

## **St. Philomena Catholic Church**

May 1, 2020

Back in the 1970's and early 1980's, many dioceses (including ours) moved the celebration of the sacrament of Confirmation from seventh or eighth grade (where it had been habitually placed since the early 1900's) to the age of sixteen or seventeen years. The rationale for this was sound; those bishops and catechists desired that young people have enough maturity to choose for themselves to receive this sacrament.

Whenever there is a procedural change, however, we always arrive in the land of unforeseen consequences. And among the unforeseen consequences in this regard were that many people began to regard Confirmation as something earned and not as a gift from the Holy Spirit, the preparation for which interfered with good and wholesome activities of high school.

And so fewer and fewer young people were being confirmed. Still worse, for many it seemed to mark a 'graduation' from the practice of the Catholic faith. As a young seminarian and priest, I had great reservations about moving the sacrament out of junior high. One of the nice things about living a long time is that occasionally, one's point of view is vindicated.

In the last three or four years, Archbishop Sartain had been exploring the possibility of moving confirmation back to middle school, and given tacit approval for some parishes to do so experimentally. The results were promising, and so now it is the policy of the Archdiocese that Confirmation be conferred in seventh grade or its equivalent.

Before Covid 19, and its attendant disruption of our lives occurred, I had planned on preaching on the subject for a couple of Sundays this spring. That opportunity having passed us by, I thought that a letter to you outlining our provisional plans for this would be useful. I say 'provisional', because we do not know what the future will hold in terms of our being able to gather for school, church services, etc. We will need to make adjustments, or perhaps even delay its inauguration for a year.

So: In the future, proximate preparation for Confirmation will be the part of the seventh grade religion curriculum in the school and religious education. There will be one celebration of confirmation presided over by one of the bishops, the date of

which is determined annually by the parish in collaboration with the Archbishop's office.

There will be a couple years of transition before we arrive at this reasonable norm. We have youngsters who will be seventh or eighth graders this coming year, who reasonably expected to enroll in the parish confirmation program in ninth or tenth grade. We will invite them to attend special Confirmation sessions on Sunday afternoons, along with the religious education students. Our need for parental assistance presence will be acute in order to accomplish this. However, don't let the apparent untidiness of all of this deter anyone from seeking formation for Confirmation for their seventh and eighth grade children. As my late mother used to say, "We'll figure it out!"

I recognize that this is a cumbersome solution, but it will only be for one year, as we adjust to the new schedule. It will, however, make for an extraordinarily large confirmation class (in the neighborhood of 125 students), and that number would be most difficult to accommodate in our parish church for the mass of confirmation itself. I am presently negotiating with, shall we say, other suitable venues, where we might celebrate the sacrament in more comfort. Stay tuned.

Invoking the intercession of our Mother, Our Lady Help of the Sick, I am

Yours in Christ,

Father Steve