

Why a Parent cannot be the Godfather or the Godmother

(Explanation of canon 874, § 1, 5° of the Code of Canon Law)

Can. 874 - § 1. To be permitted to take on the function of sponsor, a person must: **5° not be the father or the mother of the one being baptized.**

This rule represents a very long tradition in the Catholic Church. Certain reasons for its existence have disappeared over the centuries, but others have been maintained to this day.

The parents have brought natural life to their child. Closely associated with this work of creation, they speak to the immense love of God in this gift of life. They also speak to this great responsibility that they have towards their child.

As for baptism, it represents a new birth: «Born of water and the Spirit» (Jn 3:5), born to a supernatural life. The godparents symbolize the gift of supernatural life in God. Moreover, that is why in the ancient ritual, it was the godmother who presented the baby to the priest to be baptized. The godparents speak to the bearing of this gift; this gift of new life which surpasses all limits of family life, a gift that greatly expands the horizons, a gift that is introduced into the bigger family of the universal church made up of brothers and sisters from all peoples, nations, races and languages. This is why the godparents have been chosen outside the family core.

Concerning the faith of the child and the rapport that the godparents have with the parents, the role of godparent is one of aid and surrogacy. The parents are the first teachers of their children's faith. However, God forbid, something should happen to them before their child has reached spiritual autonomy. Or it could happen that they are negligent in their duty as Christian parents. In these two cases, the godparents have the obligation to assist or to substitute for the parents in the religious education of the child.

In addition, at the time of confirmation for example, in the case where there is no significant person of faith around the young boy or girl, who could serve as godparent, the mother or father (or both) can accompany the their child for presentation to the Bishop. If the father or the mother is the significant person of faith in the life of their young person, they should continue to accompany them, to help them to know Christ and to teach them to pray. And they should do this in their function as mother and father. For after all, being a mother or a father is so much more than being a godmother or a godfather.

One should know that, when it is impossible to find a significant person of faith for the child, the presence of a godparent is not obligatory. The sacrament of confirmation, in this particular case, can be received without a godparent.

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