

A Sacrament of Initiation

CONFIRMATION

Confirmation is a sacrament of initiation, one of the three sacraments through which people become members of the Christian community. In the first centuries of the Church, most people became Christians as adults, either because they were converted to the Christian faith as adults or because they postponed their baptisms. When they chose to become Christians, they received the sacraments of baptism, confirmation, and eucharist all at once.

To be baptized, these adults plunged down into a pool of water, signifying Jesus' death, and rose from the water to share Jesus' risen life. The new Christians then put on white robes and received an anointing with the Spirit—the sacrament of confirmation. Baptism and confirmation formed a double sacrament in one celebration. The Christian, newly baptized in water and sealed in the Spirit, then joined the community around the table of the Lord to celebrate and share the eucharist, the third sacrament of initiation.

As Christianity became the official religion of the Roman Empire in the early A.D. 300s, increasing numbers of

people joined the Church. The Christian community began to administer confirmation separately from baptism, so bishops, who could no longer baptize everyone, could at least continue to seal all new Christians in the Spirit.

The way we celebrate these three sacraments of initiation today stresses their connection. When confirmation does not follow baptism, as is usually the case with infants, the rite of baptism includes an anointing with oil. For young people who were baptized as infants, confirmation begins with a renewal of baptismal vows. We celebrate confirmation at the eucharist to connect it with the third sacrament of initiation.

The promises parents make for their children at baptism summarize the faith of the Christian community. The promises state the same beliefs we proclaim when we pray the *Apostles' Creed* or profess the *Nicene Creed* at Mass. At their confirmation teen candidates will make these promises for themselves.