

A Middle School Confirmation Program

saint mary's press

Anointed in the Spirit

**Program
Director
Manual**

Rita Burns Senseman

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Welcome!

Anointed in the Spirit is a Confirmation preparation program for young people in the sixth, seventh, and eighth grades. This new program prepares middle schoolers for the Sacrament of Confirmation through a process of liturgical catechesis that focuses on the ritual elements of Confirmation. Young people take part in a preparation process whose source and summit is the celebration of the Sacrament of Confirmation. After receiving Confirmation, the newly confirmed reflect back on the liturgical celebration of the Sacrament and deepen their understanding of the mystery they have received.

Whether you use this program as an immediate preparation for the Sacrament or you use it over a longer period of time, this engaging new liturgical approach to sacramental catechesis not only will please your candidates and their parents but also will fully prepare your middle school candidates to receive the Sacrament of Confirmation.

In the pages that follow, you will find a fuller description of liturgical catechesis and how it prepares middle schoolers for Confirmation.

The *Anointed in the Spirit* program includes three other components to accompany this manual:

- The candidate handbook supports the preparation sessions and includes Catholic prayers, a list of Catholic beliefs and practices, and a list of saints.
- The catechist guide contains a description of liturgical catechesis, detailed session plans for the eight preparation sessions and two mystagogy sessions, the *Apostolic Constitution on the Sacrament of Confirmation*, and numbers 1 through 33 of *The Order of Confirmation*.
- The sponsor booklet offers suggestions and guidelines for the Confirmation sponsor.

Overview of the Program Director Manual

In this program director manual, you will find information specifically designed to help you organize an effective preparation program.

In addition to the discussion of liturgical catechesis, in chapter 1, “Program Overview,” you will find an outline of the structure of *Anointed in the Spirit*, including information on what is covered in each candidate session. Chapter 1 also contains a detailed description of the other components in the program.

In chapter 2, “Celebrating the Sacrament of Confirmation with Young Adolescents,” you will find a brief history of the Sacrament of Confirmation, a summary of the theology of the Sacrament, and a description of the roles of parents, sponsors, catechists, and the parish in the preparation process.

Chapter 3, “Getting Started,” includes guidelines for planning program elements, such as engaging the candidates in service, inviting them to celebrate the Sacrament of Penance and Reconciliation, and planning a candidate retreat. The chapter ends with a checklist for getting started to help you organize your planning.

Chapter 4, “Designing Your Confirmation Program,” helps you put together the preparation process in a way that best fits your parish culture. The chapter includes planning considerations and concrete models for scheduling options. In this chapter, you will also find an outline for doing liturgical catechesis with the entire parish community.

Chapter 5, “Training Session for Catechists,” helps catechists understand the program rationale and its liturgical approach to preparation. It can be presented as an evening session or over a longer period of time. Excerpts from pertinent liturgical and catechetical documents are provided.

Chapter 6, “Orientation Session for Parents,” offers everything you need to prepare parents to be your partners in their children’s preparation for Confirmation. There are also options for including the candidates in the session, as well as an option for meeting with parents, sponsors, and candidates all in the same orientation session if you prefer to schedule just one gathering.

In chapter 7, “Orientation Session for Sponsors and Candidates,” you will find detailed plans for leading a session for the sponsors and the candidates. The session provides an opportunity for sponsors to learn about their role and, at the same time, spend time with their candidates. Adaptations are provided for an orientation session for sponsors only.

Chapter 8, “Preparation for the Confirmation Liturgy and for Mystagogy,” offers planning tools for leading a committee in arranging and rehearsing the Confirmation liturgy. The chapter also offers guidance for planning mystagogy sessions with candidates, and with the wider parish community, to allow for reflection after the Confirmation liturgy has taken place.

In appendix A, you will find the *Apostolic Constitution on the Sacrament of Confirmation*. Pope Paul VI promulgated this document in 1971. It describes some of the origins and history of the Sacrament and explores its essence.

Appendix B consists of numbers 1 through 33 of *The Order of Confirmation*, the Church’s official liturgical text for the Sacrament of Confirmation. This text is the foundation for the entire program.

