

CONFIRMATION – WHAT PARENT’S SHOULD KNOW

Is Confirmation “required?”

A. In short, yes. When an individual celebrates the sacrament of Confirmation, they complete their initiation into the Christian Community of the faithful (the Church). At the same time, they acknowledge that they will continue to grow in their understanding & love of God and neighbor in an intentional way, and to live her or his life as a disciple of Jesus.

What does the Church ask of parents in sacrament preparation?

The church views the role of parents in life long faith formation of youth as both a privilege and an obligation. Parents are the role models of faith, belief and practice and youth learn from their parents these attitudes and habits. When you presented your youth to the Church for Baptism, you were distinctly reminded that you have the responsibility to “bring your youth up in the practice of the faith” (*Rite of Baptism* 56). This privilege and obligation extends to all sacrament preparation.

What is the appropriate age for the Sacrament of Confirmation?

According to the official documents of the Church, the age for Confirmation and First Eucharist is the same. The *Code of Canon Law* states “Confirmation is to be conferred on the faithful about the age of discretion.” On August 31, 2001, the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops decreed the age of conferring the sacrament of Confirmation in the United States to be between “the age of discretion (about age 7) and about 16 years of age.” What this means is that within the age parameters set forth, **each local bishop may determine his own diocesan policy** regarding age for Confirmation. For this reason, we see a variety of practices in place from diocese to diocese and parish to parish.

How do I know if my youth is ready for Confirmation?

If a baptized youth of catechetical age is growing up in a home where the faith of the parents is actively lived out in personal prayer, faith conversations, regular worship with a parish community, and in a life lived in accordance with Gospel values, then that youth is ready.

The purpose of a parish sacrament preparation program is to **help youth and parents prepare** to celebrate these initiation events. A youth’s readiness for initiation is not a matter of reaching a certain level of knowledge of faith. It isn’t a matter of passing a litmus test of faith either. When a youth is confirmed, they are celebrating another stage in their full initiation into the Church community. **It is a beginning, not a graduation.** With guidance, participation in age-appropriate programs, and celebrating the sacraments, especially the Eucharist, they continue to grow in faith. Therefore, ongoing participation in faith formation programs and/or Catholic school is essential.

Preparation for and celebration of the Sacraments of Initiation in no way imply Christian maturity or “completion,” but rather the Sacraments celebrate an individual’s full membership in the Church. Continued catechesis and spiritual growth are integral to the life-long process of coming to Christian maturity and faith.

My youth is reluctant about participating in the Confirmation preparation program and being confirmed. What can I do?

First of all, you need to talk with your youth about why they are feeling reluctant. Are they uncomfortable with another person in the youth group or are they questioning their faith? If the issue is another person in the group, talk with the confirmation coordinator. If your youth is questioning their faith, don't panic—this is normal. Again, talk with the confirmation coordinator about your fears and concerns.

Most young people are confirmed, just as they were baptized, into their parents' religious tradition. However, before a person can truly own their faith, they need to question it. A good confirmation program will not only respect your youth's questions, but welcome his/her critical thinking.

As a parent, help your youth see the difference that faith makes in your own life. Talk about your own faith journey and what belonging to the Catholic Church or your parish has meant to you. Introduce him/her to faithful role models, both the famous and the infamous. Help your youth to see how faith comes to life when we live it out in service to others, when we pause to "retreat and reflect" on our faith, when we gather as a community to worship and give thanks for all the good moments we enjoy and seek guidance for those moments of doubt. If modeled by parents, youth will discover that belonging to the Church is meaningful, purposeful and necessary!