

CONFIRMATION SPONSOR HANDBOOK

2009-2010

Confirmation Sponsor's Sourcebook St. Michael Catholic Church

Dear Confirmation Sponsor,

So, you've been asked to be a Confirmation Sponsor. Now what? First, let me thank you and congratulate you. You have been selected to represent our parish family. You've been asked to journey with one of our own. This journey will celebrate the lives of our Confirmation candidates. We will celebrate the presence of the Holy Spirit in their lives as they are called into fuller communion with us, the church.

You have been asked to be a sponsor - a companion, a guide, a mentor. The role of sponsor is vitally important and has the potential of being the most meaningful and lasting experience of the entire process. This is true whether you have known the candidate you will be sponsoring all his/her life or whether you have just barely met him/her. It is truly the work of the Spirit.

Enclosed in this Sourcebook you will find some items that will hopefully help you be a companion to your Confirmation candidate on this journey. You will also find some items that will help deepen your own faith as well. The information is gathered around the following questions:

- What is Confirmation?
- What is my role as sponsor in the Confirmation process?

If at any time, you feel you would like more help than the Sourcebook provides, feel free to call me. Otherwise, read through this resource, pray for discernment, seek out opportunities to update and deepen your own faith, and call on the Spirit within you to journey together with your candidate. Thank you for joining with this parish community to help build the Reign of God here on earth.

Peace,

Elise A. Chapman
Youth Minister
St. Michael Catholic Church

What is Confirmation?

We all have very different memories of our Confirmation. Our experience ranges from being in 6th grade or younger to adulthood. Others of us remember singing Onward Christian Soldiers and being slapped on the cheek as a part of the sacramental rite. Some of us remember what we wore and parties and other family rituals that surrounded our experience. Because of the ongoing changes brought about by Vatican II and the fact that each diocese is given some freedom in how the sacrament is celebrated, it is likely that your experience was different than what happens at Confirmation here at St. Michael and in the Diocese of Richmond.

What Confirmation is and how it is celebrated has been a source of theological debate for some time. Instead of giving a one sentence answer to the question, I will offer an explanation that comes to us from three different sources:

A **Catholic Update** entitled, Confirmation: Anointed for Fuller Witness, by Sandra DeGidio, O.S.M., is a good resource for understanding the Sacrament of Confirmation, its debate, its meaning and its implications. Key points DeGidio makes in her article include: Confirmation is a sacrament intimately connected to the other sacraments of initiation - Baptism and Eucharist; it is a parish responsibility to foster faith and celebrate the sacrament; and we should be about bringing these youth to fuller communion and participation in the life, mission, and work of the church. Please take time to read the article, which is available upon request, and perhaps share your insights with your candidate.

A second source is **Rite of Confirmation** revised in light of the teachings of the Second Vatican Council. The rite explains what is to happen during the sacrament and what it signifies. There are several symbols and rituals that are used at the Rite of Confirmation which bring into focus what we are celebrating. They include:

- > **The community gathered** - Confirmation is a sacrament of initiation. It is a further welcoming into the community of faith. It is not only appropriate but critical that this sacrament be celebrated with the support of the full faith community.
- > **The Word proclaimed** - Readings of the Day are another way to tie the celebration to the faith community. It also helps us intimately connect our celebration to the Word of God which has invited all of us to the Eucharistic table.

- > **Renewal of Baptismal promises** - One of the central pieces of the Sacrament of Confirmation is the portion where the candidates are asked to reject Satan and proclaim that they believe the teachings of the church (God, the creator of heaven and earth; Jesus Christ who lived, died, rose, and is seated with God; the Holy Spirit, the giver of life; the holy catholic church the communion of saints, forgiveness of sins and life everlasting)
- > **Imposition of Hands** - This rich symbol signifies that, just as hands are laid upon a priest at Holy Orders, we are all ordained into the priesthood of all people.
- > **Anointing with Oil** - Oil is also a rich symbol which can mean a lot of things including: sealing, healing, marking, and cleansing. This ritual act calls on all of these meanings to celebrate the fact that each person sealed with this oil is more firmly a part of our faith community. As the oil is applied the bishop instructs them to, Be Sealed with the gift of the Holy Spirit.
- > **Sign of Peace** - This gesture is exchanged between the newly confirmed and the Bishop to symbolize this more complete union with the church and all its faithful community.
- > **Eucharist Shared** - Although the Rite allows for Confirmation to be celebrated outside the context of a Eucharistic liturgy, it is right and proper that we share in the Eucharist which binds all of us - newly confirmed, pre-confirmed, and those confirmed for varying lengths of time - together as the Body of Christ.

