

Holy Trinity Parish

Confirmation

Parent Guide Example

Welcome! From Baptism to first Reconciliation to first Holy Communion and now to Confirmation, the Catholic Church recognizes you as your child's primary educator in the life of faith. Your role is pivotal as your child prepares to receive the Sacrament of Confirmation and be fully initiated into the Catholic Church. Your call is to help your child know Jesus personally and choose to be His disciple by embracing the life of the Catholic Church.

Undoubtedly, parents respond differently to this role. Some are enthusiastic and eager to be involved in their child's formation, while others feel discouraged, annoyed or uncertain. To some, Confirmation seems more like a family tradition or rite of passage than anything with a fuller meaning. Some parents may even be unsure about their own beliefs and practices of the faith. Whatever your personal situation, this parent guide strives to meet your needs as you walk with your son or daughter towards the Sacrament of Confirmation.

We pray that, as a parent, you will be encouraged by the fact that God loves you and your child without limit. This limitless love - which is the core of our Catholic faith - is very good news indeed. May the Holy Spirit inspire and encourage you as you guide your child through this process.

WHAT IS CONFIRMATION

"Confirmation is a sacramental outpouring of the Holy Spirit that leaves a permanent imprint on the soul, completes Christian initiation, and empowers us to be witnesses of Christ."

CCC 1302-1305

Many people mistakenly see Confirmation as a teen's "graduation" from faith formation. Confirmation is not merely a symbolic ceremony or a rite of passage. As with every sacrament, Confirmation does not merely symbolize a spiritual reality - it actually does what it signifies. Confirmation candidates are actually sealed with the Holy Spirit when the bishop anoints their heads with oil. This leaves a mark on their soul that is eternal and can never be removed. According to the Catechism of the Catholic Church the five effects of Confirmation are:

- 1. It affirms our identity as children of God.**
- 2. It unites us more firmly to Christ.**
- 3. It increases in us the Gifts of the Holy Spirit.**
- 4. It strengthens our bond with the Church.**
- 5. It strengthens us to spread and defend the Faith by our words and actions, to be fearless witnesses to Christ and the power of the cross.**

Confirmation "completes" the graces we received at Baptism when we became adopted sons and daughters of God. Confirmation confirms that we are a part of God's family and empowers us to do what we have been called to do as children of God: to be living witnesses of God's love in the world. In Confirmation, we receive the power to stand up for Christ and the Church, as well as special gifts to help us serve God in particular ways. Our bond with God and the whole family of Christians is "sealed" or made permanent as well as strengthened. All these graces help us to shift our focus from interior formation (which began at baptism) to exterior evangelization or proclamation of our faith. We are given the courage to witness to the Faith in our lives, through our words and actions. Confirmation is sometimes called "the sacrament of the martyrs" because the word martyr derives from the Greek word meaning "witness." The martyrs witnessed to the truth of the Gospel no matter the cost

Many of us think, "I was confirmed ... and none of that happened to me". This seeming disconnect between the Church's teaching on Confirmation and people's personal experience of the sacrament reveals an important truth about all of the sacraments: while sacramental grace can work powerfully, we must be ready to receive the gifts the Spirit wants to give us. This reality is shown in the parable of the sower (Mark 4:1-20). Seeds are scattered in many places, but they only flourish in the right kind of soil. The goal of our faith formation process for Confirmation is to prepare these candidates to be open to all the graces offered in this Sacrament.

WHAT IS MY ROLE AS A PARENT IN CONFIRMATION?

A parent's role in faith formation is indispensable. While your child's sponsor will help him or her prepare for Confirmation and offer encouragement, as parents, you are your candidate's first and primary example. It is in and through family life, and the example lived out by their parents that children learn how to live the teachings of Jesus which lead to eternal life.

The two most important ways you can help form your child in the Faith are to **practice** your **faith** and to **pray**. Regardless of your faith practice up to this point, God is calling you now to a deeper relationship with Him and the Church. It has been said that the Church is not a museum of saints, but a hospital for sinners. So do not be afraid if you do not feel up to the task of leading your child closer to Christ. If necessary, renew your commitment to participate more fully in the life of the Church, by attending Mass every Sunday, going to Confession regularly, and praying for an increase of God's grace in your life and the life of your family.

