

Godparent plays important lifelong role

When it comes to the role of godparents in a child's life, Church of the Holy Apostles, Gambrills, pastor Father Jeffrey S. Dauses wants sponsors to heed their lifelong responsibility to be an active and present support in the life of the child.

"In the rite of baptism, there's a question specifically directed toward the godparents; are they willing to be of assistance to the parent and to support the child in his or her life of faith, not just in the rite of baptism, but as a lifelong responsibility," said Father Dauses, who conducts dozens of baptisms annually. "It's always been my dream that godparents would also serve as the sponsor at confirmation, to show that ongoing connection and their ongoing presence in the life of this child."

According to the Code of Canon Law (Canon 872), the role of a sponsor in an infant baptism is to help a child "live a Christian life befitting the baptized and faithfully to fulfill the duties inherent in baptism."

"When I look at the godparents, I see them as representatives of the whole family and the whole community," said Monsignor James O. McGovern, pastor of the 3,500-family parish of Resurrection in Ellicott City.

He said while godparents do not have any legal responsibility for the child and may live far away, they should encourage the child to grow in their faith and should try to stay in touch on special days such as first holy Communion.

According to Canon Law, the sponsor must be a Catholic who has been confirmed and received Communion and who "lives a life of faith which befits the role to be undertaken," according to Canon Law (Canon 874).

Father Dauses said that it is possible for a non-Catholic baptized Christian to serve as a Christian witness to the baptism, but noted there is a canonical distinction between a sponsor and a witness.

Father Dausés said that at Holy Apostles, parents of the child to be baptized are assigned a home host couple who meet with the parents and explain the history of the sacrament and how it is celebrated at the Gambrills church.

“We focus most of our preparation on the parents,” said Father Dausés. “We encourage godparents to listen to what’s prayed at the rite of baptism and take those words to heart. This is not just a great thing these parents are asking you to do, but it’s a responsibility.”

At Resurrection, where 77 baptisms were conferred in the past year, godparents are required to submit a form showing they are members in good standing at their parish.

The parish also has monthly baptism preparation, which not only educates parents about the sacrament and the church, but enables them to meet other families.

Monsignor McGovern, who is godfather to one of his nephews, said it’s also “a great opportunity to get people registered in their parish.”

“I always encourage godparents to see their role as a lifelong commitment, not unlike a marriage,” Father Dausés said. “You know you’re not in it just for the day, you’re in it for the long haul.”