

Guidelines for Baptism and Confirmation Sponsors

The following guidelines are meant to assist the priest or deacon in assessing suitability for the role of sponsor at Baptism or at Confirmation. These guidelines are based on the requirements for sponsors as outlined in canons 872-874 and 892-893 of The Code of Canon Law.

1. A person who is to be baptized or confirmed is to have a sponsor. While it has become a tradition to have two sponsors at Baptism, having only one sponsor is acceptable. No more than two sponsors are permitted, and the two may not be of the same sex.
2. A sponsor must be sixteen years of age, unless the pastor or minister of the Sacrament grants an exception for a lower age, provided there is a just cause.
3. A Catholic who has not already received the Sacraments of Confirmation and Holy Eucharist may not be a sponsor. Such a Catholic should be encouraged to complete Christian Initiation at an appropriate time.
4. A priest or deacon may be a sponsor, but is not encouraged to be a sponsor and minister of Baptism in the same ceremony. A member of an institute of consecrated life or society of apostolic life may be a sponsor.
5. A Catholic who has left the Church by a formal act may not be a sponsor. A non-practicing Catholic may be admitted as a sponsor only if the pastor or minister of the Sacrament can determine that the person is in the process of returning to the regular practice of the faith.
6. With the permission of the Archbishop, obtained through the Chancery, a substitute sponsor may be added to the sacramental register when, for example, the original sponsor has died or has left the Catholic Church by a formal act; however, the name of the original sponsor may not be removed.
7. A suitable member of the Eastern Orthodox Church may be admitted as a sponsor for Baptism but only together with a Catholic sponsor, for a just cause and as long as there is provision for the Catholic education of the person to be baptized. Similarly, a Catholic is not forbidden to stand as a sponsor in an Eastern Orthodox church, if he/she is so invited.
8. A baptized non-Catholic may be admitted as a Christian witness at Baptism, but only together with a Catholic sponsor. Similarly, a Catholic may act as a Christian witness for a person being baptized in another ecclesial community, but not as a sponsor.
9. One who has left the Catholic Church by a formal act may not be a Christian witness, nor may an unbaptized person serve in this capacity.
10. A parent may not be a sponsor for his/her child. An adoptive parent is to be discouraged from exercising this function