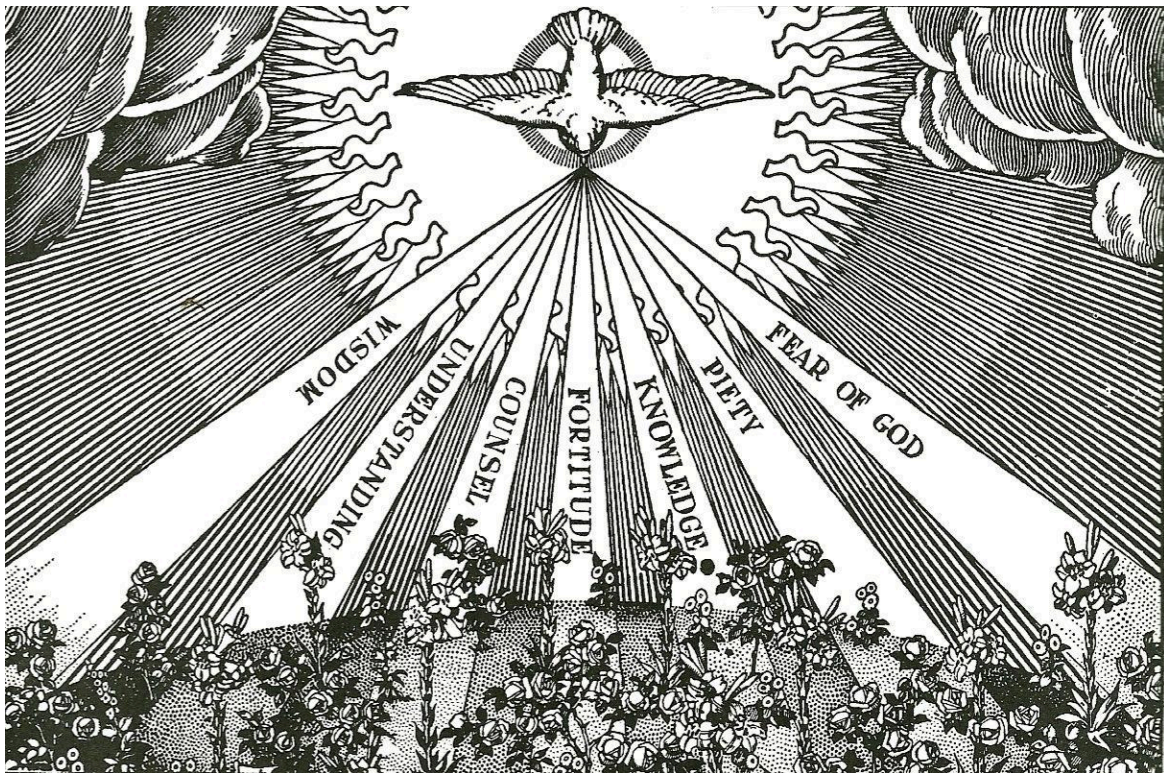


CONFIRMATION HANDBOOK



2024-25

St. Mary's Visitation Parish
Elm Grove, Wisconsin

What is the Sacrament of Confirmation?

The Second Vatican Council states that “by the sacrament of confirmation, [the baptized] are more perfectly bound to the Church and are enriched with a special strength of the Holy Spirit. Hence they are, as true witnesses of Christ, more strictly obliged to spread and defend the faith by word and deed” (Lumen Gentium, 11). We can see in this definition hints of baptism and, in fact, baptism and confirmation are closely related, the Catechism of the Catholic Church states, “the reception of the sacrament of Confirmation is necessary for the completion of baptismal grace” (CCC #1285). We see this close tie between baptism and confirmation even in the history of the Church.

