

Sponsors at Baptism

The church has made use of sponsors (godparents) at Holy Baptism from the earliest days of its history. The practice is mentioned by such early Christian writers as Tertullian, St. Dionysius the Areopagite and others. "The sponsors in Baptism are guarantors pledging to the Church that the baby to be baptized will be brought up in the faith of that Church; therefore they must be members of the Holy Orthodox Church." It is the duty of the godparents to see that their godchildren are taught the Orthodox Faith and made to understand the significance of the vows made on their behalf at Baptism. "No one can guarantee that which he himself does not possess." It is illogical to expect non-Orthodox sponsors to teach Orthodox children Orthodoxy. One cannot even reasonably expect such persons to be interested enough or to know enough about the Faith to impart its teachings to Orthodox children.

Among the other duties of sponsors is the duty of seeing that their godchildren receive Holy Communion frequently, that they attend Sunday School and church regularly, that they learn their prayers and fulfill all the other requirements of the Orthodox Faith.

It is obvious, therefore, that with their high calling, sponsors must be not only Orthodox Christians, but good Orthodox Christians. They must be practicing Orthodox who know at least the chief truths of the Christian Faith, who abide by the laws of the Church, who understand the significance of the vows they must give at Holy Baptism. According to the rules of the Archdiocese, **any Orthodox persons who have been married outside the Orthodox Church are forbidden to stand as sponsors.** If they themselves have broken the Church's law they cannot be expected to instill loyalty to the Church's law in their godchildren.

Underage persons cannot stand for sponsors because they are themselves learning the doctrines of the Church. The godfather must not be younger than 15 years of age, and the godmother not younger than 13 years of age. Those who are totally ignorant of the teachings of the Church cannot be sponsors. They cannot teach what they do not themselves know. Notorious sinners and persons who have fallen in public opinion by their moral life or scandalous behavior cannot be sponsors. Those who have been excommunicated for breaking the laws of the Church, schismatics, **and non-Orthodox generally, cannot be godparents.**

In the Orthodox Church only one sponsor is indispensable. This is the ancient tradition: the custom of having two godparents is fairly modern. As a minimum, therefore, the Church requires one sponsor: at the Baptism of a male child, a man; and at the Baptism of a child of the female sex, a woman.

Before standing as sponsors, the prospective godparents must receive the Sacraments of Confession and Holy Communion and be instructed in their duties. If this law of the Archdiocese is strictly observed the problem of non-Orthodox sponsors will soon disappear, for only Orthodox Catholics may receive Orthodox sacraments. **All sponsors are**

expected to know the Creed from memory and to recite it at the Baptism. They ought to understand the essence of the Sacrament in general and to be aware of the great responsibility they are assuming.

Parents ought to choose the most pious and devout Orthodox Christians to sponsor their children at the baptismal font. Kinship or friendship of the parents with the prospective sponsors does not insure that they will be the most suitable. In choosing the parents ought to consider the faith, the churchmanship, and the fitness to accept the responsibility of sponsorship of the prospective godparents. Those who disregard the laws of the Church, do not fast, do not attend services, do not contribute to the support of the Church's work, or do not receive the Sacraments frequently, or have no love, loyalty, or devotion to the Church, are not the type of persons to be the spiritual parents of children at Baptism.

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