These symbols and the Confirmation Rite will be explored during Confirmation Sessions with all candidates.

A third resource is the **Catechism of the Catholic Church**. The introduction to the sacrament of Confirmation provided by the Catechism identifies it as intimately connected to the other sacraments of initiation:

1285 Baptism, the Eucharist, and the sacrament of Confirmation together constitute the "sacraments of Christian initiation," whose unity must be safeguarded. It must be explained to the faithful that the reception of the sacrament of Confirmation is necessary for the completion of baptismal grace. For "by the sacrament of Confirmation, [the baptized] are more perfectly bound to the Church and are enriched with a special strength of the Holy Spirit. Hence they are, as true witnesses of Christ, more strictly obliged to spread and defend the faith by word and deed."

The Catechism goes on to explain that we benefit greatly by the sacrament of Confirmation by being more fully aware of the Holy Spirit so that we can preach the Gospel in our lives with full authority:

1302 It is evident from its celebration that the effect of the sacrament of Confirmation is the full outpouring of the Holy Spirit as once granted to the apostles on the day of Pentecost.

1303 From this fact, Confirmation brings an increase and deepening of baptismal grace:

- it roots us more deeply in the divine filiations which makes us cry, "Abba! Father!";*
- it unites us more firmly to Christ;*
- it increases the gifts of the Holy Spirit in us;*
- it renders our bond with the Church more perfect;*
- it gives us a special strength of the Holy Spirit to spread and defend the faith by word and action as true witnesses of Christ, to confess the name of Christ boldly, and never to be ashamed of the Cross:*

Recall then that you have received the spiritual seal, the spirit of wisdom and understanding, the spirit of right judgment and courage, the spirit of knowledge and reverence, the spirit of holy fear in God's presence. Guard what you have received. God the Father has marked you with his sign; Christ the Lord has confirmed you and has placed his pledge, the Spirit, in your hearts.

1304 Like Baptism which it completes, Confirmation is given only once, for it too imprints on the soul an indelible spiritual mark, the "character," which is the sign that Jesus Christ has marked a Christian with the seal of his Spirit by clothing him with power from on high so that he may be his witness.

1305 This "character" perfects the common priesthood of the faithful, received in Baptism, and "the confirmed person receives the power to profess faith in Christ publicly and as it were officially (quasi ex officio)."

The Catechism also emphasizes what should be taught to those preparing to receive the sacrament and places the responsibility for that learning squarely on the parish community:

1309 Preparation for Confirmation should aim at leading the Christian toward a more intimate union with Christ and a

more lively familiarity with the Holy Spirit - his actions, his gifts, and his biddings - in order to be more capable of assuming the apostolic responsibilities of Christian life. To this end catechesis for Confirmation should strive to awaken a sense of belonging to the Church of Jesus Christ, the universal Church as well as the parish community. The latter bears special responsibility for the preparation of confirmands.

1310 To receive Confirmation, one must be in a state of grace.

To be in a state of grace, according to Richard McBrien's reference book titled Catholicism, is to be in union with God: God in us and we in God. Your candidate may find the sacrament of Reconciliation (which will be celebrated as a group at the Confirmation Retreat) a useful step in his/her preparation for the Rite of Confirmation.

All of these resources together call for a sacramental preparation program that invites our young people to know Christ more fully, to learn about the workings of the Spirit in their lives and to be more fully a part of the church which they profess. The Preparation program is designed to address these areas, but needs special help from the sponsor to make sure that these understandings are internalized and personalized by the candidate. The following section will explain more about the preparation process at St. Michael and the third section will offer some strategies to help you foster faith for yourself and your candidate.

How is Confirmation Celebrated at St. Michael?

Since there are many elements of our faith that are celebrated in Confirmation, there are many components to our preparation process. Look for the following things that will help explain the various elements of the preparation process here at St. Michael:

- ◆ a schedule of the classes, retreats and other activities throughout the year
- ◆ a list of components of the Confirmation program including: interview, sponsor, classes, retreat, outreach/service, participation in Liturgy (Eucharist, evening prayer and other prayer opportunities), and letter to Fr. Brady
- ◆ forms that they will need to return to us during the year: sponsor information, interview form, retreat permission form, outreach form, letter to Fr. Brady

They will be informed that it is their responsibility to honor the commitments, turn things in on time, and participate in all aspects of the program. Being adolescents, however, they are very busy (and sometimes, very distracted by that busy-ness) and will need reminders and assistance on keeping some of their deadlines. Review this section carefully and refer to it often for yourself and to encourage your candidate to take her/his responsibilities seriously.

