



*Confirmed in a
Faithful
Community*

A Senior High Confirmation Process

Coordinator's Manual



Immediate Preparation Edition



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Confirmed in a Faithful Community:
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Immediate Preparation Edition

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Introduction

The Church's theological understanding and pastoral practice of Confirmation have undergone further development in the past three decades, due in part to the Church's recovery of the catechumenal model of initiation. This approach to Confirmation was formalized by the promulgation of the Rite of Christian Initiation (RCIA) in 1972. Though intended for the sacramental initiation of unbaptized adults, the theology and pastoral principles of the RCIA are recognized as normative for all the sacraments of initiation—Baptism, Confirmation, and the Eucharist—regardless of the age at which those sacraments are celebrated.

Baptism in the Early Church

Baptism in the early Church was a powerful and moving experience. The ritual used rich symbols and actions that conveyed deep meaning to those who participated. Imagine descending three steps into the waters of the baptismal pool, being immersed three times by the bishop, and then coming out of the water a new creation.

Baptism in the first few centuries of the Church's history was a celebration primarily for adults. Baptism of infant members of Christian families, however, gradually became the normal practice and is still the most common today.

In the early Church, a person preparing for Baptism was called a catechumen. This word comes from a Greek term related to sound and hearing. A catechumen is one who hears Jesus's Good News proclaimed by the Church. The preparation period was called the catechumenate. Lasting about three years, the catechumenate was a time for praying, fasting, studying, and being of service to others. During this time, the catechumen listened to the word of God and explored the Christian way of life.

The final intense stage of preparation for Baptism in the early Church lasted forty days and evolved into what we know as Lent. Baptism, the final step in the original process, took place during the Easter Vigil—the evening before the Easter celebration of the Resurrection. In the early Church, the Easter Vigil was the only time that Baptisms were performed. Even after the actual ceremony, newly initiated members were expected to pursue further study and receive more knowledge about the Christian "mysteries."

Baptism at the Easter Vigil

The Easter Vigil ceremony was preceded by ritual bathing on Holy Thursday and by two days of fasting. On the Saturday night of the vigil, all the catechumens gathered—men in one room and women in another. Their sponsors—the persons who had guided them toward their new birth—were there. Because of their parental role, the sponsors were called fathers and mothers by the catechumens. Later, sponsors became known as godparents.

At the start of the Easter Vigil ceremony, the catechumens faced the West, the place of sunset and darkness. They stretched out their arms and denounced Satan. Then suddenly they turned to the East and shouted their commitment to Christ. This physical turnabout by the catechumens marked their spiritual turnabout, or conversion. The East was considered the place of light, of the rising sun, and of new life. (Throughout the Middle Ages, churches were built facing the East.)

Next, the catechumens went to a room with a pool that was often modeled after the Roman public baths. They stripped off their old clothing, had oil poured over

their bodies, and stepped down into the waist-deep waters. The bishop submerged the catechumens in the water, usually three times—in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit. The catechumens then emerged from the other side of the pool and received new white robes. The bishop anointed them, again with oil, and embraced them in a sign of peace and welcome.

Finally, the catechumens were led into the room where the Eucharist was celebrated. For the first time, on Easter Sunday, they participated in the total Eucharistic celebration. Before Baptism, the catechumens attended Mass only until the end of the homily. As a matter of fact, the first part of the Mass was called the Mass of the Catechumens because the prayers, readings, and homily were intended to give instruction to the catechumens. What a joy it must have been for the newly baptized, after three years of preparation, to share the Eucharist with their friends and family for the first time! And what a joy for the rest of the community to welcome these long-awaited newcomers to their special Easter meal!

The process of preparing for initiation at the Easter Vigil demanded a great deal of time and dedication from those who wanted to become members of the Church. Remember, though, that just prior to this time, the Church had been an illegal, persecuted group. Accepting a candidate presented a grave risk to the whole community.

At the same time, the leaders realized that Baptism was meant to be a sustained joy, not just a moment of excitement. Developing a joyful, loving community demanded a profound initiation. In recent years the Church has revised the adult Rite of Christian Initiation to recapture the sacrifice, spirit, and joy of the ritual in the early Church.



