

SACRAMENTAL SPONSORSHIP IN THE CATHOLIC CHURCH

Considerations for all actual or potential sponsors for Baptism and/or Confirmation

What does it mean to be a sponsor?

“Sponsor” derives from a Latin verb meaning “to pledge oneself to,” “to promise solemnly,” or “to engage.” In a legal context it can mean “to be a security for,” or to “go bail for” a person. Interestingly enough, that verb is also the root of the word “spouse”; this etymological connection offers a meaningful and challenging perspective of the marital relationship.

Sacramental sponsorship possesses the weight of an **oath**, just as a sacrament does. **Godparents and Confirmation sponsors testify—swear—to the truth, goodness, and beauty of the Catholic Faith.**

What do sponsored persons want?

- + Eternal life with the Trinity in heaven
- + An earthly life of holiness—goodness, devotion, and obedience to God’s commandments and the precepts of the Church—that prepares him or her for eternal life with the Trinity in heaven
- + A sponsor who offers the prayerful and active witness that the sponsored person so needs and deserves.

If you have been asked to sponsor someone for Baptism or Confirmation, you ought to ask yourself these questions:

- + Do I testify to the truth, goodness, and beauty of the Catholic faith by my actions and words?
- + Do I strive each day to obey the **Commandments of God** and the **precepts of the Catholic Church**?

The **Ten Commandments** are generally well known (cf. Exodus 20 and Deuteronomy 5).

The *Catechism of the Catholic Church* (paragraphs 2041-2043) lists **five precepts**:

- 1. You shall attend Mass on Sundays and on holy days of obligation and rest from servile labor.**
- 2. You shall confess your sins at least once a year.**

3. You shall receive the sacrament of the Eucharist at least during the Easter season.

4. You shall observe the days of fasting and abstinence established by the Church.

5. You shall help to provide for the needs of the Church.

***Note on #1:** Potential sponsors need to acquire a letter from their parish testifying to their suitability for sacramental sponsorship. Individuals who have moved away from their parish for whatever reason (often because of school, work or marriage) are asked to register in the parish in whose boundaries they live, and to become active participants in that parish.*

***Note on #3:** Persons who are married "outside the Church" (i.e. without the Catholic Church's permission) are unable to receive the Eucharist, and therefore are ineligible to be sacramental sponsors. Ask your parish priest or deacon about how the situation may be rectified.*

If you already happen to be a sacramental sponsor and you continue to fulfill these requirements, keep up the good work! If you are a sacramental sponsor but are *not* fulfilling these requirements, start to fulfill them, one at a time (we suggest that you start with #1 above). **If you have been asked to sponsor someone for Baptism or Confirmation, but you do not meet these criteria** at the time of the request, please spare yourself and others a great amount of grief and respectfully **decline**. You cannot honestly present yourself for this role unless and until you bear witness to the Catholic Faith as described above.

Ineligible persons may think that the Church is levying a personal judgment upon them. "Are you saying that I'm not a good person? I do charity work; I haven't killed anyone. I don't tell big lies; I..." That certainly is not the Church's intention. You may be a **good** person, but you—and everyone else—are called to be **better**. If you are ineligible, consider the reasons seriously, and take appropriate action.

The importance of the sacramental sponsor demands the Church's careful attention. Our personal religious and spiritual commitments likewise demand that attention. Each day we must examine ourselves in this regard, for whether or not we are a sponsor, we are always a witness.