

## **The Restored Order of the Sacraments of Initiation**

### **The Roman Catholic Diocese of Phoenix**

#### **Introduction**

On May 15, 2005 Bishop Thomas J. Olmsted promulgated the new Policy and Guidelines concerning the restoration of the order of the Sacraments of Initiation in the Diocese of Phoenix. The chief concluding reason for Bishop Olmsted's initiative for this change was the full sense of the theological term "mystagogy". Mystagogy, in the full sense — of aiding our young people's understanding of what they have received through the Sacraments of Initiation, throughout every stage of life which includes the stages from infancy and continues throughout grade school, high school, young adulthood to mature adulthood to live as a disciple of Christ, a life dedicated to the missionary and apostolic service of Christ. As the General Directory for Catechesis notes, initiatory catechesis encompasses more than mere instruction in the faith, "it is an apprenticeship of the entire Christian life" (GDC #67).

This new policy has effectively changed the age for Confirmation preparation and reception from 16 years of age (sophomore or junior in high school), to the ages of students in the third grade. As a result, the preparation and reception of the Sacraments of Initiation throughout the Diocese of Phoenix will be: Baptism: in Infancy, Reconciliation: Second Grade, Confirmation and First Eucharist: Third Grade.

#### **QUESTIONS & ANSWERS**

The following questions and answers are intended to anticipate and address the questions that may arise from Directors of Catechetical Ministry, Catechetical Leaders, Directors of Youth Ministry, Catechists, Core Team Members, Parents and their children who participate in sacrament preparation. As a catechist or teacher, you may find this useful for the parents of children in your parish.

##### **1. What is Confirmation?**

Confirmation is the second of the three sacraments of Christian initiation. Confirmation is the completion of Baptism and the sacrament by which the baptized faithful are anointed with chrism by the laying on of hands. The grace received is the fullness of the Holy Spirit and his gifts. We also describe this fullness as the completion, strengthening, or perfection of the Holy Spirit received in Baptism.

##### **2. What are the Sacraments of Initiation?**

The sacraments of Baptism, Confirmation, and Eucharist are interrelated and all three are required for full Christian initiation. The Christian is born anew by Baptism, strengthened by Confirmation, and receives in the Eucharist the food of eternal life.

##### **3. Who is the minister of the Sacrament of Confirmation?**

The ordinary minister of Confirmation is the bishop. The bishop may designate other priests to confirm as well. In addition, pastors who baptize an adult or child of catechetical age are the ministers of Confirmation as required by the Rite of Christian Initiation of Adults (RCIA).

##### **4. Who can receive the Sacrament of Confirmation?**

According to our diocesan policy, the normal age for confirmation are those baptized children in third grade (usually around the age of eight years old). A candidate for confirmation must be at the age of discretion, seven years of age or above and must meet the following requirements:

- Be baptized and not previously confirmed
- Must be Catholic (children baptized in another church must make a Profession of Faith)
- Must be properly instructed
- Must be capable of renewing their Baptismal promises
- Must have previously been prepared for and received the Sacrament of Reconciliation (ordinarily occurs in Second Grade)

Candidates will be prepared for the Sacrament of Confirmation and First Eucharist. Both Sacraments will be celebrated together.

### **5. Why is the Diocese of Phoenix changing the age of Confirmation?**

By placing Confirmation at this age, the Diocese of Phoenix will be following the natural sequence of the Sacraments of Christian Initiation: Baptism, Then Confirmation, and then reception of First Eucharist. Pope Paul VI stated the following:

*The sharing in the divine nature given to men through the grace of Christ bears a certain likeness to the origin, development, and nourishing of natural life. The faithful are born anew by Baptism, strengthened by the sacrament of Confirmation, and received in the Eucharist the food of eternal life. By means of these sacraments of Christian initiation, they thus receive in increasing measure the treasures of the divine life and advance toward the perfection of charity (CCC 1212).*

It should also be noted that this is the sequence followed by RCIA (*Rite of Christian Initiation of Adults*) which requires that children and adults in the catechumenate receive all three sacraments together, even if the children are younger than the age at which the Catholic children of the parish are routinely confirmed and by the Eastern Catholic Churches for infants and adults alike (CCC 1232).

