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1 Report
2 Concerning the Determination of the
3 Normative Age for Confirmation
4 in the Diocese of Stockton

5
6 Executive Summary and Recommendations

7
8 Part I: Introduction

9
10 While the sacrament of Confirmation has been celebrated at different ages in the Diocese of
11 Stockton, canon 891 of the 1983 Code of Canon Law states:

12
13 The sacrament of confirmation is to be conferred on the faithful at about the
14 age of discretion unless the conference of bishops has determined another age,
15 or there is danger of death, or in the judgment of the minister a grave cause
16 suggests otherwise.

17
18 In accord with canon 891, the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops decreed in 2001
19 “that the Sacrament of Confirmation in the Latin Rite shall be conferred between the age of
20 discretion and about sixteen years of age, within the limits determined by the diocesan bishop
21 and with regard for the legitimate exceptions given in canon 891.”

22
23 Under the guidance of the Most Reverend Stephen E. Blaire, Bishop of Stockton, a Task
24 Force¹ was established to begin the discussion of a plan to determine (1) the normative age
25 for Confirmation in the Diocese of Stockton and (2) criteria for Confirmation. In addition to
26 the normative age for Confirmation, the Task Force discussed ten additional issues relating to
27 the roles of parents, sponsors, priests, and staff and the preparation process and content of
28 catechesis.

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31 Part II: Issues Concerning the Normative Age for Confirmation
32 and Preparation for the Celebration of the Sacrament

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34 ISSUE 1: NORMATIVE AGE FOR THE CELEBRATION OF CONFIRMATION

35
36 In the Diocese of Stockton, most Catholics are confirmed in junior high school. A smaller
37 number are confirmed while in high school or as adults, usually as part of a parish’s RCIA
38 process. In looking at Confirmation, the Task Force discussed the advantages and

¹ Task Force members included the Very Reverend John J. M. Foster, J.C.L., Director of the Office for Worship; Sister Gloria DeJesus Sanchez, Director of the Office of Religious Education; Ms. Linda Henkel, Director of the Office of Christian Initiation; Mr. Paul De Valle, Director of Youth Ministries, St. Luke’s Church, Stockton; and Ms. Vicki Lamanna, Director of Religious Education, Our Lady of Fatima Church, Modesto.

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39 disadvantages of determining one of three ages as normative: around the age of discretion, in
40 junior high school, or around age 16.

41

42 A. Ages 7–8 (“Restored Sequence”)

43

44 Canon 891 states that the age of discretion is normative for the celebration of Confirmation
45 in the Latin Church.

46

47 *Advantages.* Because children are dependent on their parents at this age, the preparation for
48 and celebration of Confirmation at this time presents the opportunity for greater parental
49 involvement and family catechesis. The largest number of children would also be confirmed
50 at this age, who, when older, could participate in their parish’s youth ministry.

51

52 The single greatest advantage for Confirmation at the age of discretion is rooted in the papal
53 Magisterium of Pope Paul VI, when he writes of Confirmation’s celebration between
54 Baptism and Eucharist:

55

56 Through the sacrament of confirmation those who have been born anew in
57 baptism receive the inexpressible Gift, the Holy Spirit himself, but whom
58 “they are endowed . . . with special strength.” . . . Finally, confirmation is so
59 closely linked with the holy eucharist that the faithful, after being signed by
60 baptism and confirmation, are incorporated fully into the Body of Christ by
61 participation in the eucharist.²

62

63 *Disadvantages.* Three challenges come with confirming children about the age of discretion:
64 (1) the challenge of keeping the young people involved in religious education and youth
65 ministry; (2) the danger of separate programs or liturgies for children in the parish’s school
66 and religious education program; and (3) the challenge for parish leaders to trust that the
67 Holy Spirit can truly work in children at this age and not to succumb to the urge to see
68 Confirmation preparation as a complete course in the Catholic faith.

69

70 B. Junior High School

71

72 *Advantages.* The advantages of confirming youth at the ages of 13 or 14 include the
73 continuation of religious education of the candidates and the availability of catechetical text
74 in various languages. As junior high youth are still dependent on their parents in most areas,
75 a large number of candidates would be confirmed.

76

77 *Disadvantages.* Children entering adolescence are pulled in many directions with various
78 school and extracurricular activities. Because of a lack of personal investment for many in
79 the preparation process, catechists have a difficult time engaging the increasingly secular-

² Paul VI, Apostolic Constitution *Divinae consortium naturae*, 15 August 1971: AAS 63 (1971) 657–664. English translation in International Commission on English in the Liturgy, *Documents on the Liturgy, 1963–1979: Conciliar, Papal, and Curial Texts* (Collegeville, Minnesota: The Liturgical Press, 1982), n. 2502. Hereafter, documents from this collection will be abbreviated DOL followed by the margin reference.