The Program Director Role

You have a vital role as the director of Confirmation preparation. You are the “program manager” and are central to the success of the program. Your commitment and hard work and the example of discipleship you provide to the parish are much appreciated. *Anointed in the Spirit* will give you the background and materials you need to provide an effective and enriching Confirmation preparation program.



1

Program Overview

Program Rationale

As described in the “Welcome!” section, this program is based on the ritual elements of Confirmation and is organized according to the principles of liturgical catechesis. This first chapter opens with a description of liturgical catechesis and how it is used in *Anointed in the Spirit*. An explanation of why liturgical catechesis is particularly effective with young adolescents follows. (See chapter 5, “Training Session for Catechists,” for more information.) Finally, in this chapter you will find detailed descriptions of the other components that accompany this manual.

Liturgical Catechesis

In liturgical catechesis, the liturgy itself teaches. The ritual elements of the Confirmation liturgy lead the candidates toward full participation in the celebration of the Sacrament. By reflecting on the symbols that will be part of the celebration, the candidates prepare to enter fully into the liturgical celebration. Liturgical catechesis prepares them to grasp the realities the symbols point to. Understanding the movement of the liturgy allows them to more actively and more consciously enter into the sacramental celebration.

Although there are many ways to describe liturgical catechesis, for our purposes in this program, it can be described as catechesis that (1) leads to and prepares for liturgy, (2) includes the liturgical celebration itself, and (3) reflects back on the liturgy (this activity is called mystagogy). Let’s look more closely at those three steps now.

The Three Steps of Liturgical Catechesis

Step 1: Prepare for the liturgical celebration. Each of the eight candidate preparation sessions takes one of the ritual elements of Confirmation and builds toward the celebration of the Sacrament:

- Session 1, “Being a Candidate,” introduces the “Presentation of the Candidates,” from *The Order of Confirmation* (21). The session familiarizes the candidates with the idea of being candidates and being presented to the bishop.

- Session 2, “Baptism: Waters of New Life,” is a reflection on the Sacrament of Baptism. In this session, we are doing mystagogy (step 3 of liturgical catechesis—reflecting back on a sacrament). Confirmation is the perfecting and sealing of Baptism. Recalling and reflecting on Baptism fully prepares the candidates for Confirmation.
- Session 3, “Renewing Baptismal Promises,” continues the baptismal theme by exploring the meaning and importance of the Renewal of Baptismal Promises that occurs during Confirmation (*The Order of Confirmation*, 23).
- Session 4, “The Laying On of Hands,” examines the next major ritual moment in the sacramental celebration, the bishop’s laying on of hands. This ritual gesture is loaded with meaning and history.
- Session 5, “The Gifts of the Holy Spirit,” focuses on the bishop’s prayer that is prayed during the laying on of hands. This prayer asks for the seven Gifts of the Holy Spirit.
- Session 6, “Being Anointed by the Holy Spirit,” is based on paragraph 26 of *The Order of Confirmation*. This hands-on session allows for the candidates to see, touch, and feel oil—vegetable oil, that is. Then they apply their learning to the sacramental sign of anointing with Chrism.
- Session 7, “The Eucharist: The Heart of the Church’s Life,” is grounded in the unity of the three Sacraments of Initiation. This unity is made clearer when Confirmation is celebrated during the Mass (*The Order of Confirmation*, 13).
- Session 8, “Celebrating the Sacrament of Confirmation,” is the immediate preparation for the sacramental celebration. It is an overview of the liturgical celebration.

You will find more information about the structure and content of each session later in this chapter, in the description of the catechist guide. *Anointed in the Spirit* also offers resources to prepare the broader parish community to celebrate the Sacrament of Confirmation (see pp. 39–42 of this manual).

Step 2: The celebration of the Sacrament of Confirmation. The liturgy itself is the central step of liturgical catechesis. This grace-filled sacramental moment is the pinnacle of the process. In chapter 8 of this manual, “Preparation for the Confirmation Liturgy and for Mystagogy,” you will find detailed instructions for leading a team in the work of preparing the Confirmation liturgy.

Step 3: Mystagogical reflection on the celebration of Confirmation.

