

REBORN, ANOINTED, NOURISHED



Faith and Formation for Life
On Restoring the Order of the Sacraments of Initiation
by Most Rev. William A. Wack, CSC | May 2025

CONTENTS

3	ABOUT BISHOP WACK
4	INTRODUCTION
6	THE SACRAMENTS OF INITIATION
7	A BRIEF HISTORY OF THE CELEBRATION OF CONFIRMATION
10	OUR PROGRESS OF DISCERNMENT FOR THE RESTORATION
11	A RESTORED ORDER OF THE SACRAMENTS
13	CONCLUSION
15	FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS & REFERENCES



THE CATHOLIC DIOCESE
of
PENSACOLA-TALLAHASSEE

Copyright © 2025, Diocese of Pensacola-Tallahassee,
Pensacola, FL. All rights reserved.

Cover art: **The Ascension**

Beyer Studio | Philadelphia, PA

Located in St. Paul Catholic Church | Pensacola, FL



ABOUT BISHOP WACK

On May 29, 2017, Bishop Wack was appointed by Pope Francis to serve as the sixth bishop of the Diocese of Pensacola-Tallahassee. He was ordained and installed on August 22, 2017, in Pensacola, Florida.

Most Rev. William A. Wack, CSC was ordained a priest in the Congregation of Holy Cross in 1994, having completed formation at Moreau Seminary in Notre Dame, Indiana. He served as associate pastor at Sacred Heart Parish in Colorado Springs, associate director of Vocations and Campus Minister at Notre Dame, director of André House (a soup kitchen/hospitality center) in Phoenix, and pastor of St. Ignatius Martyr Parish in Austin, TX.

Bishop Wack's episcopal motto is Come. Follow Me.

Visit ptdiocese.org/restoredorder for additional resources on **Reborn, Anointed, Nourished**





Dear Brothers and Sisters

Greetings in the Lord. It is my joy to share with you my vision for a renewal of sacramental life in the Diocese of Pensacola-Tallahassee, and a renewal of faith in Jesus Christ in our families. In this Pastoral Letter, I wish to explain my decision to move the age of Confirmation for Catholic children from the ninth or tenth grade to what is called in church law “the age of discretion,” around seven years of age. In other words, as a diocese we will be restoring for our Catholic children the original order for the reception of the three great sacraments of initiation: Baptism, Confirmation and Eucharist. In this, I am inviting all of you to take a step forward in faith, trusting that God will work through our efforts. It will require from all of us prayer, openness to change, and a willingness to work together in renewing our commitment as a diocese to the call of Jesus to missionary discipleship. In my first Pastoral Letter, I invited all the Faithful to be bold and courageous in the work of evangelization: “The Church exists to evangelize! Put simply, if we believe that Jesus Christ suffered and died for us and rose again to set us free from sin and death, we are compelled to share that Good News with everyone around us.” [1] This present Letter builds on that call, giving a vision of how evangelization and discipleship are lived out in this local church, especially through the celebration of the sacraments.

Introduction

“Come. Follow me.” These are the words that Jesus spoke to his first disciples, and it is with these same words that Jesus continues to call each one of us today. This invitation is ongoing, just as our response to it must be ongoing. It comes to us at the moment of our conception, and it beckons us onward to eternal life. Every one of us is loved and called by God, not for a single moment or activity, but rather for a lifetime of discipleship. St. Paul, who heard this summons when he encountered the risen Jesus on the road to Damascus (cf. Acts 9:1-19), knew that it was an invitation to live in a radically new way. His growth in the faith and his preaching continued until the moment he was put to death by a sword. To the Philippians he wrote, “It is not that I have already ... attained perfect maturity, but I continue my pursuit in hope that I may possess it, since I have indeed been taken possession of by Christ Jesus. I for my part do not consider myself to have taken possession. Just one thing: forgetting what lies behind but straining forward to what lies ahead, I continue my pursuit toward the goal, the prize of God’s upward calling, in Christ Jesus” (Phil 3:12-14). I understand this summons from Jesus to be an invitation to communion, wholeness, and eternal life with God the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. His words are living words, welling up to eternal life. Our Lord came in the flesh to offer his life as a ransom for many. In his death and resurrection, eternal life is restored and the gates of heaven are once again opened for us. He taught his disciples to remain in him just as he remains in us. He who is one with the Father, longs to be united to us as well. This is eternal life: “I am in my Father and you are in me and I in you” (John 14:20).