Three Sacraments of Initiation

In the candidate's handbook, authors Maura Thompson Hagarty and Tom Zanzig offer this historical perspective of the sacraments of initiation:

Originally Baptism, Confirmation, and the Eucharist were combined in one initiation ritual. Later on, so many candidates sought initiation into the Church that the bishops had difficulty presiding at all the rituals. Yet it was considered essential that the bishops conduct them.

To handle the increased numbers of converts, the Eastern Church decided to allow their priests to baptize, confirm, and celebrate the Eucharist with the initiates. In the East, Confirmation is administered immediately after Baptism and is followed by participation in the Eucharist; this tradition highlights the unity of the three sacraments of Christian initiation (see *Catechism*, no. 1318). In the West, the priests baptized initiates but delayed the rest of the ceremony until the bishop was available to “confirm” the initiation. Eventually in the Western Church, the baptized members began to participate in the Eucharist before Confirmation. Until recently, the sacraments of initiation remained separate and were celebrated in the sequence of Baptism, the Eucharist, and Confirmation. (Adapted from p. 99)

Additional Study Needed?

All three sacraments of initiation—Baptism, Confirmation, and the Eucharist—have been the object of a tremendous amount of study, discussion, and publishing in recent years. Many resources are readily available to those desiring more information.

Consult your diocesan library or resource center for the most recent publications on the subject.

To supplement the many books available on Confirmation, initiation, and the catechumenate, many dioceses have developed helpful publications and packets of material on the practice of Confirmation in their local parishes. Check with your diocesan liturgy and education offices for information and advice. Remember also that the guidelines of your own diocese carry more authority than those suggested in *Confirmed in a Faithful Community: A Senior High Confirmation Process*.

Goals and Objectives of *Confirmed in a Faithful Community*

Religious educators and youth ministers have discovered that programs of almost any kind take on greater clarity, direction, and purpose if they are described in terms of their intended goals and objectives. This observation is based on a commonsense principle: We have a difficult time getting somewhere if we do not know where we are going. The program leader who designs learning experiences must identify her or his destination as a first step in determining how to get there. The statement of goals and objectives is a practical way to identify the desired outcomes for a program.

In *Confirmed in a Faithful Community*, the terms *goals* and *objectives* are used in the following ways:

Goals. Goals are broad statements of what we wish to accomplish. They are the learning outcomes we hope to achieve by the end of the process. Goals often have an idealistic quality, inviting the leader to reflect on the process in terms of the personal and faith development of the young people. At the same time, the goals of the Confirmation process are realistic, measurable, and attainable. At the conclusion of this preparation process, you will be able to look back and determine whether you have in fact achieved the goals stated here.

Objectives. Objectives are statements that define how to get to the intended goals. Thus, objectives are more specific in tone and purpose than are goals. By dealing with the nitty-gritty, objectives name the specific tasks that must be accomplished if the overall program goals are to be achieved. In short, the goals speak to the Confirmation process in its entirety, whereas the objectives clearly state what is to be accomplished in a particular session to move the candidates toward the desired goals.

Though the task initially may appear tedious, carefully read through and reflect on all the following goals and objectives for *Confirmed in a Faithful Community*.

Goals

Of the five goals given here, the first two guide the welcoming assembly—the local parish. The last three serve as guides for developing and directing the sessions.

- The parish community will, on all levels, receive appropriate guidance to celebrate the sacrament fruitfully.
- The candidates will embrace their Baptism and experience deeper initiation into a welcoming community.

- The candidates will understand the rite of Confirmation and prepare to celebrate it in a meaningful way.
- The candidates will recognize and appreciate the role and activity of the Holy Spirit in their lives and in the life of the Church.
- The candidates will understand the basic meaning of the Church and comprehend the significance and role of the sacraments in the Church's life and in their own lives.