The third part of liturgical catechesis is mystagogical. *Mystagogy* means “to reflect on the mystery.” In this case, a mystagogical reflection on the celebration of the Sacrament of Confirmation means that the confirmands (newly confirmed) reflect on *their experiences* of Confirmation. They reflect on the meaning of the Sacrament they now have received. Two mystagogical sessions follow the eight preparation sessions. They are to be used after the reception of the Sacrament. The purpose of the mystagogical sessions is to deepen the confirmands’ understanding of the Sacrament and lead them outward into mission.

Anointed in the Spirit also provides a mystagogical session that offers an opportunity for those in the wider parish community to reflect on their own experience of Confirmation (see chapter 8, “Preparation for the Confirmation Liturgy and for Mystagogy,” of this manual).

Why Liturgical Catechesis?

Confirmation is a sacred celebration, a once-in-a-lifetime moment, a grace-filled sacramental moment, a transformative moment. Indeed, the Church tells us that all the Sacraments are transformative. The catechesis that surrounds the Sacraments helps us to prepare for, and subsequently understand, the transformation that takes place. Moreover, as Saint John Paul II tells us, catechesis is “intrinsically linked with the whole of liturgical and sacramental activity” (*On Catechesis in Our Time*, 23).

Anointed in the Spirit directly links the Sacrament to the catechesis that precedes and follows the sacramental celebration. Liturgical catechesis prepares the candidates to enter into the liturgy. Then the liturgy itself forms them in faith. After the liturgy, liturgical reflection (mystagogy) helps the confirmands to understand more fully that which they have received and to respond faithfully.

For young adolescents, focusing on the rituals, signs, and symbols of liturgical catechesis is an engaging and imaginative way to prepare for the Sacrament. Middle schoolers are in transition between concrete and abstract thinking. Exploring the abstract meaning found in the concrete symbols of water, oil, and laying on of hands allows them to think more deeply about the meaning of ritual symbols in a developmentally appropriate way. *Anointed in the Spirit* provides the candidates with solid Church doctrine on Confirmation, but the candidates approach the teachings through the liturgical symbols, making the concepts more accessible.

Components of *Anointed in the Spirit*

Candidate Handbook

Anointed in the Spirit features a full-color candidate handbook that plays a vital part in the preparation process. It contains images, prayers, explanations, and journaling space that the candidates use throughout the sessions. Each candidate and catechist should have his or her own copy. Instructions for using the candidate handbook are clearly laid out in the catechist guide. The candidate handbook includes one chapter for each of the eight preparation sessions in the catechist guide. (The two mystagogy sessions draw material from the liturgical celebration itself.) The session plans direct the catechist to invite the candidates to open their handbooks at various points to look at images, read short selections, review charts, complete activities, or say prayers together. The presentation of the candidate handbook is youth-friendly, using stories and examples to help the candidates understand the information and relate it to their lives.

Each chapter in the candidate handbook includes a number of special features:

- **Jesus Connection.** These features serve to highlight the Christological dimension of the Catholic faith and to help the candidates grow in their understanding of who Jesus is and his importance for their lives.
- **Did You Know?** These features expand on ideas from the chapter. For example, the chapter on the Gifts of the Holy Spirit includes a “Did You Know?” feature on the fruits of the Holy Spirit. The chapter on the laying on of hands includes a feature on symbols of the Holy Spirit.
- **Catholic Connection.** These features review central concepts, such as the Trinity, the Church, and the Sacraments.
- **Right from the Rite.** These features highlight quotations from *The Order of Confirmation* and *The Rite of Baptism of Children* that enhance the chapter and help the candidates to connect their preparation with the sacramental life of the Church.
- **Words from the Word.** These features highlight a selection of Scripture quotations.



- **My Mission.** The celebration of Confirmation challenges the candidates to assume a larger responsibility for carrying out the Church's mission. The "My Mission" features help the candidates to identify concrete ideas for participating in this mission. Each "My Mission" feature provides writing space for the candidates' thoughts.
- **Dear God.** These features offer a short prayer for the candidates to pray on their own or with the group as the closing prayer for the session.
- **Journal.** Each chapter concludes with a journal page. The catechist can incorporate the journal activities into the sessions as part of 15-minute session extensions or suggest that the candidates complete these activities on their own.