But how is this even possible? How can we remain in him? Jesus established the one, holy, catholic and apostolic Church as his Body on earth, empowering and entrusting her with the mission of continuing his saving work until he comes again in glory. The Church, the fullness of which subsists in the Catholic Church, carries this out through the celebration of the sacraments, worship, evangelization, and service to one another. From ancient times, the church has celebrated and safeguarded the seven sacraments, which are “efficacious signs of grace, instituted by Christ and entrusted to the Church, by which divine life is dispensed to us” (CCC 1131). Jesus instituted these sacraments as a means for human beings to access the riches of grace flowing from his saving death and resurrection. They are not merely empty symbolic actions performed by the community that is the church. Rather, sacraments contain and communicate the grace that they each uniquely signify. There are three sacraments of initiation (Baptism, Confirmation, and Eucharist), two sacraments of healing (Anointing of the Sick and Reconciliation),

and two sacraments at the service of communion (Holy Orders and Marriage). These are the ordinary means God himself has established by which we are to glorify the Holy Trinity and through which we achieve our sanctification and salvation in Jesus Christ by the working of his Holy Spirit. As such, the sacramental liturgy, which stands at the very heart of the life of faith and its celebration, “is the summit toward which the activity of the Church is directed; at the same time, it is the font from which all her power flows” (SSC 10).

“*Jesus established the one, holy, catholic and apostolic Church as his Body on earth, empowering and entrusting her with the mission of continuing his saving work until he comes again in glory.*”

My dear brothers and sisters, awakened to these great truths of faith let us run to Christ Jesus, who is the Way, the Truth, and the Life. May we never tire of following him but rather set out in haste on a journey that will lead to heaven! We do this not as isolated individuals. No, we are one Body in Christ, members of one another. Together we go forward in learning, growing, and practicing our Catholic Faith. We must encourage and challenge one another in this way. Our local church now embarks on a renewed journey that is centered especially in the life of the family, the foundation of society and the primary context in which children receive formation in the practice of the faith. It is here in the family that the encounter with God, an awakening to prayer, participation in the sacraments, and a life of good works are first learned.

The Sacraments of Initiation

“Holy Baptism is the basis of the whole Christian life, the gateway to life in the Spirit, and the door which gives access to the other sacraments. Through Baptism we are freed from sin and reborn as sons of God; we become members of Christ, are incorporated into the Church and made sharers in her mission” (CCC 1213).

One cannot receive the other sacraments without having received baptism first. As Jesus taught Nicodemus in the Gospel, “Truly, truly, I say to you, unless one is born of water and the Spirit, he cannot enter the kingdom of God” (John 3:5). In Baptism, the faithful person dies to his or her old life of sin, is reborn as a child of God, receives an indelible spiritual mark, becomes a member of Christ’s Mystical Body, is given a share in Christ’s priesthood, partakes in the divine nature, and begins to walk along the path of discipleship.

As Baptism is the fountain from which we drink of “the good things that have come” (Heb 9:11), parents should make it the highest priority to have their child baptized as soon as possible after birth or adoption – recognizing that Baptism is only the beginning of the journey of faith which continues throughout life. We receive the gift of the Holy Spirit in Baptism, who dwells in our bodies as in a temple. But it is only in Confirmation that baptismal grace is brought to completion. In this sacrament, the baptized “are more perfectly bound to the Church and are enriched with a special strength of the Holy Spirit. Hence, they are, as true witnesses of Christ, more strictly obliged to spread and defend the faith by word and deed” (CCC 1285). Confirmation has its origins in the apostolic church, as the Catechism teaches us:

“From that time on the apostles, in fulfillment of Christ’s will, imparted to the newly baptized, by the laying on of hands, the gift of the Spirit that completes the grace of Baptism. For this reason, in the Letter to the Hebrews, the doctrine concerning Baptism and the laying on of hands is listed among the first elements of Christian instruction. The imposition of hands is rightly recognized by the Catholic tradition as the origin of the sacrament of Confirmation, which in a certain way perpetuates the grace of Pentecost in the Church.

