

# Journey of Faith



## In Short:

- Confirmation makes us disciples and witnesses.
- Your choices of a sponsor and a baptismal name are significant.
- Confirmation includes many actions and symbols.



- Think of a time someone came through for you when you didn't expect it. How did you feel?



The sacrament of confirmation bestows these gifts of the Holy Spirit upon us. Like Jesus' first disciples, we are given the courage to bring the good news to our own world. Jesus is still fulfilling his promise of the Holy Spirit through the sacrament of confirmation.

## The Sacrament of Confirmation

How do you think the disciples felt in the days following Jesus' crucifixion and death? They must have been grief-stricken; the man who had loved them and led them, washed their feet, shared their meals, and faithfully taught them was now gone. The disciples must have been confused and unsure of their mission. Saint John says they were so afraid that "the doors were locked, where the disciples were, for fear of the Jews" (John 20:19). These feelings of sadness, heartbreak, confusion, and fear are things we can all relate to.

But Jesus did not abandon his friends. He promised them he would give them the courage they needed to face any fears about serving him. "But you will receive power when the holy Spirit comes upon you, and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, throughout Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth" (Acts 1:8). That was a promise that Jesus, of course, kept!

The disciples immediately went out and began to preach the good news, their fear and sadness forgotten.

*"When the time for Pentecost was fulfilled, they were all in one place together. And suddenly there came from the sky a noise like a strong driving wind, and it filled the entire house in which they were. Then there appeared to them tongues as of fire, which parted and came to rest on each one of them. And they were all filled with the holy Spirit and began to speak in different tongues, as the Spirit enabled them to proclaim."*

Acts 2:1-4

The sacraments of baptism, confirmation, and Eucharist are called the sacraments of initiation. These three sacraments lay the foundation for every Christian life. We are born anew through our baptism, strengthened in confirmation, and nourished by the food of eternal life in the Eucharist (CCC 1212).

Because of the close connection between baptism and confirmation, the early Christians usually celebrated the two sacraments together in one rite, although the New Testament does lay a foundation for two different celebrations. (See Acts 8:15, Acts 19:1-7, and Hebrews 6:2.)



While the Holy Spirit is given in both baptism and confirmation, the function or work of the Spirit is different in each. At baptism, we are made members of Christ's body, but at confirmation we are given the power of God to bear fruit in our Christian lives. The gifts of the Holy Spirit empower us to live as Jesus taught us to live. Through our love, we build up the Church, the body of Christ.

There's another way to look at the connection between baptism and confirmation. When a baby is born, he or she has the potential to become an active, productive adult, but the baby needs time to mature, develop, and grow. Compare the baby to a newly baptized Christian. The Christian doesn't become a perfect imitator of Christ overnight. The potential is there, but the Christian needs time to mature spiritually. The gifts of the Holy Spirit received at confirmation give us guidance and strength on our journey of faith.

The word *confirmation* means "strengthening." The Holy Spirit comes and strengthens those gifts we received at baptism. The Holy Spirit helps us to mature spiritually so that we can live fully Christian lives. But there's no magic in confirmation and no shortcuts to heaven. The sacraments require our response in the form of Christian witness or action. God offers us the empowering gifts of the Holy Spirit in confirmation, but it's up to us to choose to accept the gifts and use them to the best of our abilities.

To **witness** means to "stand up for the truth," even at the expense of your own life.

Because Christian growth and maturity bring a greater sense of responsibility toward those around us, confirmation is sometimes called "the sacrament of Christian witness" or "the sacrament of social action." Often preparation for this sacrament will include a service project or other activity that focuses on Christian action within the community.

The strengthening and spiritual maturity we gain through confirmation isn't only for our personal benefit. We receive them through the Holy Spirit so we can contribute to the life of the Church and our world.

- What gifts or talents do you have right now that you could use to make the world a better, more joyful place?



## How Is the Sacrament Celebrated?

The sacrament of confirmation is given by the laying on of hands, followed by the anointing in the form of a cross with chrism on the forehead. **Chrism** is perfumed oil consecrated (made sacred) by a bishop. It is a sign of the gifts of the Holy Spirit (CCC 1241). The oil is a symbol of strength, and the perfume is a symbol of the fragrance of Christ, which the Christian must spread.

