



# The Sacrament of Confirmation

POLICY AND PRACTICES FOR PARISH PROGRAMS

OFFICE OF YOUTH MINISTRY AND RELIGIOUS EDUCATION



DIOCESE OF  
**Jefferson City**

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## The Sacrament of Confirmation: Policy and Practices

Diocese of Jefferson City

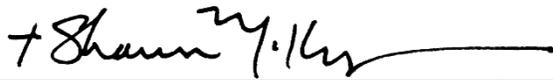
Recommended: September, 2019

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### Policy for the Conferral of the Sacrament of Confirmation

The sacrament of confirmation will normally be conferred during a child's 7th grade academic year. Confirmands, parishes, families and sponsors will abide by the diocesan, canonical, and catechetical requirements contained herein as they prepare the baptized to receive this sacrament.

Enacted: 1 October, 2019



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Most Reverend W. Shawn McKnight, S.T.D.  
Bishop of Jefferson City

# Table of Contents

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<b>Policy for the Conferral of the Sacrament of Confirmation</b>	1
<b>The Sacrament of Confirmation: Its Purpose and its Effects</b>	4
<b>Misconceptions Regarding the Purpose and Effects</b>	5
<b>Diocesan and Canonical Norms for the Reception of Confirmation</b>	5
Age and Grade	6
Canonical Requirements	6
Other canonical requirements	7
<b>Catechetical Norms and Requirements</b>	7
Foundational Doctrinal Truth	7
Essential Catechetical Concepts	7
<b>Recommendations for Persons Involved in Preparation for the Sacrament of Confirmation</b>	8
Parents	8
Sponsors	9
The Parish	9
Confirmation Leaders and Catechists	10
<b>Submitting Your Parish Program to the Diocese</b>	11
<b>The Measure of Effective Confirmation Preparation</b>	13
“Both-and” collaboration with catholic schools and families who homeschool	13
Provide proximate formation for those who may be uncatechized	14
Designate appropriate length and expectations	14
Promote stewardship and belonging to the parish	15
Prioritize encounter and experience	15
Integrate small groups or parish mentoring into your program	16
Plan for Mystagogy	16



# Part 1

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## Catechetical, Canonical, and Diocesan Norms for the Sacrament of Confirmation

## The Sacrament of Confirmation: Its Purpose and its Effects

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- 1) "Baptism, the Eucharist, and the sacrament of Confirmation together constitute the "sacraments of Christian initiation," whose unity must be safeguarded...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.'" (CCC 1285)
- 2) "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. From this fact, Confirmation brings an increase and deepening of baptismal grace:
  - a) It roots us more deeply in the divine filiation which makes us cry, "Abba! Father!"
  - b) It unites us more firmly to Christ;
  - c) It increases the gifts of the Holy Spirit in us;
  - d) It renders our bond with the Church more perfect
  - e) It gives us a special strength of the Holy Spirit to spread and defend the faith by word and action as true witnesses of Christ, to confess the name of Christ boldly, and never to be ashamed of the Cross." (CCC 1303)
- 3) "The faithful are obliged to receive this sacrament at the proper time. Parents and pastors of souls, especially pastors of parishes, are to take care that the faithful are properly instructed to receive the sacrament and come to it at the appropriate time." (CIC 890)

## Misconceptions Regarding the Purpose and Effects

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Despite these teachings, many common misconceptions about the nature, purpose, and effect of Confirmation persist. When left unaddressed, these misconceptions can adversely affect preparation for and understanding of the sacrament.

- 1) Confirmation is not a Catholic “rite of passage” wherein one makes a “choice” to become a “full, adult member of the faith.”
  - a) Confirmation is a sacrament of strengthening which fortifies those initial graces bestowed upon the faithful at baptism and nourished through regular reception of the Holy Eucharist at Mass. Confirmands are not confirming their Catholicism. God is confirming the grace of Baptism.
  - b) When the sacrament is presented as a “choice to be a full, adult member in the faith” it detracts from the actual choice young people are being asked to make in Confirmation, which is whether they want to receive the sacrament or not. While one could renounce the promises made in Baptism, those promises stand whether Confirmation is received or not. Confirmation strengthens us to keep those promises, but they are fully ours even as a babe.
  