Very early, the better to signify the gift of the Holy Spirit, an anointing with perfumed oil (chrism) was added to the laying on of hands. This anointing highlights the name “Christian,” which means “anointed” and derives from that of Christ himself whom God “anointed with the Holy Spirit” (CCC 1288-89).

Confirmation is thus to be seen as a vital “step” toward the completion of one’s full initiation into Christ and his Church. But it is the Eucharist alone that “completes Christian initiation. Those who have been raised to the dignity of the royal priesthood by Baptism and configured more deeply to Christ by Confirmation participate with the whole community in the Lord’s own sacrifice by means of the Eucharist” (CCC 1322). The Catechism goes on to tell us:

“Like Baptism which it completes, Confirmation is given only once, for it too imprints on the soul an indelible spiritual mark, the “character,” which is the sign that Jesus Christ has marked a Christian with the seal of his Spirit by clothing him with power from on high so that he may be his witness. This “character” perfects the common priesthood of the faithful, received in Baptism, and the confirmed person receives the power to profess faith in Christ publicly and as it were officially (CCC 1304-05).”

The perfected share in Christ’s priesthood conferred by Confirmation empowers the faithful to fully participate in the celebration of the Eucharistic sacrifice, which is the memorial sacrifice Christ left us that we might participate fully in the fruits of redemption he gained for us in his saving death and glorious resurrection. The Eucharist also refers to the sacramental gift and real presence of the risen Christ – Body, Blood, Soul and Divinity – which, by the power of the Holy Spirit, is made really, truly and substantially present under the forms of bread and wine. Our Lord shares his Flesh and Blood with those already born again “of water and the Holy Spirit” who have been conformed to his image through the seal of Confirmation. Unlike the Sacraments of Baptism and Confirmation, which are each received only once, it belongs to living faith to participate in the celebration of the Eucharist and receive the Lord’s Body and Blood repeatedly – weekly and even daily if possible.

A Brief History of the Celebration of Confirmation

So how is it that we got to this place where Confirmation, which prepares us for full participation in the Eucharistic Sacrifice, is received by children many years after their first Holy Communion?

All three sacraments of initiation form an orderly unity that had its origin in the earliest days of Christianity. If you have ever been to an Easter Vigil liturgy, when unbaptized adults are received into the Church, you will note that they always receive all three of these sacraments in a definite order: Baptism, then Confirmation and then Eucharist. In fact, any unbaptized person seven or older who wishes to become a Catholic Christian must, in church law,



receive Baptism, Confirmation and Eucharist all at once, in the same liturgical celebration, and only in that order. It is also worthy to note that in the Eastern Catholic and Orthodox Churches, it has been the unbroken practice from the earliest days of Christianity to Baptize, Confirm and give Holy Communion to infants. That said, in the Latin Rite Catholic Church during the 6th and 7th centuries – for historical reasons I will not detail here – the reception of Confirmation and Eucharist was increasingly delayed for years after the reception of infant Baptism. This practice eventually became normative for infants baptized in the Latin Church. While the reception of Holy Communion has been brought to the “age of discretion,” there has remained the practice of delaying Confirmation until many years after reception of Holy Communion. Even though that post-infant baptism delay remains the case, the order of reception of the sacraments that is presumed in church law, the Catechism and the Order of Christian Initiation for Adults is always the same: Baptism, Confirmation and then Eucharist. That is the universal norm. Let me reiterate here some of the reasons the Church insists on this. Baptism is the primal sacrament the gateway to all the sacraments. It is the sacrament of rebirth, of incorporation into the life of Christ and his one, holy, catholic and apostolic Church. It gives us a share in Christ’s priestly, prophetic and royal authority. When I confer the Sacrament of Confirmation, I anoint the forehead of the Confirmand with Chrism and say the words, “Be sealed with the Gift of the Holy Spirit.” Confirmation seals and perfects all that Baptism grants, communicating to us the fullness of the grace of the Holy Spirit and his

