



Restore • Renew • Proclaim

the Hope that is Christ



Restaurar, Renovar, Proclamar
la Esperanza que es Cristo

Strengthening Faith Formation in the Diocese of Manchester

The Diocese of Manchester is in the process of continuing to strengthen and renew faith formation in our parish, school and home school communities. Through this process we are being called anew to “Restore, Renew and Proclaim the Hope that is Christ.”

The goal is to make lifelong faith formation a priority and a reality throughout the diocese. This requires a few things:

- Making adult faith formation a priority in our parishes, which includes formation of catechists, parents and the entire adult community.
- Strengthening our youth ministry programs to include all teens of high school age.
- Reimagining our sacrament preparation processes to include a return to celebrating the sacraments of initiation in their restored order: Baptism, Confirmation, Eucharist.

What is Lifelong Faith Formation?

Lifelong faith formation is a process of growing in the faith that begins with baptism. Immersed in the life of the Trinity, we are adopted sons and daughters of God our Father, brothers and sisters of Jesus Christ and temples of the Holy Spirit. Like all human relationships, developing and deepening our relationship with the Trinity happens gradually and over time. Consequently, lifelong faith formation provides opportunities and experiences throughout the entire life span to strengthen our relationship and knowledge of God, Jesus and the Spirit; to enhance our understanding of Scripture, Tradition and doctrines of our faith; and to sustain us in living as disciples of Jesus Christ.

Ministry with adolescents is a concern for the entire church community. It is a call to empower young people for the mission given to them by Jesus Christ. Youth ministry focuses on three essential goals: (1) empowering young people to live as disciples of Jesus Christ in our world today; (2) drawing young people to responsible participation in the life, mission, and work of the faith community; and (3) fostering the personal and spiritual growth of each young person (*Renewing the Vision, 1997*). It is important to utilize the resources from the entire faith community and integrate ministry with adolescents and their families into the total life and mission of the church.

In their 1999 document, *Our Hearts Were Burning Within Us*, the US Bishops made a “renewed commitment to adult faith formation, positioning it at the heart of our catechetical vision and practice.” The document included their pledge “to support adult faith formation without weakening our commitment to our other essential educational ministries.” Three major goals guide adult faith formation: (1) invite and enable ongoing conversion to Jesus in holiness of life; (2) promote and support active membership in the Christian community; and (3) call and prepare adults to act as disciples in mission to the world.

FAQ's

Included here are some frequently asked questions regarding the celebration of the sacraments of initiation in the restored order. (*This is also referred to as “original order,” “traditional order,” or “proper order.”*)

1. What are the Sacraments of Initiation?

The sacraments of Baptism, Confirmation, and Eucharist are interrelated and all three are required for full Christian initiation.

2. What does restored order of the Sacraments mean?

Restored order means returning the three sacraments of Christian initiation to the logical order in which they were designed to be celebrated: first Baptism, then Confirmation, then Eucharist. During the first five hundred years or so of the history of the Church, it was always the case that the sacraments of Christian initiation were celebrated in this sequence.

3. Why is the Diocese of Manchester changing the age of Confirmation?

By placing Confirmation at this age, the Diocese of Manchester will be following the natural sequence of the sacraments of Christian initiation. In addition, by placing Confirmation prior to the reception of First Eucharist it makes it easier to view the Eucharist as the summit of Christian initiation.

4. How is the celebration of Confirmation going to change in the Diocese of Manchester?

The standard age of Confirmation is going to be third grade, and Confirmation will be celebrated at the same liturgy as First Communion. As a result, the preparation and reception of the sacraments of initiation throughout the Diocese of Manchester will be Baptism in infancy, Confirmation and Eucharist in third grade. Although not a sacrament of initiation, the Sacrament of Penance and Reconciliation will be received in the second grade.

5. What are the benefits of restored order?

First, it will highlight that the Eucharist, not Confirmation, is the culmination of Christian initiation. Secondly, with the reception of grace of the Holy Spirit at a younger age, it will give children greater courage and guidance in facing the increasing difficulties of living a Christian life. Finally, it will allow for more opportunities for parents to take

their rightful place as the primary educators of faith formation. It places sacrament preparation at an age when children are naturally more open and receptive to participating with their parents.

