Making a Decision for Christ

Program Manual

St. George Catholic Church
Valley Lee, MD 20692

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Welcome!

There once was a basketball team whose members all struggled with the same thing—no one could slam dunk the ball! So the coach, wanting to help his players out, decided to lower the basket from its regulation 10 feet to 6 feet. Suddenly all his players were dunking the ball! What do you suppose happened the next time they played against a team with players who could already dunk the ball when the basket was at 10 feet?

This year of preparation for Confirmation is going to be challenging. You have lots to do before you receive the Sacrament. The adults working with you know how difficult some of it can be but we're committed to helping you grow in your faith through the challenges you face. Our job isn't to lower the basket for you, but to help you do more than you have previously.

Many people treat Confirmation like a graduation, thinking that they're about to conclude their years of religious education and service in the Church, yet such is not the case. This year you're preparing to join the Church in its mission to proclaim and serve Christ. This is the year to test your commitment to Christ and decide if you want to serve him with the grace of Confirmation.

This booklet explains the Confirmation program in detail. Please keep it in a safe place so you can refer to it throughout the year ahead.

So, are you ready to begin? Yes? Then welcome!

Is This Right For Me?

Do you want to be an active member of the Church?

Do you know what the Church is?

The Church is a community of people who experience, celebrate and grow in their understanding of God, who is always among us. Christians believe that the Spirit guides the church, constantly reminding its members of the powerful message of Jesus, and giving us the insight and strength to live according to that message.

Is that what you want for your life? Do you demonstrate it by the way you participate in the Church community? Ask yourself these questions,

1. Do I really believe what Jesus teaches?
2. Do I want to worship the Lord every week?
3. Do I pray everyday?
4. Do I get anything out of my practice of the faith?

Throughout this year you have a decision to make--- do you want to be Confirmed and is this commitment right for you?

What Must I Do?

What kind of person do you want to become? *We* cannot live our life fully and with a clear sense of direction and purpose without asking and answering that question. In addition, what kind of Christian do you want to become? That requires you to develop a habit for the following:

1. To worship the Lord every week. It's all about our relationship with God. We need to gather to praise him in the company of other believers on a regular basis.

2. To continue to learn and think about our faith. Everyone knows how many challenges we face and how often we're tempted to behave in non-Christian ways. It's important that you attend all the Confirmation classes.

3. To develop a habit for helping others. *A habit is* a regular pattern of acting. To become good Catholic Christians it's important that we give our time and energy to helping our parish and our community.

Jesus taught his followers to love and serve one another. So, while we're on the subject, let's take a look a the service hours you'll need to complete this year:

Service Hours —

First, why are you required to do service hours? The answer is very simple—you're preparing to commit your life to serving Christ and his Church. Your experiences this year will help you understand the commitment you want to make.

So, what type of work will you do?

1. You'll help spread the Gospel message by participating in the Living Stations. The rehearsal schedule and date the stations will be presented will be forthcoming. You'll dedicate 10 hours to this project.

2. You'll help strengthen our parish community by giving a minimum of 15 hours to helping in projects such as our October dinner, annual spring cleanup, being an altar server at Mass, helping decorate the Church for Christmas, or volunteering to be a CCD teacher's assistant.

3. Finally, you'll take your faith out into the community by giving a maximum of 10 hours to helping organizations in our area, such as the monthly Sunday breakfast at the fire hall or one of the many other civic activities in our area.

Choose a Sponsor –

A sponsor is a confirmed Catholic adult (18 years of age or older) and is someone who practices their faith, meaning, they attend Mass weekly and receive the sacraments regularly.

Choose a patron Saint –

Saintly people inspire us by their heroic lives. Confirmation students choose a saint who's life encourages us in some specific way to follow Jesus better. (You will write a two-page paper on your patron saint.)

Write a letter to the Bishop –

You must write a letter asking the Bishop to Confirm you. In your letter, you'll explain why you want to be confirmed and how you made your decision. Your teacher will help you prepare your letter at the appropriate time.

More About Service Hours

To help you plan your calendar, here is some information you'll need to know about your service hours:

LIVING STATIONS (10 hours)

This will be a relatively simple task for you to complete. Rehearsals will be held on Monday evenings prior to the evening when we present the stations.

