

## UNDERSTANDING THE SACRAMENT OF CONFIRMATION:

In the Sacrament of Confirmation the candidate receives the seven fold gift of the Holy Spirit: wisdom, understanding, right judgment, courage, knowledge, reverence and fear of the Lord.

The New Testament shows how the Holy Spirit was with Christ to bring the Messiah's mission to fulfillment. On receiving the baptism of John, Jesus saw the Spirit descend on him (see Mk 1:10). The Spirit remained with him. He was led by the Spirit to undertake his public ministry as the Messiah, relying on the Spirit's presence and assistance. He later promised his disciples that the Holy Spirit would help them to bear fearless witness to their faith, even before persecutors (see Lk 4:17-21).

The day before he suffered, he assured his apostles that he would send them the Spirit of truth from his Father (see Jn 15:26) to stay with them "forever" (Jn 14:16) and help them to be his witnesses (see Jn 15:26). On the feast of Pentecost, the Holy Spirit did indeed come down in an extraordinary way on the apostles as they were gathered together with Mary the mother of Jesus and the group of disciples. They were so "filled with" the Holy Spirit (Acts 2:4) that by divine inspiration they began to proclaim "the mighty works of God."

From that time on, the apostles, in fulfillment of Christ's wish, imparted to the newly baptized by the laying on of hands, the gift of the Spirit that completes the grace of baptism. This laying on of hands is rightly recognized by reason of Catholic tradition as the beginning of the Sacrament of Confirmation, which in a certain way perpetuates the grace of Pentecost in the Church.

Through the Sacrament of Confirmation, those who have been born anew in baptism receive the inexpressible Gift, the Holy Spirit himself, by whom "they are endowed...with special strength" (LG 11). Moreover, having been signed with the character of this sacrament, they are "more closely bound to the Church" (*ibid*) and they are more strictly obliged to spread and defend the faith, both by word and by deed, as true witness of Christ" (*ibid*).

From ancient times, the conferring of the gift of the Holy Spirit has been carried out in the Church through various rites. These rites have undergone many changes in the East and the West, but always keeping as their meaning the conferring of the Holy Spirit. The Western Church retained the practice of reserving the celebration of the Sacrament of Confirmation to the Bishop. This led to extended delay in administering the Sacrament to the candidate well into childhood and adolescence. Thus, Confirmation became pastorally separated from Baptism and the Eucharist.

In 1971, Pope Paul VI implemented the revision of the Confirmation Rite that was requested by the bishops at Vatican II. With this revision, he desired that “the intimate connection of the sacrament with the whole of Christian initiation may stand out more clearly.”

Since that time, the Latin Church uses the following formula to confer the sacrament of Confirmation: *“The sacrament of Confirmation is conferred through the anointing with chrism on the forehead, which is done by the laying on of the hand, and through the words: Be sealed with the Gift of the Holy Spirit.”\**

\*Taken from the Rite of Confirmation, Apostolic Constitution on the Sacrament of Confirmation. Paul VI, 1971.

## OBJECTIVES AND STANDARDS FOR CONFIRMATION PREPARATION

### A. Objectives

A good preparation for Confirmation should facilitate a continual process of conversion and enable full and active participation in the life of the Church with ever-growing depth. Therefore, the Confirmation Guidelines were developed to:

- ✠ Help youth recognize their dignity as sons and daughters of God, and develop a personal relationship with Jesus Christ by meeting Christ in the Scriptures, in the life and teachings of the Catholic Church, in the Sacraments, and in their own prayer lives.
- ✠ Assist young people in hearing God’s call to holiness, and to guide them toward a generous response to that call.
- ✠ Assist and challenge young people to become living saints as they strive to become more like Christ.
- ✠ Nurture in young people a desire for active and habitual participation in the sacramental life of the Church.
- ✠ Enable young people to embrace the theological and moral virtues and exercise them in their daily lives and personal decision-making.
- ✠ Empower youth to respond courageously to the challenges of life by relying on the gifts and guidance of the Holy Spirit.
- ✠ Help young people develop a life of Christian service modeled on the life of Jesus and the saints.
- ✠ Encourage young people to embrace the richness of diversity among their brothers and sisters thereby inspiring them to seek and find Christ in all things and in all persons.

- ✠ Equip youth to discern their gifts and talents and use them for the greater glory of God and the good of God's Church throughout the world.
- ✠ Provide moments of silence and prayer where young people can listen to the voice of God as He invites them to a particular state of life or vocation.
- ✠ Help young people begin the lifelong task of developing well-formed consciences to equip them to address moral challenges and choices throughout their lives.
- ✠ Help young people become familiar with and appreciate the gift of Sacred Scripture, the divinely inspired Word of God, where God speaks to man in a human way.

## **B. Standards**

**Knowledge of Christ.** The candidate should recognize the importance of Jesus Christ in his/her life.

**Interview.** The readiness of the Confirmation candidate should be discerned through an interview with either a priest or his delegate prior to reception of the sacrament.

**Confirmation Age.** Those being confirmed in youth Confirmation programs in the Diocese of Atlanta should receive the sacrament by the age of sixteen.

**Knowledge of Faith.** The candidate should demonstrate an understanding of the principal elements of the Catholic Faith according to his/her age and ability and be committed to ongoing learning and growth in faith.

**Retreat.** The candidate should attend at least one retreat.

The format of the retreat should be distinct from that of regular classroom catechesis, and should deepen the prayer life of the young people through the use of creative programs to help them personally encounter Christ in the Sacraments. It is important that the Sacrament of Penance and the celebration of the Holy Eucharist be offered during the retreat.

It is strongly recommended that the retreat take place off parish premises at a retreat site where the young people can truly "retreat" from life's daily routine and reflect upon their relationship with God.

**Sacramental Life.** The candidate should participate in the sacramental and liturgical life of the parish by:

- actively participating in Holy Mass every Sunday.
- receiving the Sacrament of Penance frequently.
- intending to live a sacramental life until death.

**Service Hours.** Candidates are required to incorporate a Christian service component into their Confirmation preparation programs.

**Confirmation Name.** The candidate may choose a Confirmation name. The baptismal name is always an appropriate name for Confirmation in order to show the relationship between the Sacraments of Baptism and Confirmation. However, a special name may be chosen if desired, in which case it should be that of a recognized saint. If the baptismal name is not that of a recognized saint, a new name (that of a recognized saint) may be chosen for the celebration of Confirmation.

**Confession before Confirmation.** “To receive Confirmation one must be in a state of grace.” (CCC 1310) The sacrament of Penance must be made available to the candidates (within the month prior to the Confirmation Rite) in order to be cleansed for the gift of the Holy Spirit.