

CATHOLIC
PARENT
KNOWHOW

PREPARING YOUR CHILD FOR...

Confirmation

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The Gifts of
the Holy Spirit

YOUR QUESTIONS

ANSWERED

Intensifying the Gifts of the Holy Spirit

Dear Parents,

"Do you believe in God?" the catechist asked.

The young person enthusiastically replied, "Yes!"

"Why do you believe in God?"

The young person pondered a moment: "I don't know why. I think it runs in the family."

You wouldn't be reading this booklet if your daughter or son wasn't already growing up in an atmosphere where believing in, knowing, and experiencing God "just runs in the family." It is part of the fabric of your family life.

This time of confirmation, completing baptism, now gives your whole family a chance to reflect with your son or daughter on the pervasive importance of our Catholic life. Confirmation is a celebration of the ongoing power of the already-present Holy Spirit in our lives, the Spirit first received in baptism. Confirmation deepens and intensifies the gifts of the Spirit.

As the Church helps young people and their families prepare for the sacrament today, consider two of the many realities that underlie all that is offered:

➤ *Confirmation is a sacrament of initiation.* It's all about the beginning of our life of following Jesus. Our formation (ongoing learning about our faith), prayer, community worship, and life of service are just beginning.

➤ *Sacraments do not affect just the candidate; sacraments affect the entire community.* That is why you as parents, and the candidate's whole family, are invited and encouraged to be involved. That is why so many things happen within the parish community. We grow and go to God together. There are no "personal" or "private" sacraments.

The best preparation your son or daughter can be given at this time of confirmation is to be surrounded by the day-to-day living of the Faith by you, the family, and by the adults in the parish faith community to which you belong. Children grow naturally into full membership in the community where the faith is really lived.

Take advantage and thoroughly enjoy this special moment in your family's life! The conversation times, rituals, and traditions can last a lifetime. May this time be a graced moment of prayer, learning, and service — not only for your child, but also for all of you together. May your family experience the wonder of being surrounded by the Holy Spirit's constant comfort and challenge.

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Sacramental Preparation for Confirmation

Sacramental catechesis is not exactly the same as religious education or religious instruction. Rather, it is a unique ministry in the Church. It is a total process of faith development that includes:

- Growth in personal prayer.
- Intense involvement in a faith community (which involves community, worship, service, and message).
- An awareness of our encounter with Jesus in the sacramental celebration.

This catechetical process involves not only the individuals who are preparing to celebrate the sacrament, but also their families and the entire parish community.

What is happening, then, in the “structured” portions of the confirmation programs for our children and youth? In reality, these programs are a continuation, an intensification, of what has already been happening — and will continue to occur — for the rest of their lives, because our growth in the faith never ends.

The programs offered by our parishes today are not things to do to “get confirmed.” Confirmation is not earned. God invites; the Holy Spirit is a gift. How could we say no? Surrounded by a vibrant parish and nourished by faith-filled parents, young people will desire

to belong, to be a part of this faith-filled community, to complete their initiation, and to continue to grow and deepen their relationship with Jesus and his Church.

Perhaps the words of the *Catechism of the Catholic Church* concerning the preparation for confirmation also can give us a compelling vision and direction:

“Preparation for Confirmation 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. To this end catechesis for Confirmation should strive to awaken a sense of belonging to the Church of Jesus Christ, the universal Church as well as the parish community. The latter bears special responsibility for the preparation of confirmands.”

(1309; cf. *Ordo Confirmationis*, Introduction, 3)

Thus, the *Catechism* emphasizes two themes:

- Belonging to the Church — the worldwide Church and the parish community.
- Familiarity with the Holy Spirit.

Therefore, that is why you will find many of these elements in the opportunities provided for your confirmation candidate:

- Increased prayer and worship opportunities with the parish community.
- Mentors, guides, and witnesses from the parish.
- Special activities and celebration of rituals with parish liturgies that alert the parishioners to their role as supporters of those to be confirmed.
- Opportunities to assume responsibility in the ministry and service aspects of parish life.
- Study of the gifts and fruits of the Spirit.
- An understanding of the role of the Holy Spirit in the life of the individual and of the Church.
- Study of the ritual of confirmation, with its symbols and Scripture readings.
- Time for prayer, reflection, and discussion on the presence and working of the Spirit in our lives.

Scripture Readings

Suggested for Use in the Celebration of Confirmation

There are several options for the Scripture readings for the celebration of the Sacrament of Confirmation. These are only a few of them. During the time of preparation for celebrating confirmation, you may want to add reading one of these Scripture passages to Grace at meals or during evening prayers.

