



**Chosen**

Your Journey to Confirmation



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## SPONSOR'S GUIDE

Colin & Aimee MacIver



This Sponsor's Guide is a component of the *Chosen: Your Journey to Confirmation* program. General Editors: Chris Stefanick and Ron Bolster.

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## WELCOME TO **CONFIRMATION PREPARATION!**

You have been invited to sponsor a candidate for Confirmation—an invitation of great honor and responsibility. “Sponsor” is not just an honorary title; it is a calling. Your candidate has identified you as a living witness of faith in Jesus Christ and his Church.

With this honor comes the responsibility to guide and support your candidate as he or she prepares for the Sacrament of Confirmation and beyond. You are called to be a Christian witness, friend, prayer warrior, and ally to your candidate for the rest of your life.

You may have questions and, perhaps, even some hesitations about your role as sponsor. This guide will help you become an effective sponsor by renewing and encouraging your personal growth in the Catholic Faith and life. This *Sponsor’s Guide* includes practical ideas for engaging your candidate and provides clear answers to questions that are often asked—by teens and adults—about the fundamentals of the Catholic Faith.

The most important and effective part of your sponsorship is prayer. May the Holy Spirit inspire and encourage you as you accompany your candidate on the journey to the fullness of life in Christ.





**PART 1**

# **Becoming a Confirmation Sponsor**

*“The sponsor is to take care that the confirmed person behaves as a true witness of Christ.”*

—Code of Canon Law, 892





## WHAT IS CONFIRMATION?

*Confirmation is a sacramental outpouring of the Holy Spirit that leaves a permanent imprint on the soul, completes Christian initiation, and empowers us to be witnesses to Christ (see CCC 1302–1305).*

Many people mistakenly view Confirmation as “graduation” from religious education, merely a cultural passage into maturity or an opportunity to choose whether or not to remain Catholic. Yes, a candidate does choose whether to receive the Sacrament of Confirmation and does, upon reception of the sacrament, step toward maturity (and yes, mandatory classes often do come to an end), but none of these facts captures the heart of Confirmation.

## What happens at Confirmation?

Like all sacraments, Confirmation does more than symbolize a spiritual reality; the sacraments bring forth the spiritual realities they represent. Confirmation engages our senses. We see the bishop's hand raised in anointing. The candidate feels and smells the *sacred chrism* (the sacramental oil used in Confirmation) and hears the bishop proclaim, "Be sealed with the gift of the Holy Spirit."<sup>1</sup>

What we physically see, hear, feel, and smell in Confirmation is an anointing, a sealing with the Holy Spirit. These visible elements are not merely symbolic; rather, working through what is visible and sensory, the same Holy Spirit who was poured out upon the apostles at Pentecost now seals the newly confirmed soul.

When the Holy Spirit descended upon the apostles as they prayed together at Pentecost (see Acts 2:1-13), the effects appeared immediately. The sacramental presence of the Holy Spirit in their souls emboldened them to speak the truth, and they proclaimed their faith fearlessly.

The *Catechism of the Catholic Church* (CCC) lists five effects of Confirmation (see CCC 1303):

- It affirms our identity as children of God (“divine filiation”).
- “It unites us more firmly to Christ.”
- “It increases the gifts of the Holy Spirit in us.”
- It strengthens our bond with the Church.
- It strengthens us to spread and defend the Faith by our words and actions as fearless witnesses to Christ and the power of the Cross.

## WHAT IS A **SPONSOR**?

As a sponsor, you have three main roles, which take place before, during, and after Confirmation:

- *Before*  
Assisting the candidate as they prepare for Confirmation
- *During*  
Presenting the candidate for Confirmation
- *After*  
Helping the confirmed person to fully live out his or her Christian faith

## What does a sponsor do?

The Church tells us that “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.”<sup>2</sup> Put another way, both before and after Confirmation, your job is to help your candidate live as an authentic disciple of Jesus Christ.