What is My Role as Sponsor?

Now that very day two of them were going to a village seven miles from Jerusalem called Emmaus, and they were conversing about all the things that had occurred. And it happened that while they were conversing and debating, Jesus himself drew near and walked with them, but their eyes prevented them from recognizing him [Luke 24:13-16].

The road to Emmaus is a story about companions and a story about mentors. It is a story about two ordinary people discussing the extraordinary things going on in their lives and learning from someone else (Jesus) what it all meant. In a very real way, it is about you and your candidate, too. From this story, we can learn that there are two key elements to the mentoring experience: The first element is learning and the second is sharing.

Learning

In order for us to share our faith and our lives with another person, we must first learn what our faith is about. Much of our faith knowledge is deeply felt and part of who we are. Much of it, however, we have yet to learn. For you to be as effective a sponsor as possible you must recognize that the best way to be a model for someone on a journey of faith is to be on that journey yourself. To do this, you will need to: **identify your learning needs, locate methods for you to learn that material, and apply it to your life.**

In our lives, we **identify our learning needs** constantly - from learning money and time management skills to learning how to purchase (and/or repair) home appliances. Learning about our faith should be no different. In terms of being a sponsor, there are basically three areas that you may need to learn more about. They are: your personal faith/prayer life, the doctrine and teachings of the church, and the nature of adolescent development and working with youth.

Needless to say, adults **learn** differently than adolescents do. Because of your education and experience, you already know a great deal about yourself and your faith. The wisest among us, however, knows that we must continue to learn every day in order to cope with our changing world. Keeping that in mind, this Sourcebook lists a number of resources and opportunities that might match your learning style and your learning needs. My hope is that if you feel you need some help in one of the three areas I mentioned above, that you would know where to turn. I encourage

you to use them if you feel they would enhance your faith journey and better enable you to share your faith with your candidate.

The list is divided into 3 sections:

1. Personal Prayer/Faith Life resources and opportunities

2. Faith/Doctrine resources and opportunities

3. Adolescent Development resources and opportunities

(Some of the resources listed are mentioned in more than one section)

Personal Prayer/Faith Life

Below are several items that may assist you in continuing your faith journey. I encourage you to identify one or more of them and commit to following up on them so that your faith is richer and more alive when it comes time to share it with your candidate.

In addition, young people may ask questions about the Catholic Faith of their sponsors during the Confirmation process. You will want to tell them the truth. You will want it to be in your words. You will want to believe what you are saying. The following resources may help you prepare for possible questions and deepen your understanding of church teaching:

Classes, Workshops, etc. offered at St. Michael

Refer to the parish bulletin for details on these and other opportunities.

Catholic Updates

Adult Formation Groups (formed and gathered throughout the year)

Bible Study with Father Dan

Workshops, etc. offered off site:

Graced By God Conference (Contact Pat Mundy)

CRHP (Christ Renews His Parish)

Cursillo

Books, Articles, Videos, Other Resources

Pathways

Catechist Theology Handbook

Contact Elise Chapman, Youth Minister at St. Michael, for these and other resources.

Ministry Opportunities

Another way to foster faith is to actively engage in a ministry. I am sure that your experience with your candidate this year will help you foster your faith. In addition, I am confident that you foster your faith through your daily interactions with those you work with and spend time with. Your particular learning needs may also be calling you to participate in a

particular parish ministry which supports the four planks of parish life: Worship, Outreach, Education, Fellowship. If you are not already involved in one of these ministries, you may consider calling the parish office and volunteering for one of the many parish ministries available at St. Michael.

Adolescent Development/Relating to Youth

Many sponsors are also parents of adolescents so you may already know much about how adolescents develop. Below are some resources that will offer a systematic approach to understanding youth and their faith needs at various stages of development. If you are worrying about relating to your candidate, these resources may be helpful:

Workshops, etc. offered off site:

Youth Ministry Certificate Program (2 year program consisting of 8 weekend sessions, learning journal, etc. See Elise Chapman for details.)

National Conference for Catholic Youth Ministers: Youth and Adult conference 2009; Adult Only program 2010

Please visit the Diocesan Web site for additional opportunities-
www.richmonddiocese.org

Books, Articles, Videos, Etc.

Contact Elise Chapman, Coordinator for Youth, for these and other resources.

