

ORIGINAL ORDER OF THE SACRAMENTS OF INITIATION BAPTISM, CONFIRMATION, EUCHARIST

INTRODUCTION

On November 26, 2017, in response to Synod recommendations, Bishop Thomas John Paprocki promulgated a new norm concerning the restoration of the original order of the Sacraments of Initiation. “Looking then at question of the sequence and age for the reception of the Sacraments of Initiation, the Synod voted that the Sacraments of Christian Initiation shall be offered in the proper sequence (Baptism, Confirmation and Eucharist) for children as well as for adults. To promote discipleship and stewardship as a way of life from an early age, those who are baptized as infants are to receive the Sacraments of Confirmation and Eucharist at about the age of reason, which in this diocese will normally be in their third grade of elementary school, after they have been properly prepared and have made sacramental confession.” (Homily for the Closing of the Fourth Diocesan Synod on the Solemnity of Our Lord Jesus Christ, King of the Universe at the Cathedral of the Immaculate Conception November 26, 2017)

During the spring of 2019, parishes who normally offer the Sacrament of Confirmation during that time frame will confirm all eighth graders, as usual. Parishes that have been celebrating the Sacrament of Confirmation with high school age students should prepare all high schoolers to celebrate the Sacrament of Confirmation with eighth graders during this time period. If a parish normally has been confirming seventh and eighth graders, they should continue to do so during this time period. **Note: From the spring of 2019 on, your second-grade children will not be making their First Eucharist.**

Beginning in the fall of 2019 or the spring of 2020, parishes should begin to include these (now) third graders with eighth graders in all celebrations of Confirmation. Third graders will also receive their First Eucharist at this liturgy. This practice will continue each year until all children from fourth grade through seventh grade have received the Sacraments of Confirmation and First Eucharist (see chart for clarification). In limited cases, space may not allow combining grades 3 and 8 in one Mass. Consideration will then be given to offering two Masses, preferably on the same day.

Exceptions to the process may be necessary due to the size of parish (low number of children, established pattern of preparing two classes for reception of the sacraments in alternate years, etc.). Smaller parishes, or parishes with smaller classes, should strive to collaborate with neighboring parishes to combine celebrations. When combining classes, 2nd/3rd grades will be the norm. Because

2nd graders may not have yet reached the age of reason, spring celebrations will occur.

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FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS:

1. What is Confirmation?

Confirmation is the second of the three sacraments of Christian initiation. Confirmation is the completion of Baptism and the sacrament by which the baptized faithful are anointed with chrism by the laying on of hands. The grace received is the fullness of the Holy Spirit and his gifts. We also describe this fullness as the completion, strengthening, or perfection of the Holy Spirit received in Baptism.

2. What are the Sacraments of Initiation?

The sacraments of Baptism, Confirmation, and Eucharist are interrelated and all three are required for full Christian initiation. The Christian is born anew by Baptism, strengthened by Confirmation, and fed by the food of eternal life in the Eucharist.

3. Who is the minister of the Sacrament of Confirmation?

The ordinary minister of Confirmation is the bishop. In addition, pastors who baptize an adult or child of catechetical age are the ministers of Confirmation as required by the Rite of Christian Initiation of Adults (RCIA).

4. Who can receive the Sacrament of Confirmation?

A candidate for confirmation is one who has reached the age of reason (third grade in this Diocese) and meets the following requirements:

Is validly baptized and not previously confirmed

Is Catholic (children baptized in another church must make a Profession of Faith)

Is properly instructed

Is capable of renewing their Baptismal promises

Has been previously prepared for and received the Sacrament of Reconciliation

Candidates will be prepared for the Sacrament of Confirmation and First Holy Communion. Both sacraments will be celebrated together at the same Mass.

5. Why is the Diocese of Springfield in Illinois changing the age of Confirmation?

By placing Confirmation at this age, the Diocese of Springfield in Illinois will be following the natural sequence of the Sacrament of Christian Initiation: Baptism, then Confirmation, and then reception of First Holy Communion. Blessed Paul VI stated the following:

The sharing in the divine nature given to men through the grace of Christ bears a certain likeness to the origin, development, and nourishing of natural life. The faithful are born anew by Baptism, strengthened by the sacrament of Confirmation, and received in the Eucharist the food of eternal life. By means of these sacraments of Christian initiation, they thus receive in increasing measure the treasures of divine life and advance toward the perfection of charity (CCC 1212).

