



Frequently Asked Questions about Confirmation

What is the Sacrament of Confirmation?

Confirmation is one of the three Sacraments of Initiation. It joins the baptized more closely to the Church, strengthens them with the outpouring of the Gifts of the Holy Spirit, makes them witnesses of Christ, and gives special help to spread and defend the faith.

Why is Confirmation celebrated at different age levels?

In the early Church, Christian Initiation was one event. Adults or children were baptized, anointed or had hands laid upon them, and then participated in the Eucharist all at the same celebration. For a variety of reasons, this practice gradually became separated into three different events and the original event of initiation developed into Baptism, Confirmation, and Eucharist. In 1910 Pius X recommended in his encyclical *Quam Singulari* that the first Communion of children should not be deferred too long after they had reached the age of reason. Previous to his urging, children who had been baptized as infants usually celebrated First Communion in the early teen years and Confirmation usually was celebrated at an earlier age. However, once children began to fully participate in the Eucharist at an earlier age, the age for Confirmation was varied and not necessarily tied to reception of First Communion.

Many diocese and parishes throughout the United States have adopted the practice of celebrating Confirmation prior to First Communion. This is often referred to as restored order. Some dioceses celebrate the Sacrament of Confirmation within the same Eucharistic celebration that children celebrate their First Communion. Other dioceses celebrate at a different time but before First Communion.

Other diocese choose to celebrate Confirmation sometime after First Communion. All of these practices are approved by the United States Bishops Conference who has given approval to the celebration of Confirmation for children baptized as infants anytime between the ages of 7 and 16.

What is the role of the family in the preparation for the Sacrament of Confirmation?

When infants are presented to the Church for Baptism, family members are reminded that they have the responsibility of “raising them in the practice of the faith” (*The Rite of Baptism for Children*, 109). This obligation and privilege extends to sacramental preparation. The fact that family members know the Confirmation candidate better than anyone else, places them in the best position to help the young person uncover the mystery of the Sacrament of Confirmation with words and experiences he or she will understand. No matter what else is done in the parish or school or with the sponsor to prepare candidates, it is only as effective as the support received in the family.

How are family members involved in the preparation?

Your parish will have certain expectations that will be explained to you when you begin the process. Call to Celebrate: Confirmation provides you with ideas and suggestions to do with the candidate using the Journey Together feature in the Candidate Book. Depending on your parish structure, you may also have the opportunity to participate in special celebrations, retreats, and service projects.

Will candidates need a sponsor for Confirmation?

Yes, a candidate may select one of his or her original godparents or someone else. The Church does have specific qualifications for a sponsor. They are found in Canon Law, which is the official law of the Church and they include the following:

- be designated by the candidate, or the parents or person who takes the place of parents, or in their absence by the pastor or minister
- have the ability and intention of fulfilling the function of sponsor, which includes following through with the candidate after the celebration of the sacrament
- have completed the sixteenth year of age, unless the diocesan bishop has established another age, or the pastor or minister has granted an exception for a just cause
- be a Catholic who has been confirmed and has already received the Eucharist and who leads a life of faith in keeping with the function to be taken on as sponsor

What are the responsibilities of the sponsor?

The responsibilities of the Confirmation sponsor or mentor who accompanies the candidate throughout the preparation process is multifaceted. It includes affirming the strengths of the candidate and pointing out ways he or she can grow and become better in the practice of faith. It may involve some explanation of points brought up in the candidates' sessions. At times it may involve guidance and active listening. It is important that the sponsor be an example of how to live a life of faith. Sponsors should be people who like being Catholic, are willing to share their faith journey, and who will actively listen to their candidate's thoughts and feelings about their journey of faith. The sponsor "brings the candidates to receive the sacrament, presents them to the minister for anointing, and will later help them to fulfill their baptismal promises faithfully under the influence of the Holy Spirit whom they have received." (Rite of Confirmation, par 5)

Depending on the parish program, the sponsor may:

- attend some of the catechetical sessions
- participate in retreats and service projects with the candidate
- spend time with the candidate doing the activities and dialogue, which are found in the Journey Together feature in the Candidate Book
- share how the teachings and practices of the Church relate to your life on a daily basis

Is it important for Confirmation candidates to be involved in Service Projects?

Candidates for Confirmation are involved in the process of initiation. A full catechesis for initiation calls for participation in apostolic witness and service. So, too, does the call to discipleship received in Baptism, and service is a way of life for the disciple who is committed to participating in the kingdom of God.

Many Confirmation programs require a certain number of hours of service. Others require some service but do not put a time requirement on it. What is done usually depends on the requirements of the parish or diocese. Whatever the requirements, intentional service is essential for young people preparing for Confirmation because through it candidates get a feeling and experience of service as a normal way of life for the fully initiated Christian. The stress on service or service projects should not be presented primarily as a requirement for Confirmation but as an ongoing response to serve and care for the needs of all humans and all of creation.

Will candidates choose a Confirmation Name?

In some dioceses those to be confirmed are given the option to choose a separate Confirmation name. Although a centuries old popular practice for those baptized as infants but confirmed later, choosing another name for Confirmation is not mentioned in the Confirmation Rite or the Code of Canon Law. There is no obligation to select a Confirmation name that is different from the name given at Baptism.

If a new name is taken, it can be symbolic of a new or deeper stage in the candidate's faith life and an occasion for the candidate to reflect on how he or she wants to witness to the power of the Holy Spirit in his or her life. Encourage candidates to choose the name of a saint or holy person they admire and want to imitate.