Because confirmation is a sacrament of initiation — a beginning sacrament — of our journey of faith, it is also appropriate that parents (and families) use these Scripture readings for prayer and reflection for years to come. The journey never ends.

Isaiah 42:1–3 (The servant: A light to the nations)

This is the first of four “Servant Songs” in the Book of Isaiah. The Lord sings to honor the servant.

- Hear the Lord say to you, “My chosen, in whom my soul delights.” How does that make you feel? Why does God say that to you?
- God’s servant is compassionate and gentle with the “bruised reed” and the “dimly burning wick” — the broken and the weak of the world. How have you (how can you) care for those around you who are hurting? What about those that you don’t know who are hurting? How can you reach out to them?

Ezekiel 36:24–28 (Sprinkled with clean water, we are given a new heart and a new spirit)

This Old Testament reading reminds us that God will remove our hearts of stone and give us hearts of flesh.

- What shape is your heart in right now?
- When does your heart become like a stone?
- How do you keep your heart soft,

loving, and open to the Spirit, so that it reaches out in respect, care, and kindness to God’s people, to all you meet?

Romans 8:14–17 (Daughters and sons of God through adoption)

The Holy Spirit gives us a new relationship with God as his adopted children. We can address God intimately (“Abba”), and we are heirs with Christ.

- Would you describe your relationship with God as a close friendship? What is your favorite name for God? Your favorite adjective to describe God?
- Is your relationship with God different today than it was two months ago? Two years ago? Four years ago? How? What did you do to cause it to change?
- Would you like your relationship with God to be closer? What might you do in order for this to happen?
- When you experience hard times, do these bring you closer to God or cause you to drift away?

1 Corinthians 12:4–13 (One body with many members, many gifts)

Paul reminds us that unity, even in the midst of our differences, is central to who we are. He sees in the community different gifts but always the same Spirit, different works and deeds but always the same God working through them, many people to be baptized — Greeks and Jews, slaves and free — but all part of the same body.

- What are your gifts? How does God work through you to touch others with his love and courage?
- Tell your spouse and your children about the spiritual gifts and Christ-like qualities you notice in them.
- How did you experience God this week through someone’s gifts?

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Some Questions

What’s a confirmation name all about?

A meaningful tradition for many confirmation candidates is the decision to choose a confirmation name, such as a saint or biblical hero’s name. The choosing of an additional name is not required, however. In fact, today the Church encourages confirmation candidates to use their baptismal name. Because confirmation is the completion of our baptism, it is an opportunity to reaffirm our initiation and to strengthen the connection between these two sacraments by using again our baptismal name.

What are confirmation sponsors for?

The Church sees three roles for confirmation sponsors. First, they are role models in the Faith. Because of this,

Impressions with Conversations

TALK About it

Tell each family member which gift of the Holy Spirit you see most alive in him/her. Then invite each family member to share which gift they would like to develop more deeply in his/her life in the year to come.

Invite each family member to share his/her responses to:

- Someone in my life whom I think is a good Christian is _____, because _____.
- One thing I really like about being Catholic is _____.
- My favorite place to pray is _____; my favorite time of the day to pray is _____; my favorite way to pray is _____.

Share with each other:

- If I could ask God three questions, they would be _____.
- Is there something you are worried about, something that is challenging you? Can the gift of the Spirit help you? How?
- When and how have you sensed the Spirit at work in the world? In your life?

At the end of the day, choose one of these sets of questions to share as a family:

- When today was I most thankful? Least thankful?
- When did I give the most love today? The least love?
- When did I feel closest to God and others?

Over the years, there have been a variety of studies done to identify the traits of a strong family, all of which agree that the parents who encourage healthy communication have the greatest impact on their children. Use this time of preparation to make a lasting impression.

Use the following discussion starters as a springboard for family discussions.

Don't be limited by these questions. Include questions concerning current events in your family's life, in your and your child's faith experiences, and in the lives of people around you.

Don't stop the conversations when preparation for confirmation is over! You've just begun. Continue the sharing of thoughts, feelings, and dreams. Such sharing feeds our life of faith!

s You May Have

the Church asks that a sponsor be at least sixteen years of age, be fully initiated in the Church (having celebrated the Sacraments of Baptism, Confirmation, and Eucharist), and be a practicing member of the Church. He or she does not have to be the same gender as the confirmation candidate.

