

GIFT FROM ON HIGH

CONFIRMATION AND FIRST EUCHARIST

COMPLETING THE INITIATION OF BAPTIZED CHILDREN

Introduction

On May 15, 2005 Bishop Thomas J. Olmsted promulgated the new Policy and Guidelines concerning the restoration the order of the Sacraments of Initiation in the Diocese of Phoenix. This new policy has effectively changed the age for Confirmation preparation and reception from 16 years of age (sophomore or junior in high school), to the ages of students in the third grade. As a result, the preparation and reception of the Sacraments of Initiation throughout the Diocese of Phoenix will be: Baptism: in Infancy, Reconciliation: Second Grade, Confirmation and First Eucharist: Third Grade.

PARENTS' 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 receives in the Eucharist the food of eternal life.

3. Who can receive the Sacrament of Confirmation?

According to our diocesan policy, the normal age for confirmation are those baptized children in third grade (usually around the age of eight years old). A candidate for confirmation must be at the age of discretion, seven years of age or above and must meet the following requirements:

- Be baptized and not previously confirmed
- Must be Catholic (children baptized in another church must make a Profession of Faith)
- Must be properly instructed
- Must be capable of renewing their Baptismal promises
- Must have previously been prepared for and received the Sacrament of Reconciliation (ordinarily occurs in Second Grade)

Candidates will be prepared for the Sacrament of Confirmation and First Eucharist. Both Sacraments will be celebrated together.

4. Why is the Diocese of Phoenix changing the age of Confirmation?

By placing Confirmation at this age, the Diocese of Phoenix will be following the natural sequence of the Sacraments of Christian Initiation: Baptism, Then Confirmation, and then reception of First Eucharist. Pope 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 the 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 receive the Sacrament of Confirmation before the reception of the Holy Eucharist.

5. When our children are confirmed prior to First Eucharist, 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 adult commitment to the Church. In fact, 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.

6. What is the Restored Order of the Sacraments?

An increasing number of dioceses and parishes in the United States are adopting a Restored 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 Eucharist, not *after*. Practically speaking, this means that the two sacraments are received at the First Eucharist Mass, with Confirmation being celebrated after the homily.

7. 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 U.S. Conference of 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.

8. Isn't Confirmation a sacrament of maturity that should come after First Eucharist?

Not really. 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 that receive the sacrament are able to reap its benefits from the moment of reception. The graces 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. In the Diocese of Phoenix as of May 15th, 2005 established the reception of Confirmation and First Eucharist in the Third grade.

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

Pope 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.

Implementing this new policy the diocese will support parishes with resources for parents so that a family may prepare together for the celebration of their child's Confirmation and First Eucharist.

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).
- 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 (emphasis added). 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).

10. How will my child be preparing for Confirmation?

In the restored 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 Eucharist as the culmination of Christian initiation.

11. 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. Your child's Eucharist preparation book also teaches about the power of the Spirit and the special gifts of the Spirit. 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.

12. 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 never about learning, but about faith. As your child prepares for Confirmation and Eucharist, here are three things to keep in mind:

- 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.