- 2) Confirmation is also not a time to present the full breadth of the Catholic faith after which one “graduates.” Nor is it something to be earned after completing a series of requirements. While we do invite candidates to deepen their knowledge and their commitment to service, the intention is a fuller opening of the heart and soul to the reception of the sacramental graces. We must avoid turning preparation into an onerous hoop-jumping exercise that detracts from God’s action in the sacrament.
  - a) Confirmation is a time to lead “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 confirmands. (CCC 1309)

# Diocesan and Canonical Norms for the Reception of Confirmation

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## Age and Grade

- 1) In the Diocese of Jefferson City, the sacrament of confirmation will normally be conferred during a child's 7th grade academic year.
  - a) 7th grade will serve as the minimum grade level at which candidates may be confirmed.
  - b) Parishes may begin preparation during candidates' 6th grade year as long as the sacrament is conferred the following academic year and does not exceed the recommended length of time for preparation noted in part 2.
  - c) The sacrament may also be administered to candidates older than 7th grade should it befit the parish or situation of the child. For example, a parish might offer confirmation every other year which includes children in 7th grade as well as 8th grade.
  - d) If there is a danger of death or, in the judgement of the minister, a grave reason suggests otherwise, the sacrament of confirmation can be administered earlier than 7th grade. (CIC 891)
  - e) Children older than the age of reason who wish to join the church and have not been baptized as infants shall go through the Rite of Christian Initiation adapted for children.

## Canonical Requirements

- 1) According to the Code of Canon Law, every baptized person not yet confirmed is obliged to receive Confirmation (CIC 890). To receive confirmation licitly outside the danger of death requires that a person who has the use of reason be suitably instructed, properly disposed, and able to renew the baptismal promises. (CIC 889). Note that in danger of death, even infants, who have already been baptized, may be confirmed.
  - a) *Suitably instructed* means the confirmand:
    - i) Has a grasp of the sacrament and an understanding of the meaning and purpose of the sacrament
    - ii) Is able to participate in the rite
    - iii) Is able to renew their baptismal promises
    - iv) Catechized as appropriate to their age and cognitive ability (for adapting sacramental preparation for persons with developmental disabilities refer to the USCCB's "Guidelines for the Celebration of the Sacraments for Persons with Disabilities.")

- b) *Properly disposed* means the candidate:
- i) Demonstrates an attitude of openness to the sacrament. The candidate is not opposed to the sacrament and consents freely to receive it.
  - ii) Expresses a desire to continue to grow in relationship with God as Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.
  - iii) Expresses a desire to continue to grow in relationship with the Church.

### **Other canonical requirements**

- 1) Must be in a state of grace having recently received the sacrament of Reconciliation. (CCC 1310)
- 2) Has a sponsor who is willing to support the confirmand prayerfully as they undertake the obligations of the sacrament, and aid the newly confirmed in leading a Christian life (CIC 874; 892. More on the role and responsibilities of sponsors below).
- 3) Assumes a time of more intense prayer to prepare to receive the strength and grace of the sacrament. (CCC 1310)

## **Catechetical Norms and Requirements**

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With every doctrine of the Faith there are certain elements that are essential for understanding the teaching. This is not to say that other elements are not important or unnecessary, rather, if the essential elements are not taught, the truth will remain unknown. Thus, it is incumbent upon every preparation program to teach both the foundational truth and essential catechetical concepts in a manner appropriate to the audience.