Second, a sponsor is a companion on the candidate's faith journey. Ideally, this should/could be one of the candidate's baptismal godparents.

Finally, the confirmation sponsors witness for the candidates before the Church. Their

presence at the confirmation celebration publicly proclaims the candidates' readiness to become fully initiated members of the Catholic community.

Why are retreats and service projects required for confirmation?

Hopefully, they're not "required." That's not what our faith journey and sacraments are all about — hoops to jump through to

"earn" something. Neither are our faith formation, catechetical, or sacramental preparation processes anything like school ... so, hopefully, "requirements" aren't a part of them.

At the same time, the Church, and your parish, take very seriously the role of assisting you and your child to prepare for the celebration (and living out) of the Sacrament of Confirmation.

➤ Sacraments aren't something you do because someone else says you have to.

➤ Sacraments aren't magic, meaning they will not effect something within us unless we cooperate and work with the grace that they have bestowed.

➤ Sacraments aren't something to just get out of the way, over and done with.

➤ Sacraments are serious encounters with Almighty God. Sacraments are God's



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actions in our lives and our responses to those sacred actions. We must not minimize them in any way.

Therefore, your parish offers you and your child opportunities. They really aren't "new" opportunities, new things to do — they are the way of life you have been involved in all along because they are central to what it means to be a baptized Catholic. During this time of confirmation preparation, they might be more concentrated and more reflective: opportunities for learning, discussion, prayer and worship, and service with the community — those realities that are the life of a Catholic now and forever. So these aren't things you "have to do to get confirmed"; this is the way of the baptized Catholic.

What if my child decides not to be confirmed at this time?

Sacraments are not "things" that happen on someone else's timetable. Fortunately or unfortunately (and it is debated continually), we have placed many of our sacraments into "grade levels." But that isn't necessarily what our faith journey is about or how God works in our lives (according to grade levels). A given diocese will celebrate confirmation at a certain age, yet in the United States, the bishops have determined that the age for confirmation is anywhere between seven and seventeen.

Sacraments are celebrations that show God has first loved us, celebrations of God's action in our lives — and then our response to that. It is crucial that we surround our young people with a supportive, vibrant faith-filled community — in their homes and parishes — which enables them to enthusiastically respond to God's action. "How could we not receive this gift?" should be their response.

A thriving faith community that prays, learns, and serves together, that asks the searching questions, that walks the journey of faith together as a pilgrim church will, hopefully, help young people (all people) experience the constant presence and action of God in their lives. This will overflow, for our young people, into the desire to celebrate the richness of the Church's sacramental life together, a way to know and experience, in unique moments as a community, God's love for us.

Let's continue as parents and parishes to create the atmosphere and nurture the soil — through our home life, confirmation programs, and parish communities — so that our young people will always be open to God's action in their lives.

How to Talk to your Child About the Seven Gifts of the

Holy Spirit



Wisdom

Definition: This is a gift that comes about over time. A wise person has learned how to look at life from all perspectives, to see and understand the "whole picture" of a situation. Someone who is wise can see how everything is part of God's love. (*Wisdom 7:14; Sirach 1:23; 14:20–27; Proverbs 2:1–6*)

Discussion: This gift ties all the rest together. Wisdom enables us to see things as God sees them and to see God present in our everyday lives. When have we seen others (in our family, in our world, in the Communion of Saints) act with wisdom? How do we, with the grace of the Spirit, develop wisdom in our lives?

Understanding

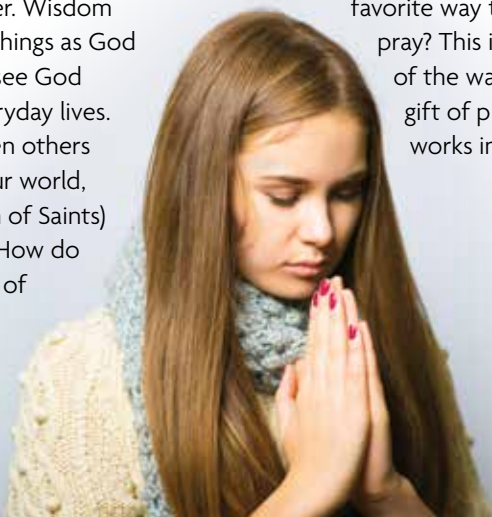
Definition: The ability to see from another person's "heart," to feel the feelings of others and to put these before our own. (*Wisdom 3:9; Proverbs 24:3*)

Discussion: Have you had the experience of feeling that another person absolutely knows how you feel? This is the gift of understanding. Name some ways that understanding is needed in the world.

