

# Guidelines for Preparation for the Sacrament of Confirmation

## Confirmation and Mission

The Church by her very nature is missionary. Her members are called to go out and bring into the Church those who are lost “like sheep without a shepherd” (Mt. 9:36). However, such a mission is not possible if there is not, first and foremost, a culture of discipleship. “The Church in our archdiocese must become a place where the path of conversion and discipleship is clearly marked and easy to access. We need to ensure that our parishes and schools are places whose primary task is to foster an encounter with Christ and assist all to navigate the path of discipleship” (Archbishop Coakley, *Go Make Disciples*, 2019).

Confirmation and its immediate preparation, if their purpose is to be truly understood, must be viewed in the context of authentic missionary discipleship. Preparation for confirmation, as for all the sacraments, provides an intentional space and time for authentic disciples to be born. Such ripe conditions, like soil, must be cultivated to bear the fruit which God desires!

In this document, the archdiocese seeks to provide the necessary guidance for cultivating a culture of discipleship through the Confirmation preparation process that will contribute to raising up lifelong missionary disciples. It is not up to the candidates and parish leaders alone to do this; intimate involvement on the part of their families, especially their parents, and the larger parish community is necessary.

## Purpose of Confirmation

It has become commonplace to view the Sacrament of Confirmation as a choice to become an adult in the Church. This is far from the truth. Instead, “as a sacrament, God offers Confirmation as a free gift that is actually more about God confirming ‘us’ as his children, not us confirming our faith in God” (Archbishop Coakley). In Confirmation, God freely pours out His graces upon the baptized as part of his love and desire for communion with us. “The baptized become perfectly bound to the Church and are enriched with a special strength of the Holy Spirit. Hence, they are, as true witnesses of Christ, more strictly obliged to spread and defend the faith by word and deed” (CCC 1285).

Viewed in this proper lens, Confirmation is all the more necessary for all baptized Catholics. Not only is it the completion of baptismal grace, but it also provides those necessary additional graces that make authentic missionary discipleship possible. Receiving Confirmation, then, has a powerful impact upon one’s discipleship and the missionary efforts of the Church.

## Age

Although maturity in faith does not denote any specific age, there is a normative age for the reception of Confirmation within the archdiocese. Those baptized as infants are to be confirmed within their 6<sup>th</sup> or 7<sup>th</sup> grade years of school. Confirmation is to be done no earlier than 6<sup>th</sup> grade and should be completed prior to beginning their 8<sup>th</sup> grade year of school. The goal of the rest of this section is to explain the decision to make this the normative age in our archdiocese.

The decision for 6th grade to be the normative age group comes after prayerful discernment upon reviewing the work of the *Sacramental Preparation Revision Task Force*



Go Make Disciples

EVANGELIZATION AND CATECHESIS  
ARCHDIOCESE OF OKLAHOMA CITY

Version 3.0 – 6-15-21

assembled in 2019 under the leadership of Archbishop Coakley. Made up of priests, deacons, catechetical leaders, youth ministers, parents, and archdiocesan staff, the task force made the decision with the goal of bolstering a culture of mission and discipleship within the archdiocese. There were two major factors that made the need for this decision clear.

The first factor is the modern secular culture that today's young people face. Such a culture confronts them with new moral challenges that require prudent navigation. In order to assist them to make decisions in accord with God's will, they need to be equipped with all the graces available, graces offered in Confirmation. This is to avoid the situation that the archdiocese had found itself in with thousands of high schoolers without the Sacrament and, therefore, without the sacramental graces they needed to navigate today's secular world.

The second factor is the need to boost involvement in the Church and to assist families. As was stated above, it is the desire of the archdiocese to refocus on the Sacrament as God "confirming us as His children, not us confirming our faith in God" (Archbishop Coakley, *Sooner Catholic*, 9/29/20). The normative age provides a better environment for families to be more intentional in the formation of the candidates for Confirmation. Furthermore, it provides the local Church with more Confirmed disciples. With these extra graces at their disposal, it is hoped that formation and discipleship in high school will yield even greater fruit.