Resources for Further Formation

The candidate handbook also includes three appendices:

- **"Catholic Prayers."** The candidates can use this collection of prayers on their own, or the catechist can invite the group to use them together during a session. The sponsor booklet contains the same collection of prayers, making it easy for the sponsors and the candidates to pray together.
- **"Catholic Beliefs and Practices."** This section provides a handy summary of Catholic beliefs and practices. For a more in-depth review of Catholicism, the catechist can direct the candidates or their parents to *The Catholic Connections Handbook for Middle Schoolers* (Saint Mary's Press, 2009).
- **"Patron Saints and Their Causes."** This listing may be especially helpful for candidates who choose not to use their baptismal names for Confirmation. It provides a starting point for considering options. The catechist should be prepared with suggestions for more in-depth exploration of the saints' biographies.

Catechist Guide

The catechist guide complements the candidate handbook and supports the catechist's work with the candidates. The guide provides detailed plans for eight preparation sessions, followed by two mystagogical sessions, designed to take place after Confirmation. The guide also provides the catechist with a description of the overall program and her or his role in the process of liturgical catechesis.

Step-by-Step Session Plans

Each preparation session in the catechist guide corresponds to a chapter in the candidate handbook. The core session is designed to fill 60 minutes. In addition, each session includes optional 15-minute session extensions for catechists wishing to extend the session beyond 60 minutes to 75 or 90 minutes. The session steps follow the same general pattern:

- welcome and prayer
- an activity to spark interest
- a teaching activity
- a life application
- a closing prayer
- an optional life application activity
- an optional journal activity

Some sessions include reproducible handouts that support the activities. Each session includes optional activities, in addition to the 15-minute session extensions:

- “Discussion Starters” that can be woven into the session at various times
- “Media Connections” that suggest songs or films that complement the session
- other options for implementing particular steps

Foundational Elements in Every Session

- **Sacred Scriptures.** The Word of God is preeminent in our lives as Catholic Christians. Indeed, the Church exhorts us to read the Sacred Scriptures to deepen our relationship with Jesus Christ (*Catechism of the Catholic Church*, 2653). Thus, all the sessions include readings from the Scriptures. Usually these readings are selected from those recommended for use in *The Order of Confirmation*, allowing the order itself to guide the formation process.
- **Prayer.** Similarly, prayer is essential for forming Christians in faith. By praying with our young people, we not only raise our minds and hearts to God, but we also teach them how to pray. “When catechesis is permeated by a climate of prayer, the assimilation of the entire Christian

life reaches its summit" (*General Directory for Catechesis*, 85). Various forms of prayer are used in the sessions. There are at least four prayer times in every session:

- A "Catechist Prayer" is included for use before each session.
 - Each session opens with a simple prayer acknowledging God's presence.
 - A simple closing prayer found in the candidate's book is suggested for ending each session.
 - Each session also provides the option for a closing prayer service that echoes the ritual element of the session—perhaps a ritual symbol or gesture or one of the *Lectionary* readings for Confirmation. (*Note:* The numbers for the *Lectionary* readings refer to the 2001 edition of the *Lectionary*. If you are using the 1970 edition, references will be off by one number.)
- ***Catechism of the Catholic Church.*** Each chapter of the candidate handbook includes references to the *Catechism of the Catholic Church* that the catechist can incorporate into the session.

Documents for the Catechist

The catechist guide also includes the same two appendices found in this manual: (1) "*Apostolic Constitution on the Sacrament of Confirmation*" and (2) "*The Order of Confirmation*, 1–33." Because the point of departure for the program is the Confirmation liturgy, catechists who are familiar with these foundational documents on the Sacrament will feel more confident as they lead the sessions. By grounding themselves in the ritual elements of Confirmation, catechists will be more effective in their role of leading young adolescents to the Sacrament.

Sponsor Booklet

The booklet for sponsors includes the following features to ensure that sponsors and candidates have a positive experience:

- information about Confirmation and an overview of what will happen at the celebration of the Sacrament
- a discussion about the role of the sponsor in the Confirmation process
- practical ideas to help the sponsor build a relationship with his or her candidate
- guidance for effective conversations with young people



- five guided conversations, with step-by-step instructions, on the topics of God, Jesus, the Holy Spirit, the Church, and faith
- an overview of the central characteristics of Catholicism
- a collection of prayers (same as in the back of the candidate handbook)

Sponsors and candidates may use the five guided conversations when they meet on their own. However, if you will routinely hold gatherings for sponsors and candidates together, these conversations may be a resource for you or the catechist.