Consider this an invitation for you to grow in your own faith alongside your candidate. God loves you and, as a baptized person, you are His son or daughter. This may be just the opportunity He is using to bring you closer to Him. If something has been separating you from God, maybe now is the time to bring that to Confession. God's forgiveness and mercy are never-ending.

Your most important job as a parent is to be a true witness of a personal relationship with Jesus. If you don't pray regularly, begin today. Commit to some small daily time of prayer for your child and for your own needs. We cannot give what we do not have. We must begin and renew our own relationships with Christ in order to witness them to our candidates. Prayer is a conversation with God. If we only talked to a friend for one hour a week and fell asleep or didn't pay attention during that conversation, we wouldn't be very good friends. Having a relationship with God works the same way.

Sometimes, getting your child to do the "basics" can be challenging. One effective way to encourage your child's faith is to appeal to his or her natural desire for independence and social connection. Suggest that your son or daughter become involved in a ministry such as altar serving, participate in a youth ministry program, join a teen Alpha course or a Bible study with other peers who are also learning about their faith.

Your role as a parent in your child's faith formation does not end with his or her Confirmation. Your prayers and personal example can exert a powerful impact on your child for his or her whole life. Studies show that having one or more parents actively involved in their faith is the leading reason why a young person continues to value religion as they mature.

LIVING OUT THE CATHOLIC FAITH

Sadly, many Catholics do not attend Sunday Mass, which is the most vital, basic element of our faith. A lack of commitment to Sunday Mass has many serious consequences. Failure to attend Sunday Mass disregards the third commandment to "Remember the Sabbath day, to keep it holy," (Exodus 20:8) as well as Jesus' command to "do this in remembrance of me" (Luke 22:19). These are not merely suggestions, but commandments that are in place to protect, guide, and offer us an immeasurable gift: Jesus Christ is truly present in the Eucharist. When we do not attend Mass, we miss receiving Jesus in the Eucharist. We miss out on the abundant grace and all the blessings offered to us when we receive Holy Communion. At Mass, Jesus offers His very self to us. God humbles himself and gathers our works, joys, and sufferings to transform them. We are united to God's love in a tangible way. Please ensure that Sunday Mass is an active and habitual part of your family life. Weekly Sunday Mass is a basic part of what it means to be Catholic and, therefore, is a requirement for your candidate to receive Confirmation.

Another important element of the Catholic faith is the Sacrament of Reconciliation because sin separates us from God. God knows we aren't perfect and wants us to be reunited to Him. In Reconciliation or Confession, our sins are forgiven, and we are reunited with God. This tangible experience of His love and mercy is a place where Christ is truly present, forgiving us, through the priest. Perhaps you have not been to Confession in a while. This is a good time to return to this Sacrament. You are an authentic witness of Christ when you examine your own shortcomings and return to God to receive His forgiveness. Your candidate will be asked to go to Confession before their Confirmation, so they will be fully ready to receive all the graces of the Sacrament. The Church suggests that we receive Reconciliation at least once a month. Invite your son or daughter to attend this Sacrament with you, talk them through the process and answer any questions they might have.

If you have questions or concerns about Sunday Mass or Reconciliation, please contact our parish. There are many here who would be happy to walk with you through the process of renewing these commitments to your faith. There are often miscommunications and misunderstandings about these sacraments which, in reality, are gifts to bring us closer to a God who loves us.

HOW DO I TALK ABOUT FAITH WITH MY TEEN?

How should I respond if my child does not want to receive the Sacrament of Confirmation?

If your child becomes resistant to the idea of being confirmed for some reason, do not be alarmed. Be open to your son or daughter's questions about the faith, as these can be instrumental in helping him or her to develop a genuine and mature faith. Many saints wrestled with questions and doubts in their younger years. Some even rejected God for a time. God will provide the grace for your son or daughter to find Him if he or she genuinely seeks truth. Your child's spiritual life matters deeply to God, and He will never stop inviting them into a relationship with Him.

We advise that all Confirmation candidates be well prepared, in a state of grace, and properly open to receiving the sacrament. Therefore, Confirmation must not be forced on a person who is rejecting it. That said, insisting that your child complete his or her sacramental formation is within your control. If your son or daughter continues to resist receiving Confirmation after going through the formation process, try to arrange a meeting with the Faith Formation Staff so you can decide together what the best course of action will be. Most importantly, pray for your son or daughter and offer them encouragement.

