

Diocesan Education Service

All you need to know about...
The Sacrament of Confirmation



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What is it and what is the purpose of Confirmation?

- Confirmation is one of the seven Sacraments of the Church.
- It is the second of the three sacraments of initiation into the Church which are necessary for people to become full members of the Church. The other two Sacraments of initiation are the Sacraments of Baptism and Eucharist.
- Under Canon Law, Confirmation can precede the receiving of the Eucharist for the first time but it does not have to. This decision is left to the local Ordinary (the diocesan Bishop). In the Archdiocese of Birmingham Confirmation follows Baptism and Eucharist.
- Through Confirmation the seven gifts of the Holy Spirit are received: wisdom, knowledge, reverence, understanding, courage, right-judgement and awe. These gifts can help a person to live as a follower of Christ.
- Through receiving the gifts of the Holy Spirit it is hoped that the candidate will through their thoughts, words and actions bear the nine fruits of the Holy Spirit: love, peace, patience, kindness, generosity, gentleness, faithfulness, self-control and joy.
- It is a means by which the candidate publically professes their faith and shows their commitment to becoming a full member of the Church.

How did Confirmation originate?

- The Sacrament of Confirmation is rooted in the event of Pentecost: the day upon which the disciples were sent the Holy Spirit as promised by Jesus before he died (John 14:15, 14:26, 15:26) and before he ascended into Heaven (Luke 24:49, Acts 1: 4-5, 1:8). It was through the power of the gifts of the Holy Spirit received at Pentecost that the disciples were able to leave the Upper Room and go out into the streets of Jerusalem to proclaim the Good News (Acts 2:1-42). Throughout the Acts of the Apostles and the Letters of the New Testament we hear dramatic accounts of the lives of the Apostles and the new Christian followers as they work to spread the Good News. Reference to the Holy Spirit is made many time (69 times in Acts and Letters). It is the gifts and fruits of the Holy Spirit that help them to face these challenges even in the face of death and it is the Holy Spirit that aids in the conversion of new followers.

When does Confirmation take place?

- Candidates can be confirmed any time after they have reached the age of reason, seen by the Church as aged seven. The bishop or archbishop of each Diocese makes the decision as to when. In some Dioceses it is as early as eight whilst in others it is

as late as aged 15. In the Archdiocese of Birmingham Confirmation candidates are confirmed in the year in which they are 11 years old (Y6).

- The date and time of Confirmation is arranged by the parish priest with the bishop.
- Confirmation usually takes place within the celebration of Mass and at such Masses a significant number of people will be confirmed.

Where does Confirmation take place?

- Confirmation is usually an annual celebration which takes place in the parish church.

Can anyone be confirmed?

- Anyone who has been baptised may be confirmed.
- The candidate must also have received the Sacrament of Reconciliation.

How many times can you be confirmed?

- A person can only be confirmed once.

Who can celebrate Confirmation?

- Traditionally the Archbishop or Bishop carries out the Sacrament of Confirmation.
- A priest may, in special circumstances, be directed by the Bishop to carry out the Sacrament of Confirmation.

Who has to be present at a Confirmation?

- An ordained bishop or priest must be there to administer the Sacrament.
- The candidates for Confirmation.
- A sponsor for each individual candidate who must also be a baptised Catholic over the age of 14. Parents cannot be sponsors for their own children. It is expected that the sponsor and the candidate would seek an opportunity to receive the Sacrament of Reconciliation before the day of Confirmation.

Are any special clothes worn?

- If the celebration takes place during the celebration of Mass the Bishop and priests will wear the vestments for Mass. If Confirmation takes place outside of Mass they may wear cassock and cottar or an alb.
- By virtue of his office the Bishop will wear his mitre (ceremonial headwear), zucchetto (skull cap) and carry his crozier (pastoral staff) for the celebration. At the anointing of the candidates with Chrism he will wear the mitre.
- There are no specific regulations about what is to be worn by the candidates. Such decisions are usually made at local parish level. Some parishes allow candidates to wear clothes of their own choice whilst others prefer the equality of school uniform. In some areas of France there is a custom for candidates to wear a white alb.

What happens at the Sacrament of Confirmation?