Rehearsal dates and presentation dates will be forth coming.

OTHER PARISH SERVICE PROJECTS AVAILABLE (15 hours)

October Fundraising Dinner

Fall & Spring Clean-up

Christmas Pageant

Decorating the Church for Christmas

Parish Christmas Party

Altar Service (no more than 5 hours)

Festival of Saints

Vacation Bible School

Parish Choir (only rehearsals count toward service hours)

What's Coming?

Confirmation reminds us that following Christ means committing ourselves to service and to community. Our program will provide you many opportunities to experience these, especially through the following:

CONFIRMATION INSCRIPTION MASS – Held in October, this is the first time you will publicly promise to live your faith by being an active member of this parish.

CONFIRMATION RETREAT – This will be an opportunity for you to experience high school youth ministry first hand while you look seriously at how prepared you are for the commitment you want to make to the Lord!

What Must I Know?

At one time (many, many years ago) a young man or woman knelt in front of the bishop. At that moment, the bishop asked the teenager a question about the faith. Every teen was required to answer the question before he or she could be Confirmed. Although it doesn't happen exactly that way any longer, bishops still ask questions at Confirmation Masses.

Here is a list of some of the basics (in addition to what you learned earlier) you'll know before you are confirmed.

- Trinity
- Incarnation
- Redemption
- Ten Commandments
- Beatitudes
- Spiritual and corporal works of mercy
- Seven capital sins
- Human rights
- Right to life
- Gifts of the Holy Spirit
- Definition of a Sacrament
- Sacraments of Christian initiation, healing, and vocation
- Holy days of obligation

- Duties of Catholic Christians
- Theological and moral virtues
- Pentecost
- The effects of Confirmation
- The rite of Confirmation (that means, how you are confirmed, what the Bishop uses to confirm you and what prayer he says).
- Name of our Pope and Bishop
- Four "marks" (characteristics) of the Church
- Liturgical seasons
- The role of a patron saint
- The role of a sponsor
- The meaning of Confirmation
- How Confirmation helps you live the faith
- The divisions of the Bible
- The names of the four gospels
- The story of St. Paul's conversion
- The characteristics of belonging to a Christian community (Acts 2)
- Mortal and venial Sin
- Why we are "required" to attend Mass
- The structure of the Mass
- The meaning of the word "Eucharist"

Also, know the following prayers:

- Sign of the Cross
- Lord's Prayer (Our Father)
- Hail Mary
- Doxology (Glory Be)
- Act of Contrition
- Prayer before meals

Getting Serious

We know that God loves us—in every book of the Bible God repeats that message. Then, in the gospels Jesus tells his disciples that God always loves us and that he cares for us by giving us special gifts (called grace) so we may respond to His love. We show that we love God when we follow his example.

Many people think of Confirmation as a time when we "become adults". Actually, that is true, but not in the way most people think. Many people think of adulthood as a time when we begin to act as we want. But "acting like we want" is not very adult-like.

When we become "adults" we take on adult responsibilities and commitments. As an "adult Catholic" we decide to participate in the mission of the Church beyond just going to Mass every Sunday.

Our Confirmation preparation program is designed to help you deepen your relationship with the Lord and with the Church. Here is how we'll encourage you —

Deepen your relationship to God through prayer.

Prayer is the first sign that you are serious about your relationship to God. To help you your Confirmation teacher will encourage you to begin and end each class with prayer.

Deepen your relationship to God through scripture.

Reading and studying the scriptures is another sign that you are serious about your commitment to Christ. We'll encourage you to get to know the scripture better by discussing it in class.

Deepen your commitment to the Church through a study of its teachings.

You demonstrate your commitment to Christ's Church by studying what the Church teaches. We'll help you take a deeper look at what our Church believes.

Deepen your ability to talk about your faith with others.

You're preparing to be a "witness" to Christ like the apostles and that means learning to talk about your faith and share your experiences. We'll encourage you in that area by meeting with you two times during the year for spiritual direction.