It should also be noted that this is the sequence followed by RCIA (Rite of Christian Initiation of Adults), which requires that children and adults in the catechumenate receive all three sacraments together, even if the children are younger than the age at which the Catholic children of the parish are routinely confirmed and by the Eastern Catholic Churches for infants and adults alike (CCC 1232).

In addition, by placing Confirmation prior to the reception of First Eucharist, it makes it easier to view the Eucharist as the “summit” of Christian initiation (CCC 1233).

Therefore, all baptized persons who have reached the age of reason should be appropriately prepared and received the Sacrament of Confirmation before the reception of the Holy Eucharist.

6. When our children are confirmed prior to First Holy Communion, how are they to make an adult commitment to the Church?

All sacraments are a gift from our Heavenly Father, who desires to give us His very life, which we call grace. Sacraments are not earned or merited. For this reason, Confirmation should not be perceived as the sacrament of choosing to confirm one’s faith but of Christ choosing us and the deepening of the grace and gifts of the Holy Spirit received in our baptism. The Church even requires priests to confirm infants and children younger than the age of reason when they are in danger of death so that they may receive the fullness of the Holy Spirit. An authentic mature commitment to Christ and the Church is expressed in full

participation in the Eucharist and apostolic life of the Church. It is not achieved at a single moment but throughout the life-long deepening of our relationship with Christ. This begins in childhood and continues until death.

7. What is the historical and theological vision for Christian Initiation?

In the early Church the sacraments of initiation were three: Baptism, Confirmation and Eucharist. They were celebrated together in a single rite, with a bishop as celebrant. This was the practice of the Roman Rite up until the 5th or 6th century when bishops could no longer be present at all baptisms, leading to a time of separation between baptism and confirmation. At first the time of separation was short, but as time went on, the delay for the bishop to arrive grew. Still the Church celebrated the sacraments in the order of Baptism, Confirmation and Eucharist until last century.

In 1910 Saint Pius X recognized that children were not being allowed First Communion until they were much older. He felt that such a denial was contrary to the vision of Jesus who always drew children to himself. Pius X ordered that children be allowed to come to the table of the Eucharist as soon as they could distinguish the Eucharist from ordinary bread. The age was then lowered to around seven. Confirmation then came after First Holy Communion. The reforms of Vatican Council II called the Church to restore the original order of sacraments. This is not without challenge and difficulties. Such a change presumes a deep commitment on the part of the family to nurture the life of the young. Such a commitment means that parents have a need to understand the reasons for change and the ways in which they can help their children.

The main reason for restoring the original order of the sacrament (i.e. putting Confirmation before First Holy Communion) is to emphasize that Eucharist is THE sacrament, which celebrates our FULL membership in the Body of Christ. It is the sacrament of ongoing growth and the sacrament of unity. The Church tells us that it “culminates” the initiation process. When it comes last in order, it calls us to renew that baptismal covenant each time we receive Holy Communion.

8. What is the Original Order of the Sacraments?

An increasing number of dioceses and parishes in the United States are adopting an Original Order policy for the celebration of the sacraments of Confirmation and Eucharist. This means, quite simply, that it becomes standard policy for Catholics who were baptized in infancy to receive Confirmation *before* First Holy Communion, not *after*. Practically speaking, this means that the two sacraments are received at the First Holy Communion Mass, with Confirmation being celebrated after the homily.

9. Why do they call it Original Order?

During the first five hundred years or so of the history of the Roman Catholic Church (and still today in the Christian churches of the East), it was always the case that the sacraments of Christian initiation were celebrated in an invariable sequence: Baptism, Confirmation, and Eucharist. And it was almost always the case that all three sacraments were celebrated together at the same time, even with infants.

The RCIA (*Rite of Christian Initiation of Adults*) requires that children and adults in the catechumenate receive all three sacraments together, even if the children are younger than the age at which the Catholic children of the parish are routinely confirmed.

Putting the celebration of Confirmation between Baptism and Eucharist better expresses its role as the completion of Baptism. The sacrament that is the culmination of a person's Christian initiation is the Eucharist, not Confirmation.

