

Confirmation Instruction

Roman Catholic Diocese of Boise



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Diocese of Boise Confirmation Instruction (Youth) For Individuals Baptized Catholic

INTRODUCTION

The sacraments of initiation—baptism, confirmation, and eucharist—are intimately bound together and form a single initiation process by which people enter into the life of faith and more fully realize their role in the mission and ministry of the Church.

Thus, the true preparation for the sacrament of confirmation begins at one's baptism. Through baptism, candidates are welcomed into the faith community and called to live as Christ's disciples according to the model of the Paschal Mystery. At the sacrament of confirmation, young people have the opportunity to renew their baptismal vows and celebrate the gift of the Holy Spirit, who, as the Giver of Life, enables people to live faithful lives.

Confirmation preparation invites the candidates to take a deeper look at their faith with other community members, both young and old. Candidates learn how they make a difference in the world as members of the Catholic Church.

When choosing to receive the sacrament of confirmation, each candidate demonstrates a personal intention to live as a Catholic according to his or her baptismal vows. Confirmation celebrates the choice of each candidate to continue the journey of faith that never ends. God offers all believers the gift of faith to be Christ's disciples, and confirmation preparation invites the candidates to accept God's gift.

Through relationships of love, expectation, trust, and challenge, the parish community provides the participants in the confirmation preparation process with many opportunities to grow in their Catholic faith and learn to live as disciples of Christ, anointed by the Holy Spirit. Upon receiving the sacrament, the newly confirmed will be invited into fuller participation and mentored into greater responsibility for parish life and mission.

Confirmation is the celebration of each church community. Because each parish and its pastor has the best understanding of the particular needs of that community, each parish should develop the specifics of its own confirmation preparation program, with these programs being informed by the instructions found in this document.

GUIDELINES

A. Candidates for Confirmation

1. Adults and adolescents who were baptized into the Catholic Church as infants, and who have been adequately prepared, are to be at least in grades 9th through 12th by the time they celebrate the sacrament.

2. Adequate preparation and proper disposition for the sacrament is determined by the appointed pastor, in consultation with the confirmation coordinator, at the completion of the preparation program (see CIC, c. 890). *All children, even those who are home-schooled, must be in a parish-based program for sacramental preparation.*
3. The sacrament may be delayed until the pastor determines readiness of the individual. (see CIC, c. 891)
4. For pastoral reasons, an individual may be confirmed at a younger age if he/she has the use of reason, is sufficiently instructed (the candidate must have taken part in the appropriate parish-based confirmation preparation program), properly disposed, and is able to renew their baptismal promises (see CIC, c. 889~2). In this case, the candidate must write a letter to the bishop stating his/her desire to be confirmed. The appointed pastor must also write a letter to the bishop, giving his/her assessment of the candidate.
5. The following are to be prepared for confirmation within the Rite of Christian Initiation of Adults (RCIA):
 - a. Anyone who is not baptized and is at least the age of reason.
 - b. Anyone who is a baptized Christian seeking full communion with the Catholic Church.

(Anyone who was baptized Catholic but raised in another faith or with no faith need not complete the full RCIA program, but should have some form of instruction before being confirmed.)
6. Candidates for confirmation who have attained the age of reason must profess the faith, be in the state of grace, have the intention of receiving the sacrament, and be prepared to assume the role of disciple and witness to Christ, both within the ecclesial community and in temporal affairs. (CCC 1319)

B. Sponsors

1. Sponsors for confirmation must be fully initiated into the Catholic Church via the sacraments of baptism, eucharist, and confirmation. The full initiation of the sponsor is to be verified via the proposed sponsor providing a recently issued baptismal certificate with notations; or verified by a credible witness.
2. Youth ministers are to inform their candidates at the beginning of the formation process that sponsors are to be selected in consultation with the confirmation coordinator and their parents. The selection of sponsors is to be based on appropriate lifestyle, participation in the Catholic faith, and the ability to provide the nurturing, supportive role expected of a sponsor. The sponsor may be male or female who has himself/herself been confirmed.
3. The sponsor is to be at least 16 years of age and sufficiently mature for the role.
4. It is recommend that one of the baptismal sponsors (godparents) serve as the confirmation sponsor, so as to emphasize the relationship between baptism and confirmation. (Canon 893, #2)
5. Parishes and faith communities are to provide formation for sponsors so as to help them to understand the permanent nature of their role. This assists them to know their faith, enables them to discuss faith with their candidate, and helps them to answer questions their candidates may ask.