Objectives

Although specific objectives are not listed for the parish goals, a major intent of this manual is to help leaders attain these goals. The objectives of the individual sessions in *Confirmed in a Faithful Community* are the following:

Session 1, Guided and Strengthened by the Holy Spirit

- To deepen the candidates' understanding of and appreciation for the activity of the Holy Spirit
- To explore with the candidates the connections between the work of the Spirit and the sacrament of Confirmation
- To explore with the candidates the images of the Holy Spirit

Session 2, Prayer: Communion with God

- To help the candidates appreciate the central importance of personal prayer in the life of the Christian
- To introduce the candidates to practical prayer techniques they might use in their daily lives
- To encourage the candidates to establish daily prayer practices

Session 3, Christian Morality: What Does Love Look Like?

- To help the candidates explore in greater depth the moral vision of Jesus
- To explore with the candidates the concept that for Christians, to live a moral life is to respond to the Gospel mandate to love as Jesus loved
- To encourage the candidates to examine the Sermon on the Mount and other scriptural sources for living a life of love

Session 4, Christian Service: Witnessing to God's Justice

- To encourage the candidates to develop a personal understanding of justice rooted in faith
- To provide the candidates with an understanding that justice requires their thoughtful action
- To help the candidates value the Scriptures and prayer as sources of power and inspiration for social action
- To invite the candidates to become aware of and appreciate Catholic social teaching as a guide for social action

Session 5, Sacraments of Initiation

- To help the candidates recognize the need within the Church for a process of initiating new members

- To provide the candidates with an experience of, not just information about, the Church's initiation process
- To deepen the candidates' understanding of the integrated nature of the sacraments of Baptism, Confirmation, and the Eucharist

Session 6, Baptism: Born in the Holy Spirit

- To help the candidates understand the effects of Baptism and that sacrament's relationship to the candidate's faith journey
- To explore with the candidates the multiple levels of meaning of the symbol of water in the sacrament of Baptism
- To guide the candidates toward making the connection between original sin and forgiveness and the sacrament of Baptism

Session 7, The Eucharist: Nourished Through the Holy Spirit

- To explore with the candidates the primary symbols of bread and wine and their meaning in the Eucharist
- To help the candidates examine the meal structure of the Eucharist
- To guide the candidates toward an appreciation of the role of the Holy Spirit in the communal celebration of the Eucharist

Session 8, Confirmation: Sealed with the Holy Spirit

- To explore with the candidates the symbols of oil and the ritual gesture of the laying on of hands and their meanings in the sacrament of Confirmation
- To deepen the candidates' understanding of and appreciation for the activity of the Holy Spirit
- To familiarize the candidates with the seven gifts of the Holy Spirit
- To help the candidates explore the connections between the work of the Spirit and the sacrament of Confirmation

Session 9, Confirmation: Celebrating the Rite

- To provide the candidates with an overview of the rite of Confirmation
- To explore with the candidates the various Scriptures for the rite of Confirmation
- To review with the candidates the ritual words and gestures of the rite

Confirmed in a Faithful Community Coordinator's Manual, Immediate Preparation Edition: An Overview

This manual provides parishes the practical guidance they need to carry out a short-term immediate preparation process for the celebration of Confirmation.

- *Chapter 1, Confirmation Preparation Planning.* A step-by-step procedure for developing a detailed process of preparation uniquely suited to your parish
- *Chapter 2, Directing the Confirmation Process: Additional Concerns and Issues.* A wide-ranging discussion of numerous practical concerns that confront the coordinator of the Confirmation process
- *Chapter 3, Orientation Session for Parents or Guardians, and Candidates.* Provides a suggested outline for gathering with parents and candidates for an initial orientation session

- *Chapter 4, Orientation Session for Candidates and Sponsors.* Provides a detailed session plan for building community and sharing faith among the candidates and their sponsors
- *Chapter 5, Retreat.* An optional overnight or daylong retreat for use at the beginning of the period of reflection
- *Chapter 6, Evening of Reflection Before the Rite of Confirmation.* A short retreat or evening of reflection to be offered immediately before the celebration of the rite of Confirmation
- *Chapter 7, Resources for Parish Involvement.* Numerous ideas for involving the entire parish community in the preparation and support of Confirmation candidates
- *Chapter 8, Parishwide Prayer Service.* Intended to mark and celebrate the candidate's progress through the process of preparation, in addition to awakening and then reminding the broader parish community of the ongoing nature of the process of preparation, and to actively and prayerfully engage them in it
- *Chapter 9, Preparing for the Confirmation Liturgy.* Provides an overview of the elements of the rite of Confirmation, and specific planning tools for preparing for the Confirmation liturgy

Confirmed in a Faithful Community has been designed with the conviction that Confirmation preparation for adolescents can be theologically sound, developmentally appropriate, and pedagogically exciting. We trust that your review of this manual and its companion program components will lead you to share that conviction.



