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Confirm

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agree on an age, leaving it was up to each bishop to set the age in his diocese.

Therefore, when any diocese's bishop or a religious educator came up with a good rationale for a certain age or time, "people bought into it because there wasn't anything else," said Joan Workmaster, diocesan director of liturgy.

The 1983 Code of Canon Law sets confirmation at the "age of discretion." In Rochester, Bishop Fulton Sheen (1966-69) set the confirmation age at about the time of high school graduation, rather than the traditional 9-12 age. Bishop Joseph L. Hogan (1969-79) reduced the age to junior high. Bishop Matthew H. Clark has maintained children be confirmed as soon as they reach readiness following the age of discretion.

Meanwhile, in 1993, the National Conference of Catholic Bishops set the maximum age for most confirmations at 18. The maximum will be 16 as of July 2002.

But the usual age may drop in the Diocese of Rochester and increasingly in other dioceses calling for confirmation, followed by first Eucharist, to take place at the same celebration. This plan restores the order of baptism, confirmation and Eucharist, as the three sacraments were administered in the early church. Eight diocesan parishes currently administer the sacraments this way.

Workmaster said the key to understanding what is called "the restored order" is that "People come to various stages of grace when their hearts are open to that, and not at an artificially marked time."

"When a child is ready for first Communion, he is ready for confirmation," Sister Dietz observed.

Mary Woodruff didn't receive first Eucharist and confirmation during the same liturgy, but she did receive them in the same year. Her first Communion took place in May at her home parish, St. Bridget's/St. Joseph's, which does not provide for the combined celebration of confirmation and Eucharist.

Historical aspects

From the early days, Christian adults and babies were anointed in connection with their baptisms.

A second anointing took place when a bishop was available, and over time became separated from baptism and first Eucharist in the Western church. This anointing gradually became known as confirmation because it "confirmed" baptism by a priest. Today, the bishop is the ordinary minister of confirmation, but certain priests may also perform confirmations.

The term confirmation is said to have first appeared in the fifth century. Not until the 12th century was confirmation referred to be a sacrament.

Over the centuries, the confirmation age grew from 7, a minimum imposed in 1280 by a provincial council at Cologne, to more commonly 7-12, and then to 13-17, especially since the 1970s, according to various sources.

The development of confirmation has not clearly been determined at each step of the way. However, a few of the key moments include:

- The 1917 Code of Canon Law preferred that confirmation in the Latin-rite church be postponed until about the age of 7, but "did not contemplate in any way the deferral of the sacrament, common in many regions, beyond the seventh year," according to the 1983 code. But for pastoral reasons, the Rite of Confirmation of 1971 had stated, conferences of bishops were allowed to set an age more suitable, "to implant deeply in the lives of the faithful complete obedience to Christ the Lord and a firm witnessing to him."

- In 1910, Pope Pius X reduced the age of first Eucharist from teen years to the age of discretion, age 7, but did not address confirmation. Confirmation was commonly administered at the 10th or 11th year. It became known as more of a com-



Father Joseph Hart (left), Father George Wiant of St. Patrick's Parish in Victor (center), and Father John Gagnier of St. Dominic's Parish in Shortsville, say a blessing over the candidates at the Oct. 10 four-parish confirmation at St. Mary's Church in Canandaigua.



Eric Chester, a parishioner of St. Mary's, watches a fellow student being confirmed.

pletion rite.

- In the 1930s the Congregation of the Sacraments encouraged rediscovering the historical order of baptism, confirmation, Eucharist, and therefore earlier confirmation.

- The Second Vatican Council called for a thorough reform of the rite of confirmation to clarify its connection with the ritual of Christian initiation.

- The 1983 Code of Canon Law states that the age of confirmation is "about the age of discretion," unless the conference of bishops determines a different age.

While pastoral practices regarding the order of sacraments may have differed at times, church teaching did not, according to Jim Schellman, executive director of the North American Forum on the Catechumenate. "The liturgical books of the church, the canon law of the church, presume the order and have always referred to baptism, confirmation and Eucharist," he said.

In Rochester

The Diocese of Rochester revised its sacramental guidelines in 1994 "to say more clearly than before that children could receive when ready, and to reemphasize that is anytime after the age of reason," Sister Dietz explained. The guidelines also allow for combined celebration of confirmation and Eucharist.

"Bishop Clark has said if a parish is fully implementing readiness and the Rite of Christian Initiation of Adults as adapted for children, and discerns the next step for them is the restored order, they are to begin to take steps in that direction," Sister Dietz said.

In the late 1960s and 1970s, before RCIA began to take hold, religious educators used confirmation "as a carrot to keep, especially teens, in the education process," ac-

ording to Barbara Carroll, former catechetical consultant and later diocesan coordinator of sacramental catechesis.

