



Introduction

Preparing children and youth for the celebration of the sacraments is a time of great joy and anticipation. It is also a lot of work! There is a need for long-range scheduling, recruitment of volunteers, coordination of key staff and other ministers, communication and meetings with parents, selection of appropriate resources, facilitation of catechetical sessions, and planning the liturgical event. Whether you are new to the process of sacramental preparation or a seasoned coordinator, this series of booklets will serve as a helpful guide toward effective planning and implementation of sacramental programs. Creative ideas for engaging candidates and families, along with reminders around key moments in the process provide practical as well as inspirational help in developing a program that fits your parish needs.

Preparation for the sacraments offers great opportunities for welcoming and engaging families in their walk of faith and experience of the parish community. May you find great blessings as you undertake this work and minister to those about to take part in celebrating the sacraments.

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Getting Candidates Ready: Where Do You Start?

Every successful program has a clearly defined mission. That's especially true for confirmation ministry. Whether you're building a program from the ground up, or you're coming into an existing one, you'll want to start by defining and knowing your mission statement. The good news is that a lot of this work has already been done for you. Your diocese's guidelines for confirmation preparation likely include:

- Diocesan requirements for confirmation preparation
- Catechetical components you're expected to cover
- Details on how the rite of confirmation is celebrated in your diocese
- Wisdom and advice from your bishop

Once you're familiar with this framework, think and pray about how it will look at your parish.* Ask yourself what values you bring to your program. Discuss your vision and priorities with your pastor, a spiritual director, and other experienced confirmation ministers. But don't sweat too much about getting lots of input from everyone. As one youth minister wisely points out, "Listen to others, but not *too* much."

Use the space here to jot down your thoughts about what matters most for your confirmation program.

** Every parish is different. To keep things simple, we'll be referring to typical parish confirmation programs that span two years of preparation during high school.*

Use this space to write some thoughts—or a rough draft if you’re ready—of your confirmation program mission statement. (If you’ve already got a mission statement, write it here anyway, just to put it in your own writing.)

How Will You Get It All Done?

When you’re in charge of confirmation, you wear lots of hats and carry many to-do lists. You might double as the parish youth minister, or work in music ministry. If you run a two-year program, you’ll always have two sets of candidate groups, catechist teams, sessions, and activities to plan and track. Whether you’re part-time or full-time, you might be wondering how you’ll get it all done and stay on top of all the details.

Don’t worry. There are lots of fairly painless things you can do to manage your program. Before you pick up a glossy new planner or download the latest organizer app, spend some time thinking about how you will, well...spend your time. It helps to think about dividing your work week into three general areas:

Pro Tip

Revisit your mission periodically. If you notice things are moving away from your core values, don’t be afraid to seek out the reasons why. A simple adjustment might be all that’s needed. On the other hand, maybe your goals weren’t realistic in the first place, or maybe something has changed at your parish, and you need to rethink things and spend some time in prayer about it.

Pastoral activities are all the ways you spend quality time with teens and families—in catechetical sessions, prayer, retreats, fellowship, etc.

Administrative activities are all the ways you keep your program running smoothly: inputting data, collecting and maintaining sacramental records, planning your calendar, keeping track of diocesan requirements, etc.

Creative activities include brainstorming ideas, developing programs, looking for inspiration, and, of course, keeping up with your own lifelong faith formation.

Looking at the activities above, jot down your strengths and weaknesses below. Commit right now to continuously seek out people and tools to support both your strengths and weaknesses.

My Strengths

I'll Need Help with

| | |
|-------|-------|
| _____ | _____ |
| _____ | _____ |
| _____ | _____ |
| _____ | _____ |
| _____ | _____ |

A Few More Organizational Tools

Now that you've got a basic idea of how you'll divide up your time, you can pay attention to the specific types of tasks you'll have. Grouping tasks by categories, like the ones below, can make everything seem a little less overwhelming. You could call this your **Four Ws of Confirmation Preparation**:

Word: This is the learning, or catechesis portion of preparation.

Worship: This includes Sunday Mass, the sacraments, liturgical and private prayer, and retreats.

Work for others: This is the service component, where you help candidates follow Christ's call to serve others.

World: This is how you help bring candidates and the world (parents, sponsors, your parish, and the Church) together.

Some of these will overlap. For instance, you'll combine Word and Worship often, because your catechetical sessions will probably always include some form of prayer. Each of these categories will require different amounts of your pastoral, administrative, and creative time. We'll get to that a little later.

