

Confirmation

The Diocesan guide to sacramental preparation for Confirmation

Introduction

‘Confirmation is a sacrament of mission, for it gives us the strength and love of the Holy Spirit to profess fearlessly our faith.’ POPE BENEDICT XVI, *MESSAGE FOR WORLD YOUTH DAY*, 2013

‘Pray... that the Holy Spirit may make us witnesses before the world to the Gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ.’ COLLECT, *ORDER OF CONFIRMATION*, 2016

Dear Fathers, Deacons and Catechists,

These guidelines are issued by the Diocese to guide, support and assist you in preparing our young people for the Sacrament of Confirmation in East Anglia.

Confirmation is a Sacrament of Mission, and presents a wonderful opportunity for our candidates truly to become ‘witnesses before the world to the Gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ’.

In your own witness and teaching as catechists, you play an invaluable role in your parishes and in the Diocese as a whole. As I travel around the Diocese, I see at first-hand how much you do, and I assure you of my heartfelt gratitude. I can only ask, in the words of the Holy Father Pope Francis, ‘Do not tire of sowing the seed!’

Thank you for all that you do.

Yours in Christ,



Bishop of East Anglia

The Sacrament of Confirmation

In the Old Testament the prophets announced that the Spirit of the Lord would rest on the hoped-for Messiah for his saving mission... By Confirmation Christians, that is, those who are anointed, share more completely in the mission of Jesus Christ. (*Catechism of the Catholic Church* 1286)

Jesus, in the synagogue at Nazareth, invokes the prophet Isaiah as He begins His mission of preaching the good news of the kingdom of God:

“The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he has anointed [*chrisme*] me to preach good news¹ to the poor. He has sent me² to proclaim release to the captives and recovering of sight to the blind, to set at liberty those who are oppressed, to proclaim the acceptable year of the Lord... Today this scripture has been fulfilled in your hearing.” (Luke 4:18-21)

Jesus is anointed so that He may be sent out: ‘apostled’, or ‘missioned’. This original anointing (or chrismation) in order to mission, is shared by young people receiving the Sacrament of Confirmation. A similar mission is later announced by Jesus to His disciples, as He bestows the gift of the Holy Spirit upon them, at the end of His earthly mission and the beginning of theirs:

‘Jesus said to them... “Peace be with you. As the Father has sent me,³ even so I send you.” And when he had said this, he breathed on them, and said to them, “Receive the Holy Spirit.”’ (John 20:21-22)

This gift of the Holy Spirit, the breath of God, is received by the disciples in order to strengthen them for their own proclamation of the Gospel. Again, the same gift is received by young people in the Sacrament of Confirmation when the Bishop anoints them with that Chrism which he has breathed upon and consecrated at the Chrism Mass in Holy Week.

‘Confirmation’ is the English form of the Latin word *confirmatio*, or strengthening. The teaching of the Church has consistently been that this sacramental strengthening is given for a reason: for mission, for the proclamation of the Gospel. The *Catechism of the Council of Trent* teaches that confirmands are:

‘Strengthened in faith to confess and glorify the name of our Lord Jesus Christ.’

The Second Vatican Council likewise teaches of confirmands that

¹ ‘to preach good news’ = *evangelizesthai* ≈ evangelise.

² ‘sent me’ = *apestalken* ≈ ‘apostled’ = ‘[com]missioned me’

³ ‘sent me’ = *apestalken* ≈ ‘apostled’ = ‘[com]missioned me’.

‘the Holy Spirit endows them with special strength... to spread and defend the faith, both by word and by deed, as true witnesses of Christ.’ (*Lumen Gentium*)

The Bible vividly depicts this strengthening of Christ’s disciples as they receive the gift of the Holy Spirit. Prior to that gift, they are frightened and hiding behind locked doors – ‘the doors being shut where the disciples were, for fear’ (John 20:19). But afterwards, at Pentecost, they go boldly out into the world to proclaim the good news: ‘Peter, standing with the eleven, lifted up his voice and addressed them, “Men of Judea and all who dwell in Jerusalem, let this be known to you...”’ (Acts 2:14).

