

# The Sacrament of Confirmation for Youth

A White Paper<sup>1</sup> from the Diocese of Dallas

***A Statement from the Office of Youth, Young Adult, and Campus Ministries, the Department of Catechetical Services, the Diocesan Catholic Schools Office, and the Office of Worship***

The 2012 United States Conference of Catholic Bishops' document *Disciples Called to Witness: The New Evangelization*<sup>2</sup> reminds us that "The task of the Church is to form Catholics who are willing to communicate and witness their faith." The Sacrament of Confirmation is administered to youth in the Diocese of Dallas normatively in the eighth grade.<sup>3</sup> We believe that Confirmation is an encounter with Christ which evokes the graciousness and generosity of God, through the gift of the Holy Spirit. Through this sacrament, youth are integrated into active and meaningful participation in the life of the Church. Effective formation creates an environment in which youth can be shaped, inspired, animated, transformed and empowered to active participation in the Body of Christ.

As Church leaders in the Diocese of Dallas, we are called to assess the effectiveness of existing formation, reconsidering and reimagining how current preparation for the sacrament meets the needs of youth. Formation for Confirmation, first *remote* and then *immediate*, should provide graced

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<sup>1</sup> White Paper = is an official, typically collaborative statement written to verify and develop a deeper understanding of a particular subject that is of interest to a wider audience. A White Paper intends to bring clarity to truth, with a deepened wisdom and understanding as a result of the effort. A White Paper is used to bring valuable guidance to a group that is concerned about a particular topic or issue.

<sup>2</sup> United States Conference of Catholic Bishops, Committee on Evangelization and Catechesis, Washington, D.C., 2012.

<sup>3</sup> Sacramental Policy Handbook of the Diocese of Dallas 2012, *Confirmation* n. 1, p. 3.

opportunities for authentic discipleship and connect youth to a fuller understanding, commitment, and participation in a lifelong journey of faith.

Rather than understanding Confirmation as an “ending” or a “graduation from religious education,” we believe that the work of the Holy Spirit through this sacrament is dynamic, ongoing, evident in parish life, and powerful in shaping our young Church as disciples of Jesus Christ. The parish community serves as the *living curriculum* for engaging our youth—sacramentally, developmentally, liturgically, spiritually—and reinforces Catholic values, creating living witnesses to the Gospel. Our primary goal is achieved only if all members of the parish community work in collaboration to create *pathways of formation* for receiving the Sacrament of Confirmation. Instead of understanding Confirmation as “the end,” the formation pathway needs to shift toward *apprenticing young disciples who are called to witness*.

The sacrament of Confirmation is both an invitation of love and a gift from God. We need to emphasize that the adolescent should be instructed and nourished in the faith *within the family*, the first teacher of youth. In time, faith formation is widened to include the Catholic school/parish faith formation, and the parish community. Together, these important groups help the adolescent continue to encounter God’s love. Confirmation is to be received freely in faith and in love. The formation process must *actively engage the family* by creating an environment that supports and encourages the adolescent’s generous response to the Church’s universal call to holiness.

There are basic truths involved in the process of formation for the sacrament of Confirmation. First, *the parish community* is the locus for preparation and celebration of Confirmation. Included in the parish community are youth in the parish school, those who are home-schooled, those who attend

Catholic school elsewhere, and youth enrolled in parish faith formation programs. Secondly, *pathways to discipleship* are introduced to these groups through Catholic schools, youth ministry, home schooling, and parish catechetics. Then all pathways transition to a unified program when it is time for *immediate preparation* for Confirmation. Thirdly, adolescents who are truly apprenticed disciples of Jesus receive testimony and witness from the parish: parishioners encourage youth to share and deepen their faith. The parish community's collaboration in formation fosters a sense of belonging and involvement, and creates powerful support for lifelong discipleship and witness. Within each parish community, the Holy Spirit moves freely and provides grace to assist in formation.

The Sacramental Policy Handbook of the Diocese indicates a two-year period of preparation. This "period" is not measured in weeks, contact hours, checklists, service hours, or mastery of curriculum goals. No single program works best for every circumstance. Planning should happen for both *remote formation* and for *immediate preparation* for Confirmation, and it should meet the needs of youth. Overall, the following elements are key to building a *remote formation* program:

- A broad framework for systematic formation
- Training and formation for catechists/youth leaders/classroom teachers/and parents in competencies used in Confirmation formation programs
- Opportunities for youth to be awakened, welcomed, formed and apprenticed as disciples of Jesus Christ
- Invitations and encouragement from the parish community for the Confirmation candidates to engage and participate in parish life
- Encouragement and affirmation of family and sponsor, especially through involvement/inclusion in discipleship activities

*Immediate preparation* intends that the youth begin to recognize the promptings and power of the Holy Spirit in their lives, and make real progress as witnesses to the Gospel. This time frame should provide opportunities to live the Gospel through action, instead of counting service hours. Building a foundation for lifelong discipleship is an intentional time, planned to focus on apprenticing young disciples for lifelong faith, including:

- unpacking Gospel values, especially the ministry of Jesus in the Gospels
- service-learning: invitation to living the Gospel through action and intentional reflection/processing of lived experience
- invitation to further discover an authentic relationship with Jesus Christ through prayer and reflection.
- Finally, we encourage all those responsible for immediate formation to embrace a fresh, positive, and dynamic way of thinking, speaking about, and understanding the sacrament of Confirmation. Our vision for youth receiving the sacrament of Confirmation is that they should all have a sense of belonging to the parish community as well as the universal Church.

Confirmation for youth completes the initiation begun through Baptism, but it is only the beginning of the journey of faith. Different pathways must converge to a shared journey *in, through and with* the parish community. We are never finished growing in faith, and Confirmation provides increased grace to sustain the journey. The young Church deserves *the best we can offer*: preparation for Confirmation is preparation for real life, i.e. an invitation to encounter and mirror Jesus Christ, animated by the Holy Spirit. The present and the future of the Church depend on shaping disciples who are strongly committed to sharing and spreading the faith. The recent document *For Ages Unending: The Ministry of Liturgy with Adolescents*<sup>4</sup> reminds us that active participation in the life of the Church “is borne of a heart reconciled to God.” With this in mind, we must work

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<sup>4</sup> National Federation for Catholic Youth Ministry (NFCYM) and Federation of Diocesan Liturgical Commissions (FDLC), *For Ages Unending: The Ministry of Liturgy with Adolescents/Por los Siglos de los Siglos: el Ministerio de Liturgia con Adolescentes*, 2014.

together to reimagine and understand Confirmation as the sacrament that will strengthen “whatever can help to call the whole of mankind into the household of the Church.”<sup>5</sup>

With this foremost in our minds, we plan and prepare to transform every young person as a committed disciple of Jesus Christ, through the gateway of the Sacrament of Confirmation.

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Given 28 January, 2015

*Memorial of St. Thomas Aquinas, Priest and Doctor of the Church*

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<sup>5</sup> CSL, *Constitution on the Sacred Liturgy*, n. 1 (1963)