

Sponsors as Supporters

Sponsorship models abound in Catholic health care, and the structure of the public juridic person varies among health care systems and facilities. In light of this diversity, this column will explore the common ground of responsibilities that sponsors have to their ministries.¹ What should sponsors do to support the mission of the institution? Few requirements are spelled out in the *Code of Canon Law*, but most are rooted in the principles of ecclesiastical law.

An obvious foundational premise is that faith must ground the relationship between the sponsor and the ministry.² Canon 675.3 makes clear that the sponsored entity is rooted in the Catholic faith tradition and is understood as a ministry of the church. Those who sponsor and those who govern or administer must recognize the ministry's integral communion with the church. All need a basic knowledge of the Catholic faith and the resources to uphold and support its tenets. Mutual trust is required as sponsors and ministry leaders³ share in the actualization of faith, demanding disclosure and honesty between the parties and also in relating to the church. Given these foundational criteria, the sponsor should afford the ministry a clear articulation of mission, vision, charism and Catholic identity; clarity of roles; and ongoing formation and support.

MISSION, VISION, CATHOLIC IDENTITY

Sponsors must make known to ministry leaders their vision of the mission. It is important that they share their patrimony (i.e., their sense of history, charism and purpose) and work with leaders to determine how the ministry can further this.⁴ The sponsored entity should be aware that it continues the mission of the sponsors and of the church and stewards the patrimony of both entities. Ministry leaders need to understand their work as something greater than and more encompassing than itself. The values that flow from the charism of the sponsors, as well as from the Catholic identity of the ministry, need to be highlighted. Sponsors must assure that ministry leaders are aware of church doctrine and the law that frames it.

Another area in which clarity is important is

that of roles. Ministry leaders need to be clear about their roles and the relationships that they involve. Sponsors must be clear about their relationship to and expectations of both administration and board. It is important that they communicate with church leaders regarding their role vis-à-vis the sponsored ministry and determine who is its spokesperson.⁵ As far as possible, sponsors also need to educate the members of their community or group regarding the role of the sponsors. They should assure that members of the sponsoring group know their status in the ministry and the appropriate lines of communication and accountability.

ONGOING FORMATION AND SUPPORT

Sponsors need to provide leadership formation for those responsible for governing and administering the ministry. They have the obligation to “construct serious and sustained formative experiences for the lay people” who assume leadership roles.⁶ This formative responsibility includes the added obligation of consciously identifying and forming “the next generation of sponsors.”⁷ Thus sponsors need to assure that those in leadership roles receive a solid theological foundation in Catholic doctrine, spirituality, social teachings, morality and ethics and canon law as integral components of their business operating practices. Trustees and administrators must be comfortable with themselves as spiritual leaders as they, in turn, become the conduits of the values of the ministry through their service to all who work within it.

It may appear superfluous to state that sponsors should support their ministries. Yet there are other areas of assistance that the sponsored ministry has a right to expect from sponsors. Perhaps the most critical is open and ongoing dialogue. Sponsorship as an ever-evolving commitment

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requires open lines of communication between the sponsors and the ministry. Ministry leaders should know that they are truly *sponsored*. Sponsors need to: 1) challenge and evaluate sponsored ministries; 2) be enthusiastic about and committed to the ministry that continues their legacy and the mission of the church; 3) enter into strategic planning with their ministries, bringing their charismatic and prophetic voice to the table; and 4) be prepared to adapt their sponsorship for the good of the ministry. The presence of members of the sponsoring group within the ministry and at key events symbolizes the supportive relationship that exists between them.

CONCLUSION

Sponsorship in its varied descriptions and models invites others to be communal witnesses to the Gospel. Those who choose to work in Catholic health care and other sponsored ministries of the Catholic Church necessarily take part, to some degree, in its public ministerial life. This prospect, however, can be overwhelming or intimidating. Sponsorship at its best offers a mentoring or partnering relationship that encourages and supports lay leaders, providing them with an experience of church that is universal and inclusive. Well-executed sponsorship enables the laity to grow theologically and to understand its rightful role in being and building church. ■



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NOTES

1. While it must be acknowledged that sponsored ministries likewise have responsibilities to the sponsor, these are not treated in this column.
2. Although the *Code of Canon Law* uses the word “apostolate” instead of “ministry,” the latter term has become common parlance in referring to the works of religious institutes and other church groups.
3. The term “ministry leaders” as used here and throughout the column includes the board of trustees, the chief executive officer and administrative team members.
4. The concept of patrimony used here is in accord with Canon 578, which describes it as constituting “the nature, purpose, spirit and character of an institute” as well as its “sound traditions.”
5. Religious are subject to the power of bishops in regard to apostolic works (Canon 678.1). Canon 678.3 speaks of the mutual consultation required of diocesan bishops and religious superiors in organizing works of the apostolate.
6. Melanie Morey and Dennis Holtschneider, “Keeping the Faith on Campus,” *Commonweal* 128 (April 20, 2001): 23.
7. Mary Kathryn Grant and Margaret Mary Kopish, “Sponsor Leadership Formation,” *Health Progress* 82, no. 4 (July-August 2001): 26.



A Shared Statement of Identity For the Catholic Health Ministry

We are the people of Catholic health care, a ministry of the church continuing Jesus’ mission of love and healing today. As provider, employer, advocate, citizen—bringing together people of diverse faiths and backgrounds—our ministry is an enduring sign of health care rooted in our belief that every person is a treasure, every life a sacred gift, every human being a unity of body, mind, and spirit.

We work to bring alive the Gospel vision of justice and peace. We answer God’s call to foster healing, act with compassion, and promote wellness for all persons and communities, with special attention to our neighbors who are poor, underserved, and most vulnerable. By our service, we strive to transform hurt into hope. 🕊

As the church’s ministry of health care, we commit to:

- Promote and Defend Human Dignity
- Attend to the Whole Person
- Care for Poor and Vulnerable Persons
- Promote the Common Good
- Act on Behalf of Justice
- Steward Resources
- Act in Communion with the Church

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