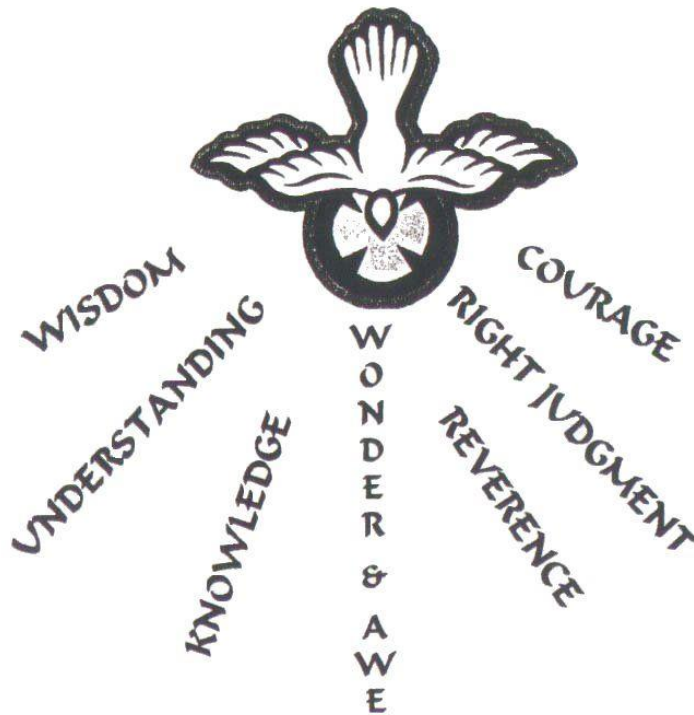


A PARENT RESOURCE:

CELEBRATING CONFIRMATION



September 2014

Faith typically has its first stirrings and nurturing in the family. In addition to school and parish programs for children's sacramental preparation, parents need the support of the greater faith community. Directly involving them in their child's formation helps parents grow in appreciation of their own faith by providing tools for speaking and learning about the faith with their children.

Our Faith Journey – Diocese of Victoria 2014

This pamphlet is designed to address the questions that may arise from parents and their children who are preparing to complete the Sacraments of Initiation.

1. What is Confirmation?

Confirmation is the second of the three sacraments of Christian initiation. Confirmation is the completion of Baptism and the sacrament by which the baptized faithful are anointed with chrism by the laying on of hands. The grace received is the fullness of the Holy Spirit and His gifts. We also describe this fullness as the completion, strengthening, or perfection of the Holy Spirit received in Baptism.

2. What are the Sacraments of Initiation?

The sacraments of Baptism, Confirmation, and Eucharist are interrelated and all three are required for full Christian initiation. The Christian is born anew by Baptism, strengthened by Confirmation, and receives in the Eucharist the food of eternal life.

3. Who is the minister of the Sacrament of Confirmation?

The ordinary minister of Confirmation is the bishop. The bishop may delegate other priests to confirm as well.

4. Who can receive the Sacrament of Confirmation?

According to our diocesan policy, the normal age for Confirmation includes those baptized children in third grade (usually around the age of eight years old). A candidate for Confirmation must be at the age of discretion, seven years of age or above, and meet the following requirements; they must...

- be baptized and not previously confirmed
- be Catholic (children baptized in another church must make a Profession of Faith)
- be properly instructed
- be capable of renewing their Baptismal promises
- have previously been prepared for and provided the opportunity to receive the Sacrament of Reconciliation (ordinarily occurs in second grade)

Candidates will be prepared for both the Sacrament of Confirmation and First Eucharist which will be celebrated together.

5. Why did the Diocese of Victoria change the age of Confirmation?

By placing Confirmation at this age, the Diocese of Victoria follows the natural sequence of the Sacraments of Christian Initiation: Baptism, then Confirmation, and then reception of First Eucharist. Pope Paul VI stated the following:

The sharing in the divine nature given to men through the grace of Christ bears a certain likeness to the origin, development, and nourishing of natural life. The faithful are born anew by Baptism, strengthened by the sacrament of Confirmation, and receive in the Eucharist the food of eternal life (CCC 1212).

