

Preparing Catholic Young People for Confirmation

Archdiocese of Seattle Policies and Guidelines at a Glance

“Through the sacrament of Confirmation, those who have been born anew in Baptism receive the inexpressible Gift, the Holy Spirit, *by which they are endowed. . . with special strength. . .* Moreover, having received the character of the sacrament, they are *bound more intimately to the Church* and they *are more strictly obliged to spread and defend the faith both by word and by deed as true witnesses of Christ.*”

Rite of Confirmation

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VISION

Confirmation marks a unique moment in a person's life when one is invited to grow in faith and, through the power of the Holy Spirit, embrace a *new maturity** where all that has gone before takes on richer and deeper meaning further forming one as a faithful disciple, grateful steward, and active evangelist of the *Risen Christ*.

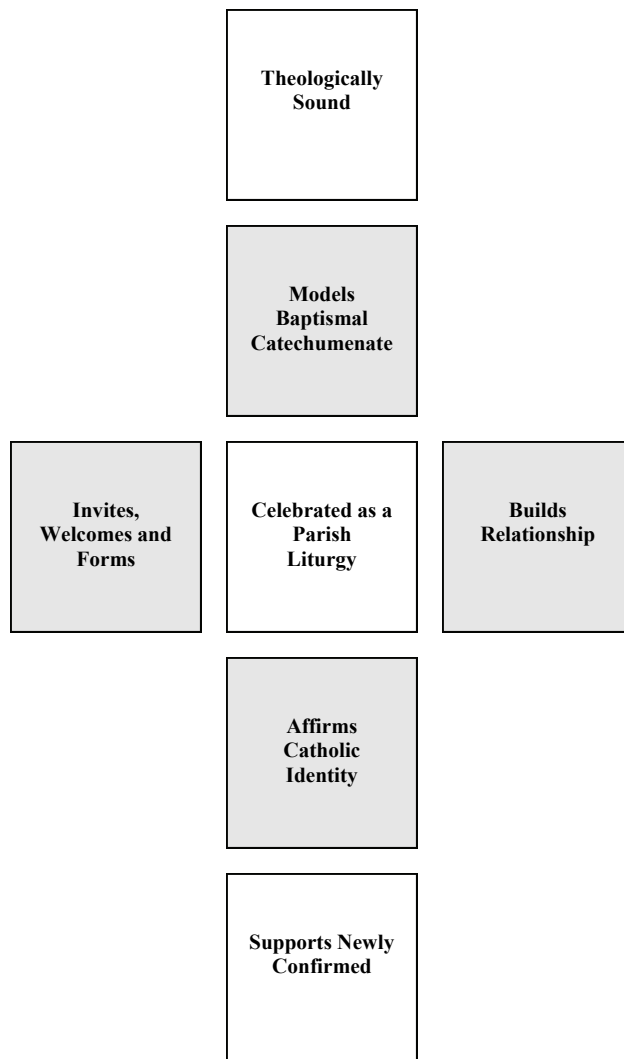
*As defined in *Secularity and the Gospel* by Rev. Ronald Rolheiser

GUIDING PRINCIPLES

1. We regularly and personally invite and welcome all baptized Catholic young people registered in the Archdiocese of Seattle between the ages of 13 and 18 to begin the Confirmation preparation journey.
2. We faithfully prepare young people to **See, Celebrate** and **Live** life as Catholics so they may know and embrace their Catholic identity and understand what it means to live life as a faithful disciple, grateful steward and active evangelist.
3. We accompany young people and their parents on their spiritual journey—marking a clear path uniting Baptism, Confirmation and Eucharist and emphasizing catechesis as an initiation and apprenticeship of the entire Christian life.
4. We create and foster in young people a commitment to the Risen Christ by sharing, affirming and modeling the lifelong faith practices of worship, prayer, study, stewardship and moral decision-making.
5. We regularly identify, evaluate and implement best practices and resources adaptable to a variety of parish settings to enrich and complement adolescent Confirmation preparation.
6. We appreciate the vital role the entire Church assembly plays in effective evangelization and take our cue from the Baptismal Catechumenate for creating a Confirmation preparation journey which—through relationships, ritual and worship—involves parents, sponsors and the entire parish community in modeling and nurturing the faith for our young people.
7. We value the faith commitment of our paid and volunteer ministers and provide them with the formation, resources and support they need to guide and prepare young people, their parents and sponsors to celebrate the Sacrament of Confirmation.

