



Confirmation

Handbook

2024-2025

“The sacrament of confirmation strengthens the baptized and obliges them more firmly to be witnesses of Christ by word and deed and to spread and defend the faith. It imprints a character, enriches by the gift of the Holy Spirit the baptized continuing on the path of Christian initiation, and binds them more perfectly to the Church.”

(Code of Canon Law, canon 879)

“The faithful are obliged to receive this sacrament at the proper time. 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, canon 890)

“Insofar as possible, there is to be a sponsor for the person to be confirmed; the 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.”

(Code of Canon Law, canon 892)

Using This Booklet

This booklet is for candidates for Confirmation and their sponsors. Family and others can also be included.

This Booklet contains:

- Some information about Confirmation
- Scripture passages for reflection
- Activities for candidates and sponsors

Registering for Confirmation

In addition to preparing for Confirmation, it is essential to register with the St. Joseph parish office so that Confirmation can be recorded in the permanent sacramental record, as required by canon law.

In order to be on the list to receive Confirmation, the parish office needs:

1. A copy of the candidate's baptismal certificate.
2. The completed Confirmation registration form:

<https://www.stjosephwestphalia.org/bulletins-publications-and-forms.html>

The Role of Sponsors

Suppose you want to become an electrician, or a surgeon, or an artist, or a famous athlete. Is it enough to read books about these things? Is it enough to sit in a classroom and listen to someone talk about wiring, anatomy, the use of color and light, or techniques you can use on the field? Of course not. To learn these things you need experience, practice, and the support of someone who has the skills you want to learn.

Suppose you want to be a good Catholic. Suppose you want to be holy and live a good life. Is it enough to listen to sermons? Or study about the faith? Absolutely not. These things are important, but they are no substitute for *experience* and *practice* and the *support* of someone who has the skills you want to learn.

At the time of Jesus, a master teacher (rabbi) would have followers or students who would live with him, share his life, and learn from him by experience and practice. In the Renaissance, if you wanted to be a sculptor, or a painter, or a blacksmith, you would live with and learn from a master, who had the skills you wanted to develop. In other words, you'd become an *apprentice*. The disciples of Jesus were really apprentices.

In her wisdom and experience over the centuries, the Catholic Church has realized that learning to be a Christian requires apprenticeship. Hence the importance of *sponsors*, particularly for Baptism and Confirmation. In the early Church, when Jewish or pagan adults were preparing to receive Baptism, Confirmation, and the Eucharist at Easter, they spent a long period of time *practicing the Christian life*. The last part of this was the season of Lent, which was a time of intense prayer and self-denial in preparation for receiving the holy mysteries at Easter.

The sponsor was like the master electrician, the experienced surgeon, the expert painter, or the skilled athlete. They would help the apprentice in the Christian life to train and learn by experience and practice.

This is still the role of sponsor today. People receiving Baptism and Confirmation, still have sponsors (also called godparents), who are meant to mentor them in living out the sacraments they receive. The sponsor is supposed to show the candidate *how to live as a Catholic* in the way a master would teach an apprentice.

Being a sponsor is not just an honor, it is a great responsibility. This responsibility begins in preparation for

the sacrament and extends long after the sacrament is received.

Activity: Sponsor, share with your candidate your own experience of receiving the sacraments. What were the positives? If there were negatives, how would you like to help your candidate have a better experience than you did.

Activity: Sponsor and candidate, develop a plan for how you will form a master-apprentice relationship in *preparation* for Confirmation and how, practically, you might continue that *after* Confirmation.

A Confirmation Name

While it is not an essential part of the sacrament and is not required (or even mentioned) by Church law, it is an old custom in the United States for those receiving Confirmation to take a *Confirmation name*.

In the Bible, when someone is equipped for a new role or responsibility, often that person is given a new name.

Activity: Candidates and sponsors, see how many examples of name-changes from the Bible you can think of.

A Confirmation name reminds you that Confirmation gives you a deeper role and responsibility. It also reminds you that you have the heavenly assistance of the saints in your battle against evil.

A Confirmation name should be the name of a canonized Saint or a beatified Blessed.

Activity: Sponsor, share your Confirmation name with your candidate. Explain why you originally chose it and how your relationship with that saint has developed.

Activity: Candidate, learn about different saints and think of possible Confirmation names.

Confirmation Myths

There are some common myths about Confirmation out there. It is important to avoid these, as they obscure the true meaning and power of this sacrament.

Myth: Confirmation is a process where you decide whether you want to commit to being Catholic or not.