### **Time for Preparation**

The length of preparation for the Sacrament of Confirmation is one year. This is a change from the two-year process used previously, made with the decision to lower the age of Confirmation. This new approach requires both "proximate" and "immediate" preparation for the sacrament. There are three types of preparation involved for the Sacrament: remote, proximate, and immediate preparation. The goal of this section is to explain the purpose of each of these three types.

*Remote preparation* encompasses that time of initial formation provided by the family and parish community. These are the earliest years of the candidate's life from Baptism into their early years of elementary school. Although it is years before the candidate's reception of the Sacrament, this preparation establishes a foundation of understanding in the heart and mind of the candidate about the Holy Spirit, Pentecost, Confirmation, the Church and the life of faith. This is done primarily in the way his or her family and community prays and intentionally speaks about such topics. It also includes the many foundations laid through religious education in their early elementary school years.

*Proximate preparation* would include the more formal faith formation during the years leading up to and including the year when the candidate is actually confirmed. During this time, the home, school, and parish teaches about the Sacraments and the purpose of grace. The Holy Spirit's role in these is highlighted more specifically as well; thus, a solid foundation is laid in the heart of the candidate that can be more readily built upon as they approach the sacrament.

*Immediate preparation* includes the intentional formation specific to the Sacrament of Confirmation. We have identified four key topics that should be included with this preparation:

- a. the role of Confirmation and its connection to the other Sacraments of Initiation;



Go Make Disciples

EVANGELIZATION AND CATECHESIS  
ARCHDIOCESE OF OKLAHOMA CITY

**Version 3.0 – 6-15-21**

- b. the effects of the Sacrament of Confirmation;
- c. the actual Rite – what will happen, basic signs and symbols, etc.;
- d. the role of the Holy Spirit in living our faith – the gifts and the fruits.

During the final year of proximate preparation, that would include other ongoing religious formation, these topics should be incorporated for candidates preparing to receive the sacrament.

### **Expectations of the Candidate**

Those to be confirmed freely choose to pursue the sacrament and must be willing to participate in the Confirmation Preparation process, consisting of study, fellowship, prayer and service. Their faith in God is evidenced through their participation in the sacramental life of the Church. They need to be attending Mass regularly on Sundays and living an active Christian life. Understanding there are times when one turns away from God or fails to follow his will for us, Candidates are encouraged to celebrate the Sacrament of Reconciliation during the preparation process.

During the course of final proximate and immediate preparation, the expectations of the Candidates would be:

- Enter the journey with a willing heart and an open mind
- Commit oneself to consistent personal prayer throughout the journey
- Regular participation and attendance at sessions and religious formation classes offered by the parish or school (Excused absences would require completion of any missed work)
- Fully participate in any community service activities offered by the parish or school as part of the process
- Participate in a Confirmation retreat
- Engage with the parish or school community of other candidates on the same journey
- Maintain an open and honest relationship with one’s parent(s) and sponsor

### **Expectations of the Parent**

Parents play a critical role in the sacramental preparation process. The environment of the home, from the time the child is born and baptized, is the source of “remote preparation”. Parents model: the commitment to personal prayer, living as disciples themselves, fellowship with other believers, communal worship, and engagement with the life and mission of the parish. Parents also assume responsibility to assist their child in meeting the candidate expectations listed above. And finally, the parents become active participants in the process of preparation, as much as is realistic and possible at the parish or school. They help their child understand the experiences they are having along the journey, enter into dialogue with them about these faith experiences, pray for and with the candidate, and are willing to share their personal faith story with them. Also, parents may periodically need to step in for the sponsor at any time if they are unable to fulfill their commitment. See also the notes below on Accompaniment.



## Expectations of the Sponsor

Each candidate, with the help of their parents, is expected to choose a sponsor. This person is a mentor who, along with the candidate's parents, will accompany the young person on their faith journey. The sponsor is another adult in the life of the candidate who models the commitment to personal prayer, living as a disciple themselves, fellowshiping with other believers, communal worship, and engagement with the life and mission of the parish.

