

The Confirmation Conversation *By Trish Keller*

In some ways, my youngest son's first communion will be like that of our two older boys. Same Grandma's Bread video. Same blue blazer and striped tie. Same level of anticipation and excitement. After all, first communion is a rite of passage, a milestone in the life of a Catholic child.

Or is it?

In my time-bound way of thinking, the milestone marks a coordinate on the timeline of my son's earthly life. On a spiritual level, through faith, I see this sacrament as it truly is: Christian initiation into an eternal life shared with God. So it was with Baptism, when he was born anew as God's child and washed clean of sin. So will it be with Confirmation, when he is sealed with the Holy Spirit and strengthened in his Christian character. And so will it be with Eucharist, when he is spiritually nourished by Jesus' body and blood. There's just one hitch in the sacramental sequence.

At our parish in Garden City, my son won't be confirmed until he reaches high school. Once again, our very human, time-bound, earthly way of thinking can obscure our perception of a sacrament – even Confirmation. It's easy to think of Confirmation as a rite of passage: no longer do we parents impose the faith on our children; now, our children choose the faith! Larger blue blazer and striped tie. Anticipation and excitement. These are adult Catholics!

In the midst of all this, other children come into the Church through the Rite of Christian Initiation for Adults, the RCIA. If age seven or above, they receive Baptism, Confirmation, and Eucharist as administered by the priest at Easter Vigil. We know the Church teaches that these sacraments are those of Christian initiation. We further know the Church prescribes a proper sequence for these sacraments: first Baptism, then Confirmation, and then Eucharist.

Naturally, questions arise about continuing catechesis for these newly-initiated children. Different parishes take different approaches, with no perfect solution at hand.

That's part of the reason Pope Benedict XVI in 2007 urged bishops worldwide to start a conversation on the sequence of the initiation sacraments in U. S. dioceses. In the Diocese of Dodge City, that process was already underway. In 2005, Bishop Gilmore had convened a study group to explore the manner in which different parishes administer the Sacrament of Confirmation. In September, Father Paul Turner of the Kansas City-St. Joseph diocese spoke to directors of religious education and confirmation catechists about this often misunderstood sacrament.

Bishop Gilmore, priests, parish volunteers, and directors of religious education are reflecting on the right time to confirm our young people. Father Bob Schremmer has asked me to keep the conversation alive in *SKR* over a series of columns. With that in mind, I invite your comments and questions on Confirmation. Until then, the conversation continues.

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.