

Article

# Models and Methods for Confirmation Catechesis in Catholic Youth Ministry

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**Abstract:** This article will briefly address the origins of confirmation and the current approaches to adolescent confirmation. Moreover, the article discusses the two predominant models of confirmation in the Catholic Church in the United States and the predominant methods for adolescent confirmation in Catholic parishes and in youth ministry settings. Finally, the article delineates three proposed methods for confirmation catechesis in Catholic youth ministry. The hope is that these three methods will help Catholic youth ministers and/or confirmation coordinators in their important work of providing confirmation catechesis with teenagers.

**Keywords:** Sacrament of Confirmation; confirmation catechesis; adolescent catechesis; youth ministry; methods of catechesis; models of confirmation; teenagers and confirmation

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*“Youth catechesis must be profoundly revised and revitalized.”*

*General Directory for Catechesis, No. 181<sup>1</sup>*

## 1. Introduction

The Sacrament of Confirmation<sup>2</sup> has had an inconsistent history in Catholicism. Much ink has been spilled on various aspects of confirmation over the past three decades: the proper age to confirm people, the two prominent schools of thought—confirmation as commitment and confirmation as initiation—and role of confirmation catechesis or confirmation classes. I have opinions on all of these topics, but it is confirmation catechesis which strikes the deepest cord of concern with me, in particular, the ways Catholic parishes in the United States accomplish catechesis with prospective confirmation candidates in youth ministry.

This article will examine the models and methods for catechetical instruction in Catholic confirmation programs. First, the article will briefly look at the origins and history of the Sacrament of Confirmation. Second, the article will discuss the current approach to confirmation and catechesis for confirmation in general. Third, this article will examine the two primary models for confirmation catechesis, and then explain the three catechetical methodologies to be implemented with either middle school or high school adolescents as one program offered within the parish’s overall comprehensive youth ministry. Moreover, the article provides a list of the strengths and limitations of the three methodologies considered.

Finally, this article incorporates both a prescriptive and descriptive analysis throughout. The majority of the article is prescriptive offering the history, theology, and ecclesial understanding regarding the Sacrament of Confirmation. The article also employs descriptive investigation in the

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<sup>1</sup> Congregation for Clergy, 1977, § 181.

<sup>2</sup> Throughout this article, the phrase “Sacrament of Confirmation” will be capitalized, but the term “confirmation” will not be capitalized unless the word “confirmation” begins a sentence.

final section providing three catechetical pastoral strategies and pedagogical tactics for implementation in a youth ministry settings.

## 2. The Origins of Confirmation

The origins of confirmation begin in Judaism. Water and the Spirit have always been part of the development of Christian baptism and the New Testament attributes this with Jesus being baptized by John the Baptist in the Jordan River (Mark 1:9–11; Luke 3:21–22). Jesus' baptism sets the stage for the way Christian initiation is understood, namely a water bath, the sending of the Holy Spirit, and religious conversion.

The relationship between water and the Holy Spirit can be seen again in the Nicodemus Narrative (John 3:3–8). This interdependent relationship is significant for understanding the Sacraments of Baptism and Confirmation. Sacramental theologian Gerard Austin states,

The tradition is clear. Water is subordinated to Spirit, not vice versa. Unfortunately, in the historical development of the initiation sacraments [baptism, confirmation, Eucharist] there has been at times a subordination of Spirit to water, and this has caused an overemphasis on the water-bath, cutting it off from its other ritual components such as anointing's and laying on of hands.<sup>3</sup>

This water and Spirit connection is part of the reality of regeneration. Baptism is a process that confers the Holy Spirit at baptism and governs both regeneration and renewal. It is through chrismation or the smearing of oil and the sealing of the Holy Spirit at confirmation that one's life is set on "fire" for God.<sup>4</sup>

## 3. The Early Developments of Confirmation

The term "seal" (*sphragis* in Greek) was used in the early centuries of Christianity, and it is generally understood to mean confirmation today. As early as 200CE Tertullian of Carthage (155–240CE) writes in his *De Baptismo* that baptism is divided into two parts: the water-bath ritual and the anointing ceremony, which included the imposition of hands.<sup>5</sup> Moreover, around 215CE, Hippolytus of Rome (170–235CE) writes in the *Apostolic Tradition* that priests are to administer a post-baptismal anointing and a signing on the forehead (sealing) of the newly baptized.<sup>6</sup> The early developments of this post-baptismal anointing were seen as a sealing of the Holy Spirit upon the neophyte. Therefore, in the early church, the bishop or priest baptized, confirmed, and eucharistized all in one religious ritual, thus celebrating all the sacraments of initiation together.

