



The Family Celebrates Confirmation:

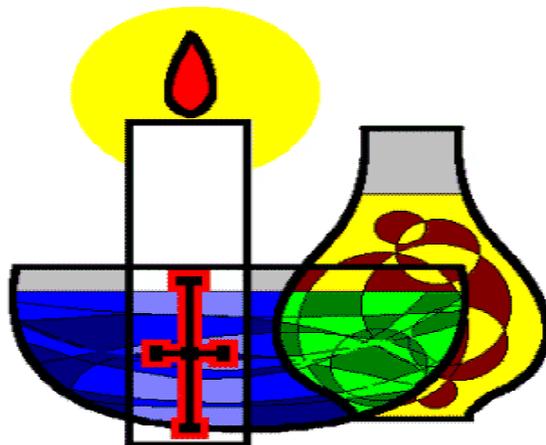
Affirming the Faith Journey



Welcome to this very special time in the life of your family. We hope that the experience of preparation for the Sacrament of Confirmation will provide your family some memorable moments of interaction that will open your family to the Holy Spirit, ever-present in your lives. Since the Sacrament of Confirmation is currently celebrated in adolescence in the Diocese of Albany, we acknowledge similarities between the family life cycle at this time and the theology of Confirmation (a sacrament of initiation).

As you know from living with them, adolescents are developing a growing ability to make independent choices. At the same time, they can enjoy an increasing *interdependence* within the family and the larger community as their unique gifts and talents are recognized and encouraged in the family's and community's life. Adolescence, then, is a time of forging new relationships within the family system as well as in the Church.

The sacrament of Confirmation has its roots in Baptism. In fact, in the early church, what we now call Confirmation was a small part of the baptismal rite. It was that part of the baptismal rite where the person, baptized in the Spirit, was sent forth in that Spirit into a new relationship with the Church.



Today, even though Confirmation is separated from Baptism by a number of years, we continue to affirm the connection between these two sacraments. In the Rite of Confirmation, candidates:

- affirm for themselves the baptismal promises made for them by parents, godparents and the faith community.
- are anointed and sealed in the Spirit who has been unfolding in their lives.
- are called to the Eucharist where we celebrate fully our identity as the family of Jesus.
- are called forth as disciples to use their gifts to participate in the mission of the Church, building a world of peace, justice and unity.

There are many ways that the “domestic church” can prepare together to celebrate the Sacrament of Confirmation. This packet suggests some activities and rituals to affirm your family and highlight your young person preparing for this Sacrament.

Affirming Our Roots - Recall their baptism and the role their baptism has played in their lives.

Affirming Our Choices - Celebrate the gifts of the Spirit in your family and the decision of your son/daughter to celebrate Confirmation.

Affirming Our Direction - Anticipate the future as you nurture your dreams of building a better world as a disciple of Jesus.

It is our hope that the parent notes, activities and prayer experiences will help you affirm the connections between faith and life, touch your family spirit and celebrate the sacredness of your home.

A Parent's Role in an Adolescent's Decision to Be Confirmed

Young persons are touched with God's grace. However, it is the task of parents and the parish community to recognize this grace and nurture its unfolding. We are, in a sense, like gardeners helping a flower to grow. Although a flower's growth is the work of God, the gardener has the responsibility to prepare the ground, water and fertilize the growing plant, and place it in a place of light. Your son or daughter is like that unique flower, holding within the mystery of God's Spirit. Young people need the intentional caring and patience of the adults around them to "prepare the ground" and supply the nourishment for proper spiritual growth.

We cannot force this growth, nor is it measured by chronological age. Everyone comes to a faith commitment at his/her own rate. While some youth show an enthusiasm and outward readiness to be confirmed, others quietly cooperate with this call even though they may be unable to clearly articulate what this call really means for them. Still others show reluctance, resistance, even refusal to be a part of the process. There is very little that can be done about their refusal, but reluctance and resistance may just be part of the growth process as they challenge our beliefs, our values and our authority. Often, it is their way of asking us to help them make sense of religious faith in their lives.

"Teenagers do not want answers, they want guidance as they search for answers," claims Elizabeth Chesto. Experience tells us this is true. Often teens resist what parents think is "best" for them because they have a strong need to discover things for themselves. What adolescents need from the adults around them is patience, a willingness to listen, and someone to walk the faith journey with them as mentor and witness.

