

A gathering of Godchildren

As a priest, I often get questions about who can be a godparent for the baptism of a child. How old does a person have to be? Do you have to be a Catholic? Do you have to be a confirmed Catholic? After answering such questions, I often wonder what criteria people use in choosing godparents for their children. I also wonder how many people know who their godparents are or if they ever hear from them.

I remember, as a kid growing up, who my godparents were. My godfather had left home when he was very young and went to England in pursuit of employment. Then, he ventured to New York. His family lost contact with him for decades until, he finally wrote home to a neighbor to see if any of his family still lived in the same neighborhood. On finding out, he decided to retire from his job with the New York Telephone Company and head home. It was then, that he came into my life as my godfather. He died when I was five years old.

Later on, I was told that he indicated that he would have loved to see me become a priest. His wish was granted but he never got to see it.

Now, as a spiritual father, I am also godfather to two young women. I will always remember the special invitation to be such and can still visualize that special moment.

One of my godchildren is a beautiful young twenty-one year old from Chicago. Her birthday is burned into my psyche. My other godchild is my fourteen year old niece, now in high school in Ireland. I remember and treasure the exact moment her mother asked me to be her godchild as Malia lay in a basinet in the hospital nursery. It was the day before I returned to Mississippi. Obviously, I was at home to celebrate with her every birthday since. I also have had the unique privilege and opportunity to baptize both of my godchildren.

I've had a unique experience of being with both godchildren in the same place at the same time. My older godchild, Katie, spent a semester in Ireland studying business at a college. One weekend, along with my other godchild, Malia, we picked up godchild Katie to spend the weekend with our family.

As part of the weekend together, I celebrated Mass with my family. It brought back another sacramental experience - both of my godchildren's baptism. Now, we were celebrating a nourishing moment together for the first time.

I knew that we would have many more reunions during the next few months. In fact, Katie's parents visited from Chicago in May. Then, they did not only reunite with their daughter but did meet my other godchild and her parents as well. Together, I was in the company of not only both of my godchildren but also in the company of each set of parents at the same time.

I feel sad when I hear some parents or children ask, can we change our godparents. Obviously, the question is motivated by the fact that their respective godparents have had little or no contact or interest in their godchildren. It makes one wonder how much godparents see their role as godparents. Do they see it as a title or as a responsibility to become involved in their spiritual and emotional life of their godchild?

Now that I am retired, I know I will be able to spend more time with my godchildren, especially my niece. I will always look forward to her dropping in on me when she arrives home from school each day and tells me how her day at school went. I also know that she is taking a home economics course in high school. Both of us will find ourselves together in my kitchen trying our hand at elementary cooking for the rest of the family. Maybe the family will need a generous supply of Pepto-Bismol in case we aggravate their constitution too much. Also, Katie's parents informed me that she is not efficient at cooking either. So, maybe, the three of us, godfather and his two godchildren - will finally graduate from the school of hard knock cooking. But, at least, together we will have fun trying.