



Saints Francis and Clare of Assisi Catholic Church

As a Confirmation Sponsor...

You are beginning a grand adventure. You've been asked to walk with a candidate as s/he embarks on the challenging journey toward Confirmation. By accepting that invitation, you'll be able to help a young person grow in her/his relationship with both Jesus and the church. What an honor! What a privilege!

The Confirmation preparation process can be—almost certainly will be—a time of spiritual and religious renewal and transformation for both you and the candidate. We, at Saints Francis and Clare of Assisi Church, would like to provide you with some background and direction to make your experience as a sponsor, both enjoyable and meaningful so that by the time you complete the preparation process you are grateful that you said “yes” when that special young person asked you to be a sponsor.

A little history...

The role of a sponsor can be traced to the early Church. Though the function of a sponsor has changed, it has always been connected with the Christian initiation and the sacraments of Baptism and Confirmation. Originally, the sponsor was responsible for teaching the candidate about Christ, Scripture, Church doctrine, and Christian-living. The sponsor also helped the candidate develop his or her prayer life and cultivated a spirit of service and outreach to others. This was at a time when adult Baptism was most common in the Church. The sponsor had a key role in the catechumenate (“period of instruction”) which lasted up to three years. The catechumenate culminated in the reception of all three sacraments of initiation— Baptism, Confirmation, and Eucharist—at the Easter Vigil. When the preparation for initiation was completed, the sponsors presented the candidates to the Church and vouched for their readiness to receive the sacraments. They brought the candidates to church at dusk. The local bishop presided over the entire ceremony. The sponsors stood with them as they received the sacraments of Baptism, Confirmation, and Eucharist. The sponsoring role did not end at the time of the reception of the sacraments. The sponsors continued to companion the newly baptized as they became more integrated into the life of the Church. About the fifth century, with the increase in infant Baptisms, the rite of Baptism and Confirmation were separated and celebrated at two different times. The baptismal sponsor—called the godparent—and the Confirmation sponsor were then often two different people.

Also, as time went on, the person chosen as the godparent for Baptism and the sponsor for Confirmation had little to do with the faith life of the candidate other than being present at the actual celebration of the sacrament. The role of the sponsor became mostly symbolic for many years.

Qualifications...

Today in the Church the qualifications for a sponsor are the same as for a baptismal sponsor.

A sponsor must:

- be chosen by the person who will be confirmed, or by the parents;
- be at least sixteen years old;
- be a Catholic who has already been confirmed and who has received the sacrament of Eucharist;
- lead a faith-filled life and be a Catholic in good standing;
- not be the mother or father of the one to be confirmed.

If you have been chosen by a teenager to be his or her Confirmation sponsor, you should:

- be a Christian witness in both words and deeds;
- offer support to your candidate as he or she moves through the challenging teen years, including experiencing doubts about his or her own faith;
- challenge your candidate's words and actions when they contradict Christian values;
- be willing to participate with the candidate at liturgy and in Christian service

Companion on the Journey vs a Role Model...

Most of us live with such an inflated sense of what it means to be Christian that we find the notion of being a role model for young people not only intimidating but even a bit arrogant. We assume that a Christian is someone who has already arrived at spiritual perfection. Then we look in the mirror and see a person with glaring shortcomings and weaknesses—limited knowledge, maybe a bad temper, impatience with others, a lack of trust in the love of God—basically, a real mess. In fact, we're so weak and so ill-equipped that we look as bad as . . . the Apostles! Jesus didn't build his ministry around those with encyclopedic knowledge of Judaism or all sorts of public acclaim as leaders of the community; in fact, those were the very people who He called "hypocrites"! Why do we assume it's different now? Rather than seeing yourself as a role model for your candidate, think of yourself as the candidate's companion on the journey of faith. You may have a little more experience than she or he does—that's why you're so aware of your shortcomings—but you share the same human and spiritual hungers, the same search for meaning, the same struggles with the human condition, the same hope for relief from all the hurts and hurdles of life. And, of course, the same deep hope that in Jesus we can find our salvation from all the things that keep us from fullness of life. Your candidate doesn't need you to be

anyone other than who you are—one who cares deeply and takes the journey of faith seriously enough to want to walk it with her or him. Paradoxically, if you just relax and enjoy that shared journey, you may well become a role model for your candidate.

The Effects of Confirmation...

