

The Sacrament of Confirmation
Parish Preparation Guidelines
Department of Lifelong Faith Formation
Diocese of Buffalo

Growth in faith is a life long process. It is essential that opportunities which foster formation and growth be continually offered for all persons in our faith communities. It is within the context of this on-going growth in faith of the community and the candidate that Confirmation and the preparation for the sacrament should be understood.

Given the current pastoral practices of the Diocese of Buffalo, if a young person requests confirmation during the high school years, this celebration takes place ideally when the candidate is in the eleventh or twelfth grade which allows for adequate comprehensive and systematic catechesis.

Parish centered Confirmation preparation is to be a special process **distinct from and in addition to** the on-going adult or youth catechesis which the parish provides. Sacramental catechesis has a focus that differs from parish/school religious formation. Below are the general preparation guidelines for Confirmation within the Diocese of Buffalo. Please contact the Office of Lifelong Faith Formation with questions.

Role of the Community

It is the responsibility of the people of God to prepare the baptized for Confirmation.
(Introduction to Rite of Confirmation, #3)

Although there is a core of persons directly involved in the preparation process for Confirmation, the sacrament is part of an initiation into the whole community. When the community actively participates in the initiation process of welcoming, preparing, and supporting the candidate, it results in enormous benefit not only for those initiated, but for the entire community. Initiation of new members is inseparable from on-going conversion and renewal of the adult members of the local church. Therefore, parishes need to develop a positive relationship between the worshipping community and those seeking to celebrate the sacrament of Confirmation. In addition, parish leaders need to be attentive to how the newly-confirmed will be welcomed and integrated into the faith community following the celebration of the sacrament in a way that brings more life to that community.

Family as Minister

The participation of the candidate's family is an important factor in understanding when the sacramental process can best be begun and celebrated.

The family encourages the candidate to dialogue with the parish priest and catechetical ministers regarding his/her readiness to seek Confirmation. By becoming more aware of the meaning of the initiation process, and by sharing this with the candidate, the family can fulfill its appropriate role as primary educators. This role needs to be cultivated and encouraged throughout the candidate's formation, which began at Baptism. In order to make the most of the preparation time, parishes should integrate the family into the process in meaningful and significant ways. The *Strong Catholic Families-Strong Catholic Youth* Initiative was adopted by the Diocese of Buffalo in 2010 and is designed to provide guidance to parish leaders in this process. Parishes should contact the Department of Lifelong Faith Formation for support in this endeavor.

Sponsor as Minister

The sponsor teaches faith by personal example; leads by being a model; lends support in difficulties; is prepared to vouch for the sincerity of the candidate; and is actively affiliated with the parish sacramental process. In order to appropriately fulfill this role the sponsor must:

- understand and take seriously his/her own baptismal promises
- show his/her continued acceptance of the Gospel challenge
- live a life of faith in and through a parish affiliation
- have completed the initiation process (received Baptism, Eucharist, and Confirmation)
- be at least sixteen (16) years of age
- receive a letter of recommendation from his/her pastor
- not be the parent of the candidate, but may be the baptismal sponsor of the candidate.

To the extent that they are able, parishes need be attentive to the proper preparation of the sponsor so that they:

- actively support and encourage the candidate
- pray with and for the candidate
- act as a faith mentor or guide
- be involved in the sacramental preparation process

The sponsor accepts their role knowing that this relationship is on-going. It is the sponsor who is called to continue to nurture the faith of the fully initiated person beyond the sacramental celebration. Parishes can offer formation to sponsors as needed.

Catechist as Minister

The catechist, as witness and role model, actively participates in the community's public worship and ministerial life. The catechist is responsible for:

- fostering a deeper understanding and knowledge of faith
- providing an awareness of ministerial possibilities
- communicating an understanding of Church as a sacramental and pilgrim people.

The catechist is a person who:

- seeks to be continually updated in current theology according to Diocesan policy
- understands faith development
- is attuned to the appropriate methods of faith formation
- is comfortable with different learning styles
- interacts effectively with other parish personnel to insure a balanced process of initiation for candidates

Clergy as Minister

As a liturgical and pastoral leader, the priest or deacon brings his own special presence to the Confirmation preparation process. He knows and experiences the diverse life and activities of the parish, and is acquainted with the candidates, their families, sponsors, and the catechists. He recognizes and appreciates his role in relation to the various other ministers of initiation, all of whom contribute to the common sacramental task.

The priest and/or the deacon:

- help the members of the parish community to understand their role toward the candidates, especially through preaching.
- become familiar with the Confirmation preparation process by participating in its planning and on-going evaluation.
- are available to the candidates, sponsors, and catechists for spiritual counseling.
- join the other ministers of initiation in introducing the candidates to various parish ministries which they might enter.

The Candidate

Becoming a fully initiated member of the Roman Catholic Church is the personal choice of an individual. After dialogue with their family and parish ministers, some individuals may decide to delay this commitment to full initiation in the Church. It is important for those ministering to the individual to understand that people grow in faith in different ways. The length of time it takes for a person to be ready for full membership in the community depends “on the grace of God and on various circumstances.”
(Introduction to the Rite of Christian Initiation #320)

Pre-Requisites before Direct Preparation:

- Young people of high school age: participation in religious education classes in a parish setting or a Catholic high school that is comprehensive and systematic, ideally for at least 2 years.
- Adults (i.e. those beyond high school age): there is great diversity within the adult population with regard to their religious formation; therefore, the catechetical leader will customize an appropriate catechetical outreach based upon open dialogue with the candidate.
- Readiness and willingness.

