

The Sacrament of CONFIRMATION



Rationale

This programme is provided to assist local parishes in the Archdiocese of Wellington as they seek to prepare children to receive the Sacraments of Initiation (and Reconciliation). This Confirmation Preparation Programme forms part of the overall programme which also includes materials for the preparation of 8- and 9-year-olds for the Sacraments of First Reconciliation and First Eucharist.

The materials here are intended to be adapted for local use by pastoral leaders and may be used elsewhere as found appropriate.

The Confirmation Preparation Programme is premised on the understanding that parents (guardians) are a child's 'first educators in faith'. This programme consists of four facilitated gatherings of parents and children (simultaneous but separate) plus joint activities for parent and child at home between sessions. Materials provided include Children's Worksheets and four short parent handouts (three topics plus a 'how to' guide).

Plan

- A. During each session, parents will be led in small group conversation exploring the designated key concept underpinning this sacrament. The three key concepts are:
- 1) Setting out on the journey
 - 2) The Spirit of God
 - 3) Being Catholic

At the conclusion of each session, a short summary is provided for each parent.

- B. Simultaneously, the children will gather with 2-3 minders who will keep them focused on the content of the children's worksheet. This will include conversation, discussion, questioning, colouring, other activity and writing down their own answers. Children and parents will come together at the conclusion of each session for a quick show-and-tell by the kids and a concluding prayer centring on the concept covered.
- C. Between sessions, parents will work with their child(ren) to finish off the worksheet they were doing in class and make time to complete the next sheet. (There are six worksheets to be covered in three weeks).

- D. A fourth gathering aimed specifically at familiarisation with the ‘mechanics’ of the Sacrament can be scheduled from the outset. A ‘how to’ handout is provided for parents. [Alternatively, the topics for the four meetings might be reconsidered/combined to enable the third meeting to include the ‘how to’ session.]

Background Topic Knowledge (for the Programme Presenter)

In order to be well prepared to lead the parent sessions, Programme Presenters are encouraged to refresh their content knowledge and background by exploring current Catholic thought around this sacrament. The following links are recommended by the Archdiocese of Wellington:

- Confirmation – Resource: Archdiocese of Melbourne
<https://resourcecem.com/2018/10/03/confirmation/>
- Sophia Sketchpad: Confirmation – short fun video summary of the Sacrament
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Lu3MoT_egFI
- Symbols of Confirmation – *Faith Journey* (Aotearoa NZ site supporting faith at home)
<https://www.faithjourney.co.nz/symbols.html>
- Pleroma Christian Supplies (for purchase here in Aotearoa NZ)
<https://www.christiansupplies.co.nz/products/books-catholic-sacraments-78798/>

The Age for Reception of the Sacrament of Confirmation in the Archdiocese of Wellington

Parents may well remember being Confirmed themselves in their early teenage years and some will ask why this has now changed to 7-8 year olds? The Archdiocese of Wellington restored the original order of the Sacraments of Initiation some years ago so that First Eucharist (Communion) is again the Sacrament that marks full membership of the Catholic Church. This required moving the Sacrament of Confirmation to an earlier age (usually 7 years) that precedes First Eucharist. Baptism – Confirmation – Eucharist is the original order of these sacraments and this is what was achieved by this change. [Note that the first reception of the Sacrament of Reconciliation must precede First Eucharist – it is itself not a Sacrament of Initiation.]

What is important is to note that Confirmation is not a rite-of-passage but rather a distinctive working of God in a person’s life. All that is required is openness to God. The Sacrament strengthens the recipient through the gifts of the Spirit; i.e. wisdom, understanding, knowledge, courage (fortitude), counsel (right judgment), reverence (piety) and awe (wonder).

Parent Sessions

Rather than providing significant content to be presented, this programme instead aims to enable facilitated sessions led by competent parishioners/pastoral leaders. The programme Leader should be very familiar with the Catholic concepts and ideas covered in the short parent handout for each session.

Supporting Resource (Parent Session):

The programme offers an interactive PowerPoint option for those with AV capability and experience. A short handout is also provided to be reproduced and given to parents at the end of each session.

Session outline:

- ❖ **Children:** gather in a separate room with 2 or 3 minders to work on tonight's topic.
- ❖ **Welcome the adults:** thank them for coming and generate some initial conversation by asking just one or two of the following:
 - How did the home session go?
 - Did any insights come up about the topic?
 - Did your child respond?
 - Did you remember to share your own experience?
 - Any questions emerge?
- ❖ **Introduce tonight's topic:** stick to the title ('Setting Out', 'Confirming Faith'. etc.) and explanatory sentence without elaboration.
- ❖ **Prayer:** Whether we are leading a parent session or working with the children it is important to centre our gathering in prayer. Prayer helps draw people in and focus them on what we are about to do.
 - Each session should begin with a simple, spontaneous prayer of blessing on your time together. And...
 - Each session should end with prayer (a 'prayer slide' is included) – sometimes recited, sometimes reflective and sometimes spontaneous.

A reminder is built into the PowerPoint.