The sponsor also agrees to discuss their Catholic faith with the candidate, and participate with them in any of the program offerings from the parish or school as part of the preparation process. They support the candidate during the journey of preparation through ongoing dialogue, personal encouragement, and a willingness to listen to the concerns and hopes of the young person. The sponsor prays for and with the candidate.

According to Canon Law, the sponsor must be a confirmed, practicing Catholic, and sufficiently mature for this role. Parents cannot be Confirmation sponsors for their own children. It is greatly encouraged that the baptismal godparent also be the confirmation sponsor to more clearly solidify the connection between Baptism and Confirmation. At the Rite of Confirmation, the sponsor presents the candidate to the Archbishop for anointing. See also the notes below on Accompaniment.

## Guidelines for Immediate Preparation

According to the National Directory for Catechesis, the catechetical topics that need to be covered during this phase of preparation include:

[*National Directory for Catechesis*, pg. 122-123]

- The role Confirmation plays in increasing and deepening the grace of Baptism;
- Confirmation strengthens the baptismal conferral of the Holy Spirit in order to:
  - incorporate those confirmed more firmly to Christ;
  - strengthen their bond with the Church;
  - associate them more closely with the Church's mission;
  - increase in them the gifts of the Holy Spirit;
  - help them bear witness to the Christian faith in words and deeds;
  - [These are also listed in the "Effects of Confirmation" in the *Catechism*, #1303-1305];
- The Rite of Confirmation and its basic symbols;
- The role of the Holy Spirit, and his gifts and his fruits.

The Directory also includes the following pastoral directions:

- ensure that parents and sponsors are involved in the catechetical preparation of those being confirmed;
- teach that the bishop is the ordinary minister of the Sacrament of Confirmation;
- formation should be developmentally appropriate and include a retreat experience.



Go Make Disciples

EVANGELIZATION AND CATECHESIS  
ARCHDIOCESE OF OKLAHOMA CITY

**Version 3.0 – 6-15-21**

We would recommend a minimum of four sessions:

- a. the role of Confirmation and its connection to the other Sacraments of Initiation;
- b. the effects of the Sacrament of Confirmation;
- c. the actual Rite – what will happen, basic signs and symbols, etc.;
- d. the role of the Holy Spirit in living our faith – the gifts and the fruits.

The ultimate goal through the preparation process should be to focus on the young people. We must leverage the time of preparation for the Sacrament of Confirmation to help them grow in their relationship with God and with significant adults in their lives – primarily their parents and sponsors, but other adult leaders as well who are involved with the preparation process.

Preparation for the Sacrament of Confirmation, seen through a lens of a culture of conversion and discipleship, needs to look and feel different than what we have done in the past. Pastors, Parish staff and catechists need to think outside the box and creatively. As Pope St. John Paul II urged when he spoke of the new evangelization, our new approach must have “new ardor, new methods and new expressions.”

### **Catechesis and Formation: A Time for Encounter**

*“Come and See”* (John 1:46)

These simple words from Apostle Philip in the Gospel shed light on the goal of confirmation preparation. These words come after Nathanael inquires more about the stranger Jesus Christ. In response, rather than giving a lengthy explanation, Philip simply *invites* Nathanael to ‘come and see’, that is, to *encounter* for himself the Lord Jesus Christ. “This personal encounter is the key event in the life of every disciple that changes the direction of life as we see happen so often in the lives of the disciples recounted in the Scriptures” (USCCB Committee on Evangelization and Catechesis, *Living as Missionary Disciples*). It is to be the priority of every catechist and family charged with the candidate’s formation to facilitate an environment for this encounter. Then, and only then, is it possible for there to be authentic discipleship and mission in his or her life.

Every aspect of the candidate’s preparation needs to focus around this encounter. It is the time to encounter the Lord in the Scriptures, in the Tradition of the Church, and in the teaching magisterium of the Church (also known as the deposit of faith). Above all, however, it is the perfect time to encounter Him in intentional prayer. Many of today’s youth do not know how to pray, thus, it is the duty of their families and parish catechists to teach them how. They must learn that prayer is the foundation of their relationship with Jesus. It is only in prayer that one’s discipleship is fed and renewed each day.

