

A High School Confirmation Program

saint mary's press

Anointed in the Spirit

Sponsor
Booklet

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Welcome!

You have been asked to walk with a candidate as she or he prepares to celebrate the Sacrament of Confirmation. By accepting that invitation, you will be able to help a young person grow in relationship with both Jesus and the Church. This is an honor and a privilege.

The Confirmation preparation process can be—almost certainly will be—a time of spiritual and religious renewal and transformation for both you and the candidate. When it's all over, you will likely echo the words of countless sponsors who have walked this journey before you: "I gained so much more than I ever gave to the candidate." You may even want to take the journey again with another young person.

Now pause for a moment and reflect on how those opening paragraphs struck you. What feelings and thoughts did they generate in you? Here are some possibilities:

- This sounds great!
- This is pretty intimidating stuff.
- My faith is the most important thing in my life. It will be exciting to help a young person discover that too.
- I'm not even sure about my own faith. How can I help lead a young person through all this religious stuff?

You may, in fact, be feeling and thinking all these things at once. Depending on your past experience, just about any thoughts and feelings are justified as you begin this process. This guide will provide you with enough background and direction to make your experience as a sponsor both enjoyable and meaningful.

About This Guide

This guide is designed to ensure that your experience as a sponsor is positive. Here is what you will find in this guide:

- information about the Sacrament of Confirmation and an overview of what will happen at the celebration of the sacrament
- a discussion about the role of the sponsor within the Confirmation process
- practical ideas for building a relationship with your candidate

- guidance for effective conversations with young people
- five guided conversations, with step-by-step instructions, on the topics of God, Jesus, the Holy Spirit, the Church, and faith
- an overview of central characteristics of Catholicism
- a collection of prayers

All this information is presented as briefly and as clearly as possible. If, after reading this guide, you find that you would like more information, please consult your parish's program coordinator.

A Closing Thought

The role of the sponsor is both a challenge and a privilege. Walking with a young person through the process of preparing for Confirmation can be a time of spiritual renewal for both of you. We are grateful that you have said yes to this invitation, and we trust that you will be too. Remember always that the Spirit of God walks with you!



Chapter I

The Sacrament of Confirmation and *Anointed in the Spirit*

The Sacrament of Confirmation

The candidate you are sponsoring is continuing on the path of Christian initiation by preparing to celebrate the Sacrament of Confirmation. Confirmation is one of the Church's three Sacraments of Initiation. The three—Baptism, the Eucharist, and Confirmation—are the foundation of the Christian life. Baptism is the first sacrament celebrated, because it makes us members of Christ and part of the Church. Confirmation strengthens us for the Christian life and completes baptismal grace. The Eucharist nourishes us with Christ's Body and Blood throughout our lives. It is the high point of Christian life. All the sacraments, including Confirmation, are oriented toward it.

When the candidates are confirmed, they will be anointed with Chrism, consecrated perfumed olive oil. The bishop will lay hands on them and anoint them on the forehead. He will say their name and then say, "Be sealed with the Gift of the Holy Spirit" (*The Order of Confirmation*, 27). This anointing will confirm the anointing they received at Baptism, and they will receive an outpouring of the Holy Spirit. This does not mean the Holy Spirit is not already present and active in their lives. The outpouring of the Holy Spirit at Confirmation makes the candidates more like Christ and gives them added strength to live as Christians. Their bond with Christ grows stronger and their connection to the Church becomes stronger.

Overview of *Anointed in the Spirit*

Anointed in the Spirit supports an approach to faith formation for Confirmation called liturgical catechesis. This involves a three-part process: (1) preparation for Confirmation, (2) celebration of Confirmation, and (3) reflection after the celebration of Confirmation. Ideally,

you will have a role—encouraging and supporting your candidate—during all three parts of the process and beyond.

Preparation for Confirmation

The program offers eight sessions designed to prepare the candidates for the Sacrament of Confirmation. The Confirmation liturgy is the point of departure for the sessions. This means the sessions focus on an aspect of the Confirmation liturgy. The candidate handbook has a chapter that corresponds to each of these sessions. (The program coordinator will be able to provide you with detailed information about how *Anointed in the Spirit* is being implemented in the parish, what the specific expectations of sponsors are, and what any additional program components such as a retreat, service work, sessions with sponsors, and meetings with parents may involve.)

The following overview is meant to give you a general idea about the preparation sessions that are part of *Anointed in the Spirit*.

Session 1: Being a Candidate

The first session relates to the presentation of the candidates (*The Order of Confirmation*, 21). The session explores the idea of being a candidate and being presented to the bishop.