Fact: As a baptized Catholic, you are already bound by the promises that were made on your behalf at Baptism. You are already a life-long member of the Catholic Church. The Catholic Church does not offer you a free chance to opt-out of being Catholic. However, each of us has free will, and we must decide *each day* whether we will actively live our faith or not. Similarly, you have certain relationships and obligations to your parents, siblings, and other family members. You don't get to "opt-out" of these relationships, but you do have the free will to choose how you respond to your family each and every day. Some choices are good, others are bad.

Myth: Confirmation is graduation from religious education.

Fact: Catholics should grow in their knowledge of God throughout their lives.

Myth: Confirmation is optional.

Fact: “The faithful are obliged to receive this sacrament [of Confirmation] at the proper time. 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*, canon 890)

Myth: Confirmation is mainly about a choice that I make for God, a public profession of my faith.

Fact: Some Protestant denominations have a “confirmation” ceremony like this. For them, confirmation is about the candidate’s choice to be Christian or to belong to a particular denomination or community. This is not the Catholic view of Confirmation. While candidates usually renew their baptismal promises—to show the connection between Baptism and Confirmation—like all sacraments, Confirmation is mainly about something *God does for you*,

not about something you do for God. Catholics believe that Confirmation really changes the soul. In the Eastern Catholic tradition, even babies are confirmed right after Baptism. In our own Roman tradition, babies are confirmed if they are in danger of death. This is because an infant is capable of receiving the grace of God, even if he or she cannot make a public profession of faith. It all goes to show that Confirmation is mainly about *gifts* that God gives to the candidate. The sacrament itself has power.

Myth: This sacrament is called “Confirmation” because the candidate is confirming his or her faith.

Fact: “Confirmation” means strengthening and also sealing or approving. It is God who confirms (strengthens) the grace of Baptism in the candidate and who seals/marks out the candidate with further power and responsibility.

Myth: In Confirmation, the candidate receives the seven Gifts of the Holy Spirit for the first time.

Fact: The seven Gifts of the Holy Spirit are given in Baptism. Anyone in the state of sanctifying grace has them. However, Confirmation does *deepen* and *strengthen* them.

Confirmation in the Bible

“In the Old Testament the prophets announced that the Spirit of the Lord would rest on the hoped-for Messiah for his saving mission. The descent of the Holy Spirit on Jesus at his baptism by John was the sign that this was he who was to come, the Messiah, the Son of God. He was conceived of the Holy Spirit; his whole life and his whole mission are carried out in total communion with the Holy Spirit whom the Father gives him without measure.”

(Catechism of the Catholic Church, no. 1286)

Scripture: Isaiah 11:2; 61:1; Luke 4:16-22

“On several occasions Christ promised this outpouring of the Spirit, a promise which he fulfilled first on Easter Sunday and then more strikingly at Pentecost. Filled with the Holy Spirit the apostles began to proclaim “the mighty works of God,” and Peter declared this outpouring of the Spirit to be the sign of the messianic age. Those who believed in the apostolic preaching and were baptized received the gift of the Holy Spirit in their turn.”

(Catechism of the Catholic Church, no. 1287)

Scripture: Luke 12:12; John 3:5-8; 7:37-39; 16:7-15; 20:22; Acts 1:8; 2:1-14.

“From that time on the apostles, in fulfillment of Christ's will, imparted to the newly baptized by the laying on of hands the gift of the Spirit that completes the grace of Baptism. For this reason in the Letter to the Hebrews the doctrine concerning Baptism and the laying on of hands is listed among the first elements of Christian instruction. the imposition of hands is rightly recognized by the Catholic tradition as the origin of the sacrament of Confirmation, which in a certain way perpetuates the grace of Pentecost in the Church.”

(Catechism of the Catholic Church, no. 1288)

Scripture: Acts 8:15-17; 19:5-6; Hebrews 6:2.

Effects of Confirmation

“With great power comes great responsibility.”

- Uncle Ben, in Stan Lee’s *Spider-Man*

Confirmation is a sacrament of *power*. Because it gives greater power, it also gives greater responsibility.

“It is evident from its celebration that the effect of the sacrament of Confirmation is the full outpouring of the Holy Spirit as once granted to the apostles on the day of Pentecost.”

“From this fact, Confirmation brings an increase and deepening of baptismal grace:

- it roots us more deeply in the divine filiation which makes us cry, "Abba! Father!";
- it unites us more firmly to Christ;
- it increases the gifts of the Holy Spirit in us;
- it renders our bond with the Church more perfect;
- it gives us a special strength of the Holy Spirit to spread and defend the faith by word and action as true witnesses of Christ, to confess the name of Christ boldly, and never to be ashamed of the Cross.”

“Like Baptism which it completes, Confirmation is given only once, for it too imprints on the soul an indelible

spiritual mark, the ‘character,’ which is the sign that Jesus Christ has marked a Christian with the seal of his Spirit by clothing him with power from on high so that he may be his witness.”