A Successful Program

Almost everything you need for a successful Confirmation preparation program is found within the pages of this manual for coordinating a new and exciting liturgical approach to Confirmation preparation. All you need now are some good catechists and the guidance of the Holy Spirit, both of which are found right within your own parish. Enjoy *Anointed in the Spirit!*

2

Celebrating the Sacrament of Confirmation with Young Adolescents

This chapter addresses the twofold focus implied by its title: Confirmation and young adolescents. First, we discuss middle schoolers and why the middle school years are a good time to celebrate Confirmation. Second, we address the history and theology of Confirmation, which must be understood in order to properly celebrate the Sacrament. Third, we address the people who bring it all together—the ministers of Confirmation. You, as the coordinator, direct the process, but it is the parish, the parents, the sponsors, and the catechists who actually bring the young people to the Sacrament. First, let's take a look at the candidates.

Middle School Confirmation

The bishops of the United States determined that each bishop could decide for his own local diocese the age for the reception of Confirmation. Various times are appropriate for celebrating the Sacrament, and each bishop is free to do what is best in his locale. If you are planning to use this program, then your local bishop must have decided that middle school is an appropriate time for the celebration of the Sacrament of Confirmation. Check with your diocesan office for the history and the specific reasons why this particular age was chosen for your diocese.

There are several advantages to confirming young people during their middle school years. First, most middle schoolers are in the early stages of adolescence, which is a great time for the Church to be especially present and active in their lives. Young adolescents are dealing with numerous identity issues, and they are exerting their independence as individual and social persons. This is an important time for the Church to influence their faith development and to reassure them of the love and support of the Church, as well as the presence of the Holy Spirit.

The communal dimension of Confirmation, and of preparation for the Sacrament, is another reason why young adolescent Confirmation is beneficial. During the middle school years, young adolescents start to become more dependent on peers. They like being with their friends, and Confirmation preparation gives them a chance to be together, have fun, and learn about their faith. *Anointed in the Spirit* is designed with this adolescent developmental characteristic in mind. The sessions employ large-group and small-group activities that engage the multiple intelligences of young adolescents.

In addition, although there is plenty of doctrine and developmentally appropriate theological reflection, this middle school approach is not as dialogical (discussion-based) as some senior high Confirmation programs. Young adolescents are inquisitive. Some of the deeper theological questions are appropriate for them, but young adolescents don't want too much talking, and they want any discussion to be fun and interactive.

Another advantage to middle school Confirmation is a practical consideration. Middle schoolers are just not as busy as high schoolers. Although they are active and social, their academics, sports, jobs, and extracurricular activities are not as demanding as they will be in high school. Middle schoolers don't drive, and most don't date. There simply are not as many competing forces in middle school, which makes it easier for these adolescents to focus on Confirmation.

The greatest benefit to confirming middle schoolers is probably the simplest reason of all: grace. The Sacrament is efficacious. It's just plain good for middle schoolers to receive the sacramental grace of Confirmation. To put it bluntly, kids can use all the grace they can get. They will face even more challenges in high school than in middle school. Our young people benefit from the full outpouring of the Holy Spirit given to them in Confirmation. And it helps for them to have the fullness of the Spirit before they enter high school.

The Gifts of the Holy Spirit—wisdom, understanding, counsel, fortitude, knowledge, piety, and fear of the Lord—can help them face the complicated situations they will encounter. As Helper and Guide, the Holy Spirit will help them face the many personal and cultural issues that adolescents encounter today. The Gifts of the Holy Spirit will help the confirmands as they continue to develop their self-identity and discover their pathway in life. The Holy Spirit strengthens and helps our young people in ways we cannot even imagine.

Whether we are in adulthood, adolescence, childhood, or even infancy, Confirmation strengthens us with the power of the Holy Spirit. This understanding, along with other insights about Confirmation, developed over centuries.

A Brief History and Theology of Confirmation

An understanding of the theology of Confirmation is essential for those leading the young candidates to the Sacrament of Confirmation. That theology can best be understood in the context of the history of the Sacrament.

