

The Role of the Sponsor/Godparent:

(The following is taken from the General Introduction of the Rite of Christian Initiation, paragraphs 8-10)

8. It is a very ancient custom of the Church that adults are not admitted to baptism without godparents, members of the Christian community who will assist the candidates at least in the final preparation for baptism and after baptism will help them persevere in the faith and in their lives as Christians. In the baptism of children, as well, godparents are to be present in order to represent both the expanded spiritual family of the one to be baptized and the role of the Church as a mother. As occasion offers, godparents help the parents so that children will come to profess the faith and live up to it.

9. At least in the later rites of the catechumenate and in the actual celebration of baptism, the part of godparents is to testify to the faith of adult candidates or, together with the parents, to profess the Church's faith, in which children are baptized.

10. Therefore godparents, chosen by the catechumens or by the families of children to be baptized, must, in the judgment of the parish priest (pastor), be qualified to carry out the proper liturgical functions mentioned in no. 9. The godparent should:

- be mature enough to undertake this responsibility,
- have received the three sacraments of initiation, baptism, confirmation, and the eucharist;
- be a member of the Catholic Church, canonically free to carry out this office. A baptized and believing Christian from a separated church or community may act as a godparent or Christian witness along with a Catholic godparent, at the request of the parents and in accordance with the norms for various ecumenical cases.

Questions and Answers:

Can a Catholic ever be a "Christian Witness?"

No. The Catholic must meet all the requirements for Catholics, even if the other godparent is Catholic. For example, the parents have, with difficulty, decided on one sponsor who is Catholic and meets all the requirements. The second sponsor is "hard to find," and may be a Catholic who never was confirmed, or someone who has left the Church. In these cases, the Catholic cannot stand as the "Christian witness," i.e., someone who has left the Church cannot sponsor a person into the Church. A Catholic who has left the Church is still considered as a Catholic under the penalty of excommunication. (Such a person is no longer bound by the canonical form of marriage, however.)

Can a Catholic be a Christian witness at a non-Catholic baptism?

Yes. Just as a baptized non-Catholic can be a witness with a Catholic at a Catholic baptism, a Catholic can be a witness with a baptized non-Catholic at a non-Catholic baptism.

Can an unbaptized person be a godparent?

No. Because the sponsor or Christian witness renews the promises made at their own baptism, an unbaptized person cannot be permitted to be the godparent.

Can a priest or deacon be a sponsor?

Yes. The former legislation requiring permission from the ordinary because of spiritual relationship is abrogated.

Can a priest or deacon be the officiant and the sponsor?

Yes. When the priest or deacon is the officiant and the sponsor, he designates a proxy for the godparent during the rite of baptism.

Can the godparents be changed at a later date?

No. Although other changes can be authorized for the baptismal register, this one is not permitted in the Diocese of Las Cruces (somewhat analogous to changing the best man and maid of honor in the marriage register).

Can there be a proxy for the godparent?

Yes. Proxies for the godparents are acceptable when the sponsors cannot be physically present on the day of the baptism. The name of the designated sponsor is entered in the register. The name of the proxy is entered under the name of the sponsor with the remark proxy.

Can a catechumen be a sponsor?

No. Those who are unbaptized may not sponsor a person into the Catholic Church.

Requirements for Sponsors/Godparents

Requirements for the Catholic:

- at least sixteen years old and
- baptized and confirmed and received the Eucharist
- living an upright life
- no penalties (e.g., left the church, etc.). Therefore, a Catholic who has left the Catholic Church cannot be a sponsor, and cannot be a “Christian witness” if they join another Christian communion.

- cannot be either parent
- “Christian Witness”
- be a Catholic who has been confirmed and has already received the sacrament of the Most Holy Eucharist and leads a life in harmony with the faith and the role undertaken;
- not be bound by a canonical penalty legitimately imposed or declared.

Requirements for the Christian Witness

- at least sixteen years old
- a validly baptized Christian
- living an upright life
- cannot be either parent
- cannot be a Catholic who has left the Church
- The notation Christian witness is placed under the name of the non-Catholic Christian witness in the baptismal register
- baptized non-Catholic with Catholic sponsor
- the other sponsor may be a baptized Christian of a different faith. This person is a “Christian witness” (and not a “sponsor”).
- The other witness with a Catholic sponsor may never be non-baptized. For example, Jewish or Muslim godparents are not permitted by universal church law.
- From the 1983 code of Canon Law Canon 874, 1: To be admitted to the role of sponsor, a person must:
 - be designated by the one to be baptized, by the parents or the one who takes their place or, in their absence, by the pastor or minister and is to have the qualifications and intention of performing this role.
 - have completed their sixteenth year, unless a different age has been established by the diocesan bishop or it seems to the pastor or minister that an exception is to be made for a just cause.
 - Not be the father or the mother of the one to be baptized.