

July 3, 1998
The feast of St. Thomas the Apostle

My Sisters and Brothers in Christ:

In the Book of the Acts (Acts 11:26), we read that after Saul and Barnabas had instructed the Church of Antioch for a year, Gentiles and Jews of this new mixed community were called "Christians" for the first time. "Anointed Ones"! That is the literal meaning of the Greek word describing men and women "filled with the Holy Spirit and faith" who were added to the Lord. Like Christ they were anointed in power and grace.

The passage very concretely describes the outcome of Christian Initiation: A people, filled with the Holy Spirit and faith, united to the Lord Jesus. In my mind, the Second Vatican Council impacted the Sacraments of Initiation more than any other Sacraments. The Church is the community of the baptized, present in the world of every age to make Christ present. Through Eucharistic life we believers faithfully renew the Christ event in the world and in our own hearts.

For a number of years, there has been much discussion and pastoral study among pastoral ministers, pastors, the Presbyteral and Pastoral Councils about the Sacraments of Initiation, Baptism, Confirmation, and Eucharist. While often the center of the discussion has been Confirmation, always the discussion has really centered about the relationship between these three Sacraments, their place in Christian tradition, their meaning, their theology; their proper order, and the appropriate circumstances for their celebration. This last year, I asked these same leaders to join in a more formal, structured dialogue about diocesan sacramental practices.

From this dialogue, it is now time for me, as Bishop, to set a clear direction about the celebration of the Sacraments of Initiation in our Diocese. From the discussions four things were very clear: 1) It is not good for the people of the Diocese (or really even the whole Church in the United States) to have a diversity of practice for the celebration of Confirmation. 2) The catechized meaning of the grace of the Sacrament of Confirmation should be consistent with the ritual celebration. 3) The celebration of Eucharist is the end point of Christian Initiation and Christian life. And 4) the relationship between Eucharistic faith and family faith must be strengthened in every way possible.

As a result, in dialogue with the consultative bodies, I have prepared a new policy which sets a common policy for the Diocese. At the heart of the policy is a piece of Christian tradition which has never been fully articulated as a norm in our age: that Confirmation should be celebrated before a baptized person receives the Eucharist. This norm clearly belongs to the tradition of the East. This norm was accepted and presupposed before the beginning of this century. This norm has been clearly stated in Rites of Christian Initiation for Adults and in the Rites for accepting persons baptized in other Christian churches into full communion with the Catholic Church.

The recent restatement of the Universal law of the Church which sets the appropriate age for the celebration of Confirmation for those baptized as infants as the "age of discretion," the same requirement as for Eucharistic participation, leads me to frame our diocesan policy around the proper sequence of the celebration of the sacraments. Confirmation in the Spirit leads to the completion of Initiation in Eucharistic life and communion. This norm is simple, meaningful, and faithful to the living traditions of the Church. It will be the common policy of our Diocese.

In one statement: all the baptized are to receive the laying on of hands and the anointing with Sacred Chrism before participating in the Eucharistic Life of the Church.

As we move toward the celebration of the Year of Jubilee, I am asking all the faith communities of the Diocese to move toward implementation of this policy. For some communities, pastoral practice already reflects the new policy. Nonetheless, I urge these parishes to provide a renewed catechesis on the sacraments of initiation. Many faithful Catholics have not yet completed Christian initiation through the sacrament of Confirmation. They need to receive the anointing with sacred Chrism so that their bond of communion at the table of the Lord will be recognized as a communion in the Spirit and in the faith entrusted to the universal Church through the ministry of the apostles. To facilitate the conferral of this sacrament, I am prepared to celebrate Confirmation at every pastoral visitation of parishes. Furthermore, I have given pastors the faculty to confirm adults who have not completed initiation at the Easter Vigil celebrations of the years 1999 and 2000.

For other communities, this policy calls for establishing a new pattern for the celebration of Confirmation and First Eucharist. I ask their pastors to carefully and faithfully lead your communities toward this common practice for our diocese. I will do all in my power to assist in the necessary "catch up" celebrations for children and adolescents.