sevenfold gifts that empower us to live a fully Christian life. Confirmation also perfects the baptized person’s share in Christ’s priesthood, anointing the confirmand with the same oil of Chrism used to ordain men who share in Christ’s ministerial priesthood. Priesthood is about offering sacrifice to God, beginning with the sacrifice of our lives as St. Paul reminds us: “Offer your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and pleasing to God, your spiritual worship” (Rom. 12:1). But it is only with Confirmation perfecting our baptismal priesthood that we are fully empowered for the awesome privilege of being able to offer Jesus’ saving sacrifice to the Father in the Holy Sacrifice of the Mass and to receive the Body and Blood of Christ as fully incorporated members of his Mystical Body. And yet we in the United States presently find ourselves in the situation where Catholics are allowed to enter into the full sharing in the Eucharist years before being sealed with the gift of the Holy Spirit in Confirmation. Some history seems useful to recount here. In 1910, Pope St. Pius X tried to remedy what was then a pastoral and spiritual problem. In his time, children were generally receiving Confirmation and then First Communion around the age of twelve, even though the

law of the church allowed for them to receive at the age of discretion, seven years old. The Pope, realizing especially that the widespread changes in Western culture were undermining faith, wanted children to have access to the fullness of sacramental grace as early as possible. However, for reasons that are not entirely clear, the Pope, in his document lowering the age of First Communion to seven years old, only made mention of the Eucharist and was silent on Confirmation. In this way Confirmation was gradually set adrift, celebrated somewhere around the age of twelve,



years after the Eucharist. Thus began an out-of-order practice that would eventually become in Catholic culture a kind of “rite of passage” or “coming of age” event. This misunderstanding of Confirmation eventually translated into a sacrament of adulthood, making it into what it was decidedly not: the culminating sacrament of Christian maturity – a title only to be held by the Most Holy Eucharist. As decades passed, the United States practice of delayed Confirmation would eventually be justified for pastoral reasons, arguing that leaving Confirmation to a later age would allow an opportunity for owning one’s faith and would serve as an incentive to keep young people in faith formation longer. This out-of-order sequence continues to be the practice in the United States in most dioceses, though a steadily growing number of bishops since 1995 have been changing this and restoring the original order of the sacraments of initiation. Changing this anomalous practice of a post-Eucharist reception of Confirmation confronts what has become a general Catholic cultural perception that “we have always done it this way.” Which of course is only true if “always” began in 1910.

In church law, Canon 891 states that “it is up to each conference of bishops to decide the proper age for reception of the sacraments.” Some bishops’ conferences around the world chose a definitive number like age 7 or 10, but the U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops decided on a very wide age range, from between the age of discretion up to “around 16 years” (2001 USCCB Declaration on the Age of Confirmation). [2] This was understood to be an “ad experimentum” decision; that is, a short-term pastoral trial-run until a more precise age could be agreed upon. However, this temporary age range continues to be the norm in the United States, with most dioceses continuing to offer Confirmation for

“*Baptism is the primal sacrament, the gateway to all the sacraments....It gives us a share in Christ’s priestly, prophetic and royal authority.*”

young people in their later teenage years. Many dioceses, like our own, have reconsidered this in recent years, with a growing number choosing to confer the Sacrament of Confirmation before First Holy Communion. It is worth noting that Pope Benedict XVI, in his 2007 document on the Eucharist, *Sacramentum Caritatis* #17 said that “we need to ask ourselves whether in our Christian communities the close link between Baptism, Confirmation and Eucharist is sufficiently recognized. It must never be forgotten that our reception of Baptism and Confirmation is ordered to the Eucharist. Accordingly, our pastoral practice should reflect a more unitary understanding of the process of Christian initiation.” [3] It is my desire that, in restoring Confirmation to the age of discretion, received before Holy Communion, I am giving the children in our diocese what is their sacred right in the church: to receive both Confirmation and Eucharist in those profoundly formative years of their life. In this way, all the graces God confers in these two magnificent sacraments will be available to fortify our children to become the saints God made them to be, especially in our culture which is increasingly alienated from Christ and his Gospel. In all of this, we are doing what the Church is asking of us, and with a fresh pastoral rationale: to renew the sacramental life of children and the faith of families in our diocese. This is our hope and ardent desire.