Chapter 1

Confirmation Preparation Planning

Turning Vision into Reality

A Word About Confirmation Planning Teams

It makes good sense for parishes to organize a Confirmation committee to plan the Confirmation process. This practice is grounded both in a commitment to shared pastoral leadership and in the nature of Confirmation itself as part of full initiation into the faith community. We want the young people to truly experience the communal dimensions of their preparation. They are not being invited into an exclusive relationship with the director of religious education or youth minister and the volunteer catechists, nor are they simply joining the parish youth group.

Additionally, the process of Confirmation affects the life and ministry of so many individuals in the parish that in fairness to the parish as a whole, a planning committee made up of various parish representatives is a good, if not essential, idea. Preparation for the sacrament can involve the pastor and his associates, the directors of religious education and youth ministry, volunteers in catechetical and youth programs, the parish liturgist, various parish council members, school administrators and teachers, parents and sponsors, and conceivably even the building and grounds committee and the parish men's or women's groups. Somehow, all those involved in or affected by the preparation process must be kept informed and, in many cases, offered a voice in that process.

However, our ideals frequently run headlong into the realities of parish life. For example, many parish leaders are already "meetinged to death" and will resist joining another committee. Some, including pastors, will say that they hired the person responsible for Confirmation precisely so that they would not have to concern themselves with such matters. In some smaller parishes, all these various roles may be held by just one or two people!

The point is this: Good communication, open dialogue, opportunities for responding to proposed processes, and so on are vital ingredients for effective planning for Confirmation. How to make these ingredients a part of the planning is another matter. If the formation of a planning committee suits your needs and the expectations of your parish, by all means pursue that. If your circumstances neither warrant nor permit such a planning team, accept that fact, but develop some other means for keeping key personnel informed of all developments and give them a chance to respond and offer their insights. This may require regular reports to the parish council, for example, or you may choose to send monthly progress reports to interested parties.

Developing Confirmation Guidelines

Young people can meet the criteria of doctrine and experience of Christian living in many ways in order to enter the specific parish preparation process found in the *Immediate Preparation Edition of Confirmed in a Faithful Community*. Of course, many of these opportunities include the parish youth ministry and adolescent

catechetical formation, Catholic high school religious education courses, involvement in the parish and civic community at large, and Church-based youth organizations such as Catholic Scouting.

Although young people can meet the criteria for readiness in a variety of ways, it is the parish process for determining readiness and the immediate preparation process for the celebration of the sacrament of Confirmation. Guidelines might include the following:

- a copy of your diocesan Confirmation policies
- a description of opportunities within the parish youth ministry and broader parish life for youth to meet the criteria established by the diocese or your parish (e.g., adolescent catechesis, retreats, outreach opportunities), as well as other non-parochial involvements
- a way for the parish to determine the readiness of candidates, using such things as interviews, self-assessments, and other criteria-based reflection tools
- a list of requirements for the immediate preparation period
- a copy of the Confirmation ritual, so that the candidates and catechists can become familiar with the short dialogue each candidate has with the bishop, and especially the prayer that enumerates the gifts of the Spirit
- some ways to include the entire parish community

The Immediate Preparation Process

Invitation

The Confirmation process begins, logically enough, with an invitation to all eligible members of the parish community. A written invitation should be mailed to all potential candidates and their parent(s) or guardian(s). It can be supplemented with bulletin and pulpit announcements, posters, phone calls, and so on.