“This ‘character’ perfects the common priesthood of the faithful, received in Baptism, and the confirmed person receives the power to profess faith in Christ publicly and as it were officially (*quasi ex officio*).”

(*Catechism of the Catholic Church*, nos. 1302-1305)

Activity: Sponsors and candidates, discuss some of the challenges you have faced or might face in living out the public witness Confirmation empowers you to give. What does it mean not to be ashamed of the cross? What does it mean to profess faith in Christ publicly and officially?

Signs and Symbols of Confirmation

“In treating the rite of Confirmation, it is fitting to consider the sign of anointing and what it signifies and imprints: a spiritual seal. Anointing, in Biblical and other ancient symbolism, is rich in meaning: oil is a sign of abundance and joy; it cleanses (anointing before and after a bath) and limbers (the anointing of athletes and wrestlers); oil is a sign of healing, since it is soothing to bruises and wounds; and it makes radiant with beauty, health, and strength.”

(Catechism of the Catholic Church, no. 1293)

Scripture: Deuteronomy 11:14; Psalm 23:5; 104:15.

“By this anointing the confirmand receives the ‘mark,’ the seal of the Holy Spirit. A seal is a symbol of a person, a sign of personal authority, or ownership of an object. Hence soldiers were marked with their leader's seal and slaves with their master's. A seal authenticates a juridical act or document and occasionally makes it secret.”

“Christ himself declared that he was marked with his Father's seal. Christians are also marked with a seal: ‘It is God who establishes us with you in Christ and has commissioned us; he has put his seal on us and given us his Spirit in our hearts as a guarantee.’ This seal of the Holy Spirit marks our total belonging to Christ, our

enrollment in his service for ever, as well as the promise of divine protection in the great eschatological trial.”

(Catechism of the Catholic Church, nos. 1295-1296)

The Bishop is the original and ordinary minister of Confirmation. A priest with proper delegation can also administer Confirmation.

The fact that the Bishop confers Confirmation or that when a priest confers it he uses the oil of Chrism consecrated by the Bishop highlights the connection between Confirmation and the Apostles. The Bishop is the full successor of the Apostles. The connection with the Bishop also highlights the connection with the universal Church, not just the local community.

The Bishop confers Confirmation by anointing the candidate on the forehead with holy Chrism, through the laying-on of a hand, and saying, “Be sealed with the Gift of the Holy Spirit.”

Immediately after, he greets the candidate with the words that Christ used to greet the Apostles when he breathed the Holy Spirit on them: “Peace be with you.” The newly confirmed responds: “And with your spirit.”

Activity: Sponsor, help your candidate practice making the response “And with your spirit” to the Bishop’s greeting “Peace be with you.”

Activity: The three holy oils are usually kept in parish churches in a special cabinet called an “ambry.” The holy Chrism is often in a container labeled SC (Latin: *Sacrum Chrisma*). Sponsor and candidate, see if you can locate and identify the container of Chrism in the church.

Gift and Gifts

In the ritual for Confirmation, there are two kinds of laying-on of hands and two kinds of gifts that are prayed for.

First, over the whole group of candidates, the Bishop raises two hands and prays for the outpouring of the *Gifts* of the Holy Spirit.

Second, over each candidate individually, he places one hand on the forehead and says, “Be sealed with the *Gift* of the Holy Spirit.”

These two moments signify that in Confirmation the candidate receives both the seven Gifts that come from the Holy Spirit *and* the Gift that is the Holy Spirit himself in person.

“The moral life of Christians is sustained by the gifts of the Holy Spirit. These are permanent dispositions which make man docile in following the promptings of the Holy Spirit.”

(Catechism of the Catholic Church, no. 1830)

The seven Gifts of the Holy Spirit are: wisdom, understanding, counsel, fortitude, knowledge, piety, and fear of the Lord.

Scripture: Isaiah 11:2

But what do the Gifts of the Holy Spirit *do* exactly? They “complete and perfect the virtues of those who receive them. They make the faithful docile in readily obeying divine inspirations.” (*Catechism of the Catholic Church*, no. 1831)

An analogy may help: Suppose your soul is like a ship. You are going on a long voyage to your true homeland (heaven). It is difficult and dangerous. There is real possibility of getting lost at sea or being shipwrecked. If you have a strong and trained rowing team, you will do better in getting more easily through the rough waters. The rowing team is like the virtues—good habits that make it easier to do what is right. But putting up the sails is like the Gifts of the Holy Spirit. The sails allow the ship to be carried along by a higher power, the wind, rather than having to move so much by its own effort. Similarly, in the soul, the Gifts of the Holy Spirit help the virtues we have and open us to be carried along more easily not by our own energy alone but by the power of the Holy Spirit who guides and moves us.