In addition, I ask all communities to reevaluate the role of the Sacrament of Reconciliation in preparing for the completion of Initiation. Reconciliation is not part of the initiation pattern, but it is part of the preparation for faithful Eucharistic living.

My sisters and brothers, for some of you this is a piece of Catholic tradition with which you are not very familiar. I am very humble and honest in noting that while the traditional sequence of the Sacraments is very clear, the pastoral practice of confirmation for those baptized in infancy in the last hundred years has not been consistent with that tradition. As a Bishop, I feel that the Sacrament of Confirmation and the Eucharist may have suffered because of this. For this reason, I am deeply committed to this renewal of the order of celebration of the Sacraments for all without exception. It is a pastoral practice that is clear, unambiguous, and faithful to an enduring understanding of the Sacraments. I have shared my decision with my brother bishops in our province and region. We have had many discussions about this matter.

I am grateful to all those who have assisted me in working toward this decision. I pray that this common practice will lead all who are involved in the catechetical ministries of the Church to a faithful and consistent proclamation of the good news of the gift of grace. This is a great opportunity to focus our celebration of the Jubilee on our very identity as Catholics and as a Eucharistic people. We are anointed in the power of the Spirit. It is the work of God, free and ever gracious. It is a mystery which we celebrate in faith. It is a mystery which is always and primarily the work of God for us in Christ Jesus. It is the mystery of the sacredness of our Eucharistic life. May this mystery reflect faithfully in our Christian living.

Sincerely yours in Christ,

William S. Skylstad
Bishop of Spokane

POLICY REGARDING THE COMPLETION OF CHRISTIAN INITIATION

FOR BAPTIZED CATHOLICS

“Those who have been baptized continue on the path of Christian initiation through the sacrament of Confirmation. In this sacrament they receive the Holy Spirit, who was sent upon the apostles by the Lord on Pentecost. This giving of the Holy Spirit conforms the believers more perfectly to Christ and strengthens them so that they may bear witness to Christ for the building up of his body in faith and love. They are so marked with the character or seal of the Lord that the sacrament of Confirmation cannot be repeated.” (Introduction to the Rite, #1 and #2).

In his Apostolic Constitution, Pope Paul VI reminded the Church that the reform of this Sacrament by the Second Vatican Council had as its primary aim that “the intimate connection which this sacrament has with the whole of Christian initiation should be more lucidly set forth.” The Holy Father went on to teach that: “the link between Confirmation and the other sacraments of initiation is shown forth more clearly not only by closer association of these sacraments, but also by the rite and words by which Confirmation is conferred.” (Apostolic Constitution).

After a significant time of diverse practice within the Diocese of Spokane, I have carried out a very serious inquiry among pastors and pastoral agents within the Diocese, especially in the regional meetings during 1997 – 1998. The one common request in this dialogue is to unify the practice of the celebration of this sacrament in the diocese. The policy given below responds to this concern.

I wish to reaffirm the important values of this policy. First, in the tradition of the Roman Rite, the Bishop is the ordinary minister of Confirmation (Can. 882) and the Rites of the Initiation of Adults (RCIA #44). As a successor of the Apostles, the Bishop invites those who are initiated to share in the sacrifice of Christ at the table of the Eucharist. Second, the sequence of Baptism, Confirmation and Eucharist is an important element in the sacramental tradition and is always to be observed as a part of our heritage. This applies to the Initiation of Adults, the Initiation of Children of Catechetical Age and the Initiation of Children Baptized in Infancy.

The tradition of the Roman Rite has consistently affirmed this tradition. In the last 100 years Pope Leo XIII, the 1917 Code of Canon Law, the 1952 response of the Commission of the Code of Canon Law, and the 1983 Code have manifested the Roman preference for the celebration of the sequence of the sacraments, namely that Confirmation should precede the reception of the Holy Eucharist. After the Second Vatican Council, the restored rite for the celebration of Confirmation reaffirmed that “with regard to children, in the Latin Church the administration of Confirmation is generally postponed until about the seventh year. For pastoral reasons, especially to strengthen the faithful in complete obedience to Christ the Lord and in loyal testimony to him, episcopal conferences may choose an age which seems more appropriate, so that the sacrament is given at a more mature age after appropriate formation.” (The Rite of Confirmation, #11).

