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*Confirmed in a  
Faithful  
Community*

A Senior High Confirmation Process

*Coordinator's Manual*

Third Edition



## **Coordinator's Manual**



**Confirmed** in a Faithful Community:  
A Senior High Confirmation Process



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Third Edition

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and Thomas Zanzig**



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# Introduction

The Church's theological understanding and pastoral practice of Confirmation have undergone further development in the past three decades, due in part to the Church's recovery of the catechumenal model of initiation. This approach to Confirmation was formalized by the promulgation of the Rite of Christian Initiation (RCIA) in 1972. Though intended for the sacramental initiation of unbaptized adults, the theology and pastoral principles of the RCIA are recognized as normative for all the sacraments of initiation—Baptism, Confirmation, and the Eucharist—regardless of the age at which those sacraments are celebrated.

## Baptism in the Early Church

Baptism in the early Church was a powerful and moving experience. The ritual used rich symbols and actions that conveyed deep meaning to those who participated. Imagine descending three steps into the waters of the baptismal pool, being immersed three times by the bishop, and then coming out of the water a new creation.

Baptism in the first few centuries of the Church's history was a celebration primarily for adults. Baptism of infant members of Christian families, however, gradually became the normal practice and is still the most common today.

In the early Church, a person preparing for Baptism was called a catechumen. This word comes from a Greek term related to sound and hearing. A catechumen is one who hears Jesus's Good News proclaimed by the Church. The preparation period was called the catechumenate. Lasting about three years, the catechumenate was a time for praying, fasting, studying, and being of service to others. During this time, the catechumen listened to the word of God and explored the Christian way of life. (In the candidate's process of preparation, the period of formation parallels the catechumenate in the early Church.)

The final intense stage of preparation for Baptism in the early Church lasted forty days and evolved into what we know as Lent. (In the candidate's preparation, the period of reflection is intended to parallel this part of the early Church's practice.) Baptism, the final step in the original process, took place during the Easter Vigil—the evening before the Easter celebration of the Resurrection. In the early Church, the Easter Vigil was the only time that Baptisms were performed. Even after the actual ceremony, newly initiated members were expected to pursue further study and receive more knowledge about the Christian "mysteries." (The period of mission in the candidate's preparation process parallels this part of the early Church's approach to the sacraments of initiation.)

## Baptism at the Easter Vigil

The Easter Vigil ceremony was preceded by ritual bathing on Holy Thursday and by two days of fasting. On the Saturday night of the vigil, all the catechumens gathered—men in one room and women in another. Their sponsors—the persons who had guided them toward their new birth—were there. Because of their parental role, the sponsors were called fathers and mothers by the catechumens. Later, sponsors became known as godparents.

At the start of the Easter Vigil ceremony, the catechumens faced the West, the place of sunset and darkness. They stretched out their arms and denounced Satan. Then suddenly they turned to the East and shouted their commitment to Christ. This



physical turnabout by the catechumens marked their spiritual turnabout, or conversion. The East was considered the place of light, of the rising sun, and of new life. (Throughout the Middle Ages, churches were built facing the East.)

Next, the catechumens went to a room with a pool that was often modeled after the Roman public baths. They stripped off their old clothing, had oil poured over their bodies, and stepped down into the waist-deep waters. The bishop submerged the catechumens in the water, usually three times—in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit. The catechumens then emerged from the other side of the pool and received new white robes. The bishop anointed them, again with oil, and embraced them in a sign of peace and welcome.

Finally, the catechumens were led into the room where the Eucharist was celebrated. For the first time, on Easter Sunday, they participated in the total Eucharistic celebration. Before Baptism, the catechumens attended Mass only until the end of the homily. As a matter of fact, the first part of the Mass was called the Mass of the Catechumens because the prayers, readings, and homily were intended to give instruction to the catechumens. What a joy it must have been for the newly baptized, after three years of preparation, to share the Eucharist with their friends and family for the first time! And what a joy for the rest of the community to welcome these long-awaited newcomers to their special Easter meal!

The process of preparing for initiation at the Easter Vigil demanded a great deal of time and dedication from those who wanted to become members of the Church. Remember, though, that just prior to this time, the Church had been an illegal, persecuted group. Accepting a candidate presented a grave risk to the whole community.

At the same time, the leaders realized that Baptism was meant to be a sustained joy, not just a moment of excitement. Developing a joyful, loving community demanded a profound initiation. In recent years the Church has revised the adult Rite of Christian Initiation to recapture the sacrifice, spirit, and joy of the ritual in the early Church.



### Three Sacraments of Initiation

In the candidate's handbook, authors Maura Thompson Hagarty and Tom Zanzig offer this historical perspective of the sacraments of initiation:

Originally Baptism, Confirmation, and the Eucharist were combined in one initiation ritual. Later on, so many candidates sought initiation into the Church that the bishops had difficulty presiding at all the rituals. Yet it was considered essential that the bishops conduct them.