What if I do not know the answer to a question?

In the midst of an increasingly secular culture, raising children in the Catholic Faith can be a daunting and intimidating task. If you feel inadequate in your own faith life, see your child's Confirmation formation as an opportunity for growth in your own walk with God. Do not feel that you need a theology degree or a spotless past to fulfill your mission as a parent to lead your teen in the faith. No one is as equipped as you are to be the spiritual leader of your child, simply by virtue of the fact that you are his or her parent. If you are authentic, your son or daughter will see your efforts and the importance you place on living the faith, and that will impact them more than any well-spoken theology.

That said, it is important to take your child's questions seriously, and you should know that it is relatively easy to discover what the Church teaches on any particular topic today. The internet is a wonderful tool. The Catechism of the Catholic Church can be found online and is an amazing resource to help you grow in knowledge, answer your questions, and recommend ways to guide your child to legitimate reasons for the Church's teachings. There is even a teen version called the "YOU CAT" that presents the Catechism in language friendly to teens. Finally, calling the Faith Formation office or asking our parish priests are always options when seeking guidance.

THE ACTIVE ROLE OF A PARENT

- Pray for your son or daughter. Praying for your children is a vital responsibility of a Christian parent.
- Ensure that your candidate has a Confirmation Sponsor that meets all of the set requirements.
- Communicate with your son or daughter's sponsor about their role and responsibilities.
- Ensure the sponsor or a faith-filled adult is present at each of the Confirmation sessions and the service projects with your candidate.
- Speak with your candidate in between each of the sessions to talk about the formation sessions, their faith formation classes, their service projects and see if they have any questions.
- Share your own faith story with your candidate.
- Pray with and for your candidate.
- Remain in communication with the Faith Formation Office about the needs of your candidate, attendance, and the necessary paperwork for the Sacrament of Confirmation.

TOP TEN CATHOLIC QUESTIONS

1. WHAT IS THE MEANING OF LIFE?

This is a question central to our humanity. Thankfully, God has not hidden the answer from us: We exist to know and love God, to live in His love by serving Him and others, and, ultimately, to live with Him forever in heaven. Living by His guidance we can have peace, purpose, and love no matter the circumstances we find ourselves in. St. John Paul II put it this way, "It is Jesus that you seek when you dream of happiness; he is waiting for you when nothing else you find satisfies you; he is the beauty to which you are so attracted; it is he who provoked you with that thirst for fullness that will not let you settle for compromise; it is he who urges you to shed the masks of a false life."

2. IF GOD IS GOOD AND ALL-POWERFUL WHY DOES HE ALLOW SO MUCH SUFFERING AND EVIL IN THE WORLD?

Suffering is a difficult and inevitable part of life. It can cause us to fall into fear, rage, despair; it can shake our faith to its very core. When tragedy strikes, many respond by saying that God must have a good reason, that everything is within God's providence, or that he is allowing suffering to make us stronger. While all these things are true, the words can ring hollow for someone overwhelmed by hurt.

The reality is God did not create us to suffer. We experience suffering and evil because our world is fallen and full of sin. He doesn't want any of us to suffer, but He gave all his people free will, and there are consequences to our choices and the choices of all of humanity. But God didn't leave us in the mess of a fallen world alone. We can find our answer when looking at the crucifix. It is the greatest sign of love in history. It reveals that God died not only to redeem us but to be with us in our suffering and give it value. We have the promise and hope that our suffering can be used for good in our lives and the lives of others. In faith, we know one day we will be home forever in heaven where there is no suffering or evil.

3. IS THERE LIFE AFTER DEATH? WHAT ABOUT HEAVEN AND HELL?

While Jesus was on earth, He frequently spoke about the reality of heaven. Because He knew it would be hard for us to understand the concept of eternity, He used many parables in the gospels to show what He meant. He told His disciples, "If it were not so, would I have told you that I go to prepare a place for you?" (John 14:2) Through His bodily resurrection, Christ showed us that death does not have the final word. In heaven, we will experience the source of all goodness directly as we behold God face to face. Hell, conversely, is where people are separated from God and, as a result, from all the light, truth, beauty, and goodness that come from Him. God does not want anyone to go to hell, nor does He "send" anyone there. Unrepentant sinners freely choose hell by refusing God's grace and mercy. God never ceases to love us, but he has given us freedom so we can love Him. This also means we are free to refuse His love.