### **Foundational Doctrinal Truth**

1. The completion and perfection of baptismal grace is accomplished in this sacrament, by which the faithful are strengthened by the Holy Spirit, bound more closely to the Church and are thus more fully enabled to receive the graces of Christ's Body and Blood in holy Communion. "Hence they are, as true witnesses of Christ, more strictly obliged to spread and defend the faith by word and deed" (CCC 1285, cf. 1302).

## **Essential Catechetical Concepts**

- a. Explain that Jesus gave us this sacrament and why (CCC 1286-1289)
- b. Explain the seal and the “sacramental character” (CCC 698, 1295, 1296, 1304, 1306).
- c. Explain spiritual maturity as being a disciple and witness (CCC 1308).
- d. Explain the requirements for reception (CCC 1385-1388).
- e. Explain the effects of this sacrament (CCC 1303, 1316).
- f. Explain that the Holy Spirit is a Person, the Third Person of the Trinity (CCC 685) bestowed upon the Church at the time of Pentecost.
- g. Explain that a relationship with the Holy Spirit is necessary for all believers (CCC 683); He is “the interior Master of Christian prayer” (CCC 2672).

## **Recommendations for Persons Involved in Preparation for the Sacrament of Confirmation**

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There are many individuals and groups involved in the process to prepare young people for Confirmation. The more involvement these groups have, the more effective preparation for the sacrament will be. Thus, it is strongly recommended that parishes engage with and include such groups and individuals in the preparation process.

### **Parents**

- 1) As the primary catechists of their children, it is vital that parents are engaged in the preparation process. As stated in the Catechism, “Parents have the first responsibility for the education of their children in the faith, and through the grace of the sacrament of marriage [parents] receive the responsibility and privilege of evangelizing their children.” (2222-2224; CIC 835 s4)
- 2) In addition, parents also undertake specific commitments at the time of their child’s baptism. Parents are to see that, “The divine life which God gives [their children] is kept safe from the poison of sin, to grow always stronger in their hearts (Rite of Baptism, no. 120).”
- 3) Thus, providing opportunities for parent catechesis, prayer, and formation is strongly recommended. Speaking with parents about their responsibility, privilege, and baptismal commitment is highly encouraged. Parents who homeschool should be included in the preparation process and should be working with the pastor and parish to prepare their children to receive the sacrament. Please refer to the resource booklet for ideas about how to engage parents in the confirmation prep process.

## Sponsors

- 1) In so far as it is possible, every candidate preparing for Confirmation needs a sponsor (CIC 892). It is desirable, though not required, that the same people who served as godparents for baptism return to fill the role of Confirmation sponsors.
- 2) If a candidate's baptismal godparents are not available, parish leaders should help the candidate find a suitable sponsor. The sponsor, however, need not be a member of the same parish as the confirmand, but it is highly recommended they are able to maintain close communication with the confirmand so as to perform their responsibilities effectively.
- 3) It is expected that each confirmand have one sponsor (CIC 892) who fulfills the requirements set out in Canon Law and the diocesan guidelines (CIC 872-874, 892-893). A person may serve as a sponsor for multiple confirmands.
- 4) Pastors and coordinators will see that sponsors, chosen by the candidates or their families, are spiritually fit to take on this responsibility and have exhibited the following qualities:
  - a) Sufficient maturity to fulfill their function (at least 16 years of age)
  - b) Practicing Catholic in good standing with the Catholic Church;
  - c) Have received Baptism, Confirmation, and Eucharist, and attempts to frequent the Sacrament of Penance at least annually in accord with the precepts of the Church.
  - d) Freedom from any impediment of canon law to their fulfilling the office of sponsor;
  - e) May not be the natural or adoptive parent of the confirmand (CIC 893 (874)). Other qualifying family members may serve as sponsors.

