

## Getting Your Child Baptized



Congratulations! Having your child baptized in the Catholic Church is a joyous occasion. They are already your child. They are already loved by God. But, through Baptism, they get to become an adopted child of God – they will be able to receive God’s love in a new and deeper way.

Since this is such an important occasion, there are a few requirements. We won’t be able to schedule your baptism until these steps are completed. The first is the paperwork. It’s not pointless bureaucracy. Baptism is unique and unrepeatable. It also comes with some rights and responsibilities. Keeping good records can be a sign that we care and this paperwork helps us do that. For the rest of your child’s life, the Church of their Baptism keeps track of their progress through the sacraments. If you are no longer a member of this parish, you need the permission of the pastor of your new parish since he is responsible for all the Catholics in his parish. Please fill out the attached form accurately and completely. Since the government sometimes uses our baptismal records as proof of paternity, it is important that the father acknowledges paternity if he is not already on the birth certificate.

Part of having your child baptized is choosing Godparents for the child. In most cultures, being a Godparent is a special honor. We often like to choose people who are close to us, who are important in our own lives to be Godparents to our children. This is a good thing! The problem is, our culture is not as religious and not as Catholic as it used to be. Most of us have close friends and family who are not Catholic or, sadly, have left the Catholic faith for some reason or another. In the eyes of the Church, being a Godparent is not just an honorary title, it is a very important responsibility.

The job of a Godparent is to be a role-model and support for the child to live the Catholic Faith. I’ve included a helpful article about this important role. In short, the Godparent should be a model, practicing Catholic. For the sake of maturity, they must also be at least 16 and Confirmed. Finally, being a good example means being in good standing with the Church. A Catholic who denies the faith or deliberately violates the teachings of the Church is not considered to be in good standing. A Catholic who marries outside the Church is therefore not eligible to be a Godparent. Non-Catholics are of course welcome to attend the Baptism and celebrate with us. A non-Catholic Christian can be considered a “Christian Witness” if you only have one Godparent. This doesn’t apply to someone who has left the Catholic Church to join another denomination.

Finally, we ask that you and your Godparents all take a class to prepare yourselves for the celebration of the sacrament. This helps to refresh your own understanding of the sacrament and allows everyone to enter more deeply into the ritual. Those classes are usually offered on a weeknight shortly before the Baptism. That class is free. Please call the parish to register for the next class. If you cannot make it to the class at the parish, please contact the office to discuss options. Once everything has been completed, we’ll put you on the schedule!

Again, congratulations on having your child baptized and thank you for bringing the child to the Church! I look forward to the occasion and pray that God’s grace continue to lead your family closer to Himself and His Church.

In Christ,  
Fr. Alexander Albert,  
Pastor,  
St. John the Evangelist

# St. John the Evangelist Catholic Church

## Baptism Registration Form

Baptisms take place after the 9:00 AM Mass on Sunday. This will be scheduled when all requirements are met.

Child's Name: First, Middle, Last: \_\_\_\_\_

Date of Birth: \_\_\_\_\_ City, State of Birth: \_\_\_\_\_

Mother's Name: First, Maiden: \_\_\_\_\_

Catholic: Y / N Other Religion: \_\_\_\_\_ Parishioner of St. John? Y / N

Father's Name: First, Middle Name, Last \_\_\_\_\_

Catholic: Y / N Other Religion: \_\_\_\_\_ Parishioner of St. John? Y / N

Are parents married to each other? Y / N

Are both names on Birth Certificate? Y / N

Parents' marriage in Catholic Church? Y / N

If not, is Paternity Acknowledged? Y / N

Previous Marriage? Mother Y / N Father Y / N

Father's Phone: \_\_\_\_\_

Mother's Phone: \_\_\_\_\_

Father's email: \_\_\_\_\_

Mother's email: \_\_\_\_\_

Father's Home Address:

Mother's Home Address:

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

If not parishioners of St. John the Evangelist, do you have your pastor's permission to baptize here?

Church Name: \_\_\_\_\_ Pastor Signature: \_\_\_\_\_

**N.B.** Godparents must be Catholic, Confirmed, over 16, and in good standing with the Church. That means that if they are married, their marriage must be recognized by the Catholic Church. Non-Catholics cannot be a Godparent, but they can be a Christian Witness.

