



Diocese of Westminster

AGENCY FOR EVANGELISATION

Essential Quick Guide for Catechists to

Confirmation Preparation

Brief Introduction to Confirmation:

In the sacrament of confirmation the apostles and the bishops who are their successors hand on to the baptised the special gift of the Holy Spirit, promised by Christ the Lord and poured out on the apostles at Pentecost. Thus the initiation in the Christian life is completed so that believers are strengthened by power from heaven, made true witnesses of Christ in word and deed, and bound more closely to the Church.

(Decree on Confirmation, Sacred Congregation for Divine Worship, 1971)

Confirmation in Scripture:

The New Testament shows the role of the Holy Spirit in Christ's fulfilment of his messianic mission.

Acts 1:8 After his resurrection Jesus promised the descent of the Holy Spirit: 'You will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes on you, and you will be my witnesses.'

Acts 2:4 On the day of Pentecost the apostles were so filled with the Spirit that they were able fearlessly to proclaim 'the mighty works of God'.

Acts 8:14-17 The apostles began to impart the gift of the Spirit to the newly baptised by the laying on of hands to complete the grace of baptism. Peter and John... 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 baptised in the name of the Lord Jesus. Then they laid their hands on them and they received the Holy Spirit"

Mark 1:10 At his baptism, Jesus saw the Spirit descending on him and remaining with him

Luke 4:17-21 Teaching in Nazareth, Jesus says that the words of Isaiah, 'The Spirit of the Lord is upon me', refer to himself.

Luke 12:12 Jesus promised his disciples that the Holy Spirit would help them to bear witness to their faith.

John 15:26 On the night before he died Jesus promised the disciples he would send the Spirit truth from the Father.

Hebrews 6:2 Among the first elements of Christian instruction are the teaching about baptism and the laying on of hands.

Confirmation in the Catechism:

The Catechism of the Catholic Church (CCC) gives the Church's teaching on confirmation in paragraphs 1285-1321 including Confirmation in the Economy of Salvation (1286-1292); The Signs and the Rite of Confirmation (1293-1301); The Effects of Confirmation (1302-1305); Who Can Receive this Sacrament (1306-1311)

and

IN BRIEF *(the summary of the teaching of the Church on Confirmation from the Catechism)*

1316 Confirmation perfects Baptismal grace; it is the sacrament which gives the Holy Spirit in order to root us more deeply in the

divine filiation, incorporate us more firmly into Christ, strengthen our bond with the Church, associate us more closely with her mission, and help us bear witness to the Christian faith in words accompanied by deeds.

1317 Confirmation, like Baptism, imprints a spiritual mark or indelible character on the Christian's soul; for this reason one can receive this sacrament only once in one's life.

1318 In the East this sacrament is administered immediately after Baptism and is followed by participation in the Eucharist; this tradition highlights the unity of the three sacraments of Christian initiation. In the Latin Church this sacrament is administered when the age of reason has been reached, and its celebration is ordinarily reserved to the bishop, thus signifying that this sacrament strengthens the ecclesial bond.

1319 A candidate for Confirmation who has attained the age of reason must profess the faith, be in the state of grace, have the intention of receiving the sacrament, and be prepared to assume the role of disciple and witness to Christ, both within the ecclesial community and in temporal affairs.

1320 The essential rite of Confirmation is anointing the forehead of the baptised with sacred chrism... together with the laying on of the minister's hand and the words: "*Accipe signaculum doni Spiritus Sancti*" (Be sealed with the Gift of the Holy Spirit.)

1321 When Confirmation is celebrated separately from Baptism, its connection with Baptism is expressed, among other ways, by the renewal of baptismal promises. The celebration of Confirmation during the Eucharist helps underline the unity of the sacraments of Christian

Confirmation in Canon Law:

Canon Law is the body of laws and regulations that government the Catholic Church and all its members.

Can. 879 The sacrament of confirmation confers a character. By it the baptised continue their path of Christian initiation. They are enriched with the gift of the Holy Spirit, and are more closely linked to the Church. They are made strong and more firmly obliged by word and deed to witness to Christ and to spread and defend the faith.

Can. 880 §1 The sacrament of confirmation is conferred by anointing with chrism on the forehead in a laying on of hands, and by the words prescribed in the approved liturgical books.

