

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 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 7th and 8th grade school years as described below.

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.

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 start discerning, with help from his/her parent or guardian, who they’d like to ask to be their sponsor during the early months of their 7th grade school year. They should have asked and gotten a commitment from their sponsor by late winter of their 7th grade school year so that both candidate and sponsor can attend a meeting typically scheduled during March of the candidate’s 7th grade year. The candidate and sponsor will continue on the formation journey for about the next year until the Confirmation Mass 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; 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. 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 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 so that they can begin the process of finding an alternative to the primary retreat experience. 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 details of the service requirement will be more fully explained in the candidate-sponsor meeting, but the highlights of the requirement follow. 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 and one of the corporal works of mercy as the basis of a service opportunity. The candidate then should spend a total of at least five hours, spread over at least three separate occasions, in service of the spiritual and the corporal work of mercy that they felt most called to serve. The candidate will write a short reflection on the discernment and performance of both of the works 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). The candidate will write a short reflection on his or her spiritual experience during six Masses, three of which should be attended and discussed with their sponsor.

Saint Names. Finally, although not required, choosing a saint name 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 choose 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 or mystery of the faith (CCC #2156) to be confirmed under. In either case, candidates should take care to not choose a name that is foreign to Christian sentiment and should remember that the Archbishop will address the candidate by this name (or virtue/mystery) during the Confirmation rite. The candidate will write a short reflection on how and why they chose their confirmation name.

Conclusion. The primary intent of these confirmation requirements 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. These highlights will be more fully explained in the candidate-sponsor-parent meeting.