Adolescent Confirmation: Seven Essential Components

This framework for adolescent Confirmation is responsive to Seattle Archdiocesan policies and guidelines and meets the needs of young people, their parents, sponsors and the entire faith community and supports seven essential components:



In preparing young people for Confirmation we use a model which. . .

(Is) Theologically Sound

In accordance with the *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, parishes understand and clearly present the Sacrament of Confirmation as “increasing and deepening the grace of Baptism; strengthening the baptismal conferral of the Holy Spirit; and incorporating the baptized more firmly in Christ.

In Confirmation the baptized cement their bond with the Church, associate themselves more closely with the Church’s mission and experience an increase in the gifts of the Holy Spirit helping them bear witness to the Christian faith in words and deeds.”

Models The Baptismal Catechumenate

The Sacraments of Initiation—Baptism, Confirmation and Eucharist—are intimately bound together and form a single initiation by which persons enter into the life of faith and more fully realize their role in the mission and ministry of the Church. While the Rite of Christian Initiation of Adults is normative and serves as a model for all sacramental preparation, the pastoral reality is that for those faithful who were baptized as infants, Confirmation often marks the completion of their initiation into the Body of Christ.

Therefore, the Baptismal Catechumenate inspires the adolescent Confirmation preparation journey as it inspires all catechesis in the Church. Archdiocesan policy calls for adolescent Confirmation preparation to model the Rite of Christian Initiation so as to lead young people to more deeply seek the living God and continue the faith and conversion experience that began at their Baptism.

Pastors are encouraged to collaborate with youth ministers and liturgical experts to fashion appropriate public and communal rituals to mark key milestones in the Confirmation preparation process.

Affirms Catholic Identity

Parishes assist parents in guiding their children’s spiritual journey by clearly marking meaningful milestones and celebrating the sacramental life of the Church. Parishes provide parents of newly baptized children information illustrating expectations and experiences vital to their child’s Catholic identity and faith development, including a planning guide highlighting faith formation for preparing and celebrating the sacraments of Reconciliation, First Holy Communion and Confirmation.

A defined period of proximate formation precedes sacramental preparation and young people are clearly able to demonstrate they have been consistently participating in systematic faith formation at a Catholic parish and/or school.

Proximate and Sacramental (Immediate) Preparation sessions, activities and experiences help young people discover and responsibly practice the teachings, traditions, and rituals central to the Catholic faith.

Invites, Welcomes and Forms

The Catechumenate model encourages the full and active participation of the parish community in sharing significant moments in a candidate's faith journey. All the faithful have a role in inviting, welcoming and helping form young people for Confirmation—modeling what it means to be Catholic and how to live as faithful disciples, grateful stewards and active evangelists.

Builds Relationship

Parishes are to build and sustain relationships between candidates and the parish community through regular bulletin announcements, gathering space displays, general intercessions and related communication informing all of candidate progress and need.

Opportunities for shared prayer and worship between candidates and their parents, sponsors and the full parish community are to be nurtured and every effort is to be made to connect young people with each other and their larger community through worship, prayer, study, social activities and service to others.

(/s) Celebrated as a Parish Liturgy

Confirmation is to be celebrated in the parish church of the candidate, as the normal place of liturgies celebrated by the parish or faith community.

- In some instances it may be preferable to schedule a regional celebration for the sacrament of Confirmation, where several parishes may celebrate together in one location.
- If, for serious reasons, candidates are unable to participate in their parish celebration of Confirmation, they are to request the assistance of the Confirmation coordinator and appointed pastoral leader in finding another parish celebration they may attend.

Confirmation should take place during the normal Sunday Eucharist celebrated by the parish or faith community of the candidate.

- For practical and pastoral reasons, including the availability of the Archbishop or his delegate, Confirmation may be celebrated during the celebration of the Eucharist at another time.
- Confirmation is not usually celebrated during Lent. Nor is it appropriate for Confirmation to take place for these candidates during the Easter Vigil, which is reserved for those preparing for full initiation through the RCIA.
- Depending on circumstances or the pastoral needs of the community, Confirmation may be celebrated every year or every other year.

Permission of the Archbishop is required to celebrate Confirmation outside the celebration of the Eucharist.

Scheduling Confirmation is to be done in consultation with the Archbishop's Office. The Archbishop's Office initiates this consultation through a letter that is sent out in the fall asking parishes/regions to submit requested dates for Confirmation.

Supports the Newly Confirmed

Parishes are to actively invite the newly Confirmed to celebrate Eucharist and to continue serving the worshipping community as grateful stewards—as Eucharistic ministers, lectors, musicians, ushers, greeters, catechists, and in other ways which encourage the sharing of their gifts of time, talent and treasure. They are also to be strongly encouraged to continue to participate in parish youth and young adult ministry programs.

