

# **Diocese of Yakima**

## **CONFIRMATION GUIDELINES**

These Guidelines have been diocesan norms since at least 1997. Bishop Sevilla made some additions, deletions and adaptations in May, 2009. The Council of Priests reviewed them in during its October 2009 Convocation and recommended the Bishop Sevilla approve them. He immediately did so. During its January 2010 meeting the Executive Committee of the Council of Priests reviewed them again regarding the age of confirmation. The committee recommended to Bishop Sevilla that no change be made in the norms as a whole or in the text about the age of confirmation.

### **I. THEOLOGICAL STATEMENT**

In order to have a balanced theology of Confirmation, five principles must be kept in mind.

1. Confirmation is a sacrament of initiation. “Baptism, the Eucharist, and the sacrament of Confirmation together constitute the “sacraments of Christian initiation.” (*Catechism of the Catholic Church* (CCC) 1285)
2. It is a distinct sacramental rite. “The sacrament of Confirmation is conferred through the anointing with chrism on the forehead, which is done by the laying on of the hand, and through the words: ‘Be sealed with the Gift of the Holy Spirit’.” (CCC 1300)
3. Confirmation includes a unique giving of the Holy Spirit. The candidate is “enriched with a special strength of the Holy Spirit.” (CCC 1285) “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.” (CCC 1302)
4. It is a “ratification of Baptism and the strengthening of baptismal grace.” (CCC 1289) This strengthening and ratifying is understood by a greater unity with the Church. “[I]t renders our bond with the Church more perfect.” (CCC 1303).
5. Confirmation provides greater power for public witness of faith. “The confirmed person receives the power to profess faith in Christ publicly and, as it were, officially.” (CCC 1305)

### **II. AGE FOR CONFIRMATION**

The United States Conference of Catholic Bishops (USCCB) promulgated a decree regarding the age of confirmation that has been effective in our nation since July 1, 2002. The text is as follows:

The National Conference of Catholic Bishops (the NCCB existed before the USCCB), in accord with the prescriptions of canon 891, hereby decrees that the sacrament of confirmation in the Latin Rite shall be conferred between the age of discretion and about 16 years of age, within the limits determined by the diocesan bishop and with the regard for the legitimate exceptions given in the canon 891.

- A. In keeping with that decree, since the fall of 2003 in the Diocese of Yakima, the bishop has confirmed young people who are high school freshman, sophomores and juniors.

- B. *Rite of Christian Initiation of Adults* (RCIA) participants who are high school seniors will be confirmed at the Easter Vigil in their parish.
- C. By exception, the Bishop will give permission, if asked and if a high school senior has been properly prepared, for that senior to be confirmed at the same ceremony during which high school freshmen, sophomores and juniors are confirmed.

### III. READINESS OF CANDIDATES

- A. Readiness involves a request made by the candidate in consultation with parents, sponsor, catechists, the Director of the confirmation program and a final decision made by the pastor of the candidate.
- B. It is vital that the candidate have a desire to be involved in the Church, especially the local parish.

### IV. SPONSORS

- A. It is the responsibility of the sponsor to show the candidate the place of the gospel in his or her own life and in society, to help the candidate with questions, doubts, anxieties and to watch over the progress of the candidate's walk of faith. The sponsor's responsibility remains important when the candidate needs to be helped in order to remain faithful to his or her baptismal promises. (RCIA 43) (Can. 874, 893)
- B. The *Code of Canon Law* of the Catholic Church outlines the requirements for those who will serve as sponsors during the celebration of the Sacrament of Confirmation. As a rule, there should be 1 sponsor. This sponsor may be male or female for each of those to be confirmed. The qualifications for sponsors include:
  - 1. The sponsor **must be a Catholic** who has already received the Sacraments of Initiation of the Catholic Church, i.e., Baptism, Confirmation, and the Holy Eucharist. [Can. 874 §1 No. 3]
  - 2. The sponsor must be at least **16 years of age**. [Can. 874 §1 No. 2]
  - 3. The sponsor must be “lead(ing) a life in harmony with the faith and the role to be undertaken.” [Can. 874 §1 No. 3] Principally, this statement means that the sponsor **must be a practicing Catholic**; that is, participating in the church's life of worship (the Sunday Eucharist) each week, and observing the laws of the church with respect to the Sacrament of Marriage. A married person, for example, must have been married “in the church”—according to the *Rite of Marriage* of the Catholic Church. Being married ‘civilly’ does not satisfy this requirement. Single persons or divorced persons who will serve as Confirmation sponsors may not be co-habiting; that is, they may not be living with someone as if they were married.
  - 4. One of the Confirmation candidate's baptismal godparents may serve as that candidate's Confirmation sponsor, if he/she satisfies all of the qualifications listed directly above. [Can. 893 §2]

The parent's role in the celebration of the *Rite of Baptism*, in the celebration of the *Rite of Confirmation* and in the Christian upbringing of their children is different than that of a godparent's/sponsor's role. Therefore, technically speaking, a parent is not a "sponsor." A sponsor is chosen to continue to assist the candidate for Confirmation in his/her spiritual growth. As the *Code of Canon Law* describes this role, "it is for the sponsor to see that the confirmed person acts as a true witness to Christ and faithfully fulfills the obligations connected with this sacrament." [Can. 892]

## V. INSTRUCTION AND FORMATION

Because young people of high school age generally are in need of an updated education and extensive formation regarding their Catholic Faith, the preparation for Confirmation should last at least 18 or 24 months with weekly meetings of about 1½ hours. They should be judged not to be prepared for reception of Confirmation if they do not attend Mass on Sunday and Holy Days and receive the Eucharist with regularity. In CCC 1309, the text states that, "Preparation for Confirmation should aim at leading the Christian toward a more intimate union with Christ..." "An important day in a young person's life is the day on which he becomes convinced that this is the only Friend who will not disappoint him, on whom he can always count." *Crossing the Threshold of Hope* by John Paul II.

