reason)) or catechumen is to have a godfather and/or a godmother—one male or one female or one of each (Canon 873). But, what do you do when you're asked to be a godparent? That question has a great deal of responsibility because you will share in the joy and responsibility of raising the person in the spiritual life of the Catholic faith. Within the Catholic Church there are minimum requirements for godparents. A baptismal godparent is: (Canon 874)

- invited by the parent/guardian of the child or the catechumen, as applicable, to be a godparent;
- at least sixteen years old;
- a Catholic who has received all of the Sacraments of Initiation; \*
- one who leads a life that will be a good Christian Catholic example for the person;
- one who is not bound by any canonical penalty legitimately imposed or declared;
- not the child's parent;
- one who has led a life of faith within the Catholic Church for at least 3 years, and
- one who understands and commits to supporting the parents in the continuing spiritual life of the godchild (e.g., First Holy Communion, Confirmation, etc).

Note: \* Baptized, non-Catholics may serve in a capacity or role called a *witness*. However, there must be at least one other godparent who is a Catholic, in good standing, and meets all of the aforementioned minimum requirements.

The purpose of this informational booklet is to get to the heart of what it means to be a Christian godparent. Much of the work in fulfilling the godparent role and responsibilities will unfold in the future, after the baptismal ceremony. Let us now examine each responsibility and characteristic individually.

## The Invitation:

The first requirement for being a godparent is that you must be asked and invited to perform this role by the child's parents/guardian or the catechumen. The process of

being asked and invited has its foundation throughout the history of Christianity. Our faith relies on the fact that God has invited us into a relationship. Abraham, the man we hear about in the Book of Genesis, is called the father of our faith, because God invited him into a relationship and Abraham accepted the invitation. This invitation and its acceptance was the beginning of our Christian faith, rooted in Judaism.

To be asked and invited to perform the important role of godparent means that someone thought you will be a good and loving influence on the child or catechumen and believes that you will help unfold God's plan to the person to be baptized. It is crucially important you understand the significance of this invitation. Good Christians know they are deeply loved and valued by God. They also know they have a responsibility to share that love with others. That is a part of the godparent's role and responsibility. The more you know and appreciate the love you have received from God and others, the more capable you will be of sharing that love with others, especially to your godchild or catechumen.

#### Maturity:

A successful godparent must be mature and growing in wisdom and faith. The minimum age requirement is sixteen. The presumption is that a dedicated, practicing Catholic develops a deeper love for God and for other people as they mature. Wisdom grows when we use each day to find opportunities to serve God and other people.

Wise people think less about what they'll get out of a situation or a relationship and more about what they can give to a situation or relationship. As Jesus said, "*It is more blessed to give than to receive*" (Acts 20:35). Your dedication to maturing in your faith by living with a servant's heart will help you be the best godparent you can be. Your mature and wise example will make a difference in the heart and faith life of your godchild or catechumen.

Prayer is a central part of our Christian faith. Prayer is a time of talking with and listening to God. Time in conversation with God daily will help you in achieve maturity in your spiritual life and your role as a godparent. Godparents are encouraged to pray with their godchild regularly, particularly at special times in the person's life. Regularly tell your godchild or catechumen that you pray for him or her—and do it!

#### Having Received the Sacraments of Initiation:

The Catechism of the Catholic Church says that "*for the grace of Baptism to unfold the ... godfather and godmother ... must be firm believers, able and ready to help the newly baptized—child or adult—on the road of Christian life*" (CCC, #1255)

The role of a godparent is to help the parents raise their child or instruct the catechumen as a dedicated Catholic. You will not be able to do that, unless you yourself are a deeply dedicated Catholic and are confident in the faith. A Christian who isn't Catholic can certainly have a strong, positive influence on the faith life of a Catholic child, which is why the Church permits a non-Catholic Christian to participate in the baptismal

ceremony as a *witness*, alongside a qualified Catholic godparent. That said however, the non-Catholic Christian cannot readily help with the child's or catechumen's Catholic religious education.

A desire of Catholic baptism is to initiate a person into the Catholic Church. It is almost impossible to achieve that goal, without surrounding a young Catholic with a diverse community of dedicated Catholics. The godparent represents that community and is, in a very special way, primary among those who set a good Catholic example for the person.

