

Integrating Confirmation into a Comprehensive Youth Ministry

Changing Directions

The comprehensive approach to youth ministry developed in *YouthWorks* provides an excellent opportunity to integrate high school Confirmation preparation into a broader programming framework. This integration will go a long way toward eliminating the chronic problems associated with the current practice of high school Confirmation, e.g. drop-off in participation after the reception of Confirmation.

If we want the active participation of youth in parish life after confirmation we must structure our Confirmation programs accordingly. This means beginning with the end in mind. We are seeking to guide young people toward an active Christian discipleship as members of the Catholic community. We need to consider our preparation programs as an apprenticeship in discipleship — a time for actively learning how to follow the Lord Jesus. If we are able to structure the content and activities of our preparation programs as an apprenticeship, we will be planning for life after confirmation.

The best way to reach our goals for Confirmation is to integrate high school Confirmation into the comprehensive model of youth ministry (described in Section Two of *YouthWorks*) by doing the following:

Shorten confirmation preparation programs to six months, allowing young people to choose freely when they are ready to celebrate the Sacrament.

Shorten the sacramental preparation for Confirmation to six months. Begin in January and culminate the process in May or June. Celebrate the flow of the liturgical year from Lent through Easter to Pentecost in our preparation process. Such programming allows Confirmation programs to be modeled on the process of the RCIA (Rite of Christian Initiation of Adults), adapting the rituals (e.g., the rite of enrollment) for Confirmation candidates. An outline of such a process is included later.

As an alternative to two year preparation programs and the practice of confirming a grade or class of young people, allow young people to choose when they are ready to celebrate the sacrament. How? Parishes can develop criteria for readiness that are based on a young person's participation in the youth ministry (and its programs) and on his or her faith growth during the adolescent years. By using youth ministry programming a young person can prepare at his or her own pace for Confirmation by taking certain recommended catechetical courses from the catechetical program, participate in justice and service programming, plan and participate in worship experiences, learn how to pray, and belong to a community. In short, the youth ministry provides the context for growth in faith of all the young people of the parish, before or after a person celebrates Confirmation!

When a young person has completed the requirements developed by the parish, he or she then applies for the Confirmation sacramental preparation program, is interviewed, and begins the six

month preparation process. By allowing young people to choose when they want to celebrate the sacrament, young people will not be confirmed as classes or grades. It allows them to prepare at their own pace, recognizing their freedom and the other involvements.

To handle the various routes that young people will take to Confirmation, a parish can develop a policy statement that outlines the preparation requirements, Confirmation process, and additional elements, such as sponsors. The policy describes either the recommended catechetical courses or the number of courses needed, service involvements, prayer and worship involvements, community life involvements, and retreat participation. The policy becomes the basis for helping young people develop their own journey to Confirmation. An outline of the elements of a parish policy follows.

Suggestions for Parish Confirmation Policies

Introduction and Rationale

- Important event for entire community
- Meaning of Confirmation (theological, attitudinal, impact on young person)
- Confirmation is not graduate or conclusion of involvement in parish life

Specific Policies

1. Readiness of Candidates

Parishes can develop criteria for readiness that are based on a young person's participation in the youth ministry (and its programs) and on his or her faith growth during the adolescent years. The policy becomes the basis for helping young people develop their journey to Confirmation. The youth ministry provides the context for growth in faith of all the young people of the parish, before or after a person celebrates Confirmation.

An Example of Participation Requirements

Catechetical courses: Prior to acceptance as a Confirmation candidate all the youth of our parish are required to take four of the following eight courses: Jesus, Gospels, Sexuality, Justice, Personal Growth, Moral Decision Making, Church, Relationships.

Service Involvement: Prior to acceptance as a Confirmation candidate all the youth of our parish are required to participate in one service project lasting a full season or in three short-term projects.

Prayer and Worship: Prior to acceptance as a Confirmation candidate all the youth of our parish are required to join a liturgy planning team to plan and conduct a worship experience for all in youth ministry (for example, the Thanksgiving Eucharist).

These types of requirement could also be applied to involvement in Pastoral Care, Community

Life, and Leadership Training programs.

