

# **Confirmation Preparation Program Handbook**



**Enlighten us, Holy Spirit**

**Assumption Church**

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## **Confirmation....**

- ♥ welcomes you into the church as the third sacrament of initiation, linked with Baptism and Eucharist.
- ♥ completes your initiation into the faith community of the Roman Catholic Church.
- ♥ recognizes your developing spiritual nature, and
- ♥ is a gift of God through the Holy Spirit.

## **Assumption Church's Confirmation Program Philosophy:**

The goal of the Confirmation Preparation Program is to nurture, enhance, and deepen the spirituality of our youth through the religious education process. During this time candidates are guided toward the maturity level of a fully initiated adult Christian. Using an experiential learning process of community service, retreats and fellowship the primary objective will be to understand and bring to life the mission Christ calls each one of us to live out as an Apostle of His love.

## **Structure of the Confirmation Process:**

The Director of Religious Education and the Youth Minister are responsible for the process. Included in this process are trained adult catechists and junior high and senior high peer mentors who desire to share their faith and journey with our young candidates.

## **Requirements For Acceptance:**

In order to be accepted into the confirmation program, each candidate must meet the following criteria:

1. Is a registered Parishioner at Assumption: The candidate's family must be registered parishioners of the parish in order to enter the program.
2. Be of High School Age: Each candidate must be a minimum of a freshman in high school.
3. Has Completed the Proper Formal Catechetical Instruction: Each candidate must have completed a minimum of grades 6-7-8 in a parish catechetical program or a parochial school. Individuals who have not completed such and wish to enter the program will be treated on an individual basis.



### **About Our Program:**

Assumption's Confirmation program is designed for the youth of our parish who have completed their faith formation studies either through a religious education program or a catholic school program. It is intended to be a two year sacramental preparation program for all youth regardless of where they go to High School.

The Year One groups meet one time per month from September through May following the 5:30 p.m. Youth and Family Mass. The dates of the meetings are indicated on the calendar of lessons given out at the first meeting in September.

The Year Two groups meet two times per month from September through May following the 5:30 p.m. Youth and Family Mass. The dates of the meetings are indicated on the calendar of lessons given out at the first meeting in September.

The youth meet in small group settings with a lead catechist and junior or senior high school peer ministers. Group meetings will take place either in a room at the Ministry Center or in the Parish Center. In addition the candidates are required to attend two retreat experiences with the large group and complete 25 hours of community service over a two year period.

### **Attendance:**

**Attendance to all the monthly scheduled sessions on the calendar of lessons is mandatory.**

If a candidate is going to be absent, it is the parent's responsibility to contact by telephone both the catechist and the Youth Minister. You must state the reason for the absence if an answering machine is reached. Candidates are expected to be at all small group sessions and all required events unless illness or family emergency arises. Sports events/practices, trips, weekends away, homework, and all other reasons are not acceptable for being absent. Any candidate who misses more than one required event within the program year will need to have a meeting with the Youth Minister to determine the appropriate course of action. Excessive absences may lead to the postponement of receiving Confirmation by one year.

### **Cancellation of Meetings:**

The authority to cancel small group meetings due to weather conditions or other unforeseen circumstances belongs to the Director of Religious Education. A phone call will be made to the catechists and a mass email will be sent out to all families. Pending on the time of the day the sessions were cancelled announcements will be made at Mass.

## **The Confirmation Process:**

The confirmation process models the Rite of Christian Initiation for Adults, (R.C.I.A.) in preparing for, accepting, and committing our youth to full initiation into the Church. The process is divided up into four stages.

The first stage is the Period of Invitation where the candidates are invited to participate in the program. The content of the studies are focused on the actual life experiences of the young candidates and methods that are enjoyable and geared toward the building of community. The end of this stage is marked by the Rite of Entrance celebrated during one of the 5:30 p.m. Youth and Family Masses. In the Rite of Entrance we celebrate the candidate's willingness to enter freely and wholeheartedly into the process of preparation. We encourage the candidate's families and sponsors to be available for this celebration.

The second stage is the Period of Formation. It includes a variety of strategies intended to deepen the candidates' understanding of Jesus, of the meaning of his message, of the nature of the Christian church, and of the implications of a personal commitment to all these realities. The end of this stage is marked by the Rite of Covenant which is celebrated during one of the 5:30 p.m. Youth and Family Masses. In this Rite the community tells the candidates that the church has appreciated their participation in the process of preparation and wishes to express its continuing openness to, gratitude for, and support of the candidates as they enter into the more intense, immediate preparation for confirmation. For their part, the candidates sign their names in a special book as a sign of their appreciation for the community's support and as a pledge to enter in a more deeply personal way into the immediate preparation for the sacrament.

The third stage is the Period of Reflection. These sessions are intended to be more prayerful and reflective than the previous two. We end this period with the Rite of Confirmation. This date is ultimately determined by the Bishop and at this time will not be available to us until late September.