Theologically, it is the gift of the Holy Spirit given in all its fullness at Confirmation that best prepares one to receive Eucharist, and thus to be most fully joined to the Body of Christ. As a result, this change reflects an emphasis on the belief that everything leads to the Eucharist, which is the source and summit of our faith.

Following the lead of official documents that were issued by the Church after the Second Vatican Council, more and more places are restoring this original order to the celebration of the sacraments of Christian initiation.

10. The Last Supper preceded Pentecost. Shouldn't Eucharist precede Confirmation?

Matthew 3:16 - 17: "After Jesus was baptized, he came up from the water and behold, the heavens were opened for him, descending like a dove and coming upon him. And a voice came from the heavens, saying, 'This is my beloved Son, with whom I am well pleased.'" Jesus is baptized, and then confirmed.

11. Why is our parish celebrating Confirmation and First Holy Communion at the same Mass?

In the early Church, Christian initiation was celebrated together as a single event. The person was immersed into the waters of Baptism, anointed with chrism, and shared in the Eucharistic meal. Over time, and for many reasons, the celebration

of these sacramental rituals became separated from one another. In the renewal of the sacraments mandated by the Second Vatican Council, the Church was invited to restore the celebrations of the sacraments of Christian initiation to their original order – Baptism, Confirmation, Eucharist. This restored order helps us recognize that sharing in the Eucharist completes our initiation into the Church.

12. What about age? Doesn't the Church require a certain age for Confirmation?

Both the *Rite of Confirmation* and Canon Law (Canon #891) set the age of discretion (age 7) as the age for Confirmation. Effective July 2002, the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops designated the age for Confirmation to be between the age of discretion and age 16. Within that range, local bishops may determine their own diocesan policy, which is third grade for the Diocese of Springfield in Illinois.

13. Isn't Confirmation a sacrament of maturity that should come after First Holy Communion?

Confirmation is actually the completion of Baptism (by the full gift of the Holy Spirit). The perfection of baptismal grace found in the Sacrament of Confirmation is not dependent upon age or knowledge of the confirmand. The grace that is conferred is a free gift and 'does not need ratification to become effective' (Cf. CCC 1308). The common practice of high school reception of Confirmation has given the impression that somehow the sacrament is merited by virtue of age or training. In truth, the Sacrament of Confirmation is an effective vehicle of grace at any age as long as it is validly conferred. Thus, those who receive the sacrament are able to reap its benefits from the moment of reception. The grace of this sacrament conferred at a young age could be of great assistance to young people as they grow toward adolescence and young adulthood.

Regardless of age, Confirmation is always a Sacrament of Initiation. The important thing to remember is that sacraments are not about age alone, they are about growing in faith, about sharing in God's grace.

14. Is it wrong, then, to be confirmed after receiving Eucharist?

No. The Church has many ways of celebrating the mysteries of God's love in the sacraments. But because Rome so strongly encourages restoring the order of celebrating the Sacraments of Christian Initiation, do not be surprised if more and more communities restore the original sequence – Baptism, Confirmation and First Eucharist.

15. I am concerned that if children are now confirmed in the third grade, they will drop out of religious education later.

Confirmation has been misunderstood and treated as graduation from learning about the Faith. This is neither the true meaning of the sacrament nor the intention of the Church. Growth in the understanding and living out of our faith is the result of a life-long effort. Parents and siblings have the first responsibility of being an example of Jesus Christ to each other and living the Gospel each day. Children will stay in religious education if they see their parents striving to grow in holiness through family prayer, Scripture reading, Sunday Mass, regular confession, and living a life of charity. Parents are to keep their children in religious education programs just as they keep their child in school until graduation. While there will be an emphasis on parent involvement, it is the parent's responsibility to see that their children grow in the faith. Our parishes are there to assist in this process.

16. How can a young child know everything about the faith?

Religious education or catechesis is a life-long process. Adults should regularly study our faith, read the Scriptures, participate in the sacraments, and practice charity. Children and youth from kindergarten through high school are expected to participate in processes of faith formation. With this in mind, Confirmation preparation is simply an explanation of the sacrament itself in the context of an active family faith life and parish catechesis. This is similar to what took place for First Penance/Reconciliation and First Holy Communion.

