

Sacrament of Confirmation - Frequently Asked Questions

Diocese of Dallas

What is the normative age for receiving the Sacrament of Confirmation in the Diocese of Dallas?

Youth who have been baptized should receive this sacrament in the eighth grade year.

(Sacramental Policy Handbook I.A)

Where should candidates who are in Catholic Schools prepare for and celebrate the Sacrament of Confirmation?

Confirmation is a sacrament of the parish, and, as such, the parish community is the locus for preparation and celebration of Confirmation. Therefore, candidates for the Sacrament of Confirmation in Catholic Schools are encouraged to enroll in sacramental preparation programs in their respective parish communities.

At times, the youth may have a stronger tie to the school community where s/he is enrolled, and, might want to prepare and be confirmed with the majority of his/her classmates. For example, if the youth attends a Catholic school that is not associated with a parish s/he may want to prepare with his/her classmates at a nearby parish. Or, if the student attends a Catholic School that is part of a parish community, s/he might want to prepare and celebrate with his/her classmates at that parish.

Parish Confirmation programs that are life-giving and nurture discipleship are the best possible choices for preparation. Whichever preparation program the young person and family enroll in, the sacramental preparation team and the Catholic School Community should engage the youth and family in the life of a parish community.

How long should a candidate prepare for the sacrament of Confirmation?

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 both for *remote formation* and for *immediate preparation* for Confirmation, and it should meet the needs of youth.

What do candidates need to know for Confirmation?

Formation is more than information. It is a process by which a person accepts the responsibilities of their faith commitment within a network of support and strength, and learns what it means to be a disciple of Christ. The objectives for Confirmation preparation include an intentionality that leads the youth to a deeper intimacy with Jesus Christ, community involvement, and a search for a stronger faith through continuing study and reflection.

To provide effective formation, parish leaders and catechists can make particular learning opportunities available for the young people. Specific opportunities include:

- Participation in Penance services, Sunday Mass, and other liturgical celebrations
- Service-learning opportunities that connect the experience of doing service with the principles of Catholic social teaching
- Catechetical learning projects (e.g., a project that teaches and clarifies the gifts of the Holy Spirit)
- Experiences that nurture a deeper sense of spirituality such as retreats, parish missions, days of reflection, or cultural experiences (e.g., pilgrimage or *Las Posadas*)

The elements that are key to building a *remote and immediate formation program* referenced above are identified in *The Sacrament of Confirmation for Youth: A White Paper from the Diocese of Dallas*.

The USCCB provides a list of faith themes that should be covered in catechesis for the Sacrament of Confirmation- there are two lists, one with themes appropriate for young adolescents and one for older adolescents. Cf. *Renewing the Vision: A Framework for Catholic Youth Ministry*, pp. 31-34. USCCB 1997. The *National Directory for Catechesis* also lists guidelines for catechesis for Confirmation (122-123).

How do we handle appropriate Confirmation preparation for those who have disabilities, such as physical or developmental?

The requirement for young persons with special needs participating in any sacramental preparation is that they know who God is and, to the extent that they are able, have a relationship with Jesus. “Persons who because of developmental or mental disabilities may never attain the use of reason are to be encouraged either directly or, if necessary, through their parents or guardian, to receive the Sacrament of Confirmation at the appropriate time” (*Guidelines for the Celebration of the Sacraments with Persons with Disabilities*, USCCB, 1995, n. 16)

How many service hours are required?

During the Confirmation process, youth are encouraged to engage in service-learning opportunities. Confirmation preparation programs should provide opportunities to live the Gospel through action, instead of counting service hours.

The emphasis should not be placed on counting or logging hours, but on unpacking the service-learning experiences through sharing or reflecting in light of the Gospel. A set number of hours should not be a method for discerning a candidate’s readiness.

Are retreats mandatory to be confirmed?

Young people should participate in experiences that nurture a deeper sense of spirituality. Retreats are one of the many pathways that can provide this type of formative experience. Though retreats are not required in order to be confirmed, they are highly encouraged as an effective and formative spiritual experience that should provide them with an opportunity for reflection and discernment.

How does one determine if the candidate is ready to celebrate the sacrament?

Minimum readiness to celebrate Confirmation requires that, beside the normal course of catechetical instruction and training (including Catholic schools), a confirmand must participate in the Confirmation preparation program of his/her parish that includes catechetical, spiritual, family, and service-learning opportunities.

