

SECRETARIAT FOR EVANGELIZATION & DISCIPLESHIP

FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS FOR PARENTS: THE CHANGE OF AGE FOR THE RECEPTION OF CONFIRMATION IN THE ARCHDIOCESE OF BOSTON

APRIL 23, 2024

How can the age of Confirmation change? Doesn't the Church require a certain age for Confirmation?

Both the *Rite of Confirmation* and the *Code of Canon Law* set the age of discretion (age 7) as the age for Confirmation unless the episcopal conference sets another age. The U.S. episcopal conference (USCCB) designated the age for the reception of the Sacrament of Confirmation in the United States to be between the age of discretion (age 7) and age 16. Local bishops may determine their own policies within that range.

In other dioceses, Confirmation is offered at a different age. Why is the ordinary age for Confirmation being moved to 8th grade in the Archdiocese of Boston?

As mentioned above, each bishop is responsible for setting the age of Confirmation in his diocese. In exercising his authority to determine the age of Confirmation in the Archdiocese of Boston, the Archbishop considers many factors and relies on the advice and experience of many people.

The current age of grade 8 (age 13-14) is a recognition that the experience of young people and their families has changed in recent years. Students in middle school are equipped to receive sacramental instruction and will benefit from receiving the sacramental grace and outpouring of the gifts of the Holy Spirit before high school. By making this change Cardinal Seán hopes to facilitate a renewal of family engagement in the life of the parish, especially Sunday Mass, and a renewal of youth ministry within parishes, that goes beyond sacramental preparation.

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Who was involved in making this decision?

The decision to change the age of Confirmation was Cardinal Seán's, acting in his role as Archbishop of Boston. Cardinal Seán formed two separate committees and asked them to research the subject and provide recommendations. Committee members included a diverse group of priests, parents, theologians, parish and school leaders, and representatives from various ethnic communities within the archdiocese.

The first committee was formed in 2017 and consulted widely with other dioceses, discovered best practices, sent out surveys regarding the age for Confirmation, and recommended changes to the current practice in the Archdiocese of Boston. The committee provided its report and recommendations to the Cardinal right before the COVID global pandemic, which prevented action from being taken.

After the pandemic, the Cardinal appointed a second committee, again comprised of a diverse group representing parish and school leaders, parents, clergy, and cultural communities. This committee reviewed the work of the first committee and then provided its own report to the Cardinal. Cardinal Seán also consulted his presbyteral council, an advisory body of priests from throughout the archdiocese.

Cardinal Seán considered the recommendations of both committees and the presbyteral council in deciding to change the age of Confirmation.

How will this change in age impact the current preparation program for Confirmation at the parish?

Parishes will need to adjust their sacramental preparation programs in ways that are appropriate for the new age of Confirmation. This may include changes to curriculum as well as schedules. Some parishes will be able to make changes quickly, but others may need more time to transition. The Cardinal has asked that all parishes have changes completed by May 2027.

Do I as parent have any say in when my child is confirmed? What if I do not feel that my 8th grader is ready to be confirmed?

Yes. Parents are the primary educators of their children. Parents should pray with their children at home, be involved in or lead their children's catechesis for the sacrament, participate regularly in the sacramental life of the Church with their family, and be involved in determining when their child requests the sacrament. Pastors ultimately have the responsibility to ensure that candidates of any age have been adequately prepared prior to the reception of the sacrament.

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Are parents allowed to prepare their children at home to receive Confirmation?

Yes. As noted above, parents are the primary educators of their children and have the right (and duty) to form their children in faith, including preparing them to receive the sacraments. Pastors must offer catechetical instruction, but parents may or may not choose to participate in those offerings. Pastors ultimately have the responsibility to ensure that candidates of any age have been adequately prepared prior to the reception of the sacrament. This responsibility does not mean that pastors can require participation in parish confirmation preparation offerings.

My child attends a Catholic School; can preparation take place at school?

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.

Are most 8th grade children able to make an adult commitment to the Church?

This question reflects a common misconception that the Sacrament of Confirmation signifies maturity and adult commitment to the Church. The maturity that is required for receiving any of the sacraments of Christian initiation is only what is age-appropriate. The Church expects that a candidate preparing to be confirmed has a basic understanding of what the sacrament is and that they freely seek to receive it. To celebrate Confirmation requires nothing more by way of age-appropriate maturity than to receive the Eucharist. An authentic, mature commitment to Christ and the Church is expressed in lifelong participation in the Eucharist and apostolic life of the Church.

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What if my child has a disability or requires special learning accommodations? Are they able to be prepared for and receive the Sacrament of Confirmation?

Yes. Candidates of varying mental and intellectual abilities are encouraged to receive the Sacrament of Confirmation. Often these candidates and their families need the support of the parish community and grace of the sacraments. You should work closely with your pastor and parish faith formation leader to determine how best to accompany your child as he or she prepares for the sacrament. They will coordinate with the bishop to plan an appropriate celebration of the sacrament. If necessary, the sacrament can be offered in ways other than a large-group Mass or ceremony.

If children are confirmed in 8th grade rather than in high school, won't they drop out of faith formation?

We hope not, though it is possible. Parents play a crucial role in whether or not they do. Confirmation has been misunderstood and often mistakenly viewed as graduation from faith formation. Growth in understanding and living out of our faith is the result of a lifelong effort. Parents have the first responsibility of being an example of Jesus Christ to each other and living the Gospel each day. Children are more likely to stay connected to the faith if they see their parents striving to grow in holiness through family prayer, scripture reading, Sunday Mass, regular Confession, and living a life of service and charity.

How will this age change affect high school youth ministry?

This change provides an opportunity for parishes to revitalize high school youth ministry. The Sacrament of Confirmation has sometimes been misused to motivate attendance. This approach risks teens feeling they are captives and being forced to attend meetings. The sacrament is one of initiation into Christian discipleship. *Confirmation is not the end but a beginning*, not graduation but initiation into a life of continued growth in the faith. Removing sacramental preparation from high school ministry allows parishes to evangelize, build teens up through formation, and send them out to minister and live as disciples of Jesus Christ.

What will happen to my high school aged children that have not yet been confirmed?

There is a three-year implementation process, May 2024 – May 2027. Pastors and parish staff members will determine their own timeline for the transition. Possible models for this transition will be provided to pastors and parish staff. The goal is that the normative age for Confirmation will be eighth grade by 2027.

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How can I help my child prepare for Confirmation? What is my child expected to know before Confirmation?

The best way for you to prepare your child for Confirmation is to let him or her see you living out your faith in an authentic way at home. Prioritizing participation at Sunday Mass, praying together and openly discussing faith as a family is the foundation for passing faith on to your child. It is less about what your child needs to know and more about him or her recognizing the invitation to have a relationship with Jesus and participate in the larger church community.