

ORIGINAL ORDER OF CHRISTIAN INITIATION

In July of this year, Bishop Thomas John Paprocki sent out a letter addressed to the whole Diocese of Springfield- in- Illinois. This letter announced the implementation of the original order of the Sacraments of Initiation – Baptism – Confirmation – Eucharist (B-C-E). In order to comply with the Bishop’s wishes, St. Patrick’s and Sacred Heart Parishes will revise their sacramental practices. The Sacrament of Reconciliation will take place in the early part of 2019, as usual, for our 2nd graders. When they are in 3rd grade, they will be confirmed and then receive First Communion, thus keeping the original order of the Sacraments of Initiation (B-C-E). The Bishop’s letter states that no First Communions shall be celebrated in the academic school year 2018-19. First Communion will be celebrated in 2020 for the 3rd grade.

HISTORY

To understand the original order of the celebration of the Sacraments of Initiation, we only have to look at the Easter Vigil. On Holy Saturday at the Easter Vigil, the people who journeyed through the Rite of Christian Initiation were first Baptized, then Confirmed, and lastly received the Holy Eucharist (B-C-E in that order). The early church celebrated entry into the faith in its early centuries. When Emperor Constantine allowed the open practice of the Christian faith, the Church experienced growing pains. With the Church no longer outlawed, whole families - adults, children, and infants - were baptized at one time.

With the increased numbers, there was a problem, and that centered around the ordinary minister of Baptism. The Eastern Orthodox Church allowed the priests to confirm after Baptism. Whether adult, child, or infant, the newly baptized was confirmed and would receive First Communion, even infants. *“I have attended an Eastern Orthodox Mass. The Communion Bread looks like little squares of sugar cookies and are floating in the chalice. The priest has a small spoon and the communicant receives the Precious Body and Blood of Christ from that spoon at the same time.”* This practice is still continued today.

In the Western Church (Roman Catholics), the ordinary minister of the Sacrament of Initiation is the bishop. As numbers of the baptized folk increased, the Confirmation of the faithful was delayed. It was much easier to be confirmed if one lived in the Cathedral City than it was for someone who lived far from the bishop. Increased numbers of baptisms, combined with distance from the Cathedral City, caused the celebration of the Sacrament of Confirmation and Holy Eucharist to be infrequent. The periodic celebrations of Confirmation and Eucharist persisted in the Catholic Church until somewhat recently.

In the early 1900s, Pope Pius X said that there was no need to delay the celebration of the Holy Eucharist. The reception of the Eucharist was encouraged (both First Communion and reception of the Eucharist more frequently), so 2nd and 3rd graders began to celebrate First Communion. The practice of Confirmation stayed back at the times the bishop would make a visit to the parish (which was infrequent). Therefore, the sacraments were now routinely celebrated out of order, Baptism-Eucharist-Confirmation (B-E-C). This practice of moving the first Eucharistic celebration before Confirmation has been done for over a hundred years. Most Rev. Bishop Thomas John Paprocki wants to reinstate the original order of the celebration of the Sacraments of Initiation, Baptism-Confirmation-Eucharist for 4th-8th grades in 2020.

We have discussed the changes in our current 2nd grade classes of St. Patrick’s and Sacred Heart Parishes. Now, let us discuss those students that have received First Communion and are not confirmed, the current 3rd - 8th graders. Since the bishop celebrated Confirmation with our current 9th and 10th

graders this year, we are looking forward to celebrating the bishop's visit again in 2020. Now, our topic is to cover the current 3rd - 8th grade.

After several conversations with Mrs. Sheila Siegert (Sacred Heart School Confirmation instructor), Cindy Duez (our PSR coordinator), Ms. Deb Zueck, and several involved in Confirmation planning, it was unanimous that if in 2020 third grade is to be confirmed, 4th- 9th should be confirmed as well.

With this in mind, Sacred Heart and St. Pat's are looking at a combined class of 136 to be confirmed. We will attempt to have Bishop Paprocki come on a Sunday and hold two Masses in one day – 1 at St. Patrick's for 100 youth (100 is the most the bishop will confirm at one time), and a group of 36 at Sacred Heart Church.

Fortunately, for us, we have a year to set up an age appropriate program for Confirmation. Books and material are already available and used for those 6th- 9th graders. We will use the current curriculum for the older students, and for the younger crowd several programs are available which covers the topic of Confirmation in an understandable format. A group of 136 is large to be confirmed and takes a lot of coordination and cooperation from the teachers, parents, and students involved. As information becomes available, it will be shared with you.

SACRAMENTS ARE A GIFT OF GRACE FROM GOD

The over-arching principle to consider is that the sacraments are a gift of grace from God freely given. They are not things that someone earns (or jumping through hoops as some have termed it). God lovingly and freely gives grace. Fr. Kevin Laughery talked about the Sacraments of Initiation recently in the Catholic Times. Parents feeding a child, not once or twice, but many times and often during their lives is an example of our faith lives in Christ, being fed by God.

Fr. Kevin states, I have long appreciated the wisdom of the communal approach to faith, which I have experienced. As mothers and fathers know very well, children need to be fed as soon as they start breathing. The very life and the thriving of all children is dependent upon their receiving food. Likewise, mothers and fathers must feed their children with their own faith. If we reflect that the love of the God who became human makes all the difference for us in accepting our own humanity, then we must be most eager to share this love with our children. We are happy to recognize that many young adults in fact commit themselves to the faith, which their parents have shared with them. They have an experiential basis for embracing this faith. Their parents have demonstrated that they want their children to be fed and to be fully alive in the Christian mystery. Our Catholic sacramental life, which begins with a baptismal plunge into the mystery of Jesus' death and resurrection, includes our being sealed in the Holy Spirit at Confirmation and our being fed by our ongoing Eucharistic nourishment. Baptism, Confirmation, and Eucharist are the three Sacraments of Initiation into the Christian mystery. All of us have an opportunity to reflect more deeply on these sacramental moments as our diocese undertakes the restoration of the proper order of reception of the sacraments. No matter how old we are, we can always grow in our appreciation for gifts given us long ago, gifts ever ancient and ever new.

The gifts of the Sacraments of Initiation, Baptism and Confirmation, when practiced through the frequent reception of the Eucharist is a lifelong process of growth and understanding of our faith in Christ Jesus. Confirmation should be seen not as a graduation ceremony from faith, as some people think in error, but a continuing part of faith life.

Therefore, religion will continue to be taught in the PSR program and Sacred Heart School past the 3rd grade Confirmation. It is a beginning, not an end, to bring Catholic Christian faith in Christ Jesus.