"In case you think I am throwing stones, I was one of these, too," she told the *Catholic Courier*.

Therefore requirements were rigid, she said, amounting to two to three years of intense education, service projects, retreats and more.

But in working with the RCIA process, she said, it "was very, very clear" that the rite was to be the norm of initiation and applied to all those over the age of 7. Confirmation should not be separate, she said. The process, as in the early church days, is about conversion and formation, with Jesus, or Scripture, as its core.

Father Thomas Mull, pastor of St. Mary's in Canandaigua, noted that — having worked together previously as part of the diocesan pastoral-planning process — the four parishes that celebrated confirmation together on Oct. 10 made the first step toward the restored order by using readiness to determine the age of confirmands.

The ages of the 70 confirmed ranged from 7 through adults in their 20s and 30s; most were teens.

"The second step is recognizing that readiness can be at first Communion," he said. "Now, because we are working as a cluster, (restored order) is something we all have to explore.

"So if we going to be faithful to our history, it is the way to go," he continued. "It's a healthy way to go, there's really no difference in preparing for first Communion and confirmation. One might raise the question, 'Why do the same thing twice?'"

One challenge posed by the restored order is ensuring that the confirmed realize they need to continue in religious education for their own growth and relationship with God, he said.

Father Mull came to Canandaigua from Sacred Heart Cathedral. The cathedral parish had spent five years preparing for the restored order, and had reached its goal by the time he left the pastorate there.

Sister Diane Dennie, a Sister of St. Joseph who serves as pastoral administrator of St. Bridget's/St. Joseph's, noted major advantages in the four-parish confirmation, which Bishop Clark had requested. In fact, she said, "I think perhaps we took it a lot further than what was being asked."

Planners from the parishes gathered seven or eight times, she said. They also offered parents and candidates the option of taking preparation classes at their own parishes or one of the others to make the classes more convenient. Also, whereas smaller parishes traditionally held confirmation only every other year, they now are able in combination with several other parishes to offer a fall or spring confirmation each year.

Sister Dennie said the parishes had not begun the process toward following the restored order and simultaneously celebrating confirmation and Eucharist.

"I believe in it," she said, "but it's coming

Guidelines for parishes

The diocesan Department of Evangelization and Catechesis, as well as the Office for Liturgy, help parishes interested in restoring the order of baptism, confirmation and Eucharist, beginning with the education of staff and parish leadership.

From there the staff and parish leadership discern whether or not the restored order is the next step for them, according to Sister Karen Dietz, SSJ, coordinator of sacramental catechesis.

For most parishes, this process takes two to three years, she said, and it may take one to three years to implement the restored order. Three years after the first step is taken in which the restored order is implemented, the child will have first Communion, either with or without confirmation, she said.

The focus of the guidelines for the family for full initiation is that the church is the most important thing to consider, she said.

It also is important to consider whether the potential confirmand is formed in his or her family, attending religious education classes or Catholic school, attending Mass, and Mass regularly. Other considerations are: Does the family have a prayer life? Do they participate in the mission of the church? Are their faith lived out more than on Sunday mornings?

a long ways from where a lot of people are. A lot of people are still thinking of confirmation in later adolescence, so this was a big step this year."

When any parish decides to take that next step, it will be following a path first blazed not only by Sacred Heart, but also by St. Margaret Mary Parish in Apalachin. "We were sort of the pilot," remarked Cathy Wunder, who became the parish's religious education coordinator this year.

St. Margaret Mary's had begun to introduce the restored order under the former pastor, Father Dave Simon. Now parents are accustomed to it, she said, and children, parents and sponsors are educated according to diocesan guidelines. The guidelines call for preparation of no more than three months, in lieu of a two-year program that gave children many activities to complete.

That's not to say the children shouldn't be doing the former activities, but they should not be seen as "hoops to jump through in order to be confirmed," Sister Dietz said.

The diocese encourages participation in ministry through acts of service that may not relate directly to a church, she said, such as raking leaves for elderly neighbors.

After confirmation, children at St. Margaret Mary may choose to participate in such ministries as the children's choir or to be usher-greeters with their families, Wunder said. "Part of confirmation we stress is if they are old enough, mature enough to know what they want to do, they are old enough to help in church," she remarked.

A big part of the challenge for religious educators is finding materials to help prepare children for both confirmation and Eucharist together, Wunder said. Last year she reviewed for a national company the only known such program.

Schellman said a dozen or so dioceses in the United States are working with the restored order, parish by parish or by diocesan mandate. Outside the United States, he said, the Scottish bishops recently decided to move to the restored order, and more than half the dioceses in Australia have gone to it.

"All around the world, the discussion is on," he said. "That doesn't mean the majority is doing this. But there is a very significant trend in this direction."