Jesus is the only way to get to heaven. All people are able to go to heaven because of the redemptive act of Jesus in His death and resurrection. No one can earn entrance to heaven by being a "good person." This does not mean we should not strive to be good. It means we cannot "earn" heaven, but it has been opened to us by Jesus and is given to us as a gift. If we live in conformity with His will and die in His grace, we will be able to receive this gift.

4. WHY SHOULD I BE CATHOLIC?

Jesus Christ, the second person of the Trinity, founded a visible, structured Church and promised to remain with His Church until the end of time (Matthew 28:20). He chose twelve men to lead the Church. Those men passed on the authority given to them by Jesus to the bishops and their successors. Jesus also placed Peter over the apostles, giving him a special grace to teach and guide the Church. This grace and authority (Matthew 16:18) were passed down to all the popes from Peter all the way to our present pope, Pope Francis. Furthermore, Jesus instituted and entrusted the Sacraments to the Church who dispenses the grace Jesus won for us.

While elements of the truth can be found in other faiths, and especially in other non-Catholic, Christian churches, the fullness of truth is found in the Catholic Church which Jesus Christ Himself founded. The Church is not merely a human institution but was founded by God and is still guided by Him to this day. Perhaps the best evidence of this is that the Church has survived these past 2,000 years despite the sin of its members, scandals, persecution, and governments throughout history trying to wipe it out. If the Church were merely a human institution it would be nothing more than a distant memory by now.

It is important to note that the Church is the guardian of truth, not the source of truth. Therefore, the Church cannot change its teachings because these truths are not subject to change but come from God Himself.

5. WHY DO I HAVE TO GO TO MASS EVERY SUNDAY?

In Scripture, God commands His people to keep holy the Sabbath, worship Him in community, and celebrate the Holy Eucharist. "Do this in remembrance of me" (Luke 22:19) "Remember the Sabbath and keep it holy," (Exodus 20:8). At Mass, we worship God as a community, pray together for our needs, collect gifts for the needs of one another, ask for forgiveness from each other and the Lord for our shortcomings. We listen to scripture and learn from His Word, but, most importantly, we are fully united to the true presence of Jesus Christ in the Eucharist. Beautiful music and an inspiring homily are good for us, but the primary purpose of attending Mass is to unite ourselves to Christ by receiving Holy Communion.

In addition to attending Mass every Sunday, we are also required to attend Mass on six holy days of obligation: The Solemnity of Mary, the Mother of God; The Ascension of Jesus; The Assumption of Mary; All Saints Day; The Immaculate Conception; and Christmas, unless these obligations are adjusted by our bishop or the USCCB.

6. WHY DO I HAVE TO CONFESS MY SINS TO A PRIEST?

In John's gospel, the resurrected Christ walked into the room where the apostles were gathered, breathed on them, and said, "If you forgive sins of any, they are forgiven ..." (John 20:23). In this act, Jesus instituted the Sacrament of Reconciliation or Confession, giving the apostles the power to forgive sins with His own authority. This authority has been handed down through the centuries to our present-day priests. When you confess your sins, you are actually confessing your sins to Jesus himself through the priest.

Confessing is not always easy. Visits to doctors and dentists are often uncomfortable, awkward, and sometimes embarrassing. Yet, those feelings do not keep us from going at the early signs of a problem. We deal with the discomfort to receive treatment and healing. When our souls need care, when our relationship with God and others are fractured because of our imperfections, we should seek healing, even when uncomfortable.

7. HOW CAN WE BELIEVE THE POPE IS INFALLIBLE? AFTER ALL, HE IS JUST A MAN.

First, we need to talk about what infallibility is not. It does not mean the pope is infallible in political and social affairs; it does not mean he is free from sin, and it doesn't mean he is infallible in his personal theological opinions.