## The Parish

- 1) As stated above, "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 confirmands." (CCC 1309). Recognizing that the parish is the pre-eminent place for catechesis (CT 67), and that Christian initiation, "Should not be the work of catechists and priests alone, but the whole community of the faithful" (GDC 220 cf Ad Gentes, 14), the entire parish community should have an active role in preparing candidates for the sacrament of confirmation.
- 2) Confirmation leaders should explore ways to invite the wider parish into the process of praying for and supporting confirmands. There are many different roles that parishioners can take. In so doing, candidates form relationships with and learn from the witness of other parishioners thus facilitating that "sense of belonging" called for by the Catechism.

- 3) In addition, the parish community becomes more invested in the lives of the confirmands and empowered to, “more fully live out their right and duty, individually or grouped in associations, to work so that the divine message of salvation may be known and accepted by all men throughout the earth.” (CCC 900). Please refer to the resource booklet for ideas on how to engage the parish community.
- 4) Confirmands shall prepare for the sacrament at the parish they are registered. In the event this is not possible, confirmands should offer a legitimate and significant reason for the accommodation. Confirmands should get written permission from their pastor as well as the pastor at the other location in order to prepare for the sacrament.
- 5) If a candidate resides within the canonical boundaries of the Diocese of Jefferson City, but is preparing to receive the sacrament through a parish in a neighboring diocese, the pastor of that parish will compose a letter to the Bishop’s Office in the Diocese of Jefferson City and request permission to confer the sacrament.
- 6) **Regarding sacramental records**, the parish where the sacrament is being conferred is responsible for keeping the sacramental records of all those confirmed in their Confirmation Ledger. If a candidate is receiving the sacrament at a parish where they are not registered, then the parish hosting the confirmation liturgy is responsible for notifying each confirmand’s Parish of Baptism that the Sacrament of Confirmation has taken place. Any visiting parish or parishioner has no obligation to keep records. *(For example: St. Stanislaus Parish in Wardsville joins St. Joseph Cathedral in Jefferson City for Confirmation. The Cathedral is responsible for keeping the sacramental records of each candidate from Wardsville in their ledger, and is responsible for notifying St. Stan’s of each recipient. It is not St. Stan’s responsibility to track this.)*

### **Confirmation Leaders and Catechists**

- 1) Confirmation leaders and catechists are tasked with both coordinating and executing the preparation process. This includes but is not limited to registering candidates, submitting diocesan forms, prepping parents and sponsors, selecting and teaching the curriculum, organizing any retreats, service, or other programmatic components, and organizing the liturgy, etc.
- 2) Confirmation leaders and catechists should be catechetically competent regarding the nature, purpose and effects of the sacrament. Leaders should be knowledgeable of the policies and recommendations in this document. Both leaders and catechists should work with their Pastor, DRE and the Office of Youth Ministry and Religious Ed. to ensure their curriculum and program are catechetically sound and in compliance with diocesan norms and expectations. To this end, The Office of Youth Ministry and Religious Education will periodically offer training and formation for those leading Confirmation programs.

## Submitting Your Parish Program to the Diocese

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1. In May, the Office of Youth Ministry and Religious Education will send out the request for program descriptions and dates. These forms (not included here) should be completed by the person overseeing Confirmation at the parish and submitted to the diocese by August.
2. Once received, the Office of Youth Ministry and Religious Education will review the parish program and offer a recommendation of approval to the Bishop. If there is a question or concern about the program, the Director of Youth Ministry and Religious Education will contact the parish for clarification.
3. Once approved and submitted, the Bishop's office will begin the scheduling process. The Bishop's office will contact pastors directly to schedule dates and locations for the celebration. The Bishop's office will also send liturgical planning forms once scheduling has been arranged.
4. All parishes who facilitate their own preparation program must complete the parish response form and program profile. Small parishes whose candidates join another parish for their formation do not need to submit these forms.



