

Sacrament of Confirmation



Recommendations for Parish Program Guidelines

**Office of Education, Evangelization, & Catechesis (OEEC)
Archdiocese of Hartford**

Introduction

The following are recommendations for parish program guidelines offered by the faith formation team of the OEEC in regards to preparation for the Sacrament of Confirmation for adolescents in parish communities within the Archdiocese of Hartford. These recommendations are **not** to be confused with the Archdiocesan Sacramental Guidelines, which detail official Canon Law/Church Doctrine on the requirements for the administration of the Holy Sacraments for the Archdiocese of Hartford. These recommendations are a direct result of the many innovative ideas, common suggestions, and overwhelming concerns brought to the attention of the OEEC staff by numerous clergy, parish directors of religious education, catechists, parents, and youth ministers. It is our hope that these recommendations assist all pastors and parish catechetical leaders in the planning and implementation of a solid and fruitful Confirmation preparation program for adolescents, and that this catechetical ministry helps parish communities form faithful missionary disciples of our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ.

A. Resources and Materials

- Become familiar with the USCCB Conformity List for approved Confirmation resources: <http://www.usccb.org/about/evangelization-and-catechesis/subcommittee-on-catechism/upload/Current-Conformity-List.pdf>
- Please note that the Conformity List is updated frequently.
- Also note that most catechetical resources include Scripture and teachings from the Catechism of the Catholic Church.
- Additional materials may be used **in conjunction** with programs and resources from the USCCB Conformity List. However, please be sure that the additional resource material is truly Catholic and consistent with Catholic doctrine.
- Avoid using only one resource/material for the entire preparation/program. This ministry is not a “one-size-fits-all.” Be flexible and open to the various up-to-date resources available for today’s youth and their reality.
- Using online resources and digital media **in conjunction** with programs and resources from the USCCB Conformity List is *highly* encouraged, as long as they are Catholic and consistent with Catholic doctrine.
- All resources from the USCCB Conformity List include Scripture; therefore any additional resources and materials should include references to Scripture.
- Opportunities for in-depth Scripture study should be offered either during Confirmation preparation or through youth ministry.
- The ***Revised Order of Confirmation*** implemented in the United States on the Feast of Pentecost, May 15, 2016 is normative.
- Consider using the resource, [Guide for Celebrating Confirmation](#) by Paul Turner, published by Liturgy Training Publications in 2016 to support the Revised Order of Confirmation.

B. Length of Program

- “Preparation” should be offered for candidates for the entirety of 9th grade year of schooling/ freshman year; all preparation requirements must be completed by the end of 9th grade (Year 1).
- 10th grade should be reserved for the administration of the Sacrament of Confirmation— either in the fall or the spring (Year 2).
- Candidates should meet weekly or biweekly for no less than 1 hour per session. Two or more hours per session is highly recommended.
- Avoid promoting Confirmation preparation solely for “9th graders” so that those who missed this time period may decide to join the preparation program. Consider using “Year 1” and “Year 2” to refer to the different stages.
- Adult Confirmation classes should be recommended to all parishioners over the age of 18 who inquire about receiving the Sacrament of Confirmation. However, if the parishioner is 17 years old, avoid encouraging them to “wait” for Adult Confirmation, as this may result in a lost opportunity to form this person in their faith. Instead, invite all youth under the age of 18 into the parish Confirmation Preparation Program. For questions or concerns, please contact the OEEC.

C. Retreats

- It is highly recommended that all candidates participate in at least one Confirmation retreat; this retreat must be solely focused on the Sacrament of Confirmation.
- The retreat should be held at a Catholic retreat center within the Archdiocese of Hartford (please see the list below), or in a parish if funding is limited.
- Retreats may be run by the parish DRE or catechists; however it is highly recommended that Catholic retreat centers provide their own retreat facilitators, or that the parish contract an external (approved) Catholic facilitator, distinct from the parish team.
- An approved retreat leader/facilitator may be hired/contracted to facilitate the retreat at the parish or at the Catholic retreat center; please go to the OEEC website to download the suitability form required by all speakers: www.catholicedaohct.org. The OEEC also has a list of potential retreat leaders/speakers.
- Failure to use the suitability form may put your parish, youth, and families at risk for:
 - 1) teachings that are not faithful to the Magisterium of the Catholic Church,
 - 2) connecting minors with persons who are not VIRTUS trained, and/or
 - 3) contracting persons with a criminal record or pending charges.
- Please be aware that retreat facilitators should not request an unreasonable monetary stipend for retreat facilitation. For any questions or concerns, please do not hesitate to contact the OEEC.
- A youth rally or youth conference may not take the place of a Confirmation retreat.
- 1-day Confirmation retreats should be at least 5-8 hours long.

