



SPONSORS AND GODPARENTS

Archdiocese of Toronto

2005

It is the responsibility of godparents to show the candidates how to practice the Gospel in personal and social life, to sustain the candidates in moments of hesitancy and anxiety, to bear witness, and to guide the candidates' progress in the baptismal life. *R.C.I.A. Introduction, no. 11*

A ministry of welcome

The role of the sponsor in the life of those preparing for the sacraments of Christian initiation and in the living out of the new life of baptism is both an ancient tradition and a modern concern. Sponsors are not merely witnesses to a life event. They are active participants in the process of sacramental initiation. They are people of firm faith and committed love, ministers of the Church's care in welcoming those whom the Holy Spirit has awakened to faith.

Representing the Church

The entire Church has responsibility for welcoming and forming those who seek the sacraments of Christian initiation. In practice, this means that priests, deacons and catechists will be the ones directly connected with the days before the celebration of the sacraments. In fact, the primary responsibility rests with parents, with the Christian community, and with the sponsors as representatives of the community and as Christians who journey in faith with the candidates.

To bear life-long witness

The role of the sponsor extends far beyond the occasion of the celebrations. The sponsor is present as the journey of faith begins, is mentor during the period of preparation, is witness to the event of baptism (reception into communion, confirmation), and offers support in the days that follow. The sponsor is one who provides the candidate with personal contact with a life of faith - - the sponsor's own life -- and a means of coming to know the Church. It is an important office not a matter of personal status, family recognition or reward.

Tradition and the ritual books often use the word godparent to describe those sponsors who present candidates for baptism. Although the terms are used interchangeably, godparent reflects a further indication of the unique relationship engendered between the baptized and those who

present them. Sponsors and godparents are individuals who accept a particular duty to care for the Christian life of those they bring to the waters of rebirth and the gift of the Spirit

Sponsors --- then

In the earlier days of the Church, the emphasis for those who wished to be baptized was less about what you knew regarding the teachings of the Church and more how you lived the life of faith. The sponsor, one who walked with you and showed you the "how" of Christian life, was even regarded as more important than the catechist-teacher.

During the days and even years of the catechumenate those seeking baptism patterned themselves on the lives of other Christians, particularly the example of their sponsors. The Church realized that we best learn how to repent, fast, pray, celebrate and serve by association with those who actually do these things and not simply by being lectured on their importance.

The sponsor was particularly responsible for bring the seekers through the moments leading to initiation and for supporting them until they were able to stand alone. A sponsor was the personal representative of the Christian community -- a witness, guarantor, and guide.

Sponsors --- now

It becomes clearer then that there are definite qualifications for the sponsor. This individual is not simply a friend or relative, but one who has some Christian authenticity and who is willing to take responsibility for the Christian life of the candidate. Each sponsor is there both a guarantor of the faith of the candidate and a representative of the entire faith community.

Clearly, sponsors must have the capability and intention of carrying out their responsibility and be mature enough to do so. They must themselves have received the sacraments of initiation (Baptism, Confirmation, Eucharist) and be living lives consistent with faith and the responsibility of their role. They are baptized, believing, and practicing members of the Catholic Church.

Sponsors (godparents) should always reflect on the responsibility that comes with their role. They are customarily invited to participate in some aspects of the preparation of the candidates for the sacraments of initiation. Sponsors who are lax or careless in the practice of their faith simply are not prepared to take on such a responsibility.

The relationship forged through the sacraments suggests that the godparent-sponsor be physically and geographically able to support and influence the religious life of the candidate. The notion of "honourary" or "proxy" sponsors is incompatible with their unique role.

What does this ministry involve for: The Christian Initiation of Adults

The initiation of adults extends through the period of the catechumenate and culminates in the celebration of the sacraments of Baptism, Confirmation, and First Eucharist. During this time sponsors offer the candidates good example, faith and friendship; as godparents they present the elects for baptism. These are Christians approved by the community because of their own faith and Christian witness. They are individuals who know and have assisted the candidates; adults who are able to stand as witnesses to the candidates' moral character, faith, and intention; committed Catholics who will help the newly initiated persevere in the grace they have received.

The Reception into Full Communion with the Catholic Church

Those who are already baptized and wish to join the Catholic Church make a profession of faith and receive (Confirmation and) First Eucharist. Their sponsors (usually one, although two are permitted) are Christian adults who have had the chief part in guiding and preparing the candidates. They present the candidates for initiation and assist them in the days ahead.

Baptism of Children

The role of godparents at the baptism of children is modeled on the sponsor in the initiation of adults. Godparents are representatives of the extended spiritual family of the Church. Along with the parents, they present a child for baptism, serve as official representatives of the community of faith, and, renewing their own commitment, join the parents in the renunciation of sin and the profession of faith. After baptism, they share with the parents the role of teachers and models of faith for the child with whom they contact a unique and life long spiritual relationship. Parents will wish to exercise great care in the selection of godparents.

Although only one sponsor (godparent) is required for the baptism of a child, two (but only two) are permitted, as godfather and godmother.

At the request of the parents, a "baptized and believing" Christian not belong to the Catholic Church may act as a Christian witness, but only along with a Catholic godparent.

Confirmation

All the above applies equally to the sponsor at confirmation, who is ideally the same person who served as godparent at baptism. This is, after all, someone already involved with the faith of the candidate now come to this further moment of Christian initiation. The sponsor is able to assure the community that the candidate is ready and so presents him/her to the minister for anointing. Afterwards, the sponsor helps the confirmed to fulfill their baptismal promises under the influence of the Holy Spirit whom they have received.

The sponsors accompany the candidates as they approach the bishop and place their right hand on the candidates shoulder during the anointing.

"Out of the believer's heart shall flow rivers of living water." John 7:38

Sponsors and Godparents

Canon 874 sets out the following criteria for those who would be sponsors or godparents at baptism, confirmation or reception into full communion with the Catholic Church

- * Chosen by the one to be baptized (confirmed, received into communion), by the parents or, in their absence, by the pastor or minister.
- * Have the qualifications and intentions of fulfilling this responsibility.
- * Be at least 16 years of age.
- * A Catholic who has already been confirmed and received first Communion and who leads a life in harmony with faith and this role.
- * Not the father or mother of the candidate.
- * Canonically free to carry out the office of sponsor or godparent

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