



A Parish Priest's Guide To the Sacraments of Initiation

[Owner: Office of Worship]

Infant Baptism

1. *Where, When, and How should the Sacrament be celebrated?*

- 1.1. So that baptism may clearly appear as the Sacrament of the Church's Faith and of incorporation into the People of God, it should normally be celebrated in the parish church (*Rite of Baptism for Children [RBC]*, §10). Infants are to be baptized in the parish church proper to their parents, unless a just cause suggests otherwise (c. 857); in this case, parents must obtain the permission of their pastor. Considered "infants" are all children less than seven years old.
- 1.2. Sunday is the ordinary time for baptism of infants, since the choice of Sunday emphasizes the paschal nature of the Sacrament (c. 856; *Christian Initiation, General Introduction [CIGI]*, §28). As far as possible, all recently born babies should be Baptized at a common celebration on the same day (*CIGI*, §27).
- 1.3. Normally there should be only one celebration of Baptism of Infants in the same church on the same Sunday. Baptism may appropriately be celebrated during Sunday Mass, so that the necessary relationship between Baptism and Eucharist may be seen; but this is not desirable as a weekly practice (*RBC*, §9).
- 1.4. Parents are obliged to see that infants are Baptized within the first weeks after birth (c. 867). Parents may choose the manner of administration of the Sacrament, either by the pouring of water or by immersion, "which is more suitable as a symbol of participation in the death and resurrection of Christ" (*CIGI*, §22).
- 1.5. The sacrament of "baptism may not be repeated and conditional Baptism is not permitted unless there is prudent doubt of the fact or validity of the Baptism already received" (*Order of Christian Initiation of Adults*, §480).
 - 1.5.1. Among non-Catholic churches which have valid Baptism are: Assembly of God, Baptists, Disciples of Christ, Evangelical Churches, Old Catholics, Old Roman Catholics, Church of the Nazarene, Reformed Churches, United Church of Christ.
 - 1.5.2. Among those without valid baptism: Apostolic Church, Christian Scientists, Church of the Latter Day Saints (Mormons), Masons (no baptism at all),

Quakers, Salvation Army, Pentecostal Churches, Jehovah's Witnesses, and Unitarians.¹

- 1.6. If after "serious investigation it seems necessary ... to confer Baptism again conditionally, the minister should explain beforehand the reasons why baptism is conferred conditionally in this instance and he should administer it in the private form" (*Order of Christian Initiation of Adults*, §480).

2. *Who can be Godparents?*

- 2.1. Those who qualify as godparents are:
 - 2.1.1. not the father or mother of the one to be Baptized
 - 2.1.2. Catholics
 - 2.1.3. who have been Confirmed
 - 2.1.4. are at least 16 years old and
 - 2.1.5. are leading "a life in harmony with the faith and the role to be undertaken" (c. 874)
- 2.2. Whenever possible, an infant to be baptized should be given a godparent (c. 872); ideally this same person will act later as the child's sponsor at confirmation (Canon 893). There may be one godmother or one godfather or one of each (Canon 873). Parents or guardians choose the godparent(s) with the approval of the pastor.
- 2.3. In infant baptism, the godparent, along with the parents, presents the child for baptism and helps the child to lead the Christian life expected by baptism, and fulfill faithfully the obligations connected with it (c. 872). "In acting as the guarantor of the faith of the candidate, the godparent is also the representative of the community of faith" (*RBC*, §2; cf. Secretariat for Christian Unity, *Ad totam Ecclesiam*, §1011 in *Documents on the Liturgy*, 147).
- 2.4. A person who belongs to a non-Catholic ecclesial community may not be a godparent at the baptism of a Catholic, but may act as a witness together with a Catholic godparent (c. 874).

3. *When should Baptism be delayed?*

- 3.1. For the licit baptism of an infant, it is necessary that the parent or guardian give consent, and that there be "a founded hope that the infant will be brought up in the Catholic religion" (c. 868). When the foundation for this hope is not evident, the pastor must make a prudent and sensitive judgment in dialogue with the parents of the infant.
- 3.2. When the parents are not prepared to undertake the duty of bringing up the child as Catholic, the pastor should postpone the baptism until the parents can be adequately moved or instructed (*RBC*, §8, c. 868). However, only if no other adult is willing to

¹ cf. John M. Huels, *The Pastoral Companion: A Canon Law Handbook for Catholic Ministry*, 4th edition, (Montréal: Wilson & Lafleur, 2009), 380-381.

make a commitment to rear the child as Catholic would the pastor have the obligation to postpone the baptism of the child.

- 3.3. The birth of a child should be regarded by pastoral ministers as a moment when problems that caused alienation from the community might be dealt with compassionately and rectified. An invalid marriage alone is not considered a sufficient reason for delay.
- 3.4. Should a delay required, the reasons for the delay should be accurately and compassionately explained to the parents and opportunities for formation in the faith should be offered to them.
- 3.5. If there is disagreement with a pastor's decision to delay baptism, an appeal may be made to the Dean (vicar forane).

4. *What catechesis is needed for Baptism?*

- 4.1. Parents should be adequately catechized in preparation for the baptism of their child. Parent programs should be designed to nourish the faith life of participants as well as provide them with theological understanding of the sacrament (*National Catechetical Directory*, §117, 119; cc. 851, 852).
- 4.2. Since godparents share with parents responsibility for the Christian upbringing of the child, godparents should receive catechesis appropriate to their role.