6. As witness to the public and permanent relationship sponsors enter into with the candidate, it is recommended that parishes provide opportunities for sponsors and candidates to participate in the preparation process together in some way. To facilitate these meetings, it is helpful if the sponsor is a local resident.
7. The sponsor must be free to celebrate the sacraments, including reception of the eucharist.
8. The sponsor must be a practicing Catholic. This includes living in a sacramental marriage (if the sponsor is married), and actively participating in parish life.
9. It is generally not advisable for a parent, spouse, fiancé(e), boyfriend, or girlfriend to serve as sponsor.
10. If the sponsor is unable to participate in the celebration of confirmation, a proxy may be designated. The proxy must fulfill the same requirements as the sponsor. The absence of the sponsor during the celebration of confirmation does not invalidate the sacrament. (See CIC, c. 892)

C. Ministers of Confirmation

1. The bishop is the ordinary minister of the sacrament of confirmation. If necessary, the bishop may also grant a presbyter the faculty to confirm baptized Catholics who desire the sacrament. (See CIC, c. 884 #1) This faculty is requested by the appointed pastoral leader in writing and includes the names of the individuals involved, the circumstances surrounding the request, and the date and place. Delegation of faculty is granted in writing for each case. The delegation is to be noted in the confirmation register. Unless the faculty is explicitly granted to a presbyter, no confirmation may take place.
2. Any presbyter may confirm a baptized person who is in danger of death. (See CIC, c. 883 30)

D. Place of Confirmation

1. Confirmation is to be celebrated in the parish church of the candidate, as the normal place of liturgies celebrated by the parish or faith community. In the Diocese of Boise, regional celebrations for the sacrament are also scheduled.
2. If, for serious reasons, candidates are unable to participate in their regional celebration of confirmation, they are to request the assistance of the confirmation coordinator and appointed pastoral leader in finding another celebration they may attend.
3. Permission of the bishop is required for a regional celebration to occur in a location other than a church.

E. Time of Celebration

1. Confirmation should take place during the normal Sunday Eucharist celebrated by the parish or faith community of the candidate.
2. For practical and pastoral reasons, including the availability of the bishop, confirmation may be celebrated during the celebration of the Eucharist at another time.

3. The scheduling of dates for confirmation is initiated by the bishop's office through a letter that requests parishes/regions to submit requested dates for confirmation.
4. Parishes who wish to schedule their confirmation celebration outside the Easter season may make that request via the bishop's office.

F. Names

The use of the baptismal name on the occasion of confirmation better expresses the relationship between baptism and confirmation. If a new name is taken, it should be the name of a recognized saint. Candidates should be guided in choosing a name.

G. Liturgical Rites

See diocesan packet for confirmation. (This will be sent every year before confirmation; this packet can be requested at any time by contacting the diocesan Office of Worship.)

H. Documentation and Parish Registers

The sacrament of confirmation is to be recorded at the parish where the confirmation takes place. E.g., if several parishes celebrate confirmation at one central parish, that parish will record *all* the confirmations that take place at that liturgy, and those records will be sent to the church of baptism. Registration of the conferral of confirmation is to take place in accord with the requirements of CIC, c. 895 and the sacramental records policy of the Diocese of Boise, regardless of immigration or legal standing of the candidate or their family. Notification of the conferral of confirmation must be sent to the church of baptism. If the parish address is not available, notification may be sent to the appropriate diocese.

CATECHETICAL PREPARATION

A. Overview

Parishes should present catechesis for the sacrament of confirmation that:

- Teaches that confirmation increases and deepens the grace of baptism, imprinting an indelible character on the soul;
- Teaches that confirmation strengthens the baptismal conferral of the Holy Spirit on those confirmed in order to incorporate them more firmly in Christ, strengthen their bond with the Church, associate them more closely with the Church's mission, increase in them the gifts of the Holy Spirit, and help them bear witness to the Christian faith in words and deeds;
- Teaches about the role of the Holy Spirit, his gifts and his fruits;
- Is developmentally and culturally appropriate and includes retreat experiences;
- Includes instruction on the Rite of Confirmation and its basic symbols: the imposition of hands, the anointing with Sacred Chrism and the words of the sacramental formula;

- Ensures that parents and sponsors are involved in the catechetical preparation of the candidates for confirmation
- Teaches that the bishop is the ordinary minister of the sacrament of confirmation.

B. Preparation

Each parish and faith community is to provide for adequate preparation for confirmation for its members.

1. Candidates are to be prepared for confirmation by the parish, mission or station in which they are members. If, for serious reasons, a candidate cannot participate in the preparation process of their own parish, they are to request assistance from the confirmation coordinator and the appointed pastoral leader for finding alternatives. Candidates must request a supportive letter from their pastor and confirmation director in order to participate in another parish's preparation time. It is the responsibility of the youth minister or pastor in the parish where the candidate wishes to be prepared to ensure that such a letter is on file.
2. Preparation for confirmation of adults, including young adults, is separate and distinct from preparation of youth. Pastoral judgment is to be made given the life circumstances, development and motivation when choosing which program to recommend.
3. The minimum length of time to prepare for the reception of confirmation is four months. Confirmation preparation programs should be no longer than six months. No preparation program should be so long or contain so many elements or requirements that the program itself becomes an obstacle to the sacrament. This assumes that the candidates already have a basic foundation in their faith and are practicing Catholics.
4. It is expected that religious formation offered in parochial schools will contribute to the readiness of confirmation candidates. Schools will actively invite eligible students to seek preparation in their own parishes.
5. Confirmation preparation should provide an opportunity to partner with families as communities of faith. Parishes are to assist parents in their role as primary catechist of their children by offering appropriate and concurrent faith formation opportunities for the parents of youth preparing for confirmation.
6. All children, even those who are home-schooled, must be in a parish-based program for sacramental preparation. (*Policies and Practices: The Sanctifying Office of the Church*. Book IV, pg. 33.)
7. Parishes can consult the Diocese for the recommendation of catechetical resources for the use in confirmation preparation. The Office of Religious Education and Catechetical Leadership maintains a list of recommended catechetical materials for all religious education. Preparation programs for confirmation should include one retreat experience.
8. Service experiences are to be parish-based, and consist of both individual and community opportunities. As formation in Christian service, these experiences should consist of direct service to and advocacy for the poor and marginalized, as recommended by the corporal works of mercy. Prayer and reflection time are a

necessary component of these experiences. Lack of a candidate's participation in a specific service experience or retreat shall not be used as the basis for denial or delay of the sacrament.