Godfather's Name: \_\_\_\_\_

Confirmed: Y / N Over 16: Y / N Practicing Faith: Y / N Married: Y / N Catholic Wedding? Y / N

Godmother's Name: \_\_\_\_\_

Confirmed: Y / N Over 16: Y / N Practicing Faith: Y / N Married: Y / N Catholic Wedding? Y / N

Christian Witness (cannot be a Catholic): \_\_\_\_\_

Baptized: Y / N Over 16: Y / N Never Catholic: Y / N Male / Female

Proxy for Godparent: \_\_\_\_\_

Proxy means someone "stands in" for a Godparent who can't be there.

Baptism Classes taken in the Last 3 Years? Mom \_\_\_\_\_ Dad \_\_\_\_\_ Godmother \_\_\_\_\_ Godfather \_\_\_\_\_

Please call the office to schedule a class.



## How to Choose the Right Godparent

The presider at baptism asks the godparents, “Are you ready to help the parents of this child in their duty as Christian parents?” And the godparents respond, “We are.”

But are they?

Baptism rites all over the country use the same words, but what it means to be “ready to help” varies by region, culture, generation and even by individual Catholic. The work of choosing and being a godparent can lead to hurt feelings, dashed expectations—and the occasional influx of unexpected grace.

One common misunderstanding: Parents sometimes assume that “godparent” is the same as “legal guardian,” while the godparents themselves expect to provide nothing more than a greeting card and an occasional prayer. While some faith communities may expect godparents to raise their godchildren if the parents die, neither civil nor church law recognizes such an obligation.

[Leticia Ochoa Adams](#), a writer who lives in Texas, said that in Hispanic culture choosing godparents is almost like adding to the family. At a recent family funeral, she found herself awash in “cousins” with whom she had no actual blood or marital ties; they were simply bound together through godparenting relationships.

“Asking someone to be a godparent is a big deal, kind of like asking someone to walk you down the aisle at your wedding,” Ms. Adams said.

Ms. Adams was raised culturally Catholic—“statues all over the place,” she said—but her mother did not go to Mass, and Ms. Adams drifted toward the Baptist Church. When as a teenager she gave birth to her first child, Anthony, she chose her uncle as the godfather. He was the one who had rescued her from an abusive household and raised her.

“It was 100 percent a choice of respect,” Ms. Adams said. She said her *tio* was a “good Catholic,” but she never expected him to teach her son any theology. It was understood that he would help raise the boy if the parents died, though. Anthony reciprocated by respectfully calling his *padrino* on his birthday and on Father’s Day.

“My *tio* was super serious, but he was like a dad to me and Anthony, so the godparent thing just took it a step further. He was traditional like that,” Ms. Adams said.

Non-Hispanic Catholics are sometimes taken aback by the warmth and enthusiasm Hispanic godparents or confirmation sponsors (often the same person) bring to the relationship. Barbara Dawson said that she barely knew Ruby, her daughter Bailey’s confirmation sponsor. But as soon as Bailey asked Ruby to sponsor her, she excitedly launched plans to buy Bailey a dress, shoes and jewelry.

“Her family was already buying candles and rosaries in Mexico, and she was planning to get Bailey stuff on her trip to Israel. I was absolutely floored. Basically, Ruby and her family adopted all of us,” Ms. Dawson said.

Choosing a friend or relative as godparent may enlarge the family, but it can also add to family drama and discord. Once a godparent is named, that person remains a godparent for life, no matter what else changes or falls apart.

When Ms. Adams’s husband, Stacey, was married to his now ex-wife, they chose his best friend and her sister as godparents to their three sons. After a series of divorces, remarriages and other upheavals, Ms. Adams’s husband’s sister is now her ex-boyfriends’ children’s godmother, and the man for whom Stacey’s ex-wife left him is his children’s godfather—for life.

## **Choosing the Right Godparent**

Despite the life-long implications of choosing godparents, the parents themselves are often not the only party with a say in the decision. Some describe feeling pressure from friends and family to choose someone they consider to be unsuitable for the task. This was the case with Ms. Adams’s own godmother, who no longer acknowledges their relationship. Ms. Adams herself chose some of her children’s godparents under duress, simply to avoid offending family members.

“Now that I understand the role of a godparent, which is to be a support in teaching the faith and helping with the formation of the child, I feel like I was cheated and like some of my kids were, too,” Ms. Adams said.

But she calls her granddaughter’s godmother “the ultimate godparent,” who brings Christmas and birthday presents, lets her goddaughter walk the Stations of the Cross with her during Lent and prays the rosary for her every day.

So what does the church actually require of godparents? How are they supposed to be chosen, and what are their duties?

Canon law says godparents must be practicing Catholics, be at least 16 years old (with some exceptions) and have received the three sacraments of initiation (baptism, confirmation and the Eucharist). A non-Catholic Christian may serve as a Christian witness, but there must be at least one Catholic godparent. It is possible to have only one godparent, but if there are two, there must be one male and one female.

