

Guidelines for SI Godmothers

Introduction:

The Godmother who takes over responsibility for a new club has a vital and essential task to perform. This begins with the founding of the core group, and extends to the Charter ceremony and subsequent support in the crucial first years of the club's existence.

The characteristics of an ideal Godmother:

- expertise and a solid background knowledge of Soroptimist International (SI)
- experience in working for SI
- a willingness to invest time and effort in the new club
- skills in motivation and integration
- patience and tenacity
- flexibility and tact
- temperament, charm, charisma, credibility
- enthusiasm and enjoyment of her task.

Godmothers who display such qualities as these are the mainstay of successful Extension work in the European Federation.

Basics for Godmothers:

The responsibility for the foundation of a new Single Club lies in the hands of the European Federation of Soroptimist International. A member who wishes to found a club in a country without a Soroptimist Union must first inform her club president and the Chairman of the SI Europe Extension Committee, who will send her written consent after consultation with the Federation President. After this, the foundation of the new club can officially begin.

The Extension Committee oversees the whole of this preliminary phase and is responsible for matters of organisation and official procedures. A member of the Extension Committee will maintain personal contact (visits, e-mails, phone calls) with the group and will notify the Chairman and the Federation board of the group's current development. In the pre-Charter period, this member will also provide the required information for the group and answer basic questions. She should ensure that the group follows the rules and statutes of the Federation as set out in the official guidelines for the foundation of new clubs.

The new group and later, prospective club, will also benefit from constant personal support, friendship and encouragement from a Godmother club, and in particular from one or two of its members who are prepared to act as individual Godmother.

If a newly formed SI group is not the first club in its country of origin, it will be very useful if another club in the region can take over the role of Godmother Club, so that there are no language difficulties in communicating information from and about SI. In many cases, only a few members may speak English. (The Godmother may wish to motivate future Soroptimists to attend an English course, for which it is possible to gain financial support.)

It is also extremely helpful and in the best Soroptimist tradition of International Goodwill and Understanding to involve a further Godmother club or individual Godmother from a different Union to provide additional encouragement and support for the founding group of a new club. It can even

be of advantage to have several Godmother Clubs who are prepared to share pre-Charter tasks and costs.

How do I become a Godmother?

Just some of the many possibilities:

- You know an interesting woman who lives in a town or rural area where there is no SI club, in which case you should inform the Chairman of the Extension Committee of SI Europe. With the consent of the Federation president, you may then start the initiative to found a new club. This may even result in you yourself becoming Godmother.
 - The Extension Committee hears of a group of women who are interested in the ideas of SI. After the official decision to found a new club, the committee asks a neighbouring club to take over the task of Godmother. In general, one member will then take over the role of individual Godmother.
 - The Extension Committee asks a specific member to take responsibility for a new group or pre-Charter club.
 - The Extension Committee wishes to found a new club in a certain area and selects a suitable Godmother.
 - A member moves to another area and consults the Extension Committee about the possibility and desirability of founding a new club. She can then find a suitable Godmother.
 - It is also possible for an already existing group to request a specific member as their Godmother.
- These are only a few examples of how SI Godmothers can be selected, and there are certainly many more.

Please note that it is on NO account possible to become an SI Godmother only on paper without personal commitment. SI does not support the idea of Honorary Godmothers.

We do not have an unending stream of members willing to take over the important role of Godmother, especially as this involves a willingness to contribute both energy and time and also requires a certain amount of financial input, as a Godmother pays her own expenses. A Godmother is committed to her undertaking through her own conviction and enthusiasm, and when she accepts the position, she must be fully dedicated to her task and remain so throughout.

What is the job of a Godmother?

First and foremost, a prospective Godmother needs to study the guidelines for the foundation of Single Clubs in Europe (“Application for Admission”). She should be familiar with the guidelines for the Foundation meeting, the Charter ceremony and the general Charter procedure, and also with the statutes and by-laws for Single Clubs and with any relevant financial obligations to the Federation.

The Godmother must be able to explain the idea and aims of SI to future club members and inform them of their tasks and duties.

