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**THE ORIGINAL ORDER OF SACRAMENTS OF  
INITIATION: BAPTISM, CONFIRMATION, EUCHARIST**

## Introduction

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In January 2016, Bishop Clarence Silva promulgated the new norms concerning the restoration of the original order of the Sacraments of Initiation. The Sacraments of Initiation throughout the Diocese of Honolulu will be: Baptism: in infancy; Confirmation and First Holy Communion: at the age of discretion (about age 7). Children will receive first Penance prior to Confirmation and first Holy Communion.

Parishes, upon establishing a comprehensive youth ministry program, may elect to implement restoring the original order of the sacraments of initiation in one of three years. The first group of parishes will celebrate Confirmation and First Holy Communion for children in 2018, the second group of parishes in 2019, the third group in 2020. Baptism, Confirmation, and Eucharist, in this order, will be the norm across the diocese in 2020.

## Frequently Asked Questions

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### **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.

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."

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

The ordinary minister of Confirmation is the bishop. The bishop may delegate 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?**

Once the new norms are promulgated, a candidate for confirmation is one who has reached the age of reason (seven years of age or above) and meets the following requirements:

Is validly baptized and not previously confirmed

Is Catholic (children baptized in another church must make a Profession of Faith)

Is properly instructed

Is capable of renewing their Baptismal promises

Has been previously been prepared for and received the Sacrament of Reconciliation

Candidates will be prepared for the Sacrament of Confirmation and First Holy Communion. Both Sacraments will be celebrated together at the same Mass.

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

By placing Confirmation at this age, the Diocese of Honolulu will be following the natural sequence of the Sacraments of Christian Initiation: Baptism, then Confirmation, and then reception of First Holy Communion. 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 Holy Communion, 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 choosing to confirm one's faith but of Christ choosing us and the deepening of the grace and gifts of the Holy Spirit received in our baptism. 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 celebrant. 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 they were much older. 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 Holy Communion. 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 original order of the sacraments (i.e. putting Confirmation before First Holy Communion) is to emphasize that Eucharist (Holy Communion) is THE sacrament, which celebrates our FULL membership in the Body of Christ. It is the sacrament of on-going 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 receive Holy Communion.

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

An increasing number of dioceses and parishes in the United States are adopting a Restored (Original) 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 Holy Communion, not *after*. Practically speaking, this means that the two sacraments are received at the First Holy Communion Mass, with Confirmation being celebrated after the homily.

## **9. Why do they call it Original 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. The Last Supper preceded Pentecost. Shouldn't Eucharist precede Confirmation?**

Matthew 3:16 - 17: "After Jesus was baptized, he came up from the water and behold, the heavens were opened for him, descending like a dove and coming upon him. And a voice came from the heavens, saying, 'This is my beloved Son, with whom I am well pleased.'" Jesus is baptized, then confirmed.

## **11. Why is our parish celebrating Confirmation and First Holy Communion at the same Mass?**

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 Holy Communion?**

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 grace 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.

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

No. 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 second 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. While there will be an 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. Children and 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 Penance/Reconciliation and First Holy Communion.

## **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).*

In implementing this new norms, the parish, with guidance from the diocese, must provide opportunities for parents and families to prepare together for the celebration of their child's Confirmation and First Holy Communion. 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 original 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. 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:

- The baptized need the sanctifying grace of Confirmation earlier, not later in life.
- 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.

## **22. What does a family-centered Sacrament of Initiation program look like and why is this a good approach to preparation?**

The initiation process would include parish and family-centered gatherings in addition to regular catechetical programs. The parish as well as the child's family are the models of sacramental life in action: a continual celebration of God's chosen people who, as a family, are called to worship, pray, study, discuss and serve others. Thus, family-centered programs include attending Mass as a family, teaching families how to pray together, how to communicate the faith in family life, adapt simple rituals in the home, and be of service to those in need.

A family-centered program would speak volumes to children about the importance of the preparation. 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 Holy Communion can wait until younger children are ready to enter the program then the entire family can enroll together. For instance, if you have a first 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 necessitate a collaboration among our families, our Catholic Schools and our Religious Education programs. This collaboration calls us to involve children and their parents/guardians, regardless of where the child's primary religious education takes place, a Catholic school or Religious Education program. Parents have the central role in preparing their children. The School or Religious Education programs will continue to provide catechesis for the children, but parents will be expected to participate in classes which will enrich their own understanding as adults and help them in their role of preparing their children.

**25. After the transitional period, how do we prepare and implement a program for young people after second grade (i.e. third – 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 with in a three-year period bracket program 3-5 grades, 6-8 grades, and 9-12 grades. The period of preparation is approximately six - eight sessions. There are many resources connecting Confirmation to Baptism and First Holy Communion. 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*)

**26. 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 goal, 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 Comprehensive 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.

**27. 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 comprehensive youth ministry program which attend to the spiritual needs of our youth and can be based upon a deepening of the sacramental grace 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.

**Notes**