C. Elements of the Confirmation Process

(For more depth and detail, and how the principles are founded in the *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, see: "Summary of Basic Principles to Be Considered in a Confirmation Preparation Program," page 18 of this document.)

1. Immediate preparation time involves a variety of methods to ensure candidates understand the reality of the sacrament and its effects. This is not a time to teach all the aspects of the Catholic faith. Persons needing this kind of formation should be provided with a way to meet their needs.

Required topics to be covered for confirmation include:

- a. Sacraments of initiation (confirmation is a beginning, not an end. It is not choosing to be Catholic but being ready to receive the gift of the Spirit in order to live the Catholic faith more fully.)
 - b. The Creed
 - c. History of confirmation
 - d. Sacrament of the Holy Spirit
 - e. Gifts of the Holy Spirit
 - f. Confirmation: Christian witness in parish and world
 - g. Rite and symbols
2. Conversion opportunities provide the candidates with a way to meet Jesus and to choose to live their lives according to the Catholic faith. These may include:
 - a. Prayer experiences, especially those centered on the Gospels
 - b. Retreat experiences (ICYC is a possibility, with confirmation-specific follow up)
 - c. Sacrament of Penance
 - d. Service to others, both inside and outside of the parish setting, to give the candidates opportunities to reach out with their gifts to serve those in need. The number of hours is not as important as the need to plan the activities and to reflect on the experience
 3. Letter to the bishop, to include (see attached sample letter):
 - a. Name, parish
 - b. Brief biography
 - c. What I believe about the sacrament of confirmation
 - d. Why I want to receive this sacrament
 - e. What do I want the bishop to pray for, for me
 4. Sponsor participation in the preparation process; may include:
 - a. Some sessions/retreats with their candidates

- b. A monthly meeting with candidates to answer questions, work on service projects or participate in other activities that give the candidates an experience of an adult living their faith.
 - c. Participation in the rites
- 5. Parent participation in the confirmation process; may include:
 - a. Prayer
 - b. An opportunity to provide input to the candidate's initial request, either in writing or at a gathering
 - c. An opportunity to assist with sessions or retreats
 - d. Participation in rites
- 6. Parish community participation in the confirmation process, through:
 - a. Prayer
 - b. Their example as adult Catholics living their faith
 - c. The opportunity to volunteer to be part of the process
 - d. Welcoming youth and young adults at parish gatherings
- 7. Possible rites during the preparation process may include:
 - a. A public calling to the confirmation process
 - b. A blessing after retreat time

An Integrated Vision of Confirmation Preparation



Parish Confirmation Preparation—Cohesive, Unified, Simplified

When we bring new members into a community, we do so with the underlying sensibility that we are refreshing the stream of life that runs through it. We are redefining—and defining—that community as we incorporate those new members and reflect on what it is we are initiating them into. The sacrament of confirmation is just such an opportunity for reflection and renewal for a parish community.

Parishes put tremendous energy and resources into their confirmation preparation programs, with commensurately high hopes for the outcome. After all, these are our children, the literal future of our families and our family of faith. However, communities too often promote with zeal practices that do not result in the desired outcomes. They are afraid youth do not know their faith, or don't want to be there; that youth are at risk in the secular world of their peers where, so frequently, teachers, parents, and mentors are baffled foreigners. One response to these fears has been mandatory, "everything-but-the-kitchen-sink" programs that consume great amounts of energy.

As *Confirming Disciples* puts it, "**Confirmation preparation is harder than it needs to be when it becomes a way to create a mandatory youth ministry program or compulsory religious education.**"¹

Ideally, the zeal and resources brought to these programs can be channeled into strengthening overall ministry with youth. The Center for Ministry Development poses the following questions to those responsible for youth ministry:

- How do we as a community create active, engaging and comprehensive ministry with youth?
- How do we plan for systematic faith education for adolescents?
- How do we prepare youth for confirmation in such a way that we honor the distinct gift of the sacrament?

Our diverse communities will answer these questions in different ways that will reflect the parish's identity, available resources, experiences, and demographics, all leading to choices that affect how each parish distributes their time, talent, and treasure.

As we all know, parishes struggle with this balance (and not just in youth ministry). Elements of the same ministry vie for youth attention, family time and limited parish resources.

Untying the Knot of Confirmation Preparation

Here, it is worth quoting again from the Center for Ministry Development:

"Confirmation preparation becomes a structural challenge when we combine our practice of sacramental preparation with all of our expectations for faith formation and youth ministry. When the Confirmation preparation program assumes all of the responsibility for meeting the expectations of our youth ministry and faith formation, the community's energy is tied up attempting to meet all of these expectations in one program. In effect, we tie ourselves in knots, unable to meet the expectations, let alone the needs, of young people. These knots paralyze our effectiveness.