A candidate's growth in personal faith should be identified in conversation with the candidate, his/her parents, sponsor, pastor, catechists, or representative members of the local faith community. Use a plurality of methods in order to discern whether he or she is adequately prepared and properly disposed.

The best way to *determine* a candidate's readiness is by knowing the candidate and how well he/she witnesses to the Gospel with apostolic zeal. After moving through an adequate formation process, parents, sponsors, and youth leaders ought to see the signs of conversion within the young person. Therefore, no written assessment is necessary to receive the Sacrament.

How many sessions can they miss and still be confirmed?

Instead of asking how many sessions can be missed, the question should be framed with the mindset that the preparatory journey they have participated in has allowed them to discern their relationship with Jesus Christ animated by the Holy Spirit, how they have come to know Him more intimately, and how they can take what they have learnt and use it in their life-long journey of faith.

How should a sponsor be selected?

For a meaningful sponsor-candidate relationship, a sponsor should:

- Live a life of faith and serve as a role model for the candidate.
- Be willing to journey with the candidate during the preparation process, accompanying them as they continue to encounter Jesus Christ and deepen their relationship with Him.
- Be willing to continue to support the candidate after reception of the sacrament, helping him/her fulfill the baptismal promises faithfully in the life-long journey of faith.

What are the qualifications to be a sponsor?

The requirements to be a sponsor are identified in Canon Law.

- a. A sponsor must be at least sixteen years of age, having completed the sacraments of initiation (Baptism, Confirmation and Eucharist), leading a life of faith (canon 874 §1,2 and §1,3) which is in keeping with the teachings of the Catholic Church.
- b. In order to express more clearly the relationship between Baptism and Confirmation and to make the duty and function of the sponsor more effective, "It is desirable that the godparent at Baptism, if present, also be the sponsor at Confirmation." (canon 893, §2) This ideal expresses clearly the relationship between Confirmation and Baptism.
- c. There is to be only one male sponsor or one female sponsor or one of each (canon 873).
- d. Neither the father nor the mother of a confirmand may be a sponsor (canon 874 §1, 5) nor a proxy.
- e. If the sponsor cannot be present a proxy may be designated. The proxy must have the same qualifications as the sponsor.

While the same sponsor may serve for one or two candidates, the practice of a single sponsor for the whole class or for part of a class is not in keeping with the spirit of the Rite of Confirmation.

What is a letter of good standing for a sponsor?

A letter of good standing is neither a Canon Law nor a Diocesan requirement, but a parish/pastor may request one of a sponsor.

If a sponsor is asked to provide a letter of good standing, s/he should contact his or her parish.

What are the expectations when selecting a saint's name for Confirmation?

Selecting a saint's name encourages the youth to embody an intercessor. The doctrine of the communion of saints should be explained to the confirmandi as part of the catechesis, so that the youth can see models of discipleship, seek to emulate them, and ask the selected saint's lifelong help and intercession.

How are confirmations scheduled?

The pastor or the Confirmation coordinator calls the Office of the Bishop and schedules the Rite of Confirmation for the parish confirmandi. Confirmations can be celebrated at various times during the year, not just during the spring time. After the Confirmation date(s) is/are scheduled, there are forms that should be completed and sent to the Office of Worship at least one month in advance of the celebration of the sacrament at Mass.

What is a Letter to the Bishop?

Candidates are strongly encouraged to write a letter to the Bishop of Dallas prior to receiving the sacrament. The candidates should introduce themselves and explain why they wish to be confirmed, how they have come to know Jesus Christ more intimately on their journey toward Confirmation, and how the sacrament will impact and inspire their discipleship. Please ensure the letters arrive to the Office of the Bishop two weeks in advance of the celebration of Confirmation, so that the bishop or delegate has sufficient time to read them.

What documentation is needed to enroll in a confirmation preparation program?

A recently issued certificate of baptism is the only document needed, as it verifies the date of birth and baptism, the child's full name, and the parent(s)' name(s). If it is not possible to obtain a recently issued baptismal certificate, an original baptismal certificate is sufficient. In case a baptismal certificate cannot be obtained, an affidavit of baptism is acceptable as proof and should be completed before the conferral of the sacrament of Confirmation. An affidavit form can be requested from the Diocese of Dallas Tribunal.

Note: A certificate of First Communion is not required.

What is the confirmand's attire for the celebration of Confirmation?

- a. Mass is a special occasion, and as such, Confirmation attire is to be modest and respectful. There is not a standard color requirement.
- b. Since stoles are a symbol of the ordained and not of the universal priesthood of the faithful, stoles are not to be worn by those being confirmed.