The history of the Sacrament of Confirmation and the Sacrament of Baptism are inter-twined. In the beginning of the life of the Church it was normal for the Sacrament of Confirmation to be celebrated immediately following baptism, which is still the practice today when an adult is baptized, however, since infant baptism is the more prevalent reality, we see confirmation being celebrated later in life, sometimes years after a person has been baptized. This is an historical reality which grew out of the nature of confirmation itself. The ordinary minister of confirmation is the bishop. In the years of the early Church, when the Church was very small, it was the bishop who would do all of the baptisms and thereby all the confirmations in his diocese, but as the Church grew in size and expanded geographically it was no longer possible for the bishop to baptize every single person in his diocese. So, baptisms were celebrated by priests, who were in charge of the local parishes, and when the bishop would visit that town or that parish would confirm whomever was in need of confirmation. Since his visits were sporadic and travel was hard, there was no codified time for confirmation, it would simply happen when the opportunity came. Over time, as travel became easier, the time for confirmation was defined and would take place, usually on an annual visit, when the bishop would make his way to a parish or village and confirm those who were ready for confirmation at that time. We see this practice continued today.

But what of the scriptural roots of Confirmation? We can discern a number of references to a distinct Sacrament of Confirmation in the scriptures. We can begin first with Jesus’ own promise that He would send the Holy Spirit upon believers after His death (cf. John 16.8) and that the Spirit would guide His people “into all truth” (John 16.13). This promise is fulfilled at Pentecost when the Holy Spirit descends upon the Apostles gathered with the Blessed Mother. This promise however is not only for the Apostles, but for all who walk in the pathways of discipleship. We hear in the Acts of the Apostles of St. Philip the Apostle who makes his way to Samaria and there preaches the gospel and people are baptized. However, it isn’t until later that they receive the Sacrament of Confirmation, “when the apostles at Jerusalem heard that Samaria had received the word of God, they sent to them Peter and John, who came down and prayed for them that they might receive the Holy Spirit; for it had not yet fallen on any of them, but they had only been baptized in the name of the Lord Jesus. Then they laid their hands on them and they received the Holy Spirit” (Acts 8.14-17). So we can see that not only does confirmation fulfill the promise of the Lord to send the Holy Spirit to His disciples, but we see that baptism and confirmation are two separate sacraments. Notice too how the Sacrament of Confirmation is conferred through the laying on of hands and prayer.

We turn first to looking at the matter of the sacrament by first examining the laying on of hands. The laying on of hands is a gesture of prayer, meant to share and impart some power from one person to another and to 'set them aside' in some fundamental way. There are numerous examples of this gesture in scripture, to look at one in the Old Testament, we see Moses laying his hands on Joshua and in so doing appointing him his successor as the head of the people of Israel (Numbers 27:22-23), but this was not some gesture that Moses dreamed up, it was a command of God, "Take Joshua, the son of Nun, a man in whom is the spirit, and lay your hand upon him..." (Numbers 27:18). This laying on of hands is also something we hear of in the New Testament, for instance, when the first deacons are ordained we hear, "these they set before the apostles, and they prayed and laid hands on them" (Acts 6:6). We see, in these two examples, that the laying on of hands accomplishes two things the first is that it imparts something to the person who receives the imposition of hands and secondly, we see that those who have had hands imposed upon them are set aside, or drawn out, for some particular task. The connection with the Sacrament of Confirmation becomes obvious then - we see in confirmation that something is imparted to those who receive the sacrament (an increase of the Gifts of the Holy Spirit) and they are set aside for some particular task (to bear witness to the world by word and deed and to suffer for the Faith).

The second aspect of the matter of the Sacrament of Confirmation is the use of oil, in this case Chrism Oil, which is also used in Baptism and Holy Orders. In the Sacrament of Confirmation this oil is used to make the sign of the cross on the forehead of the one being confirmed and the words are prayed, "Be sealed with the gift of the Holy Spirit." An anointing, as the Catechism points out (CCC #1293) both signifies and imprints a spiritual seal.