The laying on of hands is an important action found in the Bible by which the Holy Spirit is asked to come to a person. In the Gospels, Jesus healed many people with a touch. It makes sense that the power of the Spirit comes through a special touch—the laying on of hands and praying for the gift of the Spirit.

The anointing is another important action. The words *Messiah* and *Christ* both mean "anointed one." The Israelites anointed priests and, later, kings as a sign that they were chosen by God. Like these priests and kings, you are chosen by God. And like them, you are being anointed or chosen for a purpose.

As you are anointed, the minister of the sacrament will say these words: *Be sealed with the gift of the Holy Spirit.*

Usually it is the bishop, the leader of the larger Church community, who administers the sacrament. The bishop witnesses the new Christian's welcome and initiation into the worldwide community of believers.



## What Is a Sponsor?

The word **sponsor** comes from the same root as responsible, a root that means “someone who guarantees, pledges, or promises.” The idea of having a sponsor comes from the early Church, when Christians lived in fear of being persecuted for their faith. Catechumens—those wishing to become Christians—had to have a sponsor, someone who would vouch for their sincerity.

Although the purpose of the sponsor may have changed, the role remains an important one. A sponsor is a person who can travel with you on your journey to Christian maturity. This person should know you well and be available to listen to your concerns and answer your questions about your faith and the Church. Your sponsor should be a person with whom you intend to have a lifelong relationship. This person must also be mature, belong to the Catholic Church, and have received the three sacraments of initiation: baptism, confirmation, and Eucharist. Perhaps most importantly, your sponsor needs to be a spiritual friend, someone you can talk to about matters of the heart.

- *By yourself or with the group, make a list of all the characteristics you think it takes to be a good sponsor.*
- *Who are some people you might consider? Why?*



Another tradition of the Church at the time of confirmation is choosing a name that will remind you of this sacrament and its purpose. Your prayerful thought will help you determine that name. You might want to choose the name of a saint who represents the kind of Christian you wish to be. You might want to recommit yourself to your given (baptismal) name, especially after you study its meaning and discover some of the great people in Christian history who have shared it with you. Some candidates choose the name of a relative, close friend, or other person they have deeply admired.

- *Make a list of all the characteristics of faith you feel are especially important or you need the most help with.*
- *Who are the people who could be your role models in living this list?*



## When Is Confirmation Conferred?

The age of confirmation varies within the United States. At one time, young people were confirmed around the age of ten. But that has increased to twelve to seventeen years old because of the commitment it takes to witness to the faith. Confirmation is a sacrament of Christian witness and commitment, and witnessing to the faith requires maturity and a strong understanding of what that means.

Being confirmed means you’re committing to the faith, and committing to the faith means you’re going to be called as a witness for Christ. That isn’t always easy. This is why we have the sacrament of confirmation. Through this sacrament you are anointed with the power of the Holy Spirit to profess your faith and to represent the truth—even to those outside the Church. Through this sacrament you become fully immersed, or completely involved, in the life of the Church.

## What Does a Sponsor Do?

During confirmation, the sponsor places a hand on the candidate’s shoulder as a sign that the sponsor is presenting the candidate for the sacrament on behalf of the whole Christian community. Being a sponsor involves more than just showing up for the confirmation ceremony. It is the sponsor’s responsibility to encourage the newly confirmed Christian to be Christ’s witness and to bring the light of Christ to the world.



Complete the sentences about confirmation.

Confirmation is one of the three sacraments of \_\_\_\_\_; the other two are \_\_\_\_\_ and \_\_\_\_\_.

During the confirmation rite, the sponsor places a hand on the candidate's shoulder as a sign of \_\_\_\_\_.

The word confirmation means \_\_\_\_\_.

Laying on of hands signifies \_\_\_\_\_.

Messiah and Christ both mean \_\_\_\_\_.

At confirmation, being anointed means \_\_\_\_\_.

The purpose of choosing a confirmation name is \_\_\_\_\_.

Take a moment to read and reflect on Isaiah 11:2–3 from the Hebrew Scriptures.



Think about who you are at this time in your life. Of all the Spirit's special gifts, which do you believe you need the most? Why?



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