It should also be noted that this is the sequence followed by RCIA (*Rite of Christian Initiation of Adults*) which requires that children and adults in the catechumenate receive all three sacraments together. By placing Confirmation prior to the reception of First Eucharist it makes it easier to view the Eucharist as the "summit" of Christian initiation (CCC 1233). Therefore, all baptized persons

who have reached the age of reason should be appropriately prepared and receive the Sacrament of Confirmation before the reception of the Holy Eucharist.

6. When our children are confirmed prior to First Eucharist, how are they to make an adult commitment to the Church?

All sacraments are a gift from our Heavenly Father, who desires to give us His very life, which we call grace. Sacraments are not earned or merited. For this reason, Confirmation should not be perceived as the sacrament of adult commitment to the Church. In fact, the Church even requires priests to confirm infants and children younger than the age of reason when they are in danger of death so that they may receive the fullness of the Holy Spirit. An authentic mature commitment to Christ and the Church is expressed in full participation in the Eucharist and apostolic life of the Church. It is not achieved at a single moment but throughout the life-long deepening of our relationship with Christ. This begins in childhood and continues until death.

7. What is the historical and theological vision for Christian Initiation?

In the early Church, Baptism, Confirmation and Eucharist were celebrated together in a single rite, with a bishop as presider. This was the practice of the Roman Rite up until the 5th or 6th century when bishops could no longer be present at all baptisms, leading to a time of separation between Baptism and Confirmation. At first the time of separation was short, but as time went on, the delay for the bishop to arrive grew. Still the Church celebrated the sacraments in the order of Baptism, Confirmation and Eucharist until this century.

In 1910 Pope Pius X recognized that children were not being allowed First Communion until the age of twelve to fourteen. He felt that such a denial was contrary to the vision of Jesus who always drew children to himself. Pius X ordered that children be allowed to come to the table of the Eucharist as soon as they could distinguish the Eucharist from ordinary bread. The age was then lowered to around seven. Confirmation then came after First Eucharist. The reforms of Vatican Council II called the Church to restore the original order of sacraments. This is not without challenge and difficulties. Such a change presumes a deep commitment on the part of the family to nurture the life of the young. Such a commitment means that parents have a need to understand the reasons for change and the ways in which they can help their children.

The main reason for restoring the order of the sacraments (i.e. putting Confirmation before First Communion) is to emphasize that Eucharist (Communion) is THE sacrament, which celebrates our FULL membership in the Body of Christ. It is the sacrament of ongoing growth and the sacrament of unity. The Church tells us that it "culminates" the initiation process. When it comes last in order, it calls us to renew that baptismal covenant each time we come to the Table of the Eucharist.

8. Why do they call it Restored Order?

During the first five hundred years or so of the history of the Roman Catholic Church (and still today in the Christian churches of the East), it was always the case that the sacraments of Christian initiation were celebrated in an invariable sequence: Baptism, Confirmation, and Eucharist. And it was almost always the case that all three sacraments were celebrated together at the same time, even with infants. Theologically, it is the gift of the Holy Spirit given in all its fullness at Confirmation that best prepares one to receive Eucharist, and thus to be most fully joined to the Body of Christ. As a result, this change reflects an emphasis on the belief that everything leads to the Eucharist, which is the source and summit of our faith. Following the lead of official documents

that were issued by the Church after the Second Vatican Council, more and more places are restoring this original order to the celebration of the sacraments of Christian initiation.

9. What about age? Doesn't the Church require a certain age for Confirmation?

Both the *Rite of Confirmation* and Canon Law (Canon #891) set the age of discretion (age 7) as the age for Confirmation. Once the sacrament has been received on-going faith is nurtured. Children attending Island Catholic Schools for grade seven have, as part of their religious education curriculum, a unit, "Reaffirming Our Faith: Remembering Our Confirmation". A ritual is provided that may be celebrated at Sunday Eucharist or in a retreat setting.

