

UNIT 4

Confirmation Preparation

CATECHIST SESSION PLAN

The Spirit-Filled Life

We are called to live the gifts we are given in the Sacrament of Confirmation.

Nihil Obstat

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Censor Librorum, Diocese of Fort Wayne–South Bend

Imprimatur

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Bishop of Fort Wayne–South Bend

December 22, 2014

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The Spirit-Filled Life

HOW CANDIDATES UNDERSTAND THE LESSON

Middle-school age youth often feel insecure and even powerless to affect the world around them. Their physical and intellectual growth leads to a desire for more independence and autonomy, but in reality, adults decide much of their daily activities for them.

Tools from God It can be empowering for young people to know that God has a unique plan for their lives, and that he will give them the abilities they need to follow that plan. The Gifts of the Holy Spirit give us the wisdom and insight to discern God's plan, and they also give us the tools, such as courage, that we will need in order to follow it.

Think about God's Plan Continue to encourage the candidates to think about God's plan for their lives. Have them reflect on what decisions will lead them closer to, or away from, that plan. They will only be truly happy when they are using their God-given abilities to serve God and others. As they do this, they will see the Gifts of the Holy Spirit begin to bear fruit in the world around them.

Reflection for Catechists

The Sacrament of Confirmation has important effects. It strengthens our relationship with God the Father, drawing us closer as his children. The Sacrament unites us more firmly to Jesus Christ, and it perfects our bond with the Church, drawing us closer to our brothers and sisters in Christ.

Confirmation strengthens the *Gifts of the Holy Spirit* in us, which we covered in Unit 3—wisdom, understanding, counsel, fortitude, knowledge, piety (reverence), and fear of the Lord (wonder and awe). These gifts guide us to discern God's call and purpose for our lives as well as help us live as People of God.

The Sacrament of Confirmation completes our Baptism and marks our full initiation into the Church. The *General Directory for Catechesis*, our guidebook from the Vatican for how to hand on the faith, calls the Christian life a "process of continuing conversion" (56). Confirmation is the beginning of a lifelong journey as fully initiated members of the Catholic Church.

Finally, Confirmation gives us special strength to be Christ's witnesses in the world. We share our faith both through our words and through our actions. In particular, we live out our faith through our God-given vocations, his call and purpose for our lives.

- How have I witnessed or shared the faith in the past week?
- How do I use the Gifts of the Holy Spirit in my everyday life?

Scripture Background



The primary Scripture passage for this unit is the account of Saint Stephen, one of the first seven deacons appointed by the Apostles to serve God's People. He is chosen after the Apostles look for people who are "filled with the Spirit and wisdom." Saint Stephen works signs and wonders among the people and speaks with wisdom. Some members of the synagogue debate Stephen, but his wisdom and spirit are too strong for them. They chase him out of the city and stone him to death.

In this unit, candidates are also invited to explore Saint Paul's Letter to the Galatians 5:22–23. This passage lists the Fruits of the Holy Spirit as love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, generosity, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control. These are fruits that grow in the lives of every Catholic when we allow the Gifts of the Spirit to take root. Saint Paul reminds us that against these things "there is no law," meaning that we are always free to show these Fruits of the Spirit in our lives, and in doing so we will give the world a glimpse of what it is like in Heaven.

Objectives

- To reflect on overcoming fear and being open to God's voice
- To introduce the key themes of the unit and to reflect on what it means when God speaks to us



Let Us Pray

Invite the young people to gather in the prayer space.

- Begin by praying the Sign of the Cross.
- Read the opening prayer starting with Dear Lord . . .
- Direct the group to sit down for the Scripture reflection.



Scripture

Assign three young people to be readers.

- Guide the group through a reflection on the reading from 1 Kings 19:8–9, 11. You may wish to play instrumental music during the reflection.
- Invite the candidates to be still, close their eyes, and quiet themselves. Encourage them to open their minds and hearts to what God is saying to them.
- Read aloud the leader's part of the Scripture reading, then have the three readers proclaim their parts.
- Allow for several minutes of silent reflection.
- *Ask:* What did you hear God say to you today?
- Call on volunteers to respond.

Read aloud the "Have you ever thought . . ." questions.

- Call on volunteers to respond.