Leading the candidate to this encounter only bolsters their fervor and desire for the Sacrament which they are preparing for. It then becomes, in his or her eyes, an act of love on behalf of God, an invitation to deepen the relationship that has only just begun. So that, like Philip, they may indeed ‘come’ to know the love of Jesus and ‘see’ it for themselves and thus give their “yes” to being lifelong disciples of Jesus Christ, zealous to spread the Gospel to all he or she encounters.



Go Make Disciples

EVANGELIZATION AND CATECHESIS  
ARCHDIOCESE OF OKLAHOMA CITY

**Version 3.0 – 6-15-21**

## The Family and Sponsor: Accompaniment

“*Follow Me*” (Matthew 9:9)

“The personal encounter with Christ leads one to a ‘lived’ relationship with him and growth in consistent prayer. This is the response to the encounter” (Archbishop Coakley, *Go Make Disciples 2019*). After Christ called His Apostles to “Follow Him”, He brought them into a community of other disciples who, like themselves, had encountered and come to believe the love of Christ. Jesus knew that discipleship could not be done in a vacuum. It cannot be done alone, and it is no different with the candidate for Confirmation. He or she, like the Apostles themselves, requires *accompaniment*. Others are needed to walk with the new disciple as they continue to encounter Jesus, grow in faith, and prepare to receive the gifts of the Holy Spirit.

This task falls primarily to, what Saint John Paul II called, “the domestic church”, that is, their families – parents and guardians. They are the primary evangelizers and teachers of the faith in the life of the baptized. This responsibility continues through the process of preparation for the Sacrament and is not reserved for the parish catechists alone. They are to “teach them what it means to be disciples by showing them through the witness of their own lives” and to do so with courage and willingness (Archbishop Coakley, *Go Make Disciples 2019*).

In addition, it is necessary for each candidate to have a *sponsor*. Rather than negating the family’s role in the candidate’s formation, the sponsor provides *additional* support and formation. They assist and build off of the work already being done in the family. Primarily, the sponsor is charged with *accompanying* the candidate throughout his or her formation and gives witness to the progress that is being made. This is in accord with the Church’s teachings: “Insofar as possible, there is to be a sponsor for the person to be confirmed; the sponsor is to take care that the confirmed person behaves as a true witness of Christ and faithfully fulfills the obligations inherent in this sacrament” (Can. 892).

Along with Church members accompanying us here on earth, we are also “surrounded by so great a cloud of witnesses” (Hebrews 12:1) in heaven: the communion of saints. By their lives of holiness and prayers, the candidate receives heavenly accompaniment. That is why each candidate is asked as part of the preparation process to choose a Confirmation Saint. Just as many saints changed their names when they took on their missions from God, so too does the candidate take on the name of the Saint during the Rite itself, for, they too are accepting His call to be missionary disciples. This process of researching and prayerful discerning a proper saint provides a time of reflection on the qualities of being a witness for Christ and bolsters the candidate to live out the faith in their own life.

## A Sacramental Life: Community

“*Remain in Me*” (John 15:4)

God, who is a community of persons as a Trinity, has made each person with a desire and need for community. To heed those words of Christ, “Remain in Me”, requires the candidate to



begin entering into the life of the *community* of the Church. For when the candidate enters into a relationship with Christ, he or she is also entering into a relationship with all those who are in relationship with Him. That is why during preparation for Confirmation the candidate must feel welcomed and wanted by his or her own local Church. It is necessary, then, for the family, the sponsor, and the parish community to be intentional in welcoming the candidate. Only when the candidate knows that he or she is a necessary and wanted part of the Body of Christ will he or she “remain”.

This ought to be done, first and foremost, by accompanying the candidate in developing a richer sacramental life through regular confession and frequent reception of the Eucharist. These are pivotal in cultivating the soil that will bear lifelong discipleship after Confirmation.