If we invite hesitant teens to at least be part of the preparation, the experience will go a long way to help them appreciate the Sacrament of Confirmation in order to make a more informed and prayerful choice. However, even after our best efforts at nurturing their faith, some will defer their Confirmation. At this point, we must continue to gently nurture, trusting that God is still in charge.

By allowing teens the freedom to be who they are, they will have a better sense of worth and worthiness. It is that healthy sense of self that allows them to continue the process of growing in faith. It is a tough job letting go of our teens as they walk this path, but by letting go they are able to become the persons God made them to be.

For those who do confirm their faith, this is only a beginning, not a "graduation." Their journey will continue in a deeper and fuller way. As such, we must continue to be witnesses and mentors as they take their places as fellow disciples in our midst.

The purpose of this packet is to offer you activities and rituals to use in your home; we also offer here some suggestions for families during the Confirmation preparation:

- Encourage your teens to try different experiences, even though they might prefer one particular way of learning over another. Remember, personality plays a key role. Some are “joiners” while others are “loners,” some love to read while others prefer to learn experientially, some express their thoughts and ideas to the world while others prefer to keep their personal thoughts private.
- Praise those who are enthusiastic and encourage those who are not, but never scold or berate them for their lack of enthusiasm.
- Allow them to discover and develop their own call and their own gifts. Do not expect them to be your clones. Avoid comparing your teen with siblings, relatives or friends.
- Be available when they return from a Confirmation retreat, class or service project. They may have questions or want to share about something that happened. Ask questions that show your interest, but never force the issue. Here are two sample questions: “What was your favorite part of the experience?” “What did you discover that you didn’t see before?”
- Be in touch with the parish to know what to expect for your Confirmation candidate, as well as to know what is expected of you as a parent. Be willing to participate as fully as you can. Encourage your teen’s sponsor to participate fully also. Offering to be part of the Confirmation experience by volunteering is one way to let your son or daughter know this is an important part of their faith formation experience.

*“The two most important gifts you can give a child are roots and wings.”
(ancient Chinese saying)*



Activities to Celebrate Our Roots



Here are some activities to affirm your child's roots, both in his/her church family and his/her family of origin.

1. Bring out memorabilia of the child's baptism, such as photos, the baptismal gown, candle, or memorabilia from past baptisms (siblings, parents, etc.) Share memories and anecdotes of that day, and why you chose to have him/her baptized. Give information about the godparents.
2. Tell why you chose his/her particular name. Talk about the significance of each family member's name - why it was chosen, etc., as a prelude to the discussion about choosing a Confirmation name. He/she may choose to reaffirm his/her baptismal name or choose a new name, but whichever is chosen, this can be affirmed with a short ritual or blessing (see below.)
3. Share family stories when God's presence has been evident in both happy and sad times. Allow each member of the family to tell his/her own version of the story, sharing both feelings and a unique perspective. Examples: Remember the time Mom broke her arm and how the neighbors took turns cooking dinner for us? Remember Ginny's wedding and the rainbow over the church? Remember Grandma's funeral and how many people came.
4. Help create a family tree, and look up the meaning of the names on the family tree.
5. Tell about your own circumstances of birth and your own name.
6. Have a "roots" search - famous historical and religious figures from the nationality or culture of your family, e.g. St. Brigid (Ireland) or Nelson Mandela (South Africa).





Prayer for Affirming Our Roots

Here are some suggestions for the time and place for this blessing.

Outdoors

by a body of water
in the yard
in a park
in the woods
on a beach
under the stars
around a bonfire

Indoors

around a table
in the living room/family room
around the fireplace

Time

sunrise
sunset
solstice
equinox
birthday
Sunday in Lent
Easter Sunday

(Allow the Confirmation candidate to choose the time and place for this ritual or blessing. You may offer suggestions, but he/she is old enough to know what suits his/her personality best.)

Suggested Reading

Begin with this passage from Isaiah 43:

Israel, the Lord who created you says, "Do not be afraid - I will save you. I have called you by name - you are mine. When you pass through deep waters, I will be with you; your troubles will not overwhelm you. When you pass through fire, you will not be burned; the hard trials that come will not hurt you. For I am the Lord your God, the holy God of Israel, who saves you.

Blessing

Depending on whether he/she keeps the baptismal name or selects a new name, have the family share a blessing similar to one of the blessings below, encouraging each member of the family to write one line.

