

PREPARATION FOR CONFIRMATION

Why Is A Preparation Period Necessary?

Confirmation is that sacrament which confirms the action of God in Baptism and strengthens individuals to become like Christ in the Eucharistic community. Canon Law describes the sacrament of Confirmation as the one by which the baptized person continues the path of Christian initiation.

The sacrament of confirmation impresses a character and by it the baptized, continuing on the path of Christian initiation, are enriched by the gift of the Holy Spirit and bound more perfectly to the church; it strengthens them and obliges them more firmly to be witnesses to Christ by word and deed and to spread and defend the faith. (Canon 879)

The community should, therefore, involve itself in assisting the candidates to become more fully incorporated into the life of the church. The community, in its effort to nurture and guide the candidates, should provide opportunities which will guide the candidates to share the Word actively within and beyond the community, participate in the worship of the community, share fellowship with the community and involve themselves in works of justice and charity with the community.

Canon 777 calls for suitable catechesis to be given for the celebration of the sacraments. The candidates should understand what they celebrate in the sacraments so that they may participate actively and intelligently. Canon 779 calls for this catechetical formation to employ all those aids, educational resources and means of communication appropriate to the age and circumstances of the candidates. "Every parish should evangelize and provide catechetical instruction for those preparing for reception of the sacraments." (*Religious Education Policies* 2107.01) "All preparation for the reception of sacraments should follow the archdiocesan guidelines." (*Religious Education Policies* 2107.02)

As the first and foremost educators of their children, parents are called to guide their adolescents' spiritual, as well as physical, intellectual, emotional and social growth. "Every sacrament preparation program should provide assistance to parents/guardians in assuming their responsibility to prepare their children for celebrating the sacraments." (*Religious Education Policies* 707.03) The parish community can assist parents in this role through meetings and written communication concerning all aspects of preparation for Confirmation. Parents should not hesitate to encourage and help their children to participate fully in the Christian Community's life of Word, worship, fellowship and service. Many Confirmation texts offer suggestions for involving the parish, parents and sponsors in the preparation of candidates for Confirmation.

In the Archdiocese of Cincinnati, Confirmation is conferred between the ages of twelve and sixteen. Preparation is to take place in the parish or in a cluster of parishes, followed by celebration of Confirmation at

one of the parishes or at the Cathedral. (*Religious Education Policies* 2107.06)

Components of Preparation for Confirmation

Since Confirmation is a sacrament of initiation into the Church, the focus of all catechetical efforts must be aimed at incorporation into the Eucharistic community. This kind of focus will call for an approach that goes beyond instruction in the doctrines of the faith. Nevertheless, it would seem unwise to initiate an adolescent into a community about which he or she knows little. Some background and experience seem essential. However, it is assumed that most candidates for Confirmation have had some experience of the Church with their families and have participated in on-going religious education. Therefore religious instruction should be one of several components of a broader effort of formation of the Confirmation candidate.

The Archdiocese of Cincinnati does not require service hours as a prerequisite for receiving Confirmation. This is not to down play the value of service, which is explained in its proper perspective in Chapter VI, "Christian Service," of this document. However, candidates should be made aware that service throughout life is part of being a Christian.

A process of preparation should follow the same principles as any sound comprehensive youth ministry program. Foundational and operational principles for developing adolescent religious education as part of a comprehensive ministry to youth can be found in *Effective Models of Adolescent Faith Formation for Parishes*, which is available from the Archdiocese of Cincinnati Office of Evangelization and Catechesis and the Office of Youth and Young Adult Ministry. *The Challenge of Adolescent Catechesis: Maturing in Faith* (The National Federation for Catholic Youth Ministry) offers a framework for adolescent catechesis. The principles which should guide the creation of religious education programs for youth have also been articulated in *Renewing the Vision* (USCCB). Contact the Office of Youth and Young Adult Ministry and the Office of Evangelization and Catechesis for the most current documents.

1. Religious Instruction for Confirmation

A certain amount of instruction is an important element in the preparation for Confirmation. Care must be taken that the educational component does not change the focus of the sacrament from being a sacrament of initiation to being something to be earned or the completion of one's faith formation. As preparation for any sacrament seeks to foster conversion of the heart to Jesus, religious education during the time of preparation for Confirmation must leave room for candidates to mature to a deeper faith and grow to more active participation into the life of the Church.

They may be invited to take a more active part in planning and celebrating liturgical experiences, especially the Eucharist. They should be given frequent and regular opportunities to receive the Sacrament of Penance and Reconciliation. (*National Directory for Catechesis*, p. 199)

Confirmation textbooks cover various segments of time from six to eight lessons for immediate preparation to a full-year process. It is assumed

that the candidates have been and will continue to be involved in on-going catechesis. Immediate preparation for Confirmation is one part of the on-going growth in faith that should be part of the lives of the young candidates. Immediate preparation should strive to bring about active and conscious participation in the Rite of Confirmation.

