

## Confirmation Preparation FAQs for FFLs

The following questions were submitted by a group of Faith Formation Leaders in the Archdiocese of Dubuque. The answers are for relevant to those candidates in the regular confirmation preparation programs in the archdiocese. Special considerations for children and adults may differ from the responses below.

### **1. What is new about these confirmation Guidelines (2015) compared to the guidelines that were promulgated in 2005?**

Very little is actually changing in the guidelines. However, it is the hope that the spirit of how the guidelines are implemented will be changed.

There are two significant emphases in these new guidelines. First, there is no longer a requirement of one year of systematic preparation prior to enrolling in a confirmation Preparation program. This allows for a clear and independent distinction between formal religious instruction and sacramental preparation. Second, it is hoped that parishes would open wide the doors to the sacrament and ensure that we are not requiring anything more than the church requires. In other words, our requirements will be limited to that which the church requires and nothing more. For example, a parish can offer interviews, service components, retreats, a specific set of sessions, etc., but candidates who do not fulfill them are not to be denied the sacrament on that basis alone.

### **2. Why would a teen take part in faith formation or confirmation prep (e.g. retreat) if it's not required?**

The Catholic Church has a lot to offer adolescents as they begin their quest for independence and meaning in their lives. We offer them a deeper relationship with Christ and a more lively familiarity with the Holy Spirit. While the Church does not require a certain number of classes, etc. parents can certainly require their children to attend. At the same time, teens are longing to attend a faith formation program that gives them meaning and purpose, but, more importantly, connects them in a real way to a God who is ever-present in their lives.

If our programs are based on love and connecting teens to Christ in an authentic way, and not because of some artificial requirement, teens are much more likely to be receptive to our Gospel message and, also, more inclined to attend and respond with openness.

Of course, we have the responsibility of ensuring that our programs are indeed true, authentic experiences of God's love. We must settle for nothing less.

### **3. What help will be given to FFLs who have been dependent on a confirmation program that is built around minimum requirements?**

The Offices of Adolescent Faith Formation and Catechetical Services are committed to assisting parish leaders in any way they can to help continually strengthen programming in the Archdiocese.

The Archdiocese will create and support a confirmation preparation curriculum for parishes to consider using. This program will be designed specifically to assist parishes in implementing our revised confirmation guidelines.

#### **4. Do all parish confirmation programs need to change?**

A parish can certainly continue what it is currently offering for confirmation preparation especially if it is doing so according to these guidelines.

In some cases, a parish's formal religious instruction and confirmation preparation are so closely tied together that it would be prudent for those parishes to consider a more clear distinction between the two formation programs.

Additionally, parishes may want to ensure that they are offering the preparation program as a service to help parents in the formation of their children and not as an obligation that could appear to be necessary to "earn the Sacrament". FFLs are advised to be careful about how they use the word "required" when communicating about their confirmation preparation program.

#### **5. What materials should be provided to all parishes so the confirmation guidelines are communicated consistently?**

The Archdiocese will develop a list of FAQs for parish leaders and a separate list of FAQs for parents regarding these guidelines. Since all parishes may determine the specific methods in which they prepare their candidates for the sacrament of confirmation, it may be necessary for parishes to be able to create a unique FAQ to serve their local community. The main document on confirmation, "Statement about the Sacrament of Confirmation" should be included in confirmation handbooks for parents, FFLs, and candidates.

#### **6. How do we help parents and participants know that participation is important, but not required?**

First, it is important that the programming that is offered is of very high quality and is meeting the needs of the participants and their parents. So, FFLs should hold their programs to high standards and be able to assure parents that the preparation program is worth their time and efforts.

Sometimes, parents may feel that a program is not helping their children. If this is the case, it would be inappropriate to blame the parent for not sending their children. If parents are dissatisfied with what is available to their children, parishes would be wise to ask parents for their assistance and feedback in order to improve the program.

Secondly, relationships and communications with parents should help them to understand their role in forming their children and that these programs are meant to assist them in their efforts, never to replace them as the primary catechist of their children.

