

# ARCHANGEL GABRIEL ORTHODOX CHURCH



## CATECHISM - THE ROLE OF THE SPONSOR

Every person received into the Church is given a sponsor or godparent. The Church requires one sponsor of the same sex, who will stand as sponsor at baptism. An additional sponsor of the opposite sex is not required, but may be allowed if the pastor deems fit. Multiple sponsors of the same sex are not permitted. The role of the godparent is extremely serious, and not every Orthodox Christian is qualified to be a sponsor.

The bond formed between the sponsor and the baptized in the sacrament of baptism is deep, mystical and eternal. A spiritual bond even deeper than a biological bond is established, that is to say, baptismal water is thicker than blood. The 53<sup>rd</sup> canon of the Sixth Ecumenical Council forbids the marriage of sponsors to the widowed mothers of their god-children saying that “spiritual kinship is better than bodily union.” Godparents and Godchildren have a spiritual and familial bond that cannot be dissolved. Godparents cannot be changed or replaced any more than one’s biological parents can be. The relationship between sponsor and sponsored ought to be nourished and deepened throughout life by mutual prayer and encouragement.

The role of the sponsor is to speak for the catechumen. In cases where the catechumen is an infant or young child the sponsor *literally* speaks for the child answering the priest’s questions during the service of baptism, confessing the Nicene Creed, etc. The sponsor’s job is to *recommend* the candidate to the Church, to vouch for his character to the priest, and to assure the priest that the candidate knows and believes the Nicene Creed. For this reason the candidate must recite the Creed to his sponsor and explain its basic meaning.

Catechumens may wonder how exactly they are to identify a sponsor. This can take place through various means, but usually takes place naturally as the catechumen integrates himself into the life of the parish. Affinities will be made, and relationships established. In the course of such the catechumen might inquire of an acquaintance in the parish if he would be willing to stand as sponsor for him, or the acquaintance himself might inquire of the catechumen if they have found a sponsor. Obtaining a sponsor is a significant decision and ought to be done prayerfully. All sponsors must be approved by the parish priest, since in order to serve as a sponsor in baptism one must be an upstanding Orthodox Christian. It is best, therefore, that the catechumen clear a particular name with the priest *prior* to soliciting a sponsor in order to avoid potential embarrassment.