§2 The chrism to be used in the sacrament of confirmation must have been consecrated by a Bishop, even when the sacrament is administered by a priest.

Can. 881 It is desirable that the sacrament of confirmation be celebrated in a church and indeed during Mass. However, for a just and reasonable cause it may be celebrated apart from Mass and in any fitting place.

Can. 882 The ordinary minister of confirmation is a Bishop. A priest can also validly confer this sacrament if he has the faculty to do so, either from the general law or by way of a special grant from the competent authority

Can. 882 The ordinary minister of confirmation is a Bishop. A priest can also validly confer this sacrament if he has the faculty to do so, either from the general law or by way of a special grant from the competent authority.

Can. 889 §1 Every baptised person who is not confirmed, and only such a person, is capable of receiving confirmation.

§2 Apart from the danger of death, to receive confirmation lawfully a person who has the use of reason must be suitably instructed, properly disposed and able to renew the baptismal promises.

Can. 892 As far as possible the person to be confirmed is to have a sponsor. The sponsor's function is to take care that the person confirmed behaves as a true witness of Christ and faithfully fulfils the duties inherent in this sacrament.

Can. 893 §1 A person who would undertake the office of sponsor must fulfil the conditions mentioned in can. 874.

§2 It is desirable that the sponsor chosen be the one who undertook this role at baptism

Confirmation and Church history:

In the early church, Baptism and Confirmation were part of a single Rite of Initiation. The sacraments of initiation included many ritual actions: the bath, various rubbings with oil, prayers and kissing and finally fellowship at the Lord's table. It was a very sensual ceremony, and its meanings were multiple and rich. It meant beginning a new life in Christ, being sealed with the Spirit, receiving the gifts of the Spirit, strength for the human and spiritual journey, embodiment in the body of Christ.

These are the meanings of the *total ceremony*. No one part of the ceremony had a separate and distinct meaning. There were different symbolic actions—the bath, the anointings, the laying on of hands, the breaking of bread. But the meaning of any of these individual actions came from the *integral ceremony*.

Today we associate particular meanings with confirmation, such as laying on of hands, being sealed with the Spirit and receiving the Spirit's gifts; but these meanings are also *baptismal* meanings.

By the sixth century, the baptism of infants whose parents were Christians had become the norm. The integral ceremony began to break down at that time because bishops began reserving to themselves the anointing after baptism. They were unable to be present for the initiation ceremonies in all of their parishes, but they wanted to keep a role in the ritual of initiation. By reserving to themselves the anointing after baptism and various prayers for the coming of the Spirit, they could 'confirm' the initiation of the candidates at some later occasion.

From the 9th century onwards in Europe, the bishop's confirmation was adopted. On his visitation to a parish, the bishop confirmed those who had been baptised, although by now it was not just the baptisms of the previous Easter, but the baptisms of a number of years, since baptism was no longer limited to just Easter and the bishop did not manage to visit the growing numbers of parishes each year. The traditional practice was confirmation as soon as possible after baptism, usually by the age of one or two (and in some cases, parents who neglected to have their children confirmed by this age were fined).

By the 13th century, the age of confirmation had gradually gone up. The 'age of discretion' became the acceptable age for the sacrament, on the grounds that the graces of confirmation were not needed until a child could distinguish between right and wrong – again the sacramental emphasis would seem to be the fight against temptation. Official statements on the age of discretion are rare, although one Church Council in 1280 said that children under seven should not be confirmed and other loyal decrees put the age for confirmation at 12 or 14.

The *Catechism* of the Council of Trent, published in 1556, stated that the sacrament could be given to any baptised Catholic, that it was unnecessary to be confirmed before the age of seven, but confirmation should not be postponed beyond the age of 12. In practice, the sacrament continued to be given before First Communion.

The theology and practice of confirmation remained unaltered

thereafter for some time. Now and again there were minor alterations in the rite of confirmation. Nearly three hundred years after the Council of Trent, some Catholic churches began to give communion before confirmation, especially in France. This was more due to a developing understanding of communion than any theological development of confirmation. This practice was approved in 1910 by Pope Pius X who encouraged children to receive communion from the age of seven. Communion before confirmation became the norm, and thus confirmation was completely separated from baptism and Eucharist as a sacrament of initiation. The unique process of initiation that we saw at the time of the early Church had completely broken up.