### We can break this down into three things:

- ***Accompany your candidate.*** Provide a sounding board for your candidate to talk about his or her spiritual life, habits, hopes, fears, and struggles, and help your candidate find answers to their questions about the Catholic Faith.
- ***Pray for your candidate regularly.*** Pray that he or she will not only come to know about the Faith but also encounter Christ while preparing to receive the sacrament. As a sponsor, commit to lifting your candidate up in prayer every day.
- ***Encourage and challenge your candidate*** to grow in virtue and to set aside any habits that would prevent his or her soul from being fully open and ready to receive all the gifts God wants to give him or her through the Sacrament of Confirmation.

## What qualifies someone to be a Confirmation sponsor?

### **A sponsor must have these qualifications:**

- be a Catholic who is at least sixteen years old, “unless the diocesan bishop has established another age, or the pastor or minister has granted an exception for a just cause”;<sup>3</sup>
- have received the Sacrament of Confirmation;
- be a person who “leads a life of faith in keeping with the function to be taken on”;<sup>4</sup> and
- not be a parent of the candidate.

In short, a sponsor should be a fully initiated Catholic who is faithful to Christ and his Church.

## What if I am not sure I have what it takes to be a good sponsor?

If you feel spiritually inadequate to be a Confirmation sponsor, consider this as an invitation from God to grow in your own faith. If something glaring has been separating you from God, maybe now is the time to bring that to Confession. Your candidate sees something spiritually admirable in you—something in you that inspires him or her in the Catholic Faith. Set aside any self-doubt and consider that God may be calling you to this role for the sake of examining your own heart as well as guiding your candidate.

Nothing promotes personal growth like forgetting ourselves and turning toward another. The best way to be a good sponsor is to pray often for your candidate and to keep your own eyes fixed on Jesus. Do not be afraid if you are not perfect. It is often said that the Church is not a museum of saints but a hospital for sinners.



## **What do I do or say at the Confirmation ceremony? What should I say to the bishop?**

A sponsor's role in the sacramental rite is simple. You and your candidate will process to the altar in a line like a Communion line with the other sponsors and candidates. If you receive no specific instructions about what to say ahead of time, when your candidate gets to the front of the line, simply place your right hand on your candidate's right shoulder and say, "Your Excellency (or Your Eminence, if the bishop is a cardinal), I present [name of the patron saint your candidate has chosen or baptismal name if no saint was chosen]." (Note: If the confirming bishop takes the lead and asks the candidate directly what his or her name is, there is no need for you to say anything.)

If you meet the bishop at a reception or before the ceremony and the more formal greeting ("Your Excellency" or "Your Eminence") slips your mind, do not panic. Most bishops are fine with simply being addressed by their title: "Bishop," "Archbishop," or "Cardinal."

## What do I do after my candidate has been confirmed?

After your candidate has received the Sacrament of Confirmation, your role as an encouraging mentor of faith continues. Obviously, each situation allows for different levels of ongoing contact, but it is fitting to check in often with your candidate. Continue encouraging him or her in the life of faith. As best you can, send a clear message that Confirmation was not a graduation from religious education but a fuller initiation into the Christian Faith. Developing consistent communication prior to Confirmation will be helpful in continuing the relationship with your candidate after Confirmation.

## HELPING YOUR CANDIDATE **PREPARE**

Two of the most important things you can do to help your Confirmation candidate prepare for the sacrament are to

- be personally committed to prayer and
- impress on your candidate, by word and example, the importance of participating in the sacramental life of the Church.

## How can I impress on my candidate the importance of the sacraments?

The principal way that we participate in the Church's sacramental life is through the regular reception of the Eucharist and Confession.

The Mass is the most vital, basic element in the life of faith. The Eucharist is much more than a symbol or reminder; it is Christ himself truly present in the appearance of bread and wine. In his traditional benediction hymn *Tantum Ergo*, St. Thomas Aquinas reminds us that what is hidden to our senses, we grasp with the help of faith.

Through the Sacrament of Penance and Reconciliation, Jesus heals the brokenness of our souls. Do not be afraid—no matter how long it has been, you can return to Confession this week, even today, and experience healing and strengthening in your relationship with God.

Your candidate chose you as a sponsor for a reason. You have made an impression on him or her. Now, by your own example, you can help ensure that these two sacraments become an active and habitual part of your candidate's Catholic life.

## How do I talk to a teenager about faith, Jesus, and moral issues?

First, take heart. Your candidate has chosen you because he or she admires you and holds you in high regard. As a sponsor, you have a distinct advantage over any other authority figure—you were personally *chosen* by your candidate.