5. *What is the relationship of the community to the Baptized?*

- 5.1. Because baptism is a sacrament of initiation, parents are asking that their children assume a place in the community when they ask that they be baptized. The community in turn promises to support the parents in guiding their child to a relationship with God and the church.
- 5.2. Asking for baptism for their child may be a time of conversion for a couple not participating regularly in Sunday Eucharist. Parishes ought to design concrete means of support for couples who express the intention to return to active participation in the life of the Church.

6. *What record is kept of the Baptism?*²

- 6.1. Parishes are required by universal law to keep a permanent record of Baptism. Within the Diocese of Houma-Thibodaux, this record is to be kept both in the hand written Sacramental Register and on the designated digital platform.³
- 6.2. The name of a godparent may not be deleted later from the baptismal record, even if the original godparent has defected from the faith. The Bishop, however, may permit an additional sponsor's name to be *added* to the record "for just reason," reflecting a changed situation in which a "substitute sponsor" agrees to take on the responsibilities of the original godparent(s).

² Regarding adoptions, see the complementary norms of the USCCB regarding canon 877, §3. <http://www.usccb.org/beliefs-and-teachings/what-we-believe/canon-law/complementary-norms/canon-877-3-recording-the-baptism-of-adopted-children.cfm>

³ The digital platform currently in use in the Diocese of Houma-Thibodaux is *ParishSOFT*.

- 6.3. ***Adopted Children*** | Procedure for recording the baptism of children either already adopted or to be adopted:
- 6.3.1. Children Adopted Prior to Baptism: The Baptism is to be recorded in the usual manner: the child is to be registered under its adoptive name and the name of the adoptive parents is to be listed. In the notes section of the record, a notation should be made of the Civil Court which issued the decree of adoption, together with its date and number. In such cases it is not necessary to record information about the natural parents.
- 6.3.2. Children Who Are in the Process of Adoption at the Time of Baptism: The Baptism is to be recorded using the name of the child and his parent(s) as listed in the official, civil birth certificate. If this information is not known by the adopting parents, the person responsible for the placement of the child should be required to furnish it. No Certificate of Baptism is to be issued at this time.
- 6.3.2.1. When the final decree of adoption is obtained, a second (separate) entry is made in the Baptismal records as described in below.
- 6.3.3. Children Adopted after Baptism and Whose Name in the Original Record Was Recorded under the Natural Name: At the time the final adoption decree is issued, a new or second record is created in the parish of baptism with the child's adoptive name and names of adoptive parents, and then referenced to the original baptismal record for retrieval purposes. This is done as follows:
- 6.3.3.1. Enter a *new record* for the *adopted child*, listed in the same year in which the actual Baptism took place. In this new record use the *adopted last name*, and the names of the *adopted parents*. All other information in the record should remain the same as the original record, including godparents.
- 6.3.3.2. Assuming that the child's *original* name was *John Vincent Jones* and the *record number* of the original Baptism was *2019-004*, on the first line for *other information in the new record*, enter the following: “adopted 12/02/19; original name was John Vincent Jones; see record #2019-004”.
- 6.3.3.3. The information (names, dates, etc.) in the original baptismal record is *not to be changed*, but on one of the lines for *other information in the original record*, assuming that the above adoption took place on *12/02/19*, and the *new* record number is “2019-072”: “adopted by Mr. & Mrs. John V. Jones, 12/02/2019; see record #2019-004”.
- 6.3.4. ***Notations of Reception of Other Sacraments*** | Notations of Confirmation, First Communion, Marriage, Religious Profession, *and/or* Ordination should be made into both the original and the second records when these notifications are received.
- 6.3.5. ***Baptismal Certificates*** | In issuing Baptismal Certificates of the above, the option must always be left to the adoptive parents as to whether the notations

concerning adoption should be included or omitted on the certificate. Therefore, these notations should not be included on the certificate unless the adoptive parents specifically request it.

- 6.3.5.1. In the event that there is a possibility that the certificate is being requested in preparation for a Marriage to take place elsewhere, a note should be appended to the certificate requesting that the minister preparing the couple for Marriage contact the parish of Baptism prior to the Marriage.

6.4. ***The Distribution of Records***

- 6.4.1. Only the following are authorized to receive Baptismal records:
 - 6.4.1.1. the person who received the Sacrament
 - 6.4.1.2. the minister who administered the Sacrament
 - 6.4.1.3. the guardian of a minor
 - 6.4.1.4. a representative of a Catholic parish or diocese
- 6.4.2. Requests regarding genealogical questions are not fulfilled by the parish. Anyone requesting genealogical records shall be referred to the Diocesan Archives.

First Holy Communion

1. *Where and when should the Sacrament be celebrated?*

- 1.1. The ordinary place where a child celebrates First Eucharist is the parish of registration of the child's parents or legal guardian or the parish in whose territory the child's parents live (if unregistered). If the parents wish the child to celebrate this sacrament in another parish that does not fall into the above categories or with his or her class from the Catholic elementary school where he or she is registered, the child may do so with the parents' permission and the written consent of the pastor of the parish in which the parents/legal guardians are registered or to whose territory they belong (if unregistered).
- 1.2. The usual age for one to receive Holy Communion for the first time is about the seventh year.⁴ The Easter season is the most appropriate liturgical season for celebrations.
- 1.3. Children should have reached the use of reason and be properly disposed. They should have "sufficient knowledge and careful preparation so as to understand the mystery of Christ according to their capacity, and can receive the Body of the Lord with faith and devotion" (c. 913).

