

Sponsors for the Sacraments of Initiation

From ancient times the Church has required that a godparent/sponsor be present at the celebration of the sacraments of Baptism and Confirmation. An essential function that the sponsor renders is to represent the Church in receiving a person into communion with the Church, along with the celebrant who baptizes or confirms.

A sponsor is expected to support his or her candidate in living the Catholic Christian life. In terms of Baptism, the sponsor is “to help the baptized to lead a Christian life in harmony with baptism and to fulfill faithfully the obligations connected with it.”¹ The same is true for the sacrament of Confirmation, “The sponsor’s function is to take care that the person confirmed behaves as a true witness of Christ and faithfully fulfills the duties inherent in this Sacrament.”²

On a personal level, all sponsors are expected to support and accompany, in word and action, their candidates in the living of the Catholic faith. In order to do this in an effective way, any Catholic seeking to be admitted as a sponsor should believe and put into practice the teachings of the Catholic Church, regularly take part in Mass on Sunday and Holy Days of Obligation, and if married, be married in accordance with the requirements of the Catholic Church. In short, it is of paramount importance that every sponsor be a person of Catholic faith who integrally witnesses to that faith in his or her daily life.

“Because of the close communion between the Catholic Church and the Eastern Orthodox churches, it is permissible for a just cause for an Eastern faithful to act as a godparent/sponsor; together with a Catholic godparent, at the Baptism of a Catholic infant or adult, so long as there is provision for the Catholic education of the person being baptized, and it is clear that the godparent is a suitable one.”³

Given the functions and the role of the sponsor described herein, a baptized non-Catholic Christian cannot serve as a sponsor; however, he or she can serve as a Christian witness.⁴ In this case, the non-Catholic Christian witness may fully participate in the baptismal liturgy along with the Catholic godparent. Furthermore, a person baptized as a Catholic who is sacramentally or canonically ineligible to serve as a godparent may not serve as a Christian witness. These include those who subsequently formally renounce the faith in favor of another church or community of faith.

Anyone who is unbaptized, and those whose baptism is not recognized by the Catholic Church, may not serve in the role of sponsor or Christian witness but are welcome to be present at the ceremony.

Furthermore, those who are to undertake the office of sponsors, are to be suitably instructed on the meaning of these sacraments and the obligations attaching to them.⁵

I. Eligibility Requirements to serve as a Sponsor for Baptism:

Anyone who wishes to serve as a sponsor for the sacrament of Baptism must comply with the requirements as outlined in the universal law of the Church.⁶ These are:

- a. There is to be only one male sponsor or one female sponsor or one of each;
- b. 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;
- c. have completed the sixteenth year of age, unless the diocesan bishop has established another age, or the pastor or minister has granted an exception for a just cause;

¹ *Codex Iuris Canonici*, n. 872.

² CIC 892.

³ PONTIFICAL COUNCIL FOR PROMOTING CHRISTIAN UNITY, *Directory for the Application of Principles and Norms on Ecumenism*, n. 98b.

⁴ CIC 874§2.

⁵ CIC 851§2.

⁶ CIC 873-814

- d. 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;
- e. not bound by any canonical penalty legitimately imposed or declared;
- f. not be the father or the mother of the one to be baptized;
- g. if married, the sponsor is to be married in the Catholic Church. A Catholic in an irregular marriage cannot act as a Christian Witness⁷.

II. Eligibility requirements to serve as a Sponsor for Confirmation:

Anyone who wishes to serve as a sponsor for the sacrament of Confirmation must fulfill the conditions mentioned in can. 874 in the universal law of the Church,⁸ which are outlined in the prior section pertaining to sponsors for Baptism. In addition, the sponsor for Confirmation “is to take care that the confirmed person behaves as a true witness of Christ and faithfully fulfills the obligations inherent in this sacrament.”⁹ Furthermore, “It is desirable to choose as sponsor the one who undertook the same function in baptism.”¹⁰

III. Additional Considerations

If the candidate does not have a sponsor, the parish where the Confirmation takes place should provide a sponsor so long as the assigned sponsor meets the above requirements.

If a sponsor cannot be present at baptism or confirmation due to an unexpected or urgent circumstance, another person may be designated to serve as a proxy for the sponsor. The parent of the child to be baptized or confirmed may also serve as proxy for a sponsor. Special care must be given to ensure that a proper notation is made in the sacramental register if a proxy is used.

IV. Statement of Suitability

All sponsors for the sacraments of Baptism and Confirmation are required to demonstrate their suitability to serve in this important role.

In the Diocese of Bridgeport, suitability can be demonstrated in the following ways:

1. The person obtains a written statement/letter from his or her Pastor to confirm their eligibility. This statement must be submitted to the pastor or his designee at the parish wherein the sacrament will be celebrated.
2. The person fills out and presents the Diocesan Suitability Form to the pastor or his designee at the parish wherein the sacrament will be celebrated (see attached).
3. In the case where a proxy stands in for a sponsor, no suitability form is required for the proxy.

⁷ see *CLSA Roman Replies, 1988*, C. 874.

⁸ CIC 873-874.

⁹ CIC 892.

¹⁰ CIC 893§2.