To handle the increased numbers of converts, the Eastern Church decided to allow their priests to baptize, confirm, and celebrate the Eucharist with the initiates. In the East, Confirmation 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 (see *Catechism*, no. 1318). In the West, the priests baptized initiates but delayed the rest of the ceremony until the bishop was available to “confirm” the initiation. Eventually in the Western Church, the baptized members began to participate in the Eucharist before Confirmation. Until recently, the sacraments of initiation remained separate and were celebrated in the sequence of Baptism, the Eucharist, and Confirmation. (Adapted from p. 99)

## Additional Study Needed?

All three sacraments of initiation—Baptism, Confirmation, and the Eucharist—have been the object of a tremendous amount of study, discussion, and publishing in recent years. Many resources are readily available to those desiring more information. Consult your diocesan library or resource center for the most recent publications on the subject.

To supplement the many books available on Confirmation, initiation, and the catechumenate, many dioceses have developed helpful publications and packets of material on the practice of Confirmation in their local parishes. Check with your diocesan liturgy and education offices for information and advice. Remember also that the guidelines of your own diocese carry more authority than those suggested in *Confirmed in a Faithful Community: A Senior High Confirmation Process*.

## Goals and Objectives of *Confirmed in a Faithful Community*

Religious educators and youth ministers have discovered that programs of almost any kind take on greater clarity, direction, and purpose if they are described in terms of their intended goals and objectives. This observation is based on a commonsense principle: We have a difficult time getting somewhere if we do not know where we are going. The program leader who designs learning experiences must identify her or his destination as a first step in determining how to get there. The statement of goals and objectives is a practical way to identify the desired outcomes for a program.

In *Confirmed in a Faithful Community*, the terms *goals* and *objectives* are used in the following ways:

**Goals.** Goals are broad statements of what we wish to accomplish. They are the learning outcomes we hope to achieve by the end of the process. Goals often have an idealistic quality, inviting the leader to reflect on the process in terms of the personal and faith development of the young people. At the same time, the goals of the Confirmation process are realistic, measurable, and attainable. At the conclusion of this preparation process, you will be able to look back and determine whether you have in fact achieved the goals stated here.

**Objectives.** Objectives are statements that define how to get to the intended goals. Thus, objectives are more specific in tone and purpose than are goals. By dealing with the nitty-gritty, objectives name the specific tasks that must be accomplished if the overall program goals are to be achieved. In short, the goals speak to the Confirmation process in its entirety, whereas the objectives clearly state what is to be accomplished in a particular session to move the candidates toward the desired goals.

Though the task initially may appear tedious, carefully read through and reflect on all the following goals and objectives for *Confirmed in a Faithful Community*.

### Goals

Of the six goals given here, the first two guide the welcoming assembly—the local parish. The last four serve as guides for developing and directing the sessions.

- The parish community will, on all levels, receive appropriate guidance to celebrate the sacrament fruitfully.
- The candidates will embrace their Baptism and experience deeper initiation into a welcoming community.
- The candidates will recognize and appreciate the role and activity of the Holy Spirit in their lives and in the life of the Church.
- The candidates will understand the basic meaning of the Church and comprehend the significance and role of the sacraments in the Church's life and in their own lives.
- The candidates will have a reasonable understanding of the person, mission, and message of Jesus.
- The candidates will understand the rite of Confirmation and prepare to celebrate it in a meaningful way.

## Objectives

Although specific objectives are not listed for the parish goals, a major intent of this manual is to help leaders attain these goals. The objectives of the individual sessions in *Confirmed in a Faithful Community* are the following:

### For the Period of Invitation

#### *Invitation 1, Personal Uniqueness: Promise and Pain*

- To begin the preparation process on a positive note by creating a welcoming environment for the candidates
- To establish among the candidates attitudes of openness and cooperation
- To help the candidates reflect on and grow in appreciation of their uniqueness and dignity as persons

#### *Invitation 2, Identity: Looking for the Real You*

- To help the candidates examine their own personality traits, including their strengths and weaknesses
- To encourage the candidates to explore the influence of cultural stereotypes on self-image and self-acceptance

#### *Invitation 3, Faith: More Than the Eye Can See*

- To make the candidates aware that the experience of and reflection on matters of faith require a particular mind-set and perspective
- To help the candidates reflect on their current images and understandings of God
- To increase the candidates' awareness and conviction that exploring matters of faith can be engaging, exciting, and enjoyable

#### *Invitation 4, Trusting in God*

- To invite the candidates to begin serious reflection on their attitudes toward and understandings of Jesus

- To awaken the candidates to the fact that any real act of faith, including faith in Jesus and his message, involves some element of risk and, consequently, a degree of personal courage

*Invitation 5, The Church: A Community of Disciples*

- To introduce or reinforce for the candidates the understanding of the Church as a community of believers committed to living out the vision and values of Jesus

### **For the Period of Formation**

*Formation 1, Revelation: Coming to Know Our God*

- To provide the candidates with an overview of the content and goals of the period of formation
- To briefly explain to the candidates the Catholic conviction that God's Revelation is handed on through both the Scriptures and Tradition
- To review with the candidates the basic structure of the Bible and to help them approach the Scriptures with comfort and reverence

*Formation 2, Prepare the Way of the Lord: Jesus's Identity Is Revealed*

- To increase the candidates' comfort level with the Bible and to spark their interest in a biblical exploration of the life and mission of Jesus
- To help the candidates reflect on Jesus's baptism as a time when he accepted and began his mission—tasks each person must face
- To explore with the candidates Jesus's temptations in the desert as his confrontation with and rejection of destructive forms of power and his ultimate reliance upon his Father

