

GUIDELINES FOR CHOOSING A CONFIRMATION SPONSOR

A sponsor is required for the candidate being confirmed. Canon 872 and 874 of the Code of Canon Law lists those requirements for valid and lawful sponsorship in Confirmation:

- * The sponsor's role is to assist the person in Christian initiation
- * The sponsor's role is, together with the parents, to present the young person for the sacrament and help him/her to live a life befitting a baptized Catholic Christian.

A Sponsor:

1. Must be mature enough to undertake this responsibility
2. Must have received the sacraments of initiation, namely Baptism, Eucharist and Confirmation.
3. Must know the fundamental truths of the Faith and be a practicing Catholic who goes to Mass on Sunday, receives the sacraments regularly, and sees to the religious instruction of his/her family.
4. Must be a member of the Catholic Church, canonically free to carry out this office.

Being a sponsor is not just an honor given to a good friend or relative. Sponsorship implies a real appreciation of the faith, a practice of the same, and a sense of responsibility toward the person being confirmed.

Parents cannot be sponsors for their own children because they are already the child's most important teacher.

The first choice for a Confirmation sponsor would be one of the candidate's godparents, to show the close connection between Baptism and Confirmation. If this is not possible, a second choice would be a confirmed Catholic whom the candidate admires and who bears witness to the Gospel in his or her everyday life. If the sponsor is a high school student, he or she must be participating in a formal religious education program.

A sponsor also plays a vital role in the candidate's continuing initiation into full membership in the Christian community. A sponsor of a Confirmation candidate:

- *Supports the candidate in their commitment to a Christian life
- *Must know the candidate and be willing to serve as a strong and long-lasting Christian influence on the candidate.
- *May help the candidate prepare for Confirmation
- *Must be reasonably informed on current Church teachings
- *Presents the candidate to the Archbishop during the Confirmation Mass

INFORMATION ON CHOOSING A CONFIRMATION SPONSOR

A sponsor can make an enormous difference in the preparation of a candidate for the Sacrament of Confirmation. It is important, therefore, that the candidates are encouraged to choose sponsors who are well suited to the role and who will be integral to the preparation process.

The Church's tradition of involving a sponsor in the preparation of candidates for the Sacraments of Christian Initiation is one of our most ancient approaches to faith formation. In the early centuries, when the catechumenate was the entry point for anyone seeking to become a Christian, the sponsor played an extremely vital role.

The sponsor was a living witness and mentor who represented the Christian community (its values, beliefs, behaviors, and so on) to the catechumen. The sponsor would, in turn, witness to the community on behalf of the catechumen's readiness for the initiatory sacraments.

The role of a sponsor was not over with the celebration of the sacraments, however. It was seen as a lifetime commitment, a relationship that would last throughout the individual's journey of faith.

In the early Church the three Sacraments of Christian Initiation were always celebrated at one time; therefore, there was never a different sponsor at Baptism and Confirmation. In subsequent centuries, however, with the separation of Confirmation from Baptism, it became more common to have different persons act as sponsor for those two sacraments.

Both the Code of Canon Law (Canon 89302) and the introduction to the Rite of Confirmation (5) suggest that in view of contemporary pastoral circumstances, it is desirable to have one's baptismal sponsor act as sponsor at Confirmation. While this remains the ideal, it seems much more important that the sponsor chosen be available and involved with the candidate in a significant way, and be able to offer an authentic example of lived Christian faith.

As a bare minimum, the Code of Canon Law specifies that the requirements for acting as a sponsor at Confirmation (Canon 893) are the same as those for godparents at Baptism (Canon 874). Briefly, that canon directs that the person must have completed their sixteenth year, be fully initiated, live a life of faith, not be the parent, and not be bound by any other canonical restrictions.

One of the challenges that might exist occurs when sponsors live at a distance and cannot interact in person with their candidate. However, in this day of instantaneous Internet and cell phone communications, only a little extra effort is required to maintain regular contact between sponsor and candidate. It is important that interaction occurs on a consistent basis and that sponsors are informed about meetings or information they may have missed because of their distance.