#### **7. What should FFLs communicate to parents about these confirmation guidelines?**

First and foremost, parents should be reminded that it is their task to form their children in the faith and that the parish is there to assist them with that task.

The confirmation preparation program is one way parishes assist parents in their role of forming their children in the faith. So, everything that FFLs communicate to families should be done with a sense of servant leadership.

Confirmation preparation programs “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.” (CCC 1309)

As a result, parents should be invited to enroll their child in the program with expectations that the candidate would be able to experience high quality faith formation facilitated by faith-filled intentional disciples of Jesus. FFLs should assure parents that this is the case in their parish.

All aspects of the confirmation preparation program should have a clearly defined purpose so that parents know why their children are taking part.

Most importantly, though, it is important that FFLs work to establish trusting and genuine relationships with the families of the parish so that parents come to trust the quality of the programming the parish provides and, in turn, fully understand their role in the process. FFLs and parents should be in very fluid conversation years prior to a discussion regarding the sacrament of confirmation.

### **8. For what reasons should a person not be confirmed?**

Perhaps it would be better to ask this question in a different way: Who may be confirmed?

To be confirmed, the Church requires a candidate to meet the following criteria:

- They must be baptized and not yet be confirmed.
- They must have reached the age of reason (about 7 years old or older).
- They must have a sponsor.
- They must be suitably instructed.
- They must be in the state of grace and have the intention of receiving the sacrament of confirmation -- properly disposed.
- They must be able to renew their baptismal promises.

A person should not be confirmed if they are not eligible to receive the sacrament (see the list above). In general, we should err on the side of offering the sacrament.

It’s also important to note that it is the responsibility of the parents, in consultation with the pastor, to determine whether or not their children are ready to be confirmed. <sup>2</sup>

### **9. What can a parish NOT “require” for preparation for confirmation? What are “undue requirements”?**

A parish cannot require any thing other than what the Church requires for a person to be able to be confirmed. For example, a parish can offer interviews, service components, retreats, a specific set of sessions, etc., but candidates who do not fulfill them are not to be denied the sacrament on that basis alone.

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<sup>2</sup> “Parents and pastors of souls, especially pastors of parishes, are to take care that the faithful are properly instructed to receive the sacrament and come to it at the appropriate time.” Code of Canon Law #890.

Additionally, programs that are designed to prepare a person for the sacrament should be considerate of family time, school time, extra-curricular time, and the expectations of other faith formation programs (RE and Catholic school) in setting the number and duration of preparation sessions. The archdiocese recommends 8-12 hours of immediate formal instruction for the preparation for confirmation. Expecting more than that may be considered an undue burden.

**10. What should be done if the child/teen feels they are ready but the parents do not?**

The decision about whether a candidate is ready to be confirmed is that of the parents in consultation with the pastor. In this situation it would be good for the Pastor to meet with the parents and the child/teen to discuss the instruction and disposition of the candidate, keeping in mind that the sacrament is a gift offered to the candidate. We should be sure that the parents are informed about the specifics of the requirements for the sacrament so that they are aware that the sacrament is a gift to them not something that has to be earned. Still, it is the parents' task to see that their children are prepared for the sacrament. If the parents do not believe that to be the case, their decision needs to be respected. In general, we should encourage parents to err on the side of offering the sacrament.

**11. What should be done if the parents feel the child/teen is ready but the child/teen does not?**

Some teens have doubts or questions about their faith that could become obvious during confirmation preparation sessions. Some may say that they are only getting Confirmed because their parents have told them they have to. In these situations, what should be done?

First, if the candidate has expressed to a catechist or a faith formation leader anything that would significantly challenge their eligibility for the sacrament, (e.g. they say in class that they don't believe in God and can't, in good conscience, renew their baptismal promises.) that information should be shared with the Pastor. It would then be good for the Pastor to meet with the parents and the candidate to discuss the situation. We should be sure that the candidates are informed about the specifics of the requirements for the sacrament so that they are aware that the sacrament is a gift to them not something they have to earn. Still, it is the parents who make the final determination of whether their child is ready to be Confirmed.