The Rite of Confirmation normally takes place within the celebration of Mass and begins during the Liturgy of the Word following the homily by the Bishop.

- The Candidates stand and renew their Baptismal Promises.

By renewing their Baptismal Promises the candidates are professing their faith. This act is taking place at the point during the Mass where the profession of faith is usually said in the form of the Creed.

There is a strong link between Baptism and Confirmation and many aspects of the Rite of Baptism are revisited and echoed in the rite of Confirmation.

In renewing their vows the candidates are professing the beliefs of the Church for themselves whereas at Baptism the parents and Godparents do so on their behalf.

- The bishop lays his hands upon those present by extending his hands over them all and at the same time prays for the Holy Spirit to come upon them.

The gesture of the Bishop is used to invoke the power of the Holy Spirit. It is the same gesture used in other Sacraments: invoking the Holy Spirit at the consecration of the bread and wine at Mass, the ordination of a deacon, priest or bishop and in the absolution in the Sacrament of Reconciliation.

- Each candidate kneels before the bishop in turn. Their sponsor stands behind them with their right hand placed on their right shoulder. The bishop addresses each candidate by their new saint's name and anoints them with the Oil of Chrism on their forehead.

Through the laying on of hands and the anointing with the Oil of Chrism the Sacrament is received. As the bishop anoints with the Oil of Chrism he says "N. be sealed with the Gift of the Holy Spirit."

Kneeling before the Bishop is an act of reverence towards his authority.

The sponsor is present to provide spiritual support to the candidate.

The name of a saint is chosen by the candidate following a period of research and reflection. It should be someone whom they admire and would aspire to be like and someone to whom they can offer their prayers of intercession.

The choosing of the saint's name is reaffirming the fact that the candidate is choosing to be a full member of the Church. Just as their parents chose their name at baptism and said the Baptismal Promises for them now the candidate is establishing themselves as a full member of the Church by saying the Baptismal Promises and by choosing a new name. The chosen saint's name has no legal status and is not used.

In Jewish tradition only kings were anointed as it was believed they had been specially chosen by God. By anointing the candidate with the Oil of Chrism it is emphasising that they too have been chosen by God.

The act of anointing is seen as making a mark or a seal upon the child which is indelible. Because the mark is permanent there is no need for the Sacrament ever to be re-administered.

Chrism comes from the Greek word meaning 'oil of anointing'. The Oil of Chrism is olive oil perfumed with balsam. The richness of the fragrance serves to remind us of the importance of this anointing.

The Oil of Chrism is blessed by the Archbishop at a special Mass during Holy Week at which all the clergy are present. Traditionally this is celebrated on Holy Thursday but, in the Archdiocese of Birmingham, for practical reasons it is celebrated on Holy Wednesday.

- The Bishop gives the final blessing.

In the final blessing the Bishop speaks words of encouragement to the Confirmandi that they, like the first disciples, will go out and proclaim the Word in all their words and actions.

If you'd like to find out more about the Sacrament of Confirmation you can ...

- watch a short film clip featuring Bishop Christopher Coyne on the Catholic TV Network from a series of talks 'Everything you wanted to know about Catholic Liturgy' <http://www.catholictv.com/shows/everything-you-wanted-know-about-catholic-liturgy/why-does-the-bishop-wear-all-stuff>
- watch a short film clip on www.bustedhalo.com/video/confirmation-why-were-confirmed
- read more about it in 'Youcat' ('Youth Catechism of the Catholic Church') available from CTS
- read more about it in the 'Compendium of the Catechism of the Catholic Church' available from CTS
- read more in 'The Catholic Source Book' Harcourt Religion Publishers

Rite of the Sacrament of Confirmation

The Rite of Confirmation usually takes place within the celebration of Mass. It begins during the Liturgy of the Word following the homily.

Rite of Confirmation

Presentation of the Candidates

Following the Gospel the Bishop gives a brief homily using these or similar words:

Bishop: On the day of Pentecost the apostles received the Holy Spirit as the Lord had promised. They also received the power of giving the Holy Spirit to others and so completing the work of baptism. This we read in the Acts of the Apostles. When Saint Paul placed his hands on those who had been baptised, the Holy Spirit came upon them, and they began to speak in other languages and in prophetic words.

