

# Confirmation

## The Sacrament of Empowerment

### What is Confirmation?

What for you is the central meaning or significance of the Sacrament of Confirmation? Check off which responses below best capture the meaning of the Sacrament of Confirmation for you.

- Confirmation is a booster shot of the Spirit to help one live out's one baptismal commitment.
- A ritual of Christian maturity—moving from being a child to an adult of faith.
- Graduation—a celebration of having completed formal catechism classes.
- Confirmation is an opportunity to be publicly sent forth as a disciple by the Bishop.
- Confirmation is a rite of committal to serve in Christ's army as a soldier of Christ.
- Confirmation is intimately linked to the sacraments of Baptism and Eucharist as Sacrament of Initiation.
- Confirmation is an opportunity for conversion—to repent and begin again.
- Confirmation is a celebration of our relationship to the church community.

### Remembering Your Confirmation...

- I was confirmed when I was \_\_\_\_\_ (*age*) at \_\_\_\_\_ (*parish*)
- My sponsor was... He or she was chosen because...
- A significant memory of my Confirmation is...
- I was confirmed because... (*reasons, meaning of Confirmation*)





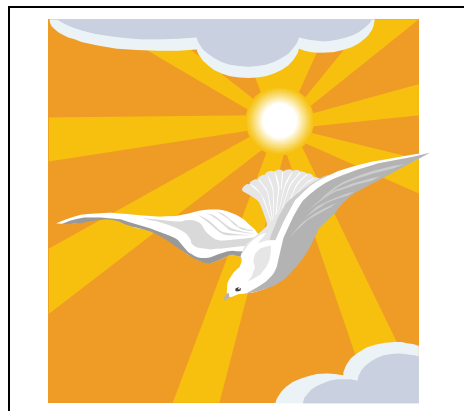
Confirmation is often defined as a sacrament of mature Christian commitment. It is the occasion when young people baptized as infants put their "personal signature" on their parents' decision.

Our earliest ancestors in faith did not distinguish Confirmation from Baptism. The apostle presiding over the little community baptized new members, anointed them with oil and offered them the Eucharist for the first time in one rite of initiation. (The same thing happens today at the Easter Vigil when catechumens are initiated.)

As the Church grew and spread throughout the world, the apostles' successors, the bishops, could no longer personally baptize every new Christian. They delegated the rite to priests. Still, the bishops made regular visits to local communities to *confirm* the priests' Baptisms with a second anointing. Thus a separate sacrament was born.

Confirmation is still, with Baptism and Eucharist, a sacrament of initiation. The *Catechism* describes Confirmation as a deepening of baptismal gifts. With Baptism and Eucharist, Confirmation shapes us as Catholic Christians. Each of these sacraments focuses on a different aspect of our life as believers: Belonging, nourishment and empowerment.

Baptism is belonging into the family of the Church. The empowerment of Christian life is the Holy Spirit, the very Spirit of God dwelling within us. First received at Baptism, the gift of the Spirit is celebrated more fully in Confirmation. Confirmation, like the other sacraments of initiation, marks the beginning of a journey toward deeper knowledge of God.



# The Symbols of Confirmation

**1. Community.** The primary symbol of Confirmation is the community itself. Baptism, Confirmation and Eucharist are sacraments of initiation, initiation into a community. The community is the sign of Christ's presence for you.

**2. Baptism.** Every Confirmation begins with Baptism. Confirmation complements the symbols of Baptism. The water ritual (Baptism) came to mean the washing away of sin, and the oil ritual (Confirmation) was interpreted to mean God's presence in us...the Holy Spirit. Confirmation is the Sacrament of the Holy Spirit.

**3. Anointing with Sacred Chrism.** As "Christ" means "anointed," we call ourselves "Christians" because we are the anointed ones. The Sacraments of Baptism, Confirmation and Eucharist initiate us into the community anointed to continue the mission of Jesus.

**4. Laying of Hands.** All seven sacraments use this symbol. From ancient times, to extend one's hand over the person's head was the sign of calling down the Holy Spirit. During Confirmation, the bishop asks for the seven gifts of the Holy Spirit.

**5. Words of the Rite of Confirmation.** The readings from Scripture, the homily, and the prayer asking for the Spirit help us learn the meaning of the sacrament.

**6. The Minister.** When we celebrate the sacraments, there is always a leader; minister who speaks in the name of us all. The bishop presiding is also a symbol of the fact that we are initiated into a Church that is much larger than our parish.

**7. Eucharist.** In Baptism our sins are washed away; in Confirmation we are filled with the Holy Spirit. The Eucharist is the repeatable part of Confirmation. In each Eucharist the Holy Spirit comes upon us anew to strengthen us for service.