If you would like to reflect on the meaning or significance of the name itself, here is a suggestion:

Mother: *I honor your (new) name, Peter, as a man of strength.*
Father: *I honor your (new) name, Peter, as a man chosen by God to lead.*
Brother: *I honor your (new) name, Peter, as a man I can rely on for help.*
Sister: *I honor your (new) name, Peter, as a man who loves the sea.*

If you would like to reflect on the positive characteristics of the candidate, here is a suggestion:

- Mother: *I honor your (new) name, Elizabeth, as a woman who loves the outdoors.*
- Father: *I honor your (new) name, Elizabeth, as a woman who is kind.*
- Brother: *I honor your (new) name, Elizabeth, as a woman who helps me with my homework.*
- Sister: *I honor your (new) name, Elizabeth, as a woman who stands up for what she believes.*

Each member of the family might want to read a personal note to the Confirmation candidate, affirming his/her gifts. After the notes are shared, the family can hold hands while one family member makes the sign of the cross on his/her forehead with a drop of scented olive oil saying:

“I anoint you with the oil of faith as a sign of commitment to your continuing journey.”

If there is a body of water nearby, you may want to continue the ritual with either the entire family or just the Confirmation candidate “re-entering the waters of baptism.”

Celebration

End the ritual with a meal. Create a special menu (brunch, picnic, dinner) that would include all of the Confirmation candidate’s favorite foods or else traditional family foods. Plan to serve each dish as a separate course, and with each course, tell a story about the food. You could tell a story about the person who handed the recipe down to you, or the first time you made it. This will help the family connect family traditions and family food with family stories and family names.

End the meal with a small memento or recognition of this passage. Appropriate homemade gifts are: a banner, poster, collage of photos, bookmark, poem; appropriate store-bought gifts are: a book, mug, key-chain, pen, lapel pin or button.





Activities to Affirm Our Choices

- Using a “namecard” or paper placemat at the dinner table with each person’s name on it, have each family member write down on the card or mat one way each person is a “gift” to the family. In other words, what is his/her unique quality that is special and needed?
- List the Gifts of the Spirit and the Fruits of the Spirit on separate pieces of paper:

<u>Gifts of the Spirit</u>	<u>Fruits of the Spirit</u>	
wisdom	love	goodness
understanding	joy	faithfulness
knowledge	peace	gentleness
counsel	patience	self-control
courage	kindness	
piety		
fear of the Lord		

 - Choose a Gift or Fruit of the Spirit and write down on the paper the name of someone in your family or circle of friends who lives it visibly.
 - Choose a Gift or Fruit of the Spirit. Spend a week living that Gift or Fruit and reflecting on the impact or outcome. Share the results with each other.
 - Have every member of the family choose a slip of paper from the basket each morning and pray for the blessing of that Gift or Fruit throughout the day. At night, share the results with each other.
- Reflect on your personal characteristics, talents and abilities, and how you used these traits during an activity or event. What did you discover about yourself/others in this time? Read Matthew 25 (seeing the face of God in the experience of service.)
- If this is not already part of the parish preparation, encourage your son/daughter to spend time with his/her sponsor. The sponsor can share his/her experience of God in life, and why the Church is an important part of his/her life.
- Have older members of the family share with younger members their memories of Confirmation - what it meant then and what it means now.
- Present the young adult with a medal or a framed card with the name (and meaning) of his/her Confirmation name.
- Each night, as he/she prepares for Confirmation, pray for the Spirit to bless the candidate with one of the Gifts or Fruits.



Prayer for Affirming Our Choices

On a table place the following: Baptismal candle, photographs, symbol of his/her current life, i.e. car keys, dance shoes, football, favorite shirt.

Gathering Prayer:

Leader:

Gracious God, we gather as a family to celebrate (name of candidate)'s choice to be confirmed in our faith. When he/she was a child, we brought him/her to the church to be baptized in our Catholic faith. Now (name of candidate) is making his/her own commitment to live as your disciple in the sacrament of Confirmation. This commitment marks a transition in (name of candidate's) life and ours. We ask for your blessing on our celebration.

[Note: ____ Anyone present is invited to pray one of these prayers.]

____ Grant us the gift of WISDOM. May this gift of wisdom enable us to see as God sees in order to learn from our past, to reflect on our present, and to live with integrity always.