It was not until the fifth-century that the history of confirmation takes a major shift in pastoral practice and theological understanding. The Bishop of Riez—in Southern France, Faustus of Riez (410–490)—preached on Pentecost Sunday in 458 that leads to the separation of the sacraments of initiation. Faustus theologizes about the importance of confirmation after baptism. He states that Christians are strengthened through confirmation, likening it to battle for struggling faith and spiritually.<sup>7</sup> Faustus maintains that "Confirmation stresses human effort and involvement, whereas baptism is passively received."<sup>8</sup> This was really the first instance of developing a theology of confirmation. Faustus words had a great impact upon the medieval church. Eventually, it even makes its way into *The False Decretals*,<sup>9</sup> who names Pope Melchiades, an early fourth-century pope, who in fact never

<sup>3</sup> (Austin 1990, p. 19).

<sup>4</sup> (Canales 2002, pp. 107, 111).

<sup>5</sup> (Austin 1985, p. 11).

<sup>6</sup> (Austin 1985, p. 11).

<sup>7</sup> (Austin 1985, p. 14).

<sup>8</sup> (Kavanagh 1988, p. 67).

<sup>9</sup> A ninth-century collection of ecclesiastical documents, compiled by Pseudo-Isidore, probably Isidore of Sevilla (560–636) or unknown Carolingian-era theologians.

existed, as the source of the battle motif for confirmation.<sup>10</sup> Unfortunately, this theological error in sacramental understanding was never corrected and it led to several prominent theologians passing on this obfuscating of confirmation: Gratian's *Decretum*, Peter Lombard's *Sentences*, and Thomas Aquinas' *Summa Theologiae*.<sup>11</sup>

#### 4. Confirmation Today

Since 1910, with Pope Pius X's (1835–1914) papal decree *Quam Singulari* or *So Extraordinary is the Love of Christ*, on the reception of First Holy Communion was lowered to the age of seven from teenage years. The rationale for the move was that children should receive their first communion at an earlier age to encounter God's mercy and experience Christ's love more fully at a younger age. Conversely, in doing so, the decree "created havoc in the United States" because it unleashed pastoral and catechetical dilemmas for confirmation because it was not lowered and celebrated before first communion.<sup>12</sup> The catechetical structure and methodology changed forever, and it has caused the separation of the proper sequence for celebrating the Sacraments of Initiation. For the past 30-years, many liturgical scholars and sacramental practitioners have been calling for confirmation to have its own *Quam Singulari*, but to no avail.<sup>13</sup>

It has been stated by liturgical scholars and religious educators alike that "confirmation is a sacrament in search of a theology" rather emphatically<sup>14</sup>. This means that confirmation has had a difficult history and cannot seem to develop a theology on its own or apart from baptism.

The initial 1978 catechetical document *National Catechetical Directory for Catholics of the United States* gives confirmation some theology: "Confirmation renews and strengthens the Christian's baptismal call to bear witness to Christ before the world and work eagerly for the building up of his body. Confirmation emphasizes the transformation of life by the outpouring of the Holy Spirit in [her] fullness."<sup>15</sup> Therefore, the theology of confirmation is still very much imbued with the Holy Spirit and connected with baptism, and thus the lament for the "restored order."

Confirmation today is celebrated as a separate sacrament of initiation as previously addressed. Liturgical historian Katharine E. Harmon addresses the so-called "restored order" regarding confirmation within the sacraments of initiation, which puts confirmation in its proper liturgical sequence after baptism and before Eucharist. Harmon states, "Thus far, thirteen dioceses in the United States have implemented the 'Restored Order' for the Sacraments of Initiation."<sup>16</sup> Therefore, 13 or 6% of Catholic dioceses out of approximately 190 Catholic dioceses offer the restored order of initiation, which confirms children at the same ritual ceremony as first communion or at a separate religious ritual that takes place before first communion.

At any rate, confirmation today still needs a more specific theology. As a religious ceremony, it is a separate sacrament for adolescents in ninety-four percent (94%) of the Catholic dioceses in the United States. In those ninety-four percent, the current approach to adolescent confirmation is stream-lined and functionally similar to each other.

<sup>10</sup> (Davenport 1916, pp. 92–97).

<sup>11</sup> (Austin 1985, pp. 14–15).

<sup>12</sup> (Gaupin 1989, p. 85).

<sup>13</sup> (Gaupin 1989, p. 92).

<sup>14</sup> Van Slyke uses this phrase as the title of the article and numerous other authors have used this phrase in their work on describing confirmation (Van Slyke 2011).

<sup>15</sup> USCCB. *National Catechetical Directory*. (USCCB United States Conference of Catholic Bishops 1978, § 118).