## Laying On of Hands

Hands are a symbol of power. Specifically the laying on of hands refers to an ancient practice of conferring power onto a person by placing both hands on that person's head. In Genesis old Isaac lays his hands on his son Jacob to give him authority over the tribe. Kings and knights traditionally received their official power through a laying on of hands. The practice was also common in the early church to symbolize passing on the power of the Holy Spirit, which the Apostles had received at Pentecost.

Hands are a particularly apt symbol for the Holy Spirit working in people. We bless with our hands. The priest at Mass gives the sign of the cross with his hand over the assembly. Friends pat each other on the back to offer encouragement or congratulations. Artists often depict God creating the world or giving life.

Similarly, we work with our hands, create things with our hands, and "give each other a hand." Hands greet, comfort, and console. Hands touch other people, and can help heal simply by their touch. Hands can support and lift up others. They can help to guide. They can be used to reach out and make connections with people.

In the Rite of Confirmation, the bishop initially "lays hands on" all the candidates together by extending his hands over the whole group. Meanwhile, he prays for the Spirit to help and guide the candidates with the seven gifts of the Holy Spirit. A few moments later, when the candidates individually come up to the bishop to be anointed with chrism, he places a hand on each person's head, which is symbolically the place of wisdom. The feeling of a hand on the head also gives a person the feeling of being strengthened by another's touch. A bond is made; the spirit of one touches the spirit of the other.

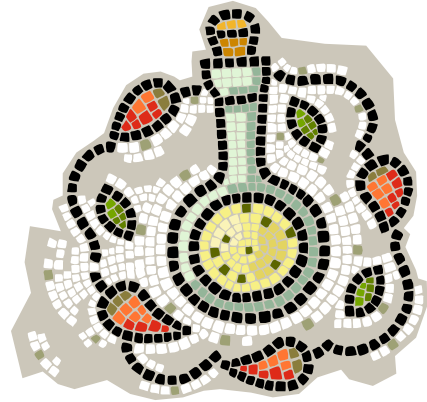
(From *Celebrating Sacraments* by Joseph Stoutzenberger, Winona, MN: St. Mary's Press, 2000. Excerpts from pages 166. Used with permission.)



## Anointing with Chrism (Oil)

**Reference:** *Catechism of the Catholic Church* #1293-1296, 1300-1301

Have you ever watched public officials take oaths of office? They raise their hand and vow to carry out their duties and responsibilities of their offices. In ancient times anointing with oil served that function. Kings and priests were anointed to symbolize their commission those roles. Jesus himself is called Christ, which means "the Anointed One." In the Rite of Confirmation, Christians are anointed by the bishop with chrism and thus are commissioned to be Christ for others. This action also recalls their anointing with chrism at Baptism.



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The anointing at Confirmation is an act of consecrating the person, to share more completely in the mission of Jesus Christ and the Church. In the Roman Catholic Church, the bishop usually does the anointing, as well as the laying on of hands, to link the person symbolically to the universal church, the church of the apostles.

To be anointed the candidates come forward one by one. As each one approaches the bishop, that candidate's sponsor places her or his right hand on the candidate's shoulder and gives the bishop the candidate's name. In the essential words and actions of the sacrament, the bishop dips his right thumb in the chrism, puts his hand on the person's head, and makes the sign of the cross on the forehead, saying, "Be sealed with the Gift of the Holy Spirit." The bishop then gives the person the sign of peace.

(From *Celebrating Sacraments* by Joseph Stoutzenberger, Winona, MN: St. Mary's Press, 2000. Excerpts from page 167, 170. Used with permission.)



# Holy Spirit and Gifts of the Holy Spirit

**Reference:** *Catechism of the Catholic Church* #1286-1289, 1299, 1302-1303

## ***Images of the Holy Spirit in the Bible***

**Fire:** He will baptize you with the Holy Spirit and with fire. (Luke 3:16)

**Dove:** So Jesus was baptized. And as soon as he came out of the water, the sky opened, and he saw the Spirit of God coming down on him like a dove. (Matthew 3:16)

**Breath:** Then he breathed upon them and said, "Receive the Holy Spirit." (John 20:22)

**Power:** The Son was sent to speak God's message, and he has been given the full power of God's Spirit. (John 3:34)

The Spirit is the one who gives life! Human strength can do nothing. (John 6:63)

The Holy Spirit will come upon you and give you power. Then you will tell everyone about me...everywhere in the world. (Acts 1:8)

**Wind:** Only God's Spirit gives new life. The Spirit is like the wind that blows wherever it wants to. You can hear the wind, but you don't know where it came from or where it is going. (John 3:8)

**Love:** God has give us the Holy Spirit, who fills our hearts with his love. (Romans 5:5)

**Oil:** Samuel poured the oil on David's head... At that moment, the Spirit of the Lord took control of David and stayed with him from them on. (1 Samuel 16:3)

**Water:** On the last and greatest day of the feast, Jesus stood up and exclaimed, "Let anyone who thirsts come to me and drink. Whoever believes in me, as scripture says, 'Rivers of living water will flow from within him.'" He said this in reference to the Spirit that those who came to believe in him were to receive. (John 7:37-39)

