

What Is the Role of the Sponsor?

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A few years ago, Cathy Anne was leaving Sunday Eucharist as she always did—talking to people she knew as well as introducing herself to those she didn't.

When she was near the front door, one of the ministers of initiation asked to speak with her. This initiation minister had noticed Cathy Anne's hospitable nature and was sure that her gift would be of service to those interested in learning more about Christianity in general and Catholicism in particular. The initiation minister told Cathy Anne that she possessed the gifts of a sponsor and invited her to be one. At that, Cathy Anne said, "Oh no! There must be a mistake. I love meeting people, but I'm not good enough, nor do I know enough theology to be a sponsor to someone looking at the Christian tradition."

Cathy Anne was honored by such an invitation, but she felt that she did not have enough knowledge to be a sponsor. The next Sunday she returned to the parish for the liturgy. As she was leaving, the coordinator of initiation ministry was waiting for her. Cathy Anne would have liked to have hidden, since she did not want to say no again. The coordinator explained that she was seeking someone who was hospitable (a gracious person, basically) as well as prayerful. Cathy Anne agreed to be a sponsor and after the first year decided she would continue in that role. Eventually she trained others to be sponsors.

The role of the sponsor is an important one but does not demand a degree in theology nor an extraordinary gift of hospitality. Rather, those seeking to understand the Christian faith require someone to help them get to know the parish community, the worship space (for example, the ambo, the stations of the cross, the altar), to invite them to parish functions and events, to help them learn to pray and listen to their story of faith, and to also share in prayer. Interestingly, these qualities are within all Christians. Being a sponsor is about living from and out of one's faith to help another learn what it means to be a Christian disciple.

A sponsor is typically different from a godparent. Godparents are usually chosen by the person who is taking part in the Rite of Christian Initiation of Adults, and they



A sponsor will explain Catholic prayers and practices as well as introduce the catechumen to others in the parish.

remain with the person, ideally, throughout their lives as a faithful support in faith. A sponsor is usually chosen by the parish initiation ministers, and stays by the side of the inquirer/catechumen until the end of the period of postbaptismal catechesis (sometimes called mystagogy).

The sponsor must be confirmed and be a practicing Catholic. It is important that the sponsor possesses a spirituality that will help the inquirer/catechumen grow and thrive during the process.

Many sponsors find, just as Cathy Anne did, that they grow in faith while sharing their spiritual journey.