

SPONSORSHIP

Selecting a Participant

Think for a moment about how you felt when you got back home after your weekend. You may have heard the words, “You’ve changed, but the world you’re going back to hasn’t.” Did it really register? On your way home were you already thinking of people that you were going to “recruit” even if you had to hog-tie them? Or were you just making a list of “can go’s” and “ought to go’s?” Or were you thinking about some folks who really “need” the weekend because they’ve been through a divorce or death of a loved one?

While all of these thoughts are well intentioned, haphazard or random selection of participants is neither desirable nor wise. The Via de Cristo method places heavy emphasis on prayer-filled planning. The first planned step is to ask the Holy Spirit to reveal any particular environments in which God wishes you to work. Read Acts 16:7-10. It tells the story of how the Spirit of Jesus prevented Paul and his companions from entering Bithynia and how Paul was beckoned to go to Macedonia. Although we may not have an experience like Paul’s, we still need to follow Paul’s example. We should pray and be open to the guidance of the Holy Spirit.

The term “environment” may mean specific settings in which Christians find themselves and can include home, job, church, leisure and so on. We ask ourselves where we might have the most impact on the largest number of people.

After selecting a specific environment, we then try to identify the natural leaders in that environment. For example, if the environment you have chosen is your own church, look for persons who seem to alter the environment of a group when they arrive. These are most likely to be the first people to approach.

After you have identified the leaders or potential leaders in those environments, then we try to, “Make them your friends.” Then pray for clear guidance as to which of these new friends to invite to a weekend.

Participants should be baptized Christians, reasonably stable and mature, with a desire for God’s love and a longing to be set on fire with a zeal to do God’s work in the church and in the world. They may not see themselves as leaders, but you do. You see a depth to their personality, an ability to make decisions, a healthy independence and a natural affinity for the giving of love. People like this are excellent choices for participation in a weekend.

It is important that the participants desire to grow spiritually and want to discover their gifts so that they can use them for the good of the community. They should be open to being transformed by Christ and to becoming active in the work of bringing others to Him.

Are there some people you should be reluctant to invite? Most definitely, yes! These might include people who have recently been through, or are currently going through, a deep emotional crisis such as divorce, death of a loved one, loss of a job, etc. Because the weekend is emotionally draining and physically tiring, persons who are not in a stable emotional condition could “go off the deep end.” We do not want to endanger anyone’s emotional health. Besides that, if there is a very emotionally needy person at a table, they may require so much nurturing that the other persons at the table may be deprived of their own experience. This just might not be the right time to invite that person. It may be better to postpone the invitation until their lives have stabilized.

How to Invite Someone

For many people a simple, direct, straightforward approach works best. You might try to get them curious by inviting them to visit your reunion group or taking them to an Ultreya. Tell them what you have gotten out of *Vía de Cristo* and what it has meant to you. Tell them you think they would enjoy it. Make sure you tell them as much as you can about the weekend; it should not seem like a secret society. Answer all their questions and keep the spouse informed. We try not to disclose the surprises (silence, prayer palanca, serenade, and personal palanca); but, if that is necessary, they probably won’t know when the surprises will happen and may actually forget that they will. Don’t build up any expectations about what they will experience because their experience may be entirely different from yours. Above all, be honest!

Sometimes people want to know why they have to have a sponsor. A simple answer is that a sponsor has some specific duties—among which is transportation to and from the weekend site. It is the sponsor’s job to prepare the participants and help them assimilate into the community through group reunion, Ultreyas, and additional training.

Sponsoring is a privilege and a responsibility that we do for the glory of God, not for ourselves.

Responsibilities of the Sponsor

- Before the weekend, pray about whom to ask.
- Pray, PRAY, PRAY!
- Tell the prospective participant everything he/she needs to know.
- Do not be secretive.
- Answer all questions honestly.
- Remind them that the weekend is isolated from the world, so leave all electronic devices at home.
- Tell them that there will be worship services with communion.
- Tell them that they will hear talks by laypersons and clergy and that there will be discussion of the talks.
- Let them and their families know what time they will get home on Sunday.
- Help them fill out the application. Make sure their pastor signs it.
- Explain any costs involved.

- Send in the completed application form and the non-refundable registration fee, if required.
- Plan to take the participant to the weekend; attend the closing and take your participant home.
- Get spouse and family letters. Bring these and any other special letters to the Send-off on Thursday. Write one yourself.
- Do these things without appearing to want to control—rather do them as though you are offering assistance.
- During the weekend, assist the family with any needs they may have. Make sure they have a contact person in the event of a family emergency.
- Go to the serenade and closing; encourage others in your community to go, too.
- Answer any questions they might have after the weekend.
- Assist them in finding or forming a reunion group. This is the real purpose of the weekend. In the reunion group, the spiritual thrust from the weekend has someplace to go and be reinforced. It is the training ground, the support group, and the place of encouragement and accountability.
- Bring the participant to the next Ultreya and leaders training session.
- Continue to be there for them.
- Pray, PRAY, PRAY!