Session 2: Baptism: Waters of New Life

This session invites the participants to reflect on their own celebration of Baptism and to explore the significance of Baptism for their lives. Deepening one's understanding of the meaning of Baptism is a helpful way to prepare for Confirmation because of Confirmation's close relationship to Baptism.

Session 3: Renewing Baptismal Promises

This session prepares the candidates for the Renewal of Baptismal Promises that takes place during Confirmation (*The Order of Confirmation*, 23). The Baptismal Promises are listed in appendix C.

Session 4: The Laying on of Hands

This session explores the meaning and significance of the laying on of hands in the Sacrament of Confirmation (*The Order of Confirmation*, 24–25).

Session 5: The Gifts of the Holy Spirit

The focus of this session is the consecratory prayer in which the bishop asks the Father to send the Holy Spirit on the candidates and give them the Gifts of the Holy Spirit (*The Order of Confirmation*, 25). These gifts are listed in appendix A.

Session 6: Being Anointed by the Holy Spirit

This session explores the anointing with Chrism, the central symbolic action in the Sacrament of Confirmation (*The Order of Confirmation*, 26), and the significance of the outpouring of the Holy Spirit at Confirmation.

Session 7: The Eucharist: The Heart of the Church's Life

This session explores the significance of celebrating Confirmation within the Mass, the usual practice unless there are special circumstances.

Session 8: Celebrating the Sacrament of Confirmation

This session involves a brief walk-through of the Order of Confirmation and leads the participants through a process for reflecting on the Word that will be proclaimed at Confirmation.

Celebration of Confirmation

The preparation period leads to the high point: the celebration of the Sacrament of Confirmation. At the celebration, you will accompany your candidate and present him or her to the bishop for the anointing. You will place your right hand on your candidate's shoulder at the time of the anointing and either you or your candidate will give your candidate's name to the bishop. After Confirmation you are encouraged to continue your special role and help your candidate live out his or her Baptismal Promises.

Reflection after Celebration of Confirmation

Sessions 9 and 10 are designed for use during the weeks following the celebration of Confirmation. This part of the process, called mystagogy, is reflection on the mystery. The purpose of the mystagogical sessions is to deepen the confirmands' understanding of the sacrament and lead them outward into mission.

Session 9: Mystagogy I: Reflecting on the Sacrament of Confirmation

This session provides the participants with an opportunity for reflection on Confirmation and a further exploration of its meaning and significance for their lives.

Session 10: Mystagogy II: Reflecting on God's Word

Session 10 provides a mystagogical reflection on one of the readings from the celebration of Confirmation. A session extension introduces the confirmands to *lectio divina* and encourages them to make prayerful reading of the Scriptures a regular part of their lives as fully initiated Catholics.



Chapter 2

The Role of the Confirmation Sponsor

The role of a person who sponsors a young adolescent Confirmation candidate roughly parallels the role of godparents who accompany a catechumen through the Rite of Christian Initiation of Adults (RCIA). The RCIA describes the godparents' role in this way:

Godparents are persons chosen by the candidates on the basis of example, good qualities, and friendship, delegated by the local Christian community, and approved by the priest. It is the responsibility of godparents to show the candidates how to practice the Gospel in personal and social life, to sustain the candidates in moments of hesitancy and anxiety, to bear witness, and to guide the candidates' progress . . . They continue to be important during the time after reception of the sacraments when the neophytes [the newly initiated] need to be assisted so that they remain true to their baptismal promises. (11)

Today many dioceses and parishes base their expectations of Confirmation sponsors on this understanding of RCIA godparents. Consider the following description of the role, taken from the Confirmation guidelines of one diocese:

The sponsor is . . .

- a model of how a person of faith lives in today's world
- a friend or relative who knows the candidate and can witness to the maturing faith of the candidate before the community
- a guide, a confidant, and a listener
- a learner who is interested in personal growth as she or he walks the faith journey with the candidate
- one who will continue after Confirmation to walk the faith journey with the candidate and invite her or him into fuller participation in parish life and service

Some sponsors (again, you may be one of them) may well enter the preparation process thinking that their role will be largely ceremonial and not too demanding. Then they'll read a description of the role like the one cited and break into a cold sweat, questioning why they said yes and what they have gotten themselves into. Here we provide a response to those questions that alleviates such concerns and helps such sponsors relax and at the same time remains true to the directives of the Church and the ideal of the sponsor that the Church holds up for us.

So, What's the Point?

