



Q What is the Sacrament of Confirmation?

A Confirmation is one of three Sacraments of Christian Initiation. It completes the Sacrament of Baptism, in which a new Christian dies and rises with Christ by being immersed in water or by having water poured on his or her head. In Confirmation, a bishop seals new Christians with the gift of the same Holy Spirit that Jesus sent upon his disciples after his Resurrection and on Pentecost. To confirm means to “complete” or “perfect.”

Q Why is my child preparing for Confirmation as well as First Eucharist this year? Is this a new practice?

A Actually, the practice of receiving Confirmation after Baptism and before First Eucharist is the ancient and original order in which new Christians received the Sacraments of Initiation. In our time the Church has rediscovered and reestablished this ancient way of initiating new members.

The Second Vatican Council called for revising the Rite of Baptism for adults and for restoring the catechumenate.

Questions Parents Ask About Confirmation



The catechumenate is a step-by-step process for inquiring about Christian faith, learning Church teaching, and seeking full initiation in the Sacraments of Baptism, Confirmation, and Eucharist. Responding to the Council’s summons, the Church approved the new *Rite of Christian Initiation of Adults* (RCIA) in 1974. The new rite gives us the model process for initiating new members into the Church.

Today adults and children over seven years of age can receive Baptism, Confirmation, and First Eucharist as a unified initiation at the Easter Vigil, just as early Christians did. Your diocese or parish chooses to confirm already-baptized children before they receive First Communion. This restores the original order in which Christians received the Sacraments of Initiation.

Q I was confirmed in eighth grade, my wife in tenth, now my son at this young age?

A Although the *Order of Confirmation* and Canon #891 name the age of discretion (about seven) as the age for Confirmation, the Church also allows bishops’ conferences and bishops in their dioceses to follow their own pastoral practice. In the United States, dioceses differ in the ages at which their bishops confirm. Some confirm young people in seventh or eighth grade or at tenth or eleventh grade. These candidates usually receive extensive catechesis before receiving the sacrament. Some confirm children at second or third grade to restore the place of Confirmation after Baptism and before First Eucharist. Some dioceses allow parishes to confirm at any of these ages.





Wouldn't it be better for bishops to agree on one age?



Setting uniform age for Confirmation might seem an easier way to approach the sacrament—and its catechesis—but it is not necessarily a better way. Why? First of all, the Church recognizes that to speak to people of diverse cultures and backgrounds, it must adapt and celebrate its rites to meet pastoral needs. That is why both the age and the form of the *Order of Confirmation* have varied throughout history.

Secondly, as a sacrament, Confirmation—like all sacramental rituals—immerses us in the mystery of God with us. Rituals bring purpose to our lives; they open us to mystery without defining it precisely. The *Order of Confirmation* celebrates the abiding, inspiring, sustaining, and empowering presence of the Holy Spirit, who creates Church in and with us.

Confirmation at whatever age is always an initiation sacrament linked to Baptism and the Eucharist through rituals. Candidates for Confirmation always renew their baptismal vows as part of celebration of Confirmation. The Sacrament of Confirmation is celebrated during the Mass, so the baptized and newly anointed Christians complete their initiation journey by sharing Holy Communion at Jesus' table.



How did the order of the Sacraments of Initiation get mixed up, changed, and then changed back again?



“In response to pastoral needs” is the short answer. Interestingly, throughout the centuries the Eastern Church has continued to welcome new members, even babies, by celebrating all three sacraments as a unified rite. Priests have authority to baptize babies, confirm them, and bring them to Eucharist by giving them a taste of the Blood of Christ.

In the Western Church, Confirmation became separate from Baptism to enable bishops to confirm all the Christians in their dioceses. Priests baptized new members, but bishops completed the initiation and welcomed them to the Eucharistic table. As infant rather than adult Baptism became the rule, the Church began to baptize babies year-round rather than only at the Easter Vigil.

The Jansenist movement of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries exaggerated people's unworthiness and the corruption of human nature. Although popes condemned the movement, it led to infrequent reception of Communion and Confession before Communion (which is how First Reconciliation preparation came to precede First Communion). The

age for First Communion advanced into the teen years until 1910, when Pope Pius X lowered the age to around seven, considered the age of reason. The pope's decree did not affect the age of Confirmation.



What is so important about linking the Sacraments of Initiation?



The three sacraments initiate new Christians into the one Paschal Mystery of Jesus' Death, Resurrection, Ascension, and sending of the one Holy Spirit. In Baptism a Christian plunges into Jesus' Death and rises to new life, making the same journey Jesus made through death to new life.

In Confirmation the candidate receives a special outpouring of the Holy Spirit, whom Jesus breathed upon his followers on the first Easter and sent upon them in fiery tongues on Pentecost.

In First Eucharist, members of the Church receive for the first time the Body and Blood of Christ. We who gather in Jesus' name to share the Eucharist become what we receive; we become the Body of Christ in the world.



Is my primary-age child ready and mature enough for Confirmation?



If your baptized child is growing up in a home where you express your faith openly through personal prayer, through regular worship with a parish community, and through a life lived in accordance with Gospel values, your child is ready for Confirmation and First Eucharist. Parents' lived faith is irreplaceable in their children's religious awakening.