Our Process of Discernment for the Restoration

If we look at the statistics and trends that confront us regarding those receiving the sacraments of initiation today, we see that many who are baptized as infants never receive the Eucharist and even fewer are confirmed. In addition, many, if not most, of those who are confirmed do not continue to be active members of the church. In my time as bishop of this diocese there is a noticeable drop-off in the number of young people being confirmed. It is troubling that the number of youth confirmations are becoming fewer and fewer. This means that many people who are baptized are not receiving the fullness of the Holy Spirit.

The reasons for this are complex, including radical secularization and increasing social disconnection in our digital age. But I would say that the problem isn't simply the way we prepare our children for Confirmation, but rather when we do it. During one's teenage years many young people are questioning everything, developing a natural sense of independence from their parents, which can sometimes be accompanied by a mistrust in institutions. Turning a sacrament into a requirement during these adolescent years can often breed resentment and cynicism. On the other hand, children around the age of seven are still full of wonder and trust and so are more open to the formative work of divine grace that is given in the sacraments. Those earlier years are crucial for setting in the mind and heart of a child a lifelong trajectory of character that will remain with them throughout life. How important it is that, as soon as the Church allows, the seeds of grace planted in them at Baptism be nurtured with the graces of the Holy Spirit given in Confirmation and nourished with the Bread from Heaven. Jesus himself said,

"let the children come to me, and do not prevent them; for the kingdom of heaven belongs to such as these" (Matt 19:14). Much as in the days of Pope St. Pius X, given many of the current pressures in our post-Christian society that our children are facing at a younger and younger age, and the decisions they are forced to make, they in a sense need more than ever the Spirit's seven-fold gifts of wisdom, knowledge, courage, understanding, right judgment, piety, and wonder and awe. Why wait for years to impart these awesome gifts? I believe that our children very much need these gifts before entering their teenage years. Finally, consider the case of a seven-year-old unbaptized child who comes to be baptized. Such a child must receive all the sacraments of initiation at once: Baptism, Confirmation, and First Holy Communion. Then again, a child who was baptized, say, in the Methodist church, makes their Profession of Faith as a Catholic and is confirmed at age seven, while a faithful Catholic child who was baptized as an infant has to wait until he or she has reached the age of fifteen or sixteen to receive the same gift. Why should a child who was baptized Catholic have to wait until they are older to be confirmed?



Given the fact that fewer and fewer of our youth are presenting themselves for Confirmation, I asked, with the agreement of the Presbyteral Council (Council of Priests), that the ministries team research and discern the question of the age for the Sacrament of Confirmation in our diocese. After consultation with other dioceses who have experimented with or implemented restored order, and studying the theology of the sacraments, they presented their findings to me. Then they went to each deanery meeting of priests to elicit feedback. I presented these findings to the Presbyteral Council who, after offering their feedback, agreed in principle with moving ahead with the change. At the annual priests' convocation, after presentations on the history and theology of the Sacrament of Confirmation was reviewed, as well as principles for family catechesis, our diocesan ministries team proposed a diocesan pastoral plan. With all this in mind, given what I have discovered in my own discernment and from reading the documents of other bishops, I have decided that our diocese will move to a restored order of the Sacrament of Confirmation for our children. My overall concern is that everyone receives the fullness of the sacraments of initiation, integrated into formation in lifelong discipleship which is the fruit of cooperation with sacramental grace. This is paramount for me as your bishop and is worth any challenges that we will have to face in implementing this new sacramental discipline. I have experienced the beginning stages of implementing restored order in two other dioceses in which I served and had the opportunity to witness the initial fruits of this decision. When I came to our diocese, I wanted to experience the sacramental life of the local church for several years before making a change. In a wonderful way, it was the parishioners, ministers and priests

in our parishes who brought this to my attention. It was confirmed in prayer and discernment. I see this as an exciting time for our diocese, because I believe that the Holy Spirit is moving us to do this at this point in our proud history.