Readiness and Willingness

Readiness cannot be determined by the calendar alone. The process for determining readiness and willingness is one in which the individual who is seeking to enter a Confirmation preparation process is encouraged to dialogue with family, sponsors, parish priests, and catechetical ministers. Indicators of readiness include:

- weekly participation in the Eucharist and the prayer life of their faith community.
- an adequate grasp of the basic content of the Catholic faith (acquired through participation in a parish or Catholic high school program or other approved process)
- the ability to freely request the Sacrament of Confirmation and to give the reasons for the request to their pastor in a written letter. This letter should include: identification of their unique gifts and a willingness to share these gifts with the community; and openness to on-going growth in faith and a commitment to Christian service.

Direct Preparation

Preparation for the Sacrament of Confirmation is *separate and distinct* from the catechetical programming offered to high school aged young people through parish faith formation or in a Catholic school. For adults, this process should be developed in a way that respects their place in the life-cycle. This direct preparation should include:

Curriculum: The focus on content uses the **approved diocesan Confirmation curriculum (2004)**. Gatherings should be well-organized into the equivalent of six to eight sessions (of 2-3 hours in length) with and include opportunities for prayer, reflection and apostolic service. Creative use of technology to facilitate learning and sharing should also be considered. A customized curriculum/format should be developed for those beyond high school age. The main topics include:

- relationship with Jesus and the Body of Christ.
- meaning of the Sacraments of Initiation.

- mission of the Church and the Call to Ministry.
- personal prayer and community worship.
- individual gifts and talents and the Gifts of the Spirit.
- the creed.

Retreat. Retreats provide a different method to grow in faith within one's peer group. For high school students, the following guidelines are recommended:

- the experience be with the other candidates from their parish;
- the experience be at least 5 hours in length
- the Confirmation retreat be distinct from other high school retreats.

For candidates beyond high school age, a retreat experience can enhance their personal growth in faith. There are many retreats offered across the diocese that might be appropriate, but it is not required.

Service. The opportunity to be engaged in worthwhile community service with their peers and/or in an intergenerational setting provides an experience that could foster a life-long commitment to Christian service. Service should be integrated across the parish's catechetical vision, therefore,

- emphasis should be placed on the value of opportunities afforded and theological reflection rather than accumulation of hours.
- opportunities both within the parish community and the community at large are encouraged.

Name

Confirmation candidates choose a Confirmation name as a sign of their new life in Christ. They may choose their baptismal name to learn about the saint they are named after or they may choose the name of a saint or blessed whose life they admire and wish to model. At times, the bishop will inquire during the ceremony why they selected their name. Candidates should be able to articulate their reason.

U.S. Bishops' Guidelines for the Celebration of the Sacraments with Persons with Disabilities

The following guidelines offering "a set of general principles to provide access to the sacraments for persons with disabilities" were approved by the U.S. Bishops during their June 15-17, 1995 meeting in Chicago, Illinois. Please contact the Department of Lifelong Faith Formation with specific questions.

General Principles:

- By reason of their baptism, all Catholics are equal in dignity in the sight of God and have the same divine calling.
- Catholics with disabilities have a right to participate in the sacraments as full functioning members of the local ecclesial community. (Canon 213)
- Ministers are not to refuse the sacraments to those who ask for them at appropriate times, who are properly disposed, and who are not prohibited by law from receiving them. (Canon 843.1)
- In accordance with Canon 777.4, pastors are to be as inclusive as possible in providing evangelization, catechetical formation, and sacramental preparation for parishioners with disabilities. Persons with disabilities, their advocates, and their families, as well as those knowledgeable in serving disabled persons can make a most valuable contribution to these programs.
- Parish catechetical and sacramental preparation programs may need to be adapted for some parishioners with disabilities. Further, parishes should encourage persons with disabilities to participate in all levels of pastoral ministry according to their abilities.

Every Christian community considers those who suffer handicaps, physical or mental, as well as other forms of disability – especially children – as persons particularly beloved of the Lord. A growth in social and ecclesial consciousness, together with undeniable progress in specialized pedagogy, makes it possible for the family and other formative centers to provide adequate catechesis for these people, who, as baptized, have this right and, if non-baptized, because they are called to salvation. The love of the Father for the weakest of his children and the continuous presence of Jesus and His Spirit give assurance that every person, however limited, is capable of growth in holiness. (General Directory for Catechesis #189)

N.B. The Diocese of Buffalo provides support services for pastors to facilitate the evangelization, catechetical formation, and sacramental preparation for parishioners with disabilities.

Summary

Confirmation is a ratification and renewal of Baptism, freely and deliberately done. It is a continuation of the Christian's baptismal commitment. The process of preparing for and celebrating Confirmation should stress the unity of Christian initiation.

Confirmation is a celebration of the Church, not merely a personal moment in the life of the individual. The local Church witnesses and accepts the commitment of the newly confirmed while the community affirms its own baptismal faith. It is important that the local community realize that it cannot ask more of the confirmation candidate than it is willing to do itself.

Resources

Catechism of the Catholic Church, United States Catholic Conference, Washington, DC, 1994.

Code of Canon Law - Latin-English Edition, Canon Law Society of America, Washington, DC, 1984.

General Directory for Catechesis, United States Catholic Conference, Washington, DC, 1997.

Carotta, Michael, Have Faith: Sustaining the Spirit for Confirmation and Beyond, Twenty-third Publications, New London, Ct. 2007.

Giocondo, Maureen & Manno, Fr. John, Countdown to Confirmation. Twenty-third Publications, New London, Ct. 2007.

Kelly, Maureen, Confirmation SourceBook, Harcourt Religion Publishers, 2008.

Martos, Joseph, Doors to the Sacred, Revised edition. Triumph, MO: Liguori, 2001.

Rite of Christian Initiation of Adults, Liturgy Training Publications, Chicago, IL, 1988.

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