AN APPROACH TOWARDS CONFIRMATION PREPARATION IN LIGHT OF
RECENT CHURCH DOCUMENTS AND CHANGES IN THE LIFE
OF THE CHURCH

* Sections 1 & 6 of the SACRAMENT OF CONFIRMATION GUIDELINES,
Archdiocese of San Francisco, October 1980 have been elimina-
ted from this document as well as the "Check List" for
"Parish Preparations for the Celebration of the Sacrament of
Confirmation."

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INTRODUCTION

The aggiornamento ("up-dating") begun by Pope John XXIII
has dramatically touched all levels of the Church's life. The
sacramental awareness of the Christian community has been
broadened and deepened. Structures and processes have been re-
vitalized to better fit today's needs.

Recent official guidelines of the Church regarding the
Sacraments of Initiation - Baptism, Confirmation and the
Eucharist - mandate such a renewal. In essential areas of
faith-understanding, no substantial change has taken place.
In the area of pastoral practice, however, significant develop-
ments have occurred. This is clearly seen in two aspects of
Confirmation: the question of proper age, and its relationship
to the life of the parish community.

The law of the Latin Rite Church requires that Confirma-
tion not be celebrated prior to the age of seven.

From a strictly doctrinal viewpoint, no single phase of
maturity is most suitable for the reception of Confirmation.
The thinking and practice of the Church reflects the convic-
tion that every level of human growth has its own unique spiri-
tual physiognomy, each equal in the eyes of God. Children even
at the first "age of reason" are seen as capable of fundamental
acts of "spiritual maturity," of entering into a true personal
relationship with their Heavenly Father, and of achieving au-
thentic holiness. Their faith is called to realize itself
through acts of ministry in the home or community in specific
ways which can never be duplicated by others who possess greater
physical or psychological maturity.

For this reason, the celebration of Confirmation is per-
mitted with the consent of the local bishop, to take place at
various age levels provided that the nature of the Confirma-
tion catechesis, the liturgical celebration, and the insertion
of those confirmed into the life of the community is appro pri-
ately adapted. When and how it is celebrated is, perhaps,
better based not so much on the growth level of the candidates,
but rather on the ability of the parish and Archdiocesan Church
to make of this event an effective symbol of the full incorpora-
tion of the candidate into the visible life of the community.

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(No specific age for Confirmation is mentioned in the Guidelines in order to place primary emphasis on the process of preparation for Confirmation. Neighboring parishes would need to be in communication with each other to insure cooperation in the implementation of their respective programs).

The question may come to mind: "Why must changes in the Sacrament of Confirmation occur?" The fact is that the revision of the Sacraments of Initiation is the result of changes, not with the sacraments, but with our parish communities themselves.

For much of the history of the Church, the local community represented a simple and stable society where almost every person living within the parish boundaries was a baptized, confirmed and practicing Catholic. Individual faith commitment may have varied. But externally, patterns of receiving the sacraments, of expressing this faith, of devotional life were fixed. In this type of "village Christianity" families were tied together through marriage and similarity of life style in such a way that the practice of religion was seen as both necessary and natural. Accordingly, a review of the basic elements of the Creed and knowledge of a few simple prayers was judged as a completely adequate preparation for receiving Confirmation from the bishop.

Traces of such communities can still be found in rural settings or in close knit ethnic groups. By and large, however, the modern Eucharistic community is markedly different.

The living community of faith can no longer be equated with civil society at large, or even with those who have been received into the Church through Baptism. It is located rather among a more limited number of individuals whose lives express the seal of the Spirit through the example of personal holiness, in building the Christian family, by involvement in various cells of prayer and action within the community, all of which find their focus and source in the weekly Eucharistic banquet.

If the extension of this living community of faith is more limited today than in the past, the community is at the same time a more intense, dynamic reality, with a mission to serve all those joined to it by Baptism and society as a whole. For all these reasons, the initiation into the fullness of this community is now, and will continue to be, a much more demanding, all-embracing process than it has been in previous times.

