

## ***Diocese of Stockton***

### ***Policy Regarding Sponsors for Baptism***

#### **The Sacrament of Baptism**

“Through baptism men and women are incorporated into Christ. They are formed into God’s people, and they obtain forgiveness of all their sins. They are raised from their natural human condition to the dignity of adopted children. They become a new creation through water and the Holy Spirit. Hence they are called, and are indeed, the children of God.” *Rite of Baptism for Children, 2*

“Baptism is the door to life and to the kingdom of God.” *Rite of Baptism for Children, 3*

“Baptism, the gateway to the sacraments and necessary for salvation by actual reception or at least by desire, is validly conferred only by a washing of true water with the proper form of words. Through baptism men and women are freed from sin, are reborn as children of God, and, configured to Christ by an indelible character, are incorporated into the Church.” Canon 849

“Holy Baptism is the basis of the whole Christian life, the gateway to life in the Spirit (*vitae spiritualis ianua*), and the door which gives access to the other sacraments. Through Baptism we are freed from sin and reborn as sons of God; we become members of Christ, are incorporated into the Church and made sharers in her mission: ‘Baptism is the sacrament of regeneration through water and in the world.’” *Catechism of the Catholic Church, 1213*

“Are you unaware that we who were baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into his death? We were indeed buried with him through baptism into death, so that, just as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, we too might live in newness of life.” *Romans 6:3-4*

#### **The Tradition of the Church**

“Will you allow me now to address some words to your sponsors so that they may know the rewards they are worthy of if they show great care for you and the punishment that will ensue if they become negligent? They should not consider that what they are doing is a routine action. Rather they should be fully aware that they will share the credit if they guide their charges to the path of virtue by their advice, but that if they are negligent, then grave condemnation will fall upon them. For this reason it is the custom to call them “spiritual parents,” in order that they may learn from their office the affection they owe to their charges in giving them spiritual instruction. For if it is a noble thing to lead those who are in no way connected with us to a desire of virtue, we have much greater duty to fulfill this obligation to one whom we have received to the position of our spiritual child.” *John Chrysostom, Fourth Century*

## Policy Statement on Sponsors for Baptism

### I. Responsibilities of Being a Sponsor

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.<sup>1</sup>

### II. Requirements of Being a Sponsor

There is to be only one male sponsor or one female sponsor or one of each.<sup>2</sup>

The sponsor must:

- 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,<sup>3</sup>

The sponsor must have completed the sixteenth year of age, unless the pastor has granted an exception for a just cause;<sup>4</sup>

The sponsor must:

- 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;<sup>5</sup>

The sponsor must not be bound by any canonical penalty legitimately imposed or declared;<sup>6,7</sup>

The sponsor must not be the father or mother of the one to be baptized.<sup>8</sup>

The Diocese of Stockton requires preparation for sponsors for baptism. For infant baptism, the sponsor(s) must complete the baptism preparation program with the parents or at his/her own parish. For the Rite of Christian Initiation of Adults (RCIA), the sponsor should be present with the catechumen throughout his or her preparation.

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<sup>1</sup> Canon 872

<sup>2</sup> Canon 873

<sup>3</sup> Canon 874§1,1

<sup>4</sup> Canon 874§1,2

<sup>5</sup> Canon 874§1,3

<sup>6</sup> Canon 874§1,4

<sup>7</sup> Canons 1364 -1399

<sup>8</sup> Canon 874§1,5

Eastern rite church participants who are in full communion with the Catholic Church can be a sponsor only along with a Catholic sponsor from the Roman Rite.

A baptized Christian 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.<sup>9</sup> The role of witness is reserved for Christians not initiated into the Catholic Church.

A Catholic who does not meet the requirements for a sponsor cannot serve as a Christian Witness.

### **III. Pastoral Judgment and Considerations**

The sponsors are understood to be delegated by the Catholic Christian community and approved by the priest (pastor), who is the one competent to judge the qualifications which are required.

A “life of faith” would generally describe a fully initiated, active, conscious, participating Catholic. Normal outward signs of a person who leads a life of faith include:

- Active participation in a Church community
- If married, married in accord with the laws of the Church<sup>10</sup>
- Regular reception of the Eucharist and participation in the sacramental life of the Church
- In communion with the Diocesan Bishop
- Responsive to the social teaching of the Church
- The faith they profess in baptism is reflected in their moral life
- Personal spirituality evidenced by a life of prayer and communion with the Church.