<sup>16</sup> (Harmon 2019, p. 4). She lists the dioceses, "Saginaw, Michigan (1995); Great Falls-Billings, Montana (1996); Portland, Maine (1997); Spokane, Washington (1998); Fargo, North Dakota (2002); Gaylord, Michigan (2003); Tyler, Texas (2005); Phoenix, Arizona (2005); Honolulu, Hawaii (2015); Denver, Colorado (2015); Manchester, New Hampshire (2017); Springfield, Illinois (2017); and Gallup, New Mexico (2019)."

## 5. The Current Approach to Adolescent Confirmation

There are three main canons regarding “Those to be Confirmed” for the Sacrament of Confirmation in the 1983 *Code of Canon Law*. Canon 891 deals directly with the proper age for celebrating confirmation:

The Sacrament of Confirmation is to be conferred on the faithful at [or] about the *age of discretion* unless the conference of bishops determines *another age* or there is danger of death or in the judgment of the minister a grave cause urges otherwise.<sup>17</sup>

Hence, the proper age to celebrate confirmation is the age of seven and older. The American Bishops have stated in the 1971 *Rite of Confirmation*: “The administration of confirmation is generally delayed until the seventh year.”<sup>18</sup> Moreover, the U.S. Bishops maintain that each diocesan bishop has the right and privilege “to set a later age as normative in his jurisdiction.”<sup>19</sup>

Confirmation scholar Paul Turner notes that this has opened up the practice of confirming tweens and early adolescents (10–13 years) and teenagers (14–17 years), but there is still no uniform practice; therefore, individual dioceses celebrate confirmation anywhere from 7 to 17 years of age.<sup>20</sup> Nevertheless, the typical catechetical approach to confirmation in the United States is to confirm adolescents somewhere between the ages of 13–17 years old and who are in the 8th through 12th grades. There are of course exceptions, but this article only addresses today’s normative approach to confirming adolescents.

The duties for adolescent confirmation usually fall on youth ministers, confirmation coordinator, or designated person to facilitate sacramental catechesis who is under the auspices of the parish youth minister. The major catechetical duties for confirmation, despite whom it falls upon, concerns youth understanding their commitment to the Church, Christian maturity, and witnessing to a faith life in Jesus the Christ.

Catechetical scholar Kieran Sawyer maintains that there are eight principles for confirmation with teenagers, also known as “delayed confirmation,” and supports the current model of celebrating the Sacrament of Confirmation with adolescents. Sawyer’s eight principles are as follows:

1. *The Process Principle*: [Confirmation] is the process by which a person comes to mature faith within the community of Christians;
2. *The Ritual Principle*: There is an intrinsic coherence between the [confirmation] and the initiation process.
3. *The Freedom Principle*: The Sacrament of [Confirmation] must be received freely.
4. *The Faith Principle*: The goal of [confirmation] is mature faith.
5. *The Readiness Principle*: The fruitful celebration of [confirmation] rituals requires readiness on the part of the participants.
6. *The Community Principle*: [Confirmation] is the responsibility of the entire Christian community (parish).
7. *The Eucharistic Principle*: The culmination of the initiation process [baptism and confirmation] is the Eucharist.
8. *The Catechesis Principle*: Catechesis for [confirmation] takes place before, during, and *after* the celebration of sacramental rituals.<sup>21</sup>

Sawyer goes into detail about each principle, but that is not the scope of this article. It seems apparent that all of these principles that support celebrating confirmation as a teenager can be integrated into various parish youth ministry settings.

<sup>17</sup> Pope John Paul II. *Code of Canon Law*. (Pope John Paul II 1983, § 891).

<sup>18</sup> Bouley. *Rite of Confirmation*. (Bouley 1992b, § 11).

<sup>19</sup> (Bishops’ Committee on the Liturgy 1972, pp. 326–27).

<sup>20</sup> (Turner 2006, p. 100).

<sup>21</sup> (Sawyer 1992, pp. 26–36). Sawyer goes into detail about each principle, but that is not the scope of this essay.

## 6. Catechesis for Confirmation

There are various opinions regarding confirmation catechesis with young people. The *Catechesis of the Catholic Church* clearly states that “At the heart of catechesis we find, in essence, a Person, the Person of Jesus of Nazareth, the only Son of the Father.”<sup>22</sup> Therefore, quality confirmation catechesis with young people is encouraged to help them encounter Jesus who is the Christ.

In the ecclesial document *Renewing the Vision: A Framework for Catholic Youth Ministry*, it generally maintains that all catechesis with youth is acceptable catechesis for confirmation.<sup>23</sup> RTV states, “The ministry of catechesis fosters growth in Catholic faith in all three [human] dimensions: trusting (heart), knowing and believing (mind), and doing (will).<sup>24</sup> These dimensions are aspects that Catholic youth ministers and confirmation coordinators would be wise to cultivate within confirmation catechesis.