*Formation 3, The Reign of God: Jesus's Mission*

- To awaken the candidates to the meaning and central significance of Jesus's vision of the Reign of God in his life, ministry, and mission
- To help the candidates reflect on the central values of Jesus's message and mission and prayerfully consider the responsibility of his followers to adopt and try to live those values

*Formation 4, Parables and Miracles: Jesus Teaches and Heals*

- To help the candidates recognize Jesus as one who not only talked about his vision of the Kingdom of God but also consistently acted upon that vision
- To acquaint the candidates with key features of Jesus's role as teacher, and to introduce the rudimentary skills for interpreting his stories
- To encourage the candidates to recognize Jesus's miracles as special signs of God's always available healing power

*Formation 5, Sin: An Obstacle to the Reign of God*

- To provide the candidates with a mature, balanced, and realistic understanding of the nature of sin and its destructive power
- To help the candidates evaluate contemporary culture in the context of their new understanding of sin and to help them reflect on how they might take action to counter the effects of cultural sin in the lives of young people

*Formation 6, Jesus Rejected: The Meaning of the Cross*

- To help the candidates confront and deal with the reality of death in a positive way; to help them see that accepting death is key to fullness of life
- To review with the candidates the series of events surrounding the Passion and death of Jesus

*Formation 7, The Resurrection: God Is Victorious!*

- To provide the candidates with a general understanding of the key events following the death of Jesus—his Resurrection and Ascension
- To invite the candidates to explore in greater depth the story of the Resurrection, and to awaken them to its central significance in the story of Jesus and, therefore, in the faith journey of all Christians

*Formation 8, Pentecost: Gift of the Spirit*

- To help the candidates understand the Church as a community of people who profess faith in the risen Jesus and in his message and who, through the power of the Spirit, live in loving service to all people
- To prepare the candidates for the transition from the period of formation to the period of reflection

**For the Period of Reflection**

*Reflection 1, Guided and Strengthened by the Holy Spirit*

- To deepen the candidates' understanding of and appreciation for the activity of the Holy Spirit
- To explore with the candidates the connections between the work of the Spirit and the sacrament of Confirmation
- To explore with the candidates the images of the Holy Spirit

*Reflection 2, Prayer: Communion with God*

- To help the candidates appreciate the central importance of personal prayer in the life of the Christian
- To introduce the candidates to practical prayer techniques they might use in their daily lives
- To encourage the candidates to establish daily prayer practices

*Reflection 3, Christian Morality: What Does Love Look Like?*

- To help the candidates explore in greater depth the moral vision of Jesus
- To explore with the candidates the concept that for Christians, to live a moral life is to respond to the Gospel mandate to love as Jesus loved
- To encourage the candidates to examine the Sermon on the Mount and other scriptural sources for living a life of love

*Reflection 4, Christian Service: Witnessing to God's Justice*

- To encourage the candidates to develop a personal understanding of justice rooted in faith

- To provide the candidates with an understanding that justice requires their thoughtful action
- To help the candidates value the Scriptures and prayer as sources of power and inspiration for social action
- To invite the candidates to become aware of and appreciate Catholic social teaching as a guide for social action

*Reflection 5, Sacraments of Initiation*

- To help the candidates recognize the need within the Church for a process of initiating new members
- To provide the candidates with an experience of, not just information about, the Church's initiation process
- To deepen the candidates' understanding of the integrated nature of the sacraments of Baptism, Confirmation, and the Eucharist

*Reflection 6, Baptism: Born in the Holy Spirit*

- To help the candidates understand the effects of Baptism and that sacrament's relationship to the candidate's faith journey
- To explore with the candidates the multiple levels of meaning of the symbol of water in the sacrament of Baptism
- To guide the candidates toward making the connection between original sin and forgiveness and the sacrament of Baptism

*Reflection 7, The Eucharist: Nourished Through the Holy Spirit*

- To explore with the candidates the primary symbols of bread and wine and their meaning in the Eucharist
- To help the candidates examine the meal structure of the Eucharist
- To guide the candidates toward an appreciation of the role of the Holy Spirit in the communal celebration of the Eucharist

*Reflection 8, Confirmation: Sealed with the Holy Spirit*

- To explore with the candidates the symbols of oil and the ritual gesture of the laying on of hands and their meanings in the sacrament of Confirmation
- To deepen the candidates' understanding of and appreciation for the activity of the Holy Spirit
- To familiarize the candidates with the seven gifts of the Holy Spirit
- To help the candidates explore the connections between the work of the Spirit and the sacrament of Confirmation

*Reflection 9, Confirmation: Celebrating the Rite*

- To provide the candidates with an overview of the rite of Confirmation
- To explore with the candidates the various Scriptures for the rite of Confirmation
- To review with the candidates the ritual words and gestures of the rite

## For the Period of Mission

### *Mission 1, Life After Confirmation: Moving On in the Spirit of Jesus*

- To help the newly confirmed reflect on and discuss their experience of the Confirmation process
- To alert the newly confirmed to the parish resources and opportunities available to support them in their faith, and to invite them to take advantage of those opportunities
- To bring closure to the process of preparation and to help the newly confirmed embrace their future within the community of faith

## **Confirmed in a Faithful Community Coordinator's Manual: An Overview**

This manual provides parishes the practical guidance they need to carry out either a one-year or a two-year process of preparation for the celebration of Confirmation.

