

**Pastoral Reflection
on the
Sacrament of Confirmation**

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October 7, 2005, Feast of Our Lady of the Rosary

1) As your bishop and successor of the apostles amongst you, I desire to hand down the *traditio* received from the Lord Jesus and His apostles. In light of this mission, I offer these theological and pastoral observations in response to the request from the Presbyteral and Diaconal Councils for an articulation of theology and practical administration of the Sacrament of Confirmation in the Diocese of Tyler. In addressing this request, I find it necessary to look closely at the interconnectedness of the Sacraments of Initiation to one another and to the Sacrament of Penance. In this Year of the Eucharist, I call particular attention to the relationship of the Sacrament of Confirmation to the Eucharist. This reflection on the Sacrament of Confirmation also necessarily touches upon the diocesan processes of Christian Initiation, Liturgical Renewal, and the Call to Holiness. I present this reflection to the clergy and lay people of the diocese for your ongoing formation and prayerful consideration. Over the last four years as your bishop, I have often spoken about the substance of this reflection with the priests and permanent deacons (at clergy days and with the Presbyteral and Diaconal Councils) and with the faithful and our lay parish leadership at the Diocesan Ministry Conferences and other meetings