The final stage is the Period of Mission. Confirmation is unending. It is during this stage that the confirmed individual puts into practice the things learned during the formation stage and begins to actively fulfill the responsibility of a fully initiated Catholic Christian. We often celebrate this stage with a social event in May.

In total there will be three Rites celebrated throughout the process: The Rite of Entrance, The Rite of Covenant and The Rite of Confirmation. The first two represent symbolic steps towards the Sacrament of Confirmation. Parents and sponsors are encouraged to attend these Rites to show support for the candidates.

## **The Role of the Parents:**

The Church teaches that parents are the first and foremost catechists of their children. Certainly parents have a great capacity for influencing the faith development and religious formation of their children. Therefore, the parents' essential role is to encourage, support, and affirm your teen's involvement in the confirmation process.

As your teen progresses through the program, there are opportunities for you to assume this responsibility. The calendar of lessons provides the goals of studies for a particular session. Become familiar with the material being presented and discuss with your teen what he or she has learned. We encourage you to reach out to the catechists to find out how you can become more involved.

Also, it is just as important that you are a witness to your own faith through your words and actions; praying with your family and attending mass are ways to be witnesses to your faith. Additionally supporting your teen and our program by attending meetings, reading the materials provided, guiding your teen's choice of a name and a faith-filled sponsor, supporting your son or daughter in planning and performing Christian service, providing transportation to and from church related meetings and functions are examples of ways you can be involved in their preparation process.

Another way to continue your own faith formation is through "Why Catholic" which Assumption is proud to offer. "Why Catholic" is a small group faith-sharing program which is offered several times per year. This program contains Scripture passages and reflections related to sections of the Catechism of the Catholic Church. Once a week for six weeks, small groups meet for 90 minutes to share what that content says to them, and listen to what it says to the other group members. Faith sharing with "Why Catholic" can benefit you in several ways: 1) it can deepen your personal faith; 2) Renew your spirituality; 3) Strengthen your relationship with Christ; and 4) Broaden your understanding of our Catholic roots and identity. Lastly, what you experience and learn from "Why Catholic" will help you in your role as the primary educator in the religious formation of your children. For more information on "Why Catholic" call the church office.

Lastly and probably most importantly, pray for your teen as well as others participating in this process.





### **The Role of the Candidates:**

One question that is often asked, "Why does confirmation happen in a time of a young person's life when he or she is already so busy with other things in his/her life?" The answer is very simple, but often hard to accept, "Because a young person is so busy with other things in his/her life!"

It is during this period that a young person begins to personify God. God is becoming a real person, rather than some distant figure that we learn about and that our parents tell us about. It is at this time teens begin to explore his/her own independence. With this independence, a teen can become involved in life situations he/she has never had to face before. It is at this time a young person looks critically at the faith and values handed on to him/her by his/her parents. It is at this time, the adolescent will begin to question, doubt, analyze his/her faith in order to come to a conclusion of either personally accepting what has been taught or refusing to accept what has been taught.

During this period of invitation, formation & reflection, the candidate will be given the opportunity to really begin to understand his or her faith. They will come to know what it is like to be a part of a Christian community as an adult. They will learn to use the tools of their faith and the catholic tradition to help them in difficult situations. They will form a bond amongst their peers they never thought could exist.

In order for the candidates to fully and freely be open to the preparation period, they are expected to participate in the program sessions, retreat experiences and Rites. They are to have a personal desire to receive Confirmation, a willingness to more fully witness to Christ by word and action, and a "yes" to the responsibility to be an active member of the Church, spreading and defending the faith according to one's ability. Regular attendance and full participation is required.

### **Confirmation Names:**

To reinforce the connections between Baptism and Confirmation, candidates are encouraged to be confirmed with their baptismal or given name. The act of reaffirming the name given them at Baptism is a way for them to confirm their baptismal promises. Candidates who decide to take a new Confirmation name should be encouraged to do so thoughtfully and seriously. The name might reflect a Christian ideal or goal or value they wish to strive for. Perhaps they wish to honor a saint whose holiness or charitable works have inspired them.

### **The Role of the Catechists:**

The catechists are the official representatives of the entire parish community who have all volunteered their time for this important ministry. They will spend the most concentrated amount of time with the candidates. They all have a desire not only to lead and guide young people but also to let them go, to free them to pursue their unique relationship with God and to share their gifts with others. They have a sense of commitment to and affection for the Church. They have been trained in the program's process. In addition, all adult volunteers are required to participate in the Diocese sponsored "Protecting God's Children" program and have a criminal background check.

### **Curriculum Overview:**

The two-year confirmation preparation program Assumption Church uses as a guide is *Confirmed in a Faithful Community* published by St. Mary's Press. This program is grounded in contemporary initiation theology, rooted in the life of an evangelizing and catechizing community of believers, and focused on initiating young people into ongoing faith development within the church.

