

## SACRAMENT OF CONFIRMATION

[THE SACRAMENT OF CONFIRMATION] CONCERNS ALL THE MEMBERS OF THE COMMUNITY AND THE COMMUNITY AS A WHOLE. IT IS NOT A CELEBRATION FOR AN INDIVIDUAL BUT A CELEBRATION OF THE CHURCH WHEN THAT COMMUNITY DISCOVERS THAT THE SPIRIT SPEAKS IN NEW WAYS THROUGH NEW MEMBERS.<sup>1</sup>

For most of you, it is likely that the Sacrament of Confirmation is a dim memory in your mind. It is for me! In fact, I remember it as a rite of passage from the world of adolescence to the grown-up world of adults. But that, of course, is not what it is about.

It is the final rite in the Sacraments of Initiation. We became fully incorporated into the Church with the imposition of hands and the anointing of oil. We proclaimed our belief in Jesus Christ and we committed ourselves to serve as He served, preach as He preached, live as He lived and love as He loved. Do we remember that?

Each year, we watch as young people enter into the Sacrament of Confirmation – the completion of their initiation into the Church. As a Christian community, we need to ensure that their journey has only just begun!

### **THE THEOLOGY:**

Of the seven sacraments of the Church, three are considered the Sacraments of Christian Initiation: Baptism, Confirmation and the Eucharist. “The faithful are born anew by Baptism, strengthened by the sacrament of Confirmation and receive in the Eucharist the food of eternal life.”<sup>2</sup>

During the early centuries of the Church, the initiation ceremony consisted of two operations: Christians received regeneration and forgiveness of sins through water and the Spirit and they received the seven gifts of the Spirit through the imposition of the bishop’s hand. In the 5<sup>th</sup> century, it became the norm for the sacrament of baptism to be conferred on infants as soon after birth as possible as a result of St Augustine’s idea that baptism was necessary for the remission of original sin and the high rate of infant deaths. With the fast-growing Church and lack of availability of bishops, it was necessary for priests to preside over this sacrament.

By the end of the 6<sup>th</sup> century, priests were anointing the children they baptized with consecrated chrism and bishops, when they visited the community, would confirm the baptism by the imposition of hands. The sacraments continued to develop and by the 12<sup>th</sup> century, St Thomas Aquinas had presented a theology which clearly separated Baptism and Confirmation: “through the character of baptism Christians received the power to achieve salvation; through that of confirmation they received the power to attain spiritual perfection.”<sup>3</sup>

Today, we understand that “by the sacrament of Confirmation, the baptized are more perfectly bound to the Church and are enriched with a special strength of the Holy Spirit. Hence they are, as true witnesses of Christ, more strictly obliged to spread and defend the faith by word and deed.”<sup>4</sup>

## OUR CHRISTIAN COMMUNITY:

Think about the words you've just read. To spread and defend the faith by word and deed. True witnesses of Christ. Ponder them in your hearts as we recognize our role, as a Church community, in the sacrament.

Confirmation is less about the person who received it, and more about it being a celebration of the gift of God to the entire Christian community. Through the annual celebration of the Sacrament of Confirmation, we, as members of the Church, have a wonderful opportunity to celebrate the gift of the Holy Spirit through our witness. Instead of our eyes looking to the young people, we should be looking to the gift of the Spirit which is visible because of them.

As a Christian community, we are agents of the Holy Spirit and it is our role to encourage and welcome each young person into the full life of the Church and challenge them with the knowledge that this is the start of the journey – not the completion of it. We must generate a sense of excitement in each young person to ensure that they continue joyfully in the life of Christ. “Confirmation should initiate the process of lifelong faith development.”<sup>5</sup>

Our role started with their baptism and should come from the direction in which the Holy Spirit is leading and the power with which the Holy Spirit encourages us to become witnesses of Christ. It is not only the candidate that should feel excited and energized by the celebration – but each of us: parents and guardians, sponsors and friends and the Church community. We need to reinforce the values of confirmation – commitment and discipleship, witness and evangelization, strengthening through the life of the Spirit, caring for society, church membership and ongoing initiation – and encourage young people to “enter into the process as explorers of the faith.”<sup>6</sup>

This year, imagine the joy as we join the young people in proclaiming our belief in Jesus and rejoicing in the gift of the Holy Spirit. Walk with them as they leave the Church and walk out into the light of Christ. Experience the celebration of the Church as we welcome them as witnesses of Christ and defenders of our faith. Imagine how wonderful it will feel to know that you have been more than an observer.

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<sup>1</sup> Arthur J Kubick, eds. *Confirming the Faith of Adolescents: An Alternative Future for Confirmation* (New Jersey: Paulist Press, 1991), 8.

<sup>2</sup> *Catechism of the Catholic Church* (New York: Doubleday Dell Publishing, 1995), 1212.

<sup>3</sup> Martos, *Doors to the Sacred: A Historical Introduction to Sacraments in the Catholic Church*, 196.

<sup>4</sup> Second Vatican Council, *Dogmatic Constitution on the Church (Lumen Gentium)* (Vatican, 1964) [http://www.vatican.va/archive/hist\\_councils/ii\\_vatican\\_council/documents/vat-ii\\_const\\_19641121\\_lumen-gentium\\_en.html](http://www.vatican.va/archive/hist_councils/ii_vatican_council/documents/vat-ii_const_19641121_lumen-gentium_en.html), 11.

<sup>5</sup> Kubick, eds. *Confirming the Faith of Adolescents: An Alternative Future for Confirmation*, 83.

<sup>6</sup> Kubick, 86.