

# Come Holy Spirit

RESTORED ORDER ADDENDUM • PASTORAL LETTER 2024



**Diocese of Tulsa**  
*and Eastern Oklahoma*



June 29, 2024  
*Solemnity of Saints Peter and Paul*

Dear Brothers and Sisters in Christ,

On the Solemnity of Pentecost, it was with great joy that I released my latest pastoral letter and strategic plan entitled *Jesus is Lord*. Within the plan, we have highlighted the essential role of the laity in the life of the Church by raising up a priority on The Vocation and Mission of the Laity.

Anticipating this necessary priority for the future spiritual health of our diocese, I commissioned a team of priests, deacons, and lay catechists to study the age of Confirmation in our diocese and also our approach to the evangelization of the young.

I and the Presbyteral Council were happy to accept their recommendation to change both the age of Confirmation and the way in which we go about accompanying both parents and children into a deeper understating of the mysteries of the faith.

Therefore, on this Solemnity of Sts. Peter and Paul who labored to make Jesus known, I am pleased to promulgate the new *Policies & Procedures for the Restored Order of the Sacraments of Initiation* as particular law in our diocese. May Jesus Christ bless our labors and help us to build up his Church.

Sincerely yours in Christ,

*Bishop David Konderla*

The Most Rev. David A. Konderla

Bishop of the Diocese of Tulsa and Eastern Oklahoma



*Dcn. Harrison Garlick*

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Chancellor

*“The eleven disciples went to Galilee, to the mountain to which Jesus had ordered them. When they saw him, they worshiped, but they doubted. Then Jesus approached and said to them, ‘all power in heaven and on earth has been given to me. Go, therefore, and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you. And behold, I am with you always, until the end of the age’” (MT 28:16–20).*

Brothers and sisters, we are the fruit of this “Great Commission” from the Lord. Those first disciples – made Christians in Baptism, empowered by the Holy Spirit in Confirmation, and continually strengthened by the Eucharist – took up the mission of the Lord so faithfully that twenty centuries later we stand ready in our own time to continue their witness.

“So we are ambassadors for Christ, as if God were appealing through us” (1Cor 5:20). The mission field of the first disciples was difficult. Most people had never heard of Jesus. The first disciples were challenged by geography, persecution, competing religions and cultural and language differences. For us who choose to live as disciples today, we face our own challenges. Our mission field is marked by materialism, scientism, secularism and is highly influenced for good and bad by our media culture and its technology. Less than a hundred years ago, the Christian faith could be assumed to be a dominant influence in the United States. Today we live in what many call a post-Christian culture in which Christianity is often ridiculed and even attacked. Many young people walk away from the faith of their parents and families and claim that they have no particular faith at all.

And yet, then as now, “the love of Christ impels us, once we have come to the conviction that one died for all; therefore, all have died. He indeed died for all, so that those who live might no longer live for themselves but for him who for their sake died and was raised” (2Cor 5:14-15). Then as now the knowledge that God’s love has been poured into us through Baptism, that we have received the indwelling of the Holy Spirit through Confirmation, and that the Body of Christ strengthens us for the mission in the Eucharist, fills us with hope that we can indeed be missionary disciples bearing fruit in our families, our parishes, and our world. Now is a time to find an even better way to address the challenges that we face. The key is the Holy Spirit at work in and through our families and giving the Gift of the Holy Spirit to our children when they reach the age of reason.

When I arrived in the diocese 8 years ago I learned that, given the challenges that we face, there was interest in the diocese among parents, catechists, and clergy to adopt a more effective approach to how we form our young people for Confirmation. In particular, three areas for improvement stand out:

1. Every year we are losing a number of children who are Baptized and who then never go on to be Confirmed. By the time they reach high school, life and family circumstances intervene in such a way that even if they received First Communion, they might not be Confirmed.

2. The current age of Confirmation ranges widely in the diocese from second grade all the way up to late high school. This lack of uniformity causes hurt and confusion among some families who see that children in one parish can be Confirmed at one age but not in their parish. Sometimes well intended families even shop around from one parish to another seeking an earlier age for their children to receive the grace of the Holy Spirit in Confirmation. Pastors recognize that this disunity creates problems within the programs and the parishes.

3. As in many places in the United States, we are celebrating the sacrament of Confirmation out of its original and theologically proper order after Baptism and before First Communion.

