



## FORM TO SEND

• CREATING A PATH FOR •  
MISSIONARY DISCIPLESHIP

### **Renewing the Domestic Church & Inspiring Young Disciples to Evangelize: A New Vision for Confirmation\***

*There is a pressing need to frame everything in terms of evangelization, as the fundamental principle that guides ecclesial activity as a whole.*

—*Directory for Catechesis [DC] (2020), no. 297*

*We can't deny that we've needed a dramatic paradigm shift with how we equip the Domestic Church to pass along the faith to the next generation. There's no better time than now.*

—Dan Cellucci, Catholic Leadership Institute, December 2020

The *Directory for Catechesis* calls for an evangelizing catechesis oriented around engaging families and with the goal of lifelong/adult missionary discipleship. We are aware of the challenges. The numbers of those attending Mass regularly and receiving sacraments have been declining across the nation, and the crisis of family and youth disaffiliation marks our own homes and communities. However, we also know that the Lord continues to work powerfully, inviting us to see anew through the lens of the Gospel. All of us in the Church are called to respond boldly to the demands of evangelization today.

Below is a plan for a new vision for the Sacrament of Confirmation—what we are calling the “Form to Send” initiative. The focus is on reorienting our evangelization and faith formation efforts around **engaging families**—parents and children—and **adult discipleship formation**, with **lifelong missionary discipleship** as the goal to which all our formation efforts are directed. This means that, more and more, our formation efforts should be preparing our young people to be sent, to be disciples who evangelize and lead others to Jesus Christ. Reception of the sacraments is not the end or goal of faith formation; rather, living into the sacramental grace received, as disciples on fire with the Holy Spirit, who know they are beloved of the Father in Christ Jesus, and who, striving to be saints, seek to bring others into communion with Jesus through His Church, is the goal.

Below you will find information on various areas of the plan. We suggest reviewing each area and then spending time in prayer and discernment, individually and as team, to see what next steps the Lord is encouraging for your parish.

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## **A New Approach to Confirmation & Faith Formation**

In consulting with other dioceses about the Sacrament of Confirmation for baptized Catholic youth, whether a change in norms regarding the age of reception was made or not, dioceses indicated that the **overall approach to formation** is the key element needing attention. Dioceses are seeking a deeper change that often revolves around family engagement (family evangelization, catechesis, and ongoing involvement) as well as renewing youth ministry within a discipleship path or catechumenal journey. The lesson can be applied here in the archdiocese: **Regarding the Sacrament of Confirmation, more important than the change of grade level or age is the change and renewal of faith formation within an evangelizing, catechumenal, and family-oriented perspective.** In other words, instead of formation's goal being the reception of the sacraments, the goal is ongoing conversion and lifelong/adult discipleship. How can we in the Archdiocese of Atlanta re-orient our formation efforts around that goal? We believe engaging and empowering parents as evangelizing agents and families as domestic Churches is a key to this catechetical renewal.

Many parishes of the Archdiocese of Atlanta have been engaging in intentional efforts of family faith formation over the last several years, especially since 2020. From the renewed outreach and participation with families, a desire to receive the Sacrament of Confirmation at younger ages has arisen. Three parishes, already utilizing family faith formation approaches, were given permission to pilot the reception of Confirmation at younger grade levels/ages (one at 6<sup>th</sup> grade, 11-12 years old, and two at 8<sup>th</sup> grade, 13-14 years old). Given the growing number of parishes with intentional family evangelization and catechesis efforts, the number of pastors asking for a change, the challenges facing adolescents and families, and the need the Church has always had for the witness of younger disciples, **the Archbishop and Bishops have decided to shift the ordinary grade level/age of Confirmation for baptized Catholics in the Archdiocese of Atlanta from 10<sup>th</sup> grade (15-16 years old) to 6<sup>th</sup> grade (11-12 years old).**

This change will take a number of years to implement (see timeline below), and every parish has unique circumstances, so we want to guide and help our parish communities (and school communities) with adequate time and support. The Office of Evangelization & Discipleship (OED), in collaboration with other chancery offices, is committed to offering ongoing support now and in the years ahead.

Note: The topic of “restored order” remains a question deserving further consideration and study. Given the *Directory for Catechesis* (2020), no. 70, which emphasizes the key role of episcopal

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conferences in this discernment, we have judged it best for now not to explore this possibility here in the archdiocese. However, a renewed approach to formation will serve any further changes, if they come.

## **Planning Steps & Objectives**

Below are the **general planning steps and objectives** we envision parishes pursuing to prepare for and implement the new approach to Confirmation:

***ALWAYS – Pray and Discern:*** Restore the initiative to God. Review this vision and plan with your parish/school leadership and pray about where you are as a community, where the Lord is calling you to focus, and how you should plan your efforts to prepare for these changes. Continue to pray and discern as a team and community, asking the Holy Spirit for direction at every step.

