



## Confirmation: When? Why? How?

In the city of our Lord's birth, Bethlehem, West Bank, youngsters preparing for communion anticipate a special event one month or so prior to that customary spring first Eucharist liturgy.

Their bishop in Jerusalem will travel the short distance to Bethlehem, and in the Nativity basilica on Manger Square confirm the first communicants.

Such a procedure preserves the ancient order of our initiation sacraments — baptism, confirmation, Eucharist.

Throughout the United States over the past decade many Catholic religious leaders have urged a move in quite the opposite direction. They argue confirmation should be postponed until a more advanced age, perhaps the later teens or even early twenties. Such a delay, in their judgment, would enable the candidates to prepare better, make a stronger commitment to Christ as part of the sacramental experience and receive the Holy Spirit in confirmation with deeper faith.

Because of that controversy the required age for confirmation varies from diocese to diocese. These different approaches cause a certain amount of confusion and difficulty, especially for those in our mobile society who shift locations every few years as their job or corporation dictates.

This writer considers the issue unresolved as yet and the debate still in progress, not ripe or mature enough for a nation-wide definite decision on the practical level.

Fr. Joseph M. Champlin



Our Church Family

In view of what he judges as satisfactory and perhaps best a compromise type of diocesan policy in which a minimal age (usually seventh grade) is required for entrance into the formation or preparation, also demanded, which lasts for one or two years. The latter includes intellectual and spiritual training, but also regular service efforts on the candidates' part, e.g., visiting the sick, helping a neighbor, working at home. This combined with confirmation celebrated in the context of a Mass seeks to preserve the main points of both the Bethlehem and the American approach.

The genesis and rapid expansion of Charismatic prayer groups with their emphasis on being born again or baptized in the Holy Spirit has raised questions about these experiences and their relationship to baptism and confirmation.

At the font we are "baptized in water and the Spirit." During the rite of confirmation, Pentecost becomes personal for us and the Holy Spirit, with those special accompanying gifts, floods our hearts.

The "baptism in the Spirit" events people describe during personal testimonies normally occur separately from the sacraments of baptism or confirmation. Consequently, some grow confused, wondering if this means the Spirit was not truly received or present in those sacramental rites.

For that reason, many avoid using the precise phrase, "baptism in the Spirit," referring instead to an outpouring or release of the Holy Spirit, an unleashing as it were of the graces, gifts and Spirit already present through the sacrament of baptism and Confirmation.

The one or two year preparation programs for confirmation candidates need to reach their heads, hearts, and hands.

Reaching the head means an intellectual appreciation of the sacrament. Monthly small group instruction and discussion sessions in homes with adults and perhaps even recently confirmed young people as moderators have proven to be very effective in this task.

Reaching the heart means a spiritual appreciation of confirmation. An overnight retreat experience can be extremely productive in fostering that awareness.

Reaching the hands means an apostolic appreciation of the sacrament. A journal recording the service projects of candidates helps focus their attention on the responsibility for others which flows from confirmation.

## Vacations Are for Warm Weather

"Write," says my son, who is looking at my glum face, "about how kids are pains when it is mid-winter vacation."

"I can't," I tell him. "I wrote about that last year."

"Nobody will remember," he says leaning back on the dining room chair, threatening both his and the chair's well being.

Stop, I say. I have already said STOP, DON'T, NO and ABSOLUTELY NOT a score of times to each of the two younger children on this Wednesday morning.

The oldest I have simply fixed with a gimlet eye. We had our spat yesterday. Relations are still only partly amicable. And I am not ready to patch things up completely — at least not until I get through at the typewriter.

Sarah Child



All in the Family

When things are super cordial between us I am treated to a confidence every two minutes, besieged with questions in between the confidences and deluged with requests (money, rides, special privileges) if there are any other lapses.

I had thought this mid-winter vacation was going to be different. They have been ice skating every day for a month, sometimes twice a day. Suddenly there

is a thaw and there is nothing to do — or at least nothing that does not require money, rides, special privileges.

At the moment I am short on cash, gas and time and several self-imposed deadlines (plus one that is not) hang heavily.

At the store earlier this morning I ran into one of the teachers. He is glum, too. I ask how he is enjoying his week off. He says, disgustedly, he has been fixing the plumbing.

He should be teaching. He is a first rate teacher. My children should be in school learning. Vacations should be reserved for June. Instead, the children will be taking tests in unbearably hot classrooms looking outside at shady green trees and inviting playgrounds, and wondering what dumb adults dreamed up this crazy schedule.

## Developing Family Spirituality

Last week, I talked about the need for the family to examine its spirituality, warts and all, and to talk about how it can grow together during Lent. This week I'd like you to get together again to scrutinize that which hampers your family's unique prayer effectiveness. I have a list of what I call the Ten Impediments that I use with families at workshops and retreats.

So pull up a family, light a candle, say a prayer together, and check the Impediments against your family's spirituality.

1. Time Together: Some families report they can't pray together because they rarely see each other. When one is home, another is at basketball practice or working. What times of the week can your family isolate to pray together? Not even half an hour weekly?

2. Family Calendar: This is an adjunct of the first but goes beyond it. The family that is over-extended with each member off in his/her sphere of activities doesn't spend enough time together to really know one another, which is a requisite for shared prayer and spirituality in the home. Check the schedule and the reasons behind an overloaded calendar. Is it to keep you away from one another?

3. Spousal Indifference: In some families, one parent is the proponent of family spirituality while the other is the obstacle. Eventually, the enthusiastic parent becomes a holy nag, a resentful martyr, or a

Dolores Curran



Talks With Parents

non-participant, also. Talk about shared enthusiasm and indifference. If just one person wants family spirituality, then the subject needs to be discussed as a family together.

4. Media Abdication: Some homes revolve around the television schedule and when families say, "We have no time," they mean TV comes first. Which is more important to your family's future: a half hour of shared prayer or "Mork and Mindy?"

5. Absentee parenting: Is Dad always at work? Mom always on the phone? Are you about doing the "important" things in life, too busy to spend a few quiet moments with your youngsters? Why?

6. Interfaith Marriage: If yours is an interfaith marriage and you are afraid to push prayer because it might infringe upon the rights and feelings of your spouse, ask him or her if together you can work out

a family prayer program that is uniquely yours. Otherwise, your marriage prevents rather than generates spirituality.

7. Teen Non-Communication: Your teenagers may feel that it isn't cool to take part in a family spirituality effort and to avoid the showdown, you avoid prayer and ritual in your home. Address this and ask them to design something with which they are comfortable (like scripture and music sessions). Or share prayer without them, but don't let it prevent the family from praying together.

8. Lack of Faith: Many parents have no faith base from which to start and the reason they want prayer during Lent is so that the children will continue to practice the faith even if the parents have stopped believing. This is futile but common.

9. Apostolic Overkill: Some parents try too hard to instill a sense of spirituality in their homes and as a result, nobody values it very much. Talk about this. Is it an impediment to real prayer and faith sharing in your family?

10. Embarrassment: It's common to find Catholic families that are too uncomfortable and embarrassed to pray together or even to discuss God or religion together. If this is a reality in your home, address the situation openly, asking where did we get this attitude and how can we overcome it?

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