

Sponsors and Sponsor Families for OCIA with Children: A Resource for Coordinators

by Rita Burns Senseman

Introduction

Sponsors are an essential part of the OCIA process. Initiation ministers universally acknowledge that it is vital for candidates and catechumens to have a companion and guide for their journey. The same is true for children in the OCIA.

Granted, the situation is a little bit different for children. Most children have a parent who accompanies them on the OCIA journey, but even when a parent is involved, it's a good idea to have a sponsor or sponsor family connected to the child catechumen.

Why Children Need a Sponsor

Actually, the parents need the sponsor as much as the children. Consider that most children who come to the OCIA have a parent who is either unchurched, of another Christian tradition, or an inactive Catholic. Most often, it's because the parents have been inactive in the Church that their child is unbaptized or uncatechized. This is precisely the reason that parents benefit from a sponsor/sponsor family as much as the children do. The OCIA parents are new to the parish or may be returning to the Church, and they need a sponsor who can welcome them, listen to them, and help them (re)connect to parish life.

However, it's not just about the parents. Children need a sponsor, too, particularly if the parent is not baptized or is from another tradition. Although the parents are always the first catechists of the children, a parish sponsor or sponsor family can add knowledge of the faith and experience in the communal life that a parent may be lacking.

Companions

If you choose a family to sponsor a child in the OCIA, the children in the sponsoring family can serve as companions and guides for the catechumenal children. Same-age companions from the parish catechetical program or school are also a fundamental element of a vibrant children's catechumenate (see OCIA 252 and 254). A sponsoring family is ideal because there is a Catholic adult to support the catechumenal family's parent and child, plus there is a companion to support and befriend the young catechumen.

Adult and Teen Sponsors

Even though a sponsoring family is an ideal, individual adults can also be sponsors. Seniors and retired adults who have a love for children can make excellent sponsors for children as well as their parents. Teenagers are also potential sponsors, especially those who are old enough to drive themselves to OCIA sessions and other events. Often, it's a good fit to pair a middle-school catechumen with an older teen. An older teen who is active in the Church is an outstanding role model for a young catechumen.



Young Apprentices

A RESOURCE FOR THE OCIA

RESOURCE ARTICLE

► TIPS FOR OCIA COORDINATORS

No matter what the age of the sponsor or the makeup of the sponsoring family, what's most important is that the catechumenal families have personal support and guidance from the parish. Here are a few practical tips for recruiting sponsors and sponsor families for child catechumens and candidates:

- ✿ Ask the catechumenal family who they know in the parish. This is a good starting point, because the family/person they already know might make a good sponsor.
- ✿ Consider asking families who have children of similar ages. Look at the religious education roster or the class list from your Catholic school.
- ✿ Find a sponsor coordinator, especially if you have a fairly large children's catechumenate. Recruiting *and training* sponsors takes time and personal contact. Consider asking a parishioner who does not want to be a catechist but who is good with people and connected in the parish.
- ✿ If your children's OCIA is "separate" from the adult process, work with the adult coordinator and form a collaborative approach to sponsor recruitment and training.
- ✿ Remember that parish sponsors are not the same as godparents. The catechumenal family may want to have different people be the godparents.
- ✿ Pray to the Holy Spirit for understanding, wisdom, and guidance.

OCIA is a faith-enriching journey, and the sponsors and sponsor families who join us on the pathway are essential.

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