Up to the present time, the Conference of Bishops of the United States has not established a national norm for a more mature age at which Confirmation is to be conferred. Diverse practices have developed across the dioceses of the country.

While I affirm my respect for this diversity and the right of local bishops to develop diocesan statutes in accord with Conference policy, it is my hope and prayer that a national norm will one day be established that is faithful to the traditional sequence of the Sacraments of Initiation. In light of the present circumstances,

I am mandating that the practice specified by the Rite of Confirmation and the Code of Canon Law becomes the normative practice followed in the Diocese of Spokane: “The sacrament of confirmation is to be conferred on the faithful at about the age of discretion unless the conference of bishops determines another age or there is danger of death or in the judgment of the minister a grave cause urges otherwise.” (Canon 891).

In order that the sacramental practice of our Diocese might better reflect this canonical norm, I ask that by Pentecost Sunday of the year 2000, all the faithful who are regular participants in Holy Communion will also have been confirmed. I am also establishing a discipline for the reception of First Holy Communion by Catholic children that is in conformity with this norm.

I. Completion of Initiation for Catholic Children:

1. All the baptized who have attained the age of discretion and seek admission to the Eucharistic table are to first be confirmed in the Spirit by the imposition of hands and anointing of the Sacred Chrism. This norm is effective immediately and is to be fully implemented by January 1, 2000.
2. Catechesis regarding the Sacraments of Initiation, including the integral relationship between Baptism, Confirmation and the Holy Eucharist shall be included in the curriculum of religion classes, and be regularly repeated to remind the fully initiated of their dignity and life in Christ. Catechesis concerning the Sacrament of Penance and the integral relationship of one's moral life to the sacramental life shall also be presented. Children must be invited to confess their sins in the sacrament of Penance prior to completion of Initiation.
3. Children as young as seven may suitably begin proximate preparation for Confirmation and Eucharist. This extended period of catechesis shall be conducted in a parish-centered program which includes the participation of parents. Children are ready to complete their initiation when they can renew the promises of their baptism, understand the mystery of Christ according to their capacity, and receive the Body and Blood of the Lord with faith and devotion. This catechesis may be extended over one or two years.
4. It is primarily the responsibility of parents to see that their children who have attained the use of reason are correctly prepared for the completion of initiation. In exercising this responsibility in collaboration with their pastor, parents are not to be guided merely by the age of their child or grade in school. Rather, the child's disposition, commitment and readiness to fully share in the faith of the Christian community must be made manifest. When children are members of families who do not regularly share in the Sunday Eucharist, the preparation program should present a very strong effort to evangelize the whole family toward a renewal of Eucharistic participation. It is the most sacred and serious responsibility of parents to themselves bear witness to the absolute necessity of Eucharistic life as the sign of communion with Christ and the Church. It is inappropriate for parents to expect that the sacraments of initiation can be completed when sacramental life is lacking in the family.

II. Completion of Initiation for adult Catholics:

1. I ask that pastors invite adults not yet confirmed but who regularly participate in the Eucharist to complete their Christian initiation. Normally, this invitation may be accompanied by minimal if any, catechetical formation.
2. To provide adequate opportunities for conferral of this sacrament, I will celebrate the sacrament of Confirmation on the occasion of parish pastoral visits. I also grant pastors the faculty to confirm adult parishioners at the Easter Vigil of 1999 and 2000.
3. When the Rites of Christian Initiation are celebrated at the Easter Vigil, all the elect who have reached catechetical age are to be fully initiated, receiving the sacraments of Baptism, Confirmation and the Eucharist. Baptized non-Catholics of catechetical age who are received into full communion are to be confirmed and admitted to the Eucharistic table. On the occasion of the Easter Vigil, pastors also are granted the faculty to confirm uncatechized Catholics who have participated in the RCIA program of the parish.

III. Renewal of Baptismal Faith

Every fully initiated member of the Christian community is annually called to solemnly renew one's commitment to the promises made in baptism. Each year all parishes shall celebrate this Easter renewal of our faith with full deliberation and attention to the liturgy and symbols of baptism. I remind pastors of their responsibility to diligently preach about the relationship of this annual renewal of our baptismal promises to the gift of grace poured out upon the faithful at their initiation into the life of the risen Christ at Baptism and Confirmation, and in each and every celebration of the Eucharistic Sacrifice.