- *Chapter 1, A Confirmation Preparation Planning Procedure.* A step-by-step procedure for developing a detailed process of preparation uniquely suited to your parish
- *Chapter 2, Directing Your Confirmation Process: Additional Concerns and Issues.* A wide-ranging discussion of numerous practical concerns that confront the coordinator of the Confirmation process
- *Chapter 3, Orientation Session for Parents or Guardians, and Candidates.* Provides a suggested outline for gathering with parents and candidates for an initial orientation session
- *Chapter 4, Orientation Session for Candidates and Sponsors.* Provides a detailed session plan for building community and sharing faith among the candidates and their sponsors
- *Chapter 5, Retreat to Prepare for the Period of Formation.* An optional overnight or daylong retreat designed for use about the time of beginning of the period of formation
- *Chapter 6, Retreat to Prepare for the Period of Reflection.* An optional overnight or daylong retreat for use at the beginning of the period of reflection
- *Chapter 7, Evening of Reflection Before the Rite of Confirmation.* A short retreat or evening of reflection to be offered immediately before the celebration of the rite of Confirmation
- *Chapter 8, Resources for Parish Involvement.* Numerous ideas for involving the entire parish community in the preparation and support of Confirmation candidates
- *Chapter 9, Parishwide Prayer Service.* Intended to mark and celebrate the candidate's progress through the process of preparation, in addition to awakening and then reminding the broader parish community of the ongoing nature of the process of preparation, and to actively and prayerfully engage them in it

- *Chapter 10, Preparing for the Confirmation Liturgy.* Provides an overview of the elements of the rite of Confirmation, and specific planning tools for preparing for the Confirmation liturgy

*Confirmed in a Faithful Community* has been designed with the conviction that Confirmation preparation for adolescents can be theologically sound, developmentally appropriate, and pedagogically exciting. We trust that your review of this manual and its companion program components will lead you to share that conviction.







# Chapter 1

## A Confirmation Preparation Planning Procedure

### Turning Vision into Reality

#### A Word about Confirmation Planning Teams

It makes good sense for parishes to organize a Confirmation committee to plan the Confirmation process. This practice is grounded both in a commitment to shared pastoral leadership and in the nature of Confirmation itself as part of full initiation into the faith community. We want the young people to truly experience the communal dimensions of their preparation. They are not being invited into an exclusive relationship with the director of religious education or youth minister and the volunteer catechists, nor are they simply joining the parish youth group.

Additionally, the process of Confirmation affects the life and ministry of so many individuals in the parish that in fairness to the parish as a whole, a planning committee made up of various parish representatives is a good, if not essential, idea. Preparation for the sacrament can involve the pastor and his associates, the directors of religious education and youth ministry, volunteers in catechetical and youth programs, the parish liturgist, various parish council members, school administrators and teachers, parents and sponsors, and conceivably even the building and grounds committee and the parish men's or women's groups. Somehow, all those involved in or affected by the preparation process must be kept informed and, in many cases, offered a voice in that process.

However, our ideals frequently run headlong into the realities of parish life. For example, many parish leaders are already "meetinged to death" and will resist joining another committee. Some, including pastors, will say that they hired the person responsible for Confirmation precisely so that they would not have to concern themselves with such matters. In some smaller parishes, all these various roles may be held by just one or two people!

The point is this: Good communication, open dialogue, opportunities for responding to proposed processes, and so on are vital ingredients for effective planning for Confirmation. How to make these ingredients a part of the planning is another matter. If the formation of a planning committee suits your needs and the expectations of your parish, by all means pursue that. If your circumstances neither warrant nor permit such a planning team, accept that fact, but develop some other means for keeping key personnel informed of all developments and give them a chance to respond and offer their insights. This may require regular reports to the parish council, for example, or you may choose to send monthly progress reports to interested parties.

#### A Framework for Designing a Confirmation Process

The program structure is summarized in chart form on page 18. The commentary that follows will lead you step by step through the chart and its implications. You may wish to make a copy of the chart for easy reference as you read this commentary.

## *Confirmed in a Faithful Community* Program Structure

RCIA Periods	Pre-catechumenate	Catechumenate	Purification and Enlightenment	Mystagogy
RCIA Adapted for Confirmation				
<b>Period Goals</b>	<p><b>Invitation</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Begin process on positive note</li> <li>• Establish trust</li> <li>• Help candidates reflect on personal religious experience</li> </ul>	<p><b>Formation</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Generate or renew candidates' interest in the Gospel story of Jesus</li> <li>• Review essential elements of the Gospel</li> <li>• Call candidates to discipleship</li> </ul>	<p><b>Reflection</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Present core beliefs, moral vision, and sacramental life of Roman Catholicism</li> <li>• Spark candidates' enthusiasm for deeper participation in life of Church</li> <li>• Prepare for meaningful celebration of Confirmation</li> </ul>	<p><b>Mission</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Reflect on experience of rite of Confirmation</li> <li>• Prepare for transition out of process of preparation</li> <li>• Introduce opportunities for continued involvement, and invite newly confirmed to commit to ongoing formation</li> </ul>
<b>Number of Sessions</b>	Five sessions	Eight sessions	Nine sessions	One session

## Grounded in the RCIA

Naturally, *Confirmed in a Faithful Community* must be grounded in sound sacramental theology—the theology manifested in the RCIA. The first row of the chart gives the basic elements of the rite, which consist of four periods of preparation (pre-catechumenate, catechumenate, purification and enlightenment, and mystagogy).

