



## DIOCESE OF SPRINGFIELD IN ILLINOIS

### OFFICE FOR COMMUNICATIONS

#### **Talking Points for Priests**

*Explaining why Confirmation/First Holy Communion is in Third Grade (Restored Order of the Sacraments)*

#### **Why the Change? Restoring the Original Order**

- The Church originally celebrated the Sacraments of Christian Initiation – Baptism, Confirmation, and Eucharist – in that order, as one unified process of entering the Church for about 1,800 years.
- The diocese is restoring this original order for children: Confirmation first, then First Holy Communion, typically around third grade.
- In fact, the Catechism of the Catholic Church clearly affirms the proper sequence in paragraph 1322: "The holy Eucharist completes Christian initiation."

#### **Third Grade Is the "Age of Reason"**

- In Church teaching, the age of reason – usually around age 7 – is when a child can understand and freely respond to God's grace.
- Since children can understand the Eucharist at this age, they can also be properly formed to understand Confirmation and the gifts of the Holy Spirit.

#### **Why This Is Good for Their Faith**

- Confirmation is not a "graduation" or a "rite of passage" – it is a real outpouring of the Holy Spirit that strengthens a person for a life of Christian witness.
- Receiving Confirmation earlier means children receive the graces of the Holy Spirit sooner – graces that help them live their faith in a world with many spiritual challenges.
- Given the unprecedented emotional and moral challenges our children face today, delaying Confirmation not only withholds the special graces that could protect and guide them at a younger age but also risks reducing the sacrament's effectiveness once they are already exposed to these challenges.



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### Addressing Common Concerns

- Some worry children won't understand the sacraments – but if a child can grasp the Eucharist reverently, they are also ready to understand the Holy Spirit's gifts.
- This change isn't about lowering standards – it's about honoring the Church's tradition and helping children receive grace when it can most benefit them at a younger age.

### Lifelong Discipleship

- The goal is to shift focus from sacramental completion to lifelong formation and discipleship.
- By celebrating these sacraments earlier, the Church invites families to keep children connected to parish life and to ongoing growth in faith.

### Things not to say

1. **Don't suggest children are too young or incapable**
  - The Church teaches the "age of reason" (~7) is when children can freely respond to grace.
2. **Don't imply this is lowering standards or making things easier**
  - Avoid: "We're just simplifying things"
  - Emphasize that this aligns with Church tradition and sacramental theology and will help their spiritual life and soul.
3. **Don't say it's just a scheduling or administrative change**
  - Avoid: "It's easier for everyone this way."
  - Parents should hear the focus is on spiritual formation and grace, not logistics.
4. **Don't frame it as a symbolic "rite of passage" or milestone**
  - Confirmation is a sacrament that strengthens a child with the Holy Spirit.
5. **Don't compare negatively to the "old way"**
  - Avoid: "It's not the way we did it before" or "most dioceses don't do this."



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- Focus on the restored order as returning to the Church's original practice and the spiritual benefits.
- 6. **Don't suggest parish life or ongoing formation is less important**
  - Emphasize that parish catechesis continues and lifelong faith formation remains the goal.
- 7. **Don't over-explain theology when parents are anxious**
  - Avoid long technical discussions of OCIA or sacramental history in a tense moment.
  - Keep explanations simple, pastoral, and focused on the child's ability to receive grace.
- 8. **Don't argue or correct defensively**
  - Instead, acknowledge concerns and redirect to the spiritual benefits of receiving Confirmation early.