

OFFICE OF DIVINE WORSHIP

Sacrament of Confirmation: Archdiocese of Boston Guidelines 2024

APRIL 23, 2024

This document and the accompanying decree formally replace the guidelines provided in the 1989 document “Pastoral Guidelines for the Celebration of the Sacraments,” commonly known as the “Grey Book,” and the guidelines provided in the document “Preparing for Confirmation: Resources and Guidelines,” commonly known as the “Red Book.” For more information, please visit our website (bit.ly/RCABconfirmation).

KEY DOCUMENTS

Episcopal conference and archdiocesan guidelines always give way to the universal Church’s guidelines.

CHURCH DOCUMENTS

Catechism of the Catholic Church (CCC)

Code of Canon Law (CIC)

Dicastery of Divine Worship document: “Age of Confirmation,” Dec. 18, 1999 (DDW)

Directory for Catechesis (DC)

Order of Confirmation (OC)

Rite of Christian Initiation of Adults (RCIA)

UNITED STATES CONFERENCE OF CATHOLIC BISHOPS’ DOCUMENTS (USCCB)

General Instruction of the Roman Missal (GIRM)

“Guidelines for Celebration of the Sacraments with Persons with Disabilities” (GCSPD)

“National Statutes for the Catechumenate” (NSC)

ARCHDIOCESE OF BOSTON DOCUMENTS

April 11, 2024 Official Decree

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“The sacrament of confirmation strengthens the baptized and obliges them more firmly to be witnesses of Christ by word and deed and to spread and defend the faith. It imprints a character, enriches by the gift of the Holy Spirit the baptized continuing on the path of Christian initiation, and binds them more perfectly to the Church.”

CIC, c. 879

Who can receive the Sacrament of Confirmation?

A baptized Catholic who desires to be confirmed, is properly disposed and suitably instructed for the sacrament, and able to renew his or her baptismal promises may receive the Sacrament of Confirmation. In the Roman rite, unless in danger of death or the episcopal conference states otherwise, the sacrament is to be bestowed at about the age of discretion (around age 7). In the United States, the episcopal conference permits each bishop to set an age for his diocese between 7 and 16. In the Archdiocese of Boston, the sacrament is to be bestowed around the ages of 13-14. “Sacred ministers cannot deny the sacraments to those who seek them at appropriate times, are properly disposed, and are not prohibited by law from receiving them” (CIC, c. 843 §1).

Church Guidelines: CCC, 1306; CIC, cc. 889-891

What does it mean to be “suitably instructed” and “properly disposed” for the Sacrament of Confirmation?

“Proper disposition” refers to a baptized Catholic in good standing and in a state of grace (that is, not aware of any unconfessed mortal sins).

“Suitably instructed” refers to evangelical and catechetical instruction that pastors and other members of the Christian faithful provide at their discretion, along with any norms established by the archdiocese or episcopal conference.

Church Guidelines: CCC, 1319; CIC, cc. 843 §2; 889 §1-2; GCSPD, n.18

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What is required to be considered “suitably instructed” and prepared to receive Confirmation in the Archdiocese of Boston?

The Archdiocese of Boston does not require more than the Church’s universal guidelines: a baptized person in good standing and a state of grace who has reached the age of discretion requests the sacrament. The person also understands – in a manner appropriate to his or her age or capacity – that: 1. a sacrament is an outward sign of inward grace instituted by Christ and 2. the Sacrament of Confirmation perfects baptismal grace; and 3. the sacrament gives the Holy Spirit to incorporate us more firmly into Jesus Christ, strengthen our bond with the Church, associate us more closely with her mission, and help us bear witness to the Christian faith in words accompanied by deeds.

Church Guidelines: CCC, 1285-1321; CIC, cc. 843 §2; 889 §1-2; GCSPD, n.18

When should the Sacrament of Confirmation be given?

In the Archdiocese of Boston, the Sacrament of Confirmation is to be bestowed normally around 8th grade when adolescents are 13 or 14 years old (by May 1, 2027). But there is no obligation to be confirmed at this age. For this reason, parishes should expect to receive and prepare candidates for Confirmation who request to receive the sacrament at an older age.

An individual person may request permission from his or her pastor to receive Confirmation between the ages of 7 and 13. In the case of children in danger of death, any priest has the faculty to administer confirmation and should exercise it even for children who have not yet reached age 7.

Parishes may request permission to maintain a 10th – 11th grade Confirmation reception timeline. All requests will be taken seriously but will be granted on a case-by-case basis. Please submit any such request in writing to Bishop Cristiano Barbosa through Patrick Krisak at pkrisak@rcab.org and Diane Campbell at dcampbell@rcab.org. Please visit bit.ly/RCABconfirmation for more information on what should be included in a request.