2. *What role do parents have in choosing this Sacrament for their child?*

- 2.1. It is the responsibility of parents along with pastors to see that children are prepared for and receive the Eucharist (c. 914). Parents should be involved in the decision regarding the readiness of their child for the Sacrament.
 - 2.1.1. If a child is under the care of someone other than the parent or guardian, the parent or guardian should be asked for permission.
 - 2.1.2. If the child's parents are not practicing Catholics but wish to have their child receive the sacrament, the child should not be kept from receiving the Eucharist (c. 843). Parents should be encouraged, however, to participate in the sacramental preparation process with the child, and pastoral ministers should explore other avenues to foster the Faith in the entire family.

⁴ "The age of discretion, both for Confession and for Holy Communion, is the time when a child begins to reason, that is about the seventh year, more or less. From that time on begins the obligation of fulfilling the precept of both Confession and Communion." (Pope Pius X, *Quam Singulari*)

3. *What kind of catechesis is required?*

- 3.1. For the child, catechesis for First Eucharist should be designed
 - 3.1.1. to help the child begin to "realize deeply that its celebration is the true center of the whole Christian life" (*Eucharisticum Mysterium*, §6);
 - 3.1.2. to help the child "participate in the Mass and to receive Christ's Body and Blood in communion in an informed and reverent manner" (*NCD*, §122); and
 - 3.1.3. to strengthen the child's "awareness of the Father's love, of the call to participate in Christ's sacrifice, and of the gift of the Spirit" (*NCD*, §122).
- 3.2. Because parents are the primary educators of their children, they have a duty to participate in the preparation of their children for the Sacraments. Parishes should provide education for parents of children preparing to receive the sacrament so that parents can fulfill their role as primary teachers of their children. Parent programs should be designed to nourish the faith life of participants as well as provide them with theological understanding of the sacrament (*NCD*, §117, 119; *Rite of Baptism for Children: Introduction*, §5; cc. 851, 852).
 - 3.2.1. Godparents should be invited to join parents in parish programs of parent preparation (c. 774).

4. *How should parishes design preparation programs?*

- 4.1. In discerning their particular preparation programs, parishes shall consider the support and guidelines given by the Office of Parish Support.

5. *What should happen in the case of a child who is developmentally disabled?*

- 5.1. "The criterion for reception of Holy Communion is the same for persons with intellectual and developmental disabilities as for all persons, namely, that the person be able to "distinguish the body of Christ from ordinary food," even if this recognition is evidenced through manner, gesture, or reverential silence rather than verbally. Pastors are encouraged to consult with parents, those who take the place of parents, diocesan personnel involved with disability issues, psychologists, religious educators, and other experts in making their judgment. If it is determined that a parishioner who is disabled is not ready to receive the sacrament, great care is to be taken in explaining the reasons for this decision. Cases of doubt should be resolved in favor of the right of the

Catholic to receive the sacrament. The existence of a disability is not considered in and of itself as disqualifying a person from receiving Holy Communion.”⁵

6. *What should happen in the case of a child who is older than the age at which the Sacrament is usually first received?*

- 6.1. Children who are baptized only, but who are beyond the age of reason are treated as adult candidates, with the rites and catechesis adapted to their age. (cf. c. 851, §1; OCIA, §252-330)

7. *What kind of record is kept of First Eucharist?*

- 7.1. Parishes within the Diocese of Houma-Thibodaux are to enter a record of First Communion into the Sacramental Register and onto the digital platform.⁶ If First Communion is received at a parish other than the parish of Baptism, the parish where the Sacrament was received shall send a notification to the parish of Baptism.

⁵ United States Conference of Catholic Bishops, Guidelines for the Celebration of the Sacraments with Persons with Disabilities, §22. <http://www.usccb.org/about/divine-worship/policies/guidelines-sacraments-persons-with-disabilities.cfm>

⁶ The digital platform currently in use in the Diocese of Houma-Thibodaux is *ParishSOFT*.

First Confession

1. *Where and when should the Sacrament be celebrated?*

- 1.1. The ordinary place where a child celebrates First Confession is the parish of registration of the child's parents or legal guardian or the parish in whose territory the child's parents live (if unregistered). If the parents wish the child to celebrate this sacrament in another parish that does not fall into the above categories or with his or her class from the Catholic elementary school where he or she is registered, the child may do so with the parents' permission.
 - 1.1.1. The parents should, however, consult with their proper pastor and the pastor of the place where the child will make First Confession (or the one whom the pastor has delegated to care for those approaching First Confession).
 - 1.1.2. Due to the Sacramental Seal, this permission is not strictly required.
- 1.2. The usual age for one to make Sacramental Confession for the first time is about the seventh year, prior to First Holy Communion.⁷ Children should have reached the use of reason and be "properly disposed" (c. 914).

