



# DIOCESE OF SPRINGFIELD IN ILLINOIS

## OFFICE OF THE BISHOP

My dear sisters and brothers in Christ,

I am writing to inform you of an important and exciting change in our approach to the initiation of our young people into the Catholic faith.

One of the prominent changes called for in our Fourth Diocesan Synod in 2017 was the restoration of the original sequence of the Sacraments of Initiation, returning First Holy Eucharist to its proper place as the pinnacle of Christian initiation, with Confirmation taking place prior to First Communion. In our diocese, we are now celebrating both sacraments in the same Mass, at the ordinary age of third grade. We have seen the enthusiasm with which our children are embracing this approach, and I am confident we will see the graces of these sacraments bearing fruit for many years to come.

With the successful implementation of this change, we are now introducing a second, related change. Beginning in July 2021, we will celebrate Confirmation and First Holy Communion Masses at the Cathedral of the Immaculate Conception in Springfield, instead of at parishes, except when I come to a parish for an official pastoral visit, which will occur approximately once every five years. This approach emphasizes the symbols and realities of our young people being initiated into the universal Catholic Church. The Cathedral is the Mother Church of our diocese and as the See of the local bishop, it is a symbol of unity with the church throughout the world. Further, a ritual celebrated by the bishop is fitting as he represents the continuity of the sacramental and teaching authority of the Catholic Church, which goes back all the way to St. Peter and the first Apostles.

This celebration of Confirmation and First Holy Communion at the Cathedral is intended to take on the form of a pilgrimage and amplify the power and uniqueness of this moment in the lives of our young people and their families. It is intentionally a step outside of their home parish and a pilgrimage to the Mother Church of the diocese for the completion of their initiation into the Church in the presence of the Diocesan Bishop, who is a successor of the Apostles.

Of course, this pilgrimage also has practical implications for families who will be traveling from all corners of the diocese for this celebration with their children. While this is true, consider this comparison: if your child or grandchild's sports team advances to the championship game

which takes place in a city several hours away in a big stadium, you and your child would be excited and happily make the long trip. Your child receiving the sacraments of Confirmation and First Holy Communion is that spiritual “championship game” for him or her. The Cathedral of the Immaculate Conception in Springfield is that “big stadium.” I hope we can embrace these life-changing sacraments with at least as much enthusiasm as a sporting event.

In addition to the spiritual benefits for our young people and their families, this approach will also enable me to allocate more time for parish visits as the previous schedule mainly limited my visits to primarily Confirmation celebrations at parishes, which typically involved only the *Confirmandi* and their families. Starting in the fall of 2021, I intend to visit each of our 129 parishes at least once every five years, including a celebration of one of the regular Sunday Masses, receptions to meet parishioners, and meetings with parish pastoral and finance councils. While making these regular parish visits possible is not the primary reason for celebrating Confirmation and First Eucharist at the Cathedral, it is an important benefit for me to stay better connected with the lay faithful throughout the diocese.

I encourage you to use this as an opportunity to build the anticipation for your children as they are about to receive the Holy Spirit and Jesus in these powerful and life changing sacraments on a pilgrimage to the Cathedral. How exciting it is that our children will lock in their spiritual compass toward authentic discipleship and holiness at such a young age!

Please visit [www.dio.org/confirmation](http://www.dio.org/confirmation) where you will find answers to frequently asked questions related to this change. You may also wonder why Confirmation is in third grade (as opposed to eighth grade) and why Confirmation now comes before Holy Eucharist. That website also includes answers to those questions as well.

I want to thank our families for raising their children in the one, holy, Catholic, and apostolic faith. I am incredibly grateful to families who are helping create intentional disciples of Christ in their children.

Sincerely yours in Christ,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Thomas John Paprocki". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style with a small cross at the beginning.

Most Reverend Thomas John Paprocki  
Bishop of Springfield in Illinois