In addition, by placing Confirmation prior to the reception of First Eucharist it makes it easier to view the Eucharist as the "summit" of Christian initiation (CCC 1233).

Therefore, all baptized persons who have reached the age of reason should be appropriately prepared and receive the Sacrament of Confirmation before the reception of the Holy Eucharist.

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

All sacraments are a gift from our Heavenly Father, who desires to give us His very life, which we call grace. Sacraments are not earned or merited. For this reason, Confirmation should not be perceived as the sacrament of adult commitment to the Church. In fact, the Church even requires priests to confirm infants and children younger than the age of reason when they are in danger of death so that they may receive the fullness of the Holy Spirit. An authentic mature commitment to Christ and the Church is expressed in full participation in the Eucharist and

apostolic life of the Church. It is not achieved at a single moment but throughout the life-long deepening of our relationship with Christ. This begins in childhood and continues until death.

### **7. What is the historical and theological vision for Christian Initiation?**

In the early Church the sacraments of initiation were three: Baptism, Confirmation & Eucharist. They were celebrated together in a single rite, with a bishop as presider. This was the practice of the Roman Rite up until the 5th or 6th century when bishops could no longer be present at all baptisms, leading to a time of separation between baptism and confirmation. At first the time of separation was short, but as time went on, the delay for the bishop to arrive grew. Still the Church celebrated the sacraments in the order of Baptism, Confirmation & Eucharist until this century.

In 1910 Pope Pius X recognized that children were not being allowed First Communion until the age of twelve to fourteen. He felt that such a denial was contrary to the vision of Jesus who always drew children to himself. Pius X ordered that children be allowed to come to the table of the Eucharist as soon as they could distinguish the Eucharist from ordinary bread. The age was then lowered to around seven. Confirmation then came after First Eucharist. The reforms of Vatican Council II called the Church to restore the original order of sacraments. This is not without challenge and difficulties. Such a change presumes a deep commitment on the part of the family to nurture the life of the young. Such a commitment means that parents have a need to understand the reasons for change & the ways in which they can help their children.

The main reason for restoring the order of the sacraments (i.e. putting Confirmation before First Communion) is to emphasize that Eucharist (Communion) is THE sacrament, which celebrates our FULL membership in the Body of Christ. It is the sacrament of ongoing growth and the sacrament of unity. The Church tells us that it "culminates" the initiation process. When it comes last in order, it calls us to renew that baptismal covenant each time we come to the Table of the Eucharist.

### **8. What is the Restored Order of the Sacraments?**

An increasing number of dioceses and parishes in the United States are adopting a Restored Order policy for the celebration of the sacraments of Confirmation and Eucharist. This means, quite simply, that it becomes standard policy for Catholics who were baptized in infancy to receive Confirmation *before* First Eucharist, not *after*. Practically speaking, this means that the two sacraments are received at the First Eucharist Mass, with Confirmation being celebrated after the homily.

### **9. Why do they call it Restored Order?**

During the first five hundred years or so of the history of the Roman Catholic Church (and still today in the Christian churches of the East), it was always the case that the sacraments of Christian initiation were celebrated in an invariable sequence: Baptism, Confirmation, and Eucharist. And it was almost always the case that all three sacraments were celebrated together at the same time, even with infants.

The RCIA (*Rite of Christian Initiation of Adults*) requires that children and adults in the catechumenate receive all three sacraments together, even if the children are younger than the age at which the Catholic children of the parish are routinely confirmed.

Putting the celebration of Confirmation between Baptism and Eucharist better expresses its role as the completion of Baptism. As a matter of fact, the sacrament that is the culmination of a person's Christian initiation is the Eucharist, not Confirmation.

Theologically, it is the gift of the Holy Spirit given in all its fullness at Confirmation that best prepares one to receive Eucharist, and thus to be most fully joined to the Body of Christ. As a result, this change reflects an emphasis on the belief that everything leads to the Eucharist, which is the source and summit of our faith.

Following the lead of official documents that were issued by the Church after the Second Vatican Council, more and more places are restoring this original order to the celebration of the sacraments of Christian initiation.