Approved on the Feats of St. Thomas the Apostle

July 3, 1998

William S. Skylstad
Bishop of Spokane

An Historical Overview Of Christian Initiation

In the Time of the Apostles

People who heard the preaching of the Apostles and believed were immediately baptized. The Apostles would lay hands upon them and they would become part of the community. Whole families were accepted into the community. (Cf. e.g., Acts 2, 37-39; 10, 44-48; 16, 14-15; 16, 30-33; 19, 1-7; 1Cor 1, 16.)

In the Second Century

By this time, a process for Christian Initiation began to develop a pattern. Baptism was administered at a place with running water; the newly baptized were brought to the bishop to be anointed with oil to complete their baptism; then the neophytes joined the community for the first time in the Eucharist.

In the Fourth Century

From the time of the Edict of Milan under the Emperor Constantine (313 A.D.), Christianity was no longer a persecuted religion. Many sought to become Christians, and a highly developed *catechumenate* or process of preparation for baptism emerged. This time of preparation usually lasted two or more years, but sometimes people remained *catechumens* for many years. Lent was the period of final preparation for the *elect*, those chosen by the Bishop for initiation. At the Easter Vigil, their baptism and anointing by the bishop culminated in the first celebration of the Eucharist with the community.

In the Christian West during the Migration of People

When the Germanic tribes and other populations moved into the Western Roman Empire, most of them became Christians. But the decline of the Empire brought significant social changes. Numerous villages sprung up outside of metropolitan areas. The bishops, who lived in the larger cities, infrequently visited the villages. Priests baptized children and those who wished to become Christians. They would have to wait for the bishop to come to be anointed with the sacred chrism. This might take place years later. Eventually laws were established that this anointing of children baptized by the priests should take place when they were about seven years old.

In the Reformation

The Protestant reformers found insufficient evidence of a command from the Lord for bishops to anoint the newly baptized. They rejected the sacrament that was now called Confirmation as part of the heritage of the Christian community.

In the 20th Century

In 1910, Pope Pius X brought about a great change. He legislated that children as young as seven should be permitted to receive the Eucharist. Prior to this, it was customary for a child to be baptized in infancy, confirmed at eight or nine, and to receive First Communion at age 14. Thus, the traditional order of initiation was maintained. But with the new practice established by Pius X,

Confirmation became dissociated from baptism and the Eucharist as part of Christian initiation. Instead, Confirmation seemed to stand on its own. It was sometimes referred to as the “sacrament of Christian maturity.” Customs for the age of Confirmation varied widely with some places postponing the sacrament until 17 or 18.

At times, the relationship of Confirmation to the Eucharist was further obscured when even persons who had already received First Communion were confirmed apart from the celebration of Mass.

The Second Vatican Council decreed that the rite of Confirmation was to be revised “so that the intimate connection of this sacrament with the whole of the Christian initiation may more clearly appear” (SC 71). The Rite of Christian Initiation of Adults requires that even children of catechetical age as well as adults are to receive Confirmation and participate in the Eucharist on the occasion of their baptism. In our day we know it is more in keeping with the pattern of Christian initiation that those who have been baptized in infancy be confirmed in the Spirit at the age of discretion and then complete their incorporation into Christ through the Holy Eucharist, “the source and summit of the Christian life.”

The Initiation of the Children of Christians: The Life of Faith and the Life of the Christian Family

Many of us Catholics received the sacrament of Baptism in infancy, perhaps within weeks of our birth. By this ancient ritual of cleansing through water and the word, our lives were forever changed. Set free from original sin, we became children of God. Submerged in the waters of baptism into the death of Christ, we were raised up in the image of Christ “to walk in newness of life.” Joined to the Body of Christ, the Church, we will not be left to our own devices to stumble in darkness, but are assured by our parents, godparents and the believing community that we shall be brought up in the practice of the Catholic faith.