The intent of the invitation is to alert people to an orientation meeting where they will receive more information about the Confirmation process. Invitations to attend the orientation should be mailed at least one month before the meeting, perhaps even earlier if the parish is large and other events might conflict.

Orientation

The orientation may involve more than one meeting, but many parishes will find that either unnecessary or unattractive. You may recognize a value in meeting with only parents initially, just to update them on the theology of Confirmation, present details regarding the content and the schedule for the process, and so on. Or you may find that you can separate parents and candidates at various points in the meeting to provide information that may not be relevant to all. A more thorough discussion of the orientation is provided in chapter 3.

Initial Retreat

Many have found that a retreat for the candidates early in the process is an effective way to build a sense of community as the foundation for the remainder of the process. A detailed description of such a retreat is provided in chapter 5.

Initial Interview

A personal interview with each candidate is suggested, even mandated, in many diocesan guidelines for Confirmation. Think of the interviews at this early stage of the process as opportunities to welcome and provide hospitality for the young candidates, not as a form of interrogation about their personal life or faith. Further suggestions regarding the interviewing process are provided in chapter 2.

Selection and Orientation of Sponsors

Each candidate is asked to select a sponsor who will join him or her for the remainder of the Confirmation process. A sponsor is an adult representative of the community who serves as both a witness to the Gospel and a mentor to the candidate.

Importantly, *Confirmed in a Faithful Community* includes two components created specifically for orienting sponsors and then supporting them in their role—the sponsor's guide and the sponsor's orientation session. Further information about both is provided in chapter 4 of this manual.

Action-Reflection Activities

In addition to suggesting appropriate course material, many dioceses either strongly recommend or mandate that candidates for Confirmation perform certain acts of service before those candidates are accepted for the sacrament. Among the seemingly endless debates and arguments that surround the sacrament of Confirmation, few if any generate as much emotional heat as the notion of mandatory service projects. Because of the multiple dimensions of this issue, a fuller discussion of service projects is found in chapter 2.



Second Interview

Whereas the earlier interview might have had the character of a relaxed get-to-know-one-another encounter between the candidate and the process leader, the interview at this point may have the tone of a more intimate conversation between people who now care for one another. In the earlier interview, both the leader and the candidate may have felt uncomfortable, praying together, for example. Now, such prayer might seem more possible, if not perfectly natural, particularly on the part of the adult leader. This interview may also be a wonderful context for helping the candidate discern how he or she will attempt to retain the spirit generated by the Confirmation process after experiencing the rite itself.

Catechetical Sessions

The nine sessions for the immediate preparation process are provided in the catechist's guide, with related material in the candidate's handbook.

Themes included in the sessions are the roots and general characteristics of Catholicism, the wisdom and worship of our Catholic Tradition, and the sacraments of initiation. The objectives for the sessions are provided in the introduction of this manual.

Evening of Reflection

As the time for the rite of Confirmation nears, we encourage a prayerful evening of reflection for candidates and sponsors during the week before the celebration of the rite. A design for such an event is included in chapter 6.

Developing a Schedule for the Confirmation Process

Timeline for Program Elements

- Step 1: Write in the Confirmation celebration date.
- Step 2: Assign dates for sessions 1 through 9. Each catechetical session is approximately 90 minutes in length. Whether you choose an evening session, a half-day format, or a full-day format is your choice.
- Step 3: Schedule the orientation session for candidates and parents or guardians. This meeting should be conducted before the initial retreat and before any of the catechetical sessions occur.
- Step 4: Plan for your process of invitation to potential candidates two to three months before the candidate orientation session.
- Step 5: If you are opting to conduct the sponsor orientation, add this program to your schedule. The date and time should be convenient for both the candidates and the sponsors who will be attending.
- Step 6: Choose a date for the retreat experience. You will also need to confirm a location for the event.
- Step 7: Determine if you will conduct interviews and, if so, the time when those will take place.
- Step 8: Determine if you will include service activities and, if so, choose the dates for each. You will also need to confirm locations for each activity.
- Step 9: Schedule the evening of reflection no more than two weeks before the celebration of Confirmation.