Paul Turner states, “Catechetical formation preparing adolescents to commit their lives to the [Catholic] Church in confirmation is similar to catechetical formation preparing adults to commit their lives to the Church in baptism, but the goal for adolescents is to persevere in Christian life.”<sup>25</sup> Therefore, confirmation catechesis with teenagers is comparable to that of adults being newly baptized in the Catholic faith. The concentration on confirmation catechesis with teenagers is on the faith of the young person and on the role of the newly confirmed will assume in the parish community.

The more normative model of confirmation for adolescents adopts certain principles but changes their goal. These principles are expressed in the *Rite of Christian Initiation of Adults* in the “Period of the Catechumenate” and are as follows: (1) suitable catechesis is necessary to acquaint catechumens with the teachings of the Church; (2) appropriate introduction to the Christian way of life and discipleship; (3) reasonable liturgical rites are to be celebrated with Sunday gathered assembly present to monitor one’s spiritual journey; and (4) suitable sharing of the Gospel by the catechumens to edify and exhort others.<sup>26</sup> These four principles are used by Catholic parishes for adults who need to be confirmed into the Catholic Church and they are flexible enough to be used with teenagers as well.<sup>27</sup>

The ecclesial document *The Challenge of Adolescent Catechesis* notes that catechesis with youth for confirmation is an opportunity to foster the faith life in adolescents. The document states, “Realizing that sacramental preparation for confirmation has a distinct catechesis with its own focus and elements.”<sup>28</sup> The exact foci and elements of confirmation catechesis seem to be an issue in Catholic parishes as well. What should young Catholics be learning in confirmation catechetical formation? Confirmation catechesis supports the young Christian to become more aware of her/his faith life in Christ.

In the ecclesial document *The Joy of Adolescent Catechesis*, it plainly states, “Confirmation preparation should be one experience among a number of opportunities for teenagers to grow in their Catholic faith and to learn [the things] to be disciples of Jesus Christ.”<sup>29</sup> It would seem that any catechesis on the Bible, discipleship, Jesus, faith, morality, and spirituality would be sufficient for confirmation; however, discipleship is paramount. Confirmation expert Michael Carotta maintains that the faith-formation process for confirmation with teenagers is about helping young people to live a life in the Holy Spirit.<sup>30</sup> Therefore, it is pastorally prudent to do some catechesis on the role and theology of the Holy Spirit and on the *Rite of Confirmation*.

<sup>22</sup> Pope John Paul II. *Catechesism of the Catholic Church*. (Pope John Paul II 1997, § 426).

<sup>23</sup> USCCB, *Renewing the Vision*. (USCCB United States Conference of Catholic Bishops 1997, pp. 28–29)

<sup>24</sup> RTV, 29.

<sup>25</sup> (Turner 2006, p. 110).

<sup>26</sup> Bouley. *Rite of Christian Initiation of Adults*. (Bouley 1992a, § 75).

<sup>27</sup> As one parish youth minister in Louisville, Kentucky, told me, “I wish some parishes would blend of the information. Some parishes spend so much time on information about the Sacrament of Confirmation and they totally miss teaching youth to be disciples and the ways to get involved in the life of the Church.”

<sup>28</sup> Delgatto, NFCYM. *The Challenge of Adolescent Catechesis*. (National Federation for Catholic Youth Ministry 2005, p. 86).

<sup>29</sup> NIAC. *Joy of Adolescent Catechesis*. (National Initiative on Adolescent Catechesis and National Federation for Catholic Youth Ministry 2017, p. 33).

<sup>30</sup> Carotta (2011, 2017). Both of Carotta’s texts help the confirmation candidate and the confirmation sponsor.

The newer 2005 catechetical document, the *National Directory for Catechesis* maintains that there are common themes that all confirmation catechesis would be wise to cover:

- a. The theology of confirmation,
- b. Elements within *The Rite of Confirmation* itself,
- c. Various traditional prayers within Catholicism,
- d. Scripture passages from the Bible pertaining to the Holy Spirit,
- e. The symbols and rituals used within confirmation, and
- f. Acts of Christian service.<sup>31</sup>

Of course, the themes might differ depending on the method selected and the best needs of the confirmation program, recognizing that it can be incredibly frustrating for a youth minister to have to do remedial religious education with some teenagers because they get little or no religious instruction at home, but that is the job sometimes.