It is perhaps the last of these considerations that brings the truth about baptism beyond the realm of theological affirmation and into our lived experience. For children who are born into a Christian family, their first experience of faith does not take place on the day they are brought into the church to be baptized. Rather, from the very onset, life in the midst of one’s family begins to form a child into the image of Christ. The marital commitment of steadfast love and fidelity; the sacrificial love of parents who bestow life upon their children; the healing and reconciling love that renews bonds broken by selfishness and betrayal—this giving and forgiving that constitute the daily experience of the family is already sacramental. When viewed through the eyes of faith, we recognize in our homes the dying and rising of Christ. Thus, it is with good reason that the home is called the domestic Church and family life the school of faith.

While faith is formed and fostered in the Christian family, the Church’s Sacraments of Initiation, confer upon us and form within us our Catholic self understanding. This development of our identity comes about in the very manner that these sacraments are conferred. The diocesan bishop exercises the ministry of apostolic service for the particular Church or diocese. As successor of the apostles, the bishop fulfills the threefold office of Christ to sanctify, teach and govern. As a member of the college of bishops in communion with the Holy Father, the bishop is the sacramental sign of the Church’s unity and universality. While it would be most appropriate for the bishop himself to preside over the rituals of initiation, it normally falls to the local pastor or deacon to celebrate the first sacrament of initiation, baptism. In the tradition of churches of the Eastern Rites, the priest also

confers confirmation through the anointing with *myron* or sacred chrism consecrated by the bishop. In the Western or Latin Rite tradition, there are circumstances in which presbyters may or even must confirm. But in the western Church it is normative that Catholics baptized in infancy be sealed with the gift of the Holy Spirit by the laying on of the hand of the bishop himself. The custom of the Latin rite makes “the age of discretion” the reference point for receiving Confirmation.

While not an absolute requirement of the Church, it seems to have been the consistent tradition that the sealing by the bishop was ordinarily done before the baptized joined in the celebration of the Eucharist, the source and summit of Christian life. All the other sacraments, all vocational commitments and all Christian spirituality or the deepest meaning of our lives, find their origin and goal in this legacy of Christian faith.

The celebration of the initiation of the children of Christians finds its culmination in the Holy Eucharist just as the rites for the initiation of adults find their completion in the eucharistic sacrifice. In our diocesan policy, therefore, we strive to structure sacramental initiation so that Confirmation is the experience that leads our children to the table of eucharistic life. Initially, they will come to that table with the disposition of children. But Sunday after Sunday, year after year, they will be nourished at that table.

Seeing the witness of faith by the members of the Church in their parish and in their families, they will respond in faith to the challenges that their developing lives lay before them.

Baptism and Confirmation impart a seal or “character” whereby the person is promised divine protection and assured a vocation to divine worship and service of the Church (cf. CCC 1121). These sacraments ritualize a commitment on the part of God so they cannot be repeated, because the enduring power of God’s promises cannot be doubted. However, matters are not so secure from our side of the covenant. We cannot presume our absolute adherence to the life of Christ. Rather, according to the Gospel mandate we pick up our cross each day to follow him who is Lord and Savior. In this spirituality, the Eucharistic affirmation, the “Amen” we make to the Body and Blood of Christ, is our sign of commitment for today. It is our free and faithful response here and now to the one who is always and everywhere awaiting our “yes” to the offer of divine love. On God’s part, this offer is assured and irrevocable; but our response can only be given day by day. It is through our fidelity to the eucharistic table and to eucharistic life that the constancy of God’s offer of love is affirmed in the response of the beloved.

Questions and Answers

What are the Sacraments of Initiation?

Baptism, Confirmation and the Holy Eucharist, the foundations of every Christian life, are the sacraments of Christian initiation. Through these sacraments we are born anew, enriched with the gift of the Holy Spirit and receive ongoing nourishment of this new life in the Body of Christ.

What is Confirmation?

Confirmation is the second of the three sacraments of Christian Initiation.

It is that sacrament of the Church by which persons who have been baptized are anointed with Chrism in the laying on of hands. These persons are thereby enriched by the Holy Spirit in continuing the path of Christian Initiation.

What is the path of Christian Initiation which Confirmation enriches?