The meaning of confirmation, however, would be foreshortened if viewed solely in the context of the parish community. As is true for every sacrament, Confirmation's source and goal is the Church Universal, an incarnate yet mysterious reality, 

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transcending boundaries of time and space. This Church takes
form on the local level as a diocese, a Eucharistic assembly
of parish communities joined in faith and charity with their
bishop. In such instances, as Vatican II tells us, "is truly
present and active, the Church of Christ, one, holy, catholic
and apostolic." (Christus Dominus, 11)

The presence of the bishop at Confirmation is a reminder
of the broader dimensions of the sacrament. He is the first
priest and pastor of that larger ecclesial community toward
which the gifts of the Spirit are directed. As a member of the
college of bishops in communion with the successor of Peter, he
is a witness to the abiding presence of the Spirit received by
the apostles at Pentecost.

Approach to be used in the Preparation of Candidates for the
Sacrament of Confirmation

"The intimate connection which Confirmation has with the
whole of Christian Initiation is to be more clearly set
forth." (SC, 71)

"Full initiation into the Church occurs by stages. The
Rite of Christian Initiation of Adults provides a norm
for catechetical as well as liturgical practice in this
regard. The intimate relationship of the sacraments of
Baptism, Confirmation, and Eucharist should be emphasized
in the catechesis of both adults and children." (National
Catechetical Directory, 115)

"As with Baptism, catechesis for Confirmation takes place
within the parish community, which has an obligation to
participate in the catechetical preparation of those to
be confirmed. The parish is the faith community into whose
life of prayer and worship they will be more fully initia-
ted. It also embodies the message to which they are to
respond and gives witness, in service, to the faith they
profess. The parish should strive to catechize on behalf
of "obedience to Christ" and "loyal testimony to Him"
through the power of the Spirit."

"As the primary educators of their children, parents, along
with sponsors, are to be intimately involved in the cate-
chesis for Confirmation. This will help them renew and
strengthen their own faith, besides enabling them to set a
better example for their children or godchildren. The pa-
rental program is an important element in planning for Con-
firmation for children and young people." (National Cate-
chetical Directory, 119)
Elements of a Parish Catechetical Program for Children and Youth - Including Preparation for the Sacrament of Confirmation - Modeled on the Rite of Christian Initiation of Adults (RCIA):

Evangelization and Pre-catechumenate:

Purpose: "This is the time of evangelization: in faith and consistency the living God is proclaimed, as is Jesus Christ whom He sent for the salvation of all. Thus, those hearts opened by the Holy Spirit may believe and be freely converted to the Lord. They sincerely adhere to Him who is the way, the truth and the life, and who fulfills all their spiritual expectations, indeed goes far beyond." (R.C.I.A. 9)

Relationship to Programs for Children and Youth:

Children are first exposed to an understanding of God through their parents. Parishes need to look for ways to help parents reflect on their own understanding of their faith so that they can adequately proclaim it to their children. Also, since young children usually learn more through their experience than through their intellect, the God they experience when they come to Church and meet the Christian community has a great influence on their understanding of the message of salvation. Parishes need to be attentive to the image of God and His people they proclaim by their actions.

Catechumenate:

Purpose: The Catechumenate is an extended period during which the candidates are given pastoral formation to help their faith become living, conscious and active. The period of time suitable for the catechumenate depends upon the grace of God and other circumstances, such as the type of program, the number of catechists, the cooperation of the candidates, and the help of the local community. The program of formation takes place in four ways:

A fitting formation given in stages and presented integrally, accommodated to the liturgical year and enriched by celebrations of the word, leads the candidates to a suitable knowledge of dogmas and precepts and also to an intimate understanding of the mystery of salvation in which they desire to share.

Familiar with living the Christian way of life and helped by the example and support of godparents and
the whole community of the faithful, the candidates will learn to pray to God more easily, to witness to the faith, to be constant in the expectation of Christ in all things, to follow supernatural inspiration in their deeds, and to exercise charity toward neighbors to the point of self-renunciation.

1212.23 By suitable liturgical rites, the Church community helps the candidates on their journey, cleanses them little by little, and strengthens them with God's blessing.

1212.24 Since the Church's life is apostolic, candidates should also learn how to work actively with others to spread the Gospel and build up the Church by the testimony of their lives and the profession of their faith. (cf. R.C.I.A., 19)

Relationship to Programs for Children and Youth: Programs for the catechesis of children and youth normally take place in Schools, Religious Education-CCD Programs, Programs of Youth Ministry, and alternate programs like "Family" programs. It is important that these programs be well-rounded and integrated programs, including the four elements mentioned above. (For further direction in this we call your attention to the National Catechetical Directory, Sharing the Light of Faith, as well as A Vision for youth Ministry published by the United States Catholic Conference.)