If the person to be baptized is a baby or young child, the godparent or godparents speak on his or her behalf at the baptism, responding to the question, “What do you ask of God’s church?” with the answer “Faith!”

But on the godparents’ role after the baptism, the church is less specific. The *Catechism of the Catholic Church* reminds us that “faith needs the community of believers,” and it names godparents as the most immediate members of that community for the newly baptized as their faith “unfolds.”

Godparents, according to the catechism, “must be firm believers, able and ready to help the newly baptized.” They are an important part of the “ecclesial community [that] bears some responsibility for the development and safeguarding of the grace given at baptism.”

Joan Nelson, the director of evangelization for young families at St. Edward the Confessor Church in Richmond, Va., is intimately familiar with that need for community. She has spent many years preparing parents for their infants’ baptism and preparing children over the age of 7 who come into the church through the Rite of Christian Initiation of Adults.

Ms. Nelson said that many older children who seek baptism are not being raised Catholic but attend Catholic school. They see their peers receiving sacraments and want that for themselves. Their parents, if they are Catholic at all, are usually agreeable to the idea but are not always invested or catechized. Even if they are practicing Catholics, she said, many do not know a single person who fulfills the criteria to be a godparent.

Ms. Nelson often has the unpleasant task of telling them they cannot honor friends with the godparent role because they are not Catholic or because they are in an invalid marriage.

“No one gets involved in church ministry because they want to make people unhappy,” Ms. Nelson said. “It’s very difficult. If this person is taking tentative steps [toward the church] and is hit with obstacles, he’s going to say, ‘Why did I bother?’ and give up. And then I’ll think it’s my fault he’s turned away from Jesus.”

She tries to present the church’s teaching on godparents as a positive opportunity rather than a list of rules. “But sometimes the rules bring people back,” Ms. Nelson said.

“They want something for their kids, or they see something in their fiancé’s family, and they want to be a part of it.”

She said it is common for people who were not confirmed, or even refused confirmation earlier in their lives, to ask to be confirmed as adults just so they can become godparents. Not long ago in Ms. Nelson’s parish, a Catholic mother married to a non-Catholic man chose her younger brother as godfather. Her brother asked to be confirmed so he could be “a proper and good godfather” for his nephew.

“It brought him back to the parish, back to Mass, back to being engaged in the life of the church in a way he hadn’t been before,” Ms. Nelson said. And she holds out hope that the child’s father will also draw closer to the church. Ms. Nelson said, “I say he’s not Catholic—yet.”

## **Baptism Basics**

In the early days of Christianity, when persecution was rampant, the situation was reversed. Rather than using baptism as an opportunity to draw in sponsors, the church needed to be wary of infiltrators posing

as catechumens. It was the baptismal sponsor's job not only to assist the new Christian in the development of his faith but to vouch for his sincerity.

Today, it is far less likely that some impostor would seek baptism under false pretenses. Instead, parents often turn up at the parish office asking for baptism without understanding in any depth what the sacrament means. Sometimes the grandparents are pressuring them to go through with it; sometimes they are simply looking for a beautiful backdrop for what they see as a purely cultural rite of passage for their baby.

But sometimes, said Catherine Crino, they want something more. Ms. Crino is the director of religious education and a pastoral associate at St. Emily Church in Mount Prospect, Ill. She has been working for the church in Chicago for 34 years.

"They want something, but they can't articulate it at all," Ms. Crino said. "These are folks who are raised with nothing. They want something for their kids, or they see something in their fiancé's family, and they want to be a part of it."

Years ago, she co-authored a book on baptism preparation, but she said it would not be useful now, considering how poorly catechized so many parents are. She said the book "assumed a level of conversation with the faith that a lot of parents just don't have."

Early in her career, Ms. Crino would try to engage new parents in "long conversations about St. Augustine and original sin," until she realized that the new moms were "ready to kill [her] because it was time to nurse."

"I got out of that mode pretty fast," Ms. Crino said. Now she speaks more simply about what parents are asking for when they seek out baptism for their children.

"I talk to them about picking out a cross and putting it in their child's room, about getting a children's Bible and reading it to them. Super simple stuff," she said. "You're trying to take people where they're at."

When parents choose godparents, they often do not look to people who know more about the faith than they do and who might fill in the gaps in their child's religious education. Instead, Ms. Crino said, "They pick nice people who sometimes have less of a clue than the parents do."

Sometimes, parents want to honor (or appease) so many people that they choose six, seven or eight godparents, even though canon law allows for no more than two.