## Adapting the RCIA for Adolescent Confirmation

If we are to be theologically and liturgically accurate and proper, we must remember that the RCIA is concerned with the sacramental initiation of adults who often have experienced neither Baptism nor the Eucharist. Again, the young people with whom you share this process of preparation have already been initiated into the community by virtue of their Baptism. Confirmation increases and deepens the grace we received at Baptism. Through Confirmation we are strengthened by the Holy Spirit to better live out our Christian vocation. Our unity with Christ becomes firmer and our connection with the Church grows stronger. Everyone is encouraged to celebrate Confirmation because the special outpouring of the Holy Spirit completes our Baptism.

Additionally, we must also remember that the RCIA is normative for all sacraments of initiation. Therefore, the Church seems best served if we draw our cues from the RCIA but re-image the various stages of formation in the RCIA to avoid confusion with the adult expression of the sacraments.

The second row in the chart proposes one way to adapt the RCIA model of initiation for use with adolescent Confirmation. You may wish to develop other names for the periods. However the names suggested—invitation, formation, reflection, and mission—accurately reflect the RCIA process and do so in language that is accessible to both the young candidates and the adults involved in the process.

As an aside, the RCIA includes a variety of major rites and minor rituals—for example, the Rite of Acceptance, the presentations of the Creed and the Lord's Prayer, and the scrutinies—that are not included in this framework. They are excluded because they may potentially confuse the young people, be a distraction from the focus on Confirmation itself, and further complicate an already ambitious process. However, adaptations of some of these rituals, most notably a penance service and a parishwide prayer service are incorporated as optional programming in *Confirmed in a Faithful Community*, rather than as parts of the parish's weekend liturgies. The parish celebrations should focus on the rite of Confirmation.

## Optional Strategies for Each Period in the Process

The basic intent and character of each of the four periods in the adapted model of the initiation process are grounded in the theology and pastoral practice of the RCIA. Naturally, specific strategies for accomplishing the purposes of each period have to be designed with the needs and abilities of adolescents in mind. The strategies suggested on the chart are both logical and manageable in most parishes, if time allows.

## The Period of Invitation

The strategies suggested for the period of invitation are listed in the order in which they would likely occur in a Confirmation process schedule.

**Invitation.** The Confirmation process begins, logically enough, with an invitation to all eligible members of the parish community. A written invitation should be mailed to all potential candidates and their parent(s) or guardian(s). It can be supplemented with bulletin and pulpit announcements, posters, phone calls, and so on.

The intent of the invitation is to alert people to an orientation meeting where they will receive more information about the Confirmation process. Invitations to attend the orientation should be mailed at least one month before the meeting, perhaps even earlier if the parish is very large and other events might conflict.

**Orientation.** The orientation may involve more than one meeting, but many parishes will find that either unnecessary or unattractive. You may recognize a value in meeting only with parents initially, just to update them on the theology of Confirmation, present details regarding the content and the schedule for the process, and so on. Or you may find that you can separate parents and candidates at various points in the meeting to provide information that may not be relevant to all. A more thorough discussion of the orientation is provided in chapter 3.

**Initial retreat.** Many have found that a retreat for the candidates early in the process is an effective way to build a sense of community as the foundation for the remainder of the process. A detailed description of such a retreat is provided in chapter 5.

**Initial interview.** A personal interview with each candidate is suggested, even mandated, in many diocesan guidelines for Confirmation. Think of the interviews at this early stage of the process as opportunities to welcome and provide hospitality for the young candidates, not as a form of interrogation about their personal life or faith. Further suggestions regarding the interviewing process are provided in chapter 2.

**Invitation sessions.** Five conventional sessions for the period of invitation are found in the catechist's guide. The objectives for those sessions are provided in the introduction of this manual. The catechetical component of Confirmation preparation must have both content and a methodology appropriate to each period in the process. In the case of the period of invitation, this means content that is focused on the actual life experience of the young candidates and methods that are enjoyable and geared toward community building.

**Selection and orientation of sponsors.** By the end of the period of invitation, each candidate is asked to select a sponsor who will join him or her for the remainder of the Confirmation process. A sponsor is an adult representative of the community who serves as both a witness to the Gospel and as a mentor to the candidate.

Importantly, *Confirmed in a Faithful Community* includes two components created specifically for orienting sponsors and then supporting them in their role—the sponsor's guide and the sponsor's orientation session. Further information about both is provided in chapter 4 of this manual.

## The Period of Formation

The period of formation parallels the RCIA period of the catechumenate. It includes various strategies for deepening the candidates' understanding of Jesus, the mean-

ing of his message, the nature of the Christian Church, and the implications of a personal commitment to all these realities.

**Formation sessions.** Sessions for the period of formation that focus on education in the matters of faith are provided in the catechist's guide, with related material in the candidate's handbook. The selection of sessions from this material must be based on the past experiences of the candidates; on their relative needs for relational ministry, evangelization, or catechesis; and on diocesan Confirmation guidelines. The objectives for these sessions are provided in the introduction of this manual to help you make your selections.