## 7. Two Models for Confirmation

Today, there are two major models or schools of thought regarding the Sacrament of Confirmation: (1) the liturgical school and (2) the religious education school.<sup>32</sup> The liturgical model correctly maintains that confirmation must be seen as an extension of and an integral part of baptism. Moreover, the Sacraments of Initiation were never intended to be separated from their proper liturgical and historical sequence.<sup>33</sup> Furthermore, confirmation has never been theologically on par with baptism and has never been described as “necessary for salvation” as baptism.<sup>34</sup> Finally, when confirmation is celebrated after First Eucharist, the proper sequence of initiation is disrupted and there is a disintegration or degeneration of the initiation process, and it appears that confirmation, rather than Eucharist, completes the Sacraments of Initiation.<sup>35</sup> For the four reasons listed above, the liturgical school model is preferable; however, due to *Quam Singulari* previously mentioned, this model does not mesh with contemporary confirmation catechetical practice.

The religious education model—more of a paradigm now than a model—preserves that confirmation is best served when adolescents are more mature to understand the meaning of the sacrament they are pursuing. Moreover, confirmation with teenagers springs from a pastoral “fear” or “nearsightedness,” namely, those youth who practice their faith either has lessened or are imperiled.<sup>36</sup> This is a legitimate concern for parents, youth ministers, and pastors who desperately desire that confirmation not be a rite of initiation out of, rather than into, the Catholic faith.<sup>37</sup> It is a “graduation” mentality. Furthermore, this practice tends to have youth and parents think that confirmation is a kind of sacrament of Christian maturity or readiness or a Christian rite of passage, and the problem with this mentality is that it may oversimplify the significance of baptism and Eucharist.<sup>38</sup> Finally, and ideally, the premise of adolescent confirmation is the belief that sacraments in general, and confirmation in particular, ought to relate to one’s real-life experiences.<sup>39</sup> There has been a shift in the past few decades to understand teenage confirmation, and the change has come about in catechetical theory, which maintains that spiritual growth begins with probing the ways that God acts in a young person’s life.<sup>40</sup>

<sup>31</sup> USCCB. *National Directory for Catechesis*. (USCCB United States Conference of Catholic Bishops 2005, pp. 199–200).

<sup>32</sup> For more on the two models or schools of thought on confirmation see these sources in the bibliography by Paul Turner, Arthur J. Kubick, and James A. Wilde.

<sup>33</sup> (Smolarski 1996, p. 55).

<sup>34</sup> (Osborne 1987, p. 116).

<sup>35</sup> (Huels 1988, p. 12).

<sup>36</sup> (Turner 2006, p. 98).

<sup>37</sup> (Smolarski 1996, p. 56).

<sup>38</sup> (Sawyer 1992, pp. 30–31).

<sup>39</sup> (Turner 2006, p. 97).

<sup>40</sup> (Turner 2006, p. 101).

Therefore, religious experiences and theological reflection become the formational components of adolescent confirmation.

These two divided models sometimes over-simplify the pastoral and practical dynamics of celebrating the Sacrament of Confirmation. Both models have theological and historical implications as well as pastoral ramifications that merit attention; however, not in this article. The remainder of this article will concentrate on the widespread practice of teenage confirmation as practiced by the majority of Catholic parishes in the United States.

## 8. Methods for Confirmation

According to American practical theologian Andrew Root, “Method, by definition, seeks not reality, but rather takes reasoned steps to reduce reality, so that it might say something particular.”<sup>41</sup> In the case of this article, the methodology seeks to help the youth minister and/or confirmation coordinator see something practical, pastoral, and pedagogical, and in ways which methods can be implemented and utilized.

The current method for confirmation in the majority of Catholic congregations is to have the parish youth minister be the main instructor of confirmation catechesis or to have a designated person such as a trusted adult who has worked with teenagers and who enjoys teaching about the sacraments, or in some cases, a parish deacon. Typically, catechesis for adolescent confirmation happens over the course of one academic year; however, some more and more parishes are implementing a two-year model, which seems a bit too long and a bit of a misnomer as well.<sup>42</sup> Giving an adolescent more time to “learn” or giving the youth minister more time to “teach” does not necessarily translate into the teen “soaking” anything in, thus it does not fix the problem. Longer catechetical programs for confirmation typically is a “Band-Aid” solution to a much larger “wound.”

From my experience of being involved in Catholic youth ministry for over 30 years and a result of the informal data collected, the two-year approach does not achieve any more success than the one-year method. The parishes that pride themselves on a two-year model, usually “force” teenagers to be part of the high school youth ministry for their second year, which typically does not keep teenagers in the church. Thus, the same old problem exists: the mentality and misperception that parents and teenagers have regarding confirmation being graduation from the workings of the church instead of another initiation rite into the ministries and life of the church.