Ms. Crino said that her religious education class now includes very few Hispanics, a group that had previously attended in larger numbers. Today her class is about half Filipinos, Poles and Indians. When Catholics come to the United States, they transmit their faith for about a generation and a half, she said.

"If they don't [know their faith], their mother certainly does, and she makes sure things happen," Ms. Crino said.

But Maria Hayes, who immigrated from Warsaw two years ago, said that at least in Poland, strong religious identity does not always translate into strong personal faith. She estimated that 90 percent of Poles consider themselves Catholic, and religion is routinely taught in the schools. But this ubiquitous Catholicism, she said, is mainly a cultural identity and lacks a spiritual component.

“Many Americans would be surprised at how liberal Poles are,” Ms. Hayes said. “The majority probably aren’t practicing [Catholics]. You still get the sacraments, though. I never went to church as a child, but I went to first Communion and got a party.” Her own godparents were friends of her nonbelieving parents, and she has no relationship with them.

Ms. Hayes left the faith but reverted as a young adult. When she married and gave birth to her daughter, she and her husband chose a close friend to be the godmother, and her friend’s husband, who is a Methodist pastor, as a Christian witness.

“We wanted my kids to have an example in the faith, which is hard to come by—someone practicing, close to God, someone approachable, honest about the faith, someone I am close with,” Ms. Hayes said. Then her friend asked her to become the godmother of her first son. “Now we’re connected forever, both ways,” she said.

Although the godmother’s husband (and father of her godson) is not Catholic, the couples talk about faith all the time and laugh about it.

“It’s part of our friendship to discuss the faith, and I don’t feel like I need to tiptoe around the topic,” Ms. Hayes said, adding that she did not have a “big plan” to bring him into the Catholic Church. “It’s not a matter of finding the most accurate argument for the faith. You can’t drag someone into the church. But we pray for them, and they know our views. It’s [a matter of] God’s grace and his own path.”

## **Children of the Light**

When Ms. Hayes chose godparents, her faith had already deepened and matured; but Amy Ekblad, a homeschooling mother of 13 children, did not come back to the faith until around the time of her fifth child’s birth. “I was a nominal Catholic, at best, until about 15 years ago,” Ms. Ekblad said. “I just picked people I liked [for godparents].”

After her reversion, Ms. Ekblad said, she realized godparents should be more than “just buddies.” But she did not know any practicing Catholics other than her parents; so she chose them as godparents for her fifth child.

Some of her children, who range in age from 1 to 26, are now old enough to be godparents for their own siblings. Ms. Ekblad does not know if the relationships between these pairs would be as strong as they are without that spiritual tie, but she is certain it is good for the older kids to have the responsibility of praying for their siblings and being active in forming their faith.

Ms. Ekblad, a charismatic Catholic, said that she lets God guide her choice for godparents. “I just feel it in my heart,” she said. “Sometimes I hear a voice; it’s different every time.”

Sometimes it is someone she would have never considered on her own or someone the family does not see often. “But we know they’re praying fervently for my kids. Praying and intercession are almost more important than contact,” she said.

Ms. Ekblad has suffered many miscarriages, and she chooses godparents for those children, too. “I don’t know if that’s a thing,” she said. “But I think the babies intercede for them.”

Godparents are often chosen before babies are born. When Joan Nelson’s lifelong friend Cathy asked her to be the godmother for her unborn daughter, she readily agreed. Then they discovered that the child had a

severe heart defect and encephalitis. The doctors said that if she survived birth, she would be blind, unable to walk or talk and would only ever suffer. They pressured the parents to abort, but as staunch Catholics, Cathy and her husband resisted.

“While Cathy was still pregnant, my role was to pray for them,” Ms. Nelson said. “They didn’t need anything material at that point. There was nothing that could be done. My job was to pray with them and to pray for them and to be present as much as they needed me.”

The baby, named Betsy, was born almost full term. She had heart surgery and lived to be 9 years old before her shunt finally failed.

“She walked, she talked, she was the school spelling bee champ, she played soccer, she was in plays. She had a beautiful life,” Ms. Nelson said. When Betsy died, over 1,000 people attended her funeral, where the priest reminded the congregation of the candle that Ms. Nelson and her husband had held on Betsy’s behalf at her baptism nine years before.

“She was a child of the light,” Ms. Nelson remembers the priest saying. “She brought a lot of light into the world for a long time.” Afterward, more than one person told Ms. Nelson that they had been away from the church but that the funeral sermon made them rethink things, and they wanted to start going to Mass again.