"You know you are tied up in knots when...

- Preparing for Confirmation and youth ministry are so bound together that programs compete for parish resources, youths' time and family support.
- Preparing for Confirmation includes all of the expectations for an adolescent to learn and grow in faith, making confirmation programs become the equivalent of studying for a faith "bar" exam. It is harder and harder each year to involve volunteers.
- It feels like the parish is fighting with families for quality time with their adolescents.
- Ministry with youth feels like you are pulling teeth because the young people just do not want to be there.

To loosen the ties that bind it is helpful to focus on the relationship between the following three

elements:

- Understanding Confirmation
- Effective sacramental preparation
- Youth ministry before, during and after confirmation.”²

1: Understanding Confirmation

“People in love make signs of love, not only to express their love but also to deepen it.”³

As Catholics, we deepen our relationship with God via the sacraments, all of which have a particular history and theology. As one of the sacraments of initiation, confirmation’s symbols have as their origin customs used in Roman culture, when soldiers preparing for service to the citizens of Rome were bathed and then anointed with oil, a procedure intended to strengthen their muscles and fit the soldiers for service. Hence, in the Christian tradition, the water-bath of baptism was followed by an anointing which evolved into confirmation.

As the Church grew and spread, taking on new members and reaching new regions of the world, this initiation practice changed. In some countries, baptism was performed by a local minister while the anointing was performed by the bishop—and so, confirmation as a separate sacrament began to evolve. However, the relationship of confirmation to baptism, the symbolism of strengthening, and the relationship with the wider Church as symbolized by the bishop’s anointing remained.

What has also developed with this separation is a confusion regarding the meaning of this sacrament. Does confirmation “finish” baptism? Do we receive “more” of the Holy Spirit when we are confirmed? How much is enough? These and other misunderstandings have sometimes led to pastoral practices that deepen the confusion.

Confirmation in the Catechism

Although not by any means an exhaustive description of the sacrament of confirmation, the following is offered in the *Catechism of the Catholic Church*:

1. Confirmation welcomes us as a sacrament of initiation:
 - a. Confirmation is linked to baptism and Eucharist.
 - b. Confirmation is part of our initiation into the faith community.
 - c. Confirmation honors the spiritual maturity of the individual.

Confirmation is not separate from baptism and Eucharist. It is an integral component of the moment that effects our initiation into the missionary Church that believes, worships, and lives the gospel as a community. Confirmation preparation should express the link between the sacraments of initiation as it instructs on the distinctive gift offered in confirmation. Preparation programs take place in an environment of authentic hospitality, and include reflections on baptism and Eucharist.

2. We are confirmed in the name of God, the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit.
 - a. Confirmation is part of the welcoming initiative of God the Father.
 - b. Confirmation unites us more firmly to Christ.
 - c. Confirmation strengthens us with the Holy Spirit.

All relationship with God is initiated by God—our faith life is our response to that love first offered by God. Confirmation is part of this call and response, and is deeply rooted in the relationship of the Trinity. Preparation programs should focus on God’s loving call, and offer opportunities for the candidates to discern that call in their own lives, to identify moments of conversion through reflection and prayer, and to be open to the movement of the Holy Spirit in their life and in the world.

3. Confirmation strengthens us for discipleship, mission and witness to our faith.
 - a. Confirmation empowers us to witness to our faith.
 - b. Confirmation links us to the ministry of Christ and the mission of the Church.
 - c. Confirmation initiates young people into the adventure of discipleship.
 - d. Preparation for confirmation is a moment of conversion which includes celebrating the sacrament of reconciliation.

The gospel leaves us in no doubt about what we are called to be. As followers of Jesus, we are servants, foot-washers, peace-makers. For this ministry, we are fortified and fed by Him. Preparation programs should offer opportunities for candidates to see gospel virtues modeled, and for candidates to discern their own strengths as disciples, their growing abilities and giftedness. There should be opportunities to celebrate the sacrament of reconciliation.

4. Confirmation is a celebration of the community of faith.
 - a. Confirmation joins us to the ministering community.
 - b. Confirmation is received by individuals and celebrated as community.
 - c. Preparation awakens a sense of belonging to the universal Church and local parish.
 - d. Preparation includes a sponsor who represents the wider faith community.
 - e. Preparation provides an opportunity to partner with families as communities of faith.

The mission and ministry our youth are being fitted for does not happen in a vacuum. Rather, around them gather the community of faith, to strengthen, model, support, and pray. As well, the faith community celebrates with joy the journey of these young pilgrims, and their continued engagement in the community. The families of the candidates are crucial parts of this community. Preparation programs should behave as partners of these families, not competitors; invite and depend on the support of the wider community; respect and include sponsors and parents in their role; include them in catechesis; and celebrate confirmation in prayer with the entire parish community.

