

CIC and Confirmation Sponsors

(For all candidates in the Christian Initiation of Children (CIC) and Confirmation Process)

Who Can Be a Sponsor?

First of all you should be a person of faith, a Roman Catholic adult who is an active member of the Church. Ideally you are a member of the same parish as the young person you have been asked to sponsor (although this is not essential). And also you're someone who is willing to make a time commitment to this faith journey process. But all this is probably the easy part.

The point is that it makes us very uncomfortable to be asked to guide another human being in the area of spirituality. We say: "Who am I? I'm not perfect! What right do I have?" And sometimes we go further with a kind of outdated or inaccurate understanding of humility. We say that it would be prideful for us to try to tell someone else, even a young person, how he or she should live a Christian life. But let's look more carefully and more honestly why it is that we shrink from taking on this role. It is often for two reasons: one a good reason and the other a bad reason. The good reason is that we feel that we are no better or no holier than anyone else. This is true, and it's proper to feel this way. Franz Josef van Beeck, S.J., a theologian, says quite simply: "Nobody knows any more about God than anyone else!" But this fact should encourage us as sponsors, not discourage us! What do I know? I don't have a degree in theology or religious education. This feeling of intellectual inadequacy is a poor reason because theologians are not what young people need. What they need are friends for life's journey, friends who are just a few steps beyond on the road of experience and wisdom and the struggle to live in God's sight. And that's us, Christian adults.

You may not believe this quite that easily, and so we want to share with you some research on the topic of adults who minister well with youth.

The first study is an extensive survey developed by Search Institute in Minneapolis for seminary candidates throughout the country. The compilers of this research inquired of Christians of all ages what they were looking for in the people who minister to them (in this case, the clergy). The responses basically boil down to two major ingredients:

- 1) an open, affirming, warm attitude toward people
- 2) an attitude toward life filled with faith

After these two primary considerations follow the desirability of skills: ability to teach, counsel, organize, administer, etc. But notice that the *major* considerations have nothing to do with professional skills or academic background. Well, think of it yourself. What kind of person do *you* like to go to when you are going through a personal struggle? And think back further. Who was it that you sought out when you were a teenager for guidance in life or spirituality? Or maybe to put it another way: What type of individual adult did you look to and feel encouraged by in your own journey when you were a teenager?

The second piece of research is from a magazine you will never find in your supermarket near the checkout counter. It is the "Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion" (17:4, 1978). In an article by Hoge and Petrillo, "Determinants of Church Participation Among High School Youth," two researchers surveyed four hundred and fifty sophomores to try to parents and peers. The third significant reason was that kids came to the group if the leader was:

- 1) approachable
- 2) sincere
- 3) expressed his or her own beliefs with self-assurance.

Notice again, an academic credential had nothing to do with it. Kids respond to some one who they feel likes them, is approachable and is sincere, not a phony. So that's why it is a cop-out to say you can't work with kids because you're not "qualified" if you equate qualifications with a certain educational background. If you mean that you don't like teenagers, that you're open, warm, sincere and affirming – then you may have a point.

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So the first step in becoming a sponsor for a young person is to believe yourself that you can be helpful to a younger person just in virtue of your personality plus the accumulation of life experience. And remember, they chose you, and so they must already see these good qualities in you.

Let's look now at what a real leader in ministry has said about what the definition of a "spiritual guide" is. Let's re-establish that it has nothing to do with being superior in any way to another person. It has to do with, to borrow from the definition of a sponsor in the Rite of Christian Initiation of Adults, a "friend for the journey." Henri Nouwen, a preacher and writer in the areas of prayer and ministry, defines a minister this way:

One who attempts to put one's own search for God, with all the moments of pain and joy, despair and hope, at the disposal of those who want to join this search but do not know how.

Kids are often people "who do not know how." And for us adults to put our own inner journeys with all their pain and joy "out on the table" for kids to see requires a good deal of vulnerability on our part. Let's add vulnerability to the list of qualifications needed for a spiritual ministry with youth. Often adults get uptight about sharing their struggles with adolescents because they feel it will weaken their image as a role model. Once in a while there may be a value in not revealing some personal struggle we're experiencing to a teenager. But most of the time, kids need to see that adults whom they like and respect are also people like themselves who have no easy time in living this life. They need to hear that it's OK for them to struggle by hearing about your pain. Rather than weaken an adult's image as a role model it usually enhances it to share the truth because that process inevitably wins the respect of anyone of any age. Henri Nouwen says that a minister needs to be a "wounded healer." By this he means that the best way to help another person find healing is for us to share in his or her "woundedness" by sharing our own with him or her.