Getting Started

Use page 38 to introduce the young people to the key themes of this unit.

Invite a volunteer to read aloud the Getting Started paragraphs.

- **Ask:** When was a time in your life that your faith was at odds with the attitudes of people around you, even of close friends? Are you satisfied with the way you resolved the tension between the two?
- Invite several volunteers to respond.
- Point out that Elijah and Saint Stephen, whom the candidates will read about shortly, provide two examples of holy people who stood firm in their faith even in the face of fear or threats.

ACTIVITY

Freedom from Fear

Have the candidates silently read the opening paragraph and respond to the questions in the Reflect activity.

- Call on volunteers to share their responses with the group.
- Have the candidates write their prayers or reflections. Encourage them to take a moment for silent reflection ahead of writing.

Symbol of Our Faith

Invite a volunteer to read aloud the text about fire as a symbol of the Holy Spirit on page 39.

- Lead the group in a brainstorming session for positive associations with fire. Then ask the group to name emotions for which fire might be a fitting symbol.
- **Ask:** Which of these do you think might be seen in the flames that came to rest on the heads of the Apostles at Pentecost?
- Call on volunteers to respond.

Encounter with Christ

Invite a volunteer to read aloud “Encounter with Christ” on page 39.

- Ask the following or similar questions:
 - What did Saint Paul mean when he described the Church as the Body of Christ? (That although the Church is made of many members, we are all one, led by Christ, the head of the Church.)
 - How does this analogy help you understand the importance of your own role and participation as a member of the Church? (Accept reasonable answers.)
- Call on volunteers to respond.

Optional Activity

Use this prayer of Saint Teresa of Ávila to help the candidates reflect on what it means for them to be members of the Body of Christ.

Write or display this prayer:

Christ has no body but yours,
No hands, no feet on earth but yours,
Yours are the eyes with which he looks
Compassion on this world,
Yours are the feet with which he walks to do good,
Yours are the hands, with which he blesses all the world.
Yours are the hands, yours are the feet,
Yours are the eyes, you are his body.
Christ has no body now but yours,
No hands, no feet on earth but yours,
Yours are the eyes with which he looks
compassion on this world.
Christ has no body now on earth but yours.

- Distribute drawing paper and colored pencils.
- Have the group create a work of art that expresses the message of the prayer. Explain that their artwork can isolate a single line or depict the overall message of the prayer. Encourage the young people to use words and images in their artwork.
- Invite volunteers to share their artwork with the group and explain its message.
- Discuss with the Confirmation candidates how this prayer helped them understand what it means to be part of the Body of Christ.

Objectives

- Explore the martyrdom of Saint Stephen
- Reflect on how the courage of Saint Stephen is a model for followers of Christ today

Stephen Becomes First Martyr

Invite a volunteer to read aloud the first two paragraphs, then another to read the Scripture from Acts of the Apostles on page 40.

- Lead a discussion of the Scripture, using the following or similar questions:
 - How is Stephen described in this Scripture passage? (As a man of great faith, filled with grace and power)
 - Why do you think some were angered by Stephen's wisdom and the spirit with which he spoke? (Answers will vary)
 - What do you think gave Stephen the courage to stand firm in his faith even to the point of death? (Accept reasonable answers)
 - How does Stephen's courage inspire you? (Answers will vary)
- Share information about modern-day followers of Christ who suffer or are killed for their faith from the Catechist Background feature below.

ACTIVITY

Connect

Have the group break up into individuals and work on the Connect activity on their own.

- Have them answer each question or statement in the activity on page 40.
- Pair the young people up to share their answers.
- Have each person share with the group, as appropriate, something about their partner's experience.

Catechist Background

Many people in the early Church suffered and were killed for their faith. Among them were Saint Peter, Saint Paul, Saints Perpetua and Felicity, and countless others persecuted under Roman rule. Throughout the centuries, and in all parts of the world, holy people have given up their lives for the faith. Unfortunately, persecution of followers of Christ is not a thing of a bygone era. In fact, recent years have seen a dramatic increase in the persecution of Christians. In numerous countries in the Middle East, Africa, and Asia, where Christians are often a minority, they suffer what is at times extreme oppression, mistreatment, and even death for their faith. Talk with your group about the plight of persecuted Christians in the world today. Provide specific examples of countries where this takes place, or have the young people conduct research on the subject and share their findings.