2. *What role do parents have in choosing the Sacrament for their child?*

- 2.1. It is the responsibility of parents along with pastors to see that children are prepared for and receive Reconciliation (c. 914). Parents should be involved in the decision regarding the readiness of their child for the Sacrament.
 - 2.1.1. If a child is under the care of someone other than a parent or a legal guardian, care must be taken that the permission of the child's parent or legal guardian is obtained or at least they are made aware and do not object before proceeding with sacramental preparation. If it is clear that the child's parents or legal guardian do not want the child to receive the Sacramental Confession because of personal disbelief against it or animosity towards the sacrament, and the child wants to receive the sacrament, the pastor, in consultation with the Bishop, may make his determination to give the sacrament, recognizing each baptized Catholic's right to the sacraments.
 - 2.1.2. If the child's parents are not practicing Catholics but wish to have their child receive the sacrament, the child should not be kept from receiving Reconciliation (c. 843). Parents should be encouraged, however, to

⁷ "The age of discretion, both for Confession and for Holy Communion, is the time when a child begins to reason, that is about the seventh year, more or less. From that time on begins the obligation of fulfilling the precept of both Confession and Communion." (Pope Pius X, *Quam Singulari*)

participate in the sacramental preparation process with the child, and pastoral ministers should explore other avenues to foster the Faith in the entire family.

3. ***What kind of catechesis is required?***

- 3.1. For the child, catechesis for First Confession should be designed
 - 3.1.1. to help the child recognize moral good and evil, repent of wrongdoing, and turn for forgiveness to Christ and the Church;
 - 3.1.2. to enable the child to experience the expression of faith in forgiving and being forgiven, and
 - 3.1.3. to encourage the child to approach the sacrament regularly (*NCD*, §126).
- 3.2. Because parents are the primary educators of their children, they have a duty to participate in the preparation of their children for the Sacraments. Parishes should provide education for parents of children preparing to receive the sacrament so that parents can fulfill their role as primary teachers of their children. Parent programs should be designed to nourish the faith life of participants as well as provide them with theological understanding of the sacrament (*NCD*, §117, 119; *Rite of Baptism for Children: Introduction*, §5; cc. 851, 852).
 - 3.2.1. Godparents should be invited to join parents in parish programs of parent preparation (c. 774).
- 3.3. Parents, godparents, and members of the parish community at large should be encouraged to act as role models for the young penitents by renewing their own participation in the sacrament. "For it is not only as an original gift that the faithful receive *metonia* in the Church through baptism; through the sacrament of penance in the Church that same gift is restored and strengthened for those members who have sinned" (Pope St. Paul VI, *Paenitemini*).

4. ***How should parishes design programs of catechesis for Reconciliation?***

- 4.1. In discerning their particular preparation programs, parishes shall consider the support and guidelines given by the Office of Parish Support.

5. ***How should the Sacrament be celebrated?***

- 5.1. The Sacrament should be celebrated in accord with the *Rite of Penance*. This may be done by means of the *Rite of Reconciliation of Individual Penitents* (§41-47) or by the *Rite of Reconciliation of Several Penitents with Individual Confession and Absolution* (§48-59).

6. ***What should happen in the case of a child who is developmentally disabled?***
 - 6.1. Whenever possible, children who are developmentally disabled should be prepared for the sacrament, and should be included in the parish sacramental celebration (*NCD*, §196).

7. ***What kind of record is kept of First Confession?***
 - 7.1. Due to the Sacramental Seal, *no record* is kept of First Confession.

Confirmation Policy

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The Rite of Confirmation

The Sacrament of Confirmation is one of the most profound gifts that God has empowered the Church to offer her members. One of the sacraments of initiation, Confirmation is a completion of baptismal grace in which a baptized Christian is more perfectly bound to the Church and enriched by the gifts of the Holy Spirit to be a true witness of Christ to the world and to defend the faith by word and deed.⁸

In the Old Testament, the Spirit, while already active within history, was simultaneously prophesied to come in fullness upon the Messiah. The descent of the Spirit upon Jesus at His baptism inaugurates His messianic mission as God's "*anointed one*". However, the Spirit was never to remain solely Christ's but was to be communicated to His *messianic people – the Church*.⁹

The Church, herself, experienced this outpouring of the Holy Spirit at Pentecost, after which the apostles continued to impart the gift of the Spirit to the newly baptized through the laying on of hands. The Catholic Church sees this as the origin of the sacrament of Confirmation which "perpetuates the grace of Pentecost." Early on, the use of sacred *chrism* was added to the laying on of hands, highlighting the nature of Christians as Christ's "anointed ones".¹⁰

In the Rite of Confirmation, the anointing is a sign of consecration and imparts a *spiritual seal*.¹¹ This seal marks the recipient's "*total belonging to Christ*" and participation in His mission. Received on the forehead through the same laying on of hands, and accompanied by the words: "be sealed with the gift of the Holy Spirit"¹², this sacramental anointing is ordinarily conferred by the Bishop of the local diocese, though any priest with his permission may celebrate the sacrament.

This sacrament, by uniting the recipient more firmly to Christ, affirms his/her identity as a Child of God. It also increases the gifts of the Holy Spirit in the recipient and strengthens his/her bond with the Church. Thus, the effects of Confirmation, after which one is more fully empowered to be a *witness* to Christ, are essentially the same as those of Pentecost: it confirms the Christians as *disciples of Jesus Christ*.

The remainder of this document will directly address specific guidelines for the preparation and celebration of the sacrament of Confirmation in the Diocese of Houma-Thibodaux.

⁸ CCC 1285

⁹ CCC1286

¹⁰ CCC 1287-1289

¹¹ CCC 1293

¹² CCC 1294-1296

Confirmation Requirements in the Diocese of Houma-Thibodaux

From the earliest days of the Church, the reception of the sacraments of initiation by those at an age of discretion was preceded by a period of preparation to ensure an adequate disposition. Today, 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 their baptismal promises.