Optional Schedules: Some Examples

Provided are some rough schedules that suggest how you might incorporate *Confirmed in a Faithful Community, Immediate Preparation Edition* into your overall youth ministry and catechetical programming.

A Four-Month Model

- | | |
|----------|--|
| February | Orientation session for candidates and parents or guardians
Optional interviews
Orientation session for sponsors and candidates
Session 1 |
| March | Retreat experience
Session 2
Session 3 |

April	Session 4
	Session 5
	Session 6
	Session 7
May	Optional interviews
	Session 8
	Session 9
	An evening of reflection for candidates and sponsors Confirmation celebration

A Six-Month Model

December	Orientation session for candidates and parents or guardians
	Optional interviews
	Orientation session for sponsors and candidates
January	Session 1
February	Retreat experience
	Session 2
	Session 3
March	Session 4
	Session 5
	Session 6
April	Session 7
	Optional interviews
	Session 8
May	Session 9
	An evening of reflection for candidates and sponsors Confirmation celebration



Chapter 2

Directing the Confirmation Process: Additional Concerns and Issues

Here we discuss many of the concerns and issues—often frustrating—that confront coordinators of Confirmation processes. We hope to alleviate some of that frustration by sharing this thought: When you adjust your own hopes and expectations for the Confirmation process to accommodate the needs and readiness of your parishioners, *you are in fact living and acting according to the spirit of the RCIA at its deepest level.* Initiation is an activity and responsibility of the entire community of faith; sensitivity to the characteristics of your community is at the heart of effective Christian leadership as well as sound planning.

Roles and Responsibilities

The Catechists' Role and Responsibilities

Realistically, the catechists involved in the Confirmation process may be the most significant influence on its effectiveness. More than anyone else, they will spend the most concentrated amount of time with the candidates, and the young people will tend to view and evaluate their catechists as the “official” representatives of the entire parish community. The selection, recruitment, and preparation of catechists is a central and critical responsibility of the process coordinator.

Many readers of this manual are experienced directors of religious education or youth ministry programs and are already familiar with the qualities and training required of those who minister among adolescents. However, the following list of required characteristics will guide you in your search for people to fill the catechists' role:

- a readily identifiable commitment to Jesus and the Gospel
- a sense of commitment to and affection for the Church
- a willingness—indeed, a drive—to grow in one's own personal faith at all levels
- a sincere and obvious care for young people
- an ability to listen and to work well with others
- a sense of humor
- basic skills for leading active learning experiences (skills that may best be learned by watching others)
- a desire not only to lead and guide young people but also to let them go, to free them to pursue their unique relationship with God and to share their gifts with others

In addition to such obvious (but no less rare and wonderful) traits, of course, Confirmation catechists will require a reasonably thorough grounding in the history and theology of the sacrament.

Ideally, recruited catechists will be adequately informed, if not fully trained, by the time of the orientation session for the Confirmation process. At that session they can be introduced to parents or guardians and candidates.

At your discretion, catechists' responsibilities—along with leading the sessions—may also include attendance at or participation in the following dimensions of the process:

- the retreats provided for the candidates
- parishwide events—such as the prayer service for candidates
- (perhaps) the candidate interviews and service involvement as warranted by your process design

In this manual, all discussions of these elements of the process presume the presence and participation of the catechists.

The Sponsor's Role and Responsibilities

First, let's begin to define the role and the responsibilities of the sponsor by looking at the minimum requirements for the role as identified by canon law. Sponsors must have the following qualifications (see *The Code of Canon Law: A Text and Commentary*, canon 874):

- A sponsor must be at least sixteen years old, unless a different age has been established by the diocesan bishop or a need for an exception is determined by the pastor.
- A sponsor must be a fully initiated Catholic (one who has celebrated Baptism, Confirmation, and the Eucharist) who "leads a life in harmony with the faith and the role to be undertaken."
- A sponsor must not be bound by any Church penalty.
- A sponsor must not be the parent of the one to be confirmed.

Though the application of canon 874 to Confirmation does not allow parents or guardians to be the sponsors of their child, the rite of Confirmation allows the parents or guardians to present their child for Confirmation during the rite itself (see canon 893). In this case, the parents or guardians would carry out the role of sponsors but not be sponsors in the strictest sense (see the commentary on canon 893 in the aforementioned text). Local policies might allow both the sponsors and the parents or guardians to present the candidate during the celebration of the rite.

