

The Spiritual Role of Godparents

To be chosen as a godparent is a special honour since you, from all others, have been entrusted with the responsibility to participate in this child's Christian life and formation. This privilege offers you the opportunity to develop a mutually enriching spiritual relationship with each other, and with the Lord – one that will last throughout this life and beyond, into eternal life.

As a representative of the Catholic Christian community into which the child is being baptized, you need to be foremost a strong Christian, witnessing to a life based on the message of Jesus Christ. A Godparent should be a role model of Christian living.

There are many ways you can nurture this spiritual relationship and become an important friend to your godchild. Among them are:

- Mark your godchild's baptismal day on your calendar and celebrate this holy day each year with a visit, a call or a card.
- Help to complement your godchild's birthday by also celebrating the day of their "second birth"; re-use their baptismal candle by lighting it as a symbol of the Light of Christ within their very being; assist them in renewing their baptismal promises; help deepen their sense of identity as belonging to God's family and sharing a destiny that is eternal life.
- As your godchild grows, be available to listen to and share in his/her struggles and joys of living a Christian life.
- Keep yourself spiritually formed in the meaning of our Christian faith and how to live it so that you will be able to answer questions as they arise.
- Encourage a life of faith by giving special cards, letters, or gifts which celebrate holy events... Easter, Christmas, ... and personal growth events... graduations, engagement... (Gift suggestions: a readable Catholic Bible [New Revised Standard Version with Apocrypha], spiritual books, rosary, religious jewelry, gift certificates for religious goods/books, retreat opportunity.)
- Participate in, or send assurance of prayer, as your godchild receives the other sacraments, particularly First Confession, First Communion and Confirmation, which complete his/her initiation into the Church as the Body of Christ.
- Be supportive of your godchild's parents in their role as the primary religious educators of their child.
- Most importantly, be a living witness of Christian living for your godchild, through daily prayer, virtue, and active participation in parish life and liturgy (i.e., Sunday Eucharist.)

A Message to Godparents

Through the prophet Isaiah, God says to each of us, "I have called you by name, and you are mine." (Isaiah 43:1) We know how special it is to be chosen and to be called by name. When we are called by name it is a sign of a relationship, of being recognized as an individual. When the relationship is close, we instantly recognize the voice of the one who calls us.

In the gospel, Jesus says that he is the Good Shepherd and that his sheep follow him because they recognize his voice. Among our own family, friends and community, each of us is recognized and known by voice. Your being chosen as a godparent means that your voice is recognized in a particular way by the family of this child to be baptized. Will you accept this invitation to enter into a special relationship with this child as well as with the child's family? Are you willing to share your own gift of faith, your own experience of God? Will you accompany this child on the Christian journey, where we "walk by faith, not by sight" (2 Corinthians 5:7)? Are you ready to help and support the parents as they raise this child? Will you be available to this child as he or she grows? Will you continue to pray for this child, even when you are separated by a great distance? Will you love and cherish this child and take an interest in his or her life in the Christian community?

Come and celebrate baptism with this child. Celebrate the naming and calling of this child into the flock of the Good Shepherd, the church. At baptism you represent the church, the community of faith. Your joyful presence, your gestures of blessing and your promise of support during the baptism are offered not only on your own behalf but also on behalf of the whole Christian community, who joins in your commitment to help this child grow in the knowledge and love of God and follow the teachings of the Church.

As godparent, however, you will have a special relationship with this child. Your ongoing presence in this child's life, your being there to listen, to offer guidance and to celebrate special moments in his or her life, will be a wonderful gift. But this child has a gift to give to you as well. Children have a wonderful capacity for joy in their relationship with God. As adults we can learn a great deal from their simplicity and earnestness, their trust and their love. Being a godparent offers a special opportunity to participate in and be blessed by the child's life in God. It is an invitation to a lifelong spiritual friendship.

At the celebration of baptism we pray that the divine life will grow always stronger in the child's heart. We listen to the gospel and to the scriptures, which tell us, "[God's] word is a lamp to my feet and a light to my path" (Psalm 119:105). We all need this light for our journey of faith. May God's word nourish, strengthen and enlighten you in your role as godparent. May you keep the word of God alive for this child and help the child become a faithful follower of and witness to the gospel.

When the child receives the small candle that is lit from the Paschal candle, the parents and godparents are asked to help the child keep this light burning brightly and keep the flame of faith alive in his or her heart. The child is also presented with a white garment, a sign of the child's Christian dignity. We pray that parents and godparents, family and community, by their word and example, will help the child "bring that dignity unstained into the everlasting life of heaven."

Whether you are a family friend or a member of the child's family, you have been chosen as a godparent because you are special to the family. May you be a source of help and inspiration to this child's family as well as to the child. May you, in turn, be open to receiving the blessings that this child's relationship with God can bring to you. May you walk together toward God as children of light.

By Carol Dittberner