For further study on any of the areas above, please contact me or any other staff members who could help you discern your learning needs and offer directions toward meeting those needs.

Sharing

Once you learn some things that will help you be a sponsor, the next task is to share this learning and your life with your companion. Below is a list of various suggested strategies that might help share faith between you and your candidate. It is impossible for you to accomplish all of the activities listed, but as you look at the list and decide on which suggestions will most fit your lifestyle and personality. Think, too, what your candidate may need to feel connected. Use as your criteria the question, "Will this help foster faith between my candidate and myself in a live-giving way?". Again, if you would like other suggestions, contact me and we can personalize the list for your situation.

- ◆ **Activities Associated with Confirmation Preparation**
 - ◆ Write a letter to your candidate to be delivered to them at the retreat. **IF YOU DO ONLY ONE THING FOR YOUR CANDIDATE, THIS IS IT.** One of the activities presented to the candidates focuses on the fact that there are people all around them who love and support them and that they are touched by God through the hands of these people. As a part of the talk we are asking each parent and sponsor and other significant members of the candidates life to write a letter of support, love and encouragement for the Confirmation Candidate. This letter should mention: 1) assurance of your love, support, and prayers for them, 2) how you have seen God touch their lives, and 3) How God has touched your life . Please mail, have them mailed, to Elise Chapman's attention or hand deliver them to St. Michael so they arrive no later than Sunday, December 14, 2008. Please make sure your candidate's name appears on the outside of the envelope. These letters are extremely important to the weekend. Please make sure you write one.
 - ◆ Call your candidate before each class to remind them and/or after each class to see how things went during the first semester. (You may be asked to attend designated classes with your candidate.)
 - ◆ Discern and discuss together if there are outreach/service opportunity you would like to do together, and carry out the activity
 - ◆ Find out his/her role in any of the prayer experiences and attend these experiences with them.
 - ◆ Discuss fears, expectations before the retreat, share any retreat experiences you have, and provide opportunities to process the retreat with you afterward.
 - ◆ Remind them of upcoming deadlines.
 - ◆ Go over his/her letter to Fr. Brady before deadline (March 21).
 - ◆ Attend Confirmation Rehearsal which will be announced closer to the date and the Mass of Confirmation.

- ◆ **Personal Contact Not Associated With Class**
 - ◆ Invite the candidate to share a meal or a family event with you
 - ◆ Offer to go see them in a school sports competition,
 - ◆ Invite candidate to join you for Mass or offer to gather and sit with him/her and his/her family at Mass
 - ◆ Consider making plans with your candidate after the Sacrament is celebrated

- ◆ **Written correspondence**
 - ◆ Write a brief thank-you note to your candidate, thanking them for the honor of the request and what your hopes are
 - ◆ See if they have an e-mail address and send them notes occasionally
 - ◆ Send a card on her/his birthday and/or at Christmas & Easter
 - ◆ Give them a congratulations card for receiving the Sacrament

- ◆ **Topics for discussion when you call, see or contact your candidate**
 - ◆ Listen, listen, listen. Let them reflect on their journey. Don't be afraid of the silence - some people need time to think before they put their thoughts into words
 - ◆ Realize the best way to build trust is to show you trust your candidate by sharing yourself with him/her
 - ◆ Be sensitive to subjects your candidate is unwilling or uncomfortable talking about
 - ◆ Discuss family relations, siblings at home and away, parental relationships, etc.
 - ◆ Inquire about friends, dating relationships, etc.
 - ◆ Ask about school: subjects, teachers, academic aspirations
 - ◆ Find out about what extracurricular activities your candidate is involved in, such as sports, jobs, clubs, lessons (piano, tae kwon do, etc.), volunteer work
 - ◆ Explore hobbies and other free time endeavors: reading, computer games and surfing the Internet, art, musical tastes, television, etc.
 - ◆ Don't be afraid to ask faith questions - the nature of your relationship fosters that area of inquiry - like: Do you believe...?, What did you think of the homily?, Do you spend any time with the bible/prayer?, Have you ever done any service work before? What things about the church do you agree/disagree with? If the Pope said he'd change one thing about the church that you wanted changed, what would it be and why?
 - ◆ Ask your candidate to pray for you and assure him/her of your prayers
 - ◆ See if there is anything he/she wants you to pray for
 - ◆ Pray together often

Please know that I, in fact the whole staff, am here to assist as you walk with your candidate. Please let us know if we can help in any way OR if there are ways in which we can improve this process for you!