Roles and Expectations

Adolescent Candidates for Confirmation

It is expected young people, baptized into the Catholic faith as infants/children and already welcome at the Eucharistic table, will take seriously their call to complete their Christian initiation and begin preparing for Confirmation at the invitation of their parish community.

A young person seeking to begin immediate preparation for Confirmation will be able to demonstrate at least an 8th grade understanding of the Catholic faith (having participated in a systematic parish faith formation program and/or attended a Catholic school). If such understanding and knowledge is not apparent, the young person is to be invited to begin a period of proximate formation before immediate formation for the celebration of the sacrament is proposed. The expected outcome of proximate formation is the young person's free decision to accept Confirmation and only then to begin preparation for the sacrament itself.

Preparation for Confirmation is to take place at the parish where the young person presently worships and/or is registered. Catholic high schools do not offer preparation programs for Confirmation but are to actively invite eligible young people to seek Confirmation in their own parishes.

At a minimum, young people presenting themselves for Confirmation are expected to:

1. Have participated prayerfully, faithfully, and responsibly in a process of preparation with attitudes and understandings appropriate to adolescence.
2. Be able to demonstrate knowledge and understandings of Jesus, his teachings and the values and practices of the Catholic faith as defined by Archdiocesan Religious Education and Confirmation Curriculum Learner Benchmarks.
3. Be faithfully attending Mass and celebrating Eucharist weekly.
4. After a defined period of preparation, be able and willing to express their free decision to accept Confirmation and a desire to continue to nurture their relationship with the Risen Christ (if a parent or another person were to coerce or force a candidate into celebration of the sacrament, it would be considered invalid).
5. Have participated in the sacrament of Reconciliation as part of the immediate preparation for the celebration of Confirmation.

Adequate preparation, or proper disposition, for the sacrament is determined by the appointed pastoral leader, in consultation with the Confirmation coordinator, at the completion of the preparation process.

Adolescent Confirmation Candidate Age Requirements

Young people who have been adequately prepared according to Archdiocesan guidelines and expectations, and who consciously and freely decide to be Confirmed, **are to be at least sixteen-years-of-age at the time they celebrate the sacrament.**

For pastoral reasons, an individual may be Confirmed at a younger age if s/he has the use of reason, is sufficiently instructed, properly disposed, and is able to renew their baptismal promises. In this case, the candidate must write a letter to the Archbishop stating their desire to be Confirmed. The appointed pastoral leader must also write a letter to the Archbishop giving their assessment of the candidate.

A young person who has not been baptized and is at least of catechetical age, or who was baptized Catholic but raised in another faith, is to be prepared for Confirmation within the Rite of Christian Initiation for Adults (RCIA). This is also the case for those who have been baptized Christian and who are now seeking full communion with the Catholic Church. If a young person who is a member of the Eastern Catholic Church requests the sacrament of Confirmation from a Latin Rite parish, the Liturgy Office is to be consulted to ensure the appropriate procedures are followed.

Adolescent Confirmation Candidate Name Requirements

In the Catechumenate model of Christian Initiation, young people preparing for Confirmation do not choose a new name but are Confirmed with their baptismal name. The act of reaffirming the name given them at their Baptism bears witness to the unity of the sacraments of initiation and affirms their baptismal promises.

While candidates are Confirmed with their baptismal name, they are also strongly encouraged to select a person from the canon of saints and “blessed” of the Church to study and emulate as a patron of their Confirmation. If a candidate desires, they may be Confirmed with both their baptismal name and the name of their patron saint.

Adolescent Confirmation Candidate Service Requirements

Catechesis and youth ministry in the years leading up to a young person’s decision to be Confirmed are to emphasize the demands of discipleship by focusing on the life and ministry of Jesus Christ (specifically *doing* in imitation of Christ). Services experiences are to be planned which teach and affirm the corporal and spiritual works of mercy and engage young people in serving others—most especially direct service to, and advocacy for, the poor and marginalized in their own community.

Service experiences are to be parish-based and consist of both individual and group opportunities. The emphasis should be on connecting young people with impressive people and organizations who model what it means to be a faithful disciple, grateful steward and active evangelist.

Lack of a candidate’s participation in a specific service experience shall not be used as the sole basis for denial or delay of the sacrament.