Piety or Reverence

Definition: The gift of piety is honoring God and God's people. A pious person worships God. (*Psalms 118:23–24, 29; Sirach 42:15–25; 43*)

Discussion: What is your favorite way to pray? This is one of the ways the gift of piety works in you.





Wonder & Awe

Definition: The fear of the Lord. The ability to be amazed by things in life, to be awake to the realization that we are always in God's presence. The gift of wonder and awe tells us that God is infinitely larger than us and created the beauty of the universe, but he also listens to us, cares for us, and loves us beyond all measure. (*Isaiah 29:23; Sirach 32:13; 43:28–35*)

Discussion: Have you ever had a time when you strongly felt God's presence?



Knowledge

Definition: The ability to find important information and facts and to look at them objectively and intelligently. (*Proverbs 19:27; 24:3–5*)

Discussion: The more knowledge you have about the world, the better you will be able to make wise decisions and assist others. Can you think of a person you respect because he or she is knowledgeable and acts for the good because of this knowledge?



Courage or Fortitude

Definition: The ability to follow our convictions and consciences no matter what the cost. Courage gives us the strength to do what is right in spite of obstacles and difficulties. (*Psalms 118:6, 13–14; Philippians 1:12–14*)

Discussion: Can you think of a time when you managed to get through a difficult situation? This is the gift of fortitude at work.

Counsel

Definition: The gift in which a person is open to others' insights about a problem and to working with them to solve that problem. (*Sirach 32:16–19; 37:7–15; Proverbs 15:22*)

Discussion: Have you had an experience when someone listened to you and then helped you make choices that would help solve your problem? That is counsel in action.

Share the Twelve Fruits of the Holy Spirit with Your Child

The fruits of the Holy Spirit show the effects of the Holy Spirit's gifts to us. Just as a tree produces fruit when properly nourished and cared for, people who utilize the Spirit's gifts show concrete evidence of their faithfulness.

Kindness: The strength of Christ's love, which leads us to a greater service to one another.

Joy: The ability to celebrate life, even in the midst of pain and confusion, because of deep, spiritual reservoirs.

Peace: Quiet, inner confidence in God's care that keeps us from feeling uptight and anxious.

Patience: A staying power that enables us to handle frustration and conflict without becoming unduly edgy or annoyed.

Goodness: A real desire to live a holy life, to set a good example.

Generosity: When we appreciate all that God has given, we naturally feel like sharing with others. Check into local ministries and charities where you and your child can share your time and talents together for the benefit of others.

Gentleness: An inner strength that permits us to be gentle in our relationships, open, and aware of our own abilities without having to make a show of them.

Faithfulness: As followers of Jesus, we honor our commitments to God and to others. Model faithfulness by keeping your promises to family members, and encourage your child to do the same.

Modesty: When the Spirit of Love fills our lives, we appreciate the dignity of all people and our own dignity, and we no longer need to impress other people with our power, degrees, connections, or wealth.

Self-Control: Learning to be disciplined with our time, energy, and desires in order to reflect our spiritual values and priorities.

Chastity: The ability to form loving and caring friendships, which helps us to act appropriately with our gift of sexuality.

Charity: Quick to sense the needs of the people with whom we work and live and to respond as Jesus would.

FAMILY PRAYERS

Loving God,
You planned to center everything in Christ
and to draw us into his all-embracing love.
Guide us, especially _____, who is preparing
to celebrate confirmation,
strengthen us in our vocation,
build us into the kingdom of your Son,
and seal us with the Spirit of your promise.
We ask this through Christ our Lord.
Amen.

— adapted from *The Rite of Baptism*

Breathe in me, O Holy Spirit,
that my thoughts may all be holy.
Act in me, O Holy Spirit,
that my work too may be holy.
Draw my heart, O Holy Spirit,
that I love but what is holy.
Strengthen me, O Holy Spirit,
to defend all that is holy.
Guide me then, O Holy Spirit,
that I always may be holy.
— St. Augustine



Come, Holy Spirit,
fill the hearts of your faithful
and kindle in them the fire of your love.
Send forth your Spirit and
they shall be created,
and you will renew the face of the earth.
Let us pray.

Lord,
By the light of the Holy Spirit
you have taught the hearts of your faithful.
In the same Spirit
help us to relish what is right
and always rejoice in your consolation.
We ask this through Christ our Lord.
Amen.
— Prayer to the Holy Spirit

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