

St. Christopher Catholic Parish
Spring 2019 Confirmation Orientation

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I. Welcome!

Candidates: We are so happy you are interested in preparing for the Sacrament of Confirmation! Whether you are the first child in your family to be confirmed or the seventh, we want you to know that you are important to our parish family. More important, you are important to God. Because of these truths, we take your preparation seriously, and want to give you nothing short of the fullness of what the Catholic faith offers to each of us.

Parents: Thank you for supporting your child in their desire to receive this sacrament! Again, we want you to know, too, that you are greatly loved and important to our parish family and to our Heavenly Father. Thank you for the opportunity to walk beside you, support you, and assist you in forming your child closer to Jesus Christ, the Holy Spirit, and the Catholic Church through this preparation process.

II. What is Confirmation?

Before we dive into what preparing for this Sacrament looks like, it would be good to take a step back and look at what exactly you will be preparing *for*. Confirmation is often misunderstood, even by those who have already prepared for and received it!

First, Confirmation is one of the seven Sacraments of the Catholic Church. A **Sacrament** is a visible sign instituted by Christ of an invisible reality. Because He created us with both a body and a soul, God knows that physical phenomena are a significant way that we experience things, even God Himself. However, God desires us to experience Him spiritually, as well, so He gave us the Sacraments as ways to do both. Through the Sacraments, we experience a divine gift (called **Sacramental Grace**) through ordinary, physical things: water, wine, wheat, oil, etc. These graces come to us when these physical, everyday objects are infused with the Holy Spirit.

More specifically, Confirmation is a **Sacrament of Initiation**. Together, Baptism, Confirmation, and the Eucharist “lay the *foundation* of every Christian life” (*Catechism of the Catholic Church*, 1212). In receiving the Sacrament of Confirmation, no one

“completes” their faith or journey with Christ. Instead, we merely “complete” the beginning.

Confirmation is not an “optional” Sacrament; it is necessary to complete the grace we received at our Baptism (CCC 1285). In Confirmation, we receive a special outpouring of the Holy Spirit, just like the Apostles did at Pentecost (cf. Acts 2). Other **effects of Confirmation** include (list paraphrased and quoted from CCC 1303):

- It roots us more deeply in our sonship/daughtership of God
- It unites us more firmly to Christ
- It increases the gifts of the Holy Spirit in us
- It makes our bond with the Church more perfect
- It gives us a special strength of the Holy Spirit to spread and defend the faith by word and action as true witnesses of Christ, to confess the name of Christ boldly, and never to be ashamed of the Cross.

III. Who can be Confirmed?

Anyone who has been baptized in the Catholic Church, who has reached the age of reason (age 7), and has not yet received the Sacrament of Confirmation may prepare for Confirmation. Our pastor, in collaboration with our bishop, has set the age for Confirmation at 9th grade (in the Spring). (If you were baptized in a church other than the Catholic Church - Lutheran, Baptist, Methodist, etc. - please let us know so we can make proper arrangements!)

In Confirmation, it is not *we* who confirm/affirm our faith, but rather the Holy Spirit who chooses us again, ratifying His divine life within us. So, in one way, it is not our “choice” to be confirmed. However, God has created us with freewill, and we respect a candidate’s decision to prepare for Confirmation when he/she is *ready* and *able* to prepare. We know that oftentimes there is an abundance of outside pressure from family, tradition, or “Catholic guilt,” to be confirmed. However, we want you to know that no such pressure comes from our parish family. We respect your freewill to prepare for Confirmation when you are ready!

The Church gives the responsibility to prepare people for Confirmation to the parish. As such, if you are a parishioner of a different parish or regularly attend Mass at another parish, we invite you to join or begin celebrating Mass with our parish family at St. Christopher. If you discern not to join the parish, we encourage you to pursue Confirmation and the sacraments through your parish or where you normally worship.

IV. Preparation for Confirmation

If you desire to receive Confirmation and are ready to begin preparations, we are very excited for you! Again, we consider it a privilege to help you prepare, and we want to give you nothing but the best. Ultimately, we hope to prepare you to live the effects of Confirmation (listed above), especially the last effect:

“To spread and defend the faith by word and action as true witnesses of Christ, to confess the name of Christ boldly, and never to be ashamed of the Cross.”

At St. Christopher Parish, we do this in a variety of ways, all aiming to deepen your relationship with Jesus, His Holy Spirit, and His Catholic Church. Preparing for any Sacrament also involves both **Remote Preparation** and **Immediate Preparation**, described in more detail below.