Adolescent Confirmation Candidate Retreat Requirements

Retreats offer candidates time away to reflect on their faith experience and to deepen their relationship with Jesus and each other. Parishes are to provide at least one retreat opportunity specific to Confirmation as part of immediate preparation for the sacrament. Alternatively, parishes may offer their candidates the option of participating in a regional or Archdiocesan retreat experience designed specifically for Confirmation. Lack of a candidate’s participation in a specific retreat experience shall not be used as the sole basis for denial or delay of the sacrament.

Parents

At Confirmation we again invite parents to support their child by participating in preparation experiences. Therefore, a parish Confirmation preparation journey is to include opportunities for parents to gather as a group, as well as with their adolescent candidate, to:

- Understand their role as models in the faith development of their son/daughter;
- Deepen their own faith lives; and
- Strengthen their family relationships so all may grow in relationship with God.

Parents are also responsible for encouraging their child/ren to attend preparation gatherings and activities while maintaining their child's freedom to make the final choice to be Confirmed. We are to remind parents that the choice they are asking their child to make is not whether or not to prepare—but whether or not to *believe* and be Confirmed. Such a decision can only be made after a period of thoughtful study, intentional practice and prayer.

Sponsors

The Rite of Christian Initiation describes sponsors as “persons who have known and assisted the candidates and stand as witnesses to the candidate’s moral character, faith and intention.” As such, young people are to be guided in their selection of a sponsor by the parish Confirmation Coordinator and their parents. Early in the preparation process each candidate is to be given a clear description of the following qualifications which are required by Church law (Canon 874):

- A sponsor must be at least sixteen years old.
- A sponsor must be a fully initiated Catholic (someone who has celebrated Baptism, Confirmation and Eucharist) who leads a life in harmony with the faith and the role to be undertaken.
- A sponsor must be free to celebrate the sacrament and not bound by any canonical penalty.
- A sponsor must not be the parent or legal guardian of the one to be Confirmed (it is also advisable that a boyfriend or girlfriend not serve as sponsor).

The full initiation of a candidate’s chosen sponsor is to be verified. Verification of full initiation is to be provided by the proposed sponsor to the parish by means of a recently issued baptismal certificate with notations, or a credible witness.

Archdiocesan policy also states:

- Candidates are to be encouraged to select one of their baptismal sponsors (godparents) if they meet requirements and expectations.
- A sponsor must be able to participate in the preparation process and be willing to serve as a guide, confidant and listener.
- Parishes are to provide formation for sponsors to help them appreciate the permanent nature of their role.

A well-planned parish Confirmation preparation process will include:

- A sponsor orientation session.
- Gatherings and formation sessions specifically for sponsors.
- Sponsor participation in candidate rituals and liturgical experiences.
- Sponsor participation in the rehearsal and liturgy celebrating the Rite of Confirmation.

These expectations assume the local residency of the sponsor and that s/he has a positive and comfortable relationship with the candidate. In special circumstances where a candidate’s intended sponsor is unable to meet one or more of these criteria, a proxy sponsor will be designated. The proxy must fulfill the same requirements as the sponsor. The absence of the sponsor during the celebration of Confirmation does not invalidate the sacrament.

The Parish Community

The Catechumenate model understands the heart of the Confirmation preparation journey as being located in the life of the full faith community.

A loving faith community is to be:

- Inviting—intentionally seeking out and personally inviting all Catholic young people and their parents to begin preparing for Confirmation.
- Welcoming and evangelizing—providing community support and involvement through rituals and activities where candidates, their parents and sponsors can experience the welcome and support of all members.
- Informed and engaged—maintaining awareness of the candidates’ preparation journey through pulpit announcements, notes in the parish bulletin, photo/essay displays in the gathering space, and requests for prayer and participation in parish activities.
- Supportive—creating opportunities for candidates to socialize and grow in relationship with each other while gaining a sense of belonging to the larger Church through worship, prayer, study and service.

The Archbishop

The Archbishop is the visible source and foundation of unity of the local Church and is the ordinary minister of the Sacrament of Confirmation. The Archbishop may grant delegation to his auxiliary bishops.

By law and by mandate of the Archbishop, pastors possess the faculty of administering Confirmation when they baptize one who is no longer an infant or when they admit one who is already baptized into the full communion with the Catholic Church. If necessary, the Archbishop may also grant a presbyter the faculty to Confirm baptized Catholics who desire the sacrament. This faculty is requested by the appointed leader in writing and includes the names of the individuals involved, the circumstances surrounding the request, and the date and place. Delegation of faculty is granted in writing for each case. The delegation is to be noted in the Confirmation register. Unless the faculty is explicitly granted to a presbyter, no Confirmation may take place.

