



Confirmation - The Role of a Sponsor

“Insofar as possible, there is to be a sponsor for the person to be confirmed; the sponsor is to take care that the confirmed person behaves as a true witness of Christ and faithfully fulfills the obligations inherent in this sacrament.”

– Code of Canon Law #892

Some History

The Church’s tradition of involving a sponsor in the preparation of candidates for the Sacraments of Christian Initiation - *Baptism, Confirmation, and Holy Eucharist* - is one of our most ancient approaches to faith formation.

The role of the sponsor originated in the early Church and is rooted in the *catechumenate*, a process of preparation and formation for initiation into the Church and for living a Christian life. Until the year 313, the Church was under the persecution of the Roman Empire and had to be cautious in conducting its affairs so as to prevent pagan infiltration and persecution. The role of the sponsor then was to attest to the integrity of the person seeking admission into the Church as well as to assist him/her in preparing for the sacraments of *Baptism, Confirmation, and Holy Eucharist* and in living a Christian life. For many centuries, the Sacraments of Initiation were administered at once, most often to adults.

When infant baptism became the norm around the year 800 A.D., these sponsors were called “*patrinus*” or “*godfather*.” Traditionally, we identify the sponsor of a child for baptism as the godparent but the technical term remains “sponsor.” These sponsors would also make the Profession of Faith in the child’s name and accept the responsibility of instructing the child in the faith, especially if the parents failed in this duty.

The sponsor was a living witness and mentor who represented the Christian community 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 893.2) 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.**

Requirements of a Sponsor

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 of age, be fully initiated in the Sacraments (Baptism, Confirmation, Eucharist), 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 communication, 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. If the Sponsor cannot be present at any required functions, the candidate must find a stand-in or proxy for your Sponsor.