

OFFICE OF DIVINE WORSHIP

Guidelines for Sponsors for Baptism & Confirmation

Based on Synod Guidelines for the Archdiocese of Boston
and the Code of Canon Law

JANUARY 11, 2012

Baptism is a moment of great joy for Christian families and for the Church, since the Sacrament of Baptism is the foundation of our sacramental life as Catholics. The following clarification concerns Sponsors at Baptism and Confirmation in the Archdiocese of Boston.

Can a non-confirmed Catholic serve as a “Christian witness” if the other sponsor for baptism is a confirmed Catholic?

A godparent or sponsor is required by Canon Law to be a fully initiated Catholic in good standing, that is, they must have received all three sacraments of initiation in the Catholic Church. When Catholics do not meet the qualifications (see below) to serve as a godparent or sponsor, they are not permitted by law to serve as a “Christian witness” and to have their names recorded in the baptismal registry. “Christian witness” is a term mentioned in Canon 874, and is described as, “A baptized person who belongs to a non-Catholic ecclesial community.” The term “Christian witness” is intended only to apply to baptized non-Catholics. A Catholic who does not meet the requirements to be a godparent cannot serve as a Christian witness. The role and qualifications for baptismal sponsors and godparents are defined in canons 872- 874 of the Code of Canon Law, and include that the sponsor or godparent be:

- a confirmed Catholic, who is living a life befitting the role of sponsor,
- and who is not under a canonical penalty,
- and who is not a parent of the person being baptized,
- and who is, ordinarily, sixteen years of age or older. These qualifications are to be explained to the catechumens, or to the parents of those to be baptized as infants, early in the formation for this sacrament, so that they can choose suitable sponsors or godparents.

It is also worth noting that only one sponsor is required for Baptism, who, of necessity, must fulfill all of the canonical requirements for this role. Also, there can be no more than two sponsors, one of each sex. One of these sponsors may be replaced by a “Christian witness”, that is, a baptized non-Catholic Christian. As noted above, a “Christian witness” would not include Catholics who have not received the sacrament of Confirmation.