(Taken and adapted from The Book of Sacramental Basics by Tad Guzie, publ. Paulist Press, 1981 and The Hallelujah Highway-a History of the Catechumenate by Paul Turner, publ. Liturgy Training Publications, 2000)

Essential elements of a Confirmation course:

Readiness to Receive the Sacrament

Canon Law (899.2)-see above- states that candidates for Confirmation must be 'properly disposed and suitably instructed to receive the sacrament'. This may be looked at under three headings:

Psychological readiness is shown by a willingness to *receive the sacrament*. This will include a desire on the part of the candidate to participate fully in the programme of preparation and to receive the sacrament with a reverence and appreciation appropriate to his or her age.

Catechetical readiness will be shown by the awareness of one's belonging to the Catholic community through baptism. It will be shown by the capacity to understand and believe that God loves us very much. This is the message of Jesus, who revealed the presence of God to us in his life through word and deed. Jesus invites us into intimacy with himself and he invites us to follow him. If the candidate sees that call as relevant and meaningful in their life by acting with compassion, justice and mercy, it shows their readiness.

Liturgical readiness will be shown by regular attendance at Mass on Sundays with a level of understanding of the Mass commensurate with his or her ability.

CCC1309 Preparation for Confirmation should aim at leading the Christian toward a more intimate union with Christ and a more lively familiarity with the Holy Spirit - his actions, his gifts, and his biddings - in order to be more capable of assuming the apostolic responsibilities of Christian life.

- The 'apostolic responsibilities of Christian life' are derived from Christ's command to the apostles:

"Having been divinely sent to the nations that she might be 'the universal sacrament of salvation,' the Church, in obedience to the command of her founder and because it is demanded by her own essential universality, strives to preach the Gospel to all men": "Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you; and Lo, I am with you always, until the close of the age." (Ad Gentes 1)

- The Catechism gives us further guidance on witness:

CCC1303 *Confirmation* 'gives us a special strength of the Holy Spirit to spread and defend the faith by word and action as true witnesses of Christ, to confess the name of Christ boldly, and never to be ashamed of the Cross.'

CCC 2472 The duty of Christians to take part in the life of the Church impels them to act as *witnesses of the Gospel* and of the obligations that flow from it. This witness is a transmission of the faith in words and deeds. Witness is an act of justice that

establishes the truth or makes it known. 'All Christians by the example of their lives and the witness of their word, wherever they live, have an obligation to manifest the new man which they have put on in Baptism and to reveal the power of the Holy Spirit by whom they were strengthened at Confirmation. (Ad Gentes 11)'

- The document *Apostolicam actuositatem*, the decree on the apostolate of the laity, gives guidance on the apostolic issues around young people:

AA12. Young persons exert very important influence in modern society. There has been a radical change in the circumstances of their lives, their mental attitudes, and their relationships with their own families. Frequently they move too quickly into a new social and economic status. While their social and even their political importance is growing from day to day, they seem to be unable to cope adequately with their new responsibilities.

Their heightened influence in society demands of them a proportionate apostolic activity, but their natural qualities also fit them for this activity. As they become more conscious of their own personalities, they are impelled by a zest for life and a ready eagerness to assume their own responsibility, and they yearn to play their part in social and cultural life. If this zeal is imbued with the spirit of Christ and is inspired by obedience and love for the Church, it can be expected to be very fruitful. They should become the first to carry on the apostolate directly to other young persons, concentrating their apostolic efforts within their own circle, according to the needs of the social environment in which they live. Adults ought to engage in such friendly discussion with young people that both age groups, overcoming the age barrier, may become better acquainted and share the special benefits each generation can offer the other. Adults should stimulate young persons first by good example to take part in the apostolate and, if the opportunity presents itself, by offering them effective advice and willing assistance. By the same token young people should cultivate toward adults respect and trust, and although they are naturally attracted to novelties, they should duly appreciate praiseworthy traditions.

- A consciousness of the activities of the parish will help the candidates have a sense of being part of a community which responds to the needs of its members and who share some part of their lives with each other.

- The candidates should spend time considering the moral choices we face as Christians – and should look at decision making and the development of moral principles. Part 3 of the Catechism gives the teaching of the Church in this.

- The published programmes for confirmation preparation approach the areas mentioned in para 1309 of the Catechism in a variety of ways. Whichever programme a parish chooses to use, whether published or original needs to consider the above.

