

Frequently Asked Questions About Confirmation in the Diocese of Albany **Prepared by the Office of Evangelization, Catechesis and Family Life**

What is Confirmation?

Confirmation is a sacrament of initiation that is closely connected to Baptism and Eucharist, even though it is often celebrated years later. It “perfects baptismal grace” and incorporates us more firmly into Christ and strengthens our bond with the whole Church and the mission of Christ. At Confirmation, one is strengthened in the gifts of the Holy Spirit to help us live more fully as disciples of Jesus Christ.

What are the pre-requisites to entering Confirmation preparation?

An individual must be baptized and *minimally* in Grade 10 or 15 years old to enter Confirmation preparation. S/he should have been in a faith formation program for at least one year prior to entering Confirmation preparation, and be willing and able to participate fully in the immediate preparation for Confirmation.

What does Confirmation preparation entail?

For adolescents, there is usually a parent or parent/candidate session so that everyone is aware of the details of the preparation, and is ready to enter the process. There may be a series of gatherings for catechesis on the sacrament, prayer and worship experiences, a retreat, meetings with sponsors, and other activities that vary from parish to parish. The preparation period often culminates in a personal conversation with the pastor, parish life director or catechetical/youth ministry leader to discern where the candidate is in his/her journey to being a disciple of Jesus.

What is a retreat and why is it necessary?

To “retreat” usually means to step away. A Confirmation retreat is just that ---a time to step away from our everyday activity and spend some concentrated time to reflect on our relationship with Jesus Christ and what that means for our life. A retreat may be held at the parish site or off-site; it may be a day, an overnight or a weekend experience. It may involve large group activities, small group process, media, music, talks by peers or adults, prayer experiences, or even the Eucharist or the Sacrament of Reconciliation. Anytime one is taking a major step in one’s faith journey, having some time apart to prayerfully discern what that means for one’s life, is an important and necessary activity.

What about “service hours”?

Service is an essential component of Christian discipleship. By the time a person enters preparation for Confirmation, s/he should have had many opportunities and experiences of serving others – both in the parish and in the wider community. The idea of accumulating a certain number of “service hours” in order to be confirmed is discouraged for a number of reasons: 1) it gives the appearance of merely “fulfilling a requirement” in order to “earn” Confirmation, similar to a person doing community service

hours in order to fulfill a parole requirement! 2) Service hours are often done as a task to be completed rather than an experience where one can encounter the living Christ. It is, however, important for the Confirmation candidate to reflect on their overall experience of serving others as a way of living their lives as a Catholic Christian and encountering Christ in those whom we serve. Sometimes a particular service experience is built into the preparation for Confirmation, so that the candidates can both participate and reflect upon the same experience together.

Do I have to have a "Confirmation name"?

When the Rite of Confirmation was revised after the Second Vatican Council, there was a renewed emphasis on the relationship between Baptism and Confirmation. This is reflected today in many practices around Confirmation: the preference for the baptismal godparent as the Confirmation sponsor, if possible; the renewal of the baptismal promises at the Confirmation liturgy; and the preference for the baptismal name. So the name you were given at your baptism is the preferred name to use at your Confirmation ----which is your real, given name!

The practice of choosing another name has been a time-honored tradition in many places. In the Bible, the giving of a "new name" signified a change of status or an inner conversion. So the practice of choosing the name of a saint signified a candidate's intention to model the holiness of this person and become more Christ-like. So you have an option --- you still may choose the name of a saint whose holiness you admire and want to emulate. But the preferred option is your very own name – as YOU were baptized and called to holiness!

Why do the requirements vary from parish to parish?

Although the diocese provides the policies and general guidelines for Confirmation preparation, there is much leeway for parishes in the format of their programs – number and types of gatherings, scheduling, fees for retreats and materials, parent/sponsor expectations, etc. It is important to check with your parish's Confirmation coordinator to find out what the Confirmation preparation process looks like in your parish.

If my child goes to a Catholic high school, why does he have to go to the parish for Confirmation preparation?

The parish is the place where we live our sacramental lives, so it is the logical place to prepare for the sacraments. The Catholic high school provides your child with a faith-based education. But no Catholic high school in our diocese provides preparation for the sacraments --- it is not their responsibility to do that. Our diocesan policy states that there is *one preparation program for Confirmation in the parish* for youth which includes youth who get their faith formation in the Catholic school, in the parish faith

formation program, or in a home school situation. If your child has been in the Catholic school, he does not have to attend the faith formation program for adolescents in your parish, but is invited to enroll only in the immediate preparation for Confirmation. It is important to contact your pastor, parish life director or Confirmation coordinator when your child first begins high school to find out when he is eligible to enter the immediate preparation. Since each parish structures their Confirmation preparation differently, you want to be sure you don't miss a component of it because you waited too late to inquire.