## Part 2

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### **Recommendations and Best Practices for Confirmation Preparation Programs**

## The Measure of Effective Confirmation Preparation

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As stated in paragraph 1309 of the Catechism, effective preparation should promote a more intimate union with Christ and familiarity with the Holy Spirit while strengthening one's relationship with the universal Church and the parish community. This is the goal and measure of all preparation programs. While parishes have agency to create and structure their programs, each aspect of a program must be evaluated to determine if it:

1. Promotes intimacy with Jesus Christ
2. Increases familiarity with the Holy Spirit
3. Strengthens belonging to the parish community
4. Fosters a life of discipleship

What follows are diocesan recommendations and best practices to this end. These are not requirements in a strict sense. They are meant to help inform effective confirmation preparation programs. Many of these practices are elaborated upon in the supplemental resource booklet.

### “Both-and” collaboration with catholic schools and families who homeschool

1. In parishes with a catholic school and families who homeschool, the opportunity exists to collaborate on the catechetical component of preparation. By “catechetical component” it is meant the method by which the essential catechetical concepts are taught. Lessons on these concepts are to be integrated into the catholic school's 7th grade religion curriculum and taught in the context of the religion class. Families who homeschool would do likewise.
2. The catholic school, parish school of religion, and homeschooling families should be in communication about curriculum, lesson topics, and timelines. While the same curriculum need not be used by all, each should ensure that the essential catechetical concepts are covered, and that the courses of study are completed by the time the sacrament is conferred.
3. The catechetical component and only the catechetical component should occur in the context of the catholic school or homeschool. All other programmatic components such as retreats or service must happen in the context of the parish. This approach recognizes that it is the parish which serves as the primary sacramental community through which a young person is initiated and lives out the sacramental life. As stated, promoting belonging to the parish is one of the principal goals of sacramental prep. This cannot happen if every aspect of a child's preparation is delegated to the catholic school or homeschool alone.

4. Without “both-and” collaboration, parishes risk creating parallel and separate tracks that isolate youth and families resulting in a divided experience of church instead of a united experience of parish. Moreover, catholic schools and homeschools would be unduly burdened with providing every aspect of sacramental preparation. A collaborative “both-and” approach shares the catechetical responsibility while seeking ways to bring all confirmands together as one parish through the preparation process.
5. Therefore, catechetical instruction can happen in the catholic school, homeschool, or parish school of religion with all other programmatic components completed in the context of the parish. Informational meetings, retreats, planned service, practices for liturgy, etc. should all take place in the parish. Programs should intentionally create opportunities to bring all confirmands and families together to foster a shared sense of community and belonging through the preparation process.

### Provide proximate formation for those who may be uncatechized

1. It is not uncommon for candidates to register for confirmation having little-to-no prior catechetical formation. This is not usually the case for youth who regularly attend PSR or a Catholic school, but may certainly be the case for a child who has not participated in catechetical formation since first communion.
2. To ensure that confirmands are “catechized appropriate to their age and cognitive abilities,” *proximate catechesis* should be offered prior to starting more immediate preparation for the sacrament. Proximate catechesis provides a broad, general overview of the Catholic Christian life. It ought to touch on all 4 pillars of the Catechism, Sacred Scripture, and various aspects of Catholic Christian practice. Proximate catechesis is not to be confused with the immediate preparation for confirmation wherein the essential catechetical concepts are taught. It happens prior to beginning the preparation process.
3. Parishes should use the 6th grade year to identify and reach out to families who may have disengaged since first eucharist and personally invite them to participate in a program of proximate catechesis prior to beginning confirmation. By identifying those who may be uncatechized and personally inviting them to undertake proximate catechesis, parishes can help ensure that confirmands are adequately prepared to begin immediate preparation for the sacrament.
4. In the event a child registers who has not received any prior catechesis, pastors and catechists should evaluate next steps on a case-by-case basis.

### Designate appropriate length and expectations

1. The recommended length of time for preparation is 6-9 months. Parish programs do have agency to choose a length of time that suits their programmatic needs.

However, programs should avoid lengthy, protracted time frames that span 9-24 months or beyond.