Any communication with teenagers must be honest above all else. Even though their own behavior is often unpredictable and inconsistent, teenagers have a keen sense of whether or not adults believe what they say. They want to be treated as increasingly mature and independent young adults, not as children.

**Here are some things to keep in mind as you talk with your candidate:**

— ***Avoid presenting yourself as an expert or as someone who never makes mistakes.***

Draw from your own life to illustrate a point or emphasize an aspect of faith. (Show appropriate discretion, and avoid giving license to undesirable behaviors. It is OK and often advisable to be vague when talking about your own faults with a teenager.) Your role is simply to use your own honest experiences to guide him or her.

— ***Listen for the question behind the question.***

If your candidate asks you a difficult question, seek to discover what he or she is really getting at. Often, when teens ask a particular question, there is really a deeper issue they are trying to understand.

— ***Be sure you understand the question before responding.***

You may want to repeat your candidate's question before answering it to be sure you understand what he or she is asking. As much as possible, talk to your candidate honestly and directly; do not water down the truth. Teenagers appreciate honesty, even if they are not yet fully mature and able to deal with the truth of your answer.

— ***Whenever possible, find a point of affirmation or agreement to build on.***

Avoid conversation-ending statements such as “That is just how it is” or “You must believe it because that is what the Church teaches.” Affirm what is good in your candidate's opinions—even if it is just to praise his or her willingness to grapple with hard questions.

## What if my candidate questions basic Catholic teachings, such as whether God exists?

First, pray for the gift of faith for your candidate, and share the life of faith with your candidate—praying, encouraging, and engaging in acts of service with him or her. Christianity is not a science to figure out but a life to live. When we live it well, many questions disappear. And good answers to theological questions do not necessarily translate into faith. Faith is about building a relationship with God.

That said, never gloss over a question. Questions can be very important in helping your candidate develop a genuine, mature faith. St. Anselm, a Doctor of the Church, gave us a clear formula for the relationship between faith and questioning, which is “faith seeking understanding.” When our faith is stirred up, we naturally ask questions and want to know more.

As questions are sparked in the heart and mind of your candidate, you can be a reliable guide to the truth by seeking answers from the *Catechism*, Scripture, and other trustworthy sources. To help you prepare for your candidate’s questions, this guide includes an outline of formation topics covered in the *Chosen* program.



## PART 2

# Four Important Conversations to Have with Your Candidate

*“You did not choose me, but I chose you and appointed  
you that you should go and bear fruit.”*

—John 15:16



## YOUR CANDIDATE'S **CHOSEN JOURNEY**

Throughout *Chosen*, the three phases of the catechumenate (sacramental preparation) follow John 14:6: “Jesus said to him, ‘I am the way, and the truth, and the life; no one comes to the Father, but by me.’” In *Chosen*, we discover that Jesus is ...

- **The Way**  
(pre-catechumenate, or discovering the Faith)
- **The Truth**  
(catechumenate, or learning the Faith)
- **The Life**  
(purification and enlightenment, or living the Faith)

Following Confirmation is the fourth phase, *mystagogy*, when the newly initiated Christian is immersed in the life of Christian community. After Confirmation, encourage your candidate to seek out and get involved in parish-based activities (like a youth group) to continue his or her spiritual journey.

Corresponding to these three phases of Confirmation preparation (the Way, the Truth, and the Life) and the mystagogy phase are four important conversations that you will have with your candidate.

## SUPPORTING AND ENCOURAGING YOUR CANDIDATE

This section of the Sponsor's Guide includes conversation starters that you can use in a variety of ways to help engage with your candidate as you support him or her in preparing for the Sacrament of Confirmation.

The suggested conversations on the following pages provide a launching pad for fruitful discussion between you and your candidate. Several possible discussions are suggested for each phase. Choose one, and then think about and prepare your own answers before you talk to your candidate. Feel free to put them into your own words. This will make the conversation more natural. Reading from the book during your time together might turn your candidate off.

Your goal should be to draw out your candidate's thoughts and feelings about what he or she is learning and experiencing. Be sure to *listen* and ask follow-up questions! If you are stumped by a question and need help finding the answer, consult the *Catechism* or ask your parish priest. Some other great resources are also listed at the end of this guide.