If the Archbishop or his delegate fails to show up, the appointed pastoral leader is to make assiduous effort to contact the minister in question to determine whether faculties may be granted to the pastor or another presbyter. Any presbyter may Confirm a baptized person who is in danger of death. If possible, there should be some spiritual preparation beforehand, suited to the particular situation.

The Archbishop is also the chief catechist with primary responsibility for catechesis in the diocese and for ensuring “catechists are adequately prepared for their task,” (*Catechesi Tradendae*, 63).

The Archbishop and his staff:

- Establish sacramental policy and religious education guidelines.
- Ensure the textbooks and catechetical resources used in parishes are found on the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops Conformity List.

Pastors and Parish Life Coordinators

The Catechumenate Model encourages the whole-hearted support of the pastor. Pastors are responsible for ensuring the goals of the Archdiocesan catechetical mission are achieved by ensuring:

- The Baptismal Catechumenate inspires all parish catechesis.
- Catechesis emphasizes age-appropriate opportunities for adults, youth and children and includes a comprehensive plan for youth ministry and for the formation of catechetical leaders.
- A suitable catechesis is imparted for the celebration of the sacraments.

Pastors are to play a visible and active role in inviting, welcoming and supporting candidates, parents, sponsors and the full parish faith community as all reflect on what it means to be a fully initiated Catholic.

Parish Confirmation Leaders

All involved in ministering to adolescents are called to help them know what Jesus taught and intentionally appropriate essential Catholic beliefs.

People invited and recruited to the role of Confirmation Leader are to be:

- Faithful and actively practicing Catholics who are committed to Jesus and the Gospel.
- Leaders who enjoy being with young people and have the necessary knowledge and skills (or the willingness to develop them) to create and/or facilitate positive learning experiences.
- Good listeners who are able to establish healthy and appropriate relationships that invite active and reflective participation.
- Able to participate in Archdiocesan and Parish orientation and formation for Catechetical and Youth Ministers.

The expectation is those called to this ministry take seriously their role as spiritual guides and mentors and are able to prayerfully and faithfully help young people assume the responsibilities that come with full Christian initiation.

Formation Periods for Adolescent Confirmation

Proximate Formation : Typically Ages 13 to 15

The formal, systematic, ongoing Catholic faith formation a young person receives through Catholic schools, parish faith formation and youth ministry programs. If a young person is unable to demonstrate participation in a systematic parish faith formation program or attendance at a Catholic School, they are to be invited to begin a period of proximate formation before immediate formation for celebration of the sacrament is proposed.

Emphasis during Proximate Formation is on the study of the Sacred Scriptures, specifically the life and ministry of Jesus. It is also a time for affirming Catholic identity and providing young people with an age-appropriate and integrated way of **Seeing, Celebrating** and **Living** life as a faithful disciple, grateful steward and active evangelist of the Risen Christ.

This is typically a two-year period *preceding* the invitation to begin immediate preparation for Confirmation.

FORMATION PERIODS FOR ADOLESCENT CONFIRMATION, cont.

Immediate Formation : Typically Ages 16 to 18

The formation a young person receives after completing a period of proximate formation and accepting the invitation to be Confirmed. The expectation is that those seeking Confirmation will be able to demonstrate at least an Eighth Grade level of knowledge concerning the principle teachings and practices of the faith at the time the sacrament is conferred.

The focus now is on preparing candidates for celebration of the sacrament itself with special emphasis on the significance of Christian Initiation, the role and activity of the Holy Spirit, and the actions, words and gestures of the Rite of Confirmation.

Mission and Continuing Formation : All fully initiated into the Catholic Faith

The ongoing catechesis and support the newly Confirmed receive as they transition from the heightened experience of celebrating the sacrament to everyday life as a faithful Catholic.

Liturgical Rites

The Archdiocesan Liturgy Office will assist local parishes in planning the celebration of Confirmation. Since the Archbishop or one of his delegates is the presider, the Archdiocesan Liturgy Office will provide final approval for all liturgical planning.

**See Appendix 2 Confirmation Liturgical Guidelines*

Documentation and Parish Registers

Registration of the conferral of Confirmation is to take place in accord with the requirements of *CIC*, c. 895 and the sacramental records policy of the Archdiocese of Seattle regardless of immigration or legal standing of the candidate or their family.

Notification of the conferral of Confirmation must be sent to the Church of Baptism (see Sacramental Records Policies: SR, V. "Confirmation").