Age

Any baptized Christian, not yet Confirmed, who has completed an appropriate period of formation, is able to receive the sacrament. The Church herself allows for the discretion of the local diocese in choosing the ordinary age for Confirmation of its parishioners. Thus, in the Diocese of Houma-Thibodaux, the normal age for the reception of the sacrament of Confirmation will be the eleventh grade, an age at which formation is possible to “implant more deeply in the lives of the faithful complete obedience to Christ the Lord and a firm witnessing to Him.”¹³

Preparation Location

The *Catechism* instructs that it is the “*parish community...that bears special responsibility for the preparation of confirmands*”¹⁴. Thus the ordinary place where an individual will be *both* prepared for and receive the sacrament of Confirmation will be the parish of registration of the candidate’s parents or legal guardian or the parish in whose territory they live (if unregistered). As discussed in greater detail below, this will allow for Confirmation to be part of an integral, lifelong process of being formed as a disciple of Christ.

Period of Preparation

Therefore, the period of preparation for the sacrament will directly precede its reception and happen within the parish community. It is envisioned that this period will be a **two-year** process, beginning in the tenth grade. As discussed in detail below, rather than being a separate entity, the period of preparation should be integrated into the parish’s ongoing youth formation program wherein at least the eleventh-grade year would utilize a formation plan dedicated specifically to immediate sacramental preparation. In order to allow the development of relationships within the parish, those not already consistently involved in the parish’s youth formation program should

¹³ Introduction to the Rite of Confirmation

¹⁴ CCC 1309

begin to attend in the tenth grade. More details surrounding the method, goals, and content used for immediate preparation are outlined in this document.

Assessment

Discussed in greater detail below, a “readiness assessment” should be part of the preparation process in order to ensure a formation plan that will foster a proper disposition in each of the candidates.

Sponsor

Candidates for the sacrament will choose a sponsor who will *accompany* him/her through the preparatory process. Because the Sacraments of Baptism and Confirmation are so closely connected, it is desirable, though not required, that the godparent at Baptism also serve as the Confirmation sponsor. The requirements for a sponsor are as follows, per *Code of Canon Law* 894:

- Must be at least 16 years of age
- Must be fully initiated into the Church, having received the Sacraments of Baptism, Eucharist, and Confirmation
- Must be a practicing Catholic in good standing with the Church (Being “in good standing” refers to those who regularly practice their faith and believe what the Church believes, having accepted the responsibilities of their baptismal promises. If the proposed sponsor is married, he/she must be in a valid marriage according to the norms of the Catholic Church.)
- May not be a parent of the candidate

Contact your liaison for suggestions and best practices on how to engage sponsors or for help understanding the role of the sponsor.

Period of Preparation I: Goals of Preparation

The essential goals for the period of preparation (referenced above) can be found articulated in paragraph #1309 of the *Catechism of the Catholic Church* as follows:

Preparation for Confirmation should aim at leading 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).

Accordingly, four essential goals of Confirmation preparation are to:

- Foster a relationship with Jesus Christ
- Foster a relationship with the Holy Spirit as well as His work
- Enhance one's integration within the Church community
- Empower for mission in the Church

Period of Preparation II: Pastoral Practices

Considering the age and location for Confirmation preparation, best pastoral practices should consider the uniquely formable state in life in which high schoolers find themselves. Our overview of pastoral practices will touch on method, goals, and content features accompanied by a few current resource recommendations.

Confirmation & Youth Formation

Preparation for the sacrament of Confirmation should not replace or exist alongside the parish's ongoing Youth Formation program but be integrated within it. This will allow sacramental preparation to contribute to the ongoing process of *discipleship formation* in an atmosphere where the youth experience connectivity and belonging within the parish community. In this way, Confirmation will not seem like a stand-alone event unrelated to the rest of one's life of faith and experience of the Church but will contribute to the fullness of the formation process. As part of an *ongoing process of discipleship formation*, Confirmation is less seen as analogous to graduation or as "the last step in the journey", after which parish participation diminishes, but as a means for continued and enhanced growth and participation:

"...in not few occasions young people experience the celebration of Confirmation as a key to university graduation: once the degree has been obtained, there is no need to return to the classrooms. Others simply understand Confirmation as a condition for further steps, such as marriage, without grasping what is proper to this sacrament..."¹⁵

Ministry Method

As discipleship formation, preparation for Confirmation should form the teen as a *whole person* and incorporate intellectual, spiritual, human, and missionary formation. Since it is the whole person who becomes a disciple of Christ, and *not just the mind*, Confirmation preparation should not be seen as merely a "classroom" exercise wherein a teacher instructs students in the content. Rather, intellectual formation should be integrated into a process of *relational ministry* that seeks to lead the youth into a relationship with the Trinity in a communal setting and ultimately to empower their apostolic mission within the Church. While this requires more personal investment than mere teaching, it is also true that a full, lived relationship with God is not something that simply happens but is something that requires an ongoing effort on our part.

Setting

¹⁵ International Theological Commission; The Reciprocity Between Faith and Sacraments in the Sacramental Economy. (2020) 99

The ideal format for such relational ministry to occur is a “small group” setting. Whether executed as a portion of a large group formation session or as a stand-alone event, the essential purpose of a small group is to create an atmosphere of trust, authenticity, and vulnerability where young people feel a sense of belonging, have a space to ask questions and share about joys and trials, and to ultimately to appropriate the faith so as to integrate it into their lives.

