

Choosing Godparents for Baby's Baptism

Question: Can you please clarify for me, something that is confusing regarding choosing godparents for baby's baptism in the Catholic Church. Having been born and raised in the Catholic faith and a practicing Catholic, it was always my understanding that as long as one godparent is Catholic, that it was OK to have the other godparent be a non-Catholic person to be the godparent. Can you please reply as to whether I am correct? I would appreciate hearing from you. Thank you.

Answer: Thank you for your question regarding who may be considered as a godparent for a Catholic baptism. A non-Catholic person may not be a godparent at a Catholic baptism. Only a practicing Catholic who meets the qualifications of a confirmed Catholic, age 16 or older, and has received the Sacrament of the Eucharist, may be a godparent or sponsor for baptism.

A non-Catholic baptized Christian can participate in the Rite of Baptism as a "Christian witness," however a Catholic godparent must also be present.

The godparent name is entered into the parish record book as the "official" godparent or sponsor for baptism. Though it is ideal to select two Catholic godparents, (one female, one male) the Church only requires that there be one godparent.

The role of a godparent is more than being a relative or friend who encourages Christian behavior. The godparent represents the Church, the community of faith, into which the child is being baptized, and will assist the child to grow in that community. For a Catholic baptism, only a Catholic can take on this responsibility.

Below is a Canon Law citation regarding the selection of godparents.

Can. 872 – Insofar as possible, a person to be baptized is to be given a sponsor who assists an adult in Christian initiation or together with the parents presents an infant for baptism. A sponsor also helps the baptized person to lead a Christian life in keeping with baptism and to fulfill faithfully the obligations inherent in it.

Can. 873 – There is to be only one male sponsor or one female sponsor or one of each.

Can. 874 §1 – To be permitted to take on the function of sponsor a person must:

1. be designated by the one to be baptized, by the parents or the person who takes their place, or in their absence by the pastor or minister and have the aptitude and intention of fulfilling this function;
2. have completed the 16th year of age, unless the diocesan bishop has established another age, or the pastor or minister has granted an exception for a just cause;
3. be a Catholic who has been confirmed and has already received the most holy Sacrament of the Eucharist and who leads a life of faith in keeping with the function to be taken on;
4. not be bound by any canonical penalty legitimately imposed or declared;
5. not be the father or mother of the one to be baptized.

§2 – A baptized person who belongs to a non-Catholic ecclesial community is not to participate except together with a Catholic sponsor and then only as a witness of the baptism.