**12. What should be done if a candidate has not done any of the program suggestions, but the parents state he/she is ready for confirmation?**

Confirmation preparation programs exist to help a person grow deeper in their understanding of the sacrament so that they may fully, actively, and consciously take part in the celebration of the sacrament. However, no confirmation preparation program is so perfect that it should be considered the only way to prepare a person for the sacrament.

Just because a person has not been to a parish's program does not mean that they are not prepared.

We should generally err on the side of offering the sacrament.

If the candidate's parents believe they are ready to receive the sacrament, then they are ready to receive the sacrament.

### **13. What should a prepared candidate know, do, and believe prior to confirmation?**

The Archdiocese will deliberately not create a list of questions that must be answered or practices that must be done. Each person should be prepared according to his or her capacity. Also, we want to be sure that there is not an artificial list of expectations that could ever be used to restrict someone from receiving the sacrament.

In short, candidates are to be suitably instructed, properly disposed, and able to renew their baptismal promises.

It would be great if every candidate would be able to demonstrate a knowledge of Jesus, His teachings, His example, and what discipleship requires in whatever way a person their age is capable of doing so. We would like them to know the nature and effects of the sacrament of confirmation so as to be able to be a full, conscious, and active participant in the celebration of the sacrament.

Ideally, a candidate would not only know about Jesus, but also know Jesus himself. Ideally, they would have an active prayer life, an awareness of what a life of discipleship looks like, and a willingness to grow in a life of discipleship.

They should also be presented with the basic skills necessary to sustain themselves in their faith. Specifically, they should know how to read a bible (book, chapter, verse) and know how to navigate the catechism so they can find answers to questions that may come up in their lives.

See also, "Statement about the Sacrament of Confirmation".

### **14. Who determines whether someone is "suitably instructed" or "properly disposed"?**

Just as it is parents who bring their children to the sacrament of baptism, it is parents who bring their children to the sacrament of confirmation. The responsibility to determine whether he/she is suitably instructed is that of the parents, in consultation with the pastor. Parents should feel free to discuss any concerns with their child, and then the pastor to make sure that all who are eligible to receive the sacrament are fully invited to do so.

We always assume that a person is properly disposed.

### **15. What can a parish "require" for preparation for confirmation?**

A parish cannot require more than the Church requires for one to be confirmed. To be confirmed, the Church requires a candidate to meet the following criteria:

- They must be baptized and not yet be confirmed.
- They must have reached the age of reason (about 7 years old or older).
- They must have a sponsor.
- They must be suitably instructed.
- They must be in the state of grace and have the intention of receiving the sacrament of confirmation -- properly disposed.
- They must be able to renew their baptismal promises.

While confirmation service hours/projects, retreats, and a specific set of sessions are helpful in preparation for the sacrament, a parish should not promulgate or condone the idea that one must complete these things in order to be eligible to receive the sacrament.

#### **16. What is meant by confirmation preparation?**

Confirmation preparation is the immediate formation that occurs prior to the Sacrament of confirmation that helps a candidate to know what happens during the reception of the Sacrament, why it happens, and the effects of the Sacrament. Further, confirmation preparation is preparing candidates to be “sent forth” as disciples of Christ. Formation includes more than simply coming to know information about the Sacrament, but also invites a personal growth “toward a more intimate union with Christ and a more lively familiarity with the Holy Spirit.” (CCC 1309). Confirmation preparation is different from Formal Faith Formation in that it is not the place to teach a person all they need to know about the Catholic faith. We must trust that candidates have already had some exposure to the teachings of the Catholic Church and, more importantly, will be given future opportunities to grow deeper in their faith. Any hopes that confirmation preparation will cover all there is to know about the Catholic faith will actually lead to the idea that Confirmation is the completion of formation or a “graduation” from the Catholic religious instruction.