- Weekend retreats are permitted as long as the theme is centered on the Sacrament of Confirmation or a related topic.
- Catholic Retreat Centers within the Archdiocese of Hartford:
 - <https://www.holyfamilyretreat.org/>
 - https://www.ascjus.org/Caritas_Christi_Center
 - <http://www.ourladyofcalvary.net/>
 - <https://www.msbt.org/trinita/>
 - <https://www.mercybythesea.org/>
 - <http://www.stseminary.org/>

D. Reconciliation

“To receive Confirmation one must be in a state of grace. One should receive the sacrament of Penance in order to be cleansed for the gift of the Holy Spirit.”¹

- Teen Penance Services are highly encouraged and should include an age-appropriate Examination of Conscience (EC). The following are two wonderful resources for an EC:
 1. <http://www.catholiceducation.org/en/education/catholic-contributions/examination-of-conscience-for-teenagers.html>
 2. <http://www.usccb.org/prayer-and-worship/sacraments-and-sacramentals/penance/sacrament-reconciliation-young-adults-examination-of-conscience.cfm>
- It is acceptable to plan a Communal Penance Service with the opportunity for individual confession of sins. General absolution is not permitted under any circumstance.

E. Christian Service Opportunities

Service flows from faith and is at the heart of what it means to be a Christian. It is *the* response to Catholic Social Teaching, which Jesus modeled in His willingness to serve those with whom he came in contact, particularly the poor and marginalized. Jesus continues to serve us each day and calls us to live out our Catholic faith. Service projects should be transformational; for this reason, Christian Service is a critical component of the Sacramental preparation of a candidate.

- Candidates should participate in 15-20 hours of service, for which:
 - 1) no compensation is received,
 - 2) does not include any liturgical ministry such as (but not limited to) altar service, and
 - 3) does not involve office or clerical duties.
- It is highly recommended— with great emphasis— that candidates be involved in service projects that specifically respond to the *Corporal Works of Mercy*. Please refer to the

¹ *Catechism of the Catholic Church*. #1310.

USCCB website for more information:

<http://www.usccb.org/beliefs-and-teachings/how-we-teach/new-evangelization/jubilee-of-mercy/the-corporal-works-of-mercy.cfm>

- If possible, candidates should be encouraged to explore several different opportunities to live out their Catholic faith. In other words, the number of hours given to one specific stewardship experience (service) should be limited. This will prevent a candidate from obtaining all of their service hours (15-20) at only one location.
- It is acceptable to have a Confirmation class work together in Christian service. These types of opportunities provide space for conversation and reflection.
- Leaders of Confirmation Preparation Programs should intentionally seek ways to draw connections between the works of mercy selected by the Confirmation Candidates and Catholic Social Teaching.
- Upon completion, it is vital that candidates be asked to reflect upon how they lived out the mission of Catholic social teaching/action through their service experiences. This should be done either in written or verbal form. This reflection process is called "theological reflection."

F. Confirmation Name

Choosing a Confirmation name is a tradition in some cultures, including our own. Naming is an important element in Sacred Scripture as we see when Abram becomes Abraham, Jacob becomes Israel, and in the New Testament Simon is renamed Peter by Jesus. To that end:

- Although a Confirmation name is not required, it is recommended that each candidate choose a Confirmation name.
- Choosing a meaningful Confirmation name should be an enlightening experience for candidates, therefore it is recommended that it not be forced upon the candidate if they decide to keep their baptismal name. This may provide an opportunity for the candidate to discover the meaning of their own name and their parent's choice of it.
- Confirmation names must be the name of a particular saint or a person the candidate personally knows who embodies a virtuous life (like a grandmother, etc.).
- The name chosen must not be contrary to Christian sentiment.
- A name from either gender may be chosen.
- It is recommended that the candidate demonstrate a strong knowledge of the saint or the person whose name they chose, through written or verbal form.