1212.3 Period of Purification and Illumination:

Purpose: "The second stage of initiation begins the period of purification and enlightenment or illumination, marked by a more intense preparation of heart and spirit. At this stage the Church makes the 'election,' that is, the choice and admission of the candidates who because of their dispositions are worthy to take part in the next celebration of the Sacraments of Initiation..." (R.C.I.A., 22)

"Before the election is celebrated, the candidates are expected to have a conversion of mind and morals, a sufficient knowledge of Christian teaching, and a sense of faith and charity. A consideration of their worthiness is also required..." (R.C.I.A., 23)

"During this period, a more intense preparation of the mind, which involves spiritual recollection more than
catechesis, is intended to purify minds and hearts by the examination of conscience and by repentance and also to enlighten those minds and hearts by a deeper knowledge of Christ the Savior." (R.C.I.A., 25)

Relationship to Programs for Children and Youth: These selections from the R.C.I.A. give a model for clarifying the relationship between regular programs of formation and programs specifically concerned with preparation of candidates for Confirmation.

Students are to receive full formation in the faith - both as regards to life and knowledge of Christian teaching - in regular catechetical programs (School, Religious Education-CCD, Youth Ministry, etc.).

Only when a person has reached a stage of readiness does he/she choose - and is he/she chosen - to enroll as a candidate for the reception of the Sacrament. It is presupposed that candidates for the Sacraments already have a sound grounding in the faith. Thus the program of preparation is able to be more a spiritual recollection than a catechesis.

Period of Post-Baptismal Catechesis or Mystagogia:

Purpose: "The community and the neophytes move forward together, meditating on the Gospel, sharing in the Eucharist, and performing works of charity. In this way they understand the paschal mystery more fully and bring it into their lives more and more.... This new frequenting of the sacraments enlightens the neophytes' understanding of the Holy Scriptures and also increases their knowledge of men and develops the experience of the community itself. As a result, the relationship of the neophyte with the rest of the faithful becomes easier and more beneficial. The time of the post-baptismal catechesis is of great importance so that the neophytes, helped by their sponsors, may enter into a closer relationship with the faithful and bring them renewed vision and a new impetus." (R.C.I.A., 37 & 39)

Relationship to Programs for Children and Youth: The reception of the Sacrament of Confirmation is not to be seen as the end of the formation process. The parish community needs to provide means by which the newly confirmed are helped to live out their new relationship with the community and with Jesus. Programs of Youth Ministry would be considered an important and necessary follow-up to insure that the newly confirmed have the opportunity to live out their new relationship to the Church and to God.

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Section 3

SPECIFIC GUIDELINES FOR CONFIRMATION PROGRAMS
SPECIFIC GUIDELINES FOR CONFIRMATION PROGRAMS

For any guidelines that are developed for a diocese, the most difficult aspect is to make them concrete and practical. People in parishes are looking for specific helps. At the same time, programs need to be tailored to the specific needs of the parish.

The Archdiocese of San Francisco is made up of people from a variety of cultures and backgrounds. Almost every parish has its own unique character because of its history and the people who comprise the parish community.

In an attempt to present something that gives direction, while at the same time is very practical and concrete, we have assembled the material into two sections. This Part III of the Archdiocesan Guidelines for Confirmation gives specific directives for Confirmation Programs. The Appendix which follows contains examples of how different parishes have implemented some of the points contained in these directives. It will be up to the leadership in each parish to decide the best way to adapt these ideas and directives to their own situation.

Prerequisite for Candidacy for Confirmation:

Before a person can be considered for acceptance as a candidate for Confirmation, i.e., admitted into a confirmation program, he/she is to have been enrolled in a regular program of catechesis for a minimum of two years (catechumenate). The catechesis is to take place during the period immediately preceding admission to candidacy so that the person has an understanding of his/her faith appropriate to his/her age. This amount of time is considered the minimum needed for the person to gain sufficient knowledge of the Christian Teaching and to integrate it into his/her life.