The one-year method for confirmation does not seem to be working either, despite the widespread use of this method across the United States for the past sixty-plus years.<sup>43</sup> The problem still exists of spiritually, non-engaged teenagers getting confirmed and still viewing confirmation as a rite of passage out of the church. The practical implications for teenagers not wanting to get confirmed or being less than enthusiastic about desiring to be confirmed are many. On a practical level, Catholic parishes would be wise to start talking about celebrating confirmation early in a child’s life. It is not pastorally ideal for a teenager to be hearing about confirmation in the same year she/he is going to be confirmed. Pastors and youth ministers would be wise to offer discipleship programs and processes for confirmation catechesis. There needs to be less indoctrination of the faith and more time and energy spent on spiritual enrichment, accompaniment, and mentorship. The difference is in building personal relationships with community and with Jesus the Christ.

Some pragmatic reasons that older adolescents do not enjoy the one-year methodology (and especially the two-year method): older teenagers drive and spend more time away from home

<sup>41</sup> (Root 2016, p. 48).

<sup>42</sup> Canales, Informal Data. This information comes from antidotal informal data gathered from over 150 Catholic youth ministers from across the United States via in-person conversations, e-mail exchanges, and Facebook posts. The question that was posed: “Does your parish use a one-year or two-year process for confirmation?” Because of that initial question sponged other conversations with Catholic youth ministers. (Data collection and informal interviews conducted from May 2020 through July 2020, via electronic mail, FaceBook, and one-on-one discussions with over 150 Catholic youth ministers).

<sup>43</sup> (Kubick 1992, pp. 73–81; Neu 1992, pp. 82–95; Viramontes-Gutierrez 1992, pp. 96–106).

and family, older adolescents are usually dating someone specifically or dating in general, older youth might be more engaged in athletics or extra-curricular activities, investigating and examining their college options, and older juveniles are more likely to have jobs. Therefore, older youth are busier than younger adolescents and are more likely to not want to be involved in a long-term confirmation process.

Finally, the one-year method usually spans most of the academic year until the celebration of the Sacrament of Confirmation, which typically takes place in the spring. Therefore, if a parish or group of parishes is getting confirmed on 15 May, then the confirmation catechesis begins sometime after 1 September. Thus, it spans eight or nine months of the year, which is programmatically and pedagogically too long for confirmation catechesis. For example, a parish will usually set aside one-evening of the week for an hour or 90-minutes to designate confirmation formation. The weekly time commitment is not too demanding; however, the span of time over the academic year is too long and arduous for the majority of teenagers and their parents. Confirmation catechesis should not take a year but only a few months at the most. The next section will provide three pastoral tactics and pedagogical strategies for implementing three confirmation catechetical methods.<sup>44</sup>

### 9. Three Specific Methods for Confirmation Catechesis with Adolescents

All three of the methods fall under the auspice of the religious education model of confirmation, which typically celebrates the Sacrament of Confirmation in the teenage years of high school. There are three methods of confirmation catechesis that youth ministers who have confirmation preparation under their ministry purview. The three methods are: (1) the once-a-week evening meeting, (2) the three-day weekend retreat, and (3) the one-week vacation confirmation school. Again, the focus with each of these catechetical methods is on personal discipleship and experience: spiritual enrichment, accompaniment, and mentorship.

*Method One: The Once-a-Week Evening Meeting.* This method maintains a more traditional view of catechetical confirmation formation with teenagers, except for the overall time commitment. This method calls for teenagers to gather and meet over the course of 12 weeks for 90 min, either in the fall semester or in the winter semester. Therefore, confirmation catechesis only lasts 12 weeks. Below is an example of the suggested curriculum within this method on a week-to-week basis.

- Week One: What is Confirmation? What is Christian Discipleship?
- Week Two: The role and theology of the Holy Spirit.
- Week Three: Scripture study on the Gifts of the Spirit (Isaiah 11:2–3).
- Week Four: Scripture study on Fruits of the Holy Spirit (Galatians 5:22–23).
- Week Five: Scripture study of Charismata (1 Corinthians 12:1–11).
- Week Six: Service project or service-learning immersion experience.
- Week Seven: Going over traditional Catholic prayers (“Our Father,” “Nicene Creed,” “Come, Holy Spirit,”<sup>45</sup> and “Hail Mary”).
- Week Eight: The Symbols within Confirmation (Oil/Chrism, Laying on of Hands, the phrase “Be sealed with the gift of the Holy Spirit”).
- Week Nine: The role of the Bishop and Gathered Assembly.