Who can be a Confirmation sponsor?

A person is eligible to be a sponsor for a Confirmation candidate if s/he

- Is at least 16 years of age
- Is a Catholic who has been fully initiated (baptized, confirmed and received Eucharist)
- Lives a life in harmony with the Catholic faith
- Is designated by the candidate and willing to take the role of sponsor
- Is neither the father or the mother of the candidate (or someone in the parental role)

The role of sponsor is not merely an honorary role just for the ceremony only. The sponsor role is very specific – s/he is a representative of the Catholic community and pledges to support the faith journey of the candidate in the Catholic community. This is why a person who is not a Catholic (even though s/he has had a positive influence through faith and witness), is not eligible to have this role. A Catholic who does not go to Mass or practice his/her faith should also not be considered for this responsibility. Sometimes a parish will require a sponsor to provide a letter from his/her parish church affirming their membership and participation in that community. If the sponsor meets all the above criteria, then he/she may be a relative, but not a parent (or not someone who acts in the parental role – e.g., a step-parent or a grandparent raising the candidate). The sponsor does not have to be the same gender as the candidate. Even though the minimum age of the sponsor can be 16, it is advisable that s/he be someone with more life experience who can act as a faith guide, not a peer. If the candidate's baptismal godparent meets the criteria for sponsor, s/he is actually the ideal sponsor, since Baptism and Confirmation are closely related sacraments.

Why does my child have to wait until the later years of high school to be confirmed in our diocese, while some other dioceses confirm at younger ages?

It is true that the minimum age for candidacy for Confirmation varies throughout the country. Each diocesan bishop has been given permission by the Vatican to choose a minimum age or age-range between age 7 and 16. In our diocese, Bishop Hubbard has chosen older adolescence, with the minimum being age 15. Anyone who moves here from another diocese is now under the regulations of the Albany Diocese, even if the preparation for Confirmation was already done at a younger age.

Can my child with special needs be confirmed?

Absolutely. Any person who has been baptized has a right to Confirmation. A person with developmental disabilities or special needs is no exception. It is important to meet with the pastor or the catechetical leader in the parish to help them know your child's needs and abilities. With that in mind, they will arrange for any adaptations that need to be made in the preparation. The Office of Evangelization, Catechesis and Family Life has a Consultant for Catechesis for Persons with Disabilities and Special Needs who will be happy to help the parish make the adaptations needed. Wherever possible, your child should be welcome to participate according to his/her ability in all aspects of the Confirmation program.

Do I have to be confirmed to be married in the Catholic Church?

If the intention of your question is "Will I be refused a sacramental marriage in the Catholic Church without having been confirmed?", the short answer is no. It is strongly encouraged, but not mandated, that a person be confirmed before marriage. But the question is not answered quite that simply, nor should it be answered out of a sense of obligation.

When a couple chooses to be married in the Catholic Church, it is assumed that they are choosing to live their faith in their home and in the parish community, to call one another to holiness, and to bring up children in the Catholic faith. The question then becomes, "Why would a person want to be married in the faith that they are not confirmed in?" That is certainly something for a couple to seriously consider. Often maturing young adults will see their faith life and Confirmation in another light than when they were faced with the option of being confirmed in adolescence. However, it is not necessary to rush through Confirmation preparation in order to be confirmed prior to their wedding date. If a couple is ready and willing to profess the faith of the community, then they should seek to celebrate the sacrament of Confirmation after they are married.

How strongly should I insist my child be confirmed?

Parents have a huge influence on children and teens. At baptism, parents promise to guide their children in faith and bring them up to practice the faith. You have every right to expect that they will participate in faith formation, so that they can have a basis on which to make decisions about their own faith journey as they mature. It is always our hope that our children embrace the faith by choosing to be confirmed and continue their journey of discipleship with the Catholic community. We can encourage, guide and be models of faith ourselves. However, we must never coerce anyone into receiving a Sacrament nor manipulate a person into being confirmed if s/he is not open to it. The Sacrament of Confirmation is a gift, and one must be open to receive it. If you sense there is something blocking that in your child, it is best to discuss this with your pastor, parish life director or Confirmation coordinator.