#### **10. What is the Church's stance in linking Confirmation and First Eucharist?**

In article #1275, *The Catechism of the Catholic Church* articulates the inseparable nature of the Sacraments of Initiation as follows: "Christian initiation is accomplished by three sacraments together: Baptism which is the beginning of new life; Confirmation which is its strengthening; and the Eucharist which nourishes the disciple with Christ's Body and Blood for his transformation in Christ."

#### **11. Why is our parish celebrating Confirmation and First Eucharist at the same event?**

In the early Church, Christian initiation was celebrated together as a single event. The person was immersed into the waters of Baptism, anointed with chrism, and shared in the Eucharistic meal. Over time, and for many reasons, the celebration of these sacramental rituals became separated from one another. In the renewal of the sacraments mandated by the Second Vatican Council, the Church was invited to restore the celebrations of the sacraments of Christian initiation to their original order—Baptism, Confirmation, Eucharist. This restored order helps us recognize that sharing in the Eucharist completes our initiation into the Church.

#### **12. What about age? Doesn't the Church require a certain age for Confirmation?**

Both the *Rite of Confirmation* and Canon Law (Canon #891) set the age of discretion (age 7) as the age for Confirmation. Effective July 2002, the U.S. Conference of Bishops designated the age for Confirmation to be between the age of discretion and age 16. Within that range, local bishops may determine their own diocesan policy.

#### **13. Isn't Confirmation a sacrament of maturity that should come after First Eucharist?**

Not really. Confirmation is actually the completion of Baptism (by the full gift of the Holy Spirit). The perfection of baptismal grace found in the Sacrament of Confirmation is not dependent upon age or knowledge of the confirmand. The grace that is conferred is a free gift and 'does not need ratification to become effective (Cf. CCC 1308). The common practice of high school reception of Confirmation has given the impression that somehow the sacrament is merited by virtue of age or training. In truth, the Sacrament of Confirmation is an effective vehicle of grace at any age as long as it is validly conferred. Thus, those that receive the sacrament are able to reap its benefits from the moment of reception. The graces of this sacrament conferred at a young age could be of great assistance to young people as they grow toward adolescence and young adulthood.

Regardless of age, Confirmation is always a Sacrament of Initiation. The important thing to remember is that sacraments are not about age alone, they are about growing in faith, about sharing in God's grace. In the Diocese of Phoenix as of May 15th, 2005 established the reception of Confirmation and First Eucharist in the Third grade.

**14. Is it wrong, then, to be confirmed after receiving Eucharist?**

Of course not. The Church has many ways of celebrating the mysteries of God's love in the sacraments. But because Rome so strongly encourages restoring the order of celebrating the Sacraments of Christian Initiation, don't be surprised if more and more communities restore the original sequence—Baptism, Confirmation and First Eucharist.

**15. I am concerned that if children are now confirmed in the third grade, they will drop out of religious education later.**

Confirmation has been misunderstood and treated as graduation from learning about the Faith. This is neither the true meaning of the sacrament nor the intention of the Church. Growth in the understanding and living out of our faith is the result of a life-long effort. Parents and siblings have the first responsibility of being an example of Jesus Christ to each other and living the Gospel each day. Children will stay in religious education if they see their parents striving to grow in holiness through family prayer, Scripture reading, Sunday Mass, regular confession, and living a life of charity. Parents are to keep their children in religious education programs just as they keep their child in school until graduation. There will be a heavy emphasis on parent involvement. It is the parent's responsibility to see that their children grow in the faith. Our parishes are there to assist in this process.

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

Religious education or catechesis is a life long process. Adults should regularly study our faith, read the scriptures, participate in the sacraments, and practice charity. Youth from Kindergarten through High School are expected to participate in processes of faith formation. With this in mind, Confirmation preparation is simply an explanation of the sacrament itself in the context of an active family faith life and parish catechesis. This is similar to what took place for First Confession and First Eucharist.