G. Sponsors

The Archdiocesan Sacramental Guidelines clearly state the basic requirements for all Confirmation Sponsors as the following: Sponsors must be

- 1) fully initiated into the Catholic Church,
- 2) 16 years of age or older,
- 3) cannot be a parent of the candidate, and
- 4) an active and faithful Catholic.

Confirmation Sponsors must also complete the Archdiocesan Godparent/Sponsor Form which was approved by the Presbyteral Council in January 2016. It is available

In addition to these requirements, these are some important recommendations to consider:

- Ordinarily, candidates should choose a Sponsor that lives in close proximity to the candidate. By choosing a sponsor who lives close by, more opportunities for genuine encounters can take place.
- Parents should kindly be reminded that choosing a Sponsor is a decision that must be made prayerfully.
- Candidates can be reminded that the persons chosen as their Godparents at Baptism can also serve as the Confirmation Sponsor.
- The parish should organize at least one gathering of sponsors and candidates in the form of a reflection night/morning, retreat, prayer service, or something similar in order to encourage more moments for growth in faith.
- Parishes should help Sponsors fully understand and embrace their important role in the preparation/celebration of this sacrament.

We recommend that candidates consider the following questions when choosing a sponsor:

1. Does this person have a strong relationship with Jesus?
2. Have they developed a prayerful life?
3. Do they regularly attend Mass and are committed to parish life?
4. Is this person someone with whom I can have a meaningful conversation?

H. Homeschooling

It is recommended that homeschooling for Confirmation preparation be permitted only for families who already homeschool their children. This means that parents who have been consistently homeschooling their children throughout their academic and religious education experience may continue to do so for Confirmation preparation. However, the parish should maintain communication with each homeschooling family throughout the preparation period in order to uphold accountability either through verbal or written form.

Even so, it is important that homeschooling families fully understand and comply with all parish Confirmation preparation requirements such as, but not limited to:

- Regular Mass attendance
- Attendance at parent meetings
- Participation in Confirmation retreats
- Completion of Christian Service Projects
- Participation in Reconciliation services
- Other Confirmation gatherings, events, activities, etc.

I. Youth Ministry

Recommendations to consider:

- Parishes should begin to provide ample opportunities to intentionally integrate Confirmation & Youth Ministry programs. This will first require a fruitful dialogue between pastors, catechists, and youth ministers.
- These opportunities must help candidates to begin to view Youth Ministry as their *own* ministry, as a post-Confirmation continuation of their lifelong faith formation where they will continue to grow deeper in their relationship with Jesus Christ.
- Parishes should offer Youth Ministry as a space for post-Confirmation youth to gather in prayer with other youth, be accompanied by loving mentors and peer ministers, go on trips, study Scripture, and be formed in parish ministries, and much, much more.
- It is recommended that parishes make connections with the Archdiocesan Director of Youth & Young Adult Ministry in order to initiate or improve parish Youth Ministry efforts.

J. Youth with Disabilities

All Catholics, including those with disabilities, have the right to celebrate the Sacrament of Confirmation, by reason of their Baptism. Children and youth with disabilities are not bound by a required Religious Education curriculum. In as much as the timing and frequency of instruction can be adapted to the child's particular needs and abilities.

The following excerpts are from the revised edition of the USCCB's *Pastoral Statement on the Guidelines for the Celebration of the Sacraments with Persons with Disabilities*:

- *“Those who have been baptized continue on the path of Christian Initiation through the Sacrament of Confirmation.” In this way, they receive the Holy Spirit, conforming them more perfectly to Christ and strengthening them so that they may “bear witness to Christ for the building up of his Body in faith and charity.”²²*
- *Parents, those who care for persons with disabilities, and shepherds of souls—especially pastors—are to see to it that the faithful who have been baptized receive the formation*