<sup>44</sup> I have been advocating and supervising with two youth ministers in parishes regarding these methods within the Archdiocese of Indianapolis for the past ten years, and it has gone over extremely well for all involved: youth ministers, catechists, youth, and parents.

<sup>45</sup> (McBrien 1995) Come, Holy Spirit, fill the hearts of your faithful. And kindle in them the fire of your love. Send forth Your Spirit and they shall be created. And you will renew the face of the earth. Lord, by the light of the Holy Spirit you have taught the hearts of your faithful. In the same Spirit help us, to relish what is right and always rejoice in your consolation. We ask this through Christ our Lord. Amen.”

This prayer is attributed to Rabanus Maurus (780–856), a Benedictine monk and the ninth-century Archbishop of Mainz, East Francia (Germany today).

- Week Ten: Celebrating *The Rite of Confirmation*.
- Week Eleven: Building community experience (some type of community experience with the young people, but not necessarily a service project).
- Week Twelve: Life after Confirmation: living a life in the Holy Spirit.

This method probably gives the most formal catechetical time but the least experiential time with young people being confirmed. The catechist of this method would be wise to be super-creative with delivering religious and theological information in order for teens to experience and reflect on their instruction. Integrating some type of accompaniment program would be welcome for this method.

**Method Two: The Three-Day Weekend Retreat.** This method would follow a weekend retreat scheme, and preferably off-site or away from the church grounds. The retreat would begin on Friday evening and end Sunday afternoon or evening with the celebration of Sunday Mass. Retreats are a solid pedagogical method for adolescents and young adults that strengthens faith and cultivates spirituality.<sup>46</sup> The goal of any retreat is to bolster faith, Christian identity, and discipleship and enhance spirituality through a series of talks, music, discussions, activities, small groups, and community-building exercises. Confirmation retreats are an excellent way to exhort and edify adolescent faith.<sup>47</sup> Below is an example of the suggested catechetical components or curriculum within this weekend retreat method. Some of the presentations for the weekend could be as follows:

- “Why Confirmation? Because God Loves You,”
- “Theology of Confirmation,”
- “Gifts of the Holy Spirit and Fruits of the Holy Spirit,” and
- “The Role of the Holy Spirit in Your Life,” and
- “Being on “Fire” for God after Confirmation.”

Of course, more developed sessions would have to be built around these talks such as ice-breakers, witness talks, small group sessions, silence and reflection time, journaling, and creative activities. A retreat planning team (perhaps from teens who were confirmed the previous year) would greatly impact the quality of the retreat. This method is the most pastoral of all the methods and is ideal for seasoned youth ministers who know: (a) the value of retreats and (b) the ways to plan, organize, and implement a weekend retreat. This method is extremely reasonable and suitable for older teenagers who have more hectic lifestyles trying to manage sports, jobs, and dating.

**Method Three: The One-Week Vacation Confirmation School.** This method mirrors the typical vacation Bible school method. The time that this method occupies could either be in the morning or the evening. I would envision three-hour blocks per day. For example, a morning version could run from 9:00 to 12:00 Monday through Friday or an evening session could span from 5:00-8:00PM Monday through Friday.

Ideally, this method should be a hybrid methodology between the first two methods discussed. It would be wise if a youth minister combined the best of the ideas from the more traditional catechetical method but also from the retreat method. Therefore, this approach to confirmation catechesis would depend upon plenty of volunteers just like a retreat. Below is an example of the suggested catechetical components or curriculum within this one-week vacation confirmation school method.

- **Day One: Why Confirmation? Or, What does Confirmation do for me?**
  - The focus is on welcoming teenagers, building community, and discussing students’ hopes for celebrating the Sacrament of Confirmation; briefly discussing the *Rite of Confirmation*.

<sup>46</sup> (Canales 2011, pp. 93–94; 2018, pp. 76–77, 147).

<sup>47</sup> (Carotta 2017, pp. 1–2).

- **Day Two: Bible Study on the Gifts of the Holy Spirit (Isaiah 11:2–3) and Fruits of the Holy Spirit (Galatians 5:22–23).**
  - The focus here is on teaching young people the significance of the Holy Spirit in Scripture.
- **Day Three: *Servus Dei*—literally meaning “servant of God” in Latin—which will be an immersion day of service and service-learning.**
  - The focus here is getting students out into the community and serving; Christian service is a hallmark of discipleship and Christian spirituality.
- **Day Four: Understanding the Rituals and Symbols with the Confirmation Celebration.**
  - The focus here is on understanding the significance of the *Rite of Confirmation* and the various symbols that are present in the confirmation ceremony.
- **Day Five: Living a Life in the Holy Spirit and Christian Discipleship.**
  - The focus here is on life after confirmation; stressing the young person’s involvement in the church and getting involved in youth ministry and the larger life and ministries of the parish.

