

The Confirmation Conversation

By Trish Keller

The study group's recommendation

In Garden City, almost everyone knows someone whose teenager was confirmed at St. Mary's instead of St. Dominic's. Or at St. Dominic's instead of at St. Mary's. Combine busy teens with confirmation class schedules, service requirements, and more friends at one parish than the other, and what do you get? A murky soup of complications quite unrelated to Christian initiation. Is this a disservice to all involved?

Bishop Gilmore finds that a worthy question.

The proof is in the parishes. Within our diocese, confirmation age lacks consistency. Moreover, the intended order of the initiation sacraments has been lost. To address this issue, Bishop Gilmore in 2005 established a diocesan-wide study of the initiation sacraments, particularly Confirmation. A 12-member study group of priests, women Religious, and lay people met for almost two years.

The group studied books and articles on Confirmation. It surveyed parishes in this dioceses as well as dioceses across the U.S. The group discussed, read Scripture, and evaluated the concerns and benefits associated with a change in Confirmation age.

After careful deliberation, the study group recommended that Bishop Gilmore restore the proper order of the initiation sacraments: Baptism, Confirmation, and Eucharist. The recommendation specified that Confirmation be celebrated prior to the celebration of First Eucharist.

No less than Pope Benedict weighed in on the subject. In February 2007, Benedict asked all Catholic bishops to refocus on the meaning of Confirmation. Catholics must square the *why* we confirm with the *when*, Benedict urged, in order to keep Eucharist as the goal of the whole initiation process. So, Catholic dioceses throughout the U.S. are revisiting our understanding of Confirmation and its role in Christian initiation.

To brush up, we need look no further than the Catechism of the Catholic Church.

It explains, "by the sacrament of Confirmation, (the baptized) are more perfectly bound to the Church and are enriched with a special strength of the Holy Spirit. Hence they are, as true witnesses of Christ, more strictly obliged to spread and defend the faith by word and deed." (1285)

The baptized and confirmed then join us at the Eucharistic table, where the centrality of the Eucharist is seen and experienced.

How much time should lapse between infant Baptism and Confirmation? The Rite of Confirmation recommends about seven years. The Church has long considered "the age of reason" to be around seven or eight. This matches up to our First Communion experience.

Ideally, children will be strengthened by the Holy Spirit earlier in their lives. Ideally, the Eucharist will truly be the source and summit of our Christian initiation and our lives. Ideally, Baptism and Confirmation will be closely connected.

Practically, however, questions and concerns abound. That's why Bishop Gilmore is encouraging an ongoing conversation on confirmation. Future installments in this space in *SKR* will consider the practical implications of a change in confirmation age. What do you think?

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.