The Catechism, similarly, links Confirmation explicitly to the events of the day of Pentecost:

1302 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.

1303 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.

Confirmation is therefore an operative sacrament, in that the confirmand is strengthened *in order to do* something else: in order to become a witness before the world. It is important, then, that our catechesis shows an awareness of potential cultural confusion around the word ‘confirmation’. There is a need to distinguish the Church’s teaching, from the common English notion of ‘confirmation’ as something completed (information being given, for example, that a contract or obligation has been fulfilled). Instead, catechists should encourage a *forward looking* sense of Confirmation: strengthened in order to witness, strengthened in order to mission. As Pope Benedict XVI taught, ‘Confirmation is a sacrament of mission, for it gives us the strength and love of the Holy Spirit to profess fearlessly our faith.’⁴

⁴ Pope Benedict XVI, *Message for World Youth Day*, 2013.

The Diocesan Confirmation Course

The Diocese of East Anglia asks that preparation for Confirmation is carried out using the course books of the YouCat series. These comprise firstly the YouCat Catechism; the YouCat Confirmation book (for candidates); and the YouCat Confirmation Handbook (for catechists). Other books in the YouCat series that may be helpful are the YouCat Prayer Book; the YouCat Study Guide; the DoCat guide to living out Catholic social teaching; and the forthcoming YouCat Confession book.

Every Confirmation candidate should have access to a YouCat Catechism, a YouCat Confirmation book, and a copy of the Holy Bible. The bible translation should be either the Jerusalem translation as currently used in the liturgy of the Church (e.g. the CTS Bible), or the RSV 2nd Catholic Edition (e.g. the Ignatius Bible).

Mass attendance

Attending Sunday Mass throughout the period of catechesis is an integral part of the Confirmation course, and this may need to be made clear to candidates and their parents.

Confession

The Sacrament of Confession should be regularly offered, and should not be seen as a 'one off' to be completed before the Confirmation Mass. Confession should be arranged for the entire group of candidates on at least three occasions during the year: firstly, during Advent; secondly, during Lent; and thirdly, in the days prior to the Confirmation Mass. Ideally a priest should be available for Confession at every session of the course.

Adoration

The group of candidates should be encouraged regularly to spend time in front of the Blessed Sacrament, and times should be arranged when the whole group does so together. This might take the form of Exposition and Benediction, or simply spending time as a group in silent prayer before the tabernacle. Parish priests and deacons are asked to ensure that these opportunities are made available.

Catechists should make arrangements with their parish priest for all candidates to observe a period of Adoration, with their sponsor and parents, in the days immediately prior to their Confirmation.

Ignite Festival

All Confirmation candidates are expected attend the Ignite Festival (Swaffham) with their Confirmation group. This is not an ‘optional extra’, but an integral part of preparation for Confirmation.

Parishes are encouraged to invite the Diocesan Ignite Team to lead one of their Confirmation sessions, and /or a retreat day for the group.

Confirmed in East Anglia

Catechists are encouraged to ground their catechesis in the particular traditions and history of the Diocese of East Anglia: its many saints, and the role and influence of Our Lady of Walsingham.

Mystagogia

Catechesis should guard against the tendency for Confirmation to be the ‘Sacrament of Exit’. Although the importance of the reception of the Sacrament should never be underestimated, catechesis should not be seen as finite process which ends in a single Mass. Rather it should be presented as part of an ongoing formation, and an ongoing journey of faith. The confirmation preparation *program* should be seen as extending both before and after the *classes* that formally prepare for the sacrament.

Confirmation groups should continue to meet after candidates are confirmed, and these post-confirmation meetings should be a scheduled part of the program from the outset. Teenagers are particularly comfortable within peer groups, and it is good to organise group activities in the year after Confirmation. Creating an online community for the group in the form of Facebook page or similar digital media resource is helpful. Those who have been confirmed should be invited back to the Ignite Festival in the year after their confirmation, and invited to act as mentors to candidates in their parish in succeeding years.

