

The Role of the Sponsor

Not too long ago, the sponsor for Confirmation was a friend or relative who showed up at the ceremony of Confirmation – and that was about it. An ancient way of sponsoring has been rediscovered. In the early years of the Church, sponsors played a practical role in the initiation process. A person often wanted to join the Church because of a Christian's personal example. Naturally, that Christian became the interested person's sponsor.

The sponsor walked with the new member, helping him or her understand the way of Christ and the Church. The sponsor served as a model of what it meant to be a person committed to traveling on the way of Christ

That is where YOU come in. Today, the Church has reclaimed this ancient way of sponsoring new members. The Church recognizes sponsors as people who are guides, models, friends, companions, and witnesses – responsible people the parish entrusts to accompany the candidates on the way to Confirmation.

A young candidate for initiation from our parish has chosen YOU to be his / her sponsor as he / she approaches the initiation sacrament of Confirmation. Are you ready for it? You probably are, for the role you have been asked to play is not as scary as it sounds. In fact, sponsoring a young person on the way to Confirmation can be an exciting and rewarding adventure for both of you.

The responsibility of being a sponsor to a young person is a serious commitment. It requires full participation in the Confirmation preparation sessions, as well as on-going communication and faith-sharing with the candidate. The responsibility does not end with the reception of the sacrament. Sponsors should have a willingness to continue to be in an active relationship with the confirmed person, as he / she continues to grow deeper in faith and closer to God.

Qualities of a Sponsor

You are not expected to be all-knowing or all-perfect. But as a sponsor, here are a few qualities that your candidate should expect from you:

Hospitality A sponsor must be a welcoming and inclusive person – a host. The sponsor needs to be open to accepting and discovering the person and gifts – sometimes hidden – of his / her candidate. Your personal welcome helps the candidate discover both the comfort and challenge offered by the community of faith. You can help establish a sense of belonging in your candidate.

Prayerfulness By being a person of prayer – willing to pray and trying to pray – you will be a person responsive to the needs of your candidate and to the message of the Holy Spirit.

Respectfulness As a sponsor, you need to remain open and considerate. You need to value and esteem the opinions, ideas, gifts, talents, hopes, fears, and feelings of your candidate. You also need to show that respect by treating the sharing you and your candidate do with confidentiality.

Generosity In the hustle and bustle of today, just being a sponsor takes a certain generosity. You will be called upon to be generous with many precious commodities – time, talent, patience and prayer. Likewise, your candidate needs to see and experience what you feel strongly about.

Faithfulness You must be living our faith – regularly attending Mass, receiving the sacraments, and proclaiming our Creed. Faithfulness does not mean perfection. Rather it must be steadfast, seeking, open, and growing. It is all right to let your candidate see that your faith is still seeking. That makes it abundantly clear that your faith is alive.

Selecting Sponsors

Canon Law: Sponsors must have the following qualifications (based on Canon 893, which in turn refers to Canon 874, a description of the qualifications for Baptismal Sponsors):

- A sponsor must be at least 16 years old, unless a different age has been established by the Diocesan Bishop or need for an exception is determined by the Pastor.
- A sponsor must be a fully initiated Catholic (one who has celebrated Baptism, Confirmation, and Eucharist) who “leads a life in harmony with the faith and the role to be undertaken.”
- A sponsor must not be bound by any Church penalty.
- A sponsor must not be the parent of the one to be baptized / confirmed.

The Catechism of the Catholic Church, 1992, states in paragraph 1311:

“Candidates for Confirmation, as for Baptism, fittingly seek the spiritual help of a sponsor. To emphasize the unity of the two sacraments, it is appropriate that this be one of the baptismal godparents.”

Using a godparent is allowed and recommended, but not required, because of sponsors living away from candidates. In our Diocese, sponsors (and parents) are asked to be intimately involved in the Confirmation preparations with the candidates. Sponsors (and parents) are strongly encouraged to attend all sessions and the retreat experience.

What are you to do as a sponsor?

- Be available to your candidate and listen to his / her stories. Help him / her answer questions.
- Attend the preparation sessions, Sacrament of Reconciliation, and retreat with your candidate.
- Pray for your candidate and attend Mass weekly.
- Take your candidate out for a special meal. Set aside enough time to relax, enjoy a meal, and share. Encourage your candidate to share his / her reflections on Confirmation, personal spirituality, or any other topic relating to the faith journey.
- Call or meet with your candidate often during the preparations for Confirmation. Continue to do so even after Confirmation. Faith is a lifelong journey. It is a privilege to be asked to accompany your candidate on his / her journey of faith.
- Attend Confirmation rehearsal and stand with your candidate during the celebration of the Sacrament of Confirmation.