***FIRST – Develop a Culture of Family Faith Formation:*** Establish a family-focused approach to catechesis as a way to begin reorienting efforts around ongoing family and adult discipleship formation. *Recommended 1-3 years before adjusting the grade level/age of Confirmation. This will and should look different at various parishes based on needs, circumstances, and capacity.*

***SECOND – Re-envision Your Parish Youth Ministry:*** Create a plan for how your parish will advance and invest in youth discipleship, engaging and mentoring young people through middle school into high school and preparing them to be sent. *Continued engagement with families will and should look different, but it's important to see what touchpoints can be continued with families, and especially parents, as youth enter middle-school and high-school years, pre- and post-Confirmation.*

***THIRD – Family-oriented Confirmation Program:*** Make plans to implement a family-oriented sacramental program for Confirmandi and their families. *This will and should look different across parishes, but a key question will be how to engage parents in meaningful and fruitful ways along the journey to Confirmation, continuing the momentum of the earlier family catechesis while also supporting the growing maturity of the adolescents.*

***HORIZON – Review, Evaluate, and Chart a Discipleship Path:*** Continue to submit efforts to the Lord, strengthening what is bearing fruit and adjusting what needs to be changed. Look at your overall parish culture and ask: *Are we oriented more towards programs per se or does what we do fit into and encourage a path for missionary discipleship?*

## **Timeline**

Below is a gradual timeline for moving forward in the archdiocese:

- **PHASE 1 – Preliminary Years (2026-2027):** Prayer, Discernment, Planning, Preparation, and Initial Implementation.
  - For parishes that already have developed and utilized a family faith formation approach for more than one year and discern a readiness to move forward, they may

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begin implementing the changes to Confirmation preparation and youth discipleship formation.

- Parishes that have not utilized a family faith formation approach are asked to discern and plan next steps in how to adjust their approach to engage families and especially parents more (again, there is a range of ways to do this, and OED can provide support and strategies).
- **PHASE 2 – Implementation Years (2028-2031):** All parishes are moving forward with some form of intentional family faith formation or engagement of parents and have begun the transition to a lower grade level/age for Confirmation after working through the planning steps above. By 2031, all parishes should be implementing the new vision.

### **OED Support**

Below are formation events in 2025-2026 in support of preparation for Phase I:

- *Listen, Teach, Send* USCCB Regional Retreat and Workshop on the National Pastoral Framework for Ministry with Youth and Young Adults (Oct. 10-12, 2025—*complete*)
- *Families Forming Disciples* Training Workshop for parishes utilizing FFD or wanting to learn about FFD as a family faith formation program and approach (Nov. 6, 2025—*complete*)
- PCL Call on Confirmation vision and plan (Dec. 9, 2025--*complete*); [video](#) & [slides](#)
- PCL Ongoing Formation & Recognition Day with Dr. Joseph White (Jan. 29, 2026--*complete*)
- Family Faith Formation Workshop for all interested parishes (Chancery, February 17, 2026)

Below are other resources and means of support to help parishes take next steps with family faith formation:

- Trainings for PCLs & Pastors – a series of hybrid training opportunities to be developed by OED with help from outside leaders and consultants as needed (TBD).
- *Pressing Forward as an Evangelizing Parish: A Discernment Tool* – resource in development by OED to help parishes discern next steps in becoming ever more evangelizing and cultivating a discipleship path (piloting early 2026; available by summer of 2026).
- *Families Forming Disciples* – a 5-year program available in English and Spanish and adaptable for every parish
- *Liturgy of the Domestic Church* (Peyton Institute) and *Five Keys for Practicing Faith* (Lifelong Faith Associates) – information and trainings available to help parishes think about next steps in engaging parents and families more intentionally, no matter what program or approach you have been using
- Updated family faith formation webpages and resources (in process)
- Other trainings, consultation and visits available (TBD and on request)

Coming Fall of 2026 – renewed basic formation for catechists and parish catechetical leaders, assisted by a team of leaders willing to provide formation sessions/days.

- Kerygma, Evangelization, and Discipleship – The Power of the Gospel & the Need for Evangelizing Catechesis
- Spirituality & Ministry of the Catechist – Restoring the Initiative to God (retreat or workshop)

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- Spirituality of and Ministry to and with the Family – Accompanying Parents & the Spiritual Development of the Child
- Salvation History – Allowing *the* Story and the Word of God to Define Us and Our Mission
- Eucharistic Life in the Holy Spirit – A Sacramental Life and a Life of Virtue and Discipleship Go Together
- *Elective*: The Sacrament of Confirmation
- *Elective*: *Listen, Teach, Send* – A Vision for Youth Ministry

OED continues to research available documents, experiences, and best practices from around the country. Basic principles that continue to be compelling for considering any strategic shifts are the encouragement to “see things anew” in the light of the Gospel (see e.g., *From Christendom to Apostolic Mission*) and to “restore the initiative to God” (see e.g., ACTS XXIX).