The program during these two years would need to include, as a minimum, formation in the following beliefs of the Church:

- Beliefs in God as Father and Creator, as one who commands our respect and reverence.

- Belief in Jesus, the Son of God, and the redeeming aspect of his life, death and resurrection.

- Belief in the Holy Spirit as the one who abides in all who are joined to God, guiding and strengthening them to live their lives in union with God.

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(Care should be taken, especially with children and youth, that God is understood as Trinity - One God in three Persons.)

- Belief in the Church as the community of believers which supports us in our life and, with the help of the Holy Spirit, guides us in our understanding and following of the message of Jesus.

- Acceptance of the characteristics of the Christian way of life which include:

  - Relationship with God - Father, Son and Spirit - expressed through a life of prayer and service.

  - Relationship to the Church community expressed through participation in the life of the Church, especially the sacraments and works of service.

  - A life guided by a deep love of God, and a love of others as Christ loved us. The Ten Commandments, the Sermon on the Mount, especially the Beatitudes and Christ's discourse at the Last Supper are seen as specific guides as to how to live this life of love. (Cf. N.C.D.#105)

These beliefs are to be treated in such a way that the students are led beyond mere knowledge to a faith that is becoming more living, conscious and active.

Acceptance as a Candidate for Confirmation (Election):

Candidacy for Confirmation is to be determined by the readiness of each person, not by the particular grade he/she is attending. The practice of linking the preparation for Confirmation to a particular grade(s) infringes upon the ability of the candidate to make a free choice. In these situations, everyone - students, parents, parishioners - expect all normal students to receive Confirmation in that grade(s). If someone does not, people judge that something is wrong.

A person is to be accepted as a candidate for the Sacrament of Confirmation when he/she accepts the invitation and decides to confirm his/her membership in the faith community of the Roman Catholic Church.

The readiness of each person will be different. For this reason, the role of the sponsors and the community is most important. The process of determining the readiness for Confirmation would include the following:

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The person expresses his/her desire to be confirmed.

The candidate is sponsored by an active member of the Church community who can attest that the person is ready. This "sponsor" can be a parent, the sponsor from Baptism, or another active member of the Church who can attest to his/her readiness.

Representatives of the parish accept the person as a candidate when they ascertain the person has the correct dispositions. The dispositions required are:

- Desire to live their lives as a Roman Catholic Christian. Some indications of this are:
  - Desire to serve God who is Father and Creator
  - Desire to love and follow Jesus who is the Word of the Father and our Redeemer
  - Desire to be a member of the Roman Catholic Faith Community in which he/she will learn the message of Jesus, be strengthened through the life of the Church (the Grace of God and the presence of others expressed and made present in the Sacraments), and become a fellow-servant of God and others by fulfilling his/her responsibilities to others.
  - Desire to receive the gift of the spirit which will help the person to live out their faith as a member of the church.

A desire that is correctly motivated. An example of this is:

- Desire to belong to the Church since he/she understands what the Church is and personally believes in this community because of the witness of parents, friends, or other members of the community.

Parishes should develop formal ways for determining the readiness of candidates for Confirmation and liturgical rites for accepting them into the preparation program. These should be adapted to the maturity and particular circumstances of the candidates.

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Program of Preparation for Confirmation (Purification & Enlightenment):

"During this period, a more intense preparation of the mind, which involves spiritual recollection more than catechesis, is intended to purify minds and hearts by the examination of conscience and by repentance and also to enlighten those minds and hearts by a deeper knowledge of Christ the Savior."
(R.C.I.A., 25)

Programs preparing candidates for Confirmation are to help the candidates reflect on their initiation into the Church Community and on the Gift of the Spirit they will receive. The length of the program will depend upon the ability of the candidates. For adult converts this lasts for the whole season of lent (6 weeks). The younger the candidates, the longer the time that is needed.

1223.1 The Sacrament of Confirmation and the Gift of the Spirit:

Candidates would be led to reflect on the following:

- What is the Sacrament of Confirmation.
- What is the Gift of the Spirit that is received.
- How the Spirit prompts us to live a life of service towards others (e.g. spiritual and corporal works of mercy).
- Do they desire the Gift of the Spirit and are they ready to follow Jesus, prompted by the Spirit.
- Why do they wish to be confirmed as a member of the Roman Catholic Church.