The reasons for this irregularity are merely historical and do not reflect the Church's theology about the Sacraments of Initiation. The bishop is the ordinary celebrant of Confirmation and in the early Church, families were initiated together. Adults, children, and infants were all Baptized, Confirmed, and received the Eucharist from the Apostles and their successors (cf. Acts 8:14-15; 16:31-33). But as the Church grew, it became increasingly impossible for the bishop to be at every place for these Sacraments of Initiation. In the Western Church, Confirmation and Eucharist were separated from Baptism and delayed in order for the bishop to be able to administer them. Even so, the practice was for children to be Confirmed and receive the Eucharist at about 12 -14 years old. In 1910, Pope Saint Pius X lowered the age of Communion to 7, the age of reason. While he was focused on the age of First Communion, he made no mention of Confirmation and so the last two Sacraments of Initiation became inadvertently out of order in pastoral practice. Yet, in his decree *Quam Singulari* explaining his reasoning he said something that is very applicable to our plans now: "This practice of preventing the faithful from receiving on the plea of safeguarding the august Sacrament (of the Eucharist) has been the cause of many evils. It happened that children in their innocence were forced away from the embrace of Christ and deprived of the food of their interior life; and from this it also happened that in their youth, destitute of this strong help, surrounded by so many temptations, they lost their innocence and fell into vicious habits even before tasting of the Sacred Mysteries....still the loss of first innocence is always to be deplored and might have been avoided by reception of the Eucharist in more tender years." This same concern for the temptations surrounding children and the need for them to have all the sacramental graces of the Sacraments of Initiation to aid them in maintaining their innocence is also the reason for them to receive Confirmation at the same time they receive First Communion. Given his stated concerns it seems very unlikely that Pope Saint Pius X intended for the age of First Communion to be lowered to the age of 7 while Confirmation, with all the help the Holy Spirit brings us, would be received after First Communion and at an older age. Yet, this has happened in the U.S. and elsewhere and it is not necessary to continue this practice.

This irregular arrangement has continued down to our own time. It creates confusion with many people thinking that Confirmation, not First Communion, is the end of Christian initiation. Many think that a primary point of Confirmation is to make



an adult decision for the faith. This idea obscures the more important truth that the gift of the Holy Spirit received in Confirmation is a free and unmerited gift. The Catechism explains it this way: “The holy Eucharist completes Christian initiation. Those who have been raised to the dignity of the royal priesthood by Baptism and configured more deeply to Christ by Confirmation participate with the whole community in the Lord’s own sacrifice by means of the Eucharist” (CCC 1321). The Eucharist is the sacrament that sustains us throughout our life. When Confirmation is received after First Communion, this often leads to an implicit understanding that once a person has been Confirmed, since “they have received all of their sacraments” they no longer need to continue with catechesis and faith formation.

I think we can do better for our children; the vision still has its time. The love we have for our children and families, the hopes we have for missionary disciples throughout the diocese are the foundation of our plan. This Pentecost as we launch a new pastoral plan, we will also begin to address how we form and prepare our children for the Sacraments of Initiation.

First, we will focus on and assist parents to fulfill their privileged role as teachers of the faith to their children. This will also help parents to grow even more in their adult faith. The greatest resource for forming children in the faith is the lived faith of their parents and family. When the whole family continues to grow in knowledge and faith together, the children learn several critical lessons.

For example, they learn that Jesus is the goal of all faith formation. Of course, Jesus is present in all the sacraments and he is why we prepare to receive the sacraments. We are learning how in each of the sacraments Jesus brings us closer to Himself for life. This means that even after we have received the sacraments, we still need faith formation so we can continue to deepen our relationship with Jesus and with each other. As we and our children grow and mature through childhood, adolescence, and adulthood, our ability to understand the sacraments in a deeper and more fruitful way grows with us.

Also, as parents grow in their faith together with other parents and families and share that faith with their children in word and deed, the children will come to see that it is a normal part of adult life to have an active and devoted relationship with God the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit in the midst of the worshipping community. Whole family catechesis organized and united in the parish community, with its focus on what Jesus is doing in each of our lives today and what he is preparing us to do in the world will unite us all in growing as disciples no matter what stage of life we are in or what age we have reached.

Secondly, we will restore the proper order of the sacraments for all in the diocese and not just those initiated through the Order of Christian Initiation of Adults (OCIA).

We have lived with the sacraments being received out of their proper order for so long that many Catholics may not even know that there is a proper order and that while receiving Holy Communion before Confirmation is not illicit, it is confusing.

There are three sacraments of full initiation in the Catholic Church: Baptism, Confirmation, and Eucharist and they are properly understood in this order. Baptism is the beginning of life with Christ and the foundation for all the other sacraments.