**17. What is the role of the parents in the preparation?**

Pope John Paul II constantly called for us to help families become a domestic Church, a place where faith is taught and lived both in word and in deed. Ever since Vatican II, the Church has considered the parents to be the primary religious educators of their children. It is also our hope that as parents work with their children, they, too, will seek to celebrate the Sacrament of Confirmation if they are not, themselves, confirmed. The grace of this Sacrament, and the gifts of the Holy Spirit, can be very helpful to us as adults living in the society we do. In celebrating the Rite of Baptism of Infants, parents publicly commit to forming their children in the life of faith. Parents are addressed:

*Parents, you have asked to have your child baptized. In doing so you are accepting the responsibility of training them in the practice of the faith. It will be your duty to bring him/her up to keep God's commandments as Christ taught us, by loving God and neighbor (RB #39).*

Implementing this new policy the diocese will support parishes with resources for parents so that a family may prepare together for the celebration of their child's Confirmation and First Eucharist.

The Catechism of the Catholic Church also teaches clearly the role of parents in handing on the gift of our Catholic faith:

- Parents have the first responsibility for the education of their children. They bear witness to this responsibility first by creating a home where tenderness, forgiveness, respect, fidelity and disinterested service are the rule. The

home is well suited for education in the virtues. This requires a apprenticeship in self-denial, sound judgment and self-mastery — the preconditions of all true freedom (CCC 2223).

- Through the grace of the sacrament of marriage, parents receive the privilege and responsibility of evangelizing their children. Parents should initiate their children at the early age into the mysteries of the faith of which they are the "first heralds" for their children (CCC 2225).
- Education in the faith by the parents should begin in the child's earliest years. This already happens when family members help one another grow in faith by the witness of a Christian life in keeping with the Gospel. Family catechesis precedes, accompanies and enriches other forms of instruction in the faith (emphasis added). Parents have the mission of teaching their children to pray and to discover their vocation as children of God. The parish is the Eucharistic community and the heart of the liturgical life of Christian families; it is a privileged place for the catechesis of children and parents. (CCC 2226).

### **18. How will my child be preparing for Confirmation?**

In the restored order, Confirmation preparation is integrated into the preparation for Eucharist. This means that the close connection between Baptism and Confirmation is emphasized, while recognizing the important of Eucharist as the culmination of Christian initiation.

### **19. Will my child be learning about the Holy Spirit?**

Naturally, as your child continues to participate in religious education, he/she will continue to learn more and more about the Holy Spirit's action in our lives. Your child's Eucharist preparation book also teaches about the power of the Spirit and the special gifts of the Spirit. Just as your child was first empowered by the Spirit in Baptism, your child will continue to grow in the Spirit through the grace of Confirmation.

### **20. How will I know if my child is ready for Confirmation?**

Readiness for Confirmation cannot be separated from readiness for Eucharist, and sacramental readiness is never about learning, but about faith. As your child prepares for Confirmation and Eucharist, here are three things to keep in mind:

- Sacraments are always a beginning. As your child matures in faith, he/she will grow in his/her understanding of Confirmation and experience of the Eucharist.
- The Eucharist is the culmination of the three Sacraments of Initiation. Your child is now welcomed as a fully participating member of the Church.
- At any age, completion of the Sacraments of Initiation—Baptism, Confirmation, and Eucharist—in no way signals graduation. Rather it is the beginning of a lifetime of being nourished at the table of the Lord.

### **21. What about adults (i.e. parents and / or relatives) who have not been Confirmed?**

Many parents have not completed their Sacraments of Initiation. Parishes offering a family model could offer parents time for spiritual growth and renewal and an opportunity for them to complete their sacramental initiation through the Sacrament of Confirmation. An intergenerational approach to formation could enliven parishes with the opportunities for parents to renew their faith. {Also refer to Diocesan policy for Adult Confirmation}

**22. What does a Family Centered / Multi-generational Sacrament of Initiation Program look like and why is this a good approach to preparation?**

Confirmation is both a celebration of our parish family, and a celebration of a family that is initiating a child into our faith. This initiation process would be parish and family centered and multi-generational in addition to regular catechetical programs. Parents would attend all sessions with their children and work at home with the use of a family handbook. Parents would also be encouraged or required to attend parent meetings held throughout the year.