#### **17. What is meant by Formal Faith Formation?**

Whether delivered in a traditional RE program or a Catholic school, formal faith formation or religious instruction is systematic Catholic formation that provides “complete and authentic” information about the Catholic Church and her teachings. This catechetical ministry typically conforms to a set curriculum to ensure that the faith is taught thoroughly and accurately. It is different from sacramental preparation in the scope of what is being taught. Sacramental preparation is simply about the “what”, “why”, and “effect” of the specific sacrament so as to prepare someone to fully, actively, and consciously receive the sacrament. Additionally, formal faith formation is life-long and helps all people grow in their faith using age-appropriate methods of engagement and instruction. With regard to the formation of children, it is important to remember that religious instruction programs exist in order to assist parents in their role as the primary catechists of their children.

#### **18. Are candidates still required to have one year of systematic formation prior to confirmation preparation?**

No. Formal faith formation is on-going and life-long. We would encourage all people to take part throughout their lives, not just for the one year prior to a sacrament.

Additionally, confirmation preparation and systematic religious instruction are two separate things (see #16 and #17 above). Being involved in confirmation preparation should be enough to meet the expectations of “suitable instruction” for the sacrament of confirmation.

#### **19. Does a family need to be registered members of a parish in order to enroll their child in the confirmation preparation program or request confirmation?**

Families should enroll their children for sacramental preparation in the parish in which they are members. Since the partnership between parents and the pastor is important in determining the suitable instruction of their children, it is important that the preparation occurs in the parish/cluster in which the family worships.

## **20. Why does the Archdiocese wait until candidates are 15 years old to confirm them when canon law says that they only have to be 7 years old?**

The usual age for the sacrament of confirmation in the Archdiocese of Dubuque is 15 years old. Canon Law (#891) says that confirmation should take place after a person has reached the age of reason. The USCCB further defines this canon by saying that “Confirmation... shall be conferred between the age of discretion and about sixteen years of age, within the limits determined by the diocesan bishop...”<sup>3</sup>

The reason that the Archdiocese of Dubuque has a later age is because of the emphasis placed on the apostolic nature of the sacrament. Since 15 year old candidates are capable of understanding more about the nature of discipleship, it was determined that this would be a good time to offer the sacrament. This age also provides a standard for the Archdiocese which allows for some consistency from one parish to another. It is also consistent with most neighboring dioceses.

Dispensations from the age requirement at the request of the parents in discussion with the pastor are possible, but not encouraged.

## **21. What is the role of a Confirmation sponsor?**

The role of the Confirmation Sponsor is “to take care that the confirmed person behaves as a true witness of Christ and faithfully fulfills the obligations inherent in this sacrament.” They are to assist the parents by serving as a faith mentor, to guide and assist the newly confirmed on their path of discipleship.

While it is not improper to have the sponsors involved in the sacramental preparation process, it is often logistically difficult to make that happen. While it would be appropriate to invite sponsors to join candidates in preparation sessions, requiring sponsors to attend a session or event may be too much of a burden on the sponsors.

## **22. Who may be a sponsor?**

A sponsor must be a Confirmed Catholic who is at least 16 years old and who leads a life of faith. Since one of the roles of the sponsor is to assist the parents in guiding the candidate in their faith journey, a sponsor may not be the parent of the candidate.

## **23. Does the parish have to validate a sponsor as a Catholic in good standing?**

As long as the candidate and his/her parents are informed on the role and requirements of a confirmation sponsor, we should assume that they have picked someone who meets those requirements.

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<sup>3</sup> From USCCB website (<http://www.usccb.org/beliefs-and-teachings/what-we-believe/canon-law/complementary-norms/canon-891-age-for-confirmation.cfm>), action of the USCCB on November 15, 2000 and implemented on July 1, 2002.

## **24. What are the requirements for selecting a Confirmation name?**

Selecting a confirmation name is a tradition in a lot of parishes, but it is not a requirement. It is certainly acceptable to keep one's given name at baptism as a way to symbolize the strong connection between baptism and confirmation. But, if someone wants to select a Catholic Saint as a patron at confirmation, they are welcome to do so.