ALL: Spirit of God be with us.

____ Grant us the gift of UNDERSTANDING. May this gift help us to be compassionate people.

ALL: Spirit of God be with us.

____ Grant us the gift of KNOWLEDGE. May this gift help us to broaden our hearts and minds so that we will be open to all that life offers.

ALL: Spirit of God be with us.

____ Grant us the gift of COUNSEL. May this gift enable us to stand firmly in our values so that our choices will be rooted in peace, justice and mercy.

ALL: Spirit of God be with us.

____ Grant us the gift of COURAGE. May this gift help us to maintain our beliefs in the midst of criticism, peer pressure and consumerism.

ALL: Spirit of God be with us.

____ Grant us the gift of PIETY. May this gift draw us to You, the source of life and holiness.

ALL: Spirit of God be with us.

_____ Grant us the gift of FEAR OF THE LORD. May this gift fill us with awe and thanksgiving.

ALL: Spirit of God be with us.

Parent:

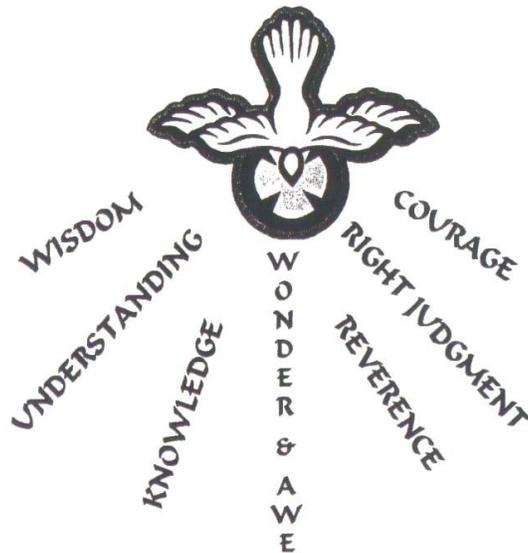
On our table we have placed symbols of your life. Your baptismal candle symbolizes the day we brought you to our faith. Photographs of different stages of your life remind us of your growth. These other items remind us of your transition from one stage to the next. Children are given to us as a gift. Our role as parents is to guide you in your growth, and so we offer the following words to you:

- Parents may offer something they hope, dream or desire for their child and invite others present to do the same.
- A new symbol may be presented to the child to mark this event.

Blessing Prayer:

All extend hands and pray this blessing prayer:

May the sacrament which you are about to receive strengthen and deepen your baptismal commitment to be a sign and source of Christ's healing presence in the world. We offer you support as you grow in wisdom and grace as a member of this family and the Church. May God's Holy Spirit, who has guided you on your journey, continue to be a source of strength and hope. AMEN.





Activities to Affirm Our Direction

1. Use the following phrases as a springboard for discussion:
“In ten years, my hopes for the world include.....”
“What can I personally contribute for this to become reality.....”
“What can my Church (the wider community of the people of God) contribute for this to become reality....”
2. Watch the movie “Contact” together. How did the main character change? What caused her to change? How might her faith experience make her life different in the future? How does faith make our lives and our choices different -- as individuals, as a family?
3. Make concrete plans to nurture your lives daily as disciples. You might want to look at areas such as personal prayer, worship, service, learning and personal relationships. Talk about ways you can support each other with these plans?
4. Teens often uncover their hidden gifts and talents through opportunities they have to be involved in service or other activities. Take an active role in encouraging these opportunities as you see them.
 - Offer to help your teen make the contacts s/he needs to volunteer.
 - Encourage your teen to do service with friends when they are looking for “something to do.” Offer transportation if possible.
 - Volunteer at a local soup kitchen, Habitat for Humanity, etc., as a family to model the experience of service.
 - Be present at musical performances, sports events, award ceremonies... ..anywhere that will affirm the talents and gifts of your teen and give him/her positive feedback.
 - Introduce your teen to people in the parish who are involved in different ministries - catechist, music minister, lector, parish council member, Eucharist minister, minister to the sick/homebound. Have them share with your teen the meaning of this ministry.



5. Affirm the direction of your relationship by making a “covenant” or commitment of promises to each other. For example:

Teens: I promise to let you know my whereabouts.
I promise to drive responsibly.
I promise to introduce you to all my friends.
I promise to keep my curfews.
I promise to do my share around the house.