Confirmation perfects the gift of the Holy Spirit begun in Baptism and orders us towards the mission of the Church to make Jesus better known and loved. And the Eucharist, as the goal of both Baptism and Confirmation, strengthens us day by day and week by week to fulfill the evangelical mission. The Church calls the Eucharist the source and summit of her faith. It is the final step of initiation as a Catholic. But when it is received before Confirmation, it causes the mistaken notion that Confirmation is the end or goal of the Sacraments of Initiation. Surely this confusion must contribute to the loss of faith in the real presence of Christ in the Eucharist that we see in the Church today.

And finally, we will make the gifts and fruits of the Holy Spirit available to our children when they reach the age of reason. First Reconciliation will occur in the second grade or about age 7 and then Confirmation and first Holy Communion will be received in the proper order in the same Mass in the third grade. The historical reasons that led to this disordered reception of the sacraments no longer pertain and so there is no reason for Confirmation to come so late that it comes after Holy Communion.

In the Gospel of Matthew we see the beautiful scene when Jesus is blessing children and the disciples try to intervene thinking that blessing children is not the best use of Jesus's time. Jesus responds to them "Let the children come to me, and do not prevent them; for the kingdom of heaven belongs to such as these" (Mt 19:13-15).

Jesus understands the openness and innocence of children and how precisely those qualities help them to love him, form a deep relationship with him and to receive the Holy Spirit with trust and Holy Communion with devotion. Of course, the Church has been Baptizing, Confirming, and giving Holy Communion to children from the beginning and continues to do so to those children who are initiated through the OCIC (Order of Christian Initiation of Children). Children who are able to understand the most profound mystery of the Eucharist are easily able to also understand and receive the gifts and fruits of the Holy Spirit in Confirmation.

Indeed, growing up in this post-Christian age, they need as early as we can give them, the indwelling presence of the Holy Spirit along with the gifts and fruits that He brings. Being fully initiated in the Catholic faith from a young age, they will more readily learn and grow in their understanding and commitment to the life of a disciple of Christ and, in a way appropriate to their age, join in the mission of the Church.

Naturally these changes will require practical adjustments to the way we form children for the sacraments and to the ongoing catechetical programs for children that we offer after the sacraments of initiation. Among the largest of the misunderstandings of offering Confirmation in the teen years and out of order with the Eucharist has been that Confirmation was seen by many to be the reason for continuing religious education. This is not true and indeed it is the graces received in Confirmation that will bring fruit from all the religious education that follows it.

In the Jerusalem Catechesis, St. Cyril of Jerusalem leads the newly initiated Christians through a process of mystagogia, a deepening in their understanding of what God has done and is doing for them in the sacraments they have received. It is this kind of continual and age-appropriate unpacking of the gifts of the sacraments that will form the main part of the ongoing catechesis of our children and we ourselves too.

We are planning for a five-year transition time. Different parishes, depending on the number of children being prepared for the sacraments, will be able to move at a pace that is best for them. Many of our parishes will be able to make the transition to the Restored Order in one year, indeed some have already done so. Others will need to do it in steps over several years. By 2029, we will have a uniform program for the preparation of and reception of the sacraments of Reconciliation in the second grade, Confirmation and First Communion together in the third grade, and ongoing whole family catechesis through the end of high school.

With the increased number of children receiving all the sacraments and able to live out of the grace of those sacraments from an early age, we will then be able to bear much fruit for the Lord and better meet the challenges of the mission today.

As your shepherd, it is my responsibility to tend to our families, parishes, and communities — to listen to the Holy Spirit and guide our flock amidst the challenges of our culture. By returning to the proper order of the reception of the Sacraments, lowering the age of the reception of Confirmation and by supporting our families as the domestic church, our children will be better equipped to become great saints. It is my hope that our parishes are so on fire with love for Jesus Christ that the whole world cannot help but notice this powerful witness of God's work in us. Every parish, every family, and every person must be captivated by His goodness and sent out "ready to give an explanation to anyone who asks you for a reason for your hope..." (1Peter 3:15). I believe that by focusing on the life of Christ given to us in the Sacraments and living out those sacramental graces, all of us can be transformed to be authentic missionary disciples."

Come Holy Spirit, give us the new life we seek so we can bring the Gospel of Jesus Christ to the whole world.

*Most Rev. David Konderla*

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**Bishop of Tulsa and Eastern Oklahoma**  
**June 29, 2024, the Feast of Sts. Peter & Paul**