A. People involved in Confirmation preparation:

You will encounter a variety of people and roles as you prepare! They include:

- **Candidate:** That’s you – the person preparing to be confirmed.
- **Parent:** You likely call them “Mom” and “Dad.” They have an important role to play! The Church calls them the “primary catechists” and first models of the faith. Learn from them!
- **Sponsor:** We all need people (in addition to our parents) to look up to and model for us what it means to be an adult. The same is true for our faith. Your sponsor will walk with you, guide you, and pray with you throughout your preparation. You will have the opportunity to select a Sponsor that meets the following requirements. Sponsors should be:
 - At least 18 years old (and have graduated High School by 2018)
 - A *confirmed, practicing* Catholic
 - Someone other than your parents
 - Someone you can meet with *in person* on a monthly basis
 - Someone whose faith life is inspiring and a good example for you
- **Program Coordinator:** Doug Ulaszek. My job is to help you prepare for this great sacrament, and help you encounter Christ in a deeper way. I’m always here to support candidates, parents, and sponsors!
- **Program Assistant:** Laura Zakrzewski. Laura helps Doug with paperwork, emails, and administrative duties. Don’t be caught off guard by an email from her, and don’t be afraid to reach out to her if you need any help, too!

B. Remote Preparation

Remote Preparation involves instruction and development of the basic knowledge and skills needed to succeed in any endeavor. In basketball, this would include running, shooting, passing, and dribbling. For the faith, this includes a regular pursuit of our parish's mission statement – **Meet Christ. Follow Christ. Bear Christ.** For Sacramental preparation (such as Confirmation), the standard set by the Diocese of Madison is for two full years of remote preparation before receiving the sacrament (for a Spring of 9th grade Confirmation, this would mean both the 8th grade and 9th grade years). Pursuing this mission statement means the following:

Meet Christ: A habit of meeting Christ at the Mass on Sundays and Holy Days of Obligation, personal prayer, and more intensive times of prayer, such as through a retreat experience. Candidates are assumed to have adequate remote preparation in this area by meeting the following *minimum requirements*:

- Demonstrated attendance at Holy Mass on Sundays and Holy Days of Obligation (see note on Mass attendance later in this document)
- Participation in a retreat experience during both years of remote preparation
 - This includes pilgrimages, Steubenville Conferences, Love Begins Here, and any other retreat approved by the pastor or program coordinator.

Follow Christ: Learning about Christ, His teachings, and His Church and striving to live those teachings in everyday life. Most often, this looks like formal religious instruction, such as in a Catholic school or through the parish's Religious Education program. The standard for formation set by the Diocese of Madison is 30 hours of instruction per school year. Candidates are assumed to have adequate remote preparation in this area by meeting the following *minimum requirements*:

- Participation in religious instruction that meets the standards set by the Diocese of Madison (can be checked through the pastor or program coordinator) for at least 30 hours in both years of remote preparation
- Demonstrated knowledge or grasping of the concepts expected of young people in those respective grade levels (according to the Diocese of Madison's *Catechetical Standards and Benchmarks*)

Bear Christ: Bringing the love of Christ to others through our witness, our service to the poor, and investing in our parish through stewardship and tithing. Candidates are assumed to have adequate remote preparation in this area by meeting the following *minimum requirements*:

- Completion of 15 hours of service to the parish and/or the poor during each year of remote preparation (through Religious Education or Youth Ministry, Love Begins Here, and other works of service approved by the pastor or program coordinator).

C. Immediate Preparation

Immediate Preparation involves instruction in and practice of the specific skills pertaining to a particular endeavor. In basketball, this would include the rules of the game, running plays, and planning for various game situations. For Confirmation, this includes instruction about the Sacrament itself, its effects on the soul, and how to cooperate with the grace it imparts. Immediate preparation for candidates includes the following:

1) Request for Confirmation and Registration

Each year, the parish holds an informational meeting for any families interested in learning more about the immediate preparation process for Confirmation and what to expect. All families with 8th grade teens or older who have not been confirmed are particularly encouraged to attend.

St. Christopher Parish then invites potential candidates to formally make a request to the pastor to begin preparing to receive the Sacrament of Confirmation. This request is made by submitting an online registration form. This form allows us to gather some basic information and communication preferences as well as get to know each candidate and family better. It also asks potential candidates and their parents to reflect on their reasons for pursuing the sacrament of Confirmation at the present time.