Canon 893 also states: "It is desirable that the one who undertook the role of sponsor at Baptism be sponsor for Confirmation." Again, our contemporary culture often makes this principle—though a logical and attractive one in view of the connection between Baptism and Confirmation—unreasonable in practice; our society's mobility makes it unlikely that the baptismal sponsor is geographically close enough to serve as a Confirmation sponsor.

Some dioceses strongly recommend that sponsors be at least twenty-one years old. This recommendation is intended to discourage candidates from choosing as their sponsor another adolescent, a young person who is not fully formed in the faith.

Church law establishes a starting point for evolving a reasonable and manageable understanding of the role of the sponsor.

Additional Characteristics of Sponsors

Invite candidates—with the help of their parent(s) or guardian(s)—to select a sponsor who reflects the following characteristics, which are beyond the minimum identified by canon law:

- local residency, to ensure consistent involvement throughout the Confirmation process (To more fully emphasize the communal nature of the sacrament, it is also suggested that the sponsor be a member of the celebrating parish, if possible.)
- a positive and comfortable relationship with the candidate
- a willingness and a capacity to engage in the Confirmation process as a means of enhancing her or his own growth as a Christian adult (That is, the sponsor need not be recognized or see herself or himself as a fully mature Christian but should demonstrate a willingness to pursue greater maturity of faith as a goal.)

An Important Note

If you wish to encourage a particularly strong or deep relationship between the candidates and their sponsors, one caution is in order. Appropriate and healthy relationship boundaries are real concerns anytime adults interact with young people. In light of heightened public awareness of and attention to child protection issues, we must ensure that a safe and healthy relationship is maintained between the adults and the young people who will spend time together. In fact, all dioceses have specific guidelines for adults who work with young people. Criminal background checks and references for those engaged in ministry are some of the tools that ensure the quality of the adults working with our young people. Check with the director of religious education, the coordinator of youth ministry, or the pastor to find out diocesan requirements concerning criminal background checks and the use of volunteer covenants.

In ministry with youth, there are several practical guidelines to keep in mind. This information is also provided in the sponsor's guide for the *Confirmed in a Faithful Community, Immediate Preparation Edition* program.

- Providing a young person with an alcoholic beverage, tobacco, or drugs is never allowed.
- Touching must be age-appropriate and based on the need of the young person and not on the need of the adult. Physical contact must be avoided when an adult is alone with a young person.
- Adults should not be alone with a young person in a residence, sleeping facility, locker room, restroom, dressing facility, or other closed room or isolated area that is inappropriate to a ministry relationship. Adults must always meet with young people in visible and accessible areas. One-on-one meetings with a young person are best held in a public area.
- It is always a safe practice to have two adults in the area where youth are present.
- Driving alone with a young person should be avoided.
- Engaging in physical discipline of a young person is unacceptable.
- Taking an overnight trip alone with a young person from the parish or school community who is not a member of your immediate family is prohibited.
- Topics, vocabulary, recordings, films, games, or the use of computer software or any other form of personal interaction or entertainment that could not be used

comfortably in the presence of parents must not be used with young people. Sexually explicit or pornographic material is prohibited.

- If anyone (adult or minor) abuses a young person in your presence, take appropriate steps to immediately intervene and to provide a safe environment for the young person. Report the misconduct.
- Be proactive in identifying young people who may be vulnerable or at risk for unhealthy relationships. Adults can have a very positive influence on young people by sharing the message of how important youth are in God's eyes, and that they are created with dignity. This can reduce the possibility of them falling into the traps of those who tell them love is just "physical."