- The General Directory for Catechesis tells us that growth in the Christian life – catechesis – is achieved in the following ways:

- In scripture
- Through witness (or apostolic work)
- In our Creed (our profession of faith)
- Through our lived moral values
- In our liturgies and prayer. (GDC 94-95)

All should be part of any programme of preparation

- The General Directory for Catechesis also gives some guidance on the catechesis of adolescents:

GDC 184 Generally youth catechesis should be proposed in new ways which are open to the sensibilities and problems of this age group. They should be of a theological, ethical, historical and social nature. In particular, due emphasis should be given to education in truth and liberty as understood by the Gospel, to the formation of conscience and to education for love. Emphasis should also be placed on vocational discernment, Christian involvement in society and on missionary responsibility in the world.

Learning from the Rite of Confirmation:

The presentation of the candidates:

- the importance of calling each candidate by name as they are presented to the bishop,
- witness to their readiness to celebrate the sacrament

The homily or instruction by the bishop:

- the significance of listening to Scripture, and how we hear God speak to us in Scripture
- how the bishops are the successors of the apostles and how they have the power of giving the Holy Spirit to the baptised, either personally or through the priests they appoint.
- how the gift of the Holy Spirit is a spiritual sign and seal to make the candidates more like Christ
- the significance of being signed with the cross on the forehead
- why the candidates are called to renew their baptismal promises.

The renewal of the baptismal promises:

- In confirmation candidates renew the vows made by parents and godparents at baptism
- Candidates commit to reject sin and evil
- And profess their belief the central tenets of the Catholic faith

The laying on of hands,

- At confirmation we pray, using the ancient sign of calling on the Spirit, for the outpouring of the Holy Spirit to strengthen the candidates with the Spirit's gifts

The anointing with Chrism

- the significance of being anointed, being sealed with the Spirit, being marked with the sign of the cross and the responsibility it confers

The General Intercessions,

- A response to the word of God, which has been heard in faith
- The offering prayers to God for the salvation of all.

Resources for Confirmation Preparation:

Published resources

Programmes:

- ***Welcome the Spirit: a Catechist's Confirmation Handbook***, Sr. Mary Bernard Potter, SP and Nigel Bavidge, Leeds Diocese, publ. Geoffrey Chapman, 1996
- ***Preparing to be Confirmed: a series of sessions to prepare for the Sacrament of Confirmation***, Diana Klein, publ. McCrimmons, 2002
- ***Called to Life, a Confirmation programme to today's young Catholics***, Tony Castle, publ. Kevin Mayhew, 2008
- ***Confirmed in a Faithful Community*** publ. St. Mary's Press 2006
- ***Survival Guide to Confirmation: The Catechist's Guide***, Stephen Gomez, publ. Pauline Multimedia, 1995
- ***We Celebrate Confirmation***: Rev. William J. Koptlik and Joan E. Brady, publ. Silver Burdett Company, 1997
- ***Born in the Spirit of Jesus***: Richard Reichert, publ. Brown-Roa, 2002
- ***Celebrating Our Faith***: Margaret Hanrahan, publ. Brown-Roa, 1999

Further Reading

- ***Catechism of the Catholic Church***, publ. Geoffrey Chapman, revised 1999
- ***A New Look at the Sacraments***, William Bausch, publ. *Twenty-third Publications*, 1983
- ***Sacraments Revisited***, Liam Kelly, publ. Darton, Longman, Todd, 1998

Useful websites for purchase of resources:

Pauline Multimedia- www.pauline-uk.org

St Pauls – www.stpauls.org.uk

McCrimmons – www.mccrimmons.com

Amazon Books – www.amazon.co.uk

Training for the Preparation Team:

- Training and formation will be initially offered by the parish priest who will be able to guide catechists in an understanding of the sacrament and will have resources available in the parish such as the Catechism of the Catholic Church and existing resources for Confirmation preparation
- Contact your diocesan Catechetical Adviser or check the diocesan website: www.rcdow.org.uk/catechesis, to ask what supplementary training opportunities there are in the diocese. Check the diocesan website for information, articles and resources.