The registration form will be open for a period of months through the parish website. This year, the registration form will close on April 1, 2018. After this time, requests to begin immediate preparation for Confirmation will be evaluated on a case-by-case basis. A nominal fee is also asked of families at this time to help cover basic costs of materials for preparation (including books, the Confirmation Mass, and retreat day).

In addition to submitting the registration form, each candidate must submit a recently issued certification of their Baptism from the parish at which they were baptized (this is completed by calling the parish of Baptism and requesting a record to be sent to St. Christopher Parish). Each candidate's family should also be formally registered with St. Christopher Parish (can be done by contacting the Parish Office).

We highly encourage families to take sufficient time remotely preparing their candidate before they begin the immediate preparation process. Before completing the Application for Confirmation, candidates should be able to demonstrate that they have sufficient remote preparation to begin.

2) Parent-Led Formation

During their immediate preparation, candidates will work through the *Decision Point* curriculum on Confirmation through Dynamic Catholic. This engaging, video-based study aims to prepare young people not only for Confirmation, but to be the best-versions-of-themselves each and every day of their life. As primary catechists, we want to empower parents to lead their teens closer to Christ and deeper into His Catholic Church.

Each candidate will receive a student workbook and a leader guide to use as they journey through the curriculum. *Decision Point* videos are all available for free online, and are therefore accessible 24/7. Sets of DVDs are also available through the parish for those families who desire them.

Candidates and parents have the freedom to work through the *Decision Point* curriculum at a pace that suits them. However, there will be two checkpoints throughout the year to ensure that all candidates are moving through at a normal pace (and do not binge-watch the entire program in one sitting to get it done!). One checkpoint will take place in the Fall of 9th grade, and other checkpoint in the Spring of 9th grade.

To help equip parents to lead their teen through this curriculum, a series of parent workshops will be offered each month, focused on each lesson of *Decision Point*. Each parent will be expected to attend an orientation to the program in the Spring of 8th grade (after the registration deadline for Confirmation) in order to learn the ins and outs of the curriculum and learn strategies to convey its content to their teen. After a short time in which to being the curriculum with their teens, parents will be expected to attend one follow-up workshop to recap and reflect on the experience with other parents. Finally, monthly workshops focusing on individual lessons in the *Decision Point* program will be offered for any parents who wish to receive added knowledge, extra support, and shared conversation about the topics with each other.

3) Sponsors and Sponsor Discussions

Sponsors, just like our godparents at Baptism, help guide their candidate into a deeper relationship with Jesus Christ and His Catholic Church. While preparation for Confirmation at the parish eventually concludes, the sponsor's duties and relationship with their candidate lasts for life. Part of the preparation process entails establishing and deepening this faith-centered relationship between candidate and sponsor.

Candidates will need to select a proper sponsor and have them attain a letter of good standing from their pastor (see the parish website for this form). Please see above for specific requirements for sponsors. ***Sponsor forms should be turned in from the Sponsor's parish no later than May 31.***

Once a sponsor has been selected, they will be asked to go through our Sponsor Formation program online. This formation helps ensure our sponsors are properly equipped to guide their candidate into a deeper relationship with Christ and His Church. It also gives practical training on how to talk about the faith with teens, a prospect many sponsors find daunting. Sponsor formation should be completed by August 31 so that candidate discussions can begin in September of 9th grade.

As part of the formation, sponsors will also receive instruction on how to conduct six discussions with their candidate throughout their immediate preparation. These discussions will have monthly due dates and should happen during the month prior to each due date. Discussions are designed to take about 2 hours. Unless coordinated with the pastor or program coordinator, all sponsor discussions must take place in person between candidate and sponsor. As you discern your sponsor, please find one who can commit to meeting with you monthly and in person!

If you need help finding a suitable sponsor, please do not hesitate to ask for help. There are many excellent and loving disciples of Christ in our own parish who would be honored to walk with your candidate!

4) Confirmation Retreat

All candidates are required to participate in the Confirmation Retreat, to be scheduled shortly before Confirmation in the Spring of 9th grade. A retreat is a crucial part of your preparation for Confirmation. Retreats allow us to separate ourselves from the everyday stresses and anxieties of life, allowing us to more clearly hear the ways that God speaks to us. The Confirmation retreat will be held at the parish (or nearby) and will likely include candidates from other area parishes. Due to its key nature in preparation, only grave reasons for an absence will be considered, and these must be discussed with the program coordinator well in advance of the retreat. Candidates who do miss the retreat for a grave reason will be asked to attend a separate retreat.

