

August 6, 2010

Dear Monsignor/Father:

I have thoroughly enjoyed celebrating Confirmations with our young people during my first four months in the Diocese and am delighted by their enthusiasm. This letter is being sent with information regarding the celebration of the Sacrament of Confirmation for the 2010-2011 school year (September 1, 2010, to May 31, 2011). The enclosed form instructs you to select three dates, by order of preference, on which the celebration of this sacrament is to take place at your parish. Note that the form must be **signed by the pastor** and returned by September 7, 2010. Requests that arrive later than September 7, 2010, will be processed after those received by the deadline.

Because we have a large number of parishes and most requests are for the months of April and May, I ask pastors and their staffs to give serious consideration to moving their usual Confirmation requests to other times during the year. In addition, please keep in mind that, in order for me to be at all parishes during the year, it has become necessary to celebrate Confirmations on weekdays. Confirmations may also be celebrated on the Second through Fifth Sundays of Lent, and on weekdays of Lent through Thursday of the Fifth Week.

As you well know, the pastor is the chief catechist of the parish and is to ensure that consistent, coherent and comprehensive catechesis takes place in preparation for Confirmation. A few important points to remember:

- The age of Confirmation in this diocese is high school (grades 9-12). The preference is for 10th and 11th grade.
- I cannot overestimate the importance of knowledge of the Creed and the ability to unpack its meaning in a simple and straightforward way. This includes understanding the identity of the Holy Spirit and the Gifts of the Holy Spirit.
- I am quite concerned about our young people's understanding of the fundamentals of our faith. In addition, an understanding of the meaning of a sacrament is also crucial. Our Catholic faith has a content and the basic content of the faith is to be known by those who approach the Sacrament of Confirmation.
- Most parishes also include prayer times and retreats before Confirmation, including invitations to the Sacrament of Penance. This is most admirable and most important. The call to service projects is good as long as the young people know why that call is asked of them. Such invitations cannot be made an absolute requirement.

Though high school students today are not always verbally articulate, I do find in them a desire to know and love God. It is incumbent upon all catechists and young adult leaders not to substitute their own ideas or ad hoc programs in place of a well-ordered and comprehensive catechesis of the faith, based on the Catechism of the Catholic Church. The Sacrament of Confirmation is the completion of Baptism and the strengthening of baptismal faith. It is not a graduation exercise. The emphasis in some programs on the "my decision" factor, as though students decided who God is or that God was subject to them, is theologically inaccurate. The emphasis should not be on their choice, but on the fact that God has chosen them and called them to bear much fruit. They are asked to respond to God's choice.

In the Diocese of Austin, the celebration of the Sacrament of Confirmation will always take place at Mass. There are a few parishes where the number of candidates is so large (over 200) that two separate ceremonies are needed for the celebration of Confirmation. This should be noted on the enclosed form.

The liturgy for the Sacrament of Confirmation is a parish event and usually includes many visitors. Therefore, the music used in the celebration of Confirmation should be available to all who come so that they may participate. The parish Director of Music and/or Liturgy Coordinator should prepare the liturgy in collaboration with the DRE and Youth Minister. I want to caution that this liturgy is not a "teen" Mass. Also, when Confirmation occurs on a Saturday evening after 4 p.m. or on Sunday, the liturgical texts are always from the Sunday Mass, including the Responsorial Psalm. The Church is celebrating the Lord's Day, at which the Sacrament of Confirmation is received. The music should reflect this fact. On weekdays, when there is no Solemnity, the Mass and texts of Confirmation are to be used. (I also want to note that during the Easter Season the Roman Church always takes the first reading from the Acts of the Apostles; it omits readings from the Old Testament during the Easter Season).

When you receive a letter verifying the date of Confirmation for your parish, it will include the *Guidelines for Preparing a Confirmation Liturgy* prepared by the Worship Office. Please review this thoroughly and do not hesitate to contact the Worship Office staff with any questions, as they are happy to assist you.

Finally, priests occasionally send in requests for delegation of the pastor to confirm an adult who was baptized in infancy as a Catholic and was catechized as a Catholic. I am happy to consider such requests but please keep in mind that these requests should be reserved for very serious reasons since the Church wants such persons to be confirmed by the bishop. Also, adults can be included in the Confirmation celebration with the parish teens or participate in one of the two diocesan adult Confirmations held each year. The dates for the next two adult Confirmations are November 4, 2010, and May 10, 2011 (locations to be determined).

With prayerful best wishes, I am

Fraternally in Christ,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Joe S. Vásquez". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a large, stylized initial "J" and "V".

Most Reverend Joe S. Vásquez
Bishop of Austin