10. Isn't Confirmation a sacrament of maturity that should come after First Eucharist?

Not really. The perfection of baptismal grace found in the Sacrament of Confirmation is not dependent upon age or knowledge of the confirmand. The grace that is conferred is a free gift and 'does not need ratification to become effective' (Cf. CCC 1308). The graces of this sacrament conferred at a young age could be of great assistance to young people as they grow toward adolescence and young adulthood.

Regardless of age, Confirmation is always a Sacrament of Initiation. The important thing to remember is that sacraments are not about age alone, they are about growing in faith, about sharing in God's grace.

11. Is it wrong, then, to be confirmed after receiving Eucharist?

Of course not. The Church has many ways of celebrating the mysteries of God's love in the sacraments. But because Rome so strongly encourages restoring the order of celebrating the Sacraments of Christian Initiation, more and more communities restore the original sequence—Baptism, Confirmation and First Eucharist.

12. I am concerned that if children are now confirmed in the third grade, they will drop out of religious education later.

Confirmation has been misunderstood and treated as graduation from learning about the Faith. This is neither the true meaning of the sacrament nor the intention of the Church. Growth in the understanding and living out of our faith is the result of a life-long effort. Parents and siblings have the first responsibility of being an example of Jesus Christ to each other and living the Gospel each day. Children will stay in religious education if they see their parents striving to grow in holiness through family prayer, Scripture reading, Sunday Mass, regular confession, and living a life of charity. Parents are to keep their children in religious education programs just as they keep their child in school until graduation. There will be parent involvement. It is the parent's responsibility to see that their children grow in the faith. Our parishes are there to assist in this process.

13. What is the role of the parents in the preparation?

Pope John Paul II constantly called for us to help families become a domestic Church, a place where faith is taught and lived both in word and in deed. Ever since Vatican II, the Church has considered the parents to be the primary religious educators of their children. It is also our hope that as parents work with their children, they, too, will seek to celebrate the Sacrament of Confirmation if they are not, themselves, confirmed. The grace of this Sacrament, and the gifts of the Holy Spirit, can be very helpful to us as adults living in the society we do.

In celebrating the Rite of Baptism of Infants, parents publicly commit to forming their children in the life of faith. Parents are addressed:

Parents, you have asked to have your child baptized. In doing so you are accepting the responsibility of training them in the practice of the faith. It will be your duty to bring him/her up to keep God's commandments as Christ taught us, by loving God and neighbor (RB #39).

Implementing this policy, the diocese will support parishes with resources for parents so that a family may prepare together for the celebration of their child's Confirmation and First Eucharist.

The ***Catechism of the Catholic Church*** also teaches clearly the role of parents in handing on the gift of our Catholic faith:

Parents have the first responsibility for the education of their children. They bear witness to this responsibility first by creating a home where tenderness, forgiveness, respect, fidelity and disinterested service are the rule. The home is well suited for education in the virtues. This requires an apprenticeship in self-denial, sound judgment and self-mastery — the preconditions of all true freedom (CCC 2223).

Through the grace of the sacrament of marriage, parents receive the privilege and responsibility of evangelizing their children. Parents should initiate their children at the early age into the mysteries of the faith of which they are the "first heralds" for their children (CCC 2225).

Education in the faith by the parents should begin in the child's earliest years. This already happens when family members help one another grow in faith by the witness of a Christian life in keeping with the Gospel. Family catechesis precedes, accompanies and enriches other forms of instruction in the faith. Parents have the mission of teaching their children to pray and to discover their vocation as children of God. The parish is the Eucharistic community and the heart of the liturgical life of Christian families; it is a privileged place for the catechesis of children and parents (CCC 2226).