2. Effective Sacramental Preparation

“Confirmation is an important part of the continued dialogue and journey of an adolescent who is growing as a young disciple; it is not a carrot to dangle at the end of this process.”⁴

Successful sacramental preparation programs will consider:

- ...the individual faith journey. Preparation is not about clock hours or the length and quantity of content. It is a conversion process.
- ...the liturgical year. The public worship of the faith community is an important time to acknowledge, celebrate and support candidates seeking sacramental preparation.
- ...the involvement of the faith community. The community’s members should be seen as a resource for the preparation and as the witnesses and stewards of candidates for sacramental preparation.⁵

What is “adequate preparation?” Understanding the sacrament of confirmation can help candidates receive the gift more fully; however, classes, study, service projects, and retreats do not operate as qualifiers or strategies to “earn” it. Adequate preparation keeps in mind the Church’s tradition and concept of “noble simplicity,” rather than becoming a vehicle into which we cram all things we think youth “need,” because we can compel them to attend in order to receive the sacrament. Youth and their families are more harmed than helped by programs that are filled with too many compulsory events, attendance requirements, and check lists.

The Diocese of Boise proposes a focused, short-term preparation program that can be completed in four to six months and relies upon complementary youth ministry efforts prior to and after preparation for confirmation.

For those who think this is not long enough, the answer is, most likely it is not. Practically, a lifetime is not long enough to learn our faith. But it is more easily accomplished if youth ministers are not trying to put everything needed for youth ministry into one sacramental preparation program. After all, youth should come away from their preparation with eyes and hearts open to what God is doing, rather than what we, the ministers, are doing. Ideally, youth become engaged in the community, and their preparation for confirmation flows naturally from that engagement.

As Fr. Paul Turner has said regarding teens’ readiness for confirmation, “Faith is a gift, the Holy Spirit is a gift, and sacraments celebrate the *unmerited* grace of God. Confirmation celebrates what God does, not what teens have shouldered.”⁶

3. Youth Ministry: Before, During and After Confirmation Preparation

The ever-present question for youth ministers, parents, and pastors is how to keep youth *in* youth ministry after preparing for confirmation. (The unspoken question is, how do we do this if we do *not* dangle confirmation like a carrot?) More to the point, how do we keep them in church?

One way is for youth to experience confirmation as part of youth ministry all along. “Ministry” for young people ideally begins before adolescence, and at early adolescence, when opportunities for involvement in the Church feel to them like a natural response to their innate desire to belong, and to matter; when being at church feels, to them, like being at home.

If your youth ministry program includes a solid faith formation component, and a solid partnership with families, then a focused, short-term confirmation preparation may become a time to build upon this foundation, and reflect upon and celebrate an ongoing, mature involvement in the parish family.

Post confirmation youth ministry should look different than pre confirmation youth ministry. Sometimes the argument is made that the teens do not continue after confirmation because there is no difference, and they are no longer being challenged.

The challenge of preparing youth for confirmation is part of the larger challenge of the parish's mission and ministry with young people, and for that matter, with all people. As a community, we can cooperate with the actions of God in the life of a young person by providing an engaged presence that responds to where that person is at that time of their life, and by providing what church provides so well: a crucial environment of prayer, catechesis, reflection, and gospel action. These opportunities can inform the faith of the young person as they also renew the mission and ministries of the faith community: parishes must begin to see and appreciate, not only what they can do for their youth, but what joyful gifts the youth bring to them.

What if our "required programs" were in fact a requirement for parishes to provide diverse opportunities for faith growth using all of the resources of the community?

What if the teens saw confirmation as part of their faith formation that assisted them with their continued spiritual growth? What if parishes made service or leadership roles available to adolescents? What if parishes put in place a variety of paths to serve youth well, providing for growth, learning, service and worship in the adolescent years?

Ideally, a parish confirmation preparation program should have a firm foundation to rest on, so parishes can feel free to provide a focused, short-term confirmation preparation program.

Youth Ministry Principles

One challenge that many dioceses face is the unevenness of youth ministry effectiveness between parishes, or even within a parish composed of a diverse demographic.

The following principles regarding youth ministry are based upon the real-life experiences of leaders in communities who have built effective youth ministry programs in diverse settings over the last twenty years.

- Ministry with youth is comprehensive.

Youth ministry is not one program, one strategy or one leader. Youth ministry describes the Church's pastoral efforts with youth. Being comprehensive means we respond to the needs of diverse youth in a holistic way that integrates them into parish life.

- Ministry with youth recognizes that young people learn, experience faith and grow in faith in many ways.

Experience of the past two decades has proven that there are as many different ways to learn as there are different young people. This diversity can be something that overwhelms us or it can be an opportunity to be seized, giving us a variety of options to help youth and families grow in faith. We know as adults the times that a program that was supposed to help us learn did not connect for us. We may have even thought that the methods employed may work for someone else, but not for us. To serve diverse youth, we need diverse strategies: youth have different starting points and need a variety of ways to learn, grow, belong and contribute.

- Ministry with youth includes faith formation.

Faith formation encompasses the hopes of the community for evangelization, catechesis and religious education.

- Ministry with youth is the responsibility of the community and draws young people into participation in the ministry efforts of the Church.

Youth ministry is the way a community stands with, guides and comes to appreciate young people. It is not a particular leader's program and it is not something to keep separate or hidden. One of the greatest challenges of

youth ministry is helping the parish family to become more youth-friendly, making room for the way that young people learn, pray, belong and share their gifts.⁷

Partnering with Parents

Ministry with youth respects and honors the role of parents in the faith development of young people.

