



Subject: St. Matthew the Evangelist Confirmation Formation Requirements

Introduction. “Preparation for the sacrament of Confirmation starts at Baptism, through which we enter into the body of Christ. This initiation continues through the Eucharist and is completed in the sacrament of Confirmation but is not the end of formation in the Christian life of virtue” (from the Guidelines for the Sacrament of Confirmation in the Archdiocese of Omaha, February 2013).

The following are the St. Matthew the Evangelist parish requirements for final preparation for the sacrament of Confirmation. These requirements apply to candidates preparing as students of the St. Matthew School or youth in the parish Religious Education (RE) program. These requirements are based upon the Archdiocese of Omaha’s guidelines. Typically, candidates accomplish these requirements during the candidate’s 8th grade school year as described below.

Roles. There are three primary parties involved in a candidate’s formation—1) the Candidate, 2) the Candidate’s parent or guardian, and 3) the Candidate’s chosen sponsor. Secondary roles are the parish DRE and Pastor who provide Candidates the guidance and catechesis for formation. Additionally, the Pastor indicates to the Archbishop whether or not the Candidate is adequately prepared, i.e. has met the formation requirements listed below. But, it is the three primary parties below who are ultimately responsible for meeting the requirements. Brief highlights of these roles are:

- *Candidate* – **Be** open to the Holy Spirit forming you; **Cooperate** with your parents’/guardians’ and sponsors’ guidance; **Be** committed and **Work** hard—Do Your Best; **Keep** your sponsor informed; **Meet** deadlines!
- *Parent/Guardian* – **Be** a role model of Catholicism; honestly **Share** your own faith life; **Encourage** the candidate; **Keep** the sponsor informed; **Hold** the candidate accountable.
- *Sponsor* – **Be** a role model of Catholicism; honestly **Share** your own faith life; **Encourage** the candidate; **Hold** candidate accountable; **Be** a spiritual companion (*confidential* but not *private*)—help the candidate recognize God’s movement in his/her formation.

Four Components of Formation. There are four primary components of Confirmation formation—1) catechesis; 2) retreat experience; 3) service; and 4) Mass attendance. The requirements for each of these components will be explained in greater detail below and discussed at the candidate-sponsor meeting. Besides these four components, another key contributor to the candidates’ formation is their Confirmation sponsor. Prior to their receiving the Sacrament of Confirmation, the candidate will be asked to write a letter to the Pastor explaining how these components of formation helped prepare them for receiving the Sacrament. A sample letter format is provided. The components of formation follow.

Sponsor. The candidate must choose a sponsor to accompany them during their final formation preparation. The sponsor should set a good example in their own faith life, be able to encourage the candidate during final preparation, and help them to recognize and communicate God’s graces during final formation preparation. Choosing a sponsor should be a thoughtful process and involve collaboration between the candidate and his/her parent(s) or guardian. The Confirmation candidate should discern, with help from his/her parent or guardian, who they’d like to ask to be their sponsor. They should have asked and gotten a commitment from their sponsor by the beginning of October of their 8th grade school year so that both candidate and sponsor can be fully engaged in the candidate’s Sacrament of Confirmation final preparation. The candidate and sponsor will continue on the formation journey until the Confirmation Mass which occurs the following spring. Although some candidate-sponsor faith-sharing interactions can be done via telephone, messaging, etc., the sponsor should be available, to their utmost, in certain face-to-face circumstances with the candidate. These settings

include attending Mass together (more on that below); the candidate-sponsor meeting(s); and the Confirmation Mass and associated rehearsal. When choosing a sponsor, some criteria for the sponsor are: cannot be the candidate's parent; may be either gender and not necessarily the same gender as the candidate; must be at least sixteen (16) years old; should be sufficiently mature for this role; must be a Catholic in good standing with the Catholic Church; and has received the sacraments of Baptism, Eucharist, and Confirmation. In the letter to the Pastor, the candidate will write a short reflection on how they decided on the sponsor they chose and some highlights of the candidate-sponsor relationship during their formation for Confirmation.

Catechesis. As mentioned above, one of the components of formation is catechesis—the process of teaching and learning about the Catholic faith. The primary purpose of catechesis in the candidate's formation is to teach that Confirmation: 1) increases and deepens the grace of Baptism, imprinting an indelible character on their soul; 2) strengthens the baptismal conferral of the Holy Spirit in order to incorporate them more firmly in Christ; 3) strengthens their bond with the Church and its mission; 4) increases in them the gifts and fruits of the Holy Spirit; and 5) is a Rite of the Church with unique symbols and prayers as conferred the Archbishop (the ordinary minister). The ways the candidate is catechized includes religious teaching in parish school or RE; parents, sponsor, or other Catholic witness; and retreats or other particular forums as established and announced by the Pastor or Director of Religious Education (DRE).

Retreat Experience. A second component of formation is the retreat experience. The retreat is typically scheduled in September or October of the candidate's 8th grade school year. The retreat is an exciting opportunity to encounter Jesus in a unique and personal way. It will include prayer, Catholic teaching, and personal witness of our call to a deepening relationship with God—Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. Each candidate is expected to participate in the retreat experience as coordinated by the DRE. This must be a high priority in the candidate's schedule. If, due to extenuating circumstances, the candidate cannot attend the scheduled retreat, the family must notify the DRE as soon as known so that they can begin the process of finding an alternative to the primary retreat experience. In the letter to the Pastor, the candidate will write a short reflection on their retreat experience.