A Restored Order of the Sacraments

In practical terms, Restored Order of Confirmation means that our children, baptized Catholic, will receive the Sacrament of Confirmation at the same Mass as their First Holy Communion. This will continue to take place around the "age of discretion" (generally around the age of seven). In Catholic tradition, the age of discretion is associated with the awakening of conscience, that ability to distinguish right from wrong. Therefore it is the practice of the Church to prepare children who have reached this age for the Sacrament of Reconciliation, which offers them the grace to nurture virtues, overcome sinful tendencies and enlighten their consciences. The regular reception of this sacrament before the reception of any other sacraments does much to dispose children to the grace God wishes to lavish on them. Like Reconciliation, the Sacraments of Confirmation and Eucharist ordinarily require that a person has the use of reason. Consequently, for Confirmation one must be suitably instructed in the basic meaning of the sacrament and be able to renew one's baptismal promises. For First Holy Communion, one must be able to distinguish the Real Presence of Jesus in the Eucharist from ordinary bread and wine. These criteria determine their readiness to receive the sacraments of Reconciliation, Confirmation and Eucharist.

As we prepare for the move to restored order, forming families in the way of discipleship must be a priority. The Church teaches that parents are the first educators of their children in the faith, and the local church and the community are here to encourage, empower and equip them in this awesome task. All catechesis should be geared toward leading parents and children together into a life-giving relationship with Jesus Christ as members of his Mystical Body, the Church, and not just to the completion of requirements in a sacramental preparation process. In the past, parishes relied heavily on catechists, youth ministers, and others to teach children the basics of the Catholic Faith. However, this “outsourcing” approach to catechesis – in practice – often eroded the God-given vocation the parents have to form their children’s faith in the home, which is the Domestic Church. In this new model our diocese is embracing, the role of parish catechetical leaders and catechists will be to support parents.

on criteria to determine readiness for each sacrament, as well as ways to proceed with catechizing their child.

While it is the role of the parents to determine when their child is ready to begin the preparation for Reconciliation and then Confirmation and First Holy Communion, they should remember that in wanting to delay the reception of Confirmation they will be delaying the reception of Eucharist, as First Holy Communion will not be received without the Sacrament of Confirmation. When parents or legal guardians together with the pastor or parish catechist determine the child is ready, they will first receive the Sacrament of Reconciliation. After this, parents and children can participate as a family in all sessions offered in preparation for Confirmation and First Holy Communion. In order to ensure that faith formation is truly a lifelong journey from womb to tomb, we are also developing catechesis for parents requesting Baptism during the period of infancy and early childhood (0-6 years old)

“Forming families in the way of discipleship must be a priority. The Church teaches that parents are the first educators of their children in the faith, and the local church and the community are here to encourage, empower and equip them in this awesome task.”

Parishes, drawing from diverse catechetical models, will offer sessions for parents and children in preparation for the reception of Reconciliation, and then for Confirmation and First Holy Communion. Parishes will establish a time for parent/child sessions to begin the child’s catechesis for these sacraments. It will be the role of parents, in close collaboration with the pastor and catechetical leader, to determine that their child is ready for each of the sacraments. Parents will receive information

that will help them to develop family catechesis in their home from the very beginning of the faith journey. Parishes will accompany these families as their children grow through these formative years and offer suggestions for family catechesis and living the faith in the home. There will also be gatherings either in parishes or in regions for these families to continue their journey of becoming Domestic Churches where the faith is both caught and taught.

In all of this, our diocese is embracing in a fresh way what the Church has always called for: prioritizing the faith of families, through which the future of humanity and of the Church passes. We are renewing our dedication to forming, catechizing, and helping parents and families to become the communities of faith they are called to be. Here we see that formation in discipleship is not to be understood as something only for school-aged children. Rather, it is the way for all of God's people – children and adults – to grow together as disciples of the Lord. We adults best form and catechize young people through our commitment to lifelong faith formation for ourselves. Jesus blessed children but taught adults. In this, he empowered those same adults to hand on his Gospel to their children.

Here is the true transformation I hope to achieve: family catechesis is not only a renewed approach to preparing our children to receive Baptism, Reconciliation, Confirmation and Eucharist, but is also a shift in focus toward lifelong faith formation with adults. After receiving these wonderful sacraments around the age of discretion, children will continue receiving faith formation with their families, growing in their prayer lives, developing virtuous hearts, and learning more about the great truths of our faith. In all of this, parents will be challenged and empowered to be the primary catechists, with the support of our parishes, in handing on our Catholic faith to another generation. As we recognize the challenges of living in a mobile society, especially among our military families, our parishes will work closely with those who move into our diocese to ensure that their older children, who already receive the Eucharist, are properly prepared to celebrate Confirmation, while at the same time being encouraged toward frequent reception of Reconciliation.