Leaders are encouraged to model familiarity with prayer in these different forms and to encourage parents to pray with their children (and as a family) between sessions.

Leading an opening prayer need not be complicated and as a presenter, you are encouraged to be creative in how you lead the group. Start with an invitation to gather and reflect.

An example for a parent session might be:

"As we gather here this evening, let us take a moment to remember that we are in the presence of a God who loves us and calls us his children."

(Allow a moment of silence, then make the Sign of the Cross)

"Loving God, you call us here to accompany our children on their journey of faith. Open our hearts and minds that we may receive and understand your Word today. We ask this through Christ our Lord, Amen."

Similarly, a closing prayer can follow the same format reminding us that this is a journey of faith:

"Loving God, we thank you for our time together tonight.

We pray that in this coming week, we may reflect on what we have learnt and turn to you with all our hearts.

We ask this through Christ our Lord, Amen."

(You may want to end with the Sign of the Cross)

But don't be bound to these formats:

- invite those present to pray, silently or aloud;
- pass a burning candle slowly around the group inviting each to pray as it comes to them (aloud or silently);
- use some reflective music or sing a locally loved hymn;
- invite prayers in other languages;

- ask each person to choose one word to describe how they are feeling tonight then invite prayer or lead a blessing on the evening.

In essence we pray to remember God is here and to welcome the Spirit of God amongst us.

❖ **Small Groups:**

- **Divide** - into small groups of about 3-5 persons. (Less than 3 or more than 5 will reduce group effectiveness).
- **Questions** – the session’s questions/statements are part of the PowerPoint presentation. These can be printed out as necessary.
- **Sharing** - to encourage sharing, go round the group inviting each person to share on each question/statement. Leader - move around and join in as is helpful (but don’t take over!).
- **Feedback** – Pause all groups and feedback or help move on as feels right. At the end share and discuss a little feedback in the main group identifying 2-3 key insights emerging from the groups’ shared experiences.

Let the adults self-select their group the first session but after that mix them up by counting them off (1,2,3,4; 1,2,3,4...) and then gathering the 1’s, 2’s, etc.

- ❖ **Handout:** regather as a whole group, distribute the handout and read it aloud very clearly as everyone follows along.
- ❖ **Re-join:** the children for the brief concluding show-and-tell.

1) Setting out on the journey

As disciples of Jesus we do not set out alone. Belonging to a church means being part of a people – the People of God. This Sacrament of Confirmation is about strengthening us for that collective journey.

- My earliest memories of Confirmation are...
- This sacrament took on real significance for me at one stage because...
- I feel... _____ about Confirmation today because...

Confirmation celebrates God working in a person’s life. All that is required is openness to God and the Spirit of God will be given to them.

- I can see the Spirit of God quietly at work in my life in...
- I see faith lived out / justice being done / someone responding to God’s Spirit when...

Read the story of Pentecost (Acts 2:1-4 from projector screen or bible).

- How do you understand what happened to the disciples that day in the upper room?

2) The Spirit of God

As disciples of Jesus, God’s Spirit guides us. But how do we find the right way...?

- For me, I usually know a decision in my life is a good one because... (results, feelings...?)

- When making decisions in my life, what really helps me is...

We are all called to be saints in the time and circumstances in which we live. This will be different for each of us but don't underestimate who you are as a child of God! We are called to be more and more 'Christ-like' in our everyday lives, in whatever situation we find ourselves. Being 'holy' isn't usually how we describe ourselves! But we are holy when we remember God and live for others rather than selfishly focusing only on ourselves.

- Prayer is remembering God. God-awareness opens us up to communicating (actually talking!) with God. I sometimes do this when...
- For me, understanding 'holiness' as including others / being unselfish makes me realise that I do this when...

As disciples, the Spirit of Jesus accompanies and strengthens us through the gifts of the Spirit, i.e. wisdom, understanding, knowledge, courage (fortitude), counsel (right judgment), reverence (piety) and awe (wonder).

- Where have I seen or heard of any of these gifts being lived out?
- What about in my own life – how have I felt the Spirit's nudge over the years?

3) Being Catholic

Read through the first slide of 'being Catholic is to...' list (on screen or on handout). Then take each in turn and discuss it using the prompts below:

- How do we actually do this?
- How does this challenge me personally?

*Use **The Call** (Joy Cowley) as part of your closing prayer.*

Contact

Questions? Contact the Archdiocesan Church Mission team:

- Chris Duthie-Jung – 04 496 1759 – c.duthie-jung@wn.catholic.org.nz
- Lucienne Hensel – 04 496 1715 – l.hensel@wn.catholic.org.nz

www.wn.catholic.org.nz

Acknowledgements

The Archdiocese of Wellington gratefully acknowledges the generosity and work of the following:

- Key resource developers - Philippa McManus (BTheo) & Chris Duthie-Jung (DMin)
- Resource consultant – Patrick Bridgman (STL)
- Earlier programme development - Fiona Rammell (DipPL)
- Diocesan collaborators - the Dioceses of Auckland, Christchurch and Dunedin in sharing their locally developed sacramental programmes as sources of inspiration and resource material for this programme.