

Things to consider when choosing a Confirmation sponsor

Candidates for the sacrament of Confirmation have lots of work to do in preparation for the day when the church will officially recognize them as adults. The day a Catholic is confirmed is one of the most significant events in his or her life, and that significance is apparent in the various requirements candidates must fulfill before they can receive the sacrament.

One of the things a candidate must do is choose a sponsor. A Confirmation sponsor supports the candidate as they prepare to become full members of the church. It's an important role to play, and one no sponsor should take lightly. Choosing a sponsor is also a decision that candidates should take seriously. The following are a few things candidates can consider when choosing a sponsor for their Confirmation candidacy.

Rules & Requirements

There are certain rules and requirements with regard to just who can and cannot be a Confirmation sponsor. These requirements might vary depending on the individual parish, so discuss the guidelines for sponsorship with a church representative if need be.

In general, a sponsor must be at least 18 years of age. In addition, candidates cannot choose one of their parents to act as a sponsor. However, godparents or even siblings often do qualify as sponsors.

A Confirmation sponsor must also be a confirmed member of the Catholic church. The sponsor must also be a practicing Catholic who attends mass. Some parishes might ask about a sponsor's personal life, so candidates should inform potential sponsors about this ahead of time.

Location

Another thing to consider when choosing a Confirmation sponsor is where that potential sponsor lives. Once chosen, the sponsor will be asked to fulfill certain requirements, including attending meetings, so it helps to choose a sponsor who lives nearby. It's not required that a sponsor live in the community, but it will make it easier on the sponsor you choose.

Age

Though any confirmed, practicing Catholic over the age of 18 is eligible to be a Confirmation sponsor in most parishes, it might help to choose someone who is older than 18. A sponsor is supposed to be a role model for the candidate who can offer advice and guidance not only during your candidacy, but after you have been confirmed as well. Someone who is just a few years older than you might not be the best person to provide that advice and guidance.

Relationship

It might make things easier if the person you ultimately choose to be a sponsor is someone you already have a strong relationship with and find is easy to talk to. The

relationship is one that should continue and strengthen after you have been confirmed, so choosing someone you already have a good rapport with will make it easier for the relationship to flourish. In addition, most people find it easier to ask questions or seek advice from someone they're personally close to, and you will likely have a few questions along the way to being confirmed.

Sponsoring A Teen for Confirmation

As they share in a teen's journey toward confirmation, sponsors offer their prayers, experience and their own faith example – as well as a lot of listening.

“They are supporting the candidate in his or her Christian walk and Christian life and, of course, part of that is also praying for the candidate,” said Vicki Klima, director of leadership development at Pax Christi in Eden Prairie, MN.

Selecting a sponsor to help a young person prepare to receive the outpouring of the Holy Spirit at confirmation requires consideration of the sponsor's faith background and relationship with the confirmand, as well as responsibilities the role entails.

Rather than choosing sponsors, there is evidence that in the early church, the entire ecclesial community cared for those entering the church, which is supported by St. Augustine's statement that the church is “Christians begetting Christians,” said Michael Silhavy, a member of the archdiocesan Parish Services Team.

Initiation into the church is still very communal.

“We require that our faith, that our membership in the church, our participation in the church is with and through other Catholics who guide us, who teach us, who celebrate with us, who witness us,” he said.

Making the right choice

The church suggests that it's appropriate for godparents to also sponsor their godchildren for confirmation but this isn't always realistic if they no longer practice the faith, Silhavy said.

The specific criteria for eligibility is a person who is at least 16 years of age, a fully initiated practicing Catholic, and not the candidate's mother or father.

Choosing a family member or friend for reasons other than faith pose the same problem and the title shouldn't be merely honorary, Klima said.

“If you're picking your favorite uncle, for example, you've got to look at the reasons why you're picking the person,” she said.

Sponsors should actively engage with the young person, which is difficult to do long distance, Silhavy said. Whatever the sponsor's connection, the confirmand's family should also know them, he added.

A sponsor should be a good example who can explore faith questions with the teen, Klima said.

“It doesn’t mean the sponsor has to have all the answers, but somebody who’s willing to walk with them, to be a kind of companion with the confirmand but in a mentor kind of way,” she added.

Sometimes teens ask people who are active in a parish ministry to sponsor them, Silhavy said.

The church doesn’t spell out the role and responsibilities for confirmation sponsors, but there are some basic ways they can help confirmands prepare to receive the sacrament, he said.

- **Pray.** Besides the spiritual benefits, young people are encouraged by knowing that their sponsor is praying for them, Silhavy said.
- **Attend formation** if the parish invites or requires sponsors to attend formation or prayer sessions with the confirmand.
- **Serve as a witness** if the parish asks sponsors to write or present a testimony stating that the teen is ready for confirmation. Some parishes have drawn this aspect of the Rite of Christian Initiation for Adults process into youth confirmation formation, Klima said.
- **Answer questions.**
- **Be a role model.** Hopefully, the sponsor somehow exemplifies virtue for the teen, Silhavy said.

In whatever way a sponsor-confirmand relationship develops, being able to talk about faith and other aspects of life will make a difference for the teen, Silhavy said. “I just think conversation is the most important thing to do, just simply to be conversing with someone,” he said.

Along with their parents, a young person’s confirmation sponsor shares the important role of guiding their faith, by words and actions, Klima said.

“You can’t have too many good examples,” she said. “For people of any age to be able to see that ‘Oh, I guess it isn’t just my parents that think faith is important.’”