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80 minded candidates. An additional challenge in keeping the newly confirmed in youth
81 ministry.

82

83 C. Age 16

84

85 *Advantages.* High school students generally possess a more adult understanding of the Faith,
86 which is not true for those in junior high school. Also, middle teens participating in
87 Confirmation preparation are able to take more ownership of the process and make a
88 commitment to live the Faith.

89

90 *Disadvantages.* Fewer youth at this age are confirmed because of the pressure of other
91 school and extracurricular activities. To accommodate the candidates, preparation programs
92 are generally abridged. It is recognized that parental involvement is weakest for this age
93 group.

94

95 ISSUE 2: THE ROLE OF PARENTS OR GUARDIANS

96

97 The Church recognizes that parents are the first educators of their children (c. 774, §2). With
98 the exception of Catholic adults approaching the Church for Confirmation, the involvement
99 of parents or guardians is an important part of the preparation process for minors of all ages.
100 Parents have a fundamental responsibility to model the Christian life for their children,
101 especially by participating in Sunday Mass. Regardless of the normative age determined for
102 Confirmation, parents are called to journey with their children during the preparation process
103 and to keep informed about dates and meetings. With younger youth and children, parents
104 will have a larger role because these candidates are dependent on them for participation at
105 Mass and catechetical sessions.

106

107 Parents who choose to undertake the catechetical preparation of their children for
108 Confirmation are encouraged to work with the parish Director of Religious Education (DRE)
109 to find age-appropriate materials and resources. In addition, parents are to participate in
110 discerning with the Pastor the child's readiness to celebrate Confirmation.

111

112 ISSUE 3: THE ROLE OF SPONSORS

113

114 Canon 874 sets forth the qualifications for Godparents for Confirmation, regardless of the
115 age of the one being confirmed. In addition to witnessing the conferral of the sacrament,
116 sponsors should, to the extent possible, endeavor to participate in the catechetical preparation
117 of their candidates.

118

119 ISSUE 4: PREPARATION PROCESS AND CATECHETICAL CONTENT

120

121 Canons 889, §2 and 890 require, for the liceity of the conferral of Confirmation, that
122 candidates for the sacrament "be suitably instructed." Since universal law permits anyone
123 who "has the use of reason [and is] suitably instructed, properly disposed, and able to renew
124 the baptismal promises" (c. 889, §2) to be confirmed, it is necessary to provide criteria for
125 persons seeking Confirmation outside the normative age.

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126 The following table proposes *minimum* diocesan requirements for the preparation process for
 127 five age groups, ensuring a well rounded formation in *kerygma, liturgia, koinonia*, and
 128 *diakonia*.
 129
 130

	Adults	High School	Junior High School	Elementary (Grades 4–5)	Primary (Grades 1–3)
Sunday Mass	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Personal interview	Yes	Yes	No	No	No
Expressed desire for Confirmation	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Proof of Catholic Baptism or Reception	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Meetings with Sponsor	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Social Service experience	2 hours	24 hours	12 hours	8 hours	6 hours
Retreat Experience	1 day	1 weekend	1 day	1 day	1 day
Catechetical Sessions (minimum hours)	12 hours	24 hours	2 consecutive years of RE or Catholic school at grade level + 12 hours, or 36 hours of supervised, parish-approved sacramental preparation	2 consecutive years of RE or Catholic school at grade level + 12 hours, or 36 hours of supervised, parish-approved sacramental preparation	RE or Catholic school at grade level + 12 hours, or 36 hours of supervised, parish-approved sacramental preparation

131
 132 As noted in the table above, the minimum number of hours of catechetical content is
 133 determined by the age of the candidates. Whether candidates are prepared in a parish or
 134 home-based program, in general the following topics should be covered as part of the
 135 catechesis: the Creed (Christology and ecclesiology), sacraments (emphasis on
 136 Confirmation/gifts of Holy Spirit), Mass (Eucharist), moral decision-making, social ministry,
 137 scripture, and prayer. These topics, each important in its own right, need not and cannot be
 138 exhausted in the limited time available. It is not expected that this period of catechetical
 139 formation should function as a “graduation” from religious education.