Sharing the Good News

Have a volunteer read the first paragraph on page 41.

- Begin a discussion centered on the last sentence of the first paragraph.
- *Ask:* Has anyone invited someone to see what Jesus or the Church is about? If the answer is yes, have people share stories. If it is no, discuss why not or if they know someone who might be interested and talk about how to invite the person.
- Have another member of the group read the last two paragraphs.
- Read the quotation from the *Order of Confirmation*, 33.
- *Ask:* Why is the effect of Confirmation to share our faith so important? (It is essential that we bring the Gospel message to others so they may gain interest. Then we can invite them to see for themselves what Jesus and his Church have to offer.)
- *Ask:* How does the Order of Confirmation show the importance of sharing our faith? (The final blessing asks us to keep in our hearts the Good News of Christ so we can share it with the world.)

Celebrating the Sacrament

Ask the young people to describe the essential rite, or act, of the Sacrament of Confirmation before reading this section.

- Then ask what is the essential formula.
- Read the paragraph and compare their responses to official Church practice.

Optional Activity

Have the candidates use their religious imagination to develop a realistic story about how the effects of Confirmation could transform the world. Get them started by asking how they could do this in their everyday lives, then what consequences could transform lives. Continue looking at consequences until they feel the world is transformed for the better. Consider having a group write the narrative and either display it or have it published in a school or local publication.

Objectives

- Discover how the effects of Confirmation will impact the lives of those who receive the Sacrament
- Explore the Saints' role in helping us live as Jesus' disciples

Go Forth as Disciples of Christ

Divide the young people into six groups.

- Assign each group one of the bulleted additional effects of the Sacrament of Confirmation on page 42.
- Tell the young people that each group will state the effect as written on the page, then each group will explain in their own words how to go about experiencing the effect.
- Help the groups that struggle to come up with ways to experience their effects.
- Have a spokesperson stand up for each group, state what the group's effect is, and include at least one way people may experience this effect of the Sacrament.

Go to the Source

Read aloud the directions centering on Galatians 5:22–23.

- Have the candidates work in pairs to read and discuss *Catechism* paragraph 1832.
- Review the definition of *Fruits of the Holy Spirit* on page 39, then have members of the group think about people who exemplify these qualities and discuss them with partners. Encourage the candidates to consider people they encounter in their daily lives as well as holy people they have read or heard about.
- Call on volunteers from each pair to share an example or two of the people they discussed.

ACTIVITY

The Effects of the Sacrament of Confirmation

Ask what happens to a person who has the life-transforming encounter of the Gift of the Holy Spirit bestowed in Confirmation?

- Listen to the responses.

Read aloud the activity directions on page 43.

- Have the candidates complete the fill-in-the-blank activity. Direct them to pages 41 and 42 for any answers that challenge them.
- Call on volunteers to share their responses.

The Saints Are Our Heroes in Faith

Call on volunteers to read aloud the text on page 43.

- *Ask:* How does the Letter to the Hebrews describe the Saints? What does this mean? (As a cloud of witnesses that cheer us on as we run the race. This means that the Saints are with God in Heaven and witness what happens on Earth. They provide support and help us in living the Christian life.)
- Invite the candidates to share their chosen Confirmation names. Have them take turns telling the Saint's name and something about the Saint, and why they chose that particular person.

Optional Activity

Have the young people reflect on the following Scripture readings and ways that we act as disciples of Jesus. They can reflect on their own, then meet with a partner and talk about their thoughts.

- We serve one another, humbly and unselfishly: John 13:4–17 and Luke 14:12–14.
- We detach ourselves from riches and possessions: Matthew 6:24; Luke 12:13–21; Matthew 19:16–30; Luke 18:18–29; Mark 10:17–31.
- We serve the poor: Luke 1:52–53; Luke 16:19–31; Matthew 25:31–46.
- We pray always and with complete trust in God: Matthew 6:5–15; Matthew 7:7–11; Luke 11:2–4; Luke 18:1–14.