5) Confirmation Conference

Shortly before Confirmation, each candidate will be asked to schedule a 20-30 min. conference with the program coordinator or the pastor. In this discussion, candidates will be asked about their reasons for wanting to be confirmed as well as about their preparation. This includes their participation in all the aspects of preparation outlined in this packet – candidates should be able to discuss things they have learned and ways they have been impacted through their preparation!

In this meeting, candidates will also be asked to demonstrate a basic understanding of the Sacrament of Confirmation. A study guide of questions to know will be made available during the immediate preparation process for parents to help their candidate master.

6) Confirmation Rehearsal & Mass

The day, time, and location of Confirmation will not be determined until the late Fall. We appreciate your patience with the scheduling process, and we promise to send that information out to all families as soon as we have a date scheduled with the bishop! Typically, Confirmations are celebrated on Wednesday evenings, Saturday evenings, or Sunday afternoons. Rehearsal for Confirmation typically takes place shortly before the Mass; candidates should plan to arrive with their sponsor 90 minutes before Mass.

D. After Confirmation

Many times, we are tempted to believe that Confirmation is a finish line. However, it is anything but an end! Rather, Confirmation completes Christian *Initiation*, meaning that it is the end of a *beginning*. As such, we expect the habits our candidates form during their remote and immediate preparation for Confirmation bear fruit in their active and conscious participation in parish life. Serving others, prayer, the Sacraments, and even learning the faith are endeavors to pursue at every stage in life. As such, St. Christopher Parish has worked diligently to establish a vibrant and active High School Ministry for all our teens to participate in during all four years of High School. Please plan on participating in this and in parish life after Confirmation!

A Note About Mass Attendance

Weekly participation at Holy Mass on all Sundays and Holy Days of Obligation is an expectation of God (cf. the Third Commandment) and also a precept of the Catholic Church (meaning fulfillment of this precept is required if we want to say we are practicing Catholics! – see the *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, paragraphs 2041-2043). More importantly, the Holy Mass is the re-celebration of the saving Sacrifice of Jesus Christ – through the Mass, we receive each Sunday the graces we need to live the Christian life during the other six days of the week.

To be Catholic – which the Sacrament of Confirmation helps us attain – means to worship the Blessed Trinity in the Holy Mass. To desire Confirmation without a spirit of obedience to this precept contradicts our Faith and the Sacrament of Confirmation (not to mention imperils our own souls!).

If you are not currently in the habit of participating in Holy Mass on a weekly basis, we invite you to begin anew. Our Heavenly Father is waiting with open arms to welcome us back to His home, just like the father of the prodigal son (cf. Lk. 15). Through the Sacrament of Confession, we can be made ready to receive the Lord once more in Holy Communion, and begin to live the life of Faith once more! Please embrace this offer of God’s mercy! To quote Pope Francis: “God never tires of forgiving us; we are the ones who tire of seeking His mercy.”

Therefore, only candidates who are in the habit of attending Mass on a weekly basis can be fully prepared for Confirmation. To help candidates and their families build and stay committed to this habit, our parish has instituted a Mass attendance check for all Confirmation candidates.

Each candidate will receive a packet of “cards” for each Sunday Mass and Holy Day of Obligation. For each Sunday, candidates should write their name legibly on the corresponding card and drop it in the collection basket during Mass. These cards will be sorted out and recorded by the parish staff. *If you forget to bring your card, a stack of blank cards will be available to grab before Mass (near the Usher’s Room in Verona and in the narthex in Paoli).*

Candidates who are out of town on a particular Sunday should grab a bulletin from the parish where they participate at Mass and turn it in to the parish office **as soon as possible**. It is assumed that candidates who are preparing for Confirmation at this parish participate in Mass at the parish – therefore, bulletins from other area parishes will not be accepted (exceptions can be made in certain circumstances, but this should not be the norm). For extended travel periods, candidates are expected to make arrangements with the program coordinator. If you have a grave reason and need to miss a Sunday Mass, a dispensation may be granted by the pastor.

After 3 unexcused absences from Mass, candidates and their parents will be asked to meet with the pastor and program coordinator to discuss their particular situation and circumstances. It is possible for preparation to be extended in order to allow candidates and their families more time to build this important habit.