Infallibility refers to the inability of the Church's Magisterium to make an error when teaching a definitive truth on matters of faith or morals. In Matthew 16:18 Jesus told Peter, the first pope, "And I tell you, you are Peter and on this rock, I will build my Church, the powers of death shall not prevail against it. I give you the keys to the kingdom of heaven, and whatever you bind on earth shall be bound in heaven. Whatever you loose on earth shall be loosed in heaven." This is Jesus passing on authority to Peter to lead and guide the Church, who passed it on to His successor and so on.

Yes, the pope is "just a man," but, since the beginning of time, God has entrusted amazing tasks to fragile people. Jesus left us an organized religion. He chose twelve apostles to lead the Church, and one of them, Peter, he made "head" of the apostles. The authority of the apostles and the first pope to govern the Church has been passed down to the bishops and pope of today.

8. DO I HAVE TO BELIEVE EVERYTHING THE CHURCH TEACHES?

Although we do not have to agree with every policy set by our local parishes, or every pastoral decision of our Church leaders, being a follower of Jesus entails accepting the essential teaching of the Church he founded. If you are Catholic, you believe that Jesus is God and that he founded a Church to teach the truth. The Church's teaching authority rests in the authority Jesus Christ gave to it, particularly in matters of faith and morals. We live in an age that prizes individual judgment and opinion over received wisdom, but, when we are talking about things that have been revealed by God, it makes sense to receive our information from an authority He ordained.

The Church's teachings are not random assertions of the pope and bishops given without explanation, historical context, or backing by sound theology. Everything the Catholic Church teaches is based on Divine Revelation in Scripture and Tradition, which is passed down to us from the Apostles themselves. Often when a particular teaching seems irrational to someone, it is because they have not taken the time to study the reasons behind the teaching with an open heart.

Of course, it is not always easy to follow the teachings of Jesus and his Church. The Catholic Church's mission is to help us get to heaven. So, we should not be surprised when our earthly inclinations sometimes conflict with God's laws. God wants to help us come to believe and understand the truths of His teaching.

9. WHY MUST WE SAVE SEX FOR MARRIAGE?

Many people mistakenly think the Church gives boundaries to sexual behavior because of a negative view of sex. In reality, the Church's view of sex is quite the opposite. Sex is an incredible good, and so sacred that we must ensure that it is lived out the way God intended it to be. God created sex as a gift to unify two people, a man and a woman, in free, total, faithful, and fruitful love. The only place where this can truly happen is within the context of marriage. Sexual intimacy before marriage communicates a degree of intimacy that does not yet exist between the couple because they are not fully committed to one another in a lifelong relationship. When we save sex for this kind of a lifelong relationship in the Sacrament of Marriage, it frees us to pursue authentic love, which puts what is good for someone else before our own pleasure. God loves us and asks that we save sex for marriage, not to restrain us or punish us, but to protect us from hurting ourselves or others and to invite us into authentic love which brings joy and peace.

(See Theology of the Body for Teens or Men, Women, and the Mystery of Love)

10. HOW CAN I KNOW GOD'S WILL FOR MY LIFE?

Seeking and discovering God's will for our lives involves prayer and openness to the people and experiences God brings into our lives. These things can help us figure out or discern the path God might be calling us to. God typically communicates with us through our experiences and our ability to reason.

God has a plan for each of our lives that is full of goodness and fulfillment. When we face a big decision, or are at a crossroads, planning for the future, or trying to determine how to respond to a situation, God wants to help us. We should remain open to hearing God by remaining in a state of grace, by participating in the life of the Church, by praying daily and asking God to reveal His plan, by living our daily lives with love, and by listening to those who know and care about us.

ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

- "Did Adam and Eve Have Belly Buttons? And 199 other questions from Catholic Teenagers" By Matthew Pinto
- "Do I Have to Go? 101 Questions about Mass, the Eucharist, and Your Spiritual Life." By Matthew Pinto and Christ Stefanick
- "Theology of His Body/Theology of Her Body" (2 books 1 volume)
- "Captivating" (for women) by Stasi Elderidge or "Wild at Heart" (for men) by John Elderidge

RESOURCES

1. The Catechism of the Catholic Church
2. The United States Catholic Conference of Bishops
3. Ascension Press: Chosen Parent Guide to Confirmation