2. Confirmation Process

- Description of the program, length, schedule, liturgical events, catechetical content, retreat
- Role and Requirements for parents of those preparing to be confirmed
- Role and Requirements for sponsors
- Specify the role of participants in planning the Confirmation ceremony.

A Short-Term Confirmation Process Modeled on the RCIA

Basic Components of the Confirmation Process

1. Catechesis

Focused catechesis for the celebration of the sacrament of Confirmation.

Suggest themes: Sacraments of Initiation, Christian lifestyle, mission and ministry of Jesus and the Church, mission and ministry of the believer, continuing growth as a Christian.

2. Spiritual Formation

Suggested: Retreat experience on the spiritual life and learning to pray

3. Liturgical/Ritual

Suggested: Special celebrations of the Word and Eucharist during formation, special rites during formation process to mark the journey (e.g., Enrollment Ceremony), regular remembrance by the community.

Stages of Preparation Process Accommodated to the Liturgical Cycle (6 month model)

January (Baptism of the Lord)	Invitation
January - Sunday before Lent	Interviews
First Sunday of Lent	Formal Inscription/enrollment
Lent	Confirmation Catechesis
Holy Week	Retreat
	Second Interviews
Easter	Renewal of Baptism
	Presentation to Community
Easter Season	Celebration of Confirmation
Pentecost Sunday	Special Liturgy Prepared by Newly Confirmed

Leadership Required for Successful Implementation of the Confirmation Process

A variety of leaders are needed for successful implementation of a Confirmation process. The following are suggested roles and responsibilities for a Confirmation team and its committee.

Team Coordinator

- coordinates/supervises the work of the team and committees
- convenes meetings and facilitates planning
- oversees recruitment, training, and supervision/support of leaders
- works with pastoral staff and other parish organizations to coordinate all aspects of the Confirmation program with total parish planning
- accountable for overall implementation of the Confirmation program

Coordinator of Catechetical Program

- organizes/schedules catechetical component
- selects materials
- administers catechetical component
- provides for the formation of catechists
- convenes catechists for support/guidance
- assists catechists in their work

Retreat Coordinator

- plans and organizes retreat experience
- recruits and trains staff for retreat experience

Liturgical Coordinator

- plans appropriate rites
- coordinates the liturgical aspects of the formation program

Parent Involvement Coordinator

- plans/conducts orientation on Confirmation Program
- coordinates the liturgical aspects of the formation program
- invites parents to participate in appropriate aspects of Confirmation Program

Planning a Confirmation Process

To assist you in planning a Confirmation process for your parish, the following planning suggestions are offered. Use the planning process in Section Four to integrate the confirmation process into your overall youth ministry plan, as well as plan specific programs within the confirmation program.

1. Preliminary decisions for planning

- How is the Confirmation Process integrated within the youth ministry and the adolescent catechesis curriculum?
- What is the length of the Confirmation process?
- What programs/opportunities will be provided for the young people after the Confirmation process?

2. Consider the elements for your overall plan

- a. Letter of invitation
- b. Evening of hospitality for parents & youth
- c. Initial interview and concluding interview
- d. Sponsor preparation
- e. Catechetical program
- f. Parental involvement/education program
- g. Liturgical Component (Rite of Enrollment, Rite of Presentation, Rite of Confirmation).

3. Develop an overall calendar for the Confirmation process

Outline in general form the flow of the various elements of the process. This will help the planners in creating programs to meet the expectations of the overall plan.

4. Develop each component of the Confirmation process using the committees

5. Integrate the components into a holistic program

After the committees have developed the concrete programs, compile the individual programs and schedule them on the calendar. At this time any changes or renegotiating can take place. Each committee should also specify potential leaders for the program. The overall design should be presented to appropriate parish leadership for comment and/or approval.

6. Develop a comprehensive Confirmation policy for the parish

7. Develop your leadership system

(See Section Five, "Leadership Basics" for a process to recruit, train, and support your leaders.)

8. Promote/publicize the program throughout the parish

9. Implement the program

Schedule regular meetings of the Confirmation Team to monitor/coordinate the components of the program and to evaluate the progress of the program.