# CONVERSATION 1

## THE WAY

### On the Road to Discovering Christ

*It would be best to have this first conversation with your candidate after he or she has completed Lesson 6, “Why be Catholic?”*

In this section of *Chosen*, your candidate will explore core questions about the meaning of life, happiness, God, Jesus, and the big picture of the Catholic Faith.

These lessons begin with establishing the Faith as a response to our deepest questions and desires, and they seek to present the core proclamation of the Faith in a clear and bold way. Giving your candidate the time and attention to talk through these ideas will help him or her appreciate the importance of preparing for Confirmation and will also help strengthen your relationship.

## Conversation Starter 1: **BIG QUESTIONS**

Consider the following questions to address with your candidate. You do not have to use them all. Just pick your favorites. Then use them as starting points to discuss the Faith and your candidate's spiritual journey. Listen carefully, and ask follow-up questions. Also, share your own thoughts and ideas as the conversation progresses (being careful not to dominate).

- » What makes you happy?
- » What was the happiest day of your life?
- » What makes you unhappy or gets in the way of your happiness?
- » What are some ways you could “prove” that God exists?
- » When have you felt close to God?
- » Have you ever felt disconnected from God or even abandoned by him?
- » What are some of the questions you have about God?
- » How would you describe Jesus to someone who has never heard of him?
- » How has your understanding of Jesus and your relationship with him changed as you have gotten older?
- » What are some misconceptions you think people have about Jesus?
- » What makes the Catholic Church different and unique compared with other churches?
- » What are some things you like about being Catholic?

Conversation Starter 2:  
**IMPORTANT BLANKS**

Email, text, or mail your candidate five of these faith-related, thought-provoking, fill-in-the-blank statements. Ask your candidate to finish the statements with a word or phrase, and tell him or her you will do the same. Choose from the following, or make up your own. Then get together with your candidate in a comfortable setting (like lunch or taking a walk), and share your answers with one another and discuss your responses.

- » I live for \_\_\_\_\_.
- » I was happiest when \_\_\_\_\_.
- » God is \_\_\_\_\_.
- » God is not \_\_\_\_\_.
- » I feel close to God when \_\_\_\_\_.
- » Jesus is \_\_\_\_\_.
- » The Church is \_\_\_\_\_.

Conversation Starter 3:  
**SAINTS' NAMES**

Ask your candidate what saint's name he or she plans to choose for Confirmation and why. If your candidate is keeping his or her baptismal name or simply has not chosen a saint yet, discuss your favorite saints—and why you like them. The conversation may help your candidate pick a Confirmation name or better appreciate the name they have already chosen.

# CONVERSATION 2

## **THE TRUTH** Encountering the Light of Christ

*It would be best to have your second  
conversation after your candidate has completed  
Lesson 14, “Why have I been chosen?”*

This second set of lessons builds on the core proclamation of the Catholic Faith, addressing questions about heaven and eternity and then the sacraments as the established way to receive grace and find fulfillment on our walk toward eternity. A conversation with your candidate at this time can help address questions that come up along the way and lead him or her into a deeper participation in the sacramental life of the Church.

### Conversation Starter 1:

## **CONFESSION**

Discuss the Sacrament of Reconciliation with your candidate, sharing your thoughts and experiences and asking about his or her thoughts and experiences. Be honest, but be careful not to discuss things in a way that may make your candidate uncomfortable or less open to the sacrament. Share how repentance, forgiveness, and mercy have been a part of your own life, especially in connection with Confession. Then go to Confession together at your parish (or a neighboring parish). Consider stopping on the way home for a meal or dessert to continue the conversation and share your experiences.

### Conversation Starter 2:

## **CONFIRMATION**

As your candidate progresses in *Chosen*, discuss what the Sacrament of Confirmation is and what it accomplishes. Share what you remember about your own Confirmation and how being part of this process may be giving you new insights into the sacrament. Ask your candidate to share what Confirmation means to him or her. Talk about how Confirmation is more than a ceremony, noting the following points and asking what he or she thinks of each (see CCC 1302–1305):

- » Confirmation completes the Christian initiation begun at Baptism.
- » Confirmation is a sealing with and an outpouring of the Holy Spirit.
- » Confirmation empowers us for Christian life and service to God and the Church.