“We think of water when we think about baptism, but what about the light, the way that light gets spread and who’s responsible for maintaining and sharing that light?” Ms. Nelson said.

As with all things infused with grace, the godparenting relationship can work in more than one way, drawing both child and godparent closer to Christ. It enlarges the family by adding names to the roles, but it also strengthens the family ties within the communion of saints—even before birth, even after death.

*This article also appeared in print, under the headline "How to Choose the Right Godparent: Baptisms can bring fallen away Catholics back to the faith," in the [October 15, 2018](#) issue.*



[Simcha Fisher](#)

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## Some Questions and Answers:

### ***Do I have to have two Godparents?***

No. Only one qualified, Catholic Godparent is required. When there are two, one must be male, the other female.

### ***Can a Catholic ever be a "Christian Witness?"***

No. The Catholic must meet all the requirements for Catholics, even if the other Godparent is Catholic. For example, the parents have, with difficulty, decided on one sponsor who is Catholic and meets all the requirements. The second sponsor is "hard to find," and may be a Catholic who never was confirmed, or someone who has left the Church. In these cases, the Catholic cannot stand as the "Christian witness," i.e., someone who has left the Church cannot sponsor a person into the Church.

### ***Can a Catholic be a Christian witness at a non-Catholic Baptism?***

Yes. Just as a baptized non-Catholic can be a witness with a Catholic at a Catholic Baptism, a Catholic can be a witness with a baptized non-Catholic at a non-Catholic Baptism.

### ***Can an unbaptized person be a Godparent?***

No. Because the sponsor or Christian witness renews the promises made at their own Baptism, an unbaptized person cannot be permitted to be the Godparent.

### ***Can a priest or deacon be a sponsor?***

Yes. It used to be against the rules, but it isn't anymore.

### ***Can a priest or deacon be the officiant and the sponsor?***

Yes. When the priest or deacon is the officiant and the sponsor, he designates a proxy for the Godparent during the rite of Baptism.

### ***Can you make an exception for someone under 16 to be a Godparent? What if they aren't confirmed?***

Yes, exceptions can be made for age, but there are no exceptions to the requirement for Confirmation.

### ***Can the Godparents be changed at a later date?***

No. It's like trying to change the best man and maid of honor in the marriage register.

### ***What if my Godparent(s) can't be there?***

They can have someone stand in for them as a "proxy." Proxies for the Godparents are acceptable when the sponsors cannot be physically present on the day of the Baptism. The name of the designated sponsor is entered in the register. The name of the proxy is entered under the name of the sponsor with the remark proxy.

To appoint a proxy, the Godparent must write and sign a letter stating who they appoint as proxy and for what purpose. (e.g. "I appoint John Smith to be the proxy for my role as Godparent at the Baptism of Jane Breau")

### ***Can a catechumen be a sponsor?***

No. Those who are unbaptized may not sponsor a person into the Catholic Church.

## Requirements for the Catholic Godparent(s)

- From the 1983 Code of Canon Law Canon 874, 1: To be admitted to the role of sponsors, a person must:
  - be designated by the one to be baptized, by the parents or the one who takes their place or, in their absence, by the pastor or minister and is to have the qualifications and intention of performing this role.
  - have completed their sixteenth year, unless a different age has been established by the diocesan bishop or it seems to the pastor or minister that an exception is to be made for a just cause;
  - be a Catholic who has been confirmed and has already received the sacrament of the Most Holy Eucharist and leads a life in harmony with the faith and the role to be undertaken;
  - not be bound by a canonical penalty legitimately imposed or declared.
- at least sixteen years old and
- baptized and confirmed and received the Eucharist
- living an upright life
- no penalties (e.g., left the Church, etc.). Therefore, a Catholic who has left the Catholic Church cannot be a sponsor and cannot be a "Christian witness" if they join another Christian communion.
- cannot be either parent
- Age exception:
  - The pastor or the minister of Baptism may admit a Catholic who is younger than sixteen.
  - In this case, the Catholic who is younger than 16 must meet requirements above (i.e., full initiation, etc.).
- "Christian Witness"
  - baptized non-Catholic with Catholic sponsor
  - The other sponsor may be a baptized Christian of a different faith. This person is a "Christian witness" (and not a "sponsor").
  - The other witness with a Catholic sponsor may never be non-baptized. For example, Jewish or Muslim Godparents are not permitted by universal church law.

## Requirements for the Christian Witness:

- at least sixteen years old
- a validly baptized Christian
- living an upright life
- cannot be either parent
- cannot be a Catholic who has left the Church.
- The notation Christian witness is placed under the name of the non-Catholic Christian witness in the baptismal register.