Biblical Beginnings

Even though the Trinity was not fully revealed in the Old Testament, there are certainly many references to the Spirit. The Spirit is active at Creation and throughout salvation history. The prophet Isaiah references the Spirit when he foretells the coming of the Messiah. Furthermore the institution of the Sacrament of Confirmation can be seen in Jesus' action in the New Testament. The Holy Spirit descended upon Jesus at his Baptism. Later, Jesus gave the full outpouring of the Holy Spirit to his Apostles on Easter Sunday (John 20:22) and at Pentecost (Acts of the Apostles 2:1–4).

Early Church

In the earliest days of the Church, Baptism, Confirmation, and the Eucharist were celebrated together as the ritual for Christian initiation. In these early days, the bishop presided at Christian initiation. As Christianity grew, it became impossible for bishops to preside at all Baptisms. Gradually, the priests became the ordinary ministers for Baptism and the Eucharist, while the anointing (which later became known as Confirmation) was reserved for the bishop. At this point, the Churches in the East and the Churches in the West handled things differently. The Churches in the East are of several types: there are Eastern Orthodox Churches that are separate from the Catholic Church, but there are also Eastern Catholic Churches, such as the Armenian Catholics and the Chaldean Catholics. The Churches in the West are the Roman Catholic Churches.

Eastern Catholic Churches

In the Eastern Churches, the Sacraments of Initiation have always been celebrated together in the same ritual. This means that whether a person is an infant or an adult, she or he receives Baptism, Confirmation (known in the East as Chrismation), and the Eucharist together. The Eastern tradition clearly emphasizes the unity of the three Sacraments of Initiation.

Roman Catholic Churches

In the Western Churches, the anointing that came after Baptism was reserved for the bishop. The number of infant Baptisms was growing. The baptismal rite, celebrated by a priest, included an anointing with Chrism. But the anointing by the bishop was done later, when the child was older. In this light, it's easy to see how Confirmation is a "perfecting" or a "completion" or a "sealing" of Baptism. This tradition also emphasized unity "with the bishop and through the bishop, unity with the universal Church" (Brian Singer-Towns, *The Catholic Faith Handbook for Youth*, 2nd edition, p. 167).

Confirmation Today in the United States

As Roman Catholics, we follow the tradition of the Western Churches. When a child is baptized as an infant, Confirmation is delayed until sometime later. In most dioceses, Confirmation takes place during the middle school or high school years.

Arguably the most significant modern development for the Sacrament of Confirmation came as a result of the Second Vatican Council. In the Council's *Constitution on the Sacred Liturgy*, the bishops called for a reform of Christian initiation. The reform was to be a "restoration" of the unity and integrity of the Sacraments of Initiation—Baptism, Confirmation, and the Eucharist (Aidan Kavanaugh, *Confirmation: Origins and Reform*, p. 81).

Among the outcomes of the Second Vatican Council's call to reform Christian initiation were specific liturgical reforms of the rites for Baptism and Confirmation. The reform of the baptismal rite began with the restoration of the adult catechumenate (the process of preparing for Baptism and entry into the Church). From this came the Rite of Christian Initiation of Adults (1972) which, among other things, emphasizes the unity of the Sacraments of Initiation (Kavanaugh, p. 84).

This restored catechumenate has been established as the norm and paradigm for Christian initiation. The revised *Order of Confirmation* (2013) is to be understood in light of its broader context in Christian initiation, linked to the other Sacraments of Initiation. With this context in mind, let's now look at the theology of Confirmation.

Theology of Confirmation

"Those who have been baptized continue on the path of Christian initiation through the Sacrament of Confirmation" (*The Order of Confirmation*, 1).

Confirmation is the full outpouring of the Holy Spirit. From the very beginning, becoming a Christian meant receiving the full outpouring of the Holy Spirit. The outpouring of the Holy Spirit is signified in the Sacrament of Confirmation by an anointing with Chrism, a laying on of hands, and the words “be sealed with the Gift of the Holy Spirit” (*The Order of Confirmation*, 27). A more complete description of the ritual signs essential to Confirmation is found in chapters 4, 5, and 6 of the candidate handbook and the catechist guide.

Confirmation is a sacrament of initiation. Through the Sacraments of Initiation—Baptism, Confirmation, and the Eucharist—we are united with Christ and his Church. We are united with Christ’s death, Resurrection, and glorification—that is, to the great Paschal Mystery. We are also united to the Church, the Body of Christ: Confirmation completes or perfects Baptism.

