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LOVE God.
SERVE people.
TRANSFORM Lives.

Dear Godparent,

Grace to you and peace in the name of Jesus Christ.

My purposes in writing are: first, to congratulate you on having been chosen to be a godparent; and second, to help you understand what this role means throughout your godchild's life.

I think I can safely, if sadly, say that most people don't think much about what it means to be a godparent except at the baptismal service. Still, the truth is that your godchild's parents wanted you to be an ongoing presence in her life. I'm sure that's a big part of the reason why they invited you to take on this responsibility.

In my mind, that means the primary dimension of your role as a godparent is simply this: to develop and maintain a lasting relationship with your godchild. Spend time with her. Invite her to family functions. Go to a museum or a ballgame. Send her cards and letters. Call or e-mail. Be a trustworthy and loving guide and friend, and let her know you care.

Unless this first dimension is present, the other one – the spiritual dimension – can never materialize. It's hard to exercise any sort of spiritual influence on another's life unless they know that you're genuinely concerned about their well-being. Because most of us view our faith as an intensely personal subject, it's difficult to have any sort of spiritual conversations outside a relationship of intense trust and love.

It becomes even more difficult if we don't take our own faith seriously. Young people are incredibly good at seeing inconsistencies between what adults say and what we do, and they don't hesitate to speak up about it. So, ask yourself: what am I doing to nurture my own spirit? Am I attending church, am I reading the Bible, am I diligent in my prayer life? It's not that you have to be a perfect Christian to be a godparent – but you do need to be seeking God's presence and guidance in your own life.

One way to think about this is to look at the words we use during the baptismal service, and use them as a standard. This question is asked of parents and godparents alike: “Will you nurture these children in Christ's holy Church, that by your teaching and example they may be guided to accept God's grace for themselves, to profess their faith openly, and to lead a Christian life?” Each of those underlined phrases represents an area that we can reflect on and ask ourselves: How am I doing – not only for my godchild, but for myself?

I know each one of those probably deserves a multi-page explanation, and exactly what some of them mean may not be immediately clear to you. Don't be afraid to ask me or your own pastor or priest about them – not because we have all the answers, either, but we may be able to help get you started.

Having said all this, maybe I could close by offering some concrete ideas for things you can do as a godparent. Send a card not just on your godchild's birthday but on the anniversary of her baptism. Emphasize the spiritual importance of holidays like Easter and Christmas, and help to take the edge off their commercialism. Whenever possible, go to church with your godchild. Ask what she's learning in Sunday School. Buy her an age-appropriate Bible and update it regularly to keep up with her reading skills. As your godchild gets older, find somewhere that you can volunteer and serve together. Make it clear that you're willing to talk about spiritual matters – even hard questions for which you may not have the answers. When the time comes and if it's feasible, consider being your godchild's sponsor for confirmation. Finally, don't underestimate the power of prayer. Pray with and for your godchild throughout her life, and encourage her to pray too.

I know all of this sounds like a big responsibility, and it is. I pray that the experience of being a godparent nurtures not only your godchild's spirit, but yours as well. Let me know if there's anything I can do to help.

In Christ,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Joe". The signature is written in a cursive style with a large, looped initial "J" and a long, sweeping underline.

Joe Monahan
Pastor

P.S. If you'd like to learn more, one place to start might be on the web at www.gbod.org (The General Board of Discipleship of the United Methodist Church). In the search field, just type "godparents" to see a list of articles and books that might be helpful.