

RITE OF CONFIRMATION: INTRODUCTION

STRUCTURE

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I DIGNITY OF CONFIRMATION

1. Those who have been baptised 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.
2. This giving of the Holy Spirit conforms 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.

II OFFICES AND MINISTRIES IN THE CELEBRATION OF CONFIRMATION

3. It is the responsibility of the people of God to prepare the baptised for confirmation. It is the responsibility of the pastors to see that all the baptised come to the fullness of Christian initiation and are carefully prepared for confirmation.

Adult catechumens, who are to be confirmed immediately after baptism, have the help of the Christian community and, in particular, the formation which is given to them during the catechumenate, catechesis, and common liturgical celebrations. Catechists, sponsors, and members of the local church should participate in the catechumenate. The steps of the catechumenate will be appropriately adapted to those who, baptised in infancy, are confirmed only as adults.

The initiation of children into the sacramental life is for the most part the responsibility and concern of Christian parents. They are to form and gradually increase a spirit of faith in the children and, with the help of catechetical institutions, prepare them for the fruitful reception of the sacraments of confirmation and the eucharist. The role of the parents is also expressed by their active participation in the celebration of the sacraments.

4. Attention should be paid to the festive and solemn character of the liturgical service, especially its significance for the local church, especially if all the candidates are assembled for a common celebration. The whole people of God, represented by the families and friends

of the candidates and by members of the local community, will be invited to take part in the celebration and will express its faith in the fruits of the Holy Spirit.

5. Ordinarily there should be a sponsor for each of those to be confirmed. The sponsor brings the candidate to receive the sacrament, presents him to the minister for the anointing, and will later help him to fulfil his baptismal promises faithfully under the influence of the Holy Spirit.

In view of contemporary pastoral circumstances, it is desirable that the godparent at baptism, if present, also be the sponsor at confirmation; canon 796, no. 1 is abrogated. This change expresses more clearly the relationship between baptism and confirmation and also makes the function and responsibility of the sponsor more effective.

Nonetheless the choice of a special sponsor for confirmation is not excluded. Even the parents themselves may present their children for confirmation. It is for the local Ordinary to determine diocesan practice in the light of local circumstances.

6. Pastors will see that the sponsor, chosen by the candidate or his family, is spiritually qualified for the office and satisfies these requirements:
 - a) that he be sufficiently mature for this role;
 - b) that he belong to the Catholic Church and have been initiated in the three sacraments of baptism, confirmation, and the eucharist;
 - c) that he be not prohibited by law from exercising the role of sponsor.
7. The ordinary minister of confirmation is the bishop. Ordinarily the sacrament is administered by the bishop so that there will be a more evident relationship to the first pouring forth of the Holy Spirit on Pentecost. After the apostles were filled with the Holy Spirit, they themselves gave the Spirit to the faithful through the laying on of their hands. Thus the reception of the Spirit through the ministry of the bishop shows the close bond which joins the confirmed to the Church and the mandate to be witnesses of Christ among men.

In addition to the bishop, the law gives the faculty to confirm to the following:

- a) apostolic administrators who are not bishops, prelates or abbots nullius, vicars and prefects apostolic, vicars capitular, within the limits of their territory and while they hold office;
 - b) priests who, in virtue of an office which they lawfully hold, baptise an adult or a child old enough for catechesis or receive a validly baptised adult into full communion with the Church;
 - c) in danger of death, provided a bishop is not easily available or is lawfully impeded: pastors and parochial vicars; in their absence, parochial associates; priests who are in charge of special parishes lawfully established; administrators; substitutes; and assistants;¹ in the absence of all of the preceding, any priest who is not subject to censure or canonical penalty.
8. In case of true necessity and special reason, for example, the large number of persons to be confirmed, the minister of confirmation mentioned in no. 7 or the extraordinary minister designated by special indult of the Apostolic See or by law may associate other priests with himself in the administration of this sacrament.

It is required that these priests:

- a) have a particular function or office in the diocese, namely, vicars general, episcopal vicars or delegates, district or regional vicars,² or those who by mandate of the Ordinary hold equivalent offices; or
- b) be the pastors of the places where confirmation is conferred, pastors of the places where the candidates belong, or priests who have had a special part in the catechetical preparation of the candidates.

III CELEBRATION OF THE SACRAMENT

9. The sacrament of confirmation is conferred through the anointing with chrism on the forehead, which is done by the laying on of the hand, and through the words: **Be sealed with the Gift of the Holy Spirit.**

Even though the laying of hands on the candidates with the prayer **All-powerful God** does not pertain to the valid giving of the sacrament, it is to be strongly emphasised for the integrity of the rite and the fuller understanding of the sacrament.

Priests who are sometimes associated with the principal minister in conferring the sacrament join him in laying their hands on all the candidates together, but they do not say the prayer.

The whole rite has a twofold meaning. The laying of hands on the candidates by the bishop and the concelebrating priests is the biblical gesture by which the gift of the Holy Spirit is invoked. This is well adapted to the understanding of the Christian people. The anointing with chrism and the accompanying words express clearly the effects of the giving of the Holy Spirit. Signed with the perfumed oil, the baptised person receives the indelible character, the seal of the Lord, together with the gift of the Spirit, which conforms him more closely to Christ and gives him the grace of spreading the Lord's presence among men.

