

Teller County Catholic Community

Guidelines for the Restored Order of the Sacraments of Initiation

Introduction

The sacraments of Christian initiation - Baptism, Confirmation, and the Eucharist - lay the foundations of every Christian life. "The sharing in the divine nature given to men through the grace of Christ bears a certain likeness to the origin, development, and nourishing of natural life. The faithful are born anew by Baptism, strengthened by the sacrament of Confirmation, and receive in the Eucharist the food of eternal life. By means of these sacraments of Christian initiation, they thus receive in increasing measure the treasures of the divine life and advance toward the perfection of charity."

(Catechism of the Catholic Church, 1212)

The basic guidelines for the preparation and reception of the Restored Order of the Sacraments of Initiation are as follows: Baptism preparation and reception from 0-7 years old; Reconciliation preparation starts with children who are in first grade.; Reconciliation reception is in second grade; Confirmation and First Eucharist preparation is in second grade and the reception is during the parish Confirmation liturgy.

QUESTIONS & ANSWERS

1. What is Confirmation?

Confirmation is the second of the three sacraments of Christian initiation. Confirmation is the completion of Baptism and the sacrament by which the baptized faithful are anointed with chrism by the laying on of hands. The grace received is the fullness of the Holy Spirit and his gifts. We also describe this fullness as the completion, strengthening, or perfection of the Holy Spirit received in Baptism.

2. What are the Sacraments of Initiation?

The sacraments of Baptism, Confirmation, and Eucharist are interrelated and all three are required for full Christian initiation.

3. Who is the minister of the Sacrament of Confirmation?

The ordinary minister of Confirmation is the bishop. In the Diocese of Colorado Springs, the Bishop will confer Confirmation at the parish Confirmation liturgy.

4. Who can receive the Sacrament of Confirmation?

A candidate for confirmation must be at the age of discretion, seven years of age or above and must meet the following requirements:

- Be baptized and not previously confirmed
- Must be Catholic (children baptized in another church must make a Profession of Faith)
- Must be properly instructed
- Must be capable of renewing their Baptismal promises
- Must have previously been prepared for and have received the Sacrament of Reconciliation

5. Why would you receive Confirmation early?

By placing Confirmation at this age, we are following the natural sequence of the Sacraments of Christian Initiation: Baptism, then Confirmation, and then reception of First Eucharist. It should also be noted that this is the sequence followed by RCIA (*Rite of Christian Initiation of Adults*) which requires that children and adults in the catechumenate receive all three sacraments together, even if the children are younger than the age at which the Catholic children of the parish are routinely confirmed and by the Eastern Catholic Churches for infants and adults alike (CCC 1232).

In addition, by placing Confirmation prior to the reception of First Eucharist it makes it easier to view the Eucharist as the "summit" of Christian initiation (CCC 1233).

6. When our children are confirmed prior to First Eucharist, how are they to make an adult commitment to the Church?

All sacraments are a gift from our Heavenly Father, who desires to give us His very life, which we call grace. Sacraments are not earned or merited. For this reason, Confirmation should not be perceived as the sacrament of adult commitment to the Church. In fact, the Church even requires priests to confirm infants and children younger than the age of reason when they are in danger of death so that they may receive the fullness of the Holy Spirit. An authentic mature commitment to Christ and the Church is expressed in full participation in the Eucharist and apostolic life of the Church. It is not achieved at a single moment but throughout the life-long deepening of our relationship with Christ. This begins in childhood and continues until death.

7. What is the historical and theological vision for Christian Initiation?

In the early Church the sacraments of initiation were three: Baptism, Confirmation & Eucharist. They were celebrated together in a single rite, with a bishop as presider. This was the practice of the Roman Rite up until the 5th or 6th century when bishops could no longer be present at all baptisms, leading to a time of separation between baptism and confirmation. At first the time of separation was short, but as time went on, the delay for the bishop to arrive grew. Still the Church celebrated the sacraments in the order of Baptism, Confirmation & Eucharist until this century.