*Confirmed in a Faithful Community* does not include a student textbook but rather a handbook. This handbook is a supplement to the learning process that is presented by the catechists. The handbook includes brief summaries of major themes, reflection and discussion activities, journal-writing exercises, and more. Each candidate will be given their own handbook at each meeting. The handbook will be collected by the catechist at the end of each meeting for safekeeping. At the end of the two year period, the candidate will be given the handbook to take home as a lifelong reference.

### **Confirmation Retreats:**

Confirmation retreats provide young people with an extended experience of prayer, activity, and faith-sharing. Retreats are designed to help young people recognize their need for the Holy Spirit in order to live the Christian life and to witness to Christ in their everyday lives. Candidates are required to attend the two retreat experiences Assumption offers during the two year preparation process.

## **The Role of the Sponsor:**

The sponsor is an important part of the preparation for Confirmation. At Baptism, parents chose two sponsors or godparents for their child – people who made a commitment to be an example of the faith and help raise them in the Catholic way of life. For Confirmation, they are once again inviting someone – whether it is one of their godparents or another person – to serve as a sponsor. The sponsor's role in Confirmation involves much more than standing behind the candidate as the bishop confirms. It is to be the beginning, or the continuation, of a lasting relationship of mentoring and apprenticeship.

A sponsor must be a fully initiated Catholic (one who has celebrated baptism, confirmation, and Eucharist) who leads a life in harmony with the faith and the role to be undertaken. It is recommended that the sponsor have local residency, to ensure consistent involvement throughout the Confirmation process. They must also have a positive and comfortable relationship with the candidate. A sponsor must not be the parent of the one to be baptized.

Once the candidates submit their sponsor names to us, we reach out to the sponsor via a letter explaining our process and their expectations. We also will include a calendar so that they can make themselves available to come to the Rites and attend Mass on a regular basis (if possible).

## **Christian Service:**

Christian love is manifested in service to other people. Jesus came as one who serves. He declared that, at the end of time, he will judge us on how well we have served him through other people. A vital part of the candidates' preparation for living a full Christian life, then, is developing a habit of service. We encourage the candidates to undertake meaningful and, preferably, ongoing service in conjunction with their study of the spiritual and corporal works of mercy.

Parents and sponsors should assist the candidates in discussing ideas for service and helping them to experience different opportunities. In addition, Youth Ministry will offer opportunities for the youth to come together to carry out service projects. Candidates need to look for opportunities where they are really making a difference in the community. Helping at the soup kitchen, assisting with the Habitat of Humanity by building homes, visiting the elderly in nursing homes are a few of the volunteer opportunities available in our community. For additional information on service opportunities available to youth go to: [www.vmcnj.org](http://www.vmcnj.org) or <http://www.vmcnj.org/docs/YouthDirectorynewpdf.pdf> for a directory of organizations engaging in Youth volunteerism.

## **Standards Expected of Our Youth:**

- Candidates are expected to attend Mass on a regular basis. On the night the groups meet, the youth are encouraged to attend the 5:30 p.m. Youth & Family Mass.
- Respect for the catechists, Confirmation Team, the building and all church property is expected.
- Being on time and having regular attendance is expected.
- The use of all electronic devices including but not limited to, cell phones, palm pilots, MP3 players, portable compact disc players, tape recorders, etc. are strictly prohibited during Mass and the sessions. These items will be confiscated if they are seen being used. Text messaging has become an issue during the Youth & Family Mass. It is not appropriate for that type of behavior to occur during Mass or during the group meetings.
- There will be zero tolerance for disrespectful, violent, or abusive behavior of any type. Bullying, in particular, will not be tolerated.
- There will be zero tolerance of harassment of any kind, including, but not limited to, verbal harassment, gender bias, threats, sexual harassment, and foul language.
- There will be zero tolerance for substance abuse of any kind, including, but not limited to drugs, inhalants, alcohol, and tobacco.
- No object which may be construed as a weapon or use of said object as a weapon will be tolerated on-site at parish programs.

We are very proud of the behavior of the young people who have gone through the program in the past. However, we wish to remind candidates and their parents that proper behavior and conduct is expected at Assumption during Mass, the small group meetings, at the retreat centers, and anywhere you go within the community as a representative of Assumption Church.

Any behavior or conduct problems will be addressed directly with the Youth Minister and Director of Religious Education.

**Dismissal Form Public School  
Zorach v. Clauson – 343U.S.306 (1956)**

This US Supreme Court case ruled that it is not unconstitutional for a public school student to attend religious instruction at a parochial school or church event even if this should disrupt the public school schedule.

By “public school schedule” it has been interpreted to include sporting events, band competitions, school plays, and any other school sponsored event.

Any type of “punishment” for missing or leaving an event early is NOT permitted and is a violation of the law.

Therefore school personnel cannot:

- Threaten the student in any way (example: removal from the team)
- Mock or make fun of a child’s religious convictions
- Point out the reason why a student is not present or leaving early to other student or staff
- Place penalty such as “extra laps,” “benching,” or an other type of action, which is placed upon the student because of his/her absence or early dismissal.

**If your family has a problem with a teacher or coach,  
Please do not hesitate to call our office.**