To our parents especially, I say: now is our opportunity to move forward in faith! Be not afraid! If you don't feel equipped, seek the help of the Holy Spirit (and your local parish). Few parents are "expert" in the faith, no one graduates from learning and growing in our faith. Together, as members of Christ's Body, lavished with gifts of the Holy Spirit, we can accomplish all things in Christ who strengthens us. And we can together, every day, say with the Psalmist, "Teach me your ways, O Lord, so that I may walk in your truth" (Ps 25:4).



Conclusion

I believe that this is a time of great grace for our diocese. Instead of simply wringing our hands and lamenting the fact that we are losing young people to other churches or to no faith in particular, I believe that the Holy Spirit is moving us to be proactive in forming our children and families in the faith of Jesus Christ from the time they are born throughout their entire life. We have long talked about the fact that parents are to be "the first teachers of the ways of the faith" for their children; but now we need to put it into practice. As a diocese, let us all commit to

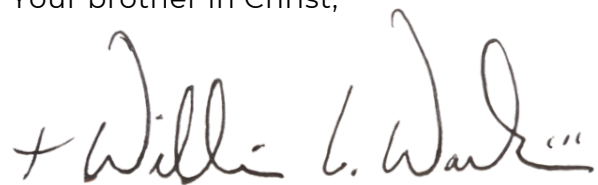
*“Here is the **true transformation** I hope to achieve: family catechesis is not only a renewed approach to preparing our children to receive Baptism, Reconciliation, Confirmation and Eucharist, but is also a **shift in focus toward lifelong faith formation with adults**. After receiving these wonderful sacraments around the age of discretion, children will continue receiving faith formation with their families, **growing in their prayer lives, developing virtuous hearts, and learning more about the great truths of our faith.**”*

sharing our faith, talents and the gifts of the Spirit with one another “to equip the saints for the work of ministry, for building up the body of Christ, until all of us come to the unity of the faith and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to maturity, to the measure of the full stature of Christ” (Eph 4:12-13). This is what God desires: to share his life with us and for us to grow into the image and likeness of his Son. As stated earlier, offering these sacraments of initiation to our children as soon as they are allowed, without tremendous barriers or conditions to be met, allows Jesus’ words to come alive in a new way: “Let the little children come to me, and do not stop them; for it is to such as these that the kingdom of heaven belongs” (Matt 19:14). And, as Jesus proclaimed to his disciples in the Gospel of Matthew, “Without cost you have received; without cost you are to give” (Matt 10:8). Together, let us go forward boldly! This is something that is very positive and good. In the midst of so much confusion and anxiety and division, the Holy Spirit is calling us to unity of action in the joy of the Gospel. Let us be encouraged by St. Paul, an apostle and fearless teacher of the Faith, who wrote to the Christians in Ephesus this impassioned plea:

“I, then, a prisoner for the Lord, urge you to live in a manner worthy of the call you have received, with all humility and gentleness, with patience, bearing with one another through love, striving to preserve the unity of the spirit through the bond of peace: one body and one Spirit, as you were also called to the one hope of your call; one Lord, one faith, one baptism; one God and Father of all, who is over all and through all and in all.” (Eph 4:1-6)

May this be our goal as well, to the honor and glory of God. May the Blessed Virgin Mother teach us and guide us to stay close to her Son, and may all of the saints, especially the patron saints of our diocese: St. Michael the Archangel, St. Elizabeth Ann Seton, and St. Thomas More, intercede for us as we live the sacraments and thus enjoy communion in the Lord.

Your brother in Christ,



The Most Reverend William A. Wack, CSC
Bishop of the Diocese of Pensacola-Tallahassee

Appendix – FAQs on Restored Order

Isn't it a problem that a person who is only 7 years old might not properly understand the Holy Spirit or Confirmation?

This may very well be true, but neither do they fully understand the mystery of Baptism and Eucharist, which are administered to infants and small children. It is also true to say that children are capable of a deep faith, trust and wonder that adults could learn from. Ongoing catechesis and formation will continue to be vital for everyone who wishes to receive the sacraments and grow in the Faith. Like Baptism and the Eucharist, Confirmation is not something that one earns; it is a pure gift from God.