In addition to growing closer to Christ, it is important to note that Confirmation preparation is not limited to simply giving information about the faith. The preparation must also be done within the framework of relationships. The candidate must experience faith sharing between themselves, and also with adult faith mentors. This faith sharing aspect changes the preparation from a strictly "classroom" approach to a faith formation approach. As Catholic Christians we need not only to have our faith taught to us, we also need to share the knowledge and experience of how God is operating in our lives.

## VI. CONTENT OF INSTRUCTION

The CCC should be used as a reference for the Confirmation preparation process. The CCC revolves around four major components of the faith. They are: The Creed, Sacraments, Commandments, and Prayer.

With the CCC in mind, the following is a possible outline for Confirmation sessions. The following is not a program; it is a list of topics that should be covered during preparation.

- A. **PARENTS' MEETING** - This should occur about two weeks before the first Confirmation session. Discuss parents' involvement, a brief theology of Confirmation, and what is required of the students during the preparation process for Confirmation. Include an overview of the preparation.
- B. **BASIC EVANGELIZATION** - The gospel message. God created us good but by our sinful actions, we've moved away from God. Jesus came to save us. It is our choice to accept and participate in the salvific work of Christ.
- C. **TRINITY** - God's self-revelation as Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.
- D. **HOLY SPIRIT** - "It is evident from its celebration that the effect of the sacrament of Confirmation is the full outpouring of the Holy Spirit..."(CCC 1302) Explain the relationship

between Confirmation and the Holy Spirit. Old Testament (Isaiah 11: 2) and New Testament (I Corinthians 12: 8-10) gifts of the Holy Spirit.

- E. **OVERVIEW OF THE SEVEN SACRAMENTS** - The sacraments distinguish us from other Christian churches. Sacraments are signs of God's presence and action.
- F. **THE SACRAMENT OF PENANCE/RECONCILIATION/CONFESSION** - Explanation of this sacrament. "Why can't we just confess our sins directly to God?" Celebrate the sacrament within a reconciliation service.
- G. **EUCCHARIST** - Truly and literally the Body and Blood of Jesus. Eucharist is not a reenactment of Jesus' death and resurrection; it's a "making present" of His salvific action so that we can participate in it. The parts of the Mass and their significance.
- H. **CONFIRMATION** - Explanation of the sacrament. The signs and symbols used. The role of the Bishop. History of Confirmation.
- I. **MORALITY** - Using the Ten Commandments and the Beatitudes as guides, bring them to bear on some important concerns:
  - 1. Faith and Social Justice Issues: For example; war, health care, discrimination, immigration.
  - 2. Sexuality: Explanation of a chaste lifestyle. How this fits into God's loving plan for us. Discussion of topics like abortion, contraception, marriage, ordained ministries, and the religious/consecrated life.
- J. **PRAYER AND SCRIPTURE** - Overview of the Old and New Testaments. Look at scriptural origin of the Our Father and Hail Mary. Explanation of prayer, how prayer and scripture fit together.
- K. **MOST OFTEN ASKED QUESTIONS BY NON-CATHOLICS** - Catholic teaching on God, Mary, the saints, purgatory, and other topics on which Catholics are challenged. Include a question and answer time.
- L. **CHURCH** - The Church is one, holy, catholic, and apostolic. The mission of the Church. The Church's faith is expressed in creeds.
- M. **ON-GOING CATECHESIS** - It is vital to continue the candidate's faith formation after they have been confirmed.

## **VII. STEWARDSHIP OF TIME, TALENT, TREASURE**

A service component must be included in the preparation of the candidates as an expression of their commitment to stewardship. Service could include a great number of different activities. It is important to give the candidates information about a variety of service opportunities. It has been highly successful in many programs to do service as a group. It would also be worthwhile to include the sponsors in the service component. This would allow the candidates to work side by side with their sponsor and provide an excellent example of service. It is

important for candidates to see stewardship as a normal component of Christian life, and to understand that service, as an outgrowth of their faith, can bring transformation to their world.

## **VIII. RETREATS**

A retreat experience is required during the Confirmation preparation. There are retreats in the diocese designed for Confirmation, or a parish could choose to provide its own retreat experience for its candidates. It is highly recommended that candidates from different parishes experience a Confirmation retreat together. This will help the candidates to realize they are being confirmed not only in a local parish, but also within the larger Church.

A. Purpose of the retreat: To give the young people the opportunity to encounter Christ and to develop their spirituality as well as to pray as individuals and as a group. The retreat should provide the time needed to reflect on the Holy Spirit who is received at baptism as well as strengthened and nurtured both in confirmation and the Eucharist.

A retreat must include the following components in order to be counted as a valid retreat experience in preparation for the Sacrament of Confirmation.

1. Individual and group prayer
2. An opportunity to receive the Sacrament of Penance
3. Eucharistic Celebrations
4. Presentations and/or activities that enhance the topics covered in the preparation program

B. Length of the Retreat: A retreat should last at least a whole day so that candidates experience and live the above mentioned components.

## **IX. CONFIRMATION NAME**

Regarding the choice of a confirmation name, the options include retaining one's baptismal name, choosing a Biblical name, or the name of a saint, or the name of an exemplary Catholic Christian.