According to the *National Directory for Catechesis*, the primary educational topics should include the meaning, rite and symbols of Confirmation and its connection to the other sacraments of initiation as well as the roles of the bishop, parents and sponsors. For the full list of topics, see pp. 122 - 123 of the *National Directory for Catechesis*.

Many parishes choose to do a review of the basic doctrines of our faith as part of the preparation for Confirmation. Even though this is not a requirement for Confirmation, there is a value in doing a review of the major tenets of our faith such as those found in the Creed. However, broadening the educational component beyond this risks making Confirmation a sacrament that must be earned through educational efforts.

2. Nurturing a Relationship with Christ

Candidates should be encouraged to spend time opening themselves to growth in their relationship with the Lord.

Since adolescence is the age of hero worship, it is helpful to present the words and example of Jesus as well as the lives and deeds of the saints in ways that appeal to young people. Such catechesis should present Christ as the Son of God, friend, guide, and model who can be not only admired but also imitated....Since they are better able to experience faith as a deeper relationship with God than are younger children, prayer and service to others in the name of Christ become more meaningful to them. (NDC, p.199)

It is the parish's responsibility to provide opportunities where this can happen. Catechetical and youth ministry sessions and retreats can provide such opportunities. A host of materials is available for parishes who wish to plan retreats themselves. Many Confirmation textbooks offer suggestions or plans for retreats. Most retreat centers provide adolescent retreats as well. See the Media Center or the Office of Youth and Young Adult Ministry for other resources for planning retreats.

3. Prayer and the Liturgy of the Church

Public and private prayer is an essential part of life as a Catholic. Participation at Sunday Liturgy should be a high priority as it is the sum and substance of Christian life. Confirmation candidates are expected to be already participating at Sunday Mass. Adolescents should also have opportunities to try new experiences of prayer. Guided meditation, prayer using body movement, scriptural meditation, Morning and Evening Prayer, traditional devotions and other types of prayer can be introduced to and used with adolescents. Suggestions for resources for prayer are found in many Confirmation texts. The Media Center has many prayer resources in print and on video.

SPONSORS

As a rule there should be a sponsor for each of those to be confirmed. These sponsors bring the candidates to receive the sacrament, present them to the minister for anointing, and will later help them to fulfill their baptismal promises faithfully under the influence of the Holy Spirit whom they have received. (*The Rite of Confirmation* #5)

The canons are not definitive about who should assume the role of Confirmation sponsor. Canon 893.2 states that it is desirable that the person who undertook the role of sponsor at Baptism should also be the sponsor at Confirmation. Canon 892 states that the role of the sponsor is "to see that the confirmed person acts as a true witness to Christ and faithfully fulfills the obligations connected with this sacrament." To show the connection between the sacraments of Baptism and Confirmation one of the candidate's godparents would be an appropriate choice. However, should the baptismal godparent be unwilling or unable to undertake the responsibility of Confirmation sponsor, the candidate would choose a confirmed, practicing Catholic whom he or she admires and who bears witness to the Gospel in everyday life.

The qualifications for a Confirmation sponsor according to Canon 874 are:

- a. The sponsor must be at least sixteen years of age.
- b. The sponsor must be a Catholic who has received Confirmation and Eucharist and is practicing the faith.
- c. The sponsor must not be bound by any canonical penalty (e.g., May not be divorced and remarried without an annulment).
- d. The sponsor may not be the father or mother of the one to be confirmed.

It should be kept in mind that a sponsor should be willing to share his/her faith in God and accompany the candidate in searching for God in his/her own life. A sponsor should also be able to serve as a mentor, by regularly spending time with the candidate. Many Confirmation Preparation textbooks and resources offer suggestions for preparing sponsors to fulfill their role.

After Confirmation

Since Confirmation is a sacrament of initiation or beginning and not the end of faith formation, it is crucial that those confirmed continue to be catechized and nurtured in the faith and in the significance of their own commitments.

The Church must make every effort through a revised and revitalized catechesis to ensure that adolescents do not view their preparation for and reception of the Sacrament of Confirmation as the end of their formal catechesis. They must be encouraged to continue to participate in catechetical programs, the celebration of Sunday Eucharist, and the practice of Christian living. As fully initiated Christians, they must be

given the opportunity to serve the community in a variety of liturgical ministries. (NDC, p.200)

Having already celebrated the Sacraments of Initiation, they continue to develop in their understanding of the life of the Eucharistic community. Subsequently, through their fuller participation in that community through catechesis or comprehensive youth ministry, those already confirmed experience a deepening relationship with Christ, Prayer and Liturgy, and Christian Service. The completion of preparation for Confirmation does not complete the formation necessary for continued growth as a Christian. Lifelong growth in faith is needed to respond to God's call to live as an effective Christian witness in the world.

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