10. Evaluate the individual components, the overall program, and the work of the Confirmation team.

Life after Confirmation — Provide Continuing Opportunities for Growth and Ministry

Is there life after confirmation? If you have integrated Confirmation into the overall youth ministry and structured your Confirmation program similar to the outline above, then you are making strides to alleviate the drop-out problem after Confirmation. If young people have been participating in the regular youth ministry programs and activities, then these experiences will go a long way toward deepening of the young people's sense of belonging and purpose. You are using your entire youth ministry to provide activities and involvements that promote the continuing growth and development of the confirmed young people.

In addition, after confirmation young people need to be treated as fully initiated members of our community and accorded the rights and responsibilities of full membership. Our attitudes toward them and our style of ministry and programming must change to accommodate their new status in the community and their new abilities. We must change our attitude from "getting them confirmed" to engaging them actively in the life and mission of the church community as fully initiated members. The community *needs* their energy and enthusiasm, their gifts and talents. The community *needs* this new generation of disciples!

There are dozens of things every parish can do to change this attitudes and ministry with confirmed adolescents. Here are several ideas to start you thinking and acting.

Provide Leadership Opportunities. There is no better way to change our attitudes and approach to young people than inviting them into leadership roles in the parish community. This is a great way to build mentoring relationships between adults and youth, and to utilize the gifts and talents of youth in the parish community. If we structure our confirmation preparation as an apprenticeship, young people will have learned the skills necessary for leadership. Think about all possibilities for leadership in the ministries, programs, and activities of the parish. Fully initiated youth can serve on parish leadership bodies like the parish council and parish committees (e.g., liturgy, social activities, religious education). They can take responsibility for organizing events for the entire parish community. They can serve as catechists (or team teachers) in the childhood or early adolescent catechetical program. They can serve as leaders in summer camp or religious education programs for children. They can serve as retreat leaders. They can serve in a variety of liturgical ministries, such as lectors, greeters (hospitality ministry), and music ministers (voice or instruments). Those with artistic abilities can use their gifts in planning the environment for the various liturgical seasons. Young people can also prepare and lead seasonal (Advent/Christmas, Lent/Easter, Pentecost) or ethnic parish celebrations, as well as liturgies that are youth-focused. The list of possibilities is endless.

Provide an Annual Renewal Retreat. Involve the confirmed in planning an annual retreat (weekend or overnight) that serves as a renewal experience. Each annual retreat could have a

unique theme, thereby making each year different. You can use outside resource people to conduct the retreat in the parish or you can bring the parish group to an existing retreat program sponsored by your diocese or by a local retreat house.

Create a Newsletter. Initiate regular communication with all the youth of the parish through the use of a monthly or seasonal newsletter. This is an excellent way to keep in contact with all those who have been confirmed, as well as those currently involved. This can be developed as a separate publication, incorporated into an existing parish newsletter or inserted into the Sunday bulletin. Young people can work as a team writing and preparing the newsletter. The newsletter can contain articles for youth enrichment, such as self-help articles, reflections on youth issues and concerns, scripture reflections, youth prayers, stories of what the young people in the parish are doing. A calendar of parish and community events can be included.

Sponsor Programs and Events Focused on the Needs of the Confirmed Youth. Develop seasonal events to gather the confirmed youth of the parish. These events build a sense of parish identity among the youth. These programs can be organized as one-time events, such as social activities, athletic activities, special trips, service projects, educational programs. They can also be organized as a short series of programs, such as a speaker or video series on topics of interest to the confirmed. You may be able to take advantage of diocesan youth activities. You may want to try co-sponsoring a program with the other churches in your community.

Promote Service and Social Change. Challenge the confirmed to organize and lead service and social change projects for adolescents (in confirmation programs) and for the entire parish. If we provide quality service projects during confirmation preparation, young people should receive the training and experience necessary to organize and/or lead a service program. Engage the young people in researching justice issues locally and globally, identifying service and social change projects and organizations that the parish can work with, organizing a program of service and social change, and taking responsibility for leading others in service.