### **Adaptable Process**

Once parishes are ready to begin the logistical process of lowering the grade level/age of Confirmation (after engaging the planning steps and objectives above), they could follow a three-year plan of transition, suggested below. Parishes are free to adapt this plan according to their circumstances.

- YEAR 1: Confirm 8<sup>th</sup>-10<sup>th</sup> graders together (13-16 years old)
- YEAR 2: Confirm 7<sup>th</sup>-9<sup>th</sup> graders together (12-15 years old)
- YEAR 3: Confirm 6<sup>th</sup>-8<sup>th</sup> graders together (11-14 years old). Additional time, or an adapted plan that moves more quickly, may be utilized by parishes as needed.

### **Reflections on Grade Level/Age**

A few considerations about receiving Confirmation in the 6<sup>th</sup> grade (11-12 years old) are offered below:

- 6<sup>th</sup> grade (11-12 years old) can be a natural transition from the general family faith formation occurring at the parish (whether K-5 or 1-5 grade levels), offering helpful continuity to advance appropriate family involvement.
- Avoiding a “graduation” approach and mentality: Parishes are encouraged to consider an earlier timeframe for Confirmation or at least an approach that envisions continued formation after the reception of the sacrament (mystagogy) and helps counter a perception of Confirmation as “graduation from faith formation.”
- Directed to the Eucharist: Theologically, Confirmation is oriented toward the Eucharist as the real culmination of the Sacraments of Christian Initiation (see note above on restored order, p. 2). Preparation for the Sacrament of Confirmation should always include a deeper orientation to the Eucharist, an emphasis which can be integrated in various ways regardless of the grade level or age.

## Family Faith Formation and Youth Ministry – Additional Considerations

**A Culture of Family Faith Formation:** A renewed approach to catechesis that moves from a traditional classroom model, involves families, and reconceives the relationship between sacramental grace and discipleship formation is a critical dimension of any strategic shift in sacramental preparation in the archdiocese. Family faith formation, infused with an evangelizing catechesis that is *kerygmatic, mystagogical*, marked by a missionary perspective, and carried out in a spirit of accompaniment (see *Directory for Catechesis*), is a vital component. Below are considerations that may be helpful for parishes taking first steps in more intentional family faith formation:

- **You are already serving and supporting families:** Discern and evaluate how you are already serving families and marriages in the parish. When it comes to faith formation or catechetical ministry, how is your parish supporting parents as the first evangelists and catechists of their children?
- **Goal:** The main goal of creating a culture of family faith formation is for more families to encounter Christ together and grow as missionary disciples. The aim is to assist families in growing more deeply in their relationship with God and with one another.
- **Discerning next steps:** Keep goals simple and meaningful to help families discover and live their mission at home and in the world. Consider ways to create opportunities at the parish for family members together to (1) pray as a family (2) have faith centered sharing conversations (3) learn more about the faith (4) live the liturgical seasons and serve, and (5) have wholesome play experiences.
- **Various models:** There is no one-size fits all approach to parish family catechesis. The key is to take next steps to engage families and parents in meaningful ways, so that they will be supported in living the mission of the domestic Church. OED is available to assist parishes discerning next steps.
- **Resources:** *Families Forming Disciples* is one available local resource to assist parishes at no cost, and OED is available to provide ongoing guidance. There are also other resources OED can recommend for those starting or growing a family faith formation program.
- **Moving-forward questions for longer-term:** Below are some areas for further discernment as parishes advance family catechesis in various ways.
  - **Family-Oriented Parish Ministries:** How do/can other ministries within the parish intentionally support the ongoing faith formation of families beyond the traditional “PSR” and YM experience?
  - **Marriage-Strengthening Parish:** How is the parish strengthening married couples and lifting up the vocation of marriage? Consider marriage prep, marriage enrichment and accompaniment during the first 5-10 years, ongoing marriage support and healing/reconciliation opportunities, and support and formation for parents (e.g., during baptismal prep and other sacramental prep opportunities).
  - **Discipleship Path: What does “success” or fruitfulness look like?** One way to consider the question of “success” or fruitfulness is to see how this shift in sacramental preparation and reception can support and be supported by a “discipleship path” at the parish (where evangelization and faith formation efforts are interwoven into a lifelong journey of discipleship, oriented around the principle that adult discipleship and catechesis should be the center of all catechetical efforts). A family-oriented approach is one key component, but the trajectory of

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parish ministries and the culture as a whole (vision, goals, strategy) need to be considered in order to avoid an experience of an earlier sacramental “graduation.” Also, keep the suggested goals above in mind.