Among the insights gained from experience in youth ministry over the past two decades, one of the most important is the opportunity and the imperative to work in partnership with families. There was a time when some leaders in youth ministry defined their ministry as being a place for youth to get away from parents. There was almost an anti-parent feel to some early youth programming. Youth ministry has learned that parents are really part of the team — they are the youth ministers at home and they deserve to be treated with respect, hospitality and support.

How do we support parents as they pass on faith and values in every aspect of family life? How do our programs support parents as they try to keep their family and their values the center of that family's life? These questions are very different from the one commonly asked: how can we get parents to support our programs?

It seems obvious to state it, but in fact youth come to youth ministry and confirmation preparation as individuals with an already-firm conception of self, of service in the world, of leadership, and of faith. The foundation for these conceptions was formed in the home —where they learned to pray, to know God's love through the love of their parents, and where they learned to serve others. Youth ministry needs to keep this in mind when planning programs. All parish ministries should bolster and encourage the faith life of the home as "domestic church."

Parents need to experience Church as something other than an adversary. Ministers should strive for mutual understanding, respect and consideration. There is no benefit to be gained when ministers attempt to win the trust and loyalty of the child by undermining the authority and position of the parent. Parents often experience Church as among those institutions families must compete with for time and energy. Instead, families should experience Church to be on their side when the practical realities of family life are considered in the implementation of programs intended to serve children and youth. This means we look carefully at requirements, schedules and our attitude of hospitality. Parents need to understand, and feel part of, programs that involve their children.

Ministers may consider approaching parents for suggestions and information about their children. Outreach to parents which includes their concerns and aspirations will go a long way toward building partnership, rather than conflict.

Parents and youth should be able to choose from a variety of resources and strategies to make their faith formation meaningful, authentic, and effective. Sometimes when the Church and community come to the realization that family support is critical in youth activities, the response becomes an additional responsibility and burden to parents. It may be most helpful, if possible, for families to select good resources and options to fulfill components of any preparation program, so that families can develop a strategy that works for their particular schedule, family system and family spirituality.

Unkotted and Re-Woven

We live out our ministry in parishes that are beautiful tapestries, ever-changing and new, yet founded and resting upon Tradition, history, and the underlying principles of family and community. The following points may help guide leaders towards a distinctive emphasis within our confirmation preparation:

Effective Confirmation Preparation:

- ✓ emphasizes what God is doing in our lives, not what we do to be worthy or deserving
- ✓ works within youth ministry and faith formation, not as a separate or competing program

- ✓ focuses on preparation for celebrating the sacrament, not as a place for all of the needed adolescent catechesis
- ✓ involves the community of faith, not anonymous preparation programs
- ✓ works in partnership with parents, not in competition for family time and attention
- ✓ launches youth toward full participation and active discipleship, not as an end but a beginning

This instruction used the image of parishes that are tied up in knots over the challenges of confirmation preparation. Knots keep things stuck in one place on the rope. But a tapestry is made of a pattern that is woven into place in a different way, a way that still keeps the whole together while allowing new threads to be introduced. Ideally, confirmation preparation can be viewed as a part of the tapestry of community, with youth being woven into the fabric of Christian life in a way that beautifies and strengthens the whole.

Summary of Basic Principles to Be Considered in a Confirmation Preparation Program



Below are primary considerations to be taken into account when creating a confirmation preparation program, together with supporting paragraphs from the *Catechism of the Catholic Church*.

One: Confirmation receives us as a sacrament of initiation.

- ✓ Confirmation is linked to baptism and eucharist.
- ✓ Confirmation is part of our initiation into the faith community.
- ✓ Confirmation recognizes the spiritual maturity of the individual.

The *Catechism* says...

1285 Baptism, the Eucharist, and the Sacrament of Confirmation together constitute the “sacraments of Christian initiation,” whose unity must be safeguarded. It must be explained to the faithful that the reception of the Sacrament of Confirmation is necessary for the completion of baptismal grace.

For, by the Sacrament of Confirmation, (the baptized) are more perfectly bound to the church and are enriched with a special strength of the Holy Spirit. Hence they are, as true witnesses of Christ, more strictly obliged to spread and defend the faith by word and deed.

1308 Although Confirmation is sometimes called the “sacrament of Christian maturity,” we must not confuse adult faith with the adult age of natural growth, nor forget that the baptismal grace is a grace of free, unmerited election and does not need “ratification” to become effective. St. Thomas reminds us of this:

Age of body does not determine age of soul. Even in childhood man can attain spiritual maturity: as the book of Wisdom says: “For old age is not honored for length of time, or measured by number of years.”

Therefore: Confirmation preparation should communicate the link between the sacraments of initiation as it explores the distinctiveness of the sacrament. Confirmation preparation should include opportunities for candidates to reflect on their own baptism, and on their identity as a eucharistic people.

Two: We are Confirmed in the name of God the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit.

- ✓ Confirmation is a response to the loving initiative of God the Father.
- ✓ Confirmation unites us more firmly to Christ.
- ✓ Confirmation strengthens us with the Holy Spirit.

The *Catechism* says...

1286 In the Old Testament the prophets announced that the Spirit of the Lord would rest on the hoped-for Messiah for his saving mission. The descent of the Holy Spirit on Jesus at his Baptism by John was the sign that this was he who was to come, the Messiah, the Son of God. He was conceived of the Holy Spirit; his whole life and his whole mission are carried out in total communion with the Holy Spirit who the Father gives him ‘without measure.’