In 1910 Pope Pius X recognized that children were not being allowed First Communion until the age of twelve to fourteen. He felt that such a denial was contrary to the vision of Jesus who always drew children to himself. Pius X ordered that children be allowed to come to the table of the Eucharist as soon as they could distinguish the Eucharist from ordinary bread. The age was then lowered to around seven. Confirmation then came after First Eucharist. The reforms of Vatican Council II called the Church to restore the original order of sacraments. This is not without challenge and difficulties. Such a change presumes a deep commitment on the part of the family to nurture the life of the young. Such a commitment means that parents have a need to understand the reasons for change & the ways in which they can help their children.

The main reason for restoring the order of the sacraments (i.e. putting Confirmation before First Communion) is to emphasize that Eucharist (Communion) is THE sacrament, which celebrates our FULL membership in the Body of Christ. It is the sacrament of ongoing growth and the sacrament of unity. The Church tells us that it "culminates" the initiation process. When it comes last in order, it calls us to renew that baptismal covenant each time we come to the Table of the Eucharist.

8. What is the Restored Order of the Sacraments?

Catholics who were baptized in infancy receive Confirmation *before* First Eucharist, not *after*. Practically speaking, this means that the two sacraments are received at Mass, with Confirmation being celebrated after the homily.

9. Why do they call it Restored Order?

During the first five hundred years or so of the history of the Roman Catholic Church (and still today in the Christian churches of the East), it was always the case that the sacraments of Christian initiation were celebrated in an invariable sequence: Baptism, Confirmation, and Eucharist. And it was almost always the case that all three sacraments were celebrated together at the same time, even with infants.

The RCIA (*Rite of Christian Initiation of Adults*) requires that children and adults in the catechumenate receive all three sacraments together, even if the children are younger than the age at which the Catholic children of the parish are routinely confirmed.

Putting the celebration of Confirmation between Baptism and Eucharist better expresses its role as the completion of Baptism. As a matter of fact, the sacrament that is the culmination of a person's Christian initiation is the Eucharist, not Confirmation.

Theologically, it is the gift of the Holy Spirit given in all its fullness at Confirmation that best prepares one to receive Eucharist, and thus to be most fully joined to the Body of Christ. As a result, this change reflects an emphasis on the belief that everything leads to the Eucharist, which is the source and summit of our faith. Following the lead of official documents that were issued by the Church after the Second Vatican Council, more and more places are restoring this original order to the celebration of the sacraments of Christian initiation.

10. What is the Church's stance in linking Confirmation and First Eucharist?

In article #1275, *The Catechism of the Catholic Church* articulates the inseparable nature of the Sacraments of Initiation as follows: "Christian initiation is accomplished by three sacraments together: Baptism which is the beginning of new life; Confirmation which is its strengthening; and the Eucharist which nourishes the disciple with Christ's Body and Blood for his transformation in Christ."

11. Why is our parish celebrating Confirmation and First Eucharist at the same event?

In the early Church, Christian initiation was celebrated together as a single event. The person was immersed into the waters of Baptism, anointed with chrism, and shared in the Eucharistic meal. Over time, and for many reasons, the celebration of these sacramental rituals became separated from one another. In the renewal of the sacraments mandated by the Second Vatican Council, the Church was invited to restore the celebrations of the sacraments of Christian initiation to their original order—Baptism, Confirmation, Eucharist. This restored order helps us recognize that sharing in the Eucharist completes our initiation into the Church.

12. What about age? Doesn't the Church require a certain age for Confirmation?

Both the *Rite of Confirmation* and Canon Law (Canon #891) set the age of discretion (age 7) as the age for Confirmation. Effective July 2002, the U.S. Conference of Bishops designated the age for Confirmation to be between the age of discretion and age 16. Within that range, local bishops determine their own diocesan policy.

13. Isn't Confirmation a sacrament of maturity that should come after First Eucharist?

Not really. Confirmation is actually the completion of Baptism (by the full gift of the Holy Spirit). The perfection of baptismal grace found in the Sacrament of Confirmation is not dependent upon age or knowledge of the confirmand. The grace that is conferred is a free gift and 'does not need ratification to become effective (Cf. CCC 1308).