17. What is the role of the parents in the preparation?

Saint John Paul II constantly called for us to help families become a domestic Church, a place where faith is taught and lived both in word and in deed. Ever since Vatican II, the Church has considered the parents to be the primary religious educators of their children. It is also our hope that as parents work with their children, they, too, will seek to celebrate the Sacrament of Confirmation if they are not, themselves, confirmed. The grace of this Sacrament, and the gifts of the Holy Spirit, can be very helpful to us as adults living in the society we do. In celebrating the Rite of Baptism of Infants, parents publicly commit to forming their children in the life of faith. Parents are addressed:

Parents, you have asked to have your child baptized. In doing so you are accepting

the responsibility of training them in the practice of the faith. It will be your duty to bring him/her up to keep God's commandments as Christ taught us, by loving God and neighbor (RB #39).

In implementing this new norm, the parish, with guidance from the bishop, must provide opportunities for parents and families to prepare together for the celebration of their child's Confirmation and First Holy Communion. The Catechism of the Catholic Church also teaches clearly the role of parents in handing on the gift of our Catholic faith.

- Parents have the first responsibility for the education of their children. They bear witness to this responsibility first by creating a home where tenderness, forgiveness, respect, fidelity and disinterested service are the rule. The home is well suited for education in the virtues. This requires an apprenticeship in self-denial, sound judgment and self-mastery – the preconditions of all true freedom (CCC 2223).
- Through the grace of the sacrament of marriage, parents receive the privilege and responsibility of evangelizing their children. Parents should initiate their children at the early age into the mysteries of the faith of which they are the 'first heralds' for their children (CCC 2225).
- Education in the faith by the parents should begin in the child's earliest years. This already happens when family members help one another grow in faith by the witness of a Christian life in keeping with the Gospel. Family catechesis precedes, accompanies and enriches other forms of instruction in the faith. Parents have the mission of teaching their children to pray and to discover their vocation as children of God. The parish is the Eucharistic community and the heart of the liturgical life of Christian families; it is a privileged place for the catechesis of children and parents (CCC 2226).

18. How will my child be preparing for Confirmation?

In original order, Confirmation preparation is integrated into the preparation for Eucharist. This means that the close connection between Baptism and Confirmation is emphasized, while recognizing the importance of the Eucharist as the culmination of Christian initiation.

19. Will my child be learning about the Holy Spirit?

Naturally, as your child continues to participate in religious education, he/she will continue to learn more and more about the Holy Spirit's action in our lives.

Just as your child was first empowered by the Spirit in Baptism, your child will continue to grow in the Spirit through the grace of Confirmation.

20. How will I know if my child is ready for Confirmation?

Readiness for Confirmation cannot be separated from readiness for Eucharist, and sacramental readiness is not so much about learning as it is about faith. As your child prepares for Confirmation and Eucharist, here are four things to keep in mind:

- The baptized need the sanctifying grace of Confirmation earlier, not later in life.
- Sacraments are always a beginning. As your child matures in faith, he/she will grow in his/her understanding of Confirmation and experience of the Eucharist.
- The Eucharist is the culmination of the three Sacraments of Initiation. Your child is now welcomed as a fully participating member of the Church.
- At any age, completion of the Sacraments of Initiation – Baptism, Confirmation and Eucharist – in no way signals graduation. Rather it is the beginning of a lifetime of being nourished at the table of the Lord.

21. What impact will this have on the School?

This new policy will necessitate collaboration among our families, our Catholic schools and our Religious Education programs. This collaboration calls us to involve children and their parents/guardians, regardless of where the child's primary religious education takes place - a Catholic school or Religious Education program. Parents have the central role in preparing their children. The School or Religious Education programs will continue to provide catechesis for the children, but parents will be expected to participate in classes which will enrich their own understanding as adults and help them in their role of preparing their children.

22. What are the requirements to be a Sponsor?

Sponsors must be:

- Ordinarily at least 16 years old, but exceptions can be made.

- A fully initiated Catholic (They must have been baptized, confirmed, and received their First Holy Communion – copies of certificates are not required).
- Practicing their Catholic faith (if they are married, they must have been married in a Catholic Church).
- Willing to support the parents and this child in his/her spiritual life.

23. What if the Sponsor cannot be present at the Confirmation Mass?

A proxy can represent the Sponsor at the Confirmation Mass.

24. Can a parent serve as a proxy for the Sponsor?

It is permissible for a parent to serve as a proxy, but not as a Sponsor.