

THE ROMAN CATHOLIC
ARCHDIOCESE OF ATLANTA



FORM TO SEND
CREATING A PATH FOR
MISSIONARY DISCIPLESHIP

The Sacrament of Confirmation

*Theological and Pastoral Reflections in View
of the New Approach*

Come,
Holy Spirit!





Plan for today

- The overall vision
- Confirmation
 - Theological/pastoral considerations
 - Family-oriented approaches



There is a pressing need to frame everything in terms of evangelization, as the fundamental principle that guides ecclesial activity as a whole.

—*Directory for Catechesis [DC] (2020), no. 297*

We can't deny that we've needed a dramatic paradigm shift with how we equip the Domestic Church to pass along the faith to the next generation. There's no better time than now.

—Dan Cellucci, Catholic Leadership Institute, December 2020



A New Approach to Faith Formation and Confirmation

- **FIRST focus:** overall approach to **faith formation** ... *reorienting around engaging families and adult discipleship* ... and re-envisioning **youth ministry**
- **SECOND:** to shift the ordinary grade level/age of Confirmation for baptized Catholics in the Archdiocese of Atlanta from 10th grade (15-16 years old) to **6th grade (11-12 years old)**
- **GOAL:** **lifelong missionary discipleship**





Planning Steps & Objectives

- **ALWAYS – Pray & Discern**
- **FIRST – Develop a Culture of Family Faith Formation**
- **SECOND – Re-envision Your Parish Youth Ministry**
- **THIRD – Family-oriented Confirmation Program**
- ***HORIZON – Review, Evaluate, and Chart a Discipleship Path***





Timeline – Gradual

- **PHASE 1 – Preliminary Years (2026-2027):**
Prayer, Discernment, Planning, Preparation, and Initial Implementation
- **PHASE 2 – Implementation Years (2028-2031):**
All parishes are moving forward with some form of intentional family faith formation or engagement of parents and have begun the transition to a lower grade level/age for Confirmation after working through the planning steps. By 2031, all parishes should be implementing the new vision.

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Confirmation

Theological and Pastoral Considerations



Confirmation: Theological considerations

(see X. DeBroeck, cited below)

- **A sacrament of initiation**
 - *Unity of the sacraments of initiation*
- **Completes baptismal grace, not initiation**
 - *Oriented to the Eucharist*
- **A seal with the Gift of the Holy Spirit**
 - *Rediscovering the charisms & Pentecost*
- **Not a sacrament of maturity (as generally understood)**
 - *A sacrament of the Holy Spirit and missionary discipleship*

A sacrament of initiation

- *Baptism, the Eucharist, and the sacrament of Confirmation together constitute the “sacraments of Christian initiation,” whose unity must be safeguarded.* (CCC, no. 1285)
- Its connection with Baptism is vital ... *an increase and deepening of baptismal grace* (CCC, no. 1303)
- A beginning ... “necessary for our ongoing conversion as Christians” (X. Debroeck, “Confirmation: Initiation Not Completion,” *Catechetical Review*)



Completes baptismal grace, not initiation

- *The holy Eucharist completes Christian initiation.* (CCC, no. 1322)
- Oriented to the Eucharist and a Eucharistic life—the Eucharist as the source and summit of the Church’s life and mission.
- Preparation for Confirmation should aim at leading the Christian toward a more intimate union with Christ... (CCC, no. 1309)



Completes baptismal grace, not initiation (cont.)



If the Eucharist is truly the source and summit of the Church's life and mission, it follows that the process of Christian initiation must constantly be directed to the reception of this sacrament. As the Synod Fathers said, we need to ask ourselves whether in our Christian communities the close link between Baptism, Confirmation and Eucharist is sufficiently recognized. It must never be forgotten that our reception of Baptism and Confirmation is ordered to the Eucharist. Accordingly, our pastoral practice should reflect a more unitary understanding of the process of Christian initiation.

(Pope Benedict XVI, *Sacramentum Caritatis*, no. 17)

A seal with the Gift of the Holy Spirit



- *Be sealed with the Gift of the Holy Spirit (CCC, no. 1300).*
- *The effect ... is the special outpouring of the Holy Spirit as once granted to the apostles on the day of Pentecost. (CCC, no. 1302)*
- More emphasis on *Whom* we receive—*the Gift.*

A seal with the Gift of the Holy Spirit (cont.)



- Rediscovering the charisms: *The doctrine of the seven gifts was something that developed in the void left by the eclipse of the theology of the charisms.* (Cantalamessa, *Come, Creator Spirit*, 180)
- Second Vatican Council: *Lumen Gentium*, no. 12
- *Pentecost is Today!* (Cantalamessa, 184)
- The co-essentiality of the hierarchical and charismatic dimensions of the Church

A seal with the Gift of the Holy Spirit (cont.)

