

The Role of Sponsors (Godparents) At Baptism (C. 872-874)

1. The sponsors, together with the parents, are present to profess the Church's faith, in which the child is being baptized. Therefore, in order to be appointed sponsor, the person must be suitable for this role and have the intention of fulfilling it.
2. In order to carry out his/her proper liturgical function as specified above, the Rite of Christian Initiation (RCIA n.10; C 874) clearly states that a sponsor should:
 - a. be appointed by the candidate for Baptism, or in the case of infants by the parents or whoever stands in their place, or failing these, by the pastor or minister
 - b. be mature enough to undertake this responsibility, having completed the 16th year (C 874)
 - c. be a Catholic who has received the three sacraments of Initiation: Baptism, Confirmation and the Eucharist; and lives a life of faith which befits the role to be undertaken. An example of not living the life of faith is being in an irregular marriage (*a marriage that is not recognized as valid by the Catholic Church*). Sponsors may be required to produce a sacramental certificate if there is concern that the person does not meet the criteria for being a sponsor.
 - d. not be bound by any canonical penalty (excommunicated or other penalty)
 - e. not be the father or the mother of the one to be baptized
3. When, for a just cause, parents wish to have another baptized and believing Christian from a separated Church or community act as a Christian witness, the following guidelines are to be observed:
 - a. Before extending this invitation to a non-Catholic, parents should consult with their parish priest, who will assist them in evaluating the reason for this choice. Except in cases of Orthodox Christians, it is not permissible for a member of another Christian community to act as a sponsor in the liturgical and canonical sense at a Roman Catholic Baptism. (EGD p.5 amended; C 874.2) An Orthodox Christian may serve as a sponsor for baptism in the Catholic Church. But a member of another Christian community may not act as sponsor in the liturgical and canonical sense at a Roman Catholic Baptism.
 - b. Only a baptized member of separated Eastern Churches (Orthodox) may act as sponsor, together with a Catholic sponsor, so long as there is provision for the Catholic education of the person being baptized, and it is clear that the sponsor is a suitable one. In this case, the duty of providing for the Christian education of the baptized person binds in the first place the sponsor who belongs to the Catholic Church.
 - c. With the exception already dealt with above, it is not permissible for a member of any other separated Christian community to act as a sponsor at Baptism in the liturgical and canonical sense. A Christian of another communion can be admitted, with a Catholic sponsor, as a Christian witness* of the Baptism. In these cases the responsibility for the Christian education of the candidate belongs of itself to the sponsor who is a member of the Catholic Church.
 - d. It follows from the above that an unbaptized person cannot act as a sponsor or Christian witness in a Catholic Baptism.
 - e. An indication ought to be made in the register as well as when issuing future certificates in cases in which a member of a separated community has acted as a Christian witness and the one acted as a Catholic sponsor.
 - f. A former Catholic or a Catholic in an irregular marriage cannot act as a Christian Witness (Roman Replies, 1988, C. 874)
4. At least one sponsor is required for the celebration of Baptism. At most two are permitted, in which case one must be male and the other female (C 872873). Sponsors are Catholics.
5. When sponsors are represented by proxies, the latter should be Catholic and the sponsors must give explicit indication of their desire to assume the role and responsibilities of sponsors. Sponsors and proxies should be noted in the Baptismal Register.
6. A Roman Catholic cannot fulfill the function of sponsor for a member of another Christian community. However, because of the ties of blood or friendship, a Christian of another communion can be admitted as a Christian witness of the Baptism with a Roman Catholic sponsor. In comparable circumstances, a Roman Catholic may be a Christian witness for a member of another Christian community. Their names should be recorded in the Baptismal book. (EGD p. 5 amended; C 877)

* Emphasis added