Retreat

Retreats serve as a valuable part of formation, providing young people with an opportunity to grow in relationships with the Lord and with one another. While a retreat is not necessarily required as part of the final year of immediate Confirmation preparation, it should be considered a normal and valuable part of the whole vision of the parish’s ongoing youth formation program for high school students.

Period of Preparation III: Content & Resources

While relational ministry and the formation of the whole person within a communal setting are essential features for the method of Confirmation preparation, the *content* itself is not to be seen as irrelevant or of a secondary nature. *Based on the goals above*, there are certain points that Confirmation preparation content would ideally address, both related to the sacrament itself as well as the Catholic faith as a whole.

We take for granted that all content should be authentic, in that it proposes nothing contradictory to the Catholic faith and simultaneously promotes “a healthy and vital Catholic identity”.

Content Features

*Sacramental Protocol III*¹⁶, The USCCB’s document for assessing Confirmation resources lists a few essential features that all Confirmation content should include. They should:

- Catechize the participant towards a belief in God
- Enhance knowledge of the Person of Jesus Christ
- Communicate a basic knowledge of the foundations of the Catholic faith, such as:
 - An understanding of sin and the need for reconciliation
 - Christ’s Paschal Mystery in the light of salvation history
 - The Nature of the Church
 - The meaning of the sacraments
- Express a desire for holiness and participation in the life of the Church

¹⁶ USCCB Committee on Evangelization and Catechesis; Protocol for Assessing the Conformity of Catechetical Materials with the Catechism of the Catholic Church: Sacramental Protocol III: Confirmation. (2013).

In addition, a recent Vatican document¹⁷ that addresses the relationship of faith and Confirmation, suggests that content presented for Confirmation preparation:

- Should help one understand his/her baptismal promises and prepare them to renew those
- Should instruct one in the meaning and purpose of the sacrament of Confirmation
- Should assist in their understanding of how they as confirmed followers of Christ fit into the larger picture of salvation history
- Should particularly focus on the formation of prayer in the life of the believer.

The fullest expression of all Confirmation content, regardless of resources utilized, will be reached only if instruction in and the practice of prayer are regularly provided. It is in prayer that a relationship with Christ is made *real*.

*“...the adequate catechesis for the reception of Confirmation, without forgetting the other elements, (doctrine & morals) offers the opportunity for an intensification and personalization of the relationship with the Lord through prayer.”*¹⁸

Resource Recommendations

Considering the method, goals, and content features for Confirmation Preparation, we desire to provide information on and recommendations for resources available so that parishes in the Diocese of Houma-Thibodaux can make informed, discerned decisions about what program would work best for their youth formation programs. A supplemental index is provided so the material can be consistently updated.

Readiness Assessment

As referenced, a “readiness assessment” should be conducted, and this should ideally be done **at the beginning of the preparation process** to evaluate each candidate’s disposition to and desire for Confirmation. Far from being a “test of worthiness”, this assessment may assist formators in their accompaniment of the youth by potentially revealing issues that need attention, questions that need answers, and areas that require pastoral care.

With more serious issues that may indicate the need to delay, it is suggested that meetings be offered with the pastor or a capable delegate who can accompany the candidate and assess when

¹⁷ International Theological Commission; The Reciprocity between Faith and Sacraments in the Sacramental Economy. (2020) §95-101.

¹⁸ International Theological Commission; The Reciprocity between Faith and Sacraments in the Sacramental Economy. (2020) §101.

they might enter into the normal preparation process. Examples of these may be, but are not limited to:

- Not believing in God
- Ignorance and lack of desire for basic knowledge of Jesus Christ (his humanity and divinity, his saving mission)
- An expressed lack of desire to participate in the Church and attend Sunday Mass
- Considerable ignorance about and lack of desire for understanding the Eucharist or any of the other Sacraments
- An expressed unwillingness to learn more about the teachings of the Church
- An expressed lack of interest in prayer and an unwillingness to grow in holiness
- Aware that they are living a life of mortal sin and “don’t care”
- An expressed mindset of opposition to the reception of Confirmation

The suggested method of assessment would be an in-person interview, ideally with the parents or legal guardian present for at least part of it. The interview would best be preceded by a written questionnaire provided to the youth so they can have a prior time to process and articulate their thoughts and experiences. A questionnaire suggestion is provided as an appendix.

CONCLUSION

Since the sacrament of confirmation is one of the greatest gifts the Catholic Church offers her faithful, it is our desire that, by clearly articulating the standard details regarding its reception, parishes will be free to focus more on the process of preparation. Whether as a youth formator, parent, or sponsor, participating in the formation process for the youth is a sacred task. It is our hope that, by supporting you in the process, parishes will be able to foster a healthy disposition to the sacrament in the hearts of the candidates so that Confirmation will further their lifelong process of becoming disciples.

Rite of Confirmation - Appendix A

Questionnaire suggestions:

The Existence of God; the Three Persons of the Trinity

- Do you believe in God? Why?
- How would you describe or explain God to a friend?
- Do you think you can know God personally? Do you think he has a real interest in you and your life? Why or why not?
- What has been the most powerful experience of God in your life?
- How are the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit God?

The Person of Jesus Christ

- How is Jesus different from someone like Buddha?
- If you were to meet someone who had never heard of Jesus, who would you say he is? How would you describe your relationship with him?
- The Son took on a human nature so that God could be close to us. Would you like to get to know Jesus better?
- What story of Jesus do you like best or relate best to?