Take a moment to think about your present dedication to your own Catholic faith:

- Do you have a daily prayer life?
- How often do you read the Gospels and other parts of the Bible?
- How do you enrich your understanding of your faith?
- Do you read books that help you deepen your understanding of the faith?
- Do you attend classes, seminars, or workshops offered by your parish to enrich your understanding of the faith?
- How do you daily live out your faith?
- Do you freely offer your time, talent, and treasure to your parish?
- Do you freely offer your time, talent, and treasure to social justice activities (locally, nationally or internationally)?
- How do you respond to the needs of the sick, homeless, those in mourning or prison?

These questions and topics are not intended to make you a “super Catholic”; but are intended to help you think about the practical connections between your faith and your daily choices and activities. In short: What you believe, determines to a large extent, how you behavior, and how you behave will make a significant difference in your godchild's or catechumen's life.

#### Church Impediments and Penalties:

The Church is made up of human beings, who are sinful and possess limitations. While we strive for and hope to participate in the perfect kingdom of God, we obviously are not there yet.

The Church can impose excommunication (restriction from sacramental participation, Catholic worship, and Catholic ministry) or a lesser penalty on Catholics who willfully and knowingly commit a grave offense and do not seek forgiveness and reconciliation. People under such penalties should not be considered for the role of godparent until the underlying issue(s) are resolved.

There is a key principal to remember: If you cannot receive Holy Communion within the Holy Mass and other sacraments\* because of, for example, an existing irregular marriage (e.g., a marriage outside the Catholic Church, which has not yet been recognized by it);

an enduring state of self-sterilization (e.g., vasectomy or tubal ligation), etc.), etc., you cannot be godparent at this time, until the impediments are rectified within the Church.

(\* Sacraments are efficacious signs of God's grace, instituted by Christ, and entrusted to the Church, by which divine life is dispensed to us. The visible rites by which the sacraments are celebrated signify and make present the graces proper to each sacrament. They bear fruit in those who receive them with the required dispositions (CCC #1131). Within the Catholic Church, baptism is the first and foundational sacrament amongst the seven.)

### A Partnership with the Parents:

Parents are the most important influence on the growth and development of any child, but parents who try to raise children entirely on their own are setting themselves up for potential failure. When a child is baptized, the Church reminds parents in an unmistakable way that they are not alone and that they will need help. A wonderful and supportive community—the Church community—stands ready and willing to assist parents in the most important and challenging work they will ever do. Godparents are a visible sign of the Church's enduring presence and support for parents.

Godparents play an important role in helping keep our children, catechumens, and faith communities active and safe. Your active role as a godparent, will do far more good than you can imagine, and your absence in the life of this person to be baptized can promote many undesirable consequences. Indeed, godparenting is a powerful and important responsibility.

One of the beautiful things about godparents is that they fulfill their role in complete freedom. A common question is heard: If something happens to the parents, will I have to adopt the child because I am a godparent? Being a godparent does not carry with it any civil, legal or moral obligation to adopt a child, if the parents die. Guardianship of children is something parents should set up when they are making a will or power of attorney. Parents can ask a godparent to also be a legal guardian or ask someone else. All the Church asks of you to do for the child, as their godparent, will be to give, in God-like fashion, a free and undeserved expression of love and guidance in the faith.

### The Baptismal Ceremony:

Our Catholic baptism looks back to the practice of the early Church. From the very beginning, at Pentecost, the followers of Jesus called on people to repent and to be baptized and receive the Holy Spirit. It is because faith has been handed down from generation-to-generation, that we gather to baptize and welcome a new member into the Christian community. It is because of the gift of our own baptism that we can take on the role of being a godparent.

In the first part of the baptismal ceremony, a member of the clergy, receives the child and welcomes everyone to the ceremony. Then he asks both the parents and Godparents specific questions. First, in that baptism identifies the child as a child of God and

incorporates them into the Body of Christ, it is appropriate that the child formally be given their name during the baptismal ceremony. After asking the parents whether they willingly accept the responsibility of raising their child in the faith, the priest or deacon will ask you, as the Godparent, if you are ready to help the parents in their duty as Christian parents.

**(NB:** If for some reason the Godparent(s) cannot be physically present for the actual baptism ceremony in the Church, a proxy (or stand-in) is not acceptable or permitted by the laws of the Roman Catholic Church.)

By declaring publicly that you are ready to be a godparent, you are committing yourself to being a good role model for this child. This does not mean you have to be perfect, but it does mean that you must develop the practice of acknowledging your weaknesses and work on deepening your relationship with Christ and His Church.