The new life bestowed upon us in baptism is our incorporation into the life-death-and-resurrection of Jesus Christ. By a certain analogy to our natural life, this new life in Christ develops in stages as in a journey along a path. At birth, we are welcomed into life; we are then received into a family and become bonded to its members. (We might think of how an adopted child receives, as it were, the 'spirit' of the new family.) Finally, we receive ongoing nourishment, and also become the givers of life and love to our family. By analogy, our new life in Christ comes to birth in baptism; it is strengthened or confirmed through the anointing with the Holy Spirit by which we are more perfectly bonded to the Church; through the ongoing nourishment of the Eucharistic table, this new life is continually renewed so that we might live it more fully day by day.

Why should Confirmation be celebrated prior to First Eucharist?

As a sacrament of Christian Initiation, Confirmation is most properly celebrated in relationship to Baptism and Eucharist. The Eucharist and not Confirmation is the summit or culmination of the initiation process. Holy Communion is the most perfect sign or sacramental ritual by which our incorporation in the Body of Christ is realized. Received in their traditional order, Baptism and Confirmation prepare us for the completion of initiation. It seems incongruous to place Confirmation after First Communion since the person will have already received the sign by which incorporation into Christ's Body is sacramentally perfected (cf. CCC 1212, 1322, 1324). When placed outside this order, the meaning of Confirmation is diminished, and it becomes a sacrament struggling for an identity and reason for existence.

The long tradition of the Church as reflected in the Code of Canon Law (canon 842.2) recognizes the intimate relationship between Baptism – Confirmation – Eucharist. Prior to St. Pius X's 1910 decision to make Eucharist available to children after the approximate age of seven, Confirmation was celebrated in the Roman Catholic Church prior to First Eucharist. Since 1910 the tendency has been to focus on the question of when (age) to celebrate the sacrament instead of concentrating on its integrity as a sacrament of Christian Initiation.

Who is the minister of the sacrament of Confirmation?

In our Roman Catholic tradition, the bishop is the ordinary minister of the sacrament of Confirmation. Through this sacrament the baptized are more perfectly bound to the Church by the gift of the Holy Spirit. The community of faith into which one is incorporated by Baptism is a larger reality than the family or the parish. As a member of the college of bishops, the diocesan bishop is guarantor and servant of the unity and catholicity of the Universal Church, and the living connection with its apostolic origins.

The gift of the Spirit bestowed by the risen and glorified Christ upon the apostles is now given through anointing with chrism by the laying on of the hand of the bishop.

When the bishop's presence is not possible (for example, at the Easter Vigil), priests who share the sacrament of Holy Orders with the Bishop, administer the sacrament of Confirmation in his stead for those who are celebrating the sacraments of Christian Initiation. Confirmation for those already baptized into the Catholic faith is reserved to the bishop unless in special circumstances he grants priests the faculty to confirm.

Who can receive the sacrament of Confirmation?

According to Church teaching, all who are baptized and properly instructed and who can renew their baptismal faith can receive the sacrament of Confirmation. Usually, this should be at the age of discretion (approximately seven years of age). Readiness for the reception of the sacrament of Confirmation is not measurable in terms of intellectual comprehension or theological understanding; rather, readiness is a matter of faith and ability to relate to the experience celebrated in the sacrament.

When our children are confirmed prior to First Eucharist, how are they to make an adult commitment to the Church?

Confirmation is neither the celebration of adulthood or maturity in the Church, nor an opportunity for making public commitment to the Christian life. It is the Eucharist itself which celebrates full citizenship in the Church, wherein the individual daily accepts the death and rising of the Lord Jesus in his or her life.

The Christian understanding of commitment is that it is a richer reality than a specific moment or time of decision. Commitment is the life-long, continuously developing identification with the Lord Jesus Christ – a commitment which is made, nourished, and strengthened in the reception of the Eucharist.

In a solemn ritual, the fully initiated are called upon each year to renew the promises of their baptism at the Easter Vigil or Easter Sunday. Having witnessed the sacramental dying and rising of the newest members of the Body of Christ, those who have already been fully incorporated into this Body now renew their own baptismal pledge to reject sin and entrust themselves to God, Father, Son and Spirit. While God's commitment to us will never be revoked, the temporal nature of our lives and the radical freedom to love, or to reject love make it necessary for us to continually embrace through our Amen the gift that God always holds out to us.