The Holy Spirit

- What do we say about the Holy Spirit when we recite the creed on Sundays? What do those things mean?
- Have you ever felt the presence of the Holy Spirit in your life?
- What do you think the connection between the Holy Spirit and Confirmation is?
- How is a person who has received the Holy Spirit in baptism's life different from one who has not? Is it?

The Church

- What is the difference between worshiping God in church on Sunday as part of a community (Mass), rather than just praying on your own at home?
- What role does the Church play in your life right now?
- How might the Church shape your future decisions such as where you go to college, what career you pursue, a potential marriage and family, etc.?

The Sacraments

- Name as many of the seven sacraments as you can.
- Why was your Baptism important, even if you don't remember it?
- What do you remember about your First Holy Communion?
- Were you prepared for the Sacrament of Reconciliation? Have you gone to Confession lately?
- Would you like to be confirmed? Why or why not? What do you hope Confirmation will do for you?

The Eucharist

- Why is it obligatory for Catholics to go to Mass on Sundays and Holy Days of Obligation?
- Do you attend Mass on Sunday? What do you think of it?
- What is the purpose of Mass? What are some of its effects?
- Do you believe in the presence of Jesus—Body, Blood, Soul, & Divinity—in the Eucharist? Do you believe that the wine and the bread become Jesus?
- How does receiving Holy Communion and praying the Mass every week affect how you live during the rest of the week?

Discipleship

- What does it mean to be holy?
- If someone asked you how to get to heaven, what would you say?
- Who's your favorite saint? Why? Who are you looking at to be your patron saint at Confirmation?
- What does a follower of Jesus (a disciple) look like?
- Would you like to be a better disciple of Jesus? What needs to happen for that to become a reality?
- Do you have the time to properly prepare for Confirmation? To become a better disciple of Jesus?

Prayer

- Why is it important to pray?
- Do you pray? What does your prayer life look like?
- What effects does prayer have in your life?
- What would you like to learn about prayer?

General

- What do you appreciate most about being Catholic?
- Which teachings of the Church confuse you the most?
- Are there any teachings of the Church that you disagree with? When did you come to the realization that you disagreed with this? Have you ever sought out answers? If so what were some of the answers you received?
- Are you willing to learn more about why we teach the things we do?

Suggested questions for parents

- Why do you want your child to be confirmed?
- What do prayer and formation look like in your home?
- Do you attend Mass regularly as a family?
- How are you and your family involved in the parish? If you're not, would you be interested in being more involved in some way?
- In what ways do you continue to learn and grow in your own faith?
- Do you understand the preparation process for your son or daughter regarding preparation for Confirmation? Are you willing to support your child in this process?
- Are there any particular needs that we should pay attention to for your child as they prepare for Confirmation?
- How can we help you in the faith formation of your family?
- Do you have any concerns with the process of preparation?

Rite of Confirmation – Appendix B

As referenced, we desire to provide information on available resources for Confirmation preparation so that parishes, taking into account both the method and goals described above as well as their unique circumstances, can make the best decision on what content to use. We wish to highlight prominent Confirmation resources which, in our estimation, are true to the features articulated in the referenced document *Sacramental Protocol III*.

Each of these programs can be appropriately utilized as a small group or large group resource according to your desire and capacity. Your individual liaisons will be happy to work with you to assist in their application.

Purpose by Life Teen:

Life Teen describes Purpose as “a transformative approach to Confirmation. Multiple components combine an impactful curriculum with a powerful digital tool to enhance communication and ease administrative tasks. Coupled with engaging supplementary material for teens and parents, Purpose is more than just a resource. It is a whole new approach to sacramental preparation.”

Life Teen’s “Purpose” Confirmation program is a 24-session curriculum that focuses on evangelizing youth to become disciples and answering the big questions they bring to the faith.

Features:

- Is available in both small group and large group formats
- Has Spanish curriculum
- Purpose contains a small group Bible study modified from Life Teen’s “Summit” series.
- Is supplemented by the “Foundations” book series for apologetics questions
- Has an App for communication and scheduling and provides leaders, parents, and youth access to all materials
- Has a built-in parent session at the beginning about the parents as primary educators
- Explanation of sacrament which then walks through the kerygma
- Provides supplementary video to the content presented at the sessions
- Contains training webinars where Life Teen staff walk through the programming
- Is updated continually with materials that are relevant to the lives of teenagers
- Gives retreat suggestions from Life Teen resources
- Is a yearly subscription vs. a one-time purchase

Pros of Purpose:

- Written in the Life Night format (Gather, Proclaim, Break, Send) format, which makes it very easy to apply in both large and small group settings
- Provides both large and small group session models so parishes can choose one or run an integration of both

- Integrates an apologetics resource and Bible study which could be adequately used as supplemental resources to a Life Night or as a separate small group resource
- “Proclaim” notes empower the Youth Formation Teams themselves, who actually journey with the teens, to be the primary catechists of the program vs. video-based content
- Substantial training webinars for resource utilization
- Isn’t stagnant programming, but digital format regularly updated to reflect current issues
- The only program which integrates an app, which provides leaders, parents, and youth access to all materials and offers a platform for communication and scheduling

Cons of *Purpose*:

- The primary catechesis for the evening (“Proclaim”) will require more planning by the YF Team since it will not be a video-based talk
- While comparable in pricing to other programs, some parishes may find the yearly subscription vs. one-time fee undesirable
- Less parent/sponsor resources than other options

***Chosen* by Ascension Press:**

Ascension Press says that *Chosen* “takes young people on a journey through the entire Catholic faith in all its richness and vitality. Teens will be captivated by the story, from Creation all the way through salvation history, and they will come to see how the sacraments, prayer, and discipleship are the keys to a happy life.”

