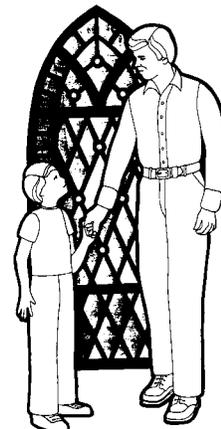


# Honoring the Role of Godparent in Your Parish with a Godparent Sunday Celebration

By Eleni Kallaur

*“Those who have been baptized into Christ have put on Christ... Alleluia.”*

The role of the Godparent in the Orthodox Church is an important one. Along with the parents, the Godparent is charged with the responsibility of assisting in the spiritual development of the child. In some cultures the Godparent is addressed by a special name (an example is Nouno Nouna in Greek) Whether a blood relative or not, the Godparent is now embraced as part of the “spiritual family” of that child.



Although great care and many prayers are put forth by the parents in choosing the Godparent for their child, sometimes after the baptism the relationship does not grow. Other than the occasional birthday and Christmas gifts, some Godchildren and Godparents rarely see or talk to each other. As with any relationship, this spiritual one needs to be fostered and cared for in order for it to develop. The best way for this relationship to grow is through prayer. Pray for your Godchild and his or her parents, and the parents should encourage their child to pray for the Godparents. By doing this, you are encouraging a relationship and giving it the spiritual basis on which to mature.

Other practical ideas for maintaining a relationship with your Godchild are to celebrate the anniversary of the baptism with a card or a telephone call. Along with learning about the child's patron saint, learn about the saint whose feast day is celebrated on the date of his or her baptism and share the story of that saint's life with your Godchild.

Model your faith through your actions. Understand the sacraments as well as the teachings of the Church so that you will be able to answer questions that your Godchild may have.

Encourage the faith through the types of gifts that you give your Godchild. Some examples of gifts are a Bible, prayer book, books on the lives of saints, prayer rope, etc. By doing this, you are giving tools to help your Godchild grow in the faith, and are helping him or her to start a personal library of Orthodox teachings.

If you live in close proximity to your Godchild, make yourself available to spend time with him or her. Find out when school activities and sports events are scheduled and try to go to a few. Plan a special time, whether for lunch or a trip to the zoo, to be with your Godchild. These times together will only help to make your relationship closer.

If you live far away, call, write, or email your Godchild. Send a letter at the beginning of a Church season (Advent, Lent, etc.) to let him or her know that you will be praying for him. If possible, plan visits to see your Godchild.

## **Godparent/Godchild Sunday**

One way that your parish can play a significant role in honoring and fostering this relationship is by hosting a **Godparent/Godchild Sunday**. By doing this, the Church community calls to mind the importance of this bond in Christ, and encourages the development of the relationship. The following description of Godparent/Godchild Sunday is taken from Holy Cross Greek Orthodox Church in Mt. Lebanon, Pennsylvania, and may be altered to suit the needs of each individual parish. It is the customary practice in the Greek Orthodox Archdiocese to celebrate Godparent Sunday on the Sunday after the Feast of the Presentation of Christ. However, the time and celebration of this event may vary according to local custom.

## **Preparation**

Our parish chooses the date for Godparent Sunday well in advance. An announcement giving the date and time is printed in the weekly church bulletin, the church newsletter (which is sent to each parishioner's home), and is announced by the priest. A flier is placed on the church bulletin board and each Sunday [Church] School student is given an individual flier to take home to his or her family. Printed in the flier, along with the date and time, is the suggestion that Godparents and Godchildren should personally invite their Godchildren/Godparents to attend Liturgy with them that morning. Even if they belong to different parishes, this is an opportunity for the Godparents and Godchildren to pray and spend the day together.

In preparation, the younger Sunday [Church] School classes work on a special written invitation. This allows the opportunity for the Sunday [Church] School teachers to present a lesson on the sacrament of baptism, and the role of a Godparent. It also encourages the students to make contact with their Godparents, and promotes a deepening of their relationship. If the class does not wish to create its own invitations, a prepared invitation can be passed out to the students to send to their Godparents.

In some cases, the Godparent may live far away. If this is the case, in order for no one to be excluded, the student is encouraged to ask a close family friend or favorite aunt or uncle to "stand in" for him or her and attend the service. I was asked to "stand in" as Godparent for a child one year. Far from taking the place of the Godparent, it was an honor to pray with that child and renew my own baptismal vows with her.

## **Reconfirmation Service**

An important part of the day is the Godparents and Godchildren receiving Holy Communion together. The Godparents and Godchildren sit together during the Divine Liturgy and throughout the Reconfirmation Service. During the Divine Liturgy, following the hymn "Praise the Lord from the Heavens", the priest comes out of the Royal Gates and asks those in the congregation to reconfirm their baptismal vows. After the Reconfirmation Service, the Godparents and Godchildren receive Holy Communion together.

## **Luncheon**

Following the Divine Liturgy, a luncheon is prepared in honor of the day. The last two years the luncheon was prepared by the teen group at Holy Cross. The food was donated, a nominal fee was charged, and the luncheon was used as a fundraiser for the group. We also have an opportunity for the Godparents and Godchildren to have their picture taken together to commemorate the day. A Polaroid camera is used so that the picture can be taken home with them. A small fee is charged to cover the cost of film. At Holy Cross, the picture is taken with the Godparents and Godchildren holding an icon of Christ.

The Godparent Sunday Celebration at Holy Cross has become an event that parishioners look forward to every year. It is made even more special to the Godchildren when their Godparents, who are not members of Holy Cross, make the extra effort to come to Church and pray with them. By celebrating as a church community to honor Godparents, the Godchildren begin to learn the importance and significance that the Church gives to this relationship. This in turn, encourages the growth of the relationship with their own Godparents, and may even plant in their hearts the desire to one day become Godparents themselves.

*At the time, Presbytera Eleni Kallaur wrote this article, she was an active member of Holy Cross Greek Orthodox Church. Fr. Michael Kallaur was the Assistant Pastor at the time. Presbytera Eleni is a former Church School teacher and youth worker. Fr. Michael pastors Presentation of Christ Greek Orthodox Church in E. Pittsburgh, PA. He and Presbytera Eleni have three sons.*

*Reprinted from the Resource Handbook for Lay Ministry, Orthodox Church in America, Volume III, 2002*  
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