*needed for the Sacrament of Confirmation and approach it at the appropriate time.*²³
*“The diocesan bishop is obliged to take care that the Sacrament of Confirmation is conferred on subjects who properly and reasonably seek it.”*²⁴

- *Confirmation is to be conferred on the faithful between the age of discretion (which is about the age of seven) and about sixteen years of age, within the limits determined by the diocesan bishop, or when there is a danger of death, or in the judgment of the minister a grave cause urges otherwise.*²⁵
- *All baptized Catholics who possess the use of reason may receive the Sacrament of Confirmation if they are “suitably instructed, properly disposed and able to renew the baptismal promises.”*²⁶ *Persons who because of intellectual or developmental disabilities may never attain the use of reason can receive the Sacrament of Confirmation and should be encouraged either directly or, if necessary, through their parents, to receive it. It is important that they receive the pastoral guidance needed, along with the welcome and embrace of the whole community of faith. To the degree possible, those with disabilities should be included along with others during the preparation and celebration of the sacrament. At times, pastoral need may necessitate an accommodated setting and a simpler manner.*
- *A sponsor for the one to be confirmed should be present. The sponsor assists the confirmed person on the continuing path of Christian Initiation.*²⁷ *For this reason, it is desirable that one of the godparents chosen for Baptism be the sponsor for Confirmation.*²⁸
- *When those with disabilities who are already baptized Christians desire to become Catholic, they should participate in the Rite of Reception of Baptized Christians into the Full Communion of the Catholic Church, which normally includes the reception of the Sacraments of Confirmation and Eucharist.*²⁹

Downloadable link of this Pastoral Letter:

<http://www.usccb.org/about/divine-worship/policies/upload/Guidelines-for-the-Celebration-of-the-Sacraments-with-Persons-with-Disabilities-Revised-Edition.pdf>

²² *Order of Confirmation, 1-2; see CIC, c. 879.*

²³ *See CIC, c. 890.*

²⁴ *CIC, c. 885, §1.*

²⁵ *See United States Conference of Catholic Bishops (USCCB), Decree implementing canon 891 (August 21, 2001):*

<http://www.usccb.org/beliefs-and-teachings/what-we-believe/canon-law/complementary-norms/canon-891-age-for-confirmation.cfm>.

²⁶ *CIC, c. 889.*

²⁷ *See CIC, c. 892.*

²⁸ *See CIC, c. 893, §2.*

²⁹ *See RCIA, 473-498; see NSC, 35.*

K. Catechesis on Sexuality

“Sexuality (i.e. puberty, dating, etc.) will always be a major part of an adolescent’s life. Therefore, it should be a major focus of adolescent catechesis. A comprehensive approach to catechesis in human sexuality should be inclusive of the Church’s teachings...”²

- It is recommended that a comprehensive catechesis on sexuality form an integral part of Confirmation preparation.
- Please refer to the USCCB Conformity List (see section A) for approved texts/material based on Catholic teaching on sexuality.
- It is recommended that parishes involve parents and families in discussions regarding sexuality, either through parent and candidate gatherings, home activities, or other means. On the other hand, candidates must also be provided opportunities where they can openly express their questions or concerns—*without* their parent being present.
- As stated in the quoted text above, it is important to try to address the following areas from a Catholic perspective: chastity, complementarity, gender, and [sexual] identity. In addition to these, it is also vital to touch upon the following: body image, rape culture, pornography, and same-sex attraction.
- Outside speakers/experts may be contracted by parishes to facilitate discussion on sexuality according to Catholic doctrine; however please refer to section D in regards to the suitability form required by all speakers.
- Please be aware that this is a sensitive subject that must be approached with caution and professionalism, but overall with love and mercy as modeled by our Lord, Jesus Christ.
- Any questions or concerns should be directed to the OEEC.

L. Vocations

“The foundation for accepting the call of Christ to marriage, chaste single life, priesthood, consecrated life, or lay ecclesial ministry is laid within the family... Parents, pastors, teachers, and catechists should help adolescents to address the vocational question directly and study the possibilities thoroughly... to listen carefully to the voice of the Holy Spirit within them and to respond generously to God’s call to service in the Church and in the world.”³

- Confirmation preparation is a wonderful and appropriate time to address the topic of vocations, and to help candidates commit to prayerfully discern God’s call for them.
- Teaching about vocations presents, first and foremost, a great opportunity for pastors to be directly involved so that they may interact with the candidates who in return may form a respectful and benign bond with their parish priest—if they do not already.