The last aspect we will look at is the form of the sacrament, the consecratory prayer. In confirmation, this prayer is prayed while the laying on of hands is taking place, the prayer is this: "All-powerful God, Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, by water and the Holy Spirit you freed your sons and daughters from sin and gave them new life. Send your Holy Spirit upon them to be their helper and guide. Give them the spirit of wisdom and understanding, the spirit of right judgment and courage, the spirit of knowledge and reverence. Fill them with the spirit of wonder and awe in your presence. Through Christ our Lord. Amen."

There are a couple of things to point out in this prayer of consecration, the first is to notice how the prayer references baptism at the beginning - this points out the clear tie between the two sacraments and how confirmation, in many ways, fulfills and completes what was begun in baptism and will culminate in the reception of the Eucharist. The second thing to note about the prayer of consecration is that it lists the gifts of the Holy Spirit, pointing out some of the effects that come about through reception of the Sacrament of Confirmation.

The Catechism of the Catholic Church points out numerous effects of the sacrament: "Confirmation brings an increase and a deepening of baptismal grace:

- it roots us more deeply in the divine filiation which makes us cry, 'Abba, Father'
- it unites us more firmly to Christ;
- it increases the gifts of the Holy Spirit in us;

-it renders our bond with the Church more perfect;

-it gives us a special strength of the Holy Spirit to spread and defend the faith..."(CCC #1303)

These effects make clear the graces of God that enter our life through confirmation. Let's look at three in particular. The first is the sense that confirmation imprints an indelible spiritual mark on our souls. This indelible spiritual mark happens in three sacraments: Baptism, Confirmation and Holy Orders. A seal is something which marks something out as belonging to someone. In history, official documents would have a bit of candle wax dipped on them and then a seal of some sort (often times a ring with a coat of arms, etc.) would be placed in the wax - it was that seal which verified that the document was official, that the words or the decrees in that document were the real words or decrees of the one who issued it. We see this even today in the use of notaries public as well as various seals that are imprinted on official documents. If we look at the seal of the Holy Spirit which we receive in confirmation we see that this indelible seal is the very seal of God and marks us out as belonging to Him in a particular way. This seal can never be lost, it is always present.

The second effect to look at is the role that the person confirmed has in defending the Faith. Our age and culture challenges the very notion of truth, and yet Christ is the Truth and He has revealed Himself to us in the Incarnation and that revelation of the sacred mysteries has been handed over to the Church to be kept intact and passed on through the generations and to every corner of the globe. At confirmation, we are called on an even deeper level to know our faith, to know these truths and then to have the fortitude to defend them when they are challenged or dismissed. Confirmation calls us, in the old terminology of the Church, to truly be 'soldiers of Christ' - ready to defend and promote the Faith at every turn.

The final effect that we can take a look at are the gifts of the Holy Spirit. The gifts of the Holy Spirit are wisdom and understanding, right judgment and courage, knowledge and reverence, and fear of the Lord. These gifts are present to us even prior to confirmation, but in confirmation they are strengthened in the heart of the person confirmed and we are given the assistance we need to grow in them. We see at Pentecost that the Apostles who are cowering in fear in the Upper Room are transformed in a radical way by the reception of the Holy Spirit who descends in tongues of fire upon them. All of a sudden these weak and fearful men become bold in their proclamation of the Gospel and are willing to preach it to the ends of the known world and to suffer martyrdom in witness to and defense of that Gospel. Like them, the Sacrament of Confirmation transforms us in a fundamental way and gives us the strength to walk in their footsteps.

The Confirmation Program at St. Mary's

The guiding principle of the Confirmation Program at St. Mary's is the understanding that the preparation for a sacrament is two-fold. The Church speaks of this two-fold preparation as involving both "remote" preparation as well as "proximate" preparation.

Remote preparation for the reception of a sacrament is that preparation which has been taking place since the moment of Baptism. It is accomplished through regular attendance at Sunday Mass, through the faith-life of the home, and by participation in religious formation in the home, a religious education program or in a Catholic school. Proximate preparation, on the other hand, is the immediate preparation which is given for a specific sacrament, helping the recipient understand the graces and the call that is present in every sacramental encounter with the Lord.

