

The Letter of the Diocesan Confirmation Study Group to Bishop Gilmore

Salutation

Greetings to Bishop Gilmore from the Diocese of Dodge City Confirmation Study Group, called forth from different cultures, places, and ministries, to propose a recommendation concerning the conferral of the sacrament of Confirmation in the diocese.

Gratitude for the Opportunity

We give thanks to God for this opportunity where we experienced...
...your openness, Bishop Gilmore, to allow an area so close to your personal pastoral ministry to be explored by a group of your people;
...the openness of the participants in the study group to explore the sacrament of Confirmation;
...being enriched in so many ways through our study of church history, sacramental theology, pastoral practice;
...grace, gifts and fruits of the Holy Spirit.

Our Prayer

From the moment we began studying the sacrament of Confirmation as a group, we prayed through Word Working that we might be filled with the knowledge, wisdom, understanding, and courage needed to make a recommendation that would enable us as a diocesan church to receive more fully the gift of the Holy Spirit, to live as the Spirit leads, to appreciate more fully the Baptism, the Confirmation and the Eucharist that we have received and thereby be built up as the Body of Christ.

Recalling the Past

Recalling the history of the Church, of our diocese, of our own lives of faith, we have come to appreciate how intimately the Sacraments of Initiation are related to each other.

Present Circumstances

At the present time in the Diocese of Dodge City, parishes are searching for the best way to prepare for and celebrate the sacrament of Confirmation. In particular, this search within our diocese is influenced by its rural nature and a large and growing Hispanic population. As a result, the means and length of preparation, the resources and materials used, and the age of celebration, vary throughout the diocese.

Studying with Hesitation and Anxiety

We felt called to move beyond our hesitation and concerns, to not be hindered by the obvious challenges and to seek truth through our study, prayer, reflection, discussion.

Our Recommendation

The fruits of our study, research and conversation lead us to recommend restoring the order of the Sacraments of Initiation; that is, the sacrament of Confirmation being celebrated prior to the celebration of First Eucharist.

Duty to Live in the Light

The Eucharist is the summit of our faith. As that conviction rests in the heart of every Catholic, so too must it reside in our lived-out practice of the faith. In his Post-Synodal Apostolic Exhortation *Sacrament of Charity* Pope Benedict XVI considered the effect of the order of the Sacraments of Initiation on the Eucharist:

In this regard, attention needs to be paid to the order of the sacraments of initiation. Different traditions exist within the Church. There is a clear variation between, on the one hand, the ecclesial customs of the East and the practice of the West regarding the initiation of adults, and, on the other hand, the procedure adopted for children. Yet these variations are not properly of the dogmatic order, but are pastoral in character. Concretely, it needs to be seen which practice better enables the faithful to put the sacrament of the Eucharist at the centre, as the goal of the whole process of initiation. (#18)

We believe that restoring the Sacraments of Initiation to their original order – Baptism, Confirmation, and then Eucharist – will allow the centrality of the Eucharist to be more clearly seen, more clearly experienced.

Acknowledging Concerns

We understand that restoring the order of the Sacraments of Initiation may give rise to certain concerns, including...

- ✚ How can we teach younger children to grasp the notion of Confirmation?
- ✚ How can we effectively minister to junior high and high school students without Confirmation to keep them in the program?
- ✚ How and when can we provide youth and young adults with a moment or ritual where the community acknowledges their commitment and supports them in it?

We acknowledge that these concerns exist. In fact, we share these concerns, as did each US diocese that we consulted that has chosen to restore the original order of the Sacraments of Initiation. However, we feel the reasons for restoring the order are more compelling than the concerns we have.

God's Indescribable Gift

These are the benefits we see in the reception of the sacrament of Confirmation preceding First Eucharist:

- ✚ If we truly see Confirmation as a spiritual strengthening with the Holy Spirit, then children need that strengthening as early as possible.
- ✚ Celebrating the sacrament of Confirmation at an early age helps avoid a mistaken notion of seeing it simply as a rite of personal commitment,

maturity, or ratification, and allows the Eucharist to properly be the repeatable sign of our commitment and personal choice.

- ✚ Receiving the sacrament of Confirmation before Eucharist allows the Eucharist to be chronologically what it has always been theologically – the climax of our initiation to the Christian faith.
- ✚ Receiving the sacrament of Confirmation before Eucharist more closely connects our Baptism to our Confirmation (and may, in fact, decrease the number of Catholics who are baptized, but never confirmed).

Our Hope

Our hope is that the people of the Diocese of Dodge City will acknowledge that catechesis and formation is a lifelong endeavor by the way they live and learn. Further, we hope that restoring the original order of the Sacraments of Initiation will highlight that the journey goes beyond Confirmation.

Constant Prayer

We will be praying for you Bishop Gilmore as you consider our recommendation.