² *The Joy of Adolescent Catechesis*, NIAC, p. 33.

³ *National Directory for Catechesis*, USCCB, p. 200.

- It is recommended that parishes make connections with the Archdiocesan Director of the Vocations Office, the Archdiocesan Vicar for Religious, the Archdiocesan Director of the Family Life Office, and the Archdiocesan Director of Adult Faith Formation (lay ecclesial ministry) in order to collaborate in these efforts.
- Parishes should also reserve many occasions for candidates to openly interact with religious sisters/novices, priests/seminarians, and married couples— if they do not do so already. These interactions should be intentional, so that candidates are exposed to the faithful and exemplary lives of these persons, who in return should willingly share their experiences with the candidates and answer any of their questions, doubts, or concerns.
- Parishes should also invite lay ecclesial ministers to share their stories of faith so to encourage and invite young people to be active in the life of the church through the many ministries in which they can be involved. This should present itself as an opportunity for young people to take up church leadership with the support of the pastor and other lay leaders.
- At least one retreat-like experience about vocations is highly recommended, although it should be an overarching theme woven into the Confirmation program.

M. Mass Attendance

“The liturgy is the summit toward which the activity of the Church is directed; at the same time it is the font from which all her power flows” (Sacrosanctum Concilium, no. 10). At the summit of the liturgical life of the Church, the Eucharistic Sacrifice stands out as the source and summit of the entire Christian life (cf. Lumen Gentium, no. 11). Therefore, of the greatest importance in the Church’s own life, which is the life of Christ her Lord, is how the Mystery of the Holy Eucharist is believed and celebrated, and how it is honored and lived outside the Mass.⁴

- Participating in Mass and receiving the Holy Eucharist is the most vital part of the Christian experience and an important part of faith nourishment and development.
- It is suggested that every effort be made to encourage youth and their families to attend Holy Mass weekly.
- Mandatory Mass sign-in sheets or anything of that nature is highly discouraged. This tends to create a hostile environment.
- Instead of sign-ins, it is encouraged to invite youth (and their families) to participate in liturgical ministries, such as hospitality/greeters, lectors, choir, ushers, gift bearers, etc. This is an excellent way to encourage participation and attendance.

⁴ *Compendium on the Eucharist*, USCCB. vii.

N. Catholic High Schools

Students who attend Catholic high schools are also called to be actively involved with their parishes in order to foster a strong **sense of community**. They must participate in their parish Confirmation sacramental preparation. Although they receive Theology classes and practice daily prayer in school, Catholic high school students are called to form part of their parish community so to help them understand that they are needed in parish life, even *after* high school graduation. That being said, here are some recommendations to consider:

- Christian Service hours may be transferred from the Catholic High School to the Parish Confirmation Program, as long as they:
 1. respond to the Corporal Works of Mercy;
 2. are approved by the pastor, parish DRE, or Confirmation catechist;
 3. are completed *during* the Confirmation preparation period,
 4. comply with the parish requirements and/or the Archdiocesan Recommendations (see Section E).
- Retreats: every effort should be made for Catholic high school students to participate in their parish Confirmation retreat with their fellow candidates. However, please consider the following:
 1. In very special circumstances, Catholic high school retreats may be accepted upon the approval of the pastor, parish DRE, or Confirmation catechist;
 2. Retreats must be completed *during* the Confirmation preparation period,
 3. Retreat content must comply with the parish requirements and/or the Archdiocesan Recommendations (see Section C).
- In many cases, Catholic high school students and youth who come from active Catholic families have received some catechetical formation already or practice their faith regularly. It is important for parish sacramental programs to consider this when planning the content and formation of these young disciples. This kind of situation creates an opportunity for peer-ministry or student-teaching, which utilizes those young people who “know the basics” and are willing to openly share their faith with others. This avoids boredom and repetition and instead generates a path into church leadership and youth involvement in ministry.