The educational philosophy undergirding the formation sessions is that *all* religious education developed for this age group must have a strong relational and evangelizing character. Therefore, even sessions on obvious theological topics, such as Jesus and the sacraments, are designed to be engaging, enjoyable, and formative, as well as informative.

**Action-reflection activities.** In addition to suggesting appropriate course material, many dioceses either strongly recommend or mandate that candidates for Confirmation perform certain acts of service before those candidates are accepted for the sacrament. Among the seemingly endless debates and arguments that surround the sacrament of Confirmation, few if any generate as much emotional heat as the notion of mandatory service projects. Because of the multiple dimensions of this issue, a fuller discussion of service projects is found in chapter 2.

**Second retreat.** As the conclusion of the period of formation, a second retreat is encouraged. A detailed design for such a retreat is provided in chapter 6.

## The Period of Reflection

The period of reflection is intended for immediate preparation for the sacrament and parallels the period of purification and enlightenment in the RCIA. A reasonable level of commitment to the Gospel and to the Church is presumed at this point. This period helps the candidates prepare in a more personal, intense, and prayerful way for the celebration of the rite of Confirmation. If the periods of invitation and formation have been effective, the period of reflection should be a gathering of friends who have come to know one another and, to a degree appropriate to their age, the Lord. By this point, the candidates should be reasonably comfortable with honest sharing, shared prayer, and dialogue with their sponsor.

Suggested strategies for the period of reflection are the following:

**Second interview.** Whereas the earlier interview might have had the character of a relaxed get-to-know-one-another encounter between the candidate and the process leader, the interview at this point may have the tone of a more intimate conversation between people who now care for one another. In the earlier interview, both the leader and the candidate may have felt uncomfortable, praying together, for example. Now, such prayer might seem more possible, if not perfectly natural, particularly on the part of the adult leader. This interview may also be a wonderful context for helping the candidate discern how he or she will attempt to retain the spirit generated by the Confirmation process after experiencing the rite itself.

**Reflection sessions.** The sessions for the period of reflection are provided in the catechist's guide, with related material in the candidate's handbook. Though clearly focused on themes of high theological significance, the sessions are designed with methodologies appropriate to this period. That is, the sessions are intended to

be more prayerful and reflective than those for previous periods in the process of preparation.

Themes included in this period are the roots and general characteristics of Catholicism, the wisdom and worship of our Catholic Tradition, and the sacraments of initiation. The objectives for the sessions of this period are provided in the introduction of this manual.

**Evening of Reflection.** As the time for the rite of Confirmation nears, we encourage a prayerful evening of reflection for candidates and sponsors during the week before the celebration of the rite. A design for such an event is included in chapter 7.

**Liturgy Preparation.** The focus and highlight of the Confirmation process, of course, is the celebration of the rite of Confirmation. Experience has shown that regardless of the season of the year it is scheduled, the rite of Confirmation, when properly celebrated, can be a deeply moving personal and communal spiritual experience.

Materials and resources for planning and preparing for the rite are found in chapter 10.

## The Period of Mission

The RCIA period of mystagogy—the time immediately following the sacraments of initiation—is set aside to help the new adult Christians plunge more deeply into the mysteries of the faith within the context of a continually supportive community. In our process of preparation, the period of mission has a similar focus. To show young people the continuing support of the community, consider using the following strategies for the period of mission:

**Continuing service and ministry.** Many parishes have programs to meet the ongoing needs of their young people—for example, youth groups or formal religious education programs. The newly confirmed should be informed *during sacramental preparation* about such opportunities.

**Prayer and support groups.** During preparation for Confirmation, special needs or desires may well surface among the candidates. Perhaps some candidates will wish to begin an intimate prayer or Bible study group. Certainly, opportunities for continued involvement in service to others is a marvelous way for the young people to immediately put into practice the commitment celebrated in the sacrament. Ideally, the sponsor will continue his or her relationship with the newly confirmed, serving as a kind of mentor to the young person as he or she struggles to live out a deeper commitment to Jesus and the Church. And for a time, parishes may wish to periodically invite the newly confirmed to celebrate liturgy together as a way to remember, reaffirm, and rekindle the spirit of their shared experience.

**Continuing catechesis.** *Confirmed in a Faithful Community* includes just one formal session designed for the period of mission. That session is intended to help the newly confirmed young people make a smooth transition between the focused spiritual journey they have experienced as participants in the Confirmation preparation process and the more “normal” routine of their lives. The objectives for the mission session are provided in the introduction of this manual.

This rather condensed discussion of the entire Confirmation process may seem overwhelming. But keep in mind that this approach to the sacrament should be patiently and gradually introduced to the parish as a whole, rather than imposed quickly with little education of the community. A parish should set reasonable goals in implementing the catechumenal approach. Begin slowly and carefully to implement the process described here. The following planning information will prove helpful.

## Developing a Schedule for the Confirmation Process

The planning chart on page 24 can help you make sound decisions regarding a schedule for the Confirmation process in your parish. The chart is an adaptation of the program structure on page 18. It is designed with a fill-in-the-blank format that will lead you step by step through the planning procedure. Consider making several copies of the planning chart, and then grab a pencil (with a good eraser!), find a calendar for reference, and start to play with planning possibilities.

