

So, you're a godparent. . .

A Godparent's Duties

The bottom line is a godparent is a child's representative at the baptism. A baby is unable to understand or respond during the service, so it's your job to make certain commitments on their behalf.

In the early years of the Christian Church, a godparent was often the "sponsor" who introduced an adult to the faith. Now the role of godparent has become much more that of a friend and mentor than a spiritual guide. Yet, the hope and expectation is that a godparent would share in the spiritual life and development of the child whom they represent.

Becoming a godparent is not a legal commitment and does not make you a legal guardian. Your role is more that of a supportive adult with a special interest in the development and upbringing of the child. Your own religious outlook and that of the child's parents will determine your spiritual responsibilities.

Chosen as a Baptism Sponsor or Godparent

Being asked to serve as a baptismal sponsor, or Godparent, is an honor. It is also a fulfilling experience. Whether asked by family members, friends, or other Christians, the sponsor has been chosen for a special relationship with the one to be baptized, with the baptizing community, and with God.

What Qualifies a Person to Serve as a Sponsor or Godparent?

The sponsor should be a baptized person. Only a Christian can, in good conscience make the required baptismal renunciations and promises on behalf of the candidate.

Sponsors should actively participate in the Christian congregation of their choice for their own spiritual growth and strengthening. It is within the worshiping community that the sponsor has direct contact with the foundations of Christian belief and life. The foundations are the Holy Scriptures, the traditions of the Church, and the exercise of human mind and heart. In the Episcopal Church, we call these three pillars of faith: Scripture, Tradition, and Reason.

Sponsors are persons who commit themselves to a long-term relationship with their candidate. The particulars of this relationship are developed and adapted as needed. The important point is that the candidate and sponsor maintain a continuous relationship, however it is lived out. This article contains some suggestions to help in this regard.

Sponsors are asked by the candidate or the family to perform this role, which is an expression of confidence in the person's ability to be a worthy sponsor. While it is a serious undertaking, discovering with someone else the treasures of Christian life is a growing, fulfilling experience. Becoming a sponsor serves as a reminder of one's own relationship with God through baptism. And is a way to live into the promises made at the time of the sponsor's own baptism.

What Is Expected of the Sponsor?

It is expected that the sponsor will:

- Establish a special relationship with the candidate;
- Represent Christ and the Church to the baptized person and vice versa (for example, standing with the candidate at the time of baptism and assisting the candidate to live into the baptismal promises);
- Set an example of Christian life for the candidate.
- Support the baptized person through prayer.

Where Did the Practice of Baptismal Sponsors Come From?

The root of the word sponsor is *spondere*. It means to “promise” – and is also the root of espouse and spouse. In the early days of the Church, when the threat of persecution was often a reality for Christians and there was a fear about spies, sponsors vouched for the candidates to the baptizing community by presenting them and guaranteeing that they were who they said they were. The sponsor stood as a witness to the Christian community that the person seeking baptism was truly desirous of following Christ and of serving and loving God and God’s creation. In addition, sponsors joined their candidates during the days of baptismal preparation. This walking together included praying for the candidates, instructing candidates in the faith, helping candidates understand what they are turning from and toward, and preparing candidates for Christian living in the world. The sponsor has a vital role in helping the candidate and family accept their full participation in the Christian community and the world. With God’s help, the relationship between the newly baptized and the sponsor is enduring and fruitful.

How Can a Sponsor Prepare?

Ways to prepare to serve as a sponsor include:

- Attend baptism preparation sessions with the parents, prior to, the baptism, when possible.
- Be willing to explore questions, issues, and expectations around baptism with the person to be baptized, a member of the clergy, and/or the family.
- Pray for the members of the baptismal party, especially the candidate, that they might approach the sacrament with reverence and thanksgiving.

How Can Sponsors Be Involved with Their Baptized Persons?

- Remembering anniversary of the baptism through a card, letter, phone call or visit.
- Noting other life events in a Christian manner, for example, birthdays, graduations, marriage, birth of children, illness, bereavement.
- Attending worship services with the baptized person.
- Expressing an interest in what the baptized person is learning and experiencing in Sunday School or in other settings of religious education.