

RCIA Sponsor Qualifications

Q: Do you have to be a practicing Catholic—meaning, attending Mass on a regular basis and receiving Holy Communion—to be a sponsor to a child receiving the sacrament of confirmation?

A: People are often unclear about the requirements for sponsorship in general, so let's take a moment to look over them. The *Code of Canon Law* states that the requirements for being a sponsor at confirmation are the same as those of being a sponsor at baptism (CIC 893 §1). The requirements for being a sponsor at baptism are as follows:

"Canon 874—§1. To be admitted to the role of sponsor, a person must:

"1° be designated by the one to be baptized, by the parents or the one who takes their place or, in their absence, by the pastor or minister and is to have the qualifications and intention of performing this role;

"2° have completed the sixteenth year, unless a different age has been established by the diocesan bishop or it seems to the pastor or minister that an exception is to be made for a just cause;

"3° be a Catholic who has been confirmed and has already received the sacrament of the Most Holy Eucharist and leads a life in harmony with the faith and the role to be undertaken;

"4° not be bound by any canonical penalty legitimately imposed or declared;

"5° not be the father or the mother of the one to be baptized.

"§2. A baptized person who belongs to a non-Catholic ecclesial community may not be admitted except as a witness to baptism and together with a Catholic sponsor."

The Code also notes, "It is desirable that the one who undertook the role of sponsor at baptism be sponsor for confirmation" (CIC 893 §2).

The requirement that applies to the questions of regular Mass attendance and reception of Communion is in 874 §1, 3° where it states that the person "leads a life in harmony with the faith."

Since Catholics are only bound to receive Communion once a year, normally during the Easter season (CIC 920), unless a person has been leaving this precept deliberately unfulfilled he would not seem to be living a life out of harmony with the faith and would not be disqualified on that ground. (Bottom line: *Regularly* receiving Communion for purposes of this requirement would mean *annually* receiving Communion.)

On the other hand, Catholics normally are bound to attend Mass on all Sundays and holy days of obligation (CIC 1247). If a person has been leaving this precept deliberately unfulfilled then he would seem to be living a life out of harmony with the faith and would seem to be disqualified.

Note, however, the including of the word *deliberately* in both of the above. Many people are poorly catechized and do not realize the existence nor seriousness of these two precepts. In such cases the failure to fulfill the precepts would be inadvertent and it would be more difficult to say that the person is living a life sufficiently out of harmony with the faith to be barred from serving as a sponsor.