Confirmation makes us more like Christ. By the power of the Holy Spirit, Confirmation completes or perfects Baptism and makes us even more like Christ. We are configured to be more like Christ so we can better carry out his mission. Filled with the Holy Spirit, and made more like Christ, we are strengthened to assume more responsibility as disciples of Jesus Christ. Confirmation propels us outward in mission for the life of the world.

One key aspect of the mission of the Church is to celebrate the Sacraments. You are one of the many people involved in this part of the mission.

Ministries of Confirmation (The Role of the Community)

“One of the highest responsibilities of the People of God is to prepare the baptized to receive the Sacrament of Confirmation” (*The Order of Confirmation*, 3).

The Parish

As a local manifestation of the “people of God,” the parish is responsible for providing the best Confirmation preparation possible. That’s why you’ve chosen *Anointed in the Spirit* for your middle school candidates. Besides supporting the chosen coordinator and catechists and providing materials for the candidates, what else can the parish do to fulfill its responsibility to prepare the baptized for Confirmation?

Celebrate Liturgy Well

One of the most important responsibilities the parish has is to celebrate liturgy well—all liturgy, but particularly the Confirmation liturgy. Indeed, “attention should be paid” to give the Confirmation liturgy a “festive and solemn character” (*The Order of Confirmation*, 4). This means a great deal of effort needs to go into drawing up and carrying out the plans for Confirmation.

As the coordinator, you will want to start planning early. You’ll definitely need to work with your pastor, liturgist, liturgy committee, and musician to plan the liturgy. You may want to recruit parents and sponsors to work with the aforementioned in a Confirmation liturgy committee. You will also need to check with the diocesan office to learn about local guidelines for the celebration of the Sacrament.

You might also consider preparing the parish for the celebration. Full, conscious, and active participation in the liturgy is more likely if you do some preparation and reflection with the assembly. Even if many parish members won’t attend the Confirmation celebration, whole-community catechesis can help everyone understand the significance of the Sacrament. (Chapter 4 of this manual, “Designing Your Confirmation Program,” includes detailed plans for simple liturgical catechesis for the parish.)

Be a Sacrament

Confirmation is the Sacrament your young people are looking forward to, but the parish is also a Sacrament for the candidates—the sign of Christ in the world. The parish is the model of what it means to be Christ for others. Through worship, apostolic service, evangelization, and catechesis, the parish provides an example of discipleship for the candidates.

Provide Opportunities for Apostolic Service

In developing their Christian identity and along with it their sense of mission, young candidates are seeking opportunities to live out their faith through service. Showing them the Christian way of life is not enough; the parish needs to provide opportunities for the candidates to work alongside others to further learn the Christian life.

Pray

The parish has a special role to play in praying for the candidates. The parish is their family, their community: the Body of Christ. The Body of Christ is most evident during Sunday worship. Thus the prayer of the faithful at Mass is an especially important way to exhibit our belief in God’s goodness and power.

Many of the typical ways we pray for candidates are listed here along with some other ideas you may not have considered:

- Conduct a special celebration of the Word for the candidates. Include in the celebration candidates for First Communion, Baptism, and reception into full communion.
- Create a prayer card based on the “Holy Spirit Prayer of Saint Augustine” (found on handout 7–C in chapter 7 of this manual). Reword it to make a prayer for the candidates. Or ask the candidates to design a prayer card. Distribute the prayer cards to students in the religious education program, to students in the Catholic school, and to other groups in the parish.
- Create an oversized card and place it in a gathering area at church. Invite parishioners to write prayers and notes of support to the candidates (Laurie Delgatto et al., *Confirmed in a Faithful Community: Coordinator’s Manual*, p. 123).
- Invite the candidates’ parents to form a prayer group that meets regularly to pray for the candidates (Delgatto et al., p. 123).
- Ask members of parish groups to pray for the candidates. Those in the RCIA, those on the hospitality committee, or people involved in other groups might choose a candidate to pray for every day.

The Parents or Guardians

“To a large extent it is the responsibility of Christian parents to show concern for the initiation of their children to the sacramental life” (*The Order of Confirmation*, 3).