1303 From this fact, Confirmation brings an increase and deepening of baptismal grace: it roots us more deeply in the divine filiation which makes us cry, “Abba, Father!” It unites us more firmly to Christ; it increases the gifts of the Holy Spirit in us....

1309 Preparation for Confirmation should aim at leading the Christian toward a more intimate union with Christ and a more lively familiarity with the Holy Spirit — his actions, his gifts, and his biddings — in order to be more capable of assuming the apostolic responsibilities of Christian life.

Therefore: In preparation for confirmation, our young people should be encouraged to identify their experience of God's call in their lives. They should be familiar with and inspired by Jesus, his person and ministry; and they should be awakened to the presence and working of the Holy Spirit.

Three: Confirmation strengthens us for discipleship.

- ✓ Confirmation empowers us to witness to our faith.
- ✓ Confirmation links us to the ministry of Christ and the mission of the Church.
- ✓ Confirmation initiates young people into the adventure of discipleship.
- ✓ Preparation for Confirmation is a moment of conversion which includes celebrating the sacrament of Reconciliation.

The *Catechism* says...

1287 The Spirit is a gift given in fullness first to Jesus, the Messiah, yet meant to be communicated to "the whole messianic people." On several occasions Christ promised this outpouring of the Spirit, a promise which he fulfilled first on Easter Sunday and then more strikingly at Pentecost. Filled with the Holy Spirit the apostles began to proclaim "the mighty works of God" ...those who believed in the apostolic preaching and were baptized received the gift of the Holy Spirit.

1302 It is evident from its celebration that the effect of the sacrament of Confirmation is the full outpouring of the Holy Spirit as once granted to the apostles on the day of Pentecost.

1303 From this fact, Confirmation brings an increase and deepening of baptismal grace: ...it renders our bond with the Church more perfect; it gives us a special strength of the Holy Spirit to spread and defend the faith by word and action as true witnesses to Christ, to confess the name of Christ boldly, and never to be ashamed of the Cross: "Recall then that you have received the spiritual seal, the spirit of wisdom and understanding, the spirit of right judgment and courage, the spirit of knowledge and reverence, the spirit of holy fear in God's presence. Guard what you have received. God the Father has marked you with his sign; Christ the Lord has confirmed you and has placed his pledge, the Spirit, in your hearts."

1309 Preparation for Confirmation should aim at leading the Christian toward a more intimate union with Christ and a more lively familiarity with the Holy Spirit — his actions, his gifts, and his biddings — in order to be more capable of assuming the apostolic responsibilities of Christian life.

1310 To receive Confirmation one must be in a state of grace. One should receive the sacrament of Penance in order to be cleansed for the gift of the Holy Spirit. More intense prayer should prepare one to receive the strength and graces of the Holy Spirit with docility and readiness to act.

Therefore: Confirmation preparation should begin to prepare youth for discipleship. We should model a pattern of relying on God for strength, as individuals and as a community. Preparation should encourage youth to begin to recognize, identify, and deploy their own gifts as disciples.

Four: Confirmation is a celebration of the community of faith.

- ✓ Confirmation joins us to the community.
- ✓ Preparation awakens a sense of belonging to the universal Church and local parish.
- ✓ Preparation includes a sponsor who represents the wider faith community.
- ✓ Preparation takes families into account as partners and members of the faith community.

The *Catechism* says...

1301 The sign of peace that concludes the rite of Confirmation signifies and demonstrates ecclesial communion with the bishop and with all of the faithful.

1303 ...it renders our bond with the Church more perfect.

1309 Preparation for Confirmation should aim at leading the Christian toward a more intimate union with Christ and a more lively familiarity with the Holy Spirit — his actions, his gifts, and his biddings — in order to be more capable of assuming the apostolic responsibilities of Christian life. To this end catechesis for Confirmation should strive to awaken a sense of belonging to the Church of Jesus Christ, the universal Church as well as the parish community. The latter bears special responsibility for the preparation of confirmandi.

1311 Candidates for Confirmation, as for Baptism, fittingly seek the spiritual help of a sponsor. To emphasize the unity of the two sacraments, it is appropriate that this be one of the baptismal godparents.

Therefore: Confirmation preparation should involve the community (which also allows for the renewal of the faithful). Preparation programs should respect family life and provide resources that allow parents to reflect on and model preparation efforts at home. Youth stand with a sponsor who represents the community as guide and support.

Curriculum Framework



Note: This framework is designed to be a review of essential doctrine.

Emphasis: Jesus came to teach about the Kingdom of God and to offer salvation to all people; the Church (people of God) continues his mission.