Bishops are successors of the apostles and have this power of giving the Holy Spirit to the baptised, either personally or through the priests they appoint.

In our day the coming of the Holy Spirit in confirmation is no longer marked by the gift of tongues, but we know his coming by faith. He fills our hearts with the love of God, brings us together in one faith but in different vocations, and works within us to make the Church one and holy.

The gift of the Holy Spirit which you are to receive will be a spiritual sign and seal to make you more like Christ and more perfect members of his Church. At his baptism by John, Christ himself was anointed by the spirit and sent out on his public ministry to set the world on fire.

You have already been baptised into Christ and now you will receive the power of his Spirit and the sign of the cross on your forehead. You must be witnesses before all the world to his suffering, death, and resurrection; your way of life should at all times reflect the goodness of Christ. Christ gives varied gifts to his Church, and he Spirit distributes them among the members of Christ's body to build up the holy people of God in unity and love.

Be active members of the Church, alive in Jesus Christ. Under the guidance of the Holy Spirit give your lives completely in the service of all, as did Christ, who came not to be served but to serve.

So now, before you receive the Spirit, I ask you to renew the profession of faith you made in baptism or your parents and godparents made in union with the whole Church.

Renewal of Baptismal Promises

The Candidates all stand and in unison answer the questions asked by the Bishop.

Bishop: Do you reject satan and all his works and all his empty promises?

Candidates: I do.

Bishop: Do you believe in God the Father almighty, Creator of heaven and earth?

Candidates: I do.

Bishop: Do you believe in Jesus Christ, His only Son, our Lord, who was born of the Virgin Mary, was crucified, died, and was buried, rose from the dead, and is now seated at the right hand of the Father?

Candidates: I do.

Bishop: Do you believe in the Holy Spirit, the Lord, the giver of life, who came upon the apostles at Pentecost and today is given to you sacramentally in confirmation?

Candidates: I do.

Bishop: Do you believe in the holy catholic Church, the communion of saints, the forgiveness of sins, the resurrection of the body, and life everlasting?

Candidates: I do.

Bishop: This is our faith. This is the faith of the Church. We are proud to profess it in Christ Jesus our Lord.

All: Amen.

The Laying on of Hands

With his hands joined the Bishop says the following prayer

Bishop: My dear friends, in baptism God our Father gave the new birth of eternal life, to his chosen sons and daughters. Let us pray to our Father that he will pour out the Holy Spirit to strengthen his sons and daughters with his gifts and anoint them to be more like Christ the Son of God.

All pray in silence for a short time. The bishop extends his hands and says:

Bishop: All-powerful God, Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, by water and the Holy Spirit you freed your sons and daughters from sin and gave them new life. Send your Holy Spirit upon them to be their Helper and Guide. Give them the spirit of wisdom and understanding, the spirit of right judgement and courage, the spirit of knowledge and reverence. Fill them with the spirit of wonder and awe in your presence. We ask this through Christ our Lord.

All: Amen.

The Anointing with Chrism

Each of the candidates in turns approaches the bishop and kneels before him. Each sponsor, having given the candidate's name card to the assistant places their right hand upon the candidates shoulder. The Bishop dips his right thumb in the oil of Chrism and makes the sign of the cross with the oil on the candidate's forehead.

Bishop: N., be sealed with the Gift of the Holy Spirit.

Candidate: Amen.

Bishop: Peace be with you.

Candidate: And also with you.

The Mass now continues with the Prayer of the Faithful, through the Liturgy of the Eucharist, Holy Communion until the Blessing and Dismissal.

Blessing and Dismissal

Bishop: God our Father made you his children by water and the Holy Spirit: may he bless you and watch over you with his fatherly love.

All: Amen.

Bishop: Jesus Christ the Son of God promised that the Spirit of truth would be with his Church for ever; may he bless you and give you courage in professing the true faith.

All: Amen.

Bishop: The Holy Spirit came down upon the disciples and set their hearts on fire with love: may he bless you, keep you one in faith and love and bring you to the joy of God's kingdom.

All: Amen.

Bishop: May almighty God bless you, the Father, and the Son, and the Holy Spirit.

All: Amen.

The blessing is followed by the Dismissal.