

Summary Briefing of Diocesan Sacramental Changes

BACKGROUND ON THE SACRAMENT OF BAPTISM:

The first Christians were Hebrews who accepted Jesus as Messiah. They were called “People of the way”. These first Christians would have been familiar with a Jewish rite described in the Old Testament that had a form of Baptism; a ritual cleansing with water for Gentiles who desired to enter Judaism. This cleansing ritual represented a commitment to follow the commandments God had given to Moses on Mt. Sinai, an outward sign.

John the Baptist, Jesus’ cousin brought this baptism ritual to the next level. He called for a Baptism of Repentance; the person receiving it made a commitment to turn away from sin and follow the laws of Moses. When Jesus came along to be baptized, initially John refused, but Jesus insisted and was baptized, not because he needed to repent (Jesus was free of sin), but because He understood that He was the sacrificial offering, taking our place and punishment for our sins onto Himself. The Holy Spirit was present at this first sacramental Baptism when He descended like a dove upon Jesus and a voice from heaven was heard “This is my beloved son, with whom I am well pleased.” (*Matt 3:16-17*)

At Jesus’ Baptism this Jewish ritual was elevated to a Sacrament, a personal encounter with Jesus for you and me, a covenant with God himself. This became fully manifested after Jesus’ death, resurrection and ascension when Jesus sent forth the Holy Spirit on the day of Pentecost for all who would be baptized in the name of the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit. Baptism is not just a ritual or an initiation into an institution. Instead, when we are baptized, the Holy Spirit - God’s very presence - is **INFUSED** into us. God is not only with us, He is **IN** us! The Sacrament of Baptism is the outward sign of an internal effect in our soul:

- We enter into a personal relationship with Jesus
- We BELONG to God, become Children of God and are adopted into God’s family
- We are Baptized into the Body of Christ...He is the head
- We become Jesus’ eyes, ears, hands, heart, feet and are called to carry on HIS mission on earth
- All previous sin is washed away and the predisposition to sin is weakened
- In Baptism, the crown of our head is blessed, we put on the crown of Christ
- We are also called to protect, nurture and feed our personal relationship with God within us

BACKGROUND ON THE SACRAMENT OF CONFIRMATION:

Confirmation is the name we have given to the action of laying of hands that disciples Peter and John would do on baptized believers who had not yet received the Holy Spirit Gifts. (*See Acts 8: 14-17*)

Following Baptism, we receive a final seal of the Holy Spirit at Confirmation. This sacrament bestows special spiritual gifts and the strength and ability to live the Christian life. Depending on our disposition and openness to receive the fullness of the gifts that the Holy Spirit wishes to give us, we may receive a greater awareness and desire to know, love and serve God. Baptism and Confirmation have an indelible character – God remains faithful to us and we can never take the mark off our soul.

WHAT IS THE DIOCESAN INITIATIVE CALLED *RESTORE-RENEW-PROCLAIM THE HOPE THAT IS CHRIST* OR RESTORED ORDER?

Restored Order means returning the three sacraments of Christian initiation to the **logical** order in which they were designed to be celebrated: first Baptism, then Confirmation, last Eucharist. During the first five hundred years or so, of the history of the Church, the sacraments of Christian initiation were celebrated in this sequence. The Eucharist, not Confirmation, is considered the culmination of Christian initiation; The Source and Summit of Christian life. Receiving the grace of the Holy Spirit at a younger age will give children greater courage and guidance in facing difficulties in life. In addition, sacramental preparation will be placed at an age where children are naturally more open and receptive to participating in the process with their parents. The parent's role in modeling and passing on of the faith for their children does not change; they will continue to be considered the primary educators of the faith and our church community will continue to assist parents with the faith formation of their children.

HOW IS THE CELEBRATION OF CONFIRMATION GOING TO CHANGE DUE TO RESTORED ORDER?

The standard age of Confirmation is going to be in third grade, and Confirmation will be celebrated at the same liturgy as First Communion. As a result, the preparation and reception of the sacraments of initiation will be Baptism in infancy, Confirmation and Eucharist in third grade. Although not a sacrament of initiation, the Sacrament of Reconciliation will be celebrated in the second grade to restore the effect of the sacrament of Baptism in the souls of those receiving the seal of Confirmation. This maximizes the soul's receptivity of the special spiritual gifts the Holy Spirit gives and places the child in a state of grace to worthily receive the Eucharist. This initiative will be implemented over the next 4 years and began last summer, with a year of preparation of pastors and their staff as to the best way to implement the changes. In July, 2018 we will begin the process of Confirmation of all grade levels between 10th and 3rd grade in incremental form. By 2021 we expect to follow the restored order process for all children with the reception of Reconciliation in 2nd Grade, and Confirmation and 1st Eucharist in 3rd Grade.

HOW DOES RESTORED ORDER AFFECT THE RELIGIOUS EDUCATION OF OUR CHILDREN?

Sacraments of Initiation are gifts given by God to help us live the Christian life. Once a child reaches the age of reason, they can be fully **infused** with the Gifts of the Holy Spirit even if they have not learned all there is to learn about Jesus, His Church or the Christian faith. Learning about our faith is a **life-long** process. All youth K-HS as well as adults are expected to continue learning about our faith through Faith Formation Programs. We at Immaculate Conception Parish will continue to offer the same outstanding programs you have come to expect for children in grades k-12, and we will continue to add young-adult and adult programs to encourage **life-long** learning. As we know, even we adults are encouraged to continue growing in our faith by reading scripture, bible studies, receiving the sacraments and serving the world through acts of mercy. The only difference you will see is the separation of the sacraments of initiation from the completion of a particular grade level faith formation program.