### Conversation Starter 3: **GOD'S PLAN FOR OUR LIVES**

*Vocation* is an essential part of the Christian life. Everyone is called by God to a particular *state in life*—to marriage, religious life (i.e., as a brother or sister in a religious order), Holy Orders (i.e., as a priest or deacon), or the single life. As a sponsor, you can be deeply influential in establishing a healthy vision of discernment and openness to God's plan. You are also in a position to guide your candidate as his or her process of discernment continues in the future. Here are a few suggestions to open a conversation about discernment:

- » Talk about your own life and how you discerned God's will. If you are still in the process of discernment yourself, talk about your experience and where you feel God is calling you.
- » Ask your candidate about any role models he or she has—people who seem to be doing exactly what they are meant to do. Talk about some people you admire in this way.
- » Ask your candidate if he or she has any fears or apprehensions about discernment. Be aware that this may be a sensitive topic because of personal history—divorced parents, a fear of religious life, a doubtful attitude about the future, or other issues. Listen carefully.
- » Pray together for discernment. A simple way of entrusting the future to God is to ask the Blessed Mother for her intercession by praying a Hail Mary.



# CONVERSATION

## **THE LIFE** Choosing Ultimate Happiness

*It would be best to have this third conversation with your candidate after he or she has completed Lesson 21, “Do I have what it takes?”*

This final set of lessons addresses questions about the active practice of the Catholic Faith in both our devotions and our everyday lives. As your candidate begins his or her final preparations to receive the Sacrament of Confirmation, the program tackles issues of morality and living a Christian life. As a sponsor, you have undoubtedly lived more life! Sharing your experiences and challenges in living a Christian life can help your candidate to consider the decisions he or she may face in the future—and give him or her both insight and hope.

### Conversation Starter 1:

## CHECK-IN

Take your candidate out for dinner, and ask how he or she is doing. If you are drawing a blank, you can ask simple things like “How is life?” “What is your favorite class?” “How are your friends?” “Are they good to you?” “Is there any drama at school weighing you down?” “What are your latest dreams for your life?” “How are you doing with living your faith?” or “How is life at home?”

### Conversation Starter 2:

## DOING GOOD

Pick a common act of service to perform with your candidate. If you live nearby, you may want to join him or her. If not, choose a similar activity that you can each do in your respective locations. For example, you can each serve at a local food bank or soup kitchen or visit a nursing home. After you have completed your acts of service, consider the following questions:

- » What does it mean that we find ourselves when we give ourselves away?
- » What does it mean to be “poor in spirit” (as in the Beatitudes)?
- » St. Teresa of Ávila says, “Christ has no body now but yours, no hands, no feet on earth but yours.” How can we be Jesus’ hands?
- » Is there a particular type of service that you feel called to?

### Conversation Starter 3:

## **HEART-TO-HEART**

Have a heart-to-heart talk about how we are expected to live as Christians after Confirmation. Emphasize that Confirmation is not an end to learning and living the Faith but rather an empowerment to do so in a fuller, more mature way.

Share how your Catholic Faith has guided your moral development. How does your faith inform your decisions? What virtues do you struggle with? (Use prudence in sharing.) What virtues have you grown in? How does your faith affect your response to making mistakes? What do you find challenging in your own pursuit of living out your faith in the world?

Ask your candidate about their faith. What virtues do they admire in others? Who are some good and holy people that they know? Where does your candidate feel inspired and encouraged in their faith? How can you support them?

Explain that you will be available in the future to listen and to answer questions and that you will pray for him or her every day for the rest of your life, which will be extremely meaningful to your candidate.

# CONVERSATION

## MYSTAGOGY Life After Confirmation

The ancient Church observed a period of fifty days after Easter during which the newly baptized and confirmed received further instruction and formation. This was known as *mystagogy*, meaning “leading into the mysteries.” The mystagogy stage helped newly initiated Christians understand how to fully live the Faith.

For the newly confirmed, mystagogy is crucial to nurturing the life of faith. While it is important and highly recommended for you to have at *least* one follow-up conversation with your candidate after his or her Confirmation, this fourth phase should be an ongoing dialogue!