1. Scripture and Church Teaching

- a. Historic records exist to verify and support the existence of Jesus.
- b. Jesus was Jewish and practiced the traditions of his ancestors.
- c. Jesus grew in awareness of himself and his mission.
- d. Jesus is the second person of the Holy Trinity; he is fully human and fully divine.
- e. Jesus came to proclaim God's reign of love and justice for all.
- f. The Holy Trinity is the central mystery of our Christian faith. The resurrection of Jesus is the work of the Holy Trinity.
- g. The Holy Spirit is the Advocate promised by Jesus to be with his disciples.
- h. The Holy Spirit is active in our lives through sanctifying grace.
- i. Jesus is the full revelation of God's saving love.
- j. Jesus came to save all people.
- k. Jesus freely offered his life and experienced death for our salvation.
- l. Jesus will come again to judge the living and the dead.
- m. Those who have died remain united with us through Jesus and his Church (Communion of Saints).
- n. Through Baptism, Jesus calls us to be his disciples and carry on his mission.
- o. Faith is God's gift to us and our response to God.

2. Liturgy and Sacraments

- a. The paschal mystery is celebrated and made present in the Mass.
- b. The Church's liturgy involves ritual actions of signs and symbols relating to creation, human life and our relationship to Jesus.
- c. The mission of the Holy Spirit in the liturgy of the Church is to prepare the assembly to encounter Christ.
- d. When we come to the sacraments with an open heart they strengthen us to live a Christian life.
- e. The Eucharist is the memorial meal of Christ's Passover to his Father through his death and resurrection.

3. Prayer

- a. Prayer is a deepening of our relationship with God.
- b. Vocal prayer, meditation, and contemplative prayer are three major expressions of prayer within Christian tradition.
- c. Scripture leads to an encounter with God's message for our lives and challenges us to action.
- d. When we pray the Lord's Prayer our prayer becomes an expression of praise, adoration, thanksgiving, petition and reconciliation.
- e. Prayers to learn and practice:
 - Nicene Creed
 - Lord's Prayer
 - Review prayers learned in previous years

4. Morality

- a. The dignity of the human person is rooted in his creation in the image and likeness of God.
- b. As followers of Christ we form our consciences and make moral decisions with the help of the Holy Spirit and the guidance of the Church.
- c. We face temptations through prayer, self-discipline and seeking help from others.
- d. We are called to grow in Christian love, chastity, honesty, justice and truthfulness.

5. Church

- a. The Church is a sacrament, a sign of Christ's presence in the world.
- b. The Church is a community of persons who believe, evangelize, pray, worship and serve together.
- c. The Church develops different rituals and traditions that reflect cultural and geographic uniqueness.

- d. Councils were held to identify the needs within the Church.
- e. Guided by the Holy Spirit, the Church continues to grow in understanding of its mission.

6. Ecumenism

- a. Through Baptism, all Christians are united as brothers and sisters in Christ.
- b. The Church prays for the reconciliation of all Christians in the unity of the one and only Church of Christ.
- c. The Church seeks to lead all people to salvation.
- d. We seek opportunities to teach others about God – evangelization.
- e. The Catholic Church respects those of other faith traditions.

7. Service

- a. A Christian steward receives God’s gifts gratefully, cares for them and uses them for the benefit of others.
- b. Christians work to uphold the quality of life and the dignity of the human person.
- c. Jesus taught his followers to work for justice within the social, economic and political life of the community.

8. Words to know

Advocate
 abstinence
 Catholic church
 councils
 creed
 disciples
 evangelization
 ecumenism
 faith
 grace
 incarnation
 moral conscience

Paschal mystery
 Pentecost
 revelation
 sacrament
 salvation
 sanctifying grace
 social justice
 stewardship
 Tradition
 Vatican II Council
 vices
 virtues

Desired Outcomes for Adolescent Faith Formation



The effectiveness of parish, school and family efforts in adolescent faith formation can be assessed by witnessing faith communities alive with young people who demonstrate their love for God and their Catholic faith by:

1. Sustaining a personal relationship with Jesus Christ supported through regular prayer, faith sharing and scripture reading.
2. Sharing the Good News through words and actions, through Christian stewardship and working for peace, justice and human dignity.
3. Participating fully, consciously, actively and regularly in the celebrations of the sacramental life of the Catholic Church.
4. Articulating the fundamental teachings of the Catholic faith and demonstrating a commitment to learning and growing in this faith.
5. Applying Catholic ethics, virtues, principles, values and social teaching to moral decision making, life situations, and in interactions with the larger culture.
6. Discerning and using their gifts to actively belong to and participate in the life and mission of the parish, school, and larger community.
7. Celebrating cultural/racial and ethnic diversity as a gift from God, and pursuing the development of Christian community across cultural/racial and ethnic backgrounds in their parishes, schools, and broader communities.
8. Exploring God's call to vocation through prayer, reflection, and discernment.⁸

End Notes:

1. *Confirming Disciples*, Foundations of Confirmation Preparation, © Center for Ministry Development, 1996.
2. *Ibid.*
3. Bishops' Committee on the Liturgy, *Music in Catholic Worship*, Revised Edition (Washington DC: National Conference of Catholic Bishops, 1983) #4, page 9.
4. *Confirming Disciples*.
5. *The Catechism of the Catholic Church*.
6. Rev. Paul Turner, Federation of Diocesan Liturgical Commissions: FDLC Newsletter — December 1995, page 46.
7. See: John Roberto and Thomas East, *Access Guide to Youth Ministry: Leadership* (New Rochelle, NY: Don Bosco Multimedia, 1993).
8. *The Joy of Adolescent Catechesis: A letter to those who minister with Catholic teenagers in the United States*, a draft document from the National Initiative on Adolescent Catechesis. 2015.