**Youth Ministry:** A significant dimension of youth ministry has involved Confirmation preparation. Shifting Confirmation to an earlier age would require promoting (and perhaps reconceiving) youth ministry more and more as support for discipleship growth and as living into the grace of the Sacrament of Confirmation (and all the Sacraments of Initiation) which has already been received. The significance of this opportunity needs appropriate consideration. Youth ministry would be “freed” from a “sacramental requirement checkbox” and maximized to its true potential along an evangelizing, “growth-in-discipleship” path. A renewed vision of youth ministry might include the following aspects:

- **Small discipleship groups:** Studies and experience have shown that engagement in parishes with young people is more successful when there is a relational element to it. The development of small discipleship groups can foster that relational ministry and create a sense of belonging in the parish community. Life Teen is one example of a fruitful approach integrating both large-group and small-group experiences. In addition, it is worth reconsidering the model of youth ministry from one “youth group” to various groups and initiatives.
- **Deepening the encounter with Christ:** More focus can be put on opportunities to encounter Christ through the sacraments (including mystagogy on Confirmation and all the Sacraments of Initiation), Eucharistic adoration, prayer, and serving others.
- **Family engagement:** Build in ongoing/supplemental family activities.
- **Service:** Being able to offer more service opportunities can encourage teens to live out their faith and to see the fruits of the Holy Spirit at work in their lives.
- **Involvement in parish ministries:** Young people and their families can explore and become active participants in ministries within the parish. This approach allows them to be life-long disciples in areas that are of particular interest to them. Ministries that may have particular appeal for young people include liturgical ministries and other ministries/initiatives taking place within the parish where Catholic social teaching is being encouraged and carried out.
- **A broader perspective:** As noted above, youth ministry in practice usually encompasses more than the formal youth ministry or youth group model. Catholic sports and Catholic scouting are examples of youth ministry opportunities and experiences, even if they have not often been recognized explicitly as such in the parish community. A new intentionality toward various ways to engage young people and foster growth, leadership, and discipleship can chart a new path.
- **Mission-oriented:** Prepare young people, in collaboration with their parents, to be *sent*.

### **Specific Confirmation Prep**

OED is reviewing existing resources that can be used or adapted for a younger age of Confirmation preparation. OED is also reviewing the sacramental guidelines to propose updates, including updating the outline of key curriculum content. The current expectation is to retain an understanding of specific sacramental prep as being of shorter duration, ideally following upon or integrated within at least two years of ordinary, ongoing formation. Experiences such as retreats

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and service will still be encouraged; however, they will be recommended within a more family-involved dynamic, given the younger ages involved. For example, the practice of overnight retreats might be adjusted to a day-retreat including participation by the parents (and sponsors); overnight retreats might be reserved for older teens post-Confirmation, though they can still be powerful experiences for middle-school youth and deserve consideration.

### **Other Questions**

- Role of Catholic Schools (OED in consultation with OCS)
  - Offer both ordinary, ongoing formation as well as specific sacramental prep re: content.
  - Specific sacramental prep expectations at the parish remain the pastor's discretion. Pastors are encouraged to accept the intellectual and catechetical formation offered by the Catholic school, not requiring additional ordinary formation at the parish. Aspects of specific preparation that can unite Catholic school students, public school students, homeschool students, and their families are encouraged, such as retreats, other prayer experiences, service opportunities, etc.
  - Sacramental reception will remain at the parish. Parochial school students registered at a different parish will need permission from their pastor if they wish to receive the sacrament with their class at the school's parish.
  - Engaging parents/families in creative ways at the schools will be encouraged.
- Intercultural aspects (OED in consultation with OIM)
  - Varied approaches depending on community circumstances reaffirm the importance of prayer and discernment by each parish to find appropriate next steps.
  - Certain communities can be more predominately focused on reception of the sacraments—this may be the place to start in terms of family catechesis, i.e., re-orienting sacramental prep as a family-focused reality.
  - With varied parental expectations and circumstances, there may be other creative ways to engage families by adapting the pillars of domestic church life into the parish culture.
  - Opportunities for mutual sharing among parish leaders and diocesan leaders will be helpful.
- Youth with disabilities (OED in consultation with Disabilities Ministry) – *TBD*

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\* The current *Form to Send* logo is a placeholder initially generated and then adapted from Google Gemini.