

Confirmation: End of an Identity Crisis

Spring is Confirmation time in many parishes. Cecelia Viggo reports on the goals of instruction offered to youngsters in several places where the Sacrament is taken seriously.

By CECELIA VIGGO

If you can recall your Confirmation at all, probably the most memorable details of getting that Sacrament include choosing your sponsor; deciding on a confirmation name, and the party after.

If you were an especially impressionable 11-year-old, you might still remember the drama of the Bishop's presence; that event took precedence over receiving the Holy Spirit — a fact pretty intangible to a fifth grader.

Confirmation has suffered this sacramental identity crisis for a long while. Somewhere, its spiritual meaning got lost among the white veils, red ties, and "martial" hymns.

From 1966-1969, no children were confirmed in this diocese; Bishop Fulton J. Sheen believed that Confirmation should be reserved for those in senior high school and older.

Now that Confirmation is once again being administered at junior high level, several parishes have updated and improved their Confirmation programs in an attempt to reaffirm the importance and dignity of this sacrament.

They have been helped by the diocese's new Confirmation Catechism, commissioned by Bishop Hogan, and published January 1970 by the Office of Christian Formation. Father Albert Shamon was the author of the 134-page tome.

The Catechism suggests that confirmation education should include at least nine one-hour classes on the Church, the Holy Spirit, and the three sacraments of Christian Initiation: Baptism, Confirmation, and Holy Eucharist.

Central to the Catechism's

Girl Scouts To Celebrate

Ecumenical services and breakfast parties are scheduled in several neighborhoods in celebration of Girl Scout Week.

Scouts of all ranks in Friendship IV Division have a choice among events this Sunday, March 7. At St. Thomas the Apostle Church, Msgr. Richard K. Burns will celebrate a folk Mass at 8:15 and Cadette Troop 858 will give a mother-daughter breakfast at 9. At Summerville Presbyterian, 8 o'clock breakfast sponsored by Cadette Troop 311 will be followed by a service at 9. Breakfast reservations at St. Thomas should be made with Mrs. Ruth Kelly, 544-4919; at Summerville, with Mrs. Donald Henry, 342-5878.

In addition, all scouts of Pleiades, Seneca and Friendship IV divisions, and their families, are invited to an ecumenical service Sunday afternoon, March 7, from 2 until 3, in the Irondequoit United Church of Christ. The Rev. Charles Kuch of the host church, Rabbi Aaron Solomon of Temple Beth El and Father William Schifferli of Christ the King will take part.

On March 14, from 3 to 5 p.m. scouts of the Winton Division will have a service at St. James Church.

Participants will include Father Robert Winterkorn, assistant pastor and diocesan scout chaplain; Rev. Edward T. Read, pastor of Covenant United Methodist Church; Rev. A. George Cuba, pastor of Lutheran Church of the Good Shepherd; and Rev. David Muir, assistant pastor of St. Mark's and St. John's Episcopal Church.

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recommendations is the conception of confirmation as the "Sacrament of Responsibility," and "the Sacrament of the Apostolate."

It urges that pre-confirmation programs involve young people in works of service to the community, and advises the participation of adult lay men and women as examples of the role of the Christian in the world.

Mindful of the broadened values now seen in the sacrament, and assisted by the new Catechism's many suggestions for confirmation education, Good Shepherd parish in Henrietta, and St. John the Evangelist parish, Greece, created innovative programs last fall.

"Confirmation is a sacrament of decision" was the focus of the program at Good Shepherd.

"What I wanted to do was have the eighth grade students become aware of the commitment made in Baptism, to perceive the meaning of Confirmation," explained program director, Father William E. Frankhauser, SJ.

Four things were asked of the young people at Good Shepherd; that they attend seven evening classes on the doctrine of confirmation, complete an assigned reading on "Faith and Conversion" from the Dutch Catechism, write a 150-word composition on Confirmation's implications for them, and attend a Day of Recollection before the ceremony.

Father Frankhauser also ad-

vised parents not to pressure their children into receiving the sacrament.

"Thirty-five out of a possible class of 283 decided not to receive the sacrament at that time," Father Frankhauser said.

"But I think that those who did carry out the program's requirements felt that they were doing a very 'grown-up' thing," he added.

"Christian Service" was the keynote of the confirmation program at St. John the Evangelist, Greece.

"We divided the class of 185 eighth graders into groups of 6 to 9 young people, each led by a volunteer parent-couple," explained Father Frank E. Lioi, the program's director.

Other parents also were involved as hosts and discussion leaders as the groups moved from home to home each week.

Along with discussion and study of the sacrament, each group completed a "Christian Service Project."

Visiting the Monroe County Penitentiary, working with mentally retarded boys in a scout troop for exceptional children, touring a Baptist church, attending a Bar-Mitzvah, and ushering at Sunday Mass were some of the activities.

"The stress was not on what they did, but why and its relationship to confirmation," Father Lioi explained.

St. Joseph's, Penfield, and Holy Family, Rochester, are presently adapting the new diocesan proposals to preparations for confirmations this March.

Father James MacLoughlin, assistant pastor at St. Joseph's, commented that the program will attempt to offer its 180 eighth graders a solid preparation in Christian doctrine, and an opportunity to discuss the practical implications of their Christian commitments.

"We also plan to hold a series of liturgical celebrations prior to the ceremony," Father said. Young people will participate in a penance celebration, Bible service and supper.

Mrs. Ronald Bennet, religious education coordinator at Holy Family, Rochester, hopes to increase the involvement of parents in confirmation education, and to encourage greater participation of the young people in planning the ceremony.

In the next three months our four bishops (including retired Bishop James E. Kearney) will crisscross the diocese confirming in dozens of churches. Aided by the new Confirmation Catechism, and encouraged by the success of several innovative programs, perhaps more parishes will insure that the rich symbolism of the confirmation ceremony contains a deep and abiding meaning for those who receive it.

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