



DIOCESE *of* LACROSSE

OFFICE OF THE BISHOP

5 August 2016

Dear Father,

May the Lord give you peace.

This correspondence is regarding the age for the reception of the Sacrament of Confirmation. I would like students to receive this Sacrament when they are between the ages of fifteen and sixteen years, preferably during the spring/second semester of the sophomore year. This range of ages falls within the parameters set by the Conference of Catholic Bishops.

The transition to confirming fifteen and sixteen-year-old students is to be applied universally across the Diocese of La Crosse. If a student should make a request to receive the Sacrament at a younger age and is properly prepared, pastors may make special arrangements according to their good judgment and discretion. I should be informed in advance when such exceptions occur.

The rationale for this transition to confirm at a more mature age is based upon the need for young people to understand fully what they are committing to as disciples of Jesus Christ. According to the *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, paragraph 1319, a candidate for Confirmation must "be prepared to assume the role of disciple and witness to Christ." Paragraph 1303 affirms that Confirmation "gives us a special strength of the Holy Spirit to spread and defend the faith by word and action as true witnesses of Christ, to confess the name of Christ boldly, and never to be ashamed of the Cross." I would like those who seek Confirmation to recognize the great seriousness of their call.

Canon Law likewise expresses the importance of proper formation. According to Canon 885 §1, care is to be taken that the Sacrament is conferred "on subjects who properly and reasonably seek it." Further, Canon 889, §2 states that a "person to be confirmed must have the use of reason, be suitably instructed, properly disposed and able to renew baptismal promises." These canons make it clear that our young people need to be formed through a comprehensive curriculum, one that should include but not be limited to helping the student:

- Develop a more intimate union with Jesus Christ in daily prayer (CCC 1309).
- Cultivate a relationship with the Holy Spirit as well as have a more lively familiarity with His actions, His gifts and His promptings in order to be capable of assuming the apostolic responsibilities.

- Be committed to living a Sacramental Life, above all by participating in Sunday Mass each week and receiving the Sacrament of Reconciliation frequently.
- Comprehend how to live life in the Holy Spirit.
- Affirm Church teachings organized under the heading: Theology of the Body.
- Study the norms regarding Marriage and the Christian Life, especially the issues that form a divide between young Catholics and their culture.
- Grasp the Church's moral teachings on bioethical issues, in particular understanding the great harm and misery caused by abortion and contraception.

By the sophomore year in high school, students are to be exposed to a true picture of their choices in life. Students at this age are usually still receptive. It is also prudent to present more information on issues surrounding human sexuality. Typically, lessons in critical thinking during the sophomore year help them develop an independent judgment of right and wrong. By this time, students in Catholic schools should have had training in Scripture, personal morality, and Sacramental theology. Students in Parish Programs should be at least introduced to these areas of Church teaching by this time.

In our culture, it is essential to include the moral teachings of the Church on bioethical issues and it would be difficult, if not unwise, for teachers to have completed their instruction in many of the controversial bioethical issues prior to the sophomore year in high school. On the other hand, this formation is timely in the sophomore year as it is usually the case that older teens lacking proper formation begin to experiment in ways that will make it more difficult for them to accept the truth, beauty, and goodness of the Church's moral teachings.

Our goal is to equip adolescents to make sound decisions based upon reason and faith so that they truly "seek" to become disciples. With proper formation to inform the intellect along with a committed habit of daily prayer, students will be more able to make good decisions while recognizing the consequences of their choices. They will encounter and take advantage of opportunities in evangelization that come with discipleship.

Canon 890 spells out the need to judge readiness for those requesting the Sacrament of Confirmation. "The faithful are obliged to receive this Sacrament at the appropriate time; their parents and shepherds of souls, especially pastors, are to see to it that the faithful are properly instructed to receive it and approach the Sacrament at the appropriate time." In determining readiness, sincerity of intention is an important consideration. Further, confirmands need to receive Confirmation in the state of grace. The Sacrament of Penance is to be made available so that the young people are cleansed and prepared for the gift of the Holy Spirit. Moreover, students are to be guided to a commitment of more intense prayer to receive the strength and graces of the Holy Spirit with docility and readiness to act. (CCC 1310)

It is also necessary that students have opportunities at the parish for ongoing formation after receiving the Sacrament of Confirmation. Accordingly, I would ask that you develop a five-year parish plan to build or strengthen high school and young adult Bible Studies and Faith Formation Groups. Thank you for your attention to the proper formation of our young people.

With personal good wishes and prayers, I am,
Fraternally yours in Christ,



Most Reverend William Patrick Callahan
Bishop of La Crosse