1223.2 The Continuation of their Initiation into the Church Community:

Candidates would be led to reflect on the following:

- What is Faith.
- What is their relationship to God.
- Who is Jesus to them.
- What does it mean to live as a Roman Catholic, especially the responsibility to be actively involved in the mission of the Church.
- Why belong to the Roman Catholic Church.

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To assist the candidates in this reflection, a retreat should be an important part of any program. It is advised that this take place at the beginning of the preparation so as to set the correct direction to the whole period of preparation.

Candidates will be better able to understand that, through Confirmation they are continuing their initiation into the Church Community, if the program takes place in a parish setting, and if there is only one program in the parish - not different/separate programs for school and CCD students.

1224  Role of the Faith Community:

- **Parents and Sponsors:** In addition to ascertaining the readiness of the candidate and sponsoring his/her candidacy for Confirmation, parents and sponsors are to take an active part in assisting the candidates prepare for the sacrament. Parents and sponsors are to be involved in the reflective period - reflecting on their own faith - sharing this faith with the candidates - assisting the candidates to reflect on their faith - and supporting them in this process.

- **Priests and Members of the Parish:** The community as a whole is to welcome and support the candidates for Confirmation. This can be done in the following ways:

  - Give example of what it means to be a Christian by the way they live and worship.
  - Participate in the ceremonies of enrollment and other celebrations that are a part of the Confirmation program.
  - Provide the necessary assistance to candidates, parents and sponsors (courses, retreats, opportunities to participate in the life of the community, etc.).
  - Support candidates through prayers and special liturgies.
  - Participate in the Confirmation ceremony.
  - Provide opportunities for study, spiritual growth, and service after the reception of Confirmation. A description of all that would be included in this is contained in A Vision of Youth Ministry (USCC 1976).

  - **WORD - Ministry of the word in relation to youth involves not only evangelization, but also catechesis in order to render faith "living, **

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conscious, and active." A creative diversity of catechetical approaches could be considered in determining the precise model that might be beneficial at any given point. As an integral part of a parish or school catechetical program, a youth retreat enables young people to experience Christian faith at a level and in a way that is seldom possible within the limitations of the more academic framework.

- WORSHIP - Incorporation into a parish faith community means involvement on a communal level in prayer and worship. A sense of prayer and involvement in liturgy may be promoted in parishes by small group prayer, days of reflection, special liturgies for youth, development of good parish liturgies, involvement of young people as lectors, extraordinary ministers of the Eucharist, and musicians, special prayer services that are youth-oriented, and spiritual formation programs that promote an understanding of prayer and ability to pray.

- CREATIVE COMMUNITY - Building new paths of communication and providing opportunities for deeper levels of sharing are part of the ministry of creating intergenerational community; they lead to a situation in which each generation learns to listen and respond to the other. As young people and adults open their lives to each other and realize their common membership in the community of faith, they establish a new basis for identity - the family of God.

- GUIDANCE AND HEALING - Family life in many instances is strained by the conflict of needs that may occur during the teenage years; often youth feel alienated from the societal structures and authority figures that influence their lives; in addition, many young people experience a deep alienation from their peers because they are "different" - racially, economically, physically, or socially. These divisions and wounds in the young person's world can be healed in Christ through the reconciling efforts of peers, family members, or a youth minister who has the confidence of the young person.

- JUSTICE AND SERVICE - Well-balanced programs that involve action, reflection, and education enable
young people to develop into responsible Christians who incorporate into their mature faith a commitment to justice and self-giving love of others.

- **ENABLEMENT** - A critical task before youth ministers today is to recognize the value of peer ministry among youth and to help young people to develop their gifts to be used in the wider community. Young people should be welcomed as co-workers in youth ministry, and programs which develop their leadership talents should have central place.

These guidelines have been prepared to help the parishes within the Archdiocese of San Francisco to find in the Sacrament of Confirmation the common oneness and mission which is the Spirit's first gift to the Church. They are meant to provide direction, however, not final answers. Each parish will need to determine the precise way these guidelines will be implemented. This will depend on the concrete situation in which it finds itself. The ultimate goal of every community is the same: to incorporate as fully as possible the baptized Christian into the life of the Eucharistic assembly.
Section 4

SUGGESTIONS ON MYSTACOGIA PROGRAM FOR THOSE WHO WERE CONFIRMED AS INFANTS
SUGGESTIONS ON MYSTAGOGIA PROGRAM FOR THOSE WHO WERE CONFIRMED AS INFANTS

Many have found the pastoral need for people, who were baptized and confirmed as infants, to celebrate solemnly their commitment to the Church at a time when they can do this for themselves.

