

PREPARATION OF YOUTH FOR CONFIRMATION

The following components should be included in every parish Confirmation program. How these are implemented may differ from parish to parish, but all components should be attended to in the design of the parish preparation program.

- ❖ Remote and Immediate Preparation
- ❖ Catechesis
- ❖ Worship
- ❖ Community
- ❖ Service
- ❖ Sponsor Involvement
- ❖ Retreat
- ❖ Interview
- ❖ Letter of Intent
- ❖ Ongoing Formation

Remote and Immediate Preparation

Consideration should be given to two periods of preparation: remote and immediate. Remote preparation refers to the years of catechesis prior to one's eligibility to receive the sacrament of Confirmation. Immediate preparation refers to catechesis and formation related specifically to the sacrament of Confirmation.

Remote catechesis takes the form of comprehensive youth ministry within the parish, family, school, and/or community settings. In an ideal situation, young people enter their confirmation program with the background of a well-developed and well-attended catechetical program, whether in the parish, a Catholic high school, or other setting. However, this does not always reflect the reality of those who approach the Church to receive the sacraments. Some young people will enter the confirmation program with a limited background at best. It is the responsibility of the parish and confirmation coordinator, with the assistance of parents, to provide any remedial education and formation that is needed.

A parish's confirmation program, that is, the *immediate preparation* for the sacrament, should not attempt to provide the more general catechesis of remote preparation, but should focus on confirmation itself. Generally, a one-year program is sufficient. A three-year program, focused on confirmation, would not be warranted.

Young people prepare for confirmation in a program offered by their own parish or parish cluster. Students in Catholic high schools participate in the confirmation program of their own parish. Likewise, teenagers who are home-schooled are to participate in the parish program for confirmation preparation.

Catechesis

Parishes should present catechesis for the Sacrament of Confirmation that

- Teaches that Confirmation increases and deepens the grace of Baptism, imprinting the 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 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 children for Confirmation
- Teaches that the bishop is the ordinary minister of the Sacrament of Confirmation (In the Eastern Churches, however, the priest is the ordinary minister.)

(National Directory for Catechesis, 122-123)

Confirmation preparation itself is concerned with the rite of confirmation and the signs, symbols and images related to the sacrament. It focuses on a life of Christian discipleship lived in the context of a Catholic community, and it explores the activity of the Holy Spirit in the life of the individual Christian and in the life of the Church.

Worship

“Faith and worship are closely related to one another as they were in the early Church: faith gathers the community for worship, and worship renews the faith of the community” (*NDC*, 109). To help young people preparing for Confirmation to appreciate the connection between faith and worship, Confirmation preparation should include liturgical catechesis as well as experiences of communal and personal prayer.

The Eucharist should be the preeminent experience of liturgical prayer. Catechesis for confirmation should encourage regular, active participation in Sunday Mass. Confirmation candidates may also be recognized or presented to the parish community at the Sunday Eucharist.

Catechesis should also include various prayer forms such as communal and private prayer, traditional prayers and spontaneous praying, gesture and song, meditation and contemplation (cf. *NDC*, 113).

Community

“Young people experience the Catholic community of faith at home, in the parish (especially in youth ministry programs), in Catholic schools and in other organizations serving youth. Ministry with adolescents recognizes the importance of each of these faith communities in helping young people grow in faith as they experience life in community and actively participate in the mission of Jesus Christ and his Church.” (*Renewing the Vision*, 11)

While each of these settings plays an important role in the remote preparation for Confirmation, the immediate preparation for the sacrament occurs in the parish setting. Parish preparation programs should take care to involve parents and families, the parish and Catholic community, sponsors, and committed, faith-filled adult leaders.

Service

As part of preparation for confirmation, involvement in community service is critical. "The experience of Christian community leads naturally to service" (#28 TJD). To live as Christ lived is to live a life that responds to the needs of others--at home, in school, in the community, etc. While service is a component of confirmation preparation, it should be seen as more than a project or a number of hours that "count." The program should involve candidates in actual service, whether serving the needy in society or serving within the parish, whether serving individually or as a group with peers and adult parishioners. Along with the actual service, the program must foster reflection on the experience – to help deepen awareness of the candidate's own gifts, of the needs of the poor and vulnerable, of Catholic social teaching, and of one's role in the mission of the Church. Particular decisions regarding approved service opportunities, duration of involvement, and methods of reflection are the responsibility of the parish confirmation coordinator.

Sponsor Involvement

Sponsors should receive formation which highlights their role and responsibilities. They are encouraged to deepen their own faith, and to be models of discipleship. Parishes should offer opportunities for sponsors to have an active role in the preparation process, including opportunities for the candidate and sponsor to share their faith and to strengthen their relationship with one another. Sponsors should also be well-prepared for their role in the celebration of Confirmation.

Retreat

Each parish is to include a retreat in its Confirmation preparation program. The retreat is integral to a candidate's preparation and is not to be omitted without serious reason. Parishes are to provide adequate resources for a quality retreat experience. A parish will normally provide a weekend or at least an overnight Confirmation retreat. A parish or cluster may plan and implement its own Confirmation retreat, or collaborate with other parishes, or contract with a retreat center that offers Confirmation retreats.

If it is impossible for a teen to participate in the scheduled parish retreat, alternatives should be explored such as: participation in a neighboring parish's retreat, participation in a Confirmation retreat at a retreat center, a private retreat designed and directed by the parish youth minister, or some other possibility.

Because the parish is the setting for Confirmation preparation and in order to facilitate a deeper connection with the parish, students attending Catholic High Schools are to participate in their parish Confirmation retreat.

Candidate Interview

Personal interviews of confirmation candidates by the pastor, the confirmation coordinator, a catechist or other staff member are helpful in assessing readiness for confirmation. Interviews also enhance the connection between the young person and his/her parish.

Interviews early in the program might include: the candidate's expectations, a description of their faith journey, goals during the program, choice of sponsor, individual's intent to be confirmed, program expectations, and service opportunities. Interviews near the end of the preparation program might include: the development of the candidate's prayer/faith life, what was most/least helpful during the year, reflection on service experiences, the candidate's self-assessment of their growth, questions that remain unanswered, and whether and why they wish to be confirmed.

Letter of Intent

Each candidate writes a letter of intent to the confirming bishop or extraordinary minister.

Letters of Intent might include:

- The candidate's desire to be confirmed
- Their confirmation name and reason for selecting that particular saint or name
- A statement or two about their growth in faith: past, present, future
- A description of their service endeavors and the effect of these on their life
- How they see themselves participating in the mission of the Church as adults

The confirmation coordinator may provide general guidance, but not a form letter. Typed or computer-generated letters on standard paper are preferred to longhand. Respecting the possibility of a confidential communication, candidate letters should be read by someone on the parish staff to see that each candidate requests the sacrament and is acting freely. Any inappropriate content should be addressed with the candidate before sending to the bishop.

Letters of intent should be mailed directly in one packet to the bishop or delegated priest at least 30 days prior to the date of Confirmation.

Ongoing Formation after Confirmation

Parishes may offer opportunities for the newly confirmed to gather following the day of the celebration to reflect on their experience of Confirmation and to appreciate the significance of the sacrament.

Confirmation is not a form of graduation nor does it mark the end of one's formation. Faith formation is a lifelong process. Therefore, programs must be provided beyond confirmation. Parishes should offer formation opportunities for high school seniors, and for adults throughout the life cycle. Newly confirmed youth should continue to participate in religious education or youth ministry in their parish or Catholic high school.