140
 141 It might also happen that elementary and primary school children seeking Confirmation have
 142 not yet celebrated First Communion, preceded by the sacrament of penance. In these cases,
 143 parents should also catechize their children in preparation for these two sacraments with an
 144 additional twelve hours of supervised parish-approved sacramental preparation in these
 145 topics.
 146

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147 ISSUE 5: LOCUS/PROCESS: PARISH-BASED OR HOME-BASED

148

149 Preparation for Confirmation rightly takes place in the parish, under the direction of the
150 Pastor, and not in the context of the parish school, parish youth group, or diocesan high
151 school.

152

153 Because universal law permits the celebration of Confirmation at the age of discretion, it falls
154 to the Pastor to ensure that persons prepared for Confirmation outside the normal parish
155 process meet the requirements of canon 889, §2. In these cases, the pastor and parents
156 together will discern a child's readiness for Confirmation. In matters of discernment, the
157 pastor is encouraged to consult the parish director of religious education.

158

159 ISSUE 6: INTER-PAROCHIAL PREPARATION AND CELEBRATION

160

161 In some cases, it may prove useful for parishes in a given locale to collaborate in the
162 preparation for and celebration of Confirmation.

163

164 ISSUE 7: STAFFING

165

166 While the Pastor has the ultimate responsibility in the parish to oversee the preparation of the
167 faithful for Confirmation, it will oftentimes be prudent to delegate to one person the task of
168 supervising the entire Confirmation program, i.e., the preparation processes for all candidates
169 regardless of age. This one person, called the Confirmation Coordinator, should be
170 designated by the Pastor.

171

172 ISSUE 8: CATECHIST FORMATION

173

174 Parents are the first educators of their children. Nevertheless, they work with persons trained
175 in the art and science of catechesis and recognized by competent authority. Every parish is
176 encouraged to have at least one certified catechist for each Confirmation process. The parish
177 Confirmation Coordinator and all catechists must be fully initiated, practicing Catholics in
178 good standing. In addition, they should engage in continuing formation through appropriate
179 workshops, in-services, and journals.

180

181 ISSUE 9: RELATIONSHIP WITH THE PARISH SCHOOL, RELIGIOUS EDUCATION PROGRAM, YOUTH
182 MINISTRY, RCIA

183

184 Currently, Confirmation preparation takes place in various ministry areas in a parish: adults
185 oftentimes enter the RCIA process, youth ministry oversees teen preparation, and the parish
186 school or religious education program does preparation of children. While these ministries
187 should cooperate with the parish office for religious education, sacramental preparation
188 rightly is located in the parish and is overseen by its office for religious education.

189

190 ISSUE 10: ROLE OF THE PRIESTS

191

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192 Priests who hold the offices of Diocesan Bishop, Pastor, or Parochial Vicar each play a
193 proper role with regard to the preparation for and celebration of Confirmation. It belongs to
194 the diocesan Bishop to determine the normative age for Confirmation in his particular
195 Church as well as celebrate the sacrament personally. The Pastor designates the parish
196 Confirmation Coordinator and recognizes and supports the catechists working in his parish.
197 Under the direction of the Pastor, Parochial Vicars and other priests work with the
198 Confirmation Coordinator.

199

200 ISSUE 11: LITURGICAL CELEBRATION OF CONFIRMATION

201

202 The parish celebration(s) of Confirmation should be scheduled with the Bishop's office well
203 in advance. When the Confirmation Guidelines and Information are sent to the Pastor, these
204 should be forwarded to the Parish Liturgy Coordination and Confirmation Coordinator.

205

206

207

Recommendations

208

209 Over the course of nearly a year, the Confirmation Task Force discussed eleven issues
210 concerning the determination of a normative age for the celebration of Confirmation in the
211 Diocese of Stockton, the preparation process and catechetical content and the roles of
212 parents, sponsors, priests, and others. In light of current ecclesiastical discipline and the
213 pastoral situation in the Diocese of Stockton, the Confirmation Task Force makes the
214 following recommendations concerning the preparation for and celebration of the sacrament
215 of Confirmation.

216

217 *1. It is recommended that Confirmation be celebrated at about the age of discretion (7 or 8*
218 *years old) by the Christian faithful in the Diocese of Stockton.*

219

220 Canon 891 clearly states the principle that the normative age for Confirmation in the Latin
221 Church *sui iuris* is "about the age of discretion." Only as an exception does the universal law
222 permit conferences of bishops to determine another age.