Parents: I promise to listen to your concerns without interrupting or yelling.
I promise to be respectful of your friends and your privacy.
I promise to be patient.
I promise to be honest and fair when there is a conflict.

6. Point out the life stories of people in your parish, neighborhood or community whose actions show they are living as disciples of Jesus. How do their actions of courage, compassion and conscience reveal what they believe? Try to articulate the connection and invite your teens to keep their eyes open for those who act on their Christian commitment. For example:

“Your grandmother brings Eucharist to her homebound neighbor each week because she believes her neighbor is still connected to the parish community even though she is unable to go out.”

“Mary Jones volunteers each week at the Center for the Disabled because she believes persons with disabilities have value and should be helped to reach their potential.”

“Frank Smith is writing to his legislator asking him to support a repeal of the death penalty because he believes that all life has value, and we don’t have the right to take another’s life, even if that person has done so.”

7. Use this as a daily prayer:

*“There are different gifts, but the same Spirit gives them.
There are different ways of serving, but the same Lord is served.
There are different abilities, but the same God gives ability to everyone for their particular service.
The Spirit’s presence is shown in some way in each person for the good of all.*

Lord, help me to use the gifts the Spirit gives me today and everyday.”



Prayer to Affirm Our Direction

This ritual may be used prior to Confirmation; however, it is very effective if used after Confirmation as a way of reflecting on the experience and future direction as a Christian disciple.

Setting:

A calendar or datebook that shows future years, packets of seed for everyone, a compass, a bible.

Opening Prayer

Lord, you have known us before we were born and created us in your image. As you set us on our paths of life, you help us to grow in trust and in the constant assurance of your loving presence in all the choices of our lives. Be with us as we gather to consider new paths of life before us. Amen.

Reading: *The Parable of the Sower and the Seed*
(Matthew 13: 3-9, 19-23 - Today's English Version)

"Once there was a man who went out to sow grain. As he scattered the seed in the field, some of it fell along the path, and the birds came and ate it up. Some of it fell on rocky ground, where there was little soil. The seeds soon sprouted, because the soil wasn't deep. But when the sun came up, it burned the young plants; and because the roots had not grown deep enough, the plants soon dried up. Some of the seed fell among thorn bushes, which grew up and choked the plants. But some seeds fell in good soil, and the plants bore grain: some had one hundred grains, others sixty, and others thirty." And Jesus concluded, "Listen, then, if you have ears!"

"Those who hear the message about the Kingdom but do not understand it are like the seeds that fell along the path. The Evil One comes and snatches away what was sown in them. The seeds that fell on rocky ground stand for those who receive the message gladly as soon as they hear it. But it does not sink deep into them, and they don't last long. So when trouble or persecution comes because of the message, they give up at once. The seeds that fell among thorn bushes stand for those who hear the message; but the worries about this life and the love for riches choke the message, and they don't bear fruit. And the seeds sown in the good soil stand for those who hear the message and understand it: they bear fruit, some as much as one hundred, others sixty, and others thirty."

Give each participant some seeds in a small package. Explain that the seeds represent the life of God already planted within us at baptism. Even though some of the seed will be found on rocky ground or choked by weeds at other times, each of us has the power, through the Spirit, to sow our seed on good ground. We prepare that “good ground” by staying rooted in prayer and the Christian community of family and parish.

Response:

Lord, teach me your truth and guide me in your paths.

(Read by the Confirmation candidate):

- *When everything is going well and the path seems smooth.....
- *When I stand up for the truth...
- *When I face difficulties and the path seems rocky...
- *When I use my gifts and talents for the good of others...
- *When others challenge me to be my real self...
- *When others tempt me to be someone else...
- *When I am true to my friends and those who love me...
- *When I try to do as Jesus did...
- *When I feel overwhelmed by demands on me...
- *When I feel alone and doubt your presence with me...
- *When I am at peace in your mercy...

Prayer of Affirmation by Family: *(Stand while candidate sits.)*

We promise to walk the path of life with you, in your good times and difficult times, in your doubts and questions, and in all the joys and challenges you will face in your life. Know that God walks always with you and asks you to trust the promise of his faithful love wherever the path leads. We make this pledge through our Lord, Jesus Christ, who walks among us in his Holy Spirit. Amen.