Post confirmation commitment within the parish should not be confined to liturgy, and catechists should try to avoid giving the impression that the only way to get involved in the life of the Church is to read at Mass, or to become an Extraordinary Minister of Holy Communion. This tendency gives a misleading impression both of the lay apostolate and of the liturgy itself, especially of the Mass, in which all the people of God have a full, conscious and active participation regardless of whether they minister in the Sanctuary.

Guidelines for Catechists

‘No-one gets to go to heaven alone. You have to bring someone along with you.’⁵

The role of the Catechist is ‘to make Christ known, loved and followed by those who do not yet know Him;’⁶ to say, with Mother Teresa, “I will give saints to Mother Church.” That role is marked by four special characteristics:

I Spiritual formation

The devotional life of catechists is the foundation of all that they teach. “The catechist ensures that his/her activities always draw support from faith in the Holy Spirit and from prayer.”⁷ Catechists should regularly examine their own devotional life, to ensure that they are regularly receiving the Sacraments; spending time in prayer on a daily basis, and regularly spending time before the Lord in the Blessed Sacrament. The advice of a spiritual director will be very helpful. Additionally, the devotional life of the catechist has its own catechetical function: with regards to the Sacrament of Confession, for example, one thing that can inhibit young people is a lack of adult role models. The catechist is not only nourished by the Sacraments, but tries to model a proper approach to them.

2 A passion for catechesis:

Catechesis is an opportunity for the catechist to grow in learning as well as the catechumen. Catechists should be returning again and again to the Catechism, to Sacred Scripture and to the magisterial documents of the Church, to continually refresh and deepen their own catechetical roots and their own knowledge of the faith.

To have one foot firmly planted in a rich devotional life, and another firmly planted in catechetical knowledge, will in turn foster confident orthodoxy and missionary boldness in the catechist: an evangelical love of the Church.

3 Love and fidelity to the Church

The Congregation for the Evangelization of Peoples (CEP) speaks of the Catechist’s relationship with the Church as one firstly of ‘filial love’:

As People of God and the Mystical Body of Christ, the Church requires from catechists a deep sense of belonging and responsibility... [to] become a visible sign to the community. The catechist’s service is never an individual or isolated act, but is always deeply ecclesial.⁸

⁵ Fr John Hardon, *Understand Your Catholic Faith or Lose It* (1996).

⁶ Congregation for the Evangelization of Peoples (1970).

⁷ *General Directory for Catechesis* 156.

⁸ *Guide for Catechists*, Congregation for the Evangelisation of Peoples (1993), 7.

Good catechesis is an action of love, that enables the catechists to teach orthodoxy, confidently from the very heart of the Church.

4 Boldness: fostering a sense of mission.

The CEP speaks of catechists as ‘missionary animators in their communities’: those who bring their communities alive ‘with a marked missionary spirit’.⁹ The Catechist shares then in the missionary spirit of the Church of the apostles; of that community which in the days after Pentecost prays first of all for ‘boldness’ in proclaiming the good news (Acts 4:29).¹⁰ Pope Francis reminds us of this spirit in his first apostolic exhortation, *Evangelii Gaudium*:

On the lips of the catechist the first proclamation must ring out over and over: “Jesus Christ loves you; he gave his life to save you; and now he is living at your side every day to enlighten, strengthen and free you.”¹¹

Guidelines for Candidates

Candidates for Confirmation must be baptised Catholics. They will ordinarily be in Year 8 at school, and have reached the age of 13 by the time they receive the Sacrament.

Candidates are expected:

- to attend Sunday Mass throughout their confirmation preparation;
- to attend all scheduled confirmation sessions unless a serious reason prevents them;
- to attend the Ignite Festival, and any other retreat days organised by catechists;
- to have participated in Adoration and received the sacrament of Reconciliation as part of the immediate preparation for the celebration of Confirmation.