Parental Sideline

Parents, the Confirmation program is larger than the 8th grade curriculum. It actually begins in the 7th grade. According to diocesan guidelines and parish policy, Confirmation preparation is conducted in two phases:

PHASE ONE – Remote Preparation – 7th Grade. During the 7th grade students are introduced to themes and ideas integral to the Confirmation program. They are also aided in deepening their commitment to the Church through community service (they must complete 15 service hours). Also, 7th graders read and learn about the scriptures, particularly the Gospels. Our goal is to encourage your preteen to think about their commitment to the Lord and to deepen their involvement in the Church.

PHASE TWO – Proximate Preparation – 8th grade. During the 8th grade, students deepen their understanding and their ability to articulate the themes and ideas integral to the Confirmation program. They also are encouraged to see the direct connection between community service and the sacrament they are preparing to receive. In addition, the 8th graders continue to read and learn about the scriptures, particularly the New Testament.

Our goal is to encourage your teen to examine the depth of their commitment to the Lord and to the Church before they present themselves for Confirmation.

PHASE THREE—Confirmation Extension—The Archdiocese has granted special permission to pursue a 'pilot' program for the Archdiocese. This will be a small extension of catechesis to the Fall of their ninth grade year.

Additionally, before a teen is Confirmed, he or she must complete three consecutive years of religious education (normally the 6th through 8th grades). This continuity helps a teen understand our faith more fully.

The Catholic Church believes and teaches that the commitment of Confirmation requires a mature faith –maturity demonstrated through a life dedicated to Christ. Thus, for teens to reach maturity it is vital that they practice the faith with their families routinely. Jesus and the scriptures are very clear about the expectations of discipleship: weekly worship, participation in the ministries of the Church and sacrificial giving. Teens who participate in this way with their families are better prepared for Confirmation. Those who wish to receive the Sacrament must practice their faith (as described above) for a minimum of two consecutive years.

A Letter to the Parents

Dear Parents,

As many of us priest and Bishops have seen first hand, there has been an exodus of children from the church after receiving the Sacrament of Confirmation. I have called it for years "graduation from church!" This is absolutely unacceptable to me as Pastor, to allow this serious error to continue. After much prayer and consultation, along with the Archdiocese, brother priests, and our own CCD teachers, I have decided to extend the actual reception of the Sacrament until the Fall of ninth grade year. There are two logical reasons why I choose this venue:

First, the child matures remarkably over the summer before going into the ninth grade. Children seem to get more focused over the summer.

Second, the eighth grade religious education curriculum does not get into the fullness of the theology and practicality of the Sacrament of Confirmation. The eight grade book goes through the basics of the Sacrament but does not get into the real focus of commitment, service to neighbor, and the Gifts and Fruits of the Holy Spirit. In the seven weeks of the fall of ninth grade, our children will get an enrichment, a deeper focus on the sacrament, with various instructors teaching in those seven weeks.

The Archdiocese has granted me *special permission* to continue the "pilot" program of extending the Confirmation catechesis to the Fall of 2011. The actual date for the 2010/2011 8th Grade Confirmation has not yet been determined, however, we have requested three dates in October 2011, and will let you know when the Bishop selects one of them.

In actuality, our children will be confirmed within the same year, with just a 3 month delay.

The students who attend Little Flower School, will not be required to attend the 2010/2011 CCD classes because they are already receiving daily Catholic education. However, any retreats, special meetings and conferences will be a requirement for one and all. Little Flower students and CCD students of the 2010/2011 8th grade will all come together in the Fall of 2011 to get the seven week final enrichment prior to the sacrament. I have full confidence in my Minister of Religious Education, Kimberly Browne, and our 8th grade confirmation class instructors.

I thank the Archdiocese for having confidence in my proposal and in your cooperation in this new paradigm God Bless you with His Grace+

In Jesus Christ the Teacher,

Rev. Msgr. Karl A. Chimiak
Pastor, Vicar Forane, St. Mary's County Deanery

Interviews & Guidance

Two interviews and spiritual direction are part of the Confirmation program.

There are specific goals for each:

Entrance Interview — The purpose of this interview is to welcome your teen into the Confirmation program, to explain the process of preparing for the Sacrament and to answer any questions your teen may have. Additionally your teen should be able to recite our basic Catholic prayers.

Exit Interview — The purpose of this interview is to help your teen review his/her knowledge of the content of our faith, and to invite them to express a firm desire to receive the Sacrament of Confirmation. Our goal is also to help your teen discern how best to use the grace he/she will receive through the Sacrament.