

A WORD ABOUT GODPARENTS

As parents you may have decided already who the godparents of your child will be. Or you may be at the point of considering who to ask. Either way, it is helpful to know what exactly the role of a godparent is in the eyes of the Church and what specific requirements there are for a godparent.

Your child's godparents are required to be members of the Catholic Church and to have celebrated all three sacraments of initiation – Baptism, Confirmation, Eucharist. There is the further requirement that they are living a life consistent with faith – given their role as a godparent. Quite simply this means that they must be seeking to live a life informed by their Catholic faith – with all the struggles that that entails. A godparent is not a super-Catholic! But hopefully a godparent is someone who is comfortable with their Catholic identity and is willing to support parents who are handing on this faith to their child.

Obviously the responsibility of being a godparent is one that requires a level of maturity. In the Catholic Church a person of sixteen years is deemed to have reached this level and, therefore, a godparent is someone who is sixteen years or older.

It is perfectly acceptable to have just one godparent but where there are two, one male and one female is required.

At the request of the parents, a baptised and believing Christian, not belonging to the Catholic Church, may also act as a Christian witness along with a Catholic godparent. They are registered as a witness in the baptism register.

So in considering who you ask to be a godparent to your child the above needs to be considered. You are asking a godparent of your child to support you as you hand on faith.

A WORD FOR GODPARENTS

It is a huge honour and privilege to be asked to be a godparent to a child. Being a godparent puts you in a particular relationship with this child – a connection now exists between the two of you that cannot be taken away. And that is a tremendous gift.

You may be wondering what is the role of a godparent? What are you expected to do? Is there a job description? The primary role of a godparent is one of support. At the very beginning of the ceremony of baptism you are asked: "Are you ready to help these parents in their duty as Christian mothers and fathers?"

This is what is being asked of you. This is your job description. The support is in the context of mothers and fathers handing on the Christian faith.

As friends or family members there is no doubt but that you will want to support these parents. But the question you are being asked in the ceremony of baptism is whether you are ready to help them in raising their child in the Christian faith. This is a question that you may need to ponder. It is an opportunity for you to reflect on whether you are in a position to offer this kind of support.

How can you show this support? On the day of baptism it can be expressed by your participation in the ceremony itself. There are definite things you will be asked to do during the ceremony. For example, you will be invited to sign the child on the forehead with the sign of the cross at the beginning of the ceremony. There are questions that will be asked of you during the ceremony and you will be

asked to come to the baptismal font at the time of baptism in solidarity with the parents. Your engagement in all these questions and actions will itself offer support to parents.

In the days and years after the baptism there will be ample opportunities to show your support - birthdays, anniversaries of baptisms, first communion days, confirmation...On these days you might consider the gift of time you can give to your godchild. Your presence at significant religious events in their life will underscore the importance of these occasions.

Outside of these events, you can encourage and help nurture the child's emerging faith through your conversations and time spent with them.

You might also consider the physical gifts you give your godchild. There may be opportunities to give your godchild gifts such as a bible, a cross, religious images, music, DVD's and books that reflect the Christian faith.

But the greatest gift you can give is the gift of your example and love – a love that makes the Christian life visible.

Taken from Julie Kavanagh & Maeve Mahon, 'A Welcome for Your Child', (Veritas)