Confirmation, since it is presently celebrated when students are in their adolescent years has been the occasion that some parishes have used for people to celebrate this commitment.

The circumstances in the Archdiocese of San Francisco, where there are a number of people who have been baptized and confirmed in infancy, provides an opportunity for pastoral experimentations to develop a recognized way in which people can solemnly celebrate their commitment to the Church community. What follows is a suggestion that parishes may want to follow as they begin to develop programs in this area.

When in the Person's Life should this Solemn Celebration take place:

The time would be up to the person, i.e., when the person is ready. However, because people of different cultures presently have traditional "coming of age" times, this would be a time to emphasize their coming of age in the Church, i.e., taking responsibility for their faith and for becoming personally involved in the mission of the Church. "Quince Años" for many Hispanic people, and the age of 16 for people of Chinese ancestry, are some examples of the cultural celebration of coming of age.

Parish leadership should be attentive to the culture of the people in the parish and ascertain the best time to prepare for and to celebrate this solemn celebration (cf. Evangelii Nuntiandi, 20).

Elements of a Parish Program to lead to a Solemn Celebration of Membership in the Church:

These programs, like the programs for preparation of Confirmation, should be modeled after the Rite of Christian Initiation of Adults. They could be part of the parish program that is preparing others for the reception of Confirmation.

Prerequisite for candidacy for the Solemn Celebration of Membership:

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Before a person can be considered for acceptance as a candidate for the Solemn Celebration of membership in the Church, he/she is to have been enrolled in a regular program of catechesis for a minimum of two years. (For details about this preparation (catechumenate), cf. Confirmation Guidelines, Part III, Section 1221).

1232.2

Acceptance as a Candidate for Solemn Celebration of Membership (Election):

A person is to be accepted as a candidate for this Solemn Celebration when he/she accepts the invitation and decides to celebrate his/her membership in the faith community of the Roman Catholic Church. (The program specified in the Confirmation Guidelines, Part III, Section 1222, can easily be adapted for these candidates).

1232.3

Program of Preparation for Solemn Celebration of Membership (Purification & Enrichment):

As in the program for those preparing for Confirmation, this period would involve spiritual recollection more than catechesis (cf. Confirmation Guidelines, Part III, Section C.). While those preparing for Confirmation may spend most of their time preparing for the reception of the sacrament, those preparing for their solemn celebration of membership would spend most of their time reflecting on what it means to be a Roman Catholic Christian. For example, they would reflect on:

- What is Faith?

- What is the meaning of their having been initiated into the Faith Community of the Roman Catholic Church?

- What is the life giving Gift of the Spirit that they have received?

- What is their relationship to God?

- Who is Jesus to them?

- What does it mean to live as a Roman Catholic Christian, especially the responsibility to be actively involved in the mission of the Church?
1232.4

Ceremony of Solemn Celebration of Membership:

It is recommended that the Solemn Celebration take place in the presence of the bishop during celebration of Mass. In addition to giving more dignity to the celebration, it more fittingly would signify the person's membership in the Church as the Bishop is the first priest and pastor of the local Church (diocese).

This could be done at the time of the celebration of Confirmation. Those who had been confirmed as infants would make a solemn profession of faith which would be accepted formally by the Bishop. (Parishes may want to adapt the Rite of Reception of Baptized Christians into Full Communion with the Catholic Church for this Ceremony.).

1232.5

Provision for Active Involvement in the Mission of the Church:

Parishes would need to provide ways for those who have solemnly celebrated their membership in the Church to be actively involved in the mission of the Church. (For those suggested areas of involvement, cf. Confirmation Guidelines, Part III, Section 1224).

NOTE: As this is a new area of pastoral activity and experimentation, parishes are asked to be in communication with the diocesan offices and other parishes so that all can work together to develop a pastoral activity that will be beneficial to the diocese as a whole.