O. Spanish and Other Languages

“Just as all races, ethnicities, and cultures in the world are represented in the population of the United States, so too do they find a home within the Catholic Church. Each group brings its own language, history, customs, rituals, and traditions ‘for building up the body of Christ.’ Since persons can only achieve their full humanity by means of culture, the Catholic Church in the

United States embraces the rich cultural pluralism of all the faithful, encourages the distinctive identity of each cultural group, and urges mutual enrichment.”⁵

The Archdiocese of Hartford is rich in cultural diversity and many of our parishes serve more than one ethnic community. With that in mind, please refer to the following recommendations for Confirmation preparation in other languages:

- It is highly encouraged that candidates be provided the opportunity to receive Confirmation preparation classes in their native language; in other words, the language they are most comfortable speaking and writing.
- Specifically in regards to language preference: parishes should invite and form catechists of all ethnic backgrounds to teach candidates of their same ethnic background.
- Please note that many materials and resources are available in other languages, especially Spanish and bilingual (Spanish/English).
- Confirmation ceremonies can be held according to the native language of the candidates and sponsors, although bilingual and trilingual ceremonies are more common.
- Parishes should consider the native language and cultural background of their candidates when planning all parent and sponsor meetings, including the Confirmation ceremony.

P. Meeting the Candidates

Many parishes continue to practice the tradition of “interviewing” candidates. However please consider the following recommendations:

- Change the language: instead of calling them “interviews” refer to them as “meet and greets” or “conversation.” Statistics show that many of our young people are highly “stressed” or full of “anxiety.” Changing the wording will help this experience to be more inviting and enlightening.
- “Interviews” are not a requirement in Confirmation preparation. If your program does not include this step, you do not need to begin to require them. If your program does include interviews, please note that they are not to be used as a way to decide if a candidate is “ready” or “not ready” to receive Confirmation preparation.
- It is recommended that the purpose for “meet and greets” be a way for the priest/DRE/catechist to get to know the candidate and learn what their expectations are for their preparation; this can aid in the planning of the preparation content.
- The following are some sample questions which may be asked:
 1. How would you like to see your faith grow during this time of preparation?
 2. What questions about your faith do you still grapple with?
 3. In what ways have you felt the presence of the Holy Spirit in your life so far?

⁵ *National Directory for Catechesis*, USCCB, p. 29.

Conclusion

“Pentecost remains the foundational event for the Catholic Sacrament of Confirmation. On that day the followers of Jesus received the gift of the Holy Spirit. But this gift was not only for their personal benefit. They were expected to use this gift--to preach the Gospel and tell all lands about Jesus Christ. The same applies to Confirmation today; the faithful receive the gift of the Holy Spirit with this purpose: to bear witness to Christ...⁶ The celebration should result in a recommitment to faith and purpose.”⁷

Confirmation preparation is a wonderful opportunity for evangelization! Effective preparation involves a commitment on behalf of the family and of the whole parish community in an effort to form young disciples of Jesus Christ who will bear witness to the Gospel. Programs need to be adapted to the reality of the parish community in order to most effectively evangelize and catechize the people of God in an ever-changing world.

Parishes are reminded that they are not alone in these evangelization efforts. The OEEC is called to accompany the adults, youth, and children of the Archdiocese of Hartford in building a vibrant community of faith in Jesus Christ. We are committed to supporting and collaborating with all parishes and schools in their effort to achieve educational excellence and transformative lifelong faith formation.

God bless your ministry and your parish community!

Prayer: Come, Holy Spirit

Come, Holy Spirit,
fill the hearts of Thy faithful
and enkindle in them the fire of Thy love.

V. Send forth Thy Spirit and they shall be created.

R. And Thou shalt renew the face of the earth.

Let us pray.

O God, Who didst instruct the hearts of the faithful by the light of the Holy Spirit,
grant us in the same Spirit to be truly wise,
and ever to rejoice in His consolation.

Through Christ our Lord.

Amen.

⁶ *Guide for Celebrating Confirmation*, LTP. Paul Turner. p.3.

⁷ *Guide for Celebrating Confirmation*, LTP. Paul Turner. p.58.