If your child is ready to receive First Communion, he or she is ready for Confirmation. The Church does not require greater maturity for Confirmation candidates than for those who receive First Eucharist.



If my child celebrates Confirmation now rather than as a teenager, won't he or she be missing an important step in his or her religious formation?



The Church recognizes Confirmation as a Sacrament of Initiation, not as a rite of passage that encourages adolescent commitment to the faith. We cannot say for sure at what age people make their faith their own. One person may do so at age 25, another at age 10, another at 55. Faith development is a process intimately connected

with every person's whole human growth toward and throughout adulthood. Parish communities that confirm second- or third-graders must provide ways other than Confirmation preparation to help their teens grow in faith, join in the life of the parish, and continue Jesus' mission of mercy and justice in the world.



What sort of catechesis or preparation for Confirmation does *Together in Jesus* provide?



Catechesis for any of the Sacraments of Initiation (Baptism, Confirmation, and Eucharist) is about welcoming candidates into our faith community with its own story, memories, understandings, values, actions, and rituals. It's about helping young people make our shared Christian life their own.

When preparing children for the sacraments, we need to resist the temptation to reduce our task to making sure children know prayers, sacramental signs, and words. Children's readiness for Confirmation does not turn on maturity or intellectual comprehension but on their faith and their friendship



with Jesus in the Spirit. They will invite the Holy Spirit to transform their lives many times over during their lifetimes in order to become more and more like Jesus.

Preparing children to receive Confirmation and Eucharist is about welcoming them into our faith community. Like a family, our faith community has its own stories, values, actions, and rituals for celebrating. *Together in Jesus* aims to help young people make our shared Christian life their own.

To prepare children for Confirmation, *Together in Jesus* immerses them in the Scripture stories and images that tell us about how the Holy Spirit acts in our world and in us. The lessons explore wind, fire, and oil as concrete ways children can recognize the activity of the invisible Spirit. The children make books that introduce the *Order of Confirmation* they will experience in celebrating the sacrament.

Together in Jesus understands that the children preparing for Confirmation are still concrete, hands-on learners. They learn from hearing and telling the Scripture stories of our tradition, which *Together in Jesus* provides in word and illustration. They learn from making a pinwheel, touching oil, and coloring a mosaic of the Holy Spirit. They learn from celebrating Jesus' continuing presence with us in liturgy and from praying with their families. As they grow in age and wisdom, these young Christians will respond in maturing ways to the Spirit's urging to be Jesus' hands, feet, and witness in the world.

Q Why only two lessons on the Sacrament of Confirmation?

A The two *Together in Jesus* lessons on Confirmation introduce but certainly do not exhaust the Church's teaching on the sacrament. Confirmation and First Eucharist initiate children's full participation in the life of the Christian community. They mark a growing-up moment that only begins ongoing reflection on what following Jesus asks of us. Parish religious education programs continue this growth process.

The *Together in Jesus* Confirmation lessons lead the children through the history of the Holy Spirit's action among God's people. They see how the Holy Spirit was active in creation and manifest in the history of the People of God. They discover that the fullness of the Holy Spirit filled Jesus to the brim and spilled over onto the Church at Pentecost. They appreciate how the Holy Spirit fills them in the celebration of Confirmation and welcomes them to the mission of Jesus, the mission of service to all of the world.



Q Will my child celebrate the Sacrament of Reconciliation before he or she celebrates Confirmation and First Eucharist?

A The Church requires that your child celebrate the Sacrament of Penance, or Reconciliation, before receiving First Eucharist. A child must be free from mortal sin and in a state of grace to receive Eucharist and, of course, also Confirmation. Parishes have the obligation to prepare children for First Reconciliation. Your child will be prepared for and celebrate First Reconciliation prior to the celebration of Confirmation and First Eucharist.

The preparation for and the celebration of the Sacrament of Reconciliation are usually separated by a significant time period from preparation for Confirmation and First Eucharist so that children do not receive the impression that they must always celebrate Reconciliation before receiving Holy Communion.

Q Should my child choose a Confirmation name?

A A baptized child has no need to choose a new name for Confirmation. In fact, Confirmation is a good time to ratify or "confirm" the name used at Baptism. The practice of choosing a new

name arose many centuries ago when people with pagan names entered the Church. The practice remained in the Roman Rite until the Second Vatican Council's revision of the *Rite of Confirmation*. Today we keep our baptismal names or choose a saint's name.

Q Who can act as Confirmation sponsor for my child?

A To emphasize the unity of Baptism and Confirmation, the Church strongly urges that one of the baptismal godparents act as Confirmation sponsor.

Your child's sponsor may be either male or female. The sponsor should be a fully initiated and active member of the Catholic Church—someone who is baptized, confirmed, and who regularly shares in the celebration of the Eucharist. A parent cannot be a sponsor for his or her own child.

Q What information will the parish require from me before confirming my child?

A Your parish will require information regarding your child's Baptism. Be ready to provide the date of your child's Baptism, the names of his or her godparents, and the name and address of the parish at which the Baptism took place.