Reading & Resources for catechists:

- **Getting Confirmed**, Steve Givens, Redemptorist Publications, Hampshire
- **Your Child's Confirmation**, Carol Luebering, Redemptorist Publications, Hampshire
- **CAFOD and Confirmation** includes ideas, activities and resources that can help complement your Confirmation programme, residential retreat or parish youth work. (http://www.cafod.org.uk/resources/youth_leaders/confirmation_and_rcia_resources/cafod_and_confirmation)
- **Revealed**, Karen North, Rebecca Barber, David O'Connell and John Toryusen, Redemptorist Publications, Chawton, Hampshire, 2008 Revealed is a Catholic youth ministry resource
- **Impact!** YCW & Impact HQ, St. Joseph's off St. Joseph's Grove, London NW4 4TY (www.jcwimpact.com) Impact! is a programme from the YCW for 13-17 year olds

DVDs:

Plugged In – Youth CaFE” is a six week DVD based course – not a confirmation course - including icebreakers, small group discussions and interactive prayer times. CaFE www.faithcafe.org

Diocesan Policy on Confirmation:

Teenagers

Catechesis for Confirmation should normally take place within the parish community, which has an obligation to participate in the catechetical preparation of those to be confirmed.

- a) The policy is to offer teenagers the sacrament at the earliest in Year 9 of secondary school, though year 10 & 11 are possible. Where there are older year groups also being presented, it is good practice to prepare them separately.
- b) Where there is a small number of candidates, parishes should consider joining with each other. A deanery celebration ought to be considered where appropriate.

Adults

- a) Adults who are being baptised at the Easter Vigil may also be confirmed by a priest at the same ceremony. The faculty to confirm at the Easter Vigil or during the Easter season must be requested in advance via the Chancery Office. *
- b) Those who are to be received into full communion with the Church may be confirmed at the Easter Vigil or during the parish's normal celebration of the sacrament of Confirmation with the bishop. The faculty for a priest to confirm at the Easter Vigil or during the Easter season must be requested in advance via the Chancery Office.*
- c) Adult Catholics who, for some reason, were not confirmed as teenagers, should be prepared in the parish and may be confirmed at one of the regular Cathedral celebrations or during the parish's

normal celebration of the sacrament of Confirmation with the bishop.*

* the new RCIA form (2008) from the Chancery Office has been amended to cover all three of the above situations.

Sponsors:

Can. 892 As far as possible the person is to have a sponsor. The sponsor's function is to take care that the person confirmed behaves as a true witness of Christ and faithfully fulfils the duties inherent in this sacrament.

Can 893 §1 A person who would undertake the office of sponsor must fulfil the conditions mentioned in Canon 874 (see below)

§2 It is desirable that the sponsor chosen be the one who undertook this role at baptism.

Can. 874 §1. To be permitted to take on the function of sponsor a person must:

- 1/ be designated by the one to be baptised, by the parents or the person who takes their place, or in their absence by the pastor or minister and have the aptitude and intention of fulfilling this function;
- 2/ have completed the sixteenth year of age, unless the diocesan bishop has established another age, or the pastor or minister has granted an exception for a just cause;
- 3/ be a Catholic who has been confirmed and has already received the most holy sacrament of the Eucharist and who leads a life of faith in keeping with the function to be taken on;
- 4/ not be bound by any canonical penalty legitimately imposed or declared;
- 5/ not be the father or mother of the one to be confirmed.

How to help and encourage parents who are not practising:

- It is important to help parents who are distanced from the Church to feel welcome and to appreciate the importance of belonging to the Christian community. (See *On the Threshold*, in the resources for catechists listed above.)
- Introduce parents who are not practising to parents with children of about the same age who are practising.
- Invite parents to come to the Parent & Toddler group (or other social groups for young parents and their children).
- Do not assume knowledge and be careful not to come across as patronising.
- Invite – but do not pressurise – the parents to become involved in the life of the parish.

How to help and encourage a non-Catholic or a non-Christian parent:

- It is important to help parents to feel welcome and to appreciate the importance of belonging to the Christian community. (See *On the Threshold* in the resources for catechists listed above.)
- Consider inviting parents to come to the RCIA sessions in the parish, where they will learn more about Catholicism (without putting any pressure on them to become Catholics)
- Introduce the couples to other couples of mixed faith
- Consider giving them publications such as *How to survive being married to a Catholic* or *Your Faith – a popular presentation of Catholic belief*.