What does each of the Gifts do in the soul? Here is a traditional way to understand the Gifts:

Wisdom: perfects the theological virtue of charity; the most perfect of all the Gifts of the Holy Spirit; enables us to see the ultimate meaning of things in the light of God; gives us a taste for divine things; brings light and warmth

Understanding: helps us to understand how the truths of our faith connect with each other and to see the big picture of our faith.

Counsel: perfects the virtue of prudence; helps us to judge promptly and rightly by a kind of supernatural instinct what we should do, especially in difficult circumstances.

Fortitude: perfects the virtue also called fortitude by giving our will an energy to do great and difficult things joyfully and fearlessly despite obstacles.

Knowledge: helps us to judge things of the world in terms of their relationship to God.

Piety: perfects the virtue of religion by fostering in our hearts an affection for God like that of children to a loving Father and makes us devoted to the things of God; helps us fulfill religious duties joyfully.

Fear of the Lord: inclines our will to a deep respect and reverence for God's majesty; removes us from sin because it is offensive to God; gives us hope in the divine assistance.

(Based on Adolphe Tanquerey, *The Spiritual Life*)

Apprenticeship in Catholic Living

Living as a Catholic requires training. There are good habits that can help you, but they have to be developed. You are not too young to take responsibility for your own spiritual development and to make decisions to put God first in your life. But remember: God is the one who can change you and make you the person he wants you to be. He does this by his grace, including the special graces of Confirmation. Will you let God change you?

One thing that is difficult about growing up is that you have to take responsibility for things that used to be done for you. This is also true in your spiritual life. For instance, you may have been used to going to confession with your class at school, but you need to develop the habit of going regularly even apart from school. You may have relied on your parents to drag you to Mass on Sunday, or they may have failed to take you, but you have to develop the habit of going on your own initiative. And so forth.

There are some key components of a good spiritual life, such as: Sunday Mass, daily prayer of some sort, regular (e.g., monthly) confession, service of time/talent/and treasure, penance (offering up sufferings), acts of generosity and mercy.

Activity: Sponsor, take your candidate with you to confession.

Activity: Sponsor, share with your candidate some of your own spiritual practices or even things you'd like to improve.

Activity: Sponsor and candidate, do you have a crucifix in your living space? Do you have other holy images? What could you change about your living and working environments to help strengthen your spiritual life?

Activity: Sponsor, plan for several follow-up meetings with your candidate for after he or she is confirmed. These can be fun and celebratory, but include a prayerful element.

Activity: Sponsor, plan to write your candidate a letter to be delivered on the first anniversary of his or her Confirmation. In this letter, be sure to check in about the plan you've developed (in the following section).

Task: A Plan for Life after Confirmation

Instead of “service hours” that are seen as a requirement in order to receive the Sacrament of Confirmation, St. Joseph recognizes that Confirmation is a *gift* (which cannot be earned). This gift also places on the recipient an additional responsibility to live his/her faith actively.

Instead of service hours to complete *before* receiving Confirmation, each candidate should work with his/her sponsor (and parents if needed) to develop a realistic plan for how he/she will live the faith actively once confirmed, especially *into high school*.

The plan should include things that the sponsor and candidate will do together. Remember: the sponsor is a mentor for the candidate in how to live the Catholic faith in an ongoing way.

Examples of things to include in the plan:

1. Sunday Mass.
2. Confession every month or every other month.
3. Ways to serve others:
 - a. E.g., specific ways to help family members who need it; visits to the elderly; assisting with the Good Shepherd Center or Catholic Charities.

4. Ways to be involved with the parish:
 - a. E.g., serving at Mass; becoming a reader for Mass; helping with music for Mass; leading the Rosary before Mass.
 - b. E.g., participating in the men's group or women's ministry.
 - c. E.g., participating in Catholic Youth of Osage County (CYOC).
 - d. E.g., assisting with groundskeeping at the parish, assisting with funeral luncheons, quilting, or any other parish needs.
5. Daily prayer practices:
 - a. E.g., morning and evening prayers.
 - b. E.g., devotions, such as the Rosary or Divine Mercy Chaplet.
6. Study of the faith:
 - a. E.g., FORMED.org, Catholic Answers (catholic.com), attending Adult Faith Formation through the parish.

What can help in developing this plan?

1. Identify a way of being involved in the parish that the candidate and sponsor can do together.
2. Identify a way of being involved in the parish that the entire family can do together.

3. These ways of being involved might be existing items in the family's time/talent pledge, or they might be something new.
4. The point is to *come up with a plan that fits with this particular candidate*. What does this candidate have to offer? What are his/her interests and abilities? How can the sponsor/parents help the candidate to use these for the parish in high school?