- 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.** To this end catechesis for Confirmation should strive to awaken a sense of belonging to the Church of Jesus Christ, the universal Church as well as the parish community. (CCC, no. 1309, emphasis added)



Not a sacrament of maturity

- A sacrament of the Holy Spirit—of Pentecost—and missionary discipleship
- The call of Jeremiah: *“Ah, Lord GOD!” I said. I do not know how to speak. I am too young!” But the Lord answered me, Do not say, “I am too young.” To whomever I send you, you shall go; whatever I command you, you shall speak.* (Jer 1:6-7)
- Children and youth are called *now* to be disciples, to be holy, to love the Lord and their neighbor according to their capacity and the grace of the Lord



Not a sacrament of maturity (cont.)

Although Confirmation is sometimes called the "sacrament of Christian maturity," we must not confuse adult faith with the adult age of natural growth, nor forget that the baptismal grace is a grace of free, unmerited election and does not need "ratification" to become effective. St. Thomas reminds us of this:

Age of body does not determine age of soul. Even in childhood man can attain spiritual maturity: as the book of Wisdom says: "For old age is not honored for length of time, or measured by number of years. Many children, through the strength of the Holy Spirit they have received, have bravely fought for Christ even to the shedding of their blood.

(CCC, no. 1308)



Not a sacrament of maturity (cont.)

At times, pastoral practices inadvertently communicate that this sacrament is about being a mature adult in the faith. The perception that an adolescent is capable of better “understanding” than a younger child has contributed to the belief that this is a sacrament of maturity. Although adolescents have a greater capacity for abstract thought than a younger child, their psychological development is such that it is not a time consistent with “maturity.” Using the language of “sacrament of maturity” additionally perpetuates the misconception that the formation in the faith ends with confirmation, as though it were a sacrament to be equated with graduation from religious study.

(X. DeBroeck, “Confirmation: Initiation Not Completion,” Catechetical Review)



Not a sacrament of maturity (cont.)

Code of Canon Law, CAN. 879 *The sacrament of confirmation, which imprints a character and by which the baptized, continuing on the path of Christian initiation, are enriched by the gift of the Holy Spirit and bound more perfectly to the Church, strengthens the baptized and obliges them more firmly to be witnesses of Christ in word and deed and to spread and defend the faith.* (Translation adjusted to reflect the order of the Latin typical edition)



Not a sacrament of maturity (cont.)

CANS. 889-91

- Those to be confirmed: “every baptized person not yet confirmed”
- To receive licitly outside danger of death: persons who have use of reason should “be suitably instructed, properly disposed, and able to renew the baptismal promises”
- “The faithful are obliged to receive this sacrament at the proper time.” Ordinary, universal age: “at about the age of discretion.”



Confirmation: Pastoral approaches

Across all ages (see X. DeBroeck):

- Explain the theological considerations above in age-appropriate ways (with emphasis on Pentecost and the Holy Spirit)
- Emphasize and explain the connection between the Sacraments of Baptism and Confirmation. This connection is expressed with the renewal of baptismal promises at the celebration of the sacrament.
- Include opportunities for reflection on the meaning of the symbols and the sacrament.



Confirmation: Pastoral approaches

Across all ages (see X. DeBroeck, cont.):

- Present preparation and sacramental formation as a *process*, not a program, thus emphasizing the need for on-going formation, on-going conversion, on-going commitment to discipleship.
- Emphasize the orientation to the Eucharist and a Eucharistic life. Celebration of confirmation during Mass allows for a fuller expression of the unity of the sacraments of initiation.



Confirmation: Pastoral approaches

Age-appropriate ways (see X. DeBroeck):

- Present the meaning of charisms and how to recognize/ discern them, modeling and introducing what “a lively familiarity with the Holy Spirit” looks like.
- Explain the gifts and fruits of the Holy Spirit.
- Integrate use of Scripture readings with different applications.
- Recognize that the understanding and acceptance of commitment to the faith journey is dependent on the level of affective maturity (not chronological age) of the candidate.

Family-oriented approaches

From the Form to Send Working Document for Leaders – Planning Steps & Objectives:

- **“THIRD – Family-oriented Confirmation Program** [*think “process of formation”*]: Make plans to implement a family-oriented sacramental program for Confirmandi and their families. *This will and should look different across parishes, but a key question will be how to engage parents in meaningful and fruitful ways along the journey to Confirmation, continuing the momentum of the earlier family catechesis while also supporting the growing maturity of the adolescents.”*



Family-oriented approaches (cont.)

- **How to *involve/engage/support* parents** ... E.g., how can parents be formed and strengthened in a lively familiarity with the Holy Spirit? How can parents help their children recognize charisms and distinguish between natural talents/strengths and the gifts and charisms of the Holy Spirit? How can the family be invited into a deeper life in the Holy Spirit?
- **Various models and opportunities:** Family-oriented sessions; engaging parents separately but in a reinforcing way; retreats with parents and youth; service opportunities including parents



Family-oriented approaches (cont.)

- FFD – Three supplemental sessions in development
- Video message from Archbishop to parents in development
- Other publishers/resources will be made available
- **Where to start?** Begin by praying and discerning with the four pillars of Domestic Church life to create a culture of family faith formation.



FAMILIES FORMING DISCIPLES
A FAMILY-FOCUSED APPROACH TO FAITH FORMATION

RESTORE THE INITIATIVE TO GOD





Thank you

- We welcome feedback
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- Questions?



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