The youth ministers or confirmation coordinators implementing this methodology would be wise to utilize ice-breakers, multi-media (music, videos, podcasts, etc.), small faith discussion groups, and activities to ignite the faith life in teenagers. Three hours of programming is a lot of time; therefore, it will need to be divided into manageable and age-appropriate blocks of time.

These three confirmation catechetical methods are designed to help adolescents: (1) *develop* a deeper relationship with Jesus Christ and the Christian community; (2) *increase* and *enhance* the core content of Catholic confirmation and the Holy Spirit; (3) *enrich* and *expand* their understanding of the Scriptures and tradition surrounding the Holy Spirit; and (4) *live* and *love* more faithfully as Christian disciples by exercising prayer, justice, and service in daily life.<sup>48</sup>

From my experience, a shortened confirmation process provides more intense catechesis, spiritual formation, and experiential and accompaniment opportunities for young people to grow in the faith. Moreover, short, intense faith formation experience like retreats, mission trips, immersion experiences, and vacation Bible school increase and enhance cognitive, affective, and active spirituality.<sup>49</sup>

## 10. Strengths and Limitations of the Three Methodologies

Although these three confirmation catechetical methodologies are worthy pastoral and spiritual encounters for teenagers during the process of confirmation, they are not beyond the scope of scrutiny. It is worthwhile to offer a few remarks regarding the strengths and limitations of these particular confirmation catechetical methodologies.

**Strengths:** The first obvious asset is that all three of these catechetical methodologies are comprehensive and cover an array of topics revolving around confirmation. The second advantage is that these methods could easily be implemented by a larger parish that has a large number of young people being confirmed. In this way, it is family-friendly because it allows for more ownership on the part of the adolescent and provides each family the opportunity to select which type of catechetical method they prefer based on the family’s availability. The third quality of these three methods is that they are flexible and adaptive in their approach, allowing for diversity in program settings. The fourth

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<sup>48</sup> RTV, 29.

<sup>49</sup> (Maddix and Estep 2017, p. 84).

benefit is that each of these methods can utilize both intergenerational and intercultural ministry techniques, especially by adopting practices that allow for diverse ethnic and cultural backgrounds. The fifth value is that these methods are developmentally appropriate for programming and matches a young person's cognitive, moral, and spiritual growth. The sixth strength is that it serves the same function as the one or two year process, but in a lot less time, thus making it more conducive to the youth minister, parents, and teenagers.

**Limitations:** One major disadvantage of these three catechetical methods is that they do not take into account home-schooled teenagers or folks living in rural areas. Regardless of their sacramental readiness and living experience, they are usually expected to make sacramental catechetical preparation at the parish despite the hardship. The second drawback is that some might think these methods are not long enough, that is, there needs to be more time actually preparing young people for the Sacrament of Confirmation. The third inadequacy is that *if* a parish decides to use all three methodologies in a given year, the parish will need three separate confirmation coordinators or the youth minister will have to do three separate confirmation sessions (certainly not impossible, but demanding). The fourth insufficiency is the reality of sponsors. Confirmation sponsors can add the overall spiritual edification of the young person. Thus, figuring out ways to utilize confirmation sponsors might be a challenge.

There are positives and concerns with every ministry program and confirmation catechesis would be no exception. These three methodologies are strong despite the limitations because it provides the parish, youth minister, confirmation coordinator, parents, and teenager the option of selecting which type of catechetical plan they feel most comfortable with and that fits her/his schedule.

## 11. Conclusions

This article addressed confirmation practices today, the two predominant models for confirmation, and the three methodologies for confirmation catechesis in Catholic youth ministry settings. The three methods for confirmation catechesis are designed to help alleviate the burden of having a year-long, week-after-week confirmation class, which typically bores most adolescents and burns out youth ministers.

The intent of these three methods is to foster a more dynamic catechesis for confirmation that allows youth ministers and/or confirmation coordinators to adopt a more flexible pastoral approach to confirmation—a pastoral approach that allows for creativity and fun, spiritual practices, and all the while learning about confirmation. The confirmation catechesis recommended here will help to transform young people into Christian disciples, who want to be active participants in the life of the parish community, which is the ultimate goal of confirmation.

My hope is that this article is breaking new ground in confirmation literature and practice and that the article is widely read and distributed to pastors, youth ministers, and confirmation coordinators who are responsible for confirmation catechesis and will be able to implement the ideas gleaned from this article. The methods addressed in this article certainly do not alleviate all of the challenges that Catholic confirmation programs face, but it does solve the problem of lengthy and time-taxing confirmation catechesis.

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