Pastoral decisions consider the whole “life of faith” of the prospective sponsor and are not limited to one criterion. In each situation, the final decision on the qualifications of the person to serve as a sponsor lies with the pastor, who exercises prudential judgment, keeping in mind the last words of the Code of Canon Law: “...the salvation of souls, which must always be the supreme law in the Church, is to be kept before one’s eyes.”<sup>11</sup>

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<sup>9</sup> Canon 874§2

<sup>10</sup> *United States Catholic Catechism for Adults*, page 189, USCCB, ©2006.

<sup>11</sup> Canon 1752

## Questions and Answers Guideline for Parish Staff

### *1. How do we respond to a request to have more than two godparents?*

Within many cultures, there is a tradition of having more than two people serve in the “godparent” role. If a family is interested in having more than two godparents, the priest or his delegate will seek from the family or from the one being baptized the names of one or two sponsors who will serve as the official godparent(s) and whose name(s) will be entered in the church records. The others will serve as “honorary godparents.”

During the baptism, the celebrant can invite the “honorary godparents” to stand in their place while professing their faith and assenting to serve as honorary godparents.

### *2. What if the parents would like two sponsors of the same gender?*

If there are two godparents, one must be male and the other female. A single godparent may be of either sex. It may happen that the parents want two persons of the same sex to be godparents and they have good reasons for this. A possible solution to such a case is to register one as the official sponsor, while the other would be the “honorary godparent.” See question 1 regarding the “honorary godparent.”

### *3. What is appropriate preparation for a sponsor?*

**For Infant Baptism:** A sponsor must attend baptism preparation at his/her parish, or with the parents at the parents’ parish. If a sponsor attends the preparation at his/her parish, proof of the participation needs to be presented to the parish of baptism. If a sponsor has attended preparation within the last two years, the requirement may be waived.

**For the RCIA Process:** Sponsors for catechumens do not need to attend a specific preparation program. However, they are expected to be present with the catechumens throughout the RCIA process.

It is important for sponsors to know and to understand their responsibilities and the seriousness of their commitment.

### *4. If the sponsor is unable to be at the baptism, what is the procedure?*

If the sponsor cannot attend the baptism, a proxy stands in the place of the sponsor. The sponsor accepts the responsibility in writing (completion of the Sponsor Eligibility Form fulfills this requirement), attends preparation, and names the proxy in consultation with the parents. In the sacramental registry the name of the sponsor is recorded, and the name of the proxy is placed in parentheses.

5. *What paper work is required for sponsors?*

Perspective sponsors or godparents need to provide information to the parish to assure that they are eligible to fulfill the responsibilities of this role. If there is a question about the sponsor living a “life of faith,” the pastor or his delegate may request a letter of reference from the sponsor’s parish or may interview the sponsor.

The Diocese recommends using the Sponsor Eligibility Form provided here for you. Once the baptism is complete and recorded, the sponsor form should be destroyed.

6. *What is the financial responsibility of a sponsor/godparent?*

From the perspective of the church, the sponsor has no financial responsibility. Culturally, there may be different expectations which parents and sponsors/godparents should discuss ahead of time.

7. *Why does the Catholic Church allow for a “Christian Witness?”*

Sponsorship is for someone to lead another into the faith community and only a fully initiated, actively participating Catholic can lead another Catholic into the fullness of life within the Catholic Church. A “Christian Witness,” however, is allowed because of the Church’s recognition of the unity of all Christians in “one baptism” in the faith of Jesus Christ. Through this one baptism, a Christian is able to be a witness of a life in Jesus Christ.

8. *What happens if the parents cannot provide a sponsor?*

If the parents are unable to provide an appropriate sponsor, than it is the responsibility of the pastor to do so for them.

9. *Who becomes the sponsor in an emergency baptism?*

In an emergency baptism, any suitable Catholic who is present can fill the role. If no one is available, then there are no sponsors, and no sponsors are recorded.

10. *Are there times when the names of sponsors are not listed on baptismal certificates?*

In the case of children who are baptized and later adopted, the name(s) of the sponsor(s) are recorded in the sacramental registry, but shall not be written on a baptismal certificate. Parish personnel having access to parish registers have an obligation not to disclose to any person any information which would identify or reveal, directly or indirectly, the fact that a person was adopted.