The common practice of high school reception of Confirmation has given the impression that somehow the sacrament is merited by virtue of age or training. In truth, the Sacrament of Confirmation is an effective vehicle of grace at any age as long as it is validly conferred. Thus, those that receive the sacrament are able to reap its benefits from the moment of reception. The graces of this sacrament conferred at a young age could be of great assistance to young people as they grow toward adolescence and young adulthood. Regardless of age, Confirmation is always a Sacrament of Initiation. The important thing to remember is that sacraments are not about age alone, they are about growing in faith, about sharing in God's grace.

14. Is it wrong, then, to be confirmed after receiving Eucharist?

Of course not. The Church has many ways of celebrating the mysteries of God's love in the sacraments. But because Rome so strongly encourages restoring the order of celebrating the Sacraments of Christian Initiation, don't be surprised if more and more communities restore the original sequence—Baptism, Confirmation and First Eucharist.

15. I am concerned that if children are now confirmed in the third grade, they will drop out of religious education later.

Confirmation has been misunderstood and treated as graduation from learning about the Faith. This is neither the true meaning of the sacrament nor the intention of the Church. Growth in the understanding and living out of our faith is the result of a life-long effort. Parents and siblings have the first responsibility of being an example of Jesus Christ to each other and living the Gospel each day. Children will stay in religious education if they see their parents striving to grow in holiness through Adult Faith Formation, family prayer, Scripture reading, Sunday Mass, regular confession, and living a life of charity. Parents are to keep their children in religious education programs just as they keep their child in school until graduation. It is the parent's responsibility to see that their children grow in the faith.

16. How can a young child know everything about the faith?

Religious education or catechesis is a life-long process. Adults should regularly study our faith, read the scriptures, participate in the sacraments, and practice charity. Youth from Kindergarten through High School are expected to participate in processes of faith formation. With this in mind, Confirmation preparation is simply an explanation of the sacrament itself in the context of an active family faith life and parish catechesis. This is similar to what took place for First Reconciliation and First Eucharist.

17. What is the role of the parents in the preparation?

Parents, you have asked to have your child baptized. In doing so you are accepting the responsibility of training them in the practice of the faith. It will be your duty to bring him/her up to keep God's commandments as Christ taught us, by loving God and neighbor (RB #39).

The Diocese of Colorado Springs Policies for the preparation of Sacraments clearly state that "Parents/guardians of all children are to participate in those catechetical programs offered by the parish for parents/guardians to help them grow in their own understanding and appreciation of the communal aspect of the sacrament." Parents must therefore attend adult formation classes on the Sacraments.

18. How will my child be preparing for Restored Order?

In the restored order, 1st Reconciliation preparation is done in first grade and then it is received during Advent of the second grade. After Reconciliation is received, then preparation for Confirmation and Eucharist commences. This means that the close connection between Baptism and Confirmation is emphasized, while recognizing the importance of Eucharist as the culmination of Christian initiation.

19. Can my child prepare for Restored Order at home?

All parents should be forming their children in the faith at home, from the moment of their baptism.

"After making the decision to catechize their children at home, parents are to meet with their pastor/sacramental minister and/or his delegate for assistance in developing a catechetical plan for their family. Anyone assuming the role of catechist for children or youth is expected to use the catechetical materials and recommended texts that are found to be in doctrinal compliance with the Catechism of the Catholic Church by the Bishops' Ad Hoc Committee on the Catechism. Parents are expected to prepare for their role as catechist by participating in courses and workshops offered by their parish or by the Diocese. And parents are expected to meet with their pastor/sacramental minister and/or his delegate periodically to review the progress of their catechetical efforts. [Policies for Home School Religious Education of the Diocese of Colorado Springs].

However, "because of the communal aspect of celebrating the Sacraments, children home schooled for religious education must participate in a parish process of preparation for the first reception of the Sacraments of Penance and Holy Communion and for the reception of the Sacrament of Confirmation in which children from the Catholic schools and catechetical ministry programs are united. They must participate in all of its communal dimensions (ritual, service, spiritual retreats, etc.) and any other requirements determined by the parish. [Policies for Home School Religious Education of the Diocese of Colorado Springs].