A family-centered, multi-generation program would speak volumes to children about the importance of the preparation. Parent's involvement during sessions provides them a firm foundation for the home preparation, offers families activities, issues to discuss, and simple rituals to adapt and model at home. This family sacramental preparation may be the first occasion of regular contact with the Church since the child's baptism. It thus could become as much a family "initiation" as an individual child's.

**23. What about families preparing together with children of different ages?**

It is possible for families to work together in preparing for Confirmation. Children who have made their First Eucharist can wait until younger children are ready to enter the program then the entire family can enroll together. For instance, if you have a second grader and a fifth grader, you could wait a year to enter the Confirmation program and bring both children in together. The fifth grader would continue to participate in the regular fifth grade class for religious education.

**24. What impact will this have on the School?**

This new policy will, of necessity, cause us to collaborate closely between our Catholic Schools and the Religious Education programs to develop a process that will be open to everyone, and involve families wherever their child's primary religious education takes place. Parents will be given the central role in preparing their children. The School and the Religious Education programs will continue to provide supporting catechesis for the children, but parents will be expected to participate in classes, which will enrich their own understanding as adults and help them with their role in preparing their children.

**25. How will the Sacraments of First Eucharist and Confirmation be celebrated after the policy is fully implemented?**

Once the policy is fully implemented, Confirmation and First Eucharist will be celebrated together in the same ceremony. Because Confirmation is reserved in Canon Law to the Bishop, or to those he may designate, the celebrant for First Eucharist and Confirmation will be either the Bishop or someone he designates as celebrant. This will be true once we have moved Confirmation to the third grade.

**26. After the transitional period, how do we prepare and implement a program for young people after third grade (i.e. fourth - twelfth grade) those who have not received Confirmation, but may have received First Eucharist?**

It is recommended that this be addressed in the same manner we do today for young people who come to a parish seeking the other Sacraments of Initiation. If they have already received Baptism and Eucharist, parishes prepare those seeking Confirmation within a three-year period bracket program 4-6 grades, 7-9 grades, and 10-12

grades. The period of preparation is approximately eight sessions. There are many resources connecting Confirmation to Baptism and First Eucharist. Many resources are available for all these age ranges.

Parishes with Intergenerational formation or Whole Community Catechesis, could approach it using multiple resources and use the same format they use for their parish faith formation.

Parents, who due to extraordinary circumstances cannot assume their role in preparation of their child for the sacraments, may designate another adult to fulfill this responsibility. (*Discerned in dialogue with pastor or designate*)

### **27. How will this change impact ministry to teens and our youth ministry programs?**

In the long run, we believe this is a great step for youth ministry. "Receiving" the sacrament can be used as a carrot or bottom-line motivation for attendance. Instead of drawing teens by our own creative efforts and quality ministry, we can easily be tempted to rely on having a "captive" audience who is required to be present. The problem with captives is that they may really feel and act like prisoners, as they are forced to be present at meetings they really do not want to attend.

Also, because the sacrament tends to be the focus and destination, few teens stay involved once confirmation is celebrated. Instead of understanding the sacrament of confirmation as a beginning or the strengthening for a more committed Christian lifestyle, many teens walk away with a sense of relief that it is all over. As a result, it is viewed more as a rite of graduation from religious education. The irony is that confirmation celebrates an initiation into a church from which many immediately drop out.

Parish based Youth Ministry programs are called to have the mission of the church as its purpose. They are called to incorporate the proclamation of the Gospel, through evangelization, growth in holiness and fullness of faith; and by loving and serving all those in need. Our youth ministry teams must evangelize, build teens up through formation, and send them out to minister, thereby help these young disciples, through the power of the Holy Spirit received in Baptism and Confirmation, become mature apostles to their peers.

### **28. Does removing Confirmation from the context of a 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?**

The preparation for the celebration of Confirmation should not be used simply as a means to an end, however noble. The parish is to develop a proper youth ministry which attend to the spiritual needs of our youth and can be based upon a deepening of the sacramental graces received in the sacraments of Christian initiation. Parents, being the first teachers of their children, have the responsibility to educate their children throughout high school, in all areas including the Faith. Parents are to keep their children in religious education programs just as they keep their child in school until graduation.