Ascension Press’s *Chosen* is a 24-lesson, video-based content which seeks to present the Catholic faith and salvation history integration into sacramental preparation.

Features:

- Video-based resources from some of the “top youth experts” in the Church
- Integrates student workbooks into video content
- Contains leaders guides, parents guides, and a guide for Confirmation sponsors
- Contains a retreat component
- Some classroom components such as compliance quizzes
- Contains its own pre-confirmation interview
- Leader orientation videos for the use of the content

Pros of *Chosen*:

- Video-based resources may be preferable for parishes who aren’t equipped to give proclaims themselves but prefer a “plug-and-play” format
- Plug-and-play format may simplify “makeup work” for youth who miss Confirmation sessions
- The unique feature of the pre-Confirmation interview integrates the questions with the content to be presented throughout the program
- Has an all-digital option in addition to a workbook option

- Guide for confirmation sponsors could be useful for their engagement in the content
- High-quality videos in various locations relevant to the Catholic faith

Cons of *Chosen*:

- Video-based content implies that the main catechesis will not come from an individual actively accompanying the youth
- Is not written in a “Life Night” format, so parishes will have to adapt it to fit a large or small group relational ministry setting
- Is a stagnant program once published – cannot be continually updated

***Decision Point* by Dynamic Catholic:**

Dynamic Catholic describes *Decision Point* as “specifically developed to engage young Catholics in a meaningful conversation about the genius of Catholicism. It teaches and inspires teens to respond to God’s grace.”

Decision Point is a video and workbook-based program that aims to make the Catholic faith and Confirmation applicable to teens' lives.

Features:

- 72 short films integrated into student workbook curriculum
- Utilizes a leader guide
- Walkthrough of the principles of Catholic Faith through a life of discipleship
- Has an additional free resource to help DRE’s and catechists in their utilization of the content
- Has parents and sponsor formation with topics comparable to those being presented to the youth

Pros of *Decision Point*:

- Content is free and accessible
- Offers ongoing parent and sponsor formation as the youth journey through the curriculum
- Video-based resources may be preferable to parishes who are not equipped to give proclaims themselves but prefer a “plug-and-play” format

Cons of *Decision Point*:

- Lower quality video content than comparable resources – videos are mostly stationary talks vs dynamic presentations in various locations
- Is not written in a “Life Night” format, so parishes will have to adapt it to fit a large or small group relational ministry setting
- Video-based content implies that the main catechesis will not come from an individual actively accompanying the youth
- The large amount of short videos may pose difficulties in how to choose which ones to use

Rite of Christian Initiation of Adults

1. *For whom is the Rite of Christian Initiation for Adults (RCIA)?*

1.1. The RCIA, strictly speaking, for:

1.1.1. Unbaptized Adults (1)¹⁹

1.1.2. Baptized but Uncatechized Catholic Adults (2)²⁰

1.2. However, Christian Initiation comes to bear on two other groups which must therefore be mentioned here:

1.2.1. Baptized Members of Christian Ecclesial Communities who are to come into Full Communion with the Catholic Church (3)²¹

1.2.2. Catholic Adults who have received Baptism and catechesis but have not received Confirmation (4)

1.2.2.1. These adults have usually also received Holy Communion.

1.2.2.2. They are **not** to be Confirmed at the Paschal Vigil.

1.3. Regarding Children:

1.3.1. Paragraphs 252 - 330 of the *Rite of Christian Initiation of Adults* outline adapted rites for children who were not Baptized as Infants yet who have attained the use of reason and are of catechetical age. (cf. c. 852)

1.3.2. Only with the following conditions having been met may Confirmation and/or First Holy Communion be withheld from such a child at the time of Baptism:

1.3.2.1. the *pastor* judges it pastorally opportune to withhold the Sacraments of Confirmation and/or First Holy Communion

1.3.2.2. the *parents* agree with the pastor's judgment

1.3.2.3. the *bishop* grants permission, preferably in writing

1.3.2.4. the *child* consents

1.4. For all, the norms in the liturgical books must be followed strictly, including those for appropriate catechesis found in the *praenotandae*.

¹⁹ *Rite of Christian Initiation for Adults*, §36-251.

²⁰ *Rite of Christian Initiation for Adults*, §400-472.

²¹ *Rite of Christian Initiation for Adults*, §473-504.

2. ***If a candidate or catechumen is in an invalid marriage, what needs to be done?***
 - 2.1. It may be that a Declaration of Nullity must be acquired before for one or both parties prior to convalidation.
 - 2.2. The convalidation of any invalid marriage must be completed before the Catechumens are numbered among the Elect.²²
3. ***When should the Rite of Acceptance into the Order of Catechumens be celebrated?***
 - 3.1. “Two dates in the year, or three if necessary, are to be fixed [in each parish] as the usual times for carrying out this rite.” (RCIA, §18.3)
4. ***When and where are the names of Catechumens recorded?***
 - 4.1. “After the celebration of the rite of acceptance, the names of the catechumens are to be duly inscribed in the register of catechumens, along with the names of the sponsors and the minister and the date and place of the celebration.” (RCIA, §46)

²² One cannot enter into the full sacramental life of the Church unless one is completely free to receive the sacraments (cf. *Familiaris Consortio*, 84; c. 1085).