



Why confirmation?

Remember those early school years, when your child learned the alphabet, addition, and subtraction? It felt good to watch your child grasp these important skills. But imagine your child entering junior high or high school without learning any more. How would he perform algebra? How would he understand literature, or

a foreign language? Sure, he'd have a solid grounding in the basics, but he would need more to prepare for these challenges.

Think of confirmation in a similar way. When your child was baptized, he was welcomed into the Church as a child of God. He received sanctifying grace to prepare him to follow

Christ. Baptism is effective on its own, but Confirmation completes, or fulfills, baptism. At confirmation, your child is sealed in Christ, enriched with a special strength of the Holy Spirit. Confirmation marks the presence of Christ in us. It gives us the grace, courage, and wisdom of the Holy Spirit, so we can live out our baptismal roles as followers of Christ.

MORE THAN A MILESTONE

There are lots of misunderstandings about the sacrament of confirmation.

Some people think of it as a Catholic rite of passage, or a graduation from religious education. But confirmation, along with baptism and Holy Eucharist, is a sacrament of initiation. An initiation marks a beginning, not an end. Just as the apostles took on a new mission when they received the Holy Spirit at Pentecost, we begin a new phase of Christian life at confirmation, and we are able to live our lives as “true witnesses of Christ” [*Catechism of the Catholic Church*, 1285].



Confirmation transforms.
Confirmation is miraculous.
Like the apostles, your child will
receive God's special strength and
courage.

Think of it this way. God has a
plan for your child that's beautiful,

phenomenal, and very good.
Confirmation invites your child to
become the person God means him
or her to be for all time.

Isn't that something worth studying
and preparing for?

“**Christian initiation is accomplished by three sacraments together: Baptism which is the beginning of new life; Confirmation which is its strengthening; and the Eucharist which nourishes the disciple with Christ's Body and Blood for his transformation in Christ.**” • CATECHISM OF THE CATHOLIC CHURCH, 1275

A GIFT FROM JESUS HIMSELF

Think about Jesus' baptism.

When the Holy Spirit descends on Jesus in the form of a dove, that's a sign that Jesus is the Messiah, the Son of God. Jesus promises his disciples this gift when he says, "But you will receive power when the holy Spirit comes upon you, and you will be my witnesses...to the ends of the earth" (Acts of the Apostles 1:8).

Jesus' promise is fulfilled at Pentecost when the Holy Spirit descends on the disciples. It's not only a sign. It's a gift, too. And it isn't just for them. As St. Peter says, "This is what was spoken through the prophet Joel... 'I will pour out a portion of my spirit upon all flesh'" (Acts of the Apostles 2:16-17).

We receive once again the very same gift of the Holy Spirit, the Third Person of the Holy Trinity, at confirmation. God—truly alive—is in us.



THE SAME SACRAMENT FROM THE VERY BEGINNING

Your own experience of confirmation preparation may be different from your child's. Many of us were confirmed in sixth or seventh grade. Perhaps some of us were confirmed while in high school. Your preparation might have seemed more intense, or less so, than your child's. Rest assured that the essence of the sacrament itself has not changed since the days of the Apostles.

Our celebrations have changed a bit, as the Church's understanding of the sacrament has evolved and deepened over time.

We see the beginnings of the

sacrament in the earliest days of the Church:

Now when the apostles in Jerusalem heard that Samaria had accepted the word of God, they sent them Peter and John, who went down and prayed for them, that they might receive the holy Spirit, for it had not yet fallen upon any of them; they had only been baptized in the name of the Lord Jesus. Then they laid hands on them and they received the holy Spirit. (ACTS OF THE APOSTLES 8:14-17)

It's in this powerful action of the Apostles—the laying on of hands—

that the Holy Spirit descends on believers.

For the first few hundred years of the Church, bishops offered the three sacraments of initiation—baptism, confirmation, and Eucharist—all at the same time, at the Easter Vigil. After the catechumens were baptized, they were dressed in white robes. The bishop laid hands on them and anointed them with oil. They then joined the community and received the Eucharist for the first time.

But by the fourth century, the Church had grown so much that it was impossible for bishops to travel



to every baptism. The Churches in what had been the eastern portions of the Roman empire resolved the issue by assigning all three sacraments of initiation to local presbyters, or priests. In the western provinces the Church gave priests the job of baptizing, but reserved the anointing and laying on of hands for the bishop, who could perform this action whenever he visited the area. This meant that many people received baptism and First Communion before receiving confirmation. The Eastern Catholic (or Eastern Orthodox) Church

has continued the tradition of offering baptism, confirmation, and Eucharist to infants at the same time. In the Roman Catholic Church, persons baptized as infants still receive the sacraments of confirmation and Eucharist when they are older, and probably at different times. Both Churches respect these different traditions, assuring us that they are equal in the sight of God.

The Gifts *of the Holy Spirit*

God's goodness is eternal and never changes. But many of us learned different names for God's gifts, and we might not recognize the terms the Church uses to better understand them. Following St. Paul, we speak of the seven gifts of the Holy Spirit:

Wisdom

Understanding

Knowledge

Right judgment

Courage

Reverence

Wonder

and awe



FAQs

➔ ***My daughter insists that she doesn't want to be confirmed. What should I do?***

First, listen to her reasons. If she doesn't know anyone in the program, or simply doesn't feel like going to classes, find out if any of her friends are enrolled, and keep encouraging her to attend. You can't force anyone to be confirmed, but you can encourage (and perhaps insist) that your daughter attend preparation classes so that she can make her decision after thoughtful study, prayer, and discussion. Often as they go through confirmation preparation, even the most reluctant candidates discover they truly want to be confirmed.

➔ ***We recently moved here and don't know anyone who can be a sponsor. Can I be my son's sponsor?***

Unfortunately, you cannot be a sponsor for your own child. But talk to your parish confirmation director or pastor. They can introduce you to other families, or older teens who are happy to be sponsors. Don't forget that your child's godparent can be a sponsor. He or she does not have to be present at confirmation and can have someone stand in as a proxy.



➔ ***I struggle with my own faith. How can I answer my child's questions?***

Even the greatest saints struggled with their faith at times. Consider that your child's confirmation preparation is a call not just for her, but for you, too. Think of this time as a great opportunity to renew your faith alongside your child.

➔ ***My son is extremely busy with sports, and his grades are also a very high priority. Does it really matter if he misses the retreat?***

Believe it or not, most high school coaches (yes, even the ones at public schools) understand about confirmation retreats. If your son really can't make your parish retreat, ask your confirmation director if it's possible to go with a neighboring parish at a different date.