

Frequently Asked Questions

Starting July 1, 2021, Confirmation and First Holy Communion for children in third grade will take place at the Cathedral of the Immaculate Conception in Springfield.

Why will Confirmations and First Holy Communions take place at the Cathedral in Springfield?

Imagine your child is on a sports team, and their team advances to the championship game, which takes place three hours away. How would you react? You likely would be thrilled and celebrate! You would enthusiastically book a hotel room, pack up your car, maybe even take a vacation day or two, deal with the traffic and travel headaches, and stand there excited and proud as your child plays in the championship game and in the big-time stadium.

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-time stadium. Traveling to the Mother Church of our diocese for your child to be sealed with the Seven Gifts of the Holy Spirit through Confirmation (wisdom, understanding, counsel, fortitude, knowledge, piety, and fear of the Lord) and receive Jesus physically present in the Eucharist (the source and summit of our faith) for the first time, is really one of the most important days for their relationship with God. The Cathedral, as the Mother Church of our diocese, is a local symbol of our universal faith. So, it is perfectly fitting for the occasion and will help provide a powerful and spiritually uplifting experience for everyone.

The old system was working just fine. This decision seems to only be about Bishop Paprocki's schedule.

Bishop Paprocki cares most importantly about the souls entrusted to his responsibility in our diocese. The old system was not working well due to the amount of parishes and geography of the diocese. Scheduling Confirmations and First Holy Communions across 28 counties and 129 parishes every year created scheduling issues not only for Bishop Paprocki, but the parishes as well. While this change helps with scheduling, the main reason for taking Confirmation and First Holy Communion to the Cathedral is to create an opportunity for an amazing pilgrimage for third-graders (and their families). This experience will boost their faith to new levels and lock in their spiritual compass toward authentic discipleship and holiness at a young age.

A pilgrimage is a journey to a sacred place to come to know God better. Every Catholic should visit their Mother Church, their Cathedral, at least once. Making a pilgrimage to the Mother Church is a spiritual journey. Our children, while on this journey, will be sealed with the Gifts of the Holy Spirit through Confirmation, will receive Jesus Christ for the first time in the Holy Eucharist and ultimately come to know God better.

The diocesan bishop, who is a successor of the Apostles, is a symbol of our connection and communion with the universal community of the Catholic Church throughout the world.

So it is fitting to celebrate the Sacraments of Confirmation and First Holy Communion with the diocesan bishop at the Cathedral, the church that is also a diocesan symbol of our universal faith.



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In light of the coronavirus pandemic impacting Confirmations that were on Bishop's calendar in 2020, this change, which was being developed and discussed months before the pandemic, now allows for a natural and powerful transition starting in 2021. It's an opportunity for all of us to help build the anticipation for our children!

This change also gives Bishop Paprocki more flexibility to make more parish visits every year across the diocese, allowing him more time at each parish to celebrate Mass, get to know parishioners, take questions, and hear what the parish is doing to advance our faith.

How will Confirmation and First Holy Communion at the Cathedral work?

Confirmations and First Holy Eucharist will be scheduled on Tuesday evenings for parishes within 50 miles of Springfield and on the first, third, and fifth Saturdays of the month for parishes more than 50 miles from Springfield.

How many from our family will be able to come to the Cathedral?

An exact number depends on how many children are receiving the sacraments. However, it's anticipated the child, the sponsor, and several other family members will be able to come, perhaps more if it's a smaller group of children.

What if one of my family members cannot make the trip to Springfield?

The Cathedral of the Immaculate Conception will live-stream all Confirmation/First Holy Communion Liturgies. Family and friends can watch the Mass LIVE at spicathedral.org.

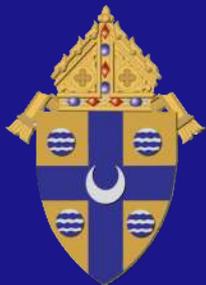
What if the parish family is upset they can't participate in this celebration?

Talk to your Pastor about hosting a local parish celebration the next Sunday or another Sunday after the children receive these sacraments, inviting the children to wear their First Holy Communion attire and pack the church with friends and family and the parish community.

Shouldn't these sacraments take place at their parish - with their parish community?

Receiving these sacraments outside your parish community reminds us that these sacraments complete a person's initiation into the Catholic faith, not into a parish congregation. The word "catholic" means "universal," so we are part of this world-wide community of faith. The Cathedral of the Immaculate Conception is the diocesan symbol of our universal faith.

Therefore, receiving these sacraments at the Cathedral will be a powerful experience - an experience which will remind everyone that what we believe and how we live as Catholics must go beyond our local communities and into the world.



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How can members of our parish celebrate with our children at the Cathedral?

Each parish can bring their cantors and/or a choir for this momentous day. Once your day is scheduled, you will work with Mark Gifford, the director of Music at the Cathedral of the Immaculate Conception, for anything music related. If you would like to bring readers or servers, you will work with Father Dominic Rankin, the Master of Ceremonies for Bishop Paprocki.

What is Confirmation and what is the purpose in choosing a Confirmation name?

Confirmation is where a Catholic is sealed with the Seven Gifts of the Holy Spirit by the authority of the diocesan bishop, a successor of the Apostles. Those gifts are wisdom, understanding, counsel, fortitude, knowledge, piety, and fear of the Lord.

When someone receives the outpouring of the Holy Spirit in the Sacrament of Confirmation, he or she is "more strictly obliged to spread and defend the faith by word and deed" (Lumen gentium, 11). While this is not a new mission for the baptized, those who are anointed with the sacred Chrism "share more completely in the mission of Jesus Christ" (Catechism of the Catholic Church, 1294). So, it became customary for those preparing for Confirmation to choose what we commonly call a Confirmation name. While not required by the Church, choosing such a name is a laudable practice and is commonly done in the dioceses of the United States of America.