Church Guidelines: CIC, cc. 883 §3, 891

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Are there reasons to delay Confirmation for individual persons?

If someone is not properly disposed, suitably instructed, or able to renew their baptismal promises then he or she or the pastor may determine that a delay in reception of the sacrament is necessary. If a person feels pressured or forced to make his or her Confirmation, there is reason to delay it. If someone does not wish to receive a sacrament, then they are not properly disposed and cannot be forced to receive it. At the same time, pastoral accompaniment for someone who must delay the reception of a sacrament is encouraged so that they may grow in habits of Christian life and desire to receive the sacrament.

Church Guidelines: CIC, cc. 889-891

What is the role of the parish and pastor?

The parish is where the sacrament ordinarily takes place. The parish and pastor (along with other clergy, staff, and catechists) should *support, accompany, and equip* parents to prepare their children for the sacraments. The parish offers catechetical instruction to help parents form and nourish the confirmation candidate to be a disciple of Jesus Christ. The pastor is responsible for determining that each candidate is properly disposed, suitably instructed, and able to renew his or her baptismal promises.

Church Guidelines: CCC, 1306, 1309-1311; CIC, cc. 776-777, 881, 890, 895; DDW

What is the role of parents or guardians in preparing their children for receiving the Sacrament of Confirmation?

Parents are the primary educators of their children. The Church recognizes it is the parents first, and then the pastors, who decide a candidate is ready for Confirmation. Parents can and should pray with their children at home, be involved in or lead their children's catechesis for the sacrament, and participate regularly in the sacramental life of the Church with their family. For ideas and guidance on how your parish can support parents in preparing their children for the sacraments, contact the Faith Formation & Missionary Discipleship team (bit.ly/SEDffmd).

Church Guidelines: CCC, 1309, 1653; CIC, c. 774; OC, 3; DDW; DC, n. 124

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Who can be a sponsor and what is the role of a sponsor?

A sponsor helps the candidate grow as a disciple of Jesus Christ by being a model and guide to personal discipleship. The sponsor must be a baptized Catholic over the age of sixteen who has received all the Sacraments of Initiation (Baptism, Holy Communion, and Confirmation), lives a life of faith, is not cohabitating outside of a sacramental marriage, if married has received the sacrament of matrimony in the Catholic Church, is not bound by any imposed or declared canonical penalty, and is not a parent of the candidate. It is desirable to choose as a Confirmation sponsor one's baptismal sponsor (godparent) to emphasize the unity of the two sacraments. Whether a godparent is chosen as a sponsor or not, an individual's godparents are encouraged to support the candidate and provide witness to their faith.

Church Guidelines: CCC, 1311; CIC, cc. 774 §2, 874 §1 °1-4, 892-893; OC, 5-6

How long should catechetical instruction take to prepare for this sacrament?

The norm in the Archdiocese of Boston for the preparation of the reception of Confirmation at age 13-14 is no less than 6 months and no more than 2 years. At the same time, it is not permitted to delay the reception of Confirmation because a candidate has not taken part in a set number of classes or years of formation if they are otherwise suitably instructed, properly disposed, and able to renew their baptismal promises. This timeframe is not required for adult Confirmation candidates, for whom the length of preparation is at the discretion of the pastor but should not exceed 2 years.

Church Guidelines: CIC, c. 889 §1-2

What is required for Confirmation of a child above the age of discretion who has not been baptized?

If someone is not baptized but is above the age of discretion (age 7, also known as the age of reason), they must be prepared for and receive all of the Sacraments of Initiation together according to the *RCIA* adapted to their age, even if their age is closer to the archdiocesan age for Confirmation.

Church Guidelines: CIC, cc. 852 §1, 866; *RCIA*, ns. 14, 215, 252-259

National Guidelines: NSC ns. 18-19

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What is the difference in preparing an adult for Confirmation versus an adolescent?

Although the requirements for receiving the sacrament are the same, how preparation is carried out should be discerned with pastoral care and prudential judgment. An adult who has already been prepared for and received the Sacraments of Baptism and Holy Communion should not be confused with a catechumen (who has never been baptized). Baptized adults need a different preparation experience than a catechumen and should not be included in *RCIA*, which is only for the unbaptized.

Church Guidelines: *OC*, 3; *RCIA*, ns. 400, 402, 506, 535, 549, 565

National Guidelines: *GCSPD*, n. 18; *NSC* ns. 30-31

Is it permissible for parents to prepare their children for Confirmation at home without parish instruction?

Yes, given the primary role parents play in the faith of their children. Pastors are required to offer catechetical instruction to the faithful but parents may or may not choose to have their children participate in those offerings. Pastors are responsible for ensuring candidates for Confirmation are properly disposed and suitably instructed, but this does not mean that pastors can impose participation in parish Confirmation preparation offerings.