**Truth:** If you love me, you will do as I command. Then I will ask the Father to send you the Holy Spirit who will help you and always be with you. The Spirit will show you what is true. The people of the world cannot accept the Spirit, because they don't see or know him. But you know the Spirit, who is with you and will keep on living in you. (John 14:15)

**Witness:** The Spirit will teach you everything and will remind you of what I said while I was with you. (John 14:26)

## Who Is the Holy Spirit?



- ...the Holy Spirit is God's own self in outreach to the world. The Holy Spirit is God's presence and activity among us. The Holy Spirit is God, continuously drawing near and passing by to vivify, renew and love us and the whole of creation."
- ...the Spirit is first and foremost the Creator Spirit who creates, empowers, and fills the whole world with life. At every moment the Spirit sustains every place, every moment, every creature, the whole interconnected community of creation itself.
- We encounter the Spirit in nature (the natural world), in human relationships, and in the social world—in the building up of the society.
- There are a variety of images of the Holy Spirit in our tradition: "the hand of God reaching out of the world," the finger of God, fire (the warmth of fire—love poured into our hearts), the sun (light and warmth), a river (irrigating land and helping to bring forth vegetation), a plant (bringing forth leaves, fruits and seeds). All of these images speak of God who draws near to the world, who dwells in the world, who vivifies the world, who heals the world, who energizes and empowers the world.

The Spirit is simply God, present and active everywhere, pervading our life. This basic but profound reality bears repeating today, because so many do not experience God's nearness, but think of God as quite distant. This is most unfortunate. For God is with us always and everywhere: past, present, in and out of religious settings.



## Rite of Confirmation

At **Baptism**, we hear of the role of the Holy Spirit in the prayer over the baptismal water:

Father, look now with love on your Church, and unseal for her the foundation of baptism.

By the power of the Spirit  
give to the water of this font  
the grace of your Son...

cleans [those to be baptized] from sin in a new birth of innocence  
by water and the Spirit (Roman Sacramentary)

At **Confirmation**, we hear about the gifts of the Holy Spirit:

"All-powerful God, Father of our Lord Jesus Christ,  
by water and the Holy Spirit  
you freed your sons and daughters from sin  
And gave them new life.

Send your Holy Spirit upon them  
to be their Helper and Guide.

Give them the spirit of [1] wisdom and [2] understanding,  
the spirit of [3] right judgment and [4] courage,  
the spirit of [5] knowledge and [6] reverence.

Fill them with the spirit of [7] wonder and awe in your presence. We  
ask this through Christ our Lord." (Rite of Confirmation, #25)

In Baptism, our sins are washed away and we come up from the water bath to be clothed in a garment. Putting on the baptismal garment is a visible symbol of the invisible reality of "putting on Christ."

When we are anointed with oil in Confirmation, it is a visible symbol of the invisible reality of being anointed with the Spirit, being "Christ-ed" and "messiah-ed." We put on Christ, and the sevenfold gifts of the Spirit become our gifts. We pray that the qualities of the Messiah take root in us and become our qualities so that we may become signs of God's presence in the world.

(From: Confirmation and the Holy Spirit by Thomas Richstatter, Millennium Monthly, August 1998. Cincinnati: St. Anthony Messenger Press.)

## SUMMARY

- Confirmation is the final part of our initiation into the faith community and is linked to Baptism and Eucharist.
- The first encounter with the Holy Spirit takes place at Baptism, when we are born again in water and the Spirit. Baptism creates a personal union with God and Confirmation deepens our relationship with God by having the Holy Spirit strengthened within us.
- At Confirmation, the candidate receives the fullness of the Holy Spirit that was given to us at Baptism. This is the same Spirit that filled the Apostles on Pentecost, with the drive and the courage needed to be disciples, or students of Christ.
- Confirmation honors the spiritual maturity of the individual.
- Confirmation **empowers us for discipleship...to be followers of Christ...to be people who live out the message of Jesus** which is the mission of the Church.
- Confirmation is a **celebration of the community of faith** and completes membership to the universal Church and local parish.
- On the day of Confirmation, Christians become public witnesses to Christ and his work. You are saying to the community...in public...I believe in the Mission of Jesus Christ and I am making the commitment to continue HIS work.
- Confirmation is not just another one of those things that we do because we are of age or because all our friends are doing it. Confirmation needs to be done because we want to live a more Christ centered life, as a mature Christian and accept all the responsibilities of being a disciple of Christ.
- Sealed with the gifts of the Holy Spirit at Confirmation, Christians strive to live in the image of the Lord and work toward building up of the body of Christ through both their actions and their words. Confirmed Catholics live out Christ's mission of serving others becoming involved in church and community service by giving of time, talent and treasure.
- Confirmation is the beginning of a life of full participation and responsibility in the Church.