You can choose one of two basic approaches to using the chart:

1. The first approach is required if you already have a set date for the rite of Confirmation and must develop a schedule dictated by that date.
2. Or you may have the luxury of having no predetermined date for the celebration of the sacrament and can, to some extent, dream of a process that truly meets your desires and the needs of your parish. Then, after proposing a date for the sacrament to the bishop, based on your ideal plan, you may have to adjust slightly to accommodate the bishop’s calendar.

Between these two extreme scenarios are myriad other possibilities based on, among other things, parish and diocesan policies and practices. The planning chart can accommodate such variations as well.



# A Confirmation Planning Chart

Confirmation Date: \_\_\_\_\_

	Invitation	Formation	Reflection	Mission
<b>RCIA Adapted for Confirmation</b>				
<b>Key Dates, Available Weeks and Months, Dates to Avoid</b>	_____ _____ _____	_____ _____ _____	_____ _____ _____	_____ _____ _____
<b>Optional Strategies</b>	Invitation Orientation Initial retreat Initial interview Invitation sessions Selection of a sponsor	Formation sessions Action-reflection activities (service) Second retreat Parish prayer service	Second interview Reflection sessions Evening of reflection	Continuing service and ministry Prayer and support groups Periodic group worship Mission session
<b>Options Selected</b>	_____ _____ _____	_____ _____ _____	_____ _____ _____	_____ _____ _____
<b>Proposed Calendar</b>	_____ _____ _____	_____ _____ _____	_____ _____ _____	_____ _____ _____

## Approach 1: Developing a Schedule with a Known Confirmation Date

You may already know the scheduled date of Confirmation in your parish and, therefore, have defined a broad schedule for your planning. Enter the date of Confirmation in the space noted on the chart. Then, having decided the length of your process of preparation (see the sections at the end of this chapter on one- and two-year scheduling options), identify the earliest starting point you can consider for the process and enter that date in the first box under the period of invitation. The reflection period (the immediate preparation for the sacrament) requires ten to twelve weeks (for the nine sessions provided in this program, perhaps a retreat, the candidate interviews, and the evening of reflection). Backing up those ten to twelve weeks from the date of Confirmation defines how much time you can devote to the periods of invitation and formation.

After identifying a tentative and broad schedule for the Confirmation process, start to select from among the options provided in the “Optional Strategies” section on the chart. Note your initial preferences in the spaces provided in the section labeled “Options Selected.” This may well be a frustrating assignment because your tentative schedule will likely force you to eliminate some attractive options. As much as possible, make your decisions based on what you perceive to be the starting point of your candidates.

Finally, in light of your broad schedule and your initial decisions regarding each period in the process, begin to refine your process schedule by inserting dates for each part of the process in the last section of the chart.

## Approach 2: Developing an Ideal Schedule

The second possible scenario is that you have no scheduled date for the rite of Confirmation and, therefore, can create your ideal process in light of the direction offered in this guide and according to parish and diocesan guidelines and policies.

How long would you like your total process to last? one year? two years? During what season of the year would you like to celebrate the rite of Confirmation? When would you be prepared to begin the process? Use your responses to such questions to sketch out a general schedule in the spaces provided at the top of the chart.

Then, refine your initial general schedule by making preliminary decisions about the strategies you wish to use for each phase of the process. You may wish to back up from the projected ideal date of Confirmation or start from the beginning of the process and let that ideal date for the rite itself be a result of the process. Keep refining the schedule until you’ve entered proposed dates for each period in the spaces at the bottom of the chart.

Of course, the bishop may not be able to accept the date you request. The earlier you request the date, the more likely he can accommodate your plan. In any case, adjustments to your proposed schedule can be made rather easily in light of the bishop’s response.

## Optional Schedules: Some Examples

Here we provide a couple of sample schedules that suggest how you might incorporate *Confirmed in a Faithful Community* into your process of Confirmation preparation. Note the careful wording of that statement: *Confirmed in a Faithful Community* is *one part* of a total process of preparation. It presumes the context of a vibrant faith community that is providing, in addition to this formal, structured program, many of the other optional strategies identified in this chapter for each of the four periods of the process. A complete process will include such elements as ongoing opportunities for community building, action-reflection activities, interaction with the sponsors, and so on. In terms of the lifelong impact of this experience for the candidates, those optional strategies may well carry as much weight as the formal educational sessions, or more. The point is simply this: View the following schedules not as complete programs of Confirmation preparation but as the formal religious education or catechetical component of a more holistic process of preparation. This should allow you to include numerous supplementary activities and ensure relative ease in handling such matters as the first and second candidate interviews and required service involvement.

### A One-Year Model

The one-year model proposed here includes the following sessions from *Confirmed in a Faithful Community*: two of the five invitation sessions, seven of the eight formation sessions, all nine sessions for the period of reflection, and the one mission session.

Note that the schedule includes fewer catechetical sessions in the first part of the year, in part to allow for other group-building activities. For the period of reflection, the schedule gets more intense, with three sessions per month. Naturally, your task in this model is to carefully select appropriate sessions based on your perception of the candidates' needs.

September:	Orientation meeting One invitation session
October:	One invitation session One formation session
November:	Two formation sessions
December:	Two formation sessions
January:	Two formation sessions
February:	Parish prayer service for candidates Three reflection sessions
March:	Three reflection sessions
April–May:	Three reflection sessions Evening of reflection Rite of Confirmation One mission session

### A Two-Year Model

The following two-year model incorporates all the sessions from *Confirmed in a Faithful Community* and also encourages the inclusion of seasonally appropriate activities during holidays and the summer months. Naturally, the schedule is more relaxed and open than the schedule for the one-year model, allowing for the inclusion of more special activities, time for sponsor-candidate activities, and so on.

