

New confirmation process fosters sense of belonging

By Michelle Martin | Staff Writer

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Auxiliary Bishop George Rassas administers the sacrament of confirmation to Nicholas Karczynski at St. Stephen Deacon and Martyr in Tinley Park on March 9, 2013. (Karen Callaway/Chicago Catholic)

The families of young people preparing for confirmation in the Archdiocese of Chicago could notice some changes in the process in the near future.

After about a year of work, the archdiocese has created new policies that emphasize the formation of young people as missionary disciples, in line with Renew My Church, said Patricia Malinowski, the archdiocese's senior coordinator for catechetical ministry.

“In ‘Evangelii Gaudium’ (‘The Joy of the Gospel’), Pope Francis asks the universal church to be a church of missionary disciples that proclaim a spirit of evangelization,” she said. “This sets the tone for us to help youth develop an appreciation of the value of our Catholic faith and the blessing of a joyous sacramental life.”

Perhaps the biggest practical change is that the new policies say that confirmation formation should be a two-year process. Previously, it was left up to parishes, Malinowski said, and while many already had two-year programs, some tried to accomplish everything in one year.

“Children and adolescents tend to want instantaneous results,” she said. “Sacramental preparation over the two years will allow the time necessary to gradually develop an intimate relationship with Jesus Christ and the true meaning of being a Catholic in today’s world as missionary disciples in service.”

That means candidates must not just know church teaching and understand the sacrament, they must feel it in their hearts.

“We all know we have to go from the head to the heart,” Malinowski said. “Sometimes that can be the hardest 12 inches to move.”

The policy calls on parishes to more fully involve candidates' families and their wider parish communities, Malinowski said.

“The new policy enlivens participation of the family and the entire faith community,” she said. “This is an open door to revisit how we catechize and foster missionary discipleship. It is time to upgrade our models and methods of catechesis and evangelization to establish a sense of Catholic identity and belonging to the Catholic Church.”

That sense of belonging is crucial, especially for adolescents.

“For most youth, the fulcrum is a true sense of belonging to the Catholic Church,” Malinowski said.

The feeling of belonging has to come not just from candidates' parishes, but also from their families.

“Faith-filled parents that witness to the Gospel are the most influential in a child's life as to whether they will stay as a practicing Catholic or leave,” Malinowski said.

Parishes will have until the beginning of the 2018-2019 school year to implement the new policies, which were developed with input from the presbyteral council, the policy committee, staff in the department of Parish Vitality and Mission and directors of religious education, youth ministers and school principals and teachers.

Janet Caschetta, the coordinator of youth catechesis at St. John of the Cross Parish in Western Springs, said her parish has been using a two-year program for years, with those in the first year — usually seventh-graders — focusing on Jesus and the New Testament, and those in the second year focusing on confirmation and morality, applying what

they learned in the first year. A one-year program — especially one that runs just from September to May — just isn't long enough.

“The whole piece is important because it serves as a model for continuing to grow in your faith throughout your life,” Caschetta said. “Our faith is so rich and deep that we cannot adequately pass it on in eight months.”

Having more time allows candidates to go deeper as they fulfill other requirements, such as researching saints to choose a confirmation patron and giving service.

Malinowski said the new guidelines call for confirmation service projects to be rooted more clearly in Catholic social teaching, once more to help young people grow into missionary disciples.

Cascetta said adolescents need to explore different kinds of service.

“I don't talk about service hours,” she said. “I talk about service opportunities. We want them to have 20 different service opportunities.”

At least some of those should be done with their families, Cascetta said, modelling Christian service that lasts a lifetime.

“It's not about checking off something on a list of requirements,” she said. “My goal is for them to discover what they love to do and how they can use their talents in life.”

Doing so will help connect them to the wider community of the church, a connection that they can maintain through the rest of their lives.

“The church is always there,” she said. “It’s a community of faith that they can return to wherever they are.”

To read the new confirmation policies, visit pvm.archchicago.org/lifelong-formation/confirmation-policy.

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Confirmation Policy

The Archdiocese of Chicago joyfully announces the promulgation of a new Confirmation sacramental preparation policy for adolescents effective July 1, 2017. This signifies a blessing for the entire archdiocese. It is from the well-spring of God's love for each one of us that a walk of faith become manifest. Through our Baptism, we become adopted children of God. Our sacramental journey united with the vibrancy of community continues to give new life as children and adolescents seek this sacred path.

Establishing a lifelong sacramental life in Jesus Christ takes time. That is why the new policy enlivens a two year timeframe for sacramental preparation archdiocesan-wide. Quality time is needed to foster ongoing conversion for youth that results in a sense of true belonging to the Catholic Church as missionary disciples.

The new policy establishes normative standards while allowing for growth and innovation through *Renew My Church*.

Confirmation Policy (PDF)

Confirmation Guidelines (PDF)

A summary of the policy sections include:

- § 1900 Sacramental Preparation for Adolescent Candidates Seeking Confirmation
- § 1900.1 Confirmation Readiness
- § 1900.2 Program Uniformity
- § 1900.3 Community Responsibility
- § 1900.4 Missionary Service
- § 1900.5 Annual Retreat
- General Instructions for §1900



Over the next two years, this policy will be adopted throughout the entire archdiocese. A time of grace will allow for the planning, development, and implementation of policy expectations. September 2017 to June 2018 constitutes a time of grace for Confirmation sacramental preparation programs currently offering one year of sacramental preparation. The Office of Lifelong Formation will serve to ensure a seamless transition.

Please contact Patricia Malinowski at pmalinowski@archchicago.org or 312.534.8053 for questions on this new policy in English. Please contact Adrian Badillo at abadillo@archchicago.org or 312.534.5383 for questions on this policy in Spanish.

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