How can I keep my child in religious education or help him/her see the need for Catholic education if there is not something like Confirmation to anticipate?

Confirmation frequently has been viewed, if not treated, much like a graduation ceremony. This has never been the intention of the Church. Confirmation does not mark the completion of catechetical instruction or the achievement of maturity in the faith. Faith development and growth in understanding and living the Christian life is a life-long journey. It does not end with the eighth grade, twelfth grade, or a degree in religious studies! It may be for the best that Confirmation is received earlier in a child's moral and intellectual development so that there will be less of a tendency to suppose that the process of education and formation in the faith is now complete. No, this is the process of a lifetime.

Does removing Confirmation from the context of a junior high or high school program miss an opportunity for a much-needed ministry to our youth at a time when they are looking for recognition and a sense of belonging?

To make the Sacrament of Confirmation the focal point of a youth ministry has a certain attractiveness, but carries grave risks. Certain requirements or standards will be set up so that this sacrament will be “earned,” rather than offered as a gift. The normal and natural rebelliousness of youth may have overtaken the docility of a younger child. Remember, initiation concerns the beginning of one’s life in the Body of Christ. From a theological perspective, the gift of the Spirit is necessary to bring that life to maturity rather than being a kind of award for achieving a certain stage of emotional maturity.

Instead, the Sacrament of the Eucharist itself, living one’s life in accord with the Eucharist, the Sacrament of Penance, the Word of God and one’s vocation in the Body of Christ provide abundant avenues for developing Christian maturity in the context of sacramental life. Today it is becoming clearer that youth ministry should focus on preparation of our young people for the spiritual life of marriage and family. For the vast majority of people, marriage should be the most significant spiritual experience of their lives. Thus, the preparation of young people for this personal commitment to honor the mystery of life in the intimacy of a commitment to one’s spouse ought to receive particular attention.

CANONICAL REFERENCES

Canon 842.1: One who has not received baptism cannot be validly admitted to the other sacraments.

Canon 842.2: The sacraments of Baptism, Confirmation, and the Most Holy Eucharist are so interrelated that they are required for full Christian initiation.

Canon 891: The sacrament of confirmation is to be conferred on the faithful at about the age of discretion unless the conference of bishops determines another age or there is danger of death or in the judgment of the minister a grave cause urges otherwise.

CONSTITUTION ON THE SACRED LITURGY, #7: The rite of Confirmation is to be revised and the intimate connection with this sacrament has with the whole of Christian Initiation is to be more lucidly set forth.

RITE OF CONFIRMATION, 11: For pastoral reasons, especially to strengthen the faithful in complete obedience to Christ the Lord and in loyal testimony to him, episcopal conferences may choose an age which seems more appropriate, so that the sacrament is given at a more mature age after appropriate formation.

NATIONAL STATUES FOR THE CATECHUMENATE #14: In order to signify clearly the interrelation or coalescence of the three sacraments which are required for full Christian initiation (canon 842.2), adult candidates, including children of catechetical age, are to receive baptism, confirmation, and Eucharist at a single Eucharistic celebration, whether at the Easter Vigil or, if necessary, at some other time.

CATECHISM OF THE CATHOLIC CHURCH: 1306 Every baptized person not yet confirmed can and should receive the sacrament of Confirmation. [121] Since Baptism, Confirmation, and Eucharist form a unity, it follows that “the faithful are obligated to receive this sacrament at the appropriate time” [122] for without Confirmation and Eucharist, Baptism is certainly valid and efficacious, but Christian initiation remains incomplete.

CATECHISM OF THE CATHOLIC CHURCH: 1307 For centuries, Latin custom has indicated “the age of discretion” as the reference point for receiving Confirmation. But in danger of death children should be confirmed even if they have not yet attained the age of discretion [123].

CATECHISM OF THE CATHOLIC CHURCH: 1308 Although Confirmation is sometimes called the “sacrament of Christian maturity,” we must not confuse adult faith with the adult age of natural growth, nor forget that the baptismal grace is a grace of free, unmerited election and does not need “ratification” to become effective.