These are the minimal practical commitments. By the end of their preparations, candidates are expected additionally to make a personal commitment: they should be able and willing to express their free decision to accept Confirmation and a desire to continue to nurture their relationship with Jesus Christ in His Church.

All candidates will receive a letter from Bishop Alan to welcome, encourage and affirm them, and to explain the significance of the Sacrament and of the candidates’ own commitment.

⁹ *Guide For Catechists* (1993) 5.

¹⁰ ‘grant to thy servants to speak thy word with all boldness’ Acts 4:29.

¹¹ *Evangelii Gaudium*, 164.

Guidelines for Parents

Parents of candidates should be asked to attend at least two sessions of catechesis and information offered for them alone.

These sessions should outline to parents the commitment that their children are making in attending the Confirmation course; and the ways in which they can (and are expected to) assist their children. These sessions should also provide a basic catechesis with regard to the Sacrament of Confirmation.

This is an opportunity to remind parents that they are the primary educators of their children. In celebrating the Rite of Baptism of Infants, parents publicly commit to forming their children in the life of faith. As the Rite says:

“Parents, you have asked to have your child baptized. In doing so you are accepting the responsibility of training them in the practice of the faith.”

This responsibility, of “training them in the practice of the faith”, includes seeing that their child receives Confirmation and Eucharist. Parish or school programs of formation and catechesis will assist parents in this responsibility; but they can never replace the primary role of parents in faith formation. A child will always learn the life of faith firstly from their family.

Among the commitments asked of parents are:

- to enable their children to get to all the Confirmation classes, to the Ignite retreat and to any other retreat days or group activities such as scheduled days for Confession or Adoration;
- where necessary, to pay for books and course materials (if their financial circumstances permit);
- to assist their children in attending weekly Sunday Mass, and to go with them;
- to make a place for regular prayer in the home, for example in saying grace before meals, or a family Rosary;
- to support their child as he or she receives the Sacrament of Confession.
- to attend a period of Adoration with their children and sponsors before the Rite of Confirmation is celebrated;

All parents will receive a letter of welcome from Bishop Alan, to thank them for their support, and to explain their responsibilities and how they can assist their child.

Guidelines for Sponsors

Sponsors have an active role in the faith life and preparation of the candidate. The sponsor should regularly pray for and with the candidate; attend classes together as required, and attend Adoration together before the Rite of Confirmation.

Sponsors must be at least 16 years old, fully initiated (baptized, confirmed and received Eucharist) and a practicing member of a parish faith community. They must be leading a life in harmony with the Catholic Faith, and free of any canonical impediments.

The sponsor cannot be the natural or adoptive parent of the candidate. The sponsor is the *patrinis* (literally, 'little parent') or godparent, who assists the parents in forming a child in faith.

If candidates are still in contact with their baptismal godparents, and their godparents can still fulfil the requirements of a sponsor, then the godparents may act as the sponsors at confirmation; and this additionally emphasises the connection between baptism and confirmation. However, others may be asked to fulfil this role.

All sponsors will receive a letter of welcome from Bishop Alan, to thank them and to explain their responsibilities.

Guidelines for the Parish Community

The parish is the community of the faithful in which the confirmation candidate is catechised, and under its pastor has a particular responsibility to provide, support, and encourage catechists; and to seek out and personally invite all young people and their parents to begin preparing for Confirmation, and to support them in their catechesis.

The first support is prayer. The confirmation group can be included in the Prayers of the Faithful at times throughout the year. Prayer partners should be sought out for confirmation candidates, and this support can often be provided by the housebound.

A parish awareness of the candidates' preparation journey can be maintained through the parish newsletter, through displays of event photos and catechetical work, and through requests for prayer and participation in parish activities.

Guidelines for the Rite of Confirmation

There are specific liturgical requirements and guidelines for the Rite of Confirmation in the Diocese, which are available from the Bishop's private secretary, Fr Pàdraig Hawkins, and which include directions for candidates and sponsors. Parish priests and catechists are asked to ensure that these guidelines are adhered to when planning for the Rite of Confirmation. A copy is attached as an appendix to this document.