

What Is A Godparent?

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Being invited to be a child's godparent is an honor and a responsibility. The United Methodist *Book of Worship* says that godparents should be chosen carefully because they will help nurture the person to be baptized into the Christian faith.

The expectations and qualifications of a godparent can vary from denomination to denomination and even from congregation to congregation. As the pastors of Foundry Church, we want to share with you our understanding of the role of godparents.

First, let us say what being a godparent is not: There was a time in some traditions when godparents assumed the responsibility to raise a child should something happen to her or his parents. This is not the meaning of godparenting in the United Methodist tradition. Parents should be sure to provide for their children's care by designating a caregiver in their wills.

So what is a godparent and what does a godparent do? The answer to these questions lies in our understanding of the sacrament of baptism.

Baptism is a profound and rich ritual with many veins and layers of meaning. But at the heart of baptism are the words spoken by God in Jesus' baptism – "This is my Child, the Beloved, with whom I am well pleased." (Matt. 3: 17) Baptism is a celebration that a particular child – and each of us – is a child of God and a member of the family of God. It is an affirmation of the truth of the pleasure God takes in this child and in all this child is by nature and grace.

So the most essential role of a godparent is to be another adult (in addition to parents and grandparents) in a godchild's life who helps them to know that they are a beloved child of God in whom God is well pleased and who helps them realize that they are a member of God's family.

How does a godparent do this? In many different ways but mostly by paying attention, listening, staying connected, praying for their godchild, and celebrating the passages of a godchild's life.

Godparents often remember their godchild's birthday with a card and phone call. We encourage godparents to remember the anniversary of their godchild's baptism, a date that others may not pause to notice. A note, e-mail or call communicating that your godchild is precious in God's heart and in yours helps make God's love specific and personal.

Some godparents watch for books that will help their godchild think about the meaning and purpose of life at each stage of their journey. Some make an effort to be present at key life passages, such as Confirmation.

But the most important role of a godparent is presence and being someone a child, then a teen, then a young adult can talk to...someone who cares and pays attention...someone who is willing to talk about anything, including spiritual concerns.

We are sometimes asked whether persons of other faiths can be godparents. While the United Methodist Book of Worship suggests that godparents should be members of a church, we have found that sincere people of other faiths have often nurtured our faith journeys as Christians. For this reason, we have been pleased to include people of other faiths as godparents.

It is important that godparents not be negative toward honest faith and spirituality. However, it is also important that godparents be secure enough in their own faith that, should a godchild go through a time of doubt or of rejecting their faith heritage, the godparent will not be threatened or feel the need to pressure a young person to believe a certain way.

[The rules of the United Methodist Church specify that, when a child's parents are not church members, a sponsor shall take the vows on their behalf. In this case, sponsors must be church members.]

During the baptism, godparents are asked the question: "Will you keep this child in your care and prayers so that he/she may grow in the love of God." The godparent answers "I will."

Believing in the family of God means that love and care transcend biology. Being a godparent is an expression of this truth. Godparents are individuals who will care and reach out to a child not because they are the child's parents or grandparents but because we are all part of the family of God.

We believe godparents can find their own sense of God's love strengthened through their relationship with their godchild. When we reach out as a member of God's family, our own place in the family of God becomes clearer.

Baptism communicates that God's love is specific. God doesn't just love all of us; God loves each one of us. As a godparent, you are invited to be an instrument of God's love to a specific child. May God bless you and grant you joy in your giving of yourself, your care, attention and prayers to this beloved child of God.