Objectives

- See through the eyes of Saint Ambrose how we can live the gifts we receive at Confirmation
- Learn about the tradition of choosing a Confirmation name and discuss names the candidates have chosen
- Explore how Saints have set an example for our lives and to choose one Saint as a personal example for Confirmation
- Explore the life of Saint Vincent de Paul
- Consider ways to live out what has been learned in this unit

Living the Gifts We Receive

Read aloud the introduction and the quotation from Saint Ambrose on page 44.

- Call on volunteers to identify the Gifts of the Holy Spirit named in the passage.
- Have volunteers read aloud the remaining text.
- Ask the following or similar questions:
 - What is Saint Ambrose admonishing his listeners to do? (To recall that they have been anointed with the Holy Spirit and that they have been given special gifts that they must guard and live by)
 - What does it mean to actively accept the Gifts of the Holy Spirit and to live them?
 - What are some ways you can witness to your faith in your daily life?
 - What are ways you can witness through important life decisions?

Catechist Background

The Holy Spirit guides us in the way of love. The Saints provide us with vivid and often exceptional examples of what it means to follow the way of love. Yet for each of us, being more firmly rooted in that way of living comes with daily practice and the forming of good habits—virtues—that over time are strengthened in us and become second nature.

In the First Letter to the Corinthians, Saint Paul wrote about the way of love with great clarity and simplicity. Read 1 Corinthians 13:1–8 and reflect on Saint Paul’s words. Share this passage with your group and discuss some examples of how the Saints exemplify the different qualities of love described in the passage.

ACTIVITY

From Head to Heart

Have the candidates complete the activity.

- You may wish to brainstorm with the class for Saints they have learned about ahead of starting the activity.
- Call on volunteers to share their responses to the four questions.
- Give the candidates time to write a prayer to the Saint they have chosen.

Optional Activity

Have the candidates create prayer cards that they can use for prayer and reflection in preparation for Confirmation.

- Distribute drawing paper and colored pencils.
- Have each candidate fold the drawing paper in half horizontally.
- Instruct them to create a prayer card that features artwork as well as an original prayer.
- Encourage the young people to reflect on what they have learned in this unit and to incorporate it into their artwork and prayer.
- Have the candidates take their prayer cards home and pray the prayers they have written as part of their Confirmation preparation.

Saint Vincent de Paul

Invite a volunteer to read aloud the text about Saint Vincent de Paul on page 46.

- Ask the following or similar questions:
 - What are some reasons that the Church honors Saint Vincent de Paul? (He founded religious orders and devoted his life to the care of the poor)
 - What can we learn from Saint Vincent de Paul's example?

Share with the group that today an organization called the Society of St. Vincent de Paul serves the poor in countries around the world. Members of the society, called Vincentians, strive to grow spiritually by offering service to individuals in need. If your parish has a Saint Vincent de Paul ministry, share some information about the ministry and the services it provides. Consider having a volunteer from the Society visit the group.

Take the Message Home

Read aloud the text on page 46.

- *Ask:* How can you affirm your commitment to be a follower of Jesus this week?
- Have the candidates take turns responding.
- Encourage the young people to follow through on the way they have been a "child of light" to someone this week.

Prepare for Prayer

Ask the group if there are any questions about any of the content they learned in Unit 4.

- Tell the young people to write on a piece of paper their answer to the following question: What part of this unit did you find most helpful in strengthening your faith and why?
- Have them save the slip of paper for the Unit Prayer coming up.



Unit Prayer

Gather around a prayer table with a Bible, a candle, and statues or images of Mary and other Saints.

Catechist: Let us become aware of the presence of God with us. Let's begin with the Sign of the Cross.

All: In the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

Catechist: We have discovered how the effects of the Gifts of the Holy Spirit will strengthen us for our journey of discipleship. We have seen that the Sacrament of Confirmation will impact our lives as we begin our lifelong journey as a disciple of Christ and as a full member of his Church. We have also explored the lives of Saints, including Saint Stephen, Saint Ambrose, and Saint Vincent de Paul, to see how we can follow their example. Please take out your slips of paper and read what you found most important from this unit.

[Individually, each candidate reads what he or she wrote and why.]

Catechist: Dear Father, we thank you for giving us knowledge about yourself and making us aware of our purpose in the world you created. Help us to always follow in the footsteps of your Son, our Mother Mary, and all your Saints, with the constant guidance of the Holy Spirit.

All: In the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.