### First year

September: Orientation meeting  
October: Two invitation sessions  
November: Two invitation sessions  
December: One invitation session  
First retreat  
Seasonal activities  
January: One formation session  
February: Two formation sessions  
March: Two formation sessions  
April: Two formation sessions  
May: One formation session  
Summer: Service involvement

### Second year

September: Second retreat  
October: Parish prayer service for candidates  
One reflection session  
November: Two reflection sessions  
December: One reflection session  
January: One reflection session  
February: Two reflection sessions  
March: Two reflection sessions  
April–May: Evening of Reflection  
Rite of Confirmation  
One mission session



# Chapter 2

## Directing Your Confirmation Process: Additional Concerns and Issues

As the Church continues to implement the catechumenal approach to the initiation of new members as called for in the RCIA, coordinators must always recognize that the ideals of the RCIA will seem foreign to those who were initiated under different models in the Church's past. Our current process, therefore, must be characterized by sensitivity, patience, reasonable compromise, and a commitment to the gradual education of our communities of faith regarding the Church's contemporary understanding of initiation.

We emphasize this guiding principle now because it is the primary determinant of this chapter's content. Here we discuss many of the concerns and issues—often frustrating—that confront coordinators of Confirmation processes. We hope to alleviate some of that frustration by sharing this thought: When you adjust your own hopes and expectations for the Confirmation process to accommodate the needs and readiness of your parishioners, *you are in fact living and acting according to the spirit of the RCIA at its deepest level*. Initiation is an activity and responsibility of the entire community of faith; sensitivity to the characteristics of your community is at the heart of effective Christian leadership as well as sound planning.



### Roles and Responsibilities

#### The Catechists' Role and Responsibilities

Realistically, the catechists involved in the Confirmation process may be the most significant influence on its effectiveness. More than anyone else, they will spend the most concentrated amount of time with the candidates, and the young people will tend to view and evaluate their catechists as the "official" representatives of the entire parish community. The selection, recruitment, and preparation of catechists is a central and critical responsibility of the process coordinator.

Many readers of this manual are experienced directors of religious education or youth ministry programs and are already familiar with the qualities and training required of those who minister among adolescents. However, the following list of required characteristics will guide you in your search for people to fill the catechists' role:

- a readily identifiable commitment to Jesus and the Gospel
- a sense of commitment to and affection for the Church
- a willingness—indeed, a drive—to grow in one's own personal faith at all levels
- a sincere and obvious care for young people
- an ability to listen and to work well with others
- a sense of humor
- basic skills for leading active learning experiences (skills that may best be learned by watching others)

- a desire not only to lead and guide young people but also to let them go, to free them to pursue their unique relationship with God and to share their gifts with others

In addition to such obvious (but no less rare and wonderful) traits, of course, Confirmation catechists will require a reasonably thorough grounding in the history and theology of the sacrament.

Ideally, recruited catechists will be adequately informed, if not fully trained, by the time of the orientation session for the Confirmation process. At that session they can be introduced to parents or guardians and candidates.

At your discretion, catechists' responsibilities—along with leading the sessions during the periods of invitation, formation, reflection, and mission—may also include attendance at or participation in the following dimensions of the process:

- the retreats provided for the candidates
- parishwide events—such as the prayer service for candidates
- (perhaps) the candidate interviews and service involvement as warranted by your process design

In this manual, all discussions of these elements of the process presume the presence and participation of the catechists.

## The Sponsor's Role and Responsibilities

First, let's begin to define the role and the responsibilities of the sponsor by looking at the minimum requirements for the role as identified by canon law. Sponsors must have the following qualifications (see *The Code of Canon Law: A Text and Commentary*, canon 874):

- A sponsor must be at least sixteen years old, unless a different age has been established by the diocesan bishop or a need for an exception is determined by the pastor.
- A sponsor must be a fully initiated Catholic (one who has celebrated Baptism, Confirmation, and the Eucharist) who "leads a life in harmony with the faith and the role to be undertaken."
- A sponsor must not be bound by any Church penalty.
- A sponsor must not be the parent of the one to be confirmed.

Though the application of canon 874 to Confirmation does not allow parents or guardians to be the sponsors of their child, the rite of Confirmation allows the parents or guardians to present their child for Confirmation during the rite itself. In this case, the parents or guardians would carry out the role of sponsors but not be sponsors in the strictest sense (see the commentary on canon 893 in the aforementioned text). Local policies might allow both the sponsors and the parents or guardians to present the candidate during the celebration of the rite.

Canon 893 also states: "It is desirable that the one who undertook the role of sponsor at Baptism be sponsor for Confirmation." Again, our contemporary culture often makes this principle—though a logical and attractive one in view of the connection between Baptism and Confirmation—unreasonable in practice; our society's mobility makes it unlikely that the baptismal sponsor is geographically close enough to serve as a Confirmation sponsor.

Some dioceses strongly recommend that sponsors be at least twenty-one years old. This recommendation is intended to discourage candidates from choosing as