10. The chrism is consecrated by the bishop in the Mass which is ordinarily celebrated on Holy Thursday for this purpose.
11. Adult catechumens and children who are baptised at an age when they are old enough for catechesis should ordinarily be admitted to confirmation and the eucharist at the same time they receive baptism. If this is impossible, they should receive confirmation in a common celebration (see no. 4). Similarly, adults who were baptised in infancy should, after suitable preparation, receive confirmation and the eucharist in a common celebration.

With regard to children, in the Latin Church the administration of confirmation is generally postponed until about the seventh year. For pastoral reasons, however, 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.

In this case the necessary precautions should be taken so that children will be confirmed at the proper time, even before the use of reason, where there is danger of death or other serious difficulty. They should not be deprived of the benefit of this sacrament.

12. One must be baptised to receive the sacrament of confirmation. In addition, if the baptised person has the use of reason, it is required that he be in a state of grace, properly instructed, and able to renew his baptismal promises.

It is the responsibility of the episcopal conferences to determine more precisely the pastoral methods for the preparation of children for confirmation.

With regard to adults, the same principles should be followed, with suitable adaptations, which are in effect in individual diocese, for the admission of catechumens to baptism and the eucharist. In particular, suitable catechesis should precede confirmation, and there should be sufficient effective relationship of the candidates with the Christian community and with individual members of the faithful to assist in their formation. This formation should be directed toward their giving the witness of a Christian life and exercising the Christian apostolate, while developing a genuine desire to participate in the eucharist (see *Christian Initiation of Adults, Introduction*, 19).

Sometimes the preparation of a baptised adult for confirmation is part of his preparation for marriage. In such cases, if it is foreseen that the conditions for a fruitful reception of confirmation cannot be satisfied, the local Ordinary will judge whether it is better to defer confirmation until after the marriage.

If one who has the use of reason is confirmed in danger of death, he should be prepared spiritually, so far as possible, depending upon the circumstances of the individual case.

13. Ordinarily confirmation takes place within Mass in order to express more clearly the fundamental connection of this sacrament with the entirety of Christian initiation. The latter reaches its culmination in the communion of the body and blood of Christ. The newly confirmed should therefore participate in the eucharist which completes their Christian initiation.

If the candidates for confirmation are children who have not received the eucharist and are not admitted to their first communion at this liturgical celebration or if there are other special circumstances, confirmation should be celebrated outside Mass. When this occurs, there should first be a celebration of the word of God.

It is fitting that the minister of confirmation celebrate the Mass or, better, concelebrate the Mass, especially with the priests who may join him in the administration of the sacrament.

If the Mass is celebrated by someone else, it is proper that the bishop preside over the liturgy of the word and that he give the blessing at the end of Mass.

Emphasis should be given to the celebration of the word of God which begins the rite of confirmation. It is from the hearing of the word of God that the many-sided power of the Holy Spirit flows upon the Church and upon each one of the baptised and confirmed, and it is by this word that God's will is manifest in the life of Christians.

The saying of the Lord's Prayer by the newly confirmed with the rest of the people is also of very great importance, whether during Mass before communion or outside Mass before the blessing. because it is the Spirit who prays in us, and in the Spirit the Christian says 'Abba, Father'.

14. The pastor should record the names of the minister, those confirmed, parents and sponsors, and the date and place of confirmation in a special book. The notation in the baptismal register should also be made according to law.
15. If the pastor of the newly-confirmed person is not present, the minister should promptly inform him of the confirmation, either personally or through a representative.

IV ADAPTATIONS IN THE RITE OF CONFIRMATION

16. In virtue of the Constitution on the Sacred Liturgy (art. 63b), episcopal conferences have the right to prepare a title in particular rituals corresponding to this title of the Roman Pontifical on confirmation. This is to be adapted to the needs of individual regions so that, after confirmation of their action by the Apostolic See, the ritual may be used in the territory.³
17. The episcopal conference will consider whether, in view of local circumstances and the culture and traditions of the people, it is opportune:
 - a) to make suitable adaptations of the formulas for the renewal of baptismal promises and professions, either following the text in the rite of baptism or accommodating these formulas to the circumstances of the candidates for confirmation;
 - b) to introduce a different manner for the minister to give the sign of peace after the anointing, either to each individual or to all the newly confirmed together.
18. The minister of confirmation may introduce some explanations into the rite in individual cases in view of the capacity of candidates for confirmation. He may also make appropriate accommodations in the existing texts, for example, by expressing these in a kind of dialogue, especially with children.

When confirmation is given by a minister who is not a bishop, whether by concession of the general law or by special indult of the Apostolic See, it is fitting for him to mention in the homily that the bishop is the original minister of the sacrament and the reason why priests receive the faculty to confirm from the law or by an indult of the Apostolic See.

V PREPARATIONS

19. The following should be prepared for confirmation:
 - a) vestments for the celebration of Mass, for the bishop and for the priests who concelebrate with him; if the bishop does not concelebrate the Mass, he and the priests who may administer confirmation with him should participate in the Mass wearing the vestments for confirmation: alb, stole, and for the minister of confirmation, cope; these vestments are also worn for confirmation outside Mass;
 - b) chairs for the bishop and the priests;
 - c) vessel or vessels of chrism;
 - d) Roman Pontifical or Ritual;
 - e) preparations for Mass and, for communion under both kinds, if it is given in this way;
 - f) preparations for the washing of the ministers' hands after the anointing.

ENDNOTES

- 1 See canons 451, 471, 476, 216, §4, 472, 474, 475.
- 2 See canon 217, §1.
- 3 See *Christian Initiation, General Instruction*, nos. 30.3, above.