Therefore, yes, you may home school your child in the faith, but no, you must participate in the parish process for preparation for the Sacraments.

20. How will I know if my child is ready for Confirmation?

Readiness for Confirmation cannot be separated from readiness for Eucharist, and sacramental readiness is never about learning, but about faith. As your child prepares for Confirmation and Eucharist, here are three things to keep in mind:

- Sacraments are always a beginning. As your child matures in faith, he/she will grow in his/her understanding of Confirmation and experience of the Eucharist.
- The Eucharist is the culmination of the three Sacraments of Initiation. Your child is now welcomed as a fully participating member of the Church.
- At any age, completion of the Sacraments of Initiation—Baptism, Confirmation, and Eucharist—in no way signals graduation. Rather it is the beginning of a lifetime of being nourished at the table of the Lord.

21. What about adults (i.e. parents and / or relatives) who have not been confirmed?

Many parents and / or relatives have not completed their Sacraments of Initiation. This is great opportunity for them to complete their sacramental initiation through the Sacrament of Confirmation and prepare with your child. All non-confirmed adults are invited to prepare with the adult preparation with your child or at the RCIA classes.

22. How does my family prepare for Restored Order?

The Diocese of Colorado Springs' guidelines for Sacrament preparation state that there must be regular attendance at Sunday Mass and parish instruction for not only the child, but also for the parents/guardians.

23. How will the Sacraments of First Eucharist and Confirmation be celebrated?

Confirmation and First Eucharist will be celebrated together in the same ceremony. Confirmation is reserved in Canon Law to the Bishop, or to those he may designate. In the Diocese of Colorado Springs, the celebrant for Restored Order First Eucharist and Confirmation will be the Bishop.

24. How do we prepare those our children who have not received Confirmation, but may have received First Eucharist?

If they have already received Baptism and Eucharist, they will be prepared with children their own age for Confirmation.

25. How will this change impact ministry to teens and our youth ministry programs?

In the long run, we believe this is a great step for youth ministry. "Receiving" the sacrament can be used as a carrot or bottom-line motivation for attendance. Instead of drawing teens by our own creative efforts and quality ministry, we can easily be tempted to rely on having a "captive" audience who is required to be present. The problem with captives is that they may really feel and act like prisoners, as they are forced to be present at meetings they really do not want to attend.

Also, because the sacrament tends to be the focus and destination, few teens stay involved once confirmation is celebrated. Instead of understanding the sacrament of confirmation as a beginning or the strengthening for a more committed Christian lifestyle, many teens walk away with a sense of relief that it is all over. As a result, it is viewed more as a rite of graduation from religious education. The irony is that confirmation celebrates an initiation into a church from which many immediately drop out.

Parish based Youth Ministry programs are called to have the mission of the church as its purpose. They are called to incorporate the proclamation of the Gospel, through evangelization, growth in holiness and fullness of faith; and by loving and serving all those in need. Our youth ministry teams must evangelize, build teens up through formation, and send them out to minister, thereby help these young disciples, through the power of the Holy Spirit received in Baptism and Confirmation, become mature apostles to their peers.

28. Does removing Confirmation from the context of a high school program miss an opportunity for a much-needed ministry to our youth at a time when they are looking for recognition and a sense of belonging?

The preparation for the celebration of Confirmation should not be used simply as a means to an end, however noble. Proper youth ministry attends to the spiritual needs of our youth and can be based upon a deepening of the sacramental graces received in the sacraments of Christian initiation.

29. How long to do I need keep my children in religious education programs?

Parents, being the first teachers of their children, have the responsibility to educate their children throughout high school, in all areas including the Faith. Parents are to keep their children in religious education programs just as they keep their child in school until graduation from high school.

30. Do I have a choice on Restored Order?

Yes, although this is the preferred order for the Sacraments of Initiation, you as primary educators of your children, have the right to prepare your child for the Sacraments whenever you feel is appropriate.