Parents, or others who are responsible for raising young people, have a dual responsibility when it comes to the initiation of their children. (Note: Throughout this manual, the term *parents* is used to refer to those who are responsible for the candidates’ upbringing. But you and the catechists may use different language if you are aware of other family structures among your candidates.) First and foremost, they are the ones primarily responsible for the children’s faith development. Second, they are also members of the faith community, which has a responsibility to initiate children.

As members of the faith community, and as “primary catechists,” the first way parents can help to prepare their children for a sacrament is “by their active participation in the celebration of the Sacraments” (*The Order of Confirmation*, 3). Children best learn the sacramental way of life by living it.

As the program coordinator, you are in a position to impress upon parents the importance of weekly participation in the Eucharist and regular participation in the Sacrament of Penance and Reconciliation.

Although regular celebration of the Sacraments by families is encouraged, we also recognize that adolescence is a time of transition for young people. Teens are in the transition from childhood to adulthood and are beginning to seek independence from their parents. Thus the parents' role in Confirmation preparation may not be as great as it was during preparation for the Eucharist or Penance and Reconciliation. Indeed the Confirmation sponsor may be more involved than the parent. Be conscious of this dynamic as you schedule time for the candidates, their parents, and their sponsors.

Nonetheless, parents are still the primary catechists for their children and have important responsibilities. Communicating expectations for parents, such as those listed here, will help the parents to understand their role in their child's Confirmation program:

- Participate in a parent orientation session. This session (see chapter 6 of this manual, "Orientation Session for Parents") provides an overview of *Anointed in the Spirit*, including parent expectations.
- Provide a baptismal certificate for the candidate.
- Assist the candidate in choosing a Confirmation sponsor and help the candidate to coordinate contact with the sponsor.
- Assist the candidate in deciding whether to choose a new Confirmation name or to honor his or her baptismal name.
- Discuss attendance policies for the sessions and check in with the candidate on session activities and learning.
- Join the candidate in celebrating the Sacrament of Penance and Reconciliation and other nonsacramental penance services that may be available.
- Join the candidate in service opportunities if possible.
- Be aware of the schedule for events, such as retreats, rehearsal, and the celebration of Confirmation, and consider assisting with necessary tasks.
- Discuss parish expectations for Confirmation attire.
- Pray for the candidate.

In addition to these items, you may want to include additional expectations that are specific to your parish.

The Sponsor

Sponsors not only bring the candidates to receive the sacrament but later will “help them to fulfill their baptismal promises faithfully in accordance with the Holy Spirit whom they have received” (*The Order of Confirmation*, 5).

The sponsor’s role is to support the candidate in her or his faith life and help her or him to live as a disciple of Jesus Christ. It is an ancient custom of the Church for a sponsor to bring the candidate to receive the Sacrament and present the candidate to the bishop or minister of the Sacrament. Presenting the candidate to the bishop implies that the sponsor testifies to the candidate’s worthiness and readiness for the Sacrament.

Note that the revised *Order of Confirmation* (5) and *Code of Canon Law* (canon 893.2) recommend that the godparent, or sponsor at Baptism, be the sponsor for Confirmation. “In this way the link between Baptism and Confirmation is more clearly expressed” (*The Order of Confirmation*, 5) and the role of supporting the candidate in the Catholic way of life is made more effective. It may not be possible to follow this practice in all cases, but the sponsor must be a practicing Catholic who is in good standing with the Church. A summary of further requirements for sponsors is found on page 11 of the sponsor booklet, but you will want to check your own diocesan guidelines.

The sponsor booklet explains how a sponsor supports a person’s journey of faith throughout a lifetime. Chapter 7 of this manual, “Orientation Session for Sponsors and Candidates,” includes a breakout session for sponsors with a review of the sponsor’s role, as well as a review of the safe environment guidelines found on page 14 of the sponsor booklet. For now, an overview of the sponsor’s role is given here:

- Participate in a sponsor orientation session (see chapter 7 of this manual). This session provides an overview of *Anointed in the Spirit*, including sponsor expectations.
- Present the candidate to the bishop during the celebration of Confirmation.
- Participate in the rehearsal, day of reflection, or retreat as required by the parish.
- Support and guide the candidate in the Catholic way of life. Be a model of discipleship.
- Spend time with the candidate as possible and appropriate.