223

224 Both the *General Introduction* for Christian Initiation (which includes both adults and
225 infants) and Paul VI's Apostolic Constitution on Confirmation set forth clearly the
226 theological position that Baptism, followed by Confirmation, leads to Eucharist. The
227 celebration of Confirmation following the reception of First Communion skews the
228 theological value of the second sacrament of initiation.

229

230 *2. It is recommended that diocesan criteria be established for the preparation and*
231 *celebration of Confirmation at various ages.*

232

233 Regardless of the normative age of Confirmation determined by the diocesan bishop for the
234 Diocese of Stockton, the faithful may request the sacrament at another age. For this reason,
235 the Task Force believes that it is important to establish minimum criteria for this sacrament
236 applicable throughout the Diocese. These criteria should be appropriate to the age and
237 condition of the candidates for Confirmation.

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238

239 *3. It is recommended that youth ministry be strengthened to provide a supportive role to*
240 *young people and complement their ongoing religious education.*

241

242 Youth ministry, for and by young people, provides a forum for teens to come together to
243 share their faith. Unfortunately, it is an all too common practice that youth ministry has
244 taken on tasks of sacramental preparation and religious education. While the Christian life is
245 always in some way catechetical, the primary goal of youth ministry isn't to do catechesis but
246 rather to engage youth in growing as disciples of the Lord.

247

248 To this end, youth ministry offers an opportunity to complement the sacramental preparation
249 and continuing religious education that young people have received. Through Scripture
250 sharing, shared prayer, issue discussions, and social activities, teens come to know Jesus the
251 Lord and his Church.

252

253 *4. It is recommended that sacramental preparation be seen as separate from (but related to)*
254 *religious education.*

255

256 Sacramental preparation does not exhaust religious education. By sacramental preparation is
257 meant the proximate period of intense formation and catechesis prior to the celebration of a
258 sacramental. Religious education, on the other hand, refers to an extended period (one's
259 lifetime) of formation and learning about the Catholic Faith.

260

261 For far too long, sacramental preparation and religious education have been viewed as
262 equivalent by many of the faithful. Removing formal sacramental preparation from religious
263 education will help the faithful understand the obligation they have to continue their
264 Christian formation throughout their lives, while entering a sacramental preparation program
265 when they are ready to celebrate a sacrament. At the same time, and because of the
266 catechetical nature of sacramental preparation, this intense period of formation is not
267 unrelated to religious education. Indeed, the relation between religious education and
268 sacramental preparation is best organized in the parish under the direction of a degreed
269 Director of Religious Education or certified Coordinator of Religious Education.

270

271 *5. It is recommended that every Pastor appoint a Confirmation Coordinator responsible for*
272 *overseeing all Confirmation processes in the parish.*

273

274 Currently, a parish might have two or three separate Confirmation processes: a large junior
275 high program, a smaller high school program, and a program for adults (probably found in
276 the RCIA process). In many cases, these programs are operated independently. With the
277 approval of diocesan criteria for Confirmation suited to the age and condition of the
278 candidate, it would be beneficial to have one person appointed by the Pastor to oversee the
279 processes and catechetical formation of all Confirmation candidates in the parish.

280

281 *6. It is recommended that parishes—and, to the extent possible, deaneries—work together to*
282 *share resources and personnel.*

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284 Parishes have limited resources and personnel. These resources would be stretched thin in
285 dealing with four or five age-based Confirmation programs. Also, today's Confirmation
286 candidates—whether adults, youth, or children—lead busy lives that sometime make it
287 difficult to participate completely in parish programs.

288
289 This recommendation encourages parishes to explore the possibilities of collaborating with
290 other parishes in a cluster or deanery to share resources and make Confirmation preparation
291 more convenient for the faithful. For example, catechetical sessions might be held in
292 common among the parishes in a city or on different days, so that a candidate missing a
293 session at his or her parish could attend an equivalent gathering at a neighboring parish. The
294 same might be considered for the retreat and social service experiences.

295
296 While the preparation for and celebration of Confirmation is located properly in the parish,
297 not every element of the formation process needs to be duplicated in every parish.

298
299 *7. It is recommended that, prior to the full implementation of any new Confirmation criteria*
300 *and program for the Diocese of Stockton, a clearly defined period of transition be outlined.*

301
302 The normative age for the celebration of Confirmation in the Diocese of Stockton has
303 changed twice since 1981. Before making another change in the normative age for
304 Confirmation, or implementing diocesan criteria for Confirmation for those outside the
305 normative age, it is important that a suitable period of time be allotted for Pastors, parish
306 staffs, and the lay faithful to become familiar with and understand the changes to be made
307 and the reasons for the changes.