### Conversation Starter 1:

## **FOLLOWING UP**

For a few months, call or text your newly confirmed young Catholic every week with a reminder to attend Sunday Mass. Invite the teen to go with you, perhaps with an invitation to go out to breakfast or dinner afterward. If possible, study the readings together or discuss the homily after Mass. If your candidate already attended Sunday Mass prior to Confirmation, touch base periodically to ask if he or she has started attending a youth group or is finding other ways to live out the grace of Confirmation. This simple gesture of accountability can be very helpful in establishing good habits.

### Conversation Starter 2:

## **CONFESSION ROUTINE**

Encourage your candidate to go to Confession at least once a month. Some find it helpful to establish a habit of going to Confession on the first Saturday of every month or some other day. Join your candidate, if possible, or text him or her a simple reminder. Consider establishing a routine where once a month or every couple of months you and your candidate get together for Confession and breakfast or lunch, or maybe just a walk afterward to catch up and talk. Establishing a routine and accountability can benefit both of you.

Conversation Starter 3:  
**ONE-MONTH CHECKUP**

Select a date to meet one month after Confirmation for both of you to look back on the Confirmation experience and look forward to the future. Consider these topics to discuss:

- » How is your prayer life developing? What are you doing to keep in contact with God every day?
- » How will you continue to deepen your knowledge of the Faith?
- » What areas of the Catholic Faith do you want to learn more about?
- » How are you staying connected to the parish community (or youth group)?
- » What are you doing to witness to Christ and your faith at your school and with your friends?

## TIPS FOR BEING A GREAT SPONSOR

### Start Praying Now

Get a rosary and begin praying with it weekly (or even daily if you so desire). At Confirmation, give the rosary to your candidate as both a sign of prayers offered and as an invitation to grow in a prayer life beyond Confirmation.

### Go to Mass

A key goal of sponsorship is to energize and encourage your candidate's participation in Mass. Invite your candidate to attend Mass with you. If this is not possible, take advantage of texting and social media to encourage your candidate to attend Mass and to share your thoughts about the homily or weekly Scripture readings.

### Soul Food

As the date of Confirmation nears, plan a special meal with your candidate to create a sense of the significance of this event. Consider choosing a nicer restaurant, and perhaps even dress up for the occasion. This will help to signify that Confirmation is both special and serious.

### Three Rules for Sharing

- » Do not glorify sinful behavior or encourage experimentation.
- » Give only as much detail as you need to make your point.
- » Be straightforward, honest, and encouraging.

## CATHOLIC RESOURCES

- The United States Conference of Catholic Bishops (USCCB) offers an online version of the *Catechism*, which you can search by topic or term ([usccb.org](http://usccb.org)).
- The USCCB website also offers the daily Mass readings. You can read these at home before or after Mass or even on weekdays when you cannot go to Mass yourself.
- Ascension Presents offers hundreds of free Catholic podcasts, videos, and articles ([media.ascensionpress.com](http://media.ascensionpress.com)).
- Join a small group or faith formation program at your parish that sounds interesting. If your parish doesn't currently offer a program, start one yourself. There are many resources and online options to get started (see [ascensionpress.com](http://ascensionpress.com)).
- Consider making your phone an ally for your faith. Explore Catholic apps, podcasts, and other resources that are accessible through your device.
- If you have not been to Confession recently, search for a Confession app to guide you through the process of making a good confession.



## NOTES

1. Rite of Confirmation Within Mass, in *The Roman Pontifical* (Washington, DC: USCCB, 2006), 27.
2. *Code of Canon Law*, c. 892.
3. *Code of Canon Law*, cc. 874, 893.
4. *Code of Canon Law*, cc. 874, 893.

### ABOUT THE AUTHORS

*Colin and Aimee MacIver* teach theology at St. Scholastica Academy in Covington, Louisiana, where they also serve as the campus minister and service director, respectively. Their decades of combined experience include youth ministry, Confirmation preparation, speaking, training, visual art, and music ministry. Aimee and Colin have authored a number of popular programs with Ascension over the years, including most recently *Connected: Catholic Social Teaching for This Generation*.