

## *Choosing Godparents*

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From time to time questions arise as to who may serve as a Godparent for the Sacrament of Baptism. Therefore, I would like to review the guidelines established by the Catholic Church concerning Godparent eligibility. These regulations should be considered *before* parents ask someone to be serve as a Godparent for their son or daughter:

- 1) The decision as to who should be a Godparent should be based upon who would provide the best example of Catholic living for the child and not merely for reasons of maintaining family harmony. A Godparent is chosen not primarily to honor the Godparent, but for the well-being and faith development of the child.
- 2) In order to be a Godparent for Baptism, an individual *must* be a practicing Catholic, at least 16 years of age and have received the Sacraments of Initiation (i.e. Baptism, Holy Communion and Confirmation). Furthermore, if this person is married, then the marriage *must* be a valid, sacramental marriage (i.e. one recognized and blessed by the Catholic Church).
- 3) The potential Godparent *must* be registered in a Catholic parish and able to obtain from his or her parish priest a letter of eligibility to be a Godparent.
- 4) Only one Godparent is required by Church law. However, if two Godparents are selected (the more common practice), then there must be one man and one woman chosen. In other words, a child cannot have two men or two women as Godparents.
- 5) In extraordinary situations when two Catholic Godparents cannot be found, then a baptized person who belongs to another Christian denomination (e.g. Methodist, Lutheran, Presbyterian) may serve as a *Christian Witness*. However, former Catholics who have left the Catholic Church for another Christian denomination *are not* permitted to serve as Christian Witnesses.

Since Baptism is the initial, foundational Sacrament in the life of a Catholic, great care must be taken in deciding who will serve as a Godparent. The guidelines above are meant to assist parents in making a reasonable and secure decision as to who will fulfill this critical role for their child. Because they are provided by the universal Church, individual parish priests are not vested with the authority to dispense from these guidelines.