Support for the Sponsors

Leaders of the process of preparation must provide positive and reasonable direction to help sponsors fulfill their role. A resource has been created to help you accomplish this task: the sponsor's guide, a small booklet that describes the role of the sponsor and offers numerous practical suggestions on how the sponsor might build a positive relationship with the candidate. As a general principle, never suggest as a task for sponsors something that you could not envision accomplishing comfortably yourself if you were in their position—or, for that matter, in the position of the Confirmation candidate. Instead, provide opportunities throughout the process for sponsors and candidates to relate to one another in enjoyable and comfortable settings. For example, well-designed prayer services in which sponsors and candidates together follow the direction of process leaders are far less threatening than those in which sponsors must take a leadership role. Sponsors can also be invited to participate with, rather than direct or monitor, the candidates in service experiences.



Involvement of Sponsors

Process coordinators will need to discern effective, reasonable ways to involve sponsors in the process of preparation, that is, beyond the relational and supportive roles previously described. The *minimal* involvement of sponsors will include attendance at an orientation session after all the candidates have selected their sponsors. At the orientation, the sponsors will be provided with information (like that offered in this chapter) regarding their role. A sample orientation session is provided in chapter 4 of this manual.

Your parish setting, the number of candidates and catechists involved in your process, and other elements will either enhance or limit the other ways sponsors might be involved in the process of preparation. However, if such elements are not too restrictive, consider inviting the sponsors to participate in all the retreats and, as noted above, in the candidates' service projects. You may also wish to invite sponsors to participate in one or more of the regularly scheduled sessions during the process. Note, however, that in such cases the sponsors are not expected to assume a leadership role. They should instead experience these exercises as their candidate's *partner*.

The Parent's or Guardian's Role and Responsibilities

The emotional, intellectual, and spiritual characteristics the candidates bring to the Confirmation experience are in large part a reflection of parental influence.

At the same time, we recognize that adolescence is a time when young people and their parents or guardians must begin to negotiate a new relationship, and those “negotiations” frequently include periods of stress and tension. During this period of transition, adolescents frequently begin to seek and build relationships with other influential adults, such as teachers, coaches, and counselors. Additionally, we must remember that the intent of Confirmation is not simply to affirm or celebrate the past faith formation of the young people but to invite and welcome them into a deeper relationship with the broader faith community, in particular as that community is represented by the Confirmation coordinator, catechists, and sponsors.

Reflection on these realities gives rise to the following observations regarding the role and responsibilities of the parents or guardians in Confirmation preparation:

- The essential role of the parents or guardians is to encourage, support, and affirm the young person’s involvement in the Confirmation process. Parents or guardians are called to play a primary role in the Confirmation process by word and example, although they generally do not carry out this primary leadership role in the formal parish preparation process.
- The parents or guardians must attend the orientation session, where they receive background on the sacrament’s meaning in light of their own Confirmation experience, the content and schedule for the process, the description of their role and responsibilities—as well as those of the catechists and the sponsors—and direction for the fulfillment of their responsibilities as supportive parents or guardians.
- Parents or guardians should attend the rite of Confirmation, as well as any additional parish events you might schedule (for example a parishwide prayer service for the candidates). Parents or guardians may also be invited to play an appropriate role in the events.
- Parents or guardians should affirm, support, and pray for the candidates and their sponsors throughout the process. For example, they might invite their young person’s sponsor to a family dinner. In fact, parents or guardians will want to advise their young person in his or her choice of a sponsor.

The Community’s Role and Responsibilities

“As with Baptism, catechesis for Confirmation takes place within the parish community, which has an obligation to participate in the preparation of those to be confirmed. The parish is the faith community into whose life of prayer and worship they will be more fully initiated. It also embodies the message to which they are to respond and gives witness, in service, to the faith they profess. The parish should strive to catechize on behalf of obedience to Christ and loyal testimony to him through the power of the Spirit.” (United States Conference of Catholic Bishops, *Sharing the Light of Faith*, no. 119)

Confirmation processes should involve members of the parish in every way possible. Mentoring and nurturing young people is the responsibility of the whole community. Chapter 7 provides a sampling of ways to more intimately include the parish community in the process.

Determining Candidates’ Readiness for Confirmation

How do we decide who is ready to be confirmed? Many diocesan guidelines speak to this question within the context of canon law. Canon 889, number 2, says: “Apart from the danger of death, to receive confirmation lawfully a person who has the use