Confirmation for teens is something special. Shouldn't we keep this tradition of teenagers receiving the Holy Spirit during their years as a high school student?

As I mentioned earlier in this Letter, teenage Confirmation is a relatively recent tradition. And in recent years, fewer and fewer teens are receiving the Sacrament of Confirmation. All the sacraments should be special occasions of grace and celebration, no matter what age one has reached when they are received.

What are we going to do with young people after Confirmation? Won't they just leave the church earlier and not continue to practice the faith?

This is a huge concern for us as a Church. Again, we ought not use Confirmation as an incentive to force young people to come to confirmation classes in high school. The summit of our Faith is not Confirmation, but the Holy Eucharist which, celebrated each Sunday, offers us a privileged opportunity to participate in the wedding of heaven and earth. For those who have been fully initiated through the sacraments into the life of Christ and his Church, we need ongoing, solid and engaging catechesis to kindle the faith of young people and adults together for a lifetime of living as disciples. This is why our diocese will be focusing on family catechesis for all ages. Not only is this a solution to the objection raised, it is the proper way to catechize and form one another as Catholics for life.

Who is going to teach Confirmation classes?

Presently, our parishes form our young people for First Reconciliation and Communion when they have reached 7 years old or so. Parents are, as has been noted, the primary educators in the faith for their children. Our parishes will assist the parents in this sacred duty. Under this new model, children would also be prepared to receive Confirmation at the same time they are prepared for First Holy Communion.

What about families moving into the diocese who have children who have not received Confirmation yet?

As long as we have a model in place for sacramental preparation and family catechesis, that family, in cooperation with their parish, could prepare their child for Confirmation and have them confirmed at the next possible occasion.

Appendix – FAQs on Restored Order cont.

What about the children/youth over the age of 7 who are not yet confirmed when this movement to the restored order takes place?

We will be working with parishes to develop a plan for these children to be confirmed over the next couple of years with more than one “grade” being confirmed at a time. If need be, there will be two celebrations of the Sacrament of Confirmation in a parish for a couple of years until we have transitioned to a full implementation of Confirmation being celebrated with First Holy Communion. As bishop of the diocese, I am the ordinary minister of Confirmation, but if the need arises, I can delegate this responsibility to the Vicar General or to the pastor of the parish, who of course works in communion with me.

Why make this change now?

As has been mentioned many times, the current model seems to be lacking. Not only are fewer and fewer people returning for Confirmation in their mid-to-late teens, it is painfully obvious that even our youngest children desperately need the special graces of the Holy Spirit that come with the Sacrament of Confirmation to assist them in living out their faith in this time of confusion, turmoil and uncertainty.

How long will this take for this change to come about fully?

This will take a few years to implement, to be sure. First, we must focus heavily on establishing solid family catechesis. We will also begin having a process for young couples after the baptism of their infant to assist them in continuing their own faith formation and be empowered to carry out the formation of their children in the faith. While this is happening, we will begin to “step down” the age for Confirmation. The whole process of the full implementation of restored order across our diocese will take several years, with each parish determining its own unique time-frame of implementation.

References

- 1) Bishop William A. Wack, CSC. "Sharing the Gift - Pastoral Letter." Diocese of Pensacola-Tallahassee; ptdiocese.org/pastoral-letter; 6 Nov 2021
- 2) 2001 United States Conference of Catholic Bishops Decree on Canon 891 and the Age of Confirmation; <https://www.usccb.org/beliefs-and-teachings/what-we-believe/canon-law/complementary-norms/canon-891-age-for-confirmation>
- 3) Benedict XVI, Sacramentum Caritatis, The Holy See, 22 Feb 2007, https://www.vatican.va/content/benedict-xvi/en/apost_exhortations/documents/hf_ben-xvi_exh_20070222_sacramentum-caritatis.html

Scripture texts in this work are taken from the New American Bible, revised edition © 2010, 1991, 1986, 1970 Confraternity of Christian Doctrine, Washington, DC.

Catechism citations from the Catechism of the Catholic Church. 2nd ed. Washington, DC: United States Catholic Conference, 2000.