She will provide information about the history and structure of SI, about the general concept and current status of Programme Focus, and about joint projects with other clubs and unions and within the Federation.

She will emphasize that socio-political commitment lies at the heart of the work of SI, and that SI is an international organization providing a network of women for women.

She will point out the financial obligations of each club and explain the special financial situation with regard to Single Clubs: she will also give an overview of how Federation funds work and how they can be used.

She will outline the structure of a club meeting, and show how best to communicate information to members and conduct a discussion.

She will give advice on finding new members and stress the vital importance of regular recruitment even after the Charter has taken place.

She will invite the new group to attend her own club meetings (as far as practicable) in order for them to gain experience and be better informed about club life.

She will support the future club in all matters relating to the Charter. (See the guidelines for the formation of new clubs).

She will emphasize the importance of communication with the Federation: e.g. compiling reports, participation in the Governors' Meeting (invitation only), passing on relevant information (e.g. number of members, notification of **all** changes in membership including changes of address, names of office holders etc.), answering requests for information, drawing up Focus Reports, reading newsletters, checking SI websites and journals (such as *The Link* and *Soroptimist International*),

To summarize:

The Godmother is required to

- 1) communicate a wide range of information about SI to the new club.
- 2) explain the organisation of club life and other SI procedures prior to the Charter.
- 3) support the club in the post-Charter period, as a trusted contact person who can be consulted about members' questions and problems.

The Godmother should be an inspiration to the new group.

Apart from conveying information, the Godmother needs to motivate the group by communicating the spirit of Soroptimism, that is, a commitment to the goals of SI, the idea of friendship (Friendship Links), the idea of worldwide community and cooperation and exchange of ideas, also advantages such as professional advancement, the understanding of other cultures through invitations, grants, etc.

The Godmother needs to exercise tact

It is of great importance that the Godmother withdraws gradually from her primary tasks so that the club may develop as a Soroptimist institution in its own way and at its own pace. She must not exert too much control, especially in a new group that contains those who are already long-standing members.

Here may be seen the significance of the Godmother's background knowledge and experience. It is of great importance for her to gain the trust of the club and to explain more than once that in any case of uncertainty, it is of importance to check and if necessary recheck with the Godmother rather than take an uninformed decision and hope for the best.

The Godmother must encourage her group and explain the value of patience in personal contacts. She must intervene when required, but also sense when this is not necessary.

She must give her group time but also set clear goals so that the group's original impetus is retained.

The Godmother need not be present at every meeting, but she should attend regularly and should be on hand when needed. She must be regarded as a reliable partner; nothing is more destructive than a Godmother who imposes her own restrictions on a club.

She should be able to master the art of sensing the needs of a group, for no two groups are the same. The founding president also sets her mark on a group, and the group dynamics will in addition depend on interactions resulting from diverse proportions of strong and voluble characters to quieter personalities. Again, the Godmother must exercise care when interfering, and encourage tolerance in all situations.

In short, the task of a Godmother is a fascinating one that requires a high degree of sensitivity.

Task sharing between the Godmother and the competent member of the Extension Committee.

The Godmother works closely with the competent member of the Extension Committee, who will keep the Committee Chairman fully informed of developments. She in turn is accountable to the

Federation President. It is the duty of the Extension Committee member to manage the official side, and in this, she complements the work of the Godmother.

The member of the Extension Committee is the most important external contact, demonstrating, for instance, that a club does not exist only for itself but is part of a Federation with various Unions that in itself is part of a worldwide network. This integration into a Federation becomes particularly evident when the competent member of the Extension Committee visits the club for the official signing of the 'Application for Admission'. This is generally regarded as a special occasion and is accompanied by festivities.

A good Godmother saves the competent member of the Extension Committee a good deal of time and thus also saves money for the Federation. When she has carried out her job effectively, she ensures that the group in her charge have an extensive knowledge of SI and have been well prepared for their Charter and for their acceptance into the international community of SI. In addition, her efforts guarantee that the Federation gains a well-informed and efficient club.

If, as an SI Godmother, you are prepared to accept this responsibility, you will find it one of the most pleasurable and rewarding tasks SI can offer.