Lastly, let it be said that you have as much to gain during this process as does your candidate. It is a beautiful and rare opportunity to share your faith with another. It is bound to be a helpful and challenging experience for you also.

What Are You Being Asked to Do? (for those who are local)

1. For those sponsoring eight grade candidates, attend the Rite of Enrollment at a Sunday liturgy prior to the celebration of the Sacrament of Confirmation
2. To meet (at least) four times for thirty minutes with your candidate.
3. To attend required sacramental catechesis sessions, retreats, rehearsals and prayer service prior to the celebration of the Sacrament(s) of Initiation and of course the celebration itself.
4. To pray for the young person you are being asked to sponsor.

What Do I Do at the Liturgical Celebrations?

Directions will be given to you at the rehearsal. It is imperative that you be there so that you may understand your role and also put your candidate at ease.

What Do I Do during the Four Interviews?

1. Choose a comfortable atmosphere (perhaps your home) in which to meet where there is also some privacy.
2. Follow the simple outline for each meeting which are on the topics of obstacles, values, prayer life and commitment, each rooted in Matthew's Gospel.
3. Try to be a good *listener*. Share your advice and wisdom, yes. But most importantly young people need someone to trust, someone who will listen to them about their spiritual journey. You can provide acceptance, affirmation and encouragement by your simple willingness to listen to what they have to say.

First Sponsor Meeting

(These meetings should last about thirty minutes; depending on your relationship they may last longer. It is important that the sessions be established at a particular time for four consecutive weeks. Doing so keeps them special and protects them in a world where we all live such busy lives. If you are comfortable pray with your candidate briefly at the end of the meeting. If you are not, tell him or her that you will be praying for him or her during the week. If you do not live in the area, this can be done via phone, letters or e-mail.)

Scripture

Read together Matthew 19:16-24

Once a man came to Jesus. “Teacher, he asked, “what good thing must I do to receive eternal life?” “Why do you ask me concerning what is good?” answered Jesus. “There is only One who is good. Keep the commandments if you want to enter life.” “What commandments?” he asked. Jesus answered, “Do not murder; do not commit adultery; do not steal; do not lie; honor your father and mother; and love your fellowman as yourself.” “I have obeyed all these commandments,” the young man replied. “What else do I need?” Jesus said to him, “If you want to be perfect, go and sell all you have and give the money to the poor, and you will have riches in heaven; then come and follow me.” When the young man heard this he went away sad, because he was very rich. Jesus then said to his disciples, “It will be very hard, I tell you, for a rich man to enter the Kingdom of heaven. I tell you something else: it is much harder for a rich man to enter the Kingdom of God than for a camel to go through the eye of a needle.”

Commentary

At first glance, it may appear that Jesus is saying it is wrong to be rich. Upon further study of the New Testament, however, we discover that Jesus does not have anything against the rich; in fact, he even seems to frequent their company. Jesus was concerned not because he was rich, but because his wealth was *his* number one concern. It kept him from putting Jesus first in this life.

Having a lot of money can sometimes be a problem if a person wants to be a good Christian. Why? Because having money can lead to a life of comfort and selfishness. And that lifestyle makes it easy to forget the plight of the less fortunate in society. *In itself*, having money is not necessarily an obstacle to living a Christian life. But it *can* be an obstacle for *some* people. When it is such an obstacle, Jesus is saying here that it is better to get rid of one’s money altogether. The same point applies across the board. For example, the drinking of alcohol is not in itself an obstacle to a good family life. But if a husband or wife becomes preoccupied with drinking, then it is an obstacle.

Discussion

Now that the sacramental process is nearing completion ask your candidate what he or she has learned about himself or herself as a result. What does he or she consider to be for himself or herself the main obstacle to spiritual growth? (Feel free to also share your main obstacle.)

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Second Sponsor Meeting

Topic: Values

Scripture: Matthew 13:4-6

The Parable of the Hidden Treasure

“The Kingdom of heaven is like this. A man happens to find a treasure hidden in a field. He covers it up again, and is so happy that he goes and sells everything he has, and then goes back and buys the field.