6. Does the Church require a certain age for Confirmation?

Both the *Rite of Confirmation* and the *Code of Canon Law (Canon #891)* set the age of discretion (age 7) as the age for Confirmation. In 2002, the USCCB designated the age for Confirmation to be between the age of discretion and age 16, and gave local bishops the ability to determine their own policies within that range.

7. How will children be able to make an adult commitment to the Church if they are confirmed prior to First Eucharist?

This question reflects a common misconception that the Sacrament of Confirmation signifies maturity and adult commitment to the Church. The maturity that is required for receiving any of the sacraments of Christian initiation is only what is age-appropriate. The Church expects interior dispositions of readiness, such as understanding and freedom, that are realistic at any given age, nothing more. To celebrate Confirmation requires nothing more by way of age-appropriate maturity than to receive the Eucharist. An authentic, mature commitment to Christ and the Church is expressed in lifelong participation in the Eucharist and apostolic life of the Church.

8. How can a young child know everything about the faith?

It is impossible to know everything about the faith. Faith Formation is a lifelong process. All youth, kindergarten through high school, are expected to be engaged in faith formation. Adults need to continually learn about the faith, read the scriptures, receive the sacraments, and serve the church and the world through acts of mercy.

9. If children are confirmed earlier, won't they drop out of faith formation?

They might. It depends on their parents. Confirmation has been misunderstood and often viewed as graduation from faith formation. Growth in the understanding and living out of our faith is the result of a lifelong effort. Parents have the first responsibility of being an example of Jesus Christ to each other and living the Gospel each day. Children will stay in faith formation if they see their parents striving to grow in holiness through family prayer, scripture reading, Sunday Mass, regular Confession, and living a life of service and charity.

10. How will restored order affect youth ministry?

Restored order provides great opportunities to revitalize youth ministry. The sacrament of Confirmation can be misused as a carrot to motivate attendance. Instead of drawing teens by our own creative efforts and quality ministry, we easily fall into requiring them to be present. This can lead teens to feel they are captives and being forced to attend meetings. Also, because the sacrament tends to be the focus and goal, few teens stay involved once Confirmation is celebrated. The sacrament is an initiation into Christian discipleship. By confirming at the time of First Communion, we make it very clear that Confirmation is not the end but the beginning, not graduation but initiation into a life of continued growth

in the faith. Parish based Youth Ministry is to have the mission of the church as its purpose. Youth ministry teams must evangelize, build teens up through formation, and send them out to minister as disciples of Jesus Christ.

11. Will curriculum materials and guidelines be provided?

Yes. Catechetical curriculum materials used are to be from the USCCB Conformity List <http://www.usccb.org/about/evangelization-and-catechesis/subcommittee-on-catechism/upload/Current-Conformity-List.pdf>. This is a listing of materials reviewed by the USCCB Subcommittee on Catechism and found in conformity with the Catechism. In addition, five publishers currently offer sacramental preparation materials for restored order reviewed by this USCCB Subcommittee. Other publishers expect to have restored order sacramental preparation materials available in the fall of 2017.

A caution: if a parish attempts to create its own curriculum or uses a published curriculum not on the USCCB Conformity List, it is stepping outside the diocesan-wide process and needs to submit the curriculum to the Secretariat for Catholic Formation for approval.

12. When will this transition happen?

There will be no change in the celebration of the sacraments of initiation during the first year, June 2017- June 2018. This will be a diocesan-wide year of preparation. The Directors in the Secretariat for Catholic Formation will be available for staff meetings, parish and/or parent presentations tailored to parish needs and all age groups.

13. How will this transition happen?

There will be a three-year implementation process, June 2018 – June 2021. Pastors and parish staff members will determine their own timeline for the transition. Possible models for this transition will be provided to pastors and parish staffs. The goal is that the normative age for Confirmation and Eucharist will be third grade by 2021.

Many dioceses generously offered us input from their experience of implementing the restored order of celebrating the Sacraments of Initiation. We are grateful for the time, resources and encouragement they shared. Their contributions enhanced this FAQ resource as well as the other resources we developed.