The priest or deacon will then make a sign of the cross on the child's forehead and ask the parents and godparents to do the same. You simply trace a cross on the child's forehead with your thumb.

### **Prayer of Exorcism and Anointing Before Baptism**

The priest or deacon will say a prayer called an *exorcism* and anoint the child/catechumen with the Oil of the Catechumen. The exorcism prayer expresses God's will and our desire to protect the person to be baptized from evil. The anointing with oil on the chest/breast is a symbol of God's protection and strength, which will remain with the person to be baptized throughout their life.

### **Celebration of the Sacrament**

Now, at the heart of the ceremony, the priest or deacon will bless the baptismal font's water and call the parents, godparents, and other members of the gathered faith community to renounce sin and profess the faith of the Church. You are asked to profess your faith only if you are ready to accept your responsibility as a godparent. The priest or deacon will then ask a series of short questions, that the parents and godparents will be asked to answer.

### Water

Water is essential for life. It is a sign that sin dies in our hearts, when Christ is born in our hearts. As you watch the water pouring during the baptism, think of the way's you are called to weed out sin in your own heart, so Christ's love can grow stronger in you and your godchild or catechumen.

### Sacred Chrism Oil

The word *Christ* means “*anointed*,” so we call upon Jesus *the Christ* because he is “the anointed one.” The priest or deacon next anoints the child a second time; this time on the crown of the head, to signify the messianic anointing of Jesus as Priest, Prophet, and King. This anointing is a reminder that this child (as are all Christians) is invited to share in the ministry of Jesus Christ.

Every Christian is called to be:

- **Priestly:** one who worships God in a community of believers;
- **Prophetic:** one who listens closely to God and speaks God’s truth without fear or unjust consequence; and
- **Kingly:** one who leads others to God with wise words and good example.

### White Garment

A special, white garment is then placed on the child/catechumen after the anointing. It is often provided by the family and is a symbol of the new purity of this person’s Christian dignity. The baptized person is truly a new creation in Christ. This symbol also calls you, as the godparent, to renew and protect your own Christian dignity as well, as to protect the dignity of others.

### Lighted Candle

The light of Christ burns brightly in the heart of every Christian. The world can see this light in our good words and works. In this part of the ceremony, the priest or deacon addresses the parents and godparents as the baptized person receives the baptismal candle, because they have a particular responsibility to show this baptized person the light of Christ in their own daily, Christian living.

You may be asked to light the baptismal candle from the parish’s, large paschal or Easter candle, that burns during the entire ceremony. The Easter candle represents Jesus Christ, the baptismal candle represents Christ’s life in the baptized person, and the person who lights the candle represents the willingness of family and friends to help the child grow in the light of Christ. During this part of the ceremony, recall the people who are the light of Christ for you. Pray you will be the light of Christ to your godchild or catechumen as well.

### Ephphetha (Prayer over Ears and Mouth)

Jesus touched and healed many people when he walked among us. As a sign of Christ’s healing ministry, the priest or deacon touches the ears and mouth of the baptized person. This simple ritual and accompanying prayer, symbolize the power of God, who opens our ears to hear His Word and opens our mouth to proclaim His message, glory, and praise.

### Concluding Rite

The priest or deacon then leads the community in a closing prayer and blessing, and all are then asked to depart the ceremony and church in the love and peace of God.

### Additional Information:

**Rite of Christian Initiation of Adults (RCIA)** (adults and children entering the Church who are 7 years of age or older): Insofar as possible, a person to be baptized, is to be given a [godparent] ... who accompanies the catechumen at the celebration of the Rite of Election, at their baptism, and during the period of post-baptismal catechesis (Canons 872, 874). Therefore, baptismal instruction for parents and godparents are deemed necessary within the U.S. Catholic Church. While the aforementioned baptismal ceremony is worded for a “child”, the catechumen will experience a similar ceremony; without the requirement for parental permissions, since the person is of the age of reason.

**A PRAYER OF GODPARENTS**

Loving, merciful, and all-powerful God, parenting is inspired by the perfect example you showed us in your relationship with Jesus, Your Son. Thank you for calling me to the ministry of godparenting. Craft me into a worthy godparent. Forgive my failings and bless my successes. Watch over my godchild \_\_\_\_, today and every day, and bless his/her parents \_\_\_\_.

Through the intercession of the Blessed Virgin Mary, fill us all with your love and life, so our relationships will be a blessing to the world.

We ask this through Our Lord Jesus Christ, Your Son, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, One God for ever and ever.

(Amen.)

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