→ Pro Tip

Your administrative priorities are a little different from the rest of the parish. If your parish uses administration software, you might have to think out of the box to find the functionality you need. Try using whatever systems you're comfortable with—Google Docs, Microsoft Word, or any productivity apps you like—to get you started. You might have to enter information twice; once in your system, and again in the parish system, but it will pay off for you in flexibility and functionality later, when you can access a list of chosen saint names, or find that praise music video you saved a year ago.

Putting Together Your Team: People First

Don't be afraid to ask for help—often! Many people are inspired by the faithfulness of young people, and are happy to lend you a hand. And remember, you're building a team that will walk

with you at different steps of this process. So, walk with your team members, too. Be aware of what's going on in their jobs and their lives. You don't have to be nosy or bear anyone's burdens for them. Just be aware, and grateful for their presence. Of course, you'll want to find ways to pray with your team too.

Reach out to the following team members regularly. You'll find considerations and tips for working with some of them on the following pages.

Your Parish Team

- Candidates (*of course!*)
- Pastor and other ordained ministers, including deacons
- Parish administrator
- Facilities manager
- Music ministers
- Liturgical ministers (*sacristans, extraordinary ministers*)
- Outreach ministers
- Director of religious education
- Middle school, youth and young adult ministers
- Other

Your Community Team

- Catechist team
- Non-teaching volunteers
- Potential speakers
- Parents
- Sponsors
- Colleagues at other parishes
- Spiritual director
- Social ministry contacts (*Catholic Worker, St. Vincent de Paul, etc.*)
- Other

Your Diocesan Team

- Diocesan Youth Leader
- Bishop's Office contacts
- Office of Worship
- Safe Environments
- Other

CANDIDATES. How will you get to know your candidates? Will you schedule family interviews, or do you prefer to get to know everyone on a more informal basis? Step back often and think about your group as a whole. Be observant of culture and group dynamics, and how they change over time. Knowing your teens individually and as a group can help you develop tools and resources they need most.

YOUR PASTOR AND OTHER ORDAINED MINISTERS. Your pastor is probably the most important person on your support team. Different pastors have different ways of supporting you, but the surest way to make your program successful is learning how your pastor works, what he expects from you, and how you can work together.

PARISH STAFF. By and large, confirmation directors are among the youngest people on most parish staffs. If that's you, be patient, open, and professional with others. Even if you're not the youngest person there, look at this as a chance to get to know people with some different perspectives and learn about what's happening in other ministries. Working with youth, and with a sacrament as your goal, your priorities might seem different from everyone else's, so be the person who looks for common ground. But don't be afraid to make your voice heard, too.

CATECHISTS/SMALL GROUP LEADERS. One of your most challenging jobs is building a team of catechists who are in good standing with the church, can relate to your candidates' age group, and are willing to give their time consistently. Show that you respect and support your catechists and group leaders by seeking out their ideas. Put time and intentionality into the teaching tools you provide. Start and end sessions and

meetings on time. Work with your DRE to provide catechist formation, safe environments training, and spiritual support.

NON-TEACHING VOLUNTEERS. You'll always need a small army of workers: chaperones, drivers, discussion leaders, servers, check-in volunteers, and more. Work with your parish hospitality or welcome groups to recruit volunteers. Create volunteer sign-up opportunities for parents at your kick-off meetings. Look to recently confirmed youth who are on fire with their faith and want to help out. Be sure everyone is fingerprinted and has completed all safe environments training required by your diocese. And of course, give all your volunteers the same respect and support you give your catechists.

SPEAKERS. As you build a roster of engaging guest speakers, be familiar with your diocese's speaker policies. (Some even offer lists of approved speakers.) Ask around at your parish—what types of jobs do people have? Are there counselors who can speak about anxiety or other relevant issues? Do you know any volunteers with outreach groups such as St. Vincent de Paul or Catholic Charities who might talk about their experiences and ignite a passion for service? Are there parents of confirmed candidates who can speak to other parents? Confirmed youth with a powerful faith story to tell? Don't overlook your pastor and deacons as speakers. Try trading off speaking duties with other confirmation directors and youth ministers. Make sure you vet all potential speakers beforehand, and make sure all subject matter relates to your curriculum.

Getting down to the Nitty-Gritty: The Four Ws

Now it's time to build your program, using those four Ws we talked about earlier as a guide.