The Eucharist, as the source and summit of our faith, conforms the candidate’s heart to be more like that of Jesus. There in the Blessed Sacrament, Jesus Christ encounters those preparing for Confirmation. By gathering around the altar with other faithful disciples to pray and to receive the Body of Christ, the candidate engages in the core activity of the Catholic Church community: worship (Acts 2:46-47). Before the altar he or she adores the living God with all the choirs of angels and saints, and the candidate becomes one body with Jesus Christ and the members of His Body the Church.

With the Eucharist, the Sacrament of Reconciliation must be viewed as an encounter of the mercy and love of God. Far from a punitive act, the candidate comes to see the Sacrament as it truly is: a gift from God. It is the means by which the candidate is welcomed back eagerly by a merciful and loving Father into the Body of Christ.

As was stated above, the parish community must do its part outside of the Sacraments to include and readily welcome the candidate in the activities of the community. Involvement in different parish ministries is encouraged; however, the power of invitation into the individual lives of those in the community can’t be overstated. Simply the witness of living out one’s faith in the family or with friends creates a lasting impression on the candidate and encourages him or her to live out such faith.

### **The Rite: Reception of the Sacrament**

At the close of the one year of final proximate and immediate preparation, the candidate is ready to receive the Sacrament of Confirmation. The candidate is at this point in a state of grace, has personally encountered the Lord, has given his or her “yes” to following Him as an intentional disciple, and is ready to go forth sealed with the Holy Spirit to further Christ’s Church through evangelization.

The normative location for the administration of the Sacrament is the home parish of the candidate. The Archbishop is the sole administer of the Sacrament, unless for some special circumstance, he delegates another priest. On that day, the sponsor and the Pastor of the Parish



*Go Make Disciples*

EVANGELIZATION AND CATECHESIS  
ARCHDIOCESE OF OKLAHOMA CITY

**Version 3.0 – 6-15-21**

account for the readiness of the candidate and presents him or her to the Archbishop to receive Confirmation. In response, the Archbishop anoints the forehead of the baptized with sacred chrism oil, together with the laying on of his hands, and says, “Be sealed with the Gift of the Holy Spirit.” At these words, by the authority of the Bishop, the candidate, after months of preparation, receives an abundance of graces to strengthen him or her in proclaiming the Gospel as a witness to Christ.

### **A Lifetime of Conversion: Send**

*“Go, therefore, and make disciples of all nations.”* (Matthew 28:19)

Confirmation is not the end of one’s formation in the faith. Indeed, discipleship is a lifelong journey, not a season in one’s life. It is at this point after Confirmation that the ideal candidate is ready to heed the call to take his or her encounter with Jesus Christ out into the world. The disciple is ready to be *sent*. Far from being alone on this journey, the candidate will go forth *accompanied* by a strong *community* of faithful Catholics united in prayer, the Sacraments, and a common mission. Coupled with the graces just received in the Sacrament, the candidate is all the more prepared to make other disciples.

It is a mistaken notion that a disciple must be perfectly knowledgeable in the faith and free from all faults in order to go on mission. The candidate can’t expect for his or her faults to disappear after Confirmation. Rather, conversion – the process by which we become more and more like Christ – is a lifelong process. Even in the midst of being on mission a disciple *needs* to encounter the Lord anew every day and recommit to his or her relationship with Jesus Christ.

The candidate’s acceptance of and commitment to this mission will be witnessed in his or her ongoing formation in the faith, participation in the life of the parish and school, especially the youth ministry offerings where they can find themselves surrounded by others who are trying to live their lives the same way. The Sacramental life of the Church becomes the ongoing “food for the journey” with frequent reception of the Eucharist and regular confession.

The world desperately needs authentic witnesses to the love of Christ. Always under attack from the devil and the flesh, there is need for hope and salvation in every age that the Church finds Herself. It is the hope and desire of the Church that the Sacrament of Confirmation, prefaced by the necessary preparation, yields many intentional missionary disciples that are strengthened by the graces received to “go and make disciples of all nations.”



Go Make Disciples

EVANGELIZATION AND CATECHESIS  
ARCHDIOCESE OF OKLAHOMA CITY

**Version 3.0 – 6-15-21**