14. Will my child be learning about the Holy Spirit?

Naturally, as your child continues to participate in religious education, he/she will continue to learn more and more about the Holy Spirit's action in our lives. Your child's Eucharist preparation book also teaches about the power of the Spirit and the special gifts of the Spirit. Just as your child was first empowered by the Spirit in Baptism, your child will continue to grow in the Spirit through the grace of Confirmation.

15. How will I know if my child is ready for Confirmation?

Readiness for Confirmation cannot be separated from readiness for Eucharist, and sacramental readiness is never about learning, but about faith. As your child prepares for Confirmation and Eucharist, here are three things to keep in mind:

- Sacraments are always a beginning. As your child matures in faith, he/she will grow in his/her understanding of Confirmation and experience of the Eucharist.

- The Eucharist is the culmination of the three Sacraments of Initiation. Your child is now welcomed as a fully participating member of the Church.
- At any age, completion of the Sacraments of Initiation—Baptism, Confirmation, and Eucharist—in no way signals graduation. Rather it is the beginning of a lifetime of being nourished at the table of the Lord.

16. What about families preparing together with children of different ages?

It is possible for families to work together in preparing for Confirmation. Children who have made their First Eucharist can wait until younger children are ready to enter the program then the entire family can enroll together. For instance, if you have a second grader and a fifth grader, you could wait a year to enter the Confirmation program and bring both children in together. The fifth grader would continue to participate in the regular fifth grade class for religious education.

17. What impact will this have on the School?

This policy will, of necessity, cause us to collaborate closely between our Catholic Schools and the Religious Education programs to develop a process that will be open to everyone, and involve families wherever their child's primary religious education takes place. Parents will be given the central role in preparing their children. The School and the Religious Education programs will continue to provide supporting catechesis for the children, but parents will be expected to participate in classes, which will enrich their own understanding as adults and help them in their role of preparing their children.

18. How will the Sacraments of First Eucharist and Confirmation be celebrated?

Once the policy is fully implemented, Confirmation and First Eucharist will be celebrated together in the same ceremony. Because Confirmation is reserved in Canon Law to the Bishop, or to those he may delegate, the celebrant for First Eucharist and Confirmation will be either the Bishop or someone he delegates as celebrant.

19. How do we prepare and implement a program for young people after third grade (i.e. fourth - twelfth grade) those who have not received Confirmation, but may have received First Eucharist?

It is recommended that this be addressed in the same manner we do today for young people who come to a parish seeking the other Sacraments of Initiation. If they have already received Baptism and Eucharist, parishes work with those in grades 4 – 7 or 8 – 12 seeking Confirmation in a period of preparation that is usually six to eight sessions. Many resources are available for all these age ranges.

20. How will this change impact ministry to teens and our youth ministry programs?

In the long run, we believe this is a great step for youth ministry. "Receiving" the sacrament can be used as a carrot or bottom-line motivation for attendance. Instead of drawing teens by our own creative efforts and quality ministry, we can easily be tempted to rely on having a "captive" audience who is required to be present. The problem with captives is that they may really feel and act like prisoners, as they are forced to be present at meetings they really do not want to attend.

Also, because the sacrament tends to be the focus and destination, few teens stay involved once confirmation is celebrated. Instead of understanding the sacrament of confirmation as a beginning or the strengthening for a more committed Christian lifestyle, many teens walk away with a sense of relief that it is all over. As a result, it is viewed more as a rite of graduation from religious

education. The irony is that confirmation celebrates an initiation into a Church from which many immediately drop out.

Any parish-based Youth Ministry program is called to have the mission of the Church as its purpose. Our youth ministry teams must evangelize, build teens up through formation, and send them out to minister, thereby help these young disciples, through the power of the Holy Spirit received in Baptism and Confirmation, become mature apostles to their peers.

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Note: *The original article, adapted to reflect policy in the Diocese of Victoria, B.C. may be found courtesy of Eternal Word Television Network, 5817 Old Leeds Road, Irondale, AL 35210 or www.ewtn.com*



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