The effects of the sacrament of confirmation are about strength. Can we find power in Someone we cannot even see? Certainly the Spirit can blow at will—we are unable to predict, control or explain the work of the Spirit! But in this sacrament we see that the effects of the Spirit are anything but invisible: real unity in the assembly, real leaders who stand beside us, real Bishops, Archbishops, and Abbots who present the touch of Christ. We are called together here. We are best at being human when we work with others. Confirmation, in its rite and in its theology, links us to others. The one whose hand is on my shoulder, sponsoring me, makes it clear that I can depend on real people. Our sponsors remind us that there are helpers right here who we look up to and can talk to. The gathering of many people together to be confirmed, as well as the assembly of those who come to celebrate with us, gives us a dramatic experience of the people of God. Are all the folks here in this church serious about this? Maybe we really aren't alone. The one rubbing oil on us links us to the larger unity of the universal Church. Are any of these people here perfect? None of them is. But God wants to make something of each one of us. With Mary, we hear the message, "Nothing will be impossible with God" (Luke 1:37). Christian life is not just a matter of beginning—it involves deepening and feeding our commitment along the way. The Holy Spirit confirmed in us creates power to transform challenges into victories, into the rewards of a rich life lived in the body of Christ, where our unique gifts become available to others, and to ourselves, in a deeper way

Connection Points....

Consider using one or more of the following Bible passages during the period of formation (August to April) as a focus of personal reflection and possible dialogue with your candidate:

Matthew 4:1-11. Jesus is tempted in the desert. • Jesus had to confront temptations about wealth, prestige, and power. What are the temptations that young people really struggle with today? Is there one that you're particularly drawn to? How might you combat that temptation?

Mark 10:46-52. Jesus heals Bartimaeus: "My teacher, let me see again." • Each of us has one or more "blind spots," parts of the message of Jesus that we have a hard time seeing or understanding. Share one or more of your own blind spots with your candidate, and then invite him or her to do likewise.

John 20:19-29. Thomas the Doubter demands a sign. • Thomas can come off as weak and unfaithful, but can you really blame Thomas for doubting Jesus and his Resurrection? Can't doubt even be a good thing at times, something that leads us to seek help and therefore promotes growth? What parts of the Gospel do you struggle to believe, and how might that struggle be an invitation to grow

John 14:15-29. Jesus promises to send the Holy Spirit to his disciples. • Read the entire passage once. Then read it again, listening for verses, phrases, maybe even a word or two that strikes a chord in your

heart. Ask your candidate to do so as well. Then discuss what words or verses resonated with each of you and why

James 2:14-17. Faith must be backed up by good works. • Name three concrete, practical ways in which you can express your faith through actions. Ask your candidate to do the same. Compare lists and discuss how you might help each other carry out those actions.

Colossians 3:12-17. Many qualities permeate the life of the mature Christian. • This exquisite passage would work well in summing up and bringing to a close your pre-Confirmation relationship with your candidate. Consider ways you might use it in a prayerful way with your candidate. If you feel comfortable doing so, consider reading it to each other in alternating verses.

A Closing Thought ...

The role of the sponsor is both a challenge and a privilege. Walking with a young person through the Confirmation process can be a time of spiritual renewal for both of you. Please know that our Youth Ministry Leaders are praying for you and your candidate as you walk this journey together. And remember always that the Spirit of God walks with you.

Dates to Remember...

Saturday, January 18, 2020 11:30 Registration

12:00-5:30 **Mandatory Afternoon of Reflection** with Sponsor

5:30-6:30p Blessing at 5:30 Mass

Friday-Saturday, March 13-14, 2020 Confirmation Retreat at SSFC (Sponsors do not attend but will be asked to write a letter to and pray for their Confirmation Candidate)

5:30-6:30 Blessing at 5:30 Mass on March 14 (Sponsors attendance for the Mass is optional.)

Mandatory Rite of Confirmation at Saints Francis and Clare is on **May 9, 2020 at 5:30pm**

Prayer for Confirmation...

Holy Spirit, strengthen _____ with your gifts of Wisdom, Understanding, Counsel, Fortitude, Knowledge, Piety, and Fear of the Lord to serve as a disciple of Christ. Grant that s/he may grow into the fullness of the stature of Christ. Fill her/him with the joy of your presence. Increase in her/him the fruit of your Spirit. Help him/her to experience and trust your dwelling within, so that he/she can count on your guidance today and every day. Show us the way to help one another become better disciples of Jesus Christ, sharing your love with our world and with each person we meet.

Come, Holy Spirit! Come.