What if, when you were recruited by a candidate, you expected a largely ceremonial role, only to discover that your role is much more active and involved? How do you feel as you review guidelines for sponsors like those you just read? How can you look at the ideal characteristics of the sponsor and not feel inadequate, or worse, hypocritical? Following are a few observations that will help put these issues in perspective.

Look to Canon Law

First of all, be aware that the official Church policies regarding Confirmation sponsors are actually much narrower and far less intimidating than the ideals reflected in many diocesan guidelines. According to canon law, sponsors must have the following qualifications (based on canon 893, which in turn refers to canon 874, a description of the qualifications for baptismal sponsors):

- A sponsor must be at least sixteen years old, unless the diocesan bishop has established a different age requirement or the pastor has determined a need for an exception.
- A sponsor must be a fully initiated Catholic (one who has celebrated Baptism, Confirmation, and the Eucharist) who "leads a life of faith in keeping with the function to be taken on" (Code of Canon Law, canon 874).
- A sponsor must not be bound by any Church penalty.
- A sponsor must not be the parent of the one to be baptized (or, by extension, confirmed).

It should be noted that canon 893 expresses that it is desirable for Confirmation candidates to choose their baptismal godparent or sponsor as their Confirmation sponsor. This reflects an effort by the Church to stress the close link between Baptism and Confirmation.

See Yourself as a Companion on the Journey

Most of us live with such an inflated sense of what it means to be Christian that we find the notion of being a role model for young people not only intimidating but even a bit arrogant. We assume that a Christian is someone who has already arrived at spiritual perfection. Then we look in the mirror and see a person with glaring shortcomings and weaknesses—limited knowledge, maybe a bad temper, impatience with others, a lack of trust in the love of God. In fact, we're so weak and ill-equipped that we look as bad as . . . the Apostles!

Jesus didn't build his ministry around those with encyclopedic knowledge of Judaism or all sorts of public acclaim as leaders of the community; in fact, those were the very people who gave him fits! Why do we assume it is different now?

Rather than seeing yourself as a role model for your candidate, think of yourself as your candidate's companion on the journey of faith. You may have a little more experience than he or she does, but you share the same human and spiritual hungers, the same search for meaning, the same struggles with the human condition, the same hope for relief from all the hurts and hurdles of life. And of course, you have the same deep hope that in Jesus we can find our salvation from all the things that keep us from fullness of life.

Your candidate doesn't need you to be anyone other than who you are—one who cares deeply and takes the journey of faith seriously enough to want to walk it with him or her. Paradoxically, if you just relax and enjoy that shared journey, you may well become a role model for your candidate.

Keep It Simple

Think about your strongest, deepest relationships. How did they develop? What now sustains them? For most of us, relationships aren't built on the dramatic stuff of movies or on the high-energy events of TV sitcoms; rather, normal relationships evolve slowly over time,

developing from brief and often simple connections and exchanges. A thoughtful comment, a funny aside, a simple meal, a casual walk together, a small gesture of care—these are the things on which good relationships are built.

The next two sections of this guide offer practical strategies for fostering your relationship with your candidate and provide step-by-step guidance for having significant conversations. With the direction provided by this guide, and with the support of the Confirmation coordinator, other sponsors, your candidate's parents, and the community of faith to which you belong, you already have what you need to be an effective sponsor. The key is not to create unrealistic or unreasonable expectations for your relationship with the candidate. Make a commitment to do what you can and not to stress over what you cannot do. Do what you can, and God will do what you can't!



Chapter 3

Practical Ideas for Building a Relationship with Your Candidate

In this chapter, you will find concrete, practical suggestions on how to build and sustain a solid relationship with your candidate, one that will support the goals of the preparation process and make the Sacrament of Confirmation a meaningful celebration for both of you.

Let these ideas spark your imagination and creativity. Trust your intuition about what will work well with your candidate, particularly as you get to know each other better. Most of all, relax and enjoy the time together.

An Important Note

Appropriate and healthy relationship boundaries are real concerns any time adults interact with young people. In light of heightened public awareness of and attention to child protection issues, we must ensure that a safe and healthy relationship is maintained between the adults and the young people who spend time together. In fact, all dioceses have specific guidelines for adults who work with young people. Criminal background checks and references for those engaged in ministry are some of the tools that measure the quality of the adults working with young people. Check with the Confirmation program coordinator about diocesan requirements concerning criminal background checks and the use of volunteer covenants.

In ministry with young people, several practical guidelines to keep in mind include the following:

- Providing a young person with an alcoholic beverage, tobacco, or drugs is never allowed.
- Touching must be age-appropriate and based on the need of the young person and not on the need of the adult. Physical contact must be avoided when an adult is alone with a young person.