

Guidelines for Godparents

Preparing to Serve as a Godparent

Every person in the Orthodox Faith must have a Godparent at Baptism. Serving as a Godparent is both an honor and a responsibility that lasts a lifetime. God uses Godparents to help lead souls to redemption. Christ tells us, "Whosoever believeth and is baptized shall be saved" (Mark 16:16). Before one accepts the role of Godparent, they should make certain that they are prepared for the commitment required.

Background

The early Church faced the problem that the majority of those who wanted to become Her members came from pagan families and therefore lacked even an elementary Christian education and knowledge of the new Faith. To remedy this, the Church decided to educate them before their baptism through systematic instruction called "catechism" where they learned simple elements of the Christian Faith. During the 4th Prebaptismal Catechesis of Catechesis of Cyril of Jerusalem a faithful member of the church, an "anadochos" (one who receives) was assigned to each catechumen. The anadochos played an important role in the catechesis of the candidate before and after baptism. Eventually, infant baptism became the norm and the anadochos or Godparent was called upon to serve as spokesperson for the infant.

Choosing a Godparent

Parents must exercise great care when selecting Godparents for their children. The Godparent must bring Godliness and Holiness to the child. They make a faithful commitment of love and join the parents in the struggle to bring the child carefully and prayerfully along the difficult road to heaven. The faith of the Godparent is significant during baptism as they confess that Jesus Christ is their Lord and Savior.

Parents should never select atheists or agnostics or persons who are lukewarm toward the Church. It goes without saying that the Godparent cannot be a non-Orthodox person. They must be in good standing and should have reached the age of reason and moral responsibility (at least 12 years old).

Godparents during Baptism

The Godparent is the child's representative as they enter the Church of Christ. The Godparent speaks for the child and vows that they will do all they can do assure that the child will be a true soldier of Christ and devoted member of His Church. The Godparent renounces Satan on behalf of the child at Baptism and makes a public profession of the Nicene Creed.

Choosing a Name

The Godparent gives the child their Christian name during the baptismal service. St. John Chrysostom writes: "Let us afford our children from the first an incentive to goodness from the name that we give them. Let none of us hasten to call his children

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after his forebears, his father and mother and grandfather and grandmother but rather after the righteous martyrs, bishops and apostles. Let one be called Peter, another John, another bear the name of one of the saints. Let the names of the saints enter our homes through the naming of our children." It is St. John Chrysostom's idea that the child be given a great name and that they are repeatedly told the story of the great bearer of the name. This is so that they might make themselves like the great owner of the name they bear.

After the Baptism

The Godparent's true job begins after the baptism. At the close of the baptismal service, the Godparent solemnly delivers the child into the arms of the mother in front of all those in attendance. As she receives the child, now baptized, sealed and illuminated, the mother kisses the hand of the Godparent. This is a token of the spiritual relationship between the Godparent and the family. The Church encourages the Godparent to bring the child regularly for Holy Communion and prepare to receive Communion with the child. A faithful Godparent will be a friend in Christ and maintain close contact with the Godchild. The Godparent should at all times be a Christ-like example and is encouraged to call to remembrance the sacred and joyous moment of Baptism. The relationship between Godparent and the baptized is so important and so close that the Church forbids marriage between the Godchild and Godparent or their immediate family.

Important Considerations

If you hope to be a Godparent, be sure to carefully consider the chief conditions the Church prescribes in the way of preparation:

1. When you are approached to baptize a child, do not answer immediately but reflect and ask yourself if you could be true to the Baptismal vow
2. The Godparent must be an Orthodox Christian, of good moral character, regular and faithful in attendance at Liturgy and the receipt of the Sacraments and with a sound knowledge of the basic teachings of the Orthodox Church
3. Study the Creed and be prepared to recite it when the Priest calls upon you
4. A Godparent should be neither excessively young (under 12) or advanced in years nor poor in health so that there is a fair possibility that they will live long enough to carry out their obligations
5. The Church recommends one Godparent