Service. The third component of formation is for the candidate to better understand the call to serve the Church and the world. Through preparing for the sacrament of Confirmation, the candidate should start to better understand the unique charisms (gifts) that the Holy Spirit is calling him or her to lovingly use for the service of neighbor and ultimately to God. Hopefully, this insight into their individual calling will lead to a lifelong passion to serve with the unique charisms given to each person. The formation program will use the corporal and spiritual works of mercy as the basis for service. The candidate, with the guidance of their sponsor, parents, etc. is asked to prayerfully reflect on which of the works of mercy that they feel called to serve. The candidate will then be asked to select one of the spiritual or one of the corporal works of mercy as the basis of a service opportunity. The candidate then should spend a total of *at least seven hours*, spread over *at least four separate occasions*, in service of the work of mercy that they felt most called to serve. In the letter to the Pastor, the candidate will write a short reflection on the discernment and performance of the work of mercy that he or she chose.

Mass Attendance. The fourth component of formation is Mass attendance. Attending Mass on Sundays and holy days of obligation is one of the five precepts of the Catholic Church. The five precepts are “meant to guarantee to the faithful the very necessary minimum in the spirit of prayer and moral effort, in the growth in love of God and neighbor,” (Catechism of the Catholic Church, CCC, #2041). In the letter to the Pastor, the candidate will write a short reflection on his or her spiritual experience during three Masses, one of which should be attended and discussed with their sponsor.

Saint Names or Virtue. Finally, choosing a saint name, or a Virtue, to be confirmed under is a highly encouraged custom. In participating in this tradition, the candidate explores the holy men and women recognized as Saints by the Catholic Church to learn more about their lives and virtues. The candidate can then chose a Saint that best exemplifies some of the traits they see, or hope to develop, within themselves. An alternative to choosing a saint is to choose a virtue of the faith (CCC #2156) to be

confirmed under. In either case, candidates should take care to choose a name that is reverent, reflects great Christian character. As well, the candidate and parents/guardians should remember that the Archbishop will address the candidate by this name (or virtue) during the Confirmation rite. In the letter to the Pastor, the candidate will write a short reflection on how and why they chose their confirmation name or virtue.

Candidate's Letter to the Pastor. This letter summarizes the Candidate's formation experience. Candidates should make their best effort to note, and discuss with their sponsor, their spiritual awareness and growth during their Confirmation formation. The candidate will be responsible for thinking about and writing a reflection on each of the formation components discussed above. These reflections will be written in the form of a letter to the Pastor. This letter helps the Candidate, with the assistance of the sponsor, to reflect on his/her formation journey. As well, the letter helps assure the Pastor that the Candidate has thoughtfully and prayerfully participated in all the components of formation mentioned above before the Pastor presents the Candidate to the Archbishop for the Rite of the Sacrament of Confirmation. To help them write the letter, Candidates should discuss their experiences with their sponsor and/or parents to gain additional insights to help them recognize and communicate the Holy Spirit's graces during these formation experiences. Unless coordinated otherwise with the DRE, Candidates should give the DRE their letter to the Pastor **by the first Wednesday in March** of their Confirmation year. Some questions for the Candidates to reflect upon follow. As well, a sample letter format is provided. An alternative to the letter to the Pastor can be a face-to-face Candidate-led discussion on the Candidate's formation experience, but that must be specifically coordinated with the DRE and be done by the deadline mentioned above.

- Sponsor:
 - Why did you select your sponsor?
 - How has your sponsor been useful to you in your formation on your journey to Confirmation?
- Retreat Experience:
 - What did you find useful and/or learn about your faith at the retreat experience?
- Service:
 - How did you decide which of the works of mercy you based your service on?
 - What was your experience like while performing the work of mercy? Account for how you spent your time (minimum *seven hours over four occasions*) performing this work of mercy.
 - How might your experience in performing this work of mercy affect you in the course of your life?
- Mass Attendance: Summarize the three Masses that you chose for reflection.
 - What special or unique fruits (insights or experiences) occurred during these Masses?
 - What are some highlights from the discussion that you and your sponsor had on the Mass that you shared together?
- Saint Name or Virtue:
 - Why did you choose this Saint or Virtue?

Conclusion. The primary intent of these Sacrament of Confirmation opportunities is for the candidate to prayerfully reflect on the graces of their ever-deepening relationship of love for God and neighbor during their Confirmation formation. It is important to remember that Confirmation is not some sort of graduation! It's the beginning of the newly Confirmed disciple's taking ever more increasing responsibility to continue to grow in holiness. And, they will be more empowered to do so by the grace of the Sacrament of Confirmation.

Sample Confirmation "Letter to the Pastor"

Due 1st Wednesday of March

This is just a format guideline.

Candidates should use their own words.

Date

Dear Father Rigatuso,

I am looking forward to my upcoming Sacrament of Confirmation which I anticipate celebrating on May xx, 20xx. I believe that I have prepared well for the Sacrament. I would like to share some of the highlights from my preparation with you in the letter below.

One of the main highlights has been the faith-filled relationship that I developed with my sponsor. My sponsor's name is xxxx and he/she is (describe your relationship here, ex. "my Grandpa.")

Continue describing with a paragraph.

A second highlight from my formation was the experience I had during my Confirmation retreat at xxx.

Continue describing with a paragraph.

I also had a good experience in my Confirmation preparation by performing service hours in a work of mercy.

Continue describing with a paragraph.

Another highlight during Confirmation preparation was reflecting on some of the Masses that I attended during formation.

Continue describing with a paragraph.

Finally, I'd like to share why I chose the Confirmation Saint that I did, St. xxx.

Continue describing with a paragraph.

Although it has been hard work at times, I am glad that I did all this preparation for my Confirmation. It has made me closer to God already and I look forward to growing even closer to Him by being Confirmed.

Respectfully in Christ,

Ima Disciple

Ima Disciple