In line with that two-fold preparation process, the Confirmation Formation Program will be primarily focused on proximate preparation - in other words, preparing for the Sacrament of Confirmation itself, rather than attempting to give years' worth of religious education in a short period of time. Because this proximate preparation presumes that religious education has been continuous in the life of a child since their baptism, it is a streamlined program which focuses on the Sacrament of Confirmation itself - what constitutes it and what its effects are.

The REQUIRED aspects of the program are as follows:

- A Parent/Candidate Session to introduce candidates to the Sacrament of Confirmation as well as laying out the expectations of the program.
- Choosing a Confirmation Sponsor.
- Attend all seven Confirmation classes
- For those candidates who have little or no formal religious education, they will meet with one of the priests or deacons to establish what part of their religious education must be supplemented.
- A Confirmation Retreat which is attended by the candidate either here or with another parish if necessary because of scheduling conflicts.
- Completion of some service to the parish, community, or individuals in need.
- Choosing a Confirmation Patron Saint ("Confirmation Name").
- Filling in the required Confirmation Questionnaire for the bishop.
- A Confirmation Rehearsal the night before the Confirmation and Confirmation itself.

The OPTIONAL aspects of the program are as follows:

- Joining the Youth Discipleship Program which meets throughout the year
- An individual meeting with one of the priests of the parish, if the candidate desires.
- A group session following Confirmation for those who would like to join in prayer of thanksgiving for the Sacrament of Confirmation and to discuss their own experiences of being confirmed.

Individual Components

Seven classes (Required)

Confirmation Retreat (Required)

The Retreat is a whole day set aside to pray and grow closer to Christ. If, due to scheduling conflicts, the retreat cannot be attended, the candidate will contact another parish and ask to join their Confirmation Program Retreat.

Confirmation Rehearsal (Required)

The Rehearsal takes place the evening before Confirmation so that the candidates know and understand what they should do at the Confirmation themselves and what the bishop himself will do.

Confirmation Sponsor (Required)

The candidate chooses a sponsor who is a baptized, confirmed and practicing Catholic who will support them through this process by word, example and prayer. The candidate will choose a sponsor who models the Catholic Faith and a life of fidelity to Jesus Christ. The sponsor may not be a parent.

Confirmation Saint Name (Required)

The candidate chooses a saint name they would like as their Confirmation name. The candidate's Confirmation saint name will be listed on their Confirmation certificate.

Confirmation Questionnaire to the Bishop (Required)

The Archdiocese asks that this questionnaire be filled out and submitted to St. Mary's to be forwarded to the confirming bishop.

Confirmation Service (Required)

The Confirmation candidate will commit to some type of service to the parish, community or individuals over the course of their preparation. Opportunities will be made available through the parish or other activities as determined by the candidate (i.e. their own choice of service).

Confirmation Meeting (Optional/Required in some cases)

For candidates who would like to spend some time with one of the parish priests discussing their prayer and spiritual lives or have specific questions about their faith. These meetings are scheduled directly with the priest. For candidates who have very little religious education a meeting is required to assess their knowledge and any supplement work will need to be completed.

Youth Discipleship Program (Optional/Required in some cases)

This program is offered through our religious education department and gives parish teenagers the opportunity to deepen their faith with their peers.

CONFIRMATION CHECK LIST

Candidate's Name: _____

Sponsor's Name: _____

Confirmation Patron Saint Name: _____

Class #1 attended _____

Class #2 attended _____

Class #3 attended _____

Class #4 attended _____

Class #5 attended _____

Class #6 attended _____

Class #7 attended _____

Service Completed: _____

(If Required) Meeting with Priest or Deacon to Supplement Religious Education: _____

Retreat: _____

Confirmation Questionnaire: _____

Date and Time of Rehearsal: _____

Date and Time of Confirmation: _____