2. As noted, confirmation prep is not a time to provide an exhaustive overview of the faith. Parishes are encouraged to provide proximate catechesis prior to beginning immediate confirmation prep. Nor should confirmation prep function as a parish's "youth program" where extensive confirmation classes and activities are used in place of structured youth ministry.
3. Programs should avoid presenting candidates with a lengthy series of mandatory requirements to complete as conditions to receive the sacrament. While we do invite young people to undertake certain responsibilities to become "adequately instructed and properly disposed," we must avoid placing onerous and rigorous expectations upon confirmands which undermine their canonical right and obligation to receive the sacrament.

### Promote stewardship and belonging to the parish

1. One of the most effective ways to ensure that confirmation does not become "graduation" from parish life is to use sacramental preparation to intentionally engage young people in the life of the parish community while simultaneously engaging parishioners in the lives of the confirmands. While a comprehensive faith formation program ought to be doing this already, sacramental preparation affords a privileged opportunity to more intentionally promote a spirit of stewardship and belonging for all involved.
2. In the context of the parish community, stewardship aims to recognize and foster the gifts of others while at the same time uses one's own gifts to serve the broader community. As the Holy Spirit bestows its gifts upon the newly confirmed, we must help confirmands identify their giftedness and provide them with opportunities to use these gifts in service to the community during preparation and beyond.
3. The more effectively we can promote this spirit of stewardship and use confirmation as a time to identify and employ their giftedness, the more we will be able to achieve the goal of strengthening belonging to the parish and fostering a life of discipleship. Refer to the resource booklet for ideas on how to promote stewardship through confirmation prep.

### Prioritize encounter and experience

1. Intimacy with Jesus and familiarity with the Holy Spirit cannot come solely through direct catechetical instruction. Without opportunities to encounter the Living Christ in prayer and works of mercy, confirmands may never come to experience the intimacy and familiarity with the Spirit which compels discipleship. The most effective ways to incorporate encounter is through prayer, service, and

personal sharing. It is strongly recommended that parishes include one or several of these elements into their programmatic offerings. These and other opportunities are elaborated upon in the resource booklet.

- a. Confirmation retreats and planned prayer experiences
- b. Works of mercy and planned service learning (not service hours!)
- c. Hearing lived witnesses from other youth or parishioners, and offering their own witness to their faith
- d. Small group faith sharing and discussion
- e. Apprenticeships in parish ministries

### Integrate small groups or parish mentoring into your program

1. Research on effective faith formation with adolescents show that small groups work. Small groups afford a more personal and intimate environment for kids and adults to pray and share faith together. It creates space for a kind of catechesis that facilitates encounter, promotes relationship and belonging. It is strongly recommended that parishes integrate a small group component into their prep programs.
2. In addition, a parish mentoring element which connects a confirmand to a willing parishioner engaged in parish life can also foster that belonging and personal relationship to the parish that confirmands desire. There are a variety of ways a program may integrate either of these approaches into their prep process. Refer to the resource booklet for more information on how to do this.

### Plan for Mystagogy

1. Confirmation should always be situated within a broader plan for lifelong faith formation at the parish. Ideally, parishes should have a comprehensive plan in place that ministers to young people before, during and beyond confirmation. Confirmation should never be the final offering for young people in the parish. When preparation facilitates encounter and intimacy with Jesus, engages parents, and creates a deeper bond to the parish community, the newly confirmed will be more apt to participate in mystagogical activity that promotes discipleship and increases retention.
2. Thus, parishes should plan for and create opportunities for the newly confirmed to plug into current ministries in the parish, while also developing youth-specific programs that the newly confirmed can seamlessly participate in. Strategies to accompany the newly confirmed as they grow in discipleship and involvement are essential for the mystagogical phase of their formation.
3. The Office of Youth Ministry and Religious Ed is always available to assist parishes in developing ministry beyond confirmation.