

The Confirmation Conversation

By Trish Keller

What about our teenagers?

My college roommate was surprised to hear from me. I caught her on her cell phone during her evening commute.

Springing some heavy questions on her, I was touched by the answers that came off the top of her head, but clearly from the bottom of her heart.

Anne is an Eastern Rite Christian. Her late father was Greek. Members of St. Nicholas Greek Orthodox Church in St. Louis, the five Yannakakis children received Baptism, Confirmation, and Eucharist as babies in the Eastern Rite practice known as Chrismation. Anne's nieces and nephews have followed suit. Confirmation happened early in their lives, with positive effects.

"You are considered a full member of the Church," Anne said of Chrismation. "You still go to Sunday school. You still want to participate in Church activities."

"I go up and take communion with my nieces and nephews. That's something I can do as godmother. That strengthens your family and your faith. You are partaking of the most significant aspect of our faith."

Pope Benedict would agree. With the Eucharist as our source and summit in mind, Pope Benedict would like bishops to restore the sacraments of initiation to their proper order of Baptism, Confirmation, and Eucharist. New Catholics who enter the Church through the RCIA already receive the three initiation sacraments at once.

Most parishes in our diocese offer Confirmation to teenagers. Moreover, many Catholic parents have told me their preference: continue to confirm children during the teenage years.

Confirmation catechist Kim Eakes of Plains provided her perspective. Kim, Debbie Eakes, and Jenny Amerin are catechists for ninth through twelfth graders. Two years of catechesis and preparation culminate in Confirmation for teenagers in the cluster comprising St. Patrick, Plains; St. John the Baptist, Mead; and St. Anthony, Fowler.

Class topics include the fruits and gifts of the Holy Spirit, the Beatitudes, the Rosary, and the saints. Most important, Kim said, is "to teach them to be responsible and of the importance of attending Mass regularly."

Each student must perform ten hours of apostolic work.

"A lot of ours accomplish this by participating in Mass as servers, lectors, leading the Rosary, or as music ministers. Plus we do some group activities such as a food drive, taking Christmas plates and visiting the elderly, and a soup kitchen visit to Amarillo," Kim said.

Besides these benefits to the community, Kim described how the parish benefits from the Confirmation program as well.

"We are probably most proud of their involvement in many aspects of Mass. They are past the stage of going because 'Mom and Dad make me.' In our small parish it keeps them very involved, and they set an example for the younger students."

Practically speaking, Confirmation preparation keeps teens involved in the Mass. They also do volunteer work that bears witness to Christ. If our diocese moves Confirmation to a younger age, where does that leave teens?

One family can provide a possible answer, or at least a reflection on their own experience.

Kevin and Nicki Twiss of Garden City, baptized Catholics, returned to the Church as adults after a long absence. Through the RCIA, they completed their Christian initiation, and their children received Baptism, Confirmation, and Eucharist at Easter Vigil. Nicki and Kevin keep the faith alive in their home through, "prayer at dinner and bedtime. We continually learn more about our Catholic values and try to instill those in our children," Nicki said.

They teach a seventh grade religious education class at St. Dominic, where their sons, ages 14 and 15, attend classes. A seventeen-year-old daughter, already confirmed, does not. Her 11th grade classmates are preparing for Confirmation, which Shelby need not do. She does make time to grown in her faith, though.

“Shelby participated in TEC this past quarter and spoke to the reunion class. Shelby is my champion. She is very faithful and is a great leader in the family. However, all my kids have friends outside our church---that attend Bible Christian or Cornerstone, etc---and they say that their friends have a more religious, closer-to-God experience, on their Wednesday classes. They truly wish they could experience that. Shelby had attended a couple of sessions with friends during the summer and expressed that she had felt closer to God than ever before, “ Nicki said.

Teens are influenced by their peers. In matters of faith, we’d like our Catholic teens to be the ones doing the influencing. And with the beauty and truth of the Eucharist on our side, how can we miss?

We can miss. We can miss if we fail to share that truth and beauty. To be open to hearing it, teens clearly need a structured program. They need interested and caring adults. They need the company of friends. They need to give of themselves to others. Sounds like Confirmation preparation, doesn’t it?

Or better yet, teen ministry.

Trish Keller of St. Dominic Parish in Garden City will occasionally address the possible changes in the administration of the Sacrament of Confirmation in the Dodge City Diocese. Your comments are welcomed at stdomoffice@st-dominic.org.