The Parable of the Pearl

“Also, the Kingdom of heaven is like this. A man is looking for fine pearls, and when he finds one that is unusually fine, he goes and sells everything he has, and buys that pearl.”

Commentary

These two short parables illustrate that values we have need to be cherished, sacrificed for, protected, and put in a place of priority above everything else. Values are one’s beliefs and behaviors chosen freely after serious thought. We cherish them, are willing to publicly affirm them, and act on them. Hopefully for Christians their values reflect those of the Gospel.

Discussion

Give your candidate a pencil and paper and ask him or her to write down the top seven values in life (e.g., family, friends, fun, parties, money, faith, success, sports, etc.) Tell him or her to be as honest as possible. You are not here to judge him or her but to help him or her clarify what his or her true priorities in life really are. You can do the same exercise. Share your lists with each other.

Third Sponsor Meeting

Topic: Prayer Life

Scripture: Matthew 6:5-8

When you pray, do not be like the hypocrites! They love to stand up and pray in the houses of worship and on the street corners so that everyone will see them. I assure you, they have already been paid in full. But when you pray, go to your room, close the door and pray to your Father, who is unseen. And your Father, who sees what you do in private, will reward you.

When you pray, do not use a lot of meaningless words, as the pagans do, who think that God will hear them because their prayers are long. Do not be like them. Your Father already knows what you need before you ask him.

Commentary

The purpose of the interview is to support your candidate in the practice of private prayer. It is also to be assured that he or she is faithful to Sunday Mass. At this stage in his or her sacramental process, he or she really should be attending Mass weekly. If you have any difficulty in this matter, you could discuss with the D.R.E., his or her leader or parish priest.

Discussion

Ask your candidate to fill out this short questionnaire. After completion, discuss his or her responses as well as your own to the same questions.

FREQUENCY:

I pray _____ per day, per week, per month

PUBLICLY:

I attend Mass how often? _____

What I find most difficult at Mass is _____

FORM:

My favorite form of prayer is _____

PLACE:

The place I like to pray is _____

What I find most helpful at Mass is _____

DIFFICULTY:

My major difficulty in praying is _____

What I find most difficult at Mass is _____

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Fourth Sponsor Meeting

Topic: Commitment

Scripture: Matthew 13:1-9, 18-23

The same day Jesus left the house and went to the lakeside, where he sat down to teach. The crowd that gathered around him was so large that he got into a boat and sat in it while the crowd stood on the shore. He used parables to tell them many things.

“There was a man who went out to sow. As he scattered the seed in the field, some of it fell along the path and the birds came and ate it up. Some of it fell on rocky ground, where there was a little soil. The seeds soon sprouted, because the soil wasn’t deep. When the sun came up it burned the young plants and because the roots had not grown deep enough the plants soon dried up. Some of the seed fell among thorns, which grew up and choked the plants. But some seeds fell in good soil, and bore grain; some had one hundred grains, other sixty and others thirty.”

And Jesus concluded, “Listen, then, if you have ears! Listen then and learn what the parable of the sower means. Those who hear the message about the Kingdom but do not understand it are like the seed that fell along the path. The Evil One comes and snatches away what was sown in them. The seeds that fell on rocky ground stand for those who receive the message gladly as soon as they hear it. But it does not sink deep in them, and they don’t last long. So when trouble or persecution comes because of the message, they give up at once. The seed that fell among thorns stands for those who hear the message, but the worries about this life and the love for riches choke the message, and they don’t bear fruit. And the seed sown in the good soil stand for those who hear the message and understand it; they bear fruit, some as much as one hundred, others sixty, and others thirty.”

Commentary

Commitment is the name of another challenge. Many people today want to avoid being pinned down about anything. They want to be casual about everything in life. This of commitment, while permeating the entire culture, is especially noticeable among youth. How many kids do you know who, having made a promise to do something or go somewhere, will break the original promise? It’s as if they had written in an exception clause: “I’ll do this if something better doesn’t come along” or “if it doesn’t get too boring or too hard.” In some teenage circles this is the accepted way of acting.

After the investment of so much energy, time, study and reflection during their sacramental process, it is hoped that your candidate is ready and serious about being a follower of Jesus Christ.

Discussion

Ask your candidate what kind of “soil” he or she sees himself or herself as (also share how you see yourself). Ask him or her if he or she sees religious education as entrance into fuller participation in the Christian community. Does he or she feel ready to *try* to follow Jesus’ way more closely?