Some time ago, it became somewhat usual to choose a Confirmation name because it was the name that a grandparent had, but this was never the idea behind the choosing of a name. Rather, because the one to be Confirmed will be sent out "to confess the name of Christ boldly, and never to be ashamed of the Cross," the idea is to choose the name of a saint who can help fulfill this mission (Catechism of the Catholic Church, 1303). Sometimes, we choose the saint because of his or her patronage, because of the name itself, because of a common personality, or because of his or her story. Sometimes, though, it also seems a saint, as it were, chooses us. Whatever the case, choosing the name of saint is a way of placing oneself under the patronage of this particular friend of God, of seeking to imitate this person who imitated Christ, and of seeking the prayers and guidance of this saint (cf. I Corinthians 11:1).

Why are we now Confirming third-graders?

Confirming children in third grade and having First Holy Communion come after Confirmation is what's called the "restored order" of the sacraments, which was implemented several years ago in our diocese. It's important to note that we are not starting something new. Aside from fairly recent history, it has always been the Church's practice to first confirm new members and then welcome them to receive Communion. This practice held for adults and children, alike, and it has continued to the practice of RCIA. In fact, the Catechism of the Catholic Church clearly affirms the proper sequence in paragraph 1322: "The holy Eucharist completes Christian initiation."



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The approach of inverting the sequence of first Eucharist and Confirmation first appeared in France in the middle of the 19th century, as the bishops sought a longer formation period for confirmandi. In 1879, Pope Leo XIII rebuked the French practice and ordered the original sequence to be restored, but the bishops failed to make the change. The practice spread subsequently to the Church in America as well.

So, the real question is not why we would lower the age of Confirmation, but rather what have we gained by deferring it to a later age? The facts in this regard are eye-opening. Consider that nearly 80 percent of all fallen away Catholics were never confirmed, and the average age of Catholics falling away from the faith is 13 years old. By deferring the age of Confirmation, we have deprived these children of the gifts of the Holy Spirit, which are strengthened by the sacrament of Confirmation. We will never know what might have otherwise happened for them.

But how can children receiving Confirmation earlier in their life help them?

Bishop Paprocki summed it up best, saying: “Given what our children are confronting in society, why would we delay the grace of Confirmation – a grace that can protect them from those dangers.”

Our children are facing an unprecedented barrage of threats to their emotional well-being and moral clarity.

Deferring Confirmation deprives our children of special graces that can help them withstand the spiritual challenges of this new reality. Further, deferring Confirmation until they are already swimming in these waters also increases the likelihood that they will experience barriers to the sacramental grace. After all, as St. Thomas Aquinas teaches us, there are three obstacles to grace: lack of faith/insincerity; lack of repentance; and presence of demons (STL III 66-68).

Therefore, delaying Confirmation is a double-edged sword: It deprives our children of grace they badly need at a younger age; and it likely decreases the effectiveness of the sacrament in their lives.

Confirmation and First Holy Communion in the same year - how can our children grasp these deep, theological aspects of our faith?

If an 8-year-old is able to understand enough about the Eucharist – that the bread and wine are changed with the words of consecration and become the very Body, Blood, Soul, and Divinity of Christ – and be properly disposed to receive the Eucharist reverently, then it seems reasonable that he or she is also able to understand what it means when we teach that the Holy Spirit gives seven gifts to be used in faith. In fact, this is why the Church established the “age of reason” as the appropriate normal age for reception of the sacraments of initiation.

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Quoting St. Thomas Aquinas, the Catechism of the Catholic Church wisely reminds us that “age of body does not determine age of soul. Even in childhood, man can attain spiritual maturity: as the book of Wisdom says: ‘For old age is not honored for length of time or measured by number of years’ (4:8). Many children, through the strength of the Holy Spirit they have received, have bravely fought for Christ even to the shedding of their blood” (CCC, 1308).

How can we expect third-graders to be prepared to confirm their own faith as adults in the Church?

This question points to a couple common points of misunderstanding regarding the sacrament of Confirmation. The first over-emphasizes the action of the confirmandi in the sacrament, and the second mistakenly views Confirmation as a sort of graduation from faith formation. Paragraph 1308 of the Catechism states: “Although Confirmation is sometimes called the ‘sacrament of Christian maturity,’ we must not confuse adult faith with the age of natural growth, nor forget that the baptismal grace is grace of free, unmerited election and does not need ‘ratification’ to become effective.”

It is certainly important that recipients of the sacraments be properly disposed and prepared to receive the sacraments. As noted above, however, there is a very high probability that a third-grader is more open, receptive, and properly disposed to this sacramental grace than an eighth-grader. Conversely, it is more likely that an eighth-grader faces greater obstacles to grace. The Church has deemed the age of reason to be the age of 7.

Is restored order being made in other dioceses?

This change has been encouraged by both Pope Benedict XVI and by Pope Francis, and many bishops are implementing or planning for the restored order. In the United States, about 15 dioceses have implemented the restored order, including Phoenix, Denver and Spokane.

Is this asking a lot of our teachers?

It is certainly a significant change for our teachers and catechists, but our schools and parish formation programs are blessed with gifted and talented teachers who are eager to do what is best for their students. Each parish has the flexibility to choose the curriculum they feel is best for their teachers and students (curriculum suggestions can be found at dio.org/catechesis/restored-order.html). Let's remember that we should treat this as an opportunity to form lifelong disciples of Christ.

More information about restored order can be found at: dio.org/confirmation

