



# The 7 Essentials of Sponsorship in the Orthodox Church

Sponsorship within the Orthodox Church holds significant spiritual and communal weight, extending beyond a simple formality. Understanding its essential elements is crucial for both those seeking to become sponsors and for the life of the parish community. Sponsorship in the Orthodox tradition is a sacred responsibility, a commitment to guide and support an individual on their journey of faith. It signifies a profound connection, often forging a lasting spiritual bond between the sponsor and the sponsored. Therefore, the selection of a sponsor is not to be taken lightly but approached with prayerful discernment. The role encompasses active participation in the spiritual growth of the individual, offering guidance, prayer, and a living example of Orthodox Christian life. These essentials provide a framework for understanding the depth and importance of this ministry within the Church.

## 1. **Meet with Your Sponsee Outside of Church, and Get to Know Their Life**

- Understanding the background of those seeking sponsorship within the Orthodox Church is foundational to providing effective and compassionate support.
  - Taking the time to inquire about their birthplace and upbringing can offer valuable insights into their cultural norms and past experiences.
  - Similarly, understanding their reasons for being in their current location sheds light on their journey and potential challenges.
  - Exploring their work history, both past and present, provides context for their skills, resources, and potential needs.

- Gaining insight into their homelife allows sponsors to better understand their family dynamics and support systems.
- Perhaps most importantly, discovering what individuals value and what is truly important to them enables sponsors to offer assistance that aligns with their priorities and their present beliefs.
- This deeper understanding fosters a stronger, more meaningful relationship built on empathy and trust, ultimately leading to more effective sponsorship.
- Furthermore, making oneself readily available to answer questions is a crucial aspect of the sponsorship role.
  - Newcomers to a community or faith tradition often have numerous questions, ranging from practical matters to theological inquiries. By being accessible and willing to provide guidance, sponsors can alleviate anxieties and facilitate a smoother transition.
  - This open line of communication ensures that those being sponsored feel supported, informed, and empowered to navigate their new circumstances with greater confidence. A proactive approach to answering questions, even anticipating potential areas of confusion, demonstrates a genuine commitment to their well-being and integration into the Orthodox community.

## **2. Know What You Believe**

- Solid comprehension of the Church's teachings is crucial.
  - A grasp of Orthodox Church teachings is fundamental for effective sponsorship. This involves more than a superficial familiarity; it necessitates an understanding of the core tenets of the faith.
  - For instance, the Nicene Creed, which articulates the Trinitarian understanding of God as Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, is a cornerstone of Orthodox theology. Sponsors should be able to articulate its meaning and significance within the broader context of Orthodox belief and practice.
  - Similarly, the Chalcedonian Definition, addressing the dual nature of Christ as both fully God and fully human, is crucial for understanding the Orthodox perspective on salvation and the Incarnation.

- This comprehension enables sponsors to guide and support those they are sponsoring with theological clarity and faithfulness to the traditions of the Church.

### **3. Talk About What You Believe Informally With Your Sponsee**

- Sharing your faith should feel like a natural conversation, not a forced homily or polished theological treatise. Avoid debates if possible, but be open to answering questions without trying to persuade.
- Speak from your own experiences and understanding, using language that is accessible and relatable to the person you are speaking with. Be prepared to listen as well as speak, creating a dialogue where both individuals can explore and learn from each other's experiences of faith.

### **4. Share With Your Sponsee What It Means to Be Orthodox on a Daily Basis**

- Living Orthodoxy extends beyond theological understanding and liturgical participation; it permeates the daily lives of Orthodox Christians, shaping their actions, interactions, and perspectives.
- It is the conscious and consistent effort to embody the teachings and spirit of the Orthodox faith in every aspect of existence, from personal conduct and family life to professional endeavors and engagement with the wider community.
- This practical application of faith involves cultivating virtues, practicing spiritual disciplines such as prayer, fasting, giving and striving to live in accordance with the Gospel message and the traditions of the Church.

### **5. Stand with Your Sponsee During Liturgy and Spend Time With Them During Coffee Hour**

- During Divine Liturgy, stand with your sponsee to answer questions and demonstrate proper Orthodox practices: when to cross oneself and bow, bow only, cross oneself and touch the floor, fully prostrate, venerate icons, and the customs of lighting candles (why, how, and when), etc.

**6. Purchase an Orthodox Cross and Chain, a Candle, and an Icon (optional) for Your Sponsee Before Their Chrismation and/or Baptism**

- The cross given to a newly baptized or chrismated Orthodox Christian symbolizes their embrace of the Orthodox faith in Jesus Christ and serves as a spiritual shield against demonic forces. It is often worn as a constant reminder of Christ's sacrifice and their commitment to him.
- Furthermore, providing your sponsee with an icon of their patron saint is a meaningful gesture. This icon can become a focal point in their home, helping them establish a dedicated space for personal prayer and connection with God, often referred to as an icon corner. This practice fosters a deeper spiritual life and provides a tangible reminder of their heavenly intercessor.

**7. Ensure that Your Sponsee Has Picked a Patron Saint**

- Selecting a patron saint is a significant step for a catechumen. While practical considerations like birthdates or existing names might influence the choice, the most meaningful connection arises from a personal resonance with a particular saint.
- Guide catechumens to actively explore the lives of the saints through reading and contemplation. Encourage them to seek a saint whose struggles, virtues, or miracles speak to their own journey of faith. This personal connection fosters a deeper relationship with their patron saint, who becomes a spiritual guide and intercessor.