Pastors should meet with candidates to get to know the families, learn more about the desire of the candidates for Confirmation and faith, and offer advice and guidance on what is required for candidates to be suitably instructed and properly disposed to receive the sacrament of Confirmation.

Church Guidelines: *CCC*, 1309-1311, 1653; *CIC*, cc. 774, 776; *DC*, n. 124; *DDW*

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How should parishes provide Confirmation preparation for Catholic school students?

In the case of students who attend a parish Catholic school, pastors have the discretion to permit preparation for Confirmation to take place in the school and the parish or to keep confirmation preparation solely in the parish.

Pastors have the freedom to decide whether to permit their parishioners to pursue confirmation preparation through independent Catholic schools not affiliated with the parish. Parishioners should contact pastors if they wish to pursue confirmation preparation at an independent school but should not expect such requests to be granted in all cases. In the case of candidates whom pastors permit to prepare for Confirmation at an independent school, pastors are encouraged to require the candidates to participate in some aspect of Confirmation preparation at the parish to foster the young person's connection to his or her parish, be that a retreat, prayer service, or other similar event or gathering. Pastors and their parish faith formation leaders (including confirmation preparation catechists) should exercise pastoral care in these situations to help the family feel part of the parish without burdening them unnecessarily or repeating formation in the parish that candidates already received in the school.

Church Guidelines: CIC, c. 843 §1-2

What should be included in the preparation of a candidate for the Sacrament of Confirmation?

Any program of formation should not be limited to catechetical or academic formation but also include invitation and instruction on how to participate in the life of the Church as an expression of lived faith in the person of Jesus Christ. It should not be expected that candidates for Confirmation have memorized particular prayers or information on the Christian life such that they might be able to repeat them back or pass a test on the information. The expectation is that candidates have an earnest desire for the sacrament, openness to living a Christian life, and have been exposed to catechetical instruction and Christian practice at some point leading up to or during their preparation. A suggested program of formation is available at bit.ly/RCABconfirmation.

Church Guidelines: CCC 1309; CIC, c. 889-891; GCSPD, n.18

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What role do retreats and Christian service play in Confirmation preparation?

A retreat should be offered as part of the preparation for the Sacrament of Confirmation but it is not permissible for a pastor or parish to require participation in a retreat as a condition for receiving the sacrament. No parish or diocese is permitted to establish requirements or particular law that exceeds the universal law of the Church and impedes the fundamental right of the faithful to receive the sacraments. Therefore, a parish cannot require participation in a retreat before someone receives the Sacrament of Confirmation.

The same is true for service hours. Service hours cannot be required because service is not required for receiving the sacrament. However, parishes should offer Christian service opportunities to candidates as part of their preparation. Appropriate catechesis should accompany these offerings to help the candidates understand the importance of service and know how to continue serving after their Confirmation. Candidates should also learn how to maintain and grow in their relationship with Jesus.

Church Guidelines: CIC, cc. 889-890; DDW

What are the guidelines for choosing a confirmation saint name?

At Baptism, we receive a Christian name. Many young people find it beneficial to enhance their private devotion and Christian practice through choosing a saint name while preparing for Confirmation, which is encouraged. The name should be of a canonized saint or blessed in the Catholic Church but does not need to be from a saint of the same sex as the candidate for Confirmation. It is not permitted to require a candidate to choose a saint name and there is no need to choose another name because there is no mention of using a special confirmation name in the *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, *Code of Canon Law*, or *Order of Confirmation*.

Should Confirmation take place within a Mass?

Yes. However, whether your parish's celebration of Confirmation takes place within the context of a Mass is a conversation the pastor should have with the bishop or priest celebrating the Confirmation.

Church Guidelines: CIC, c. 881

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Should robes be used for receiving the Sacrament of Confirmation?

For the Archdiocese of Boston, robes are permitted but not required.

How should we let the Bishop know the name of each candidate?

Our bishops prefer to be shown an index card with the name of each person to be confirmed and hear the sponsor announce the candidate's name. It allows them to clearly see and hear the name before using it in the rite, avoiding any miscommunication.

Do our candidates need to send a letter to the Bishop?

Parishes and individual bishops may request letters from candidates; there is no archdiocesan requirement and the Church does not state anything on this topic.

How does a parish request additional Confirmation dates?

It is expected that it will be possible for parishes to request additional Confirmation dates with Episcopal Vicars and Bishops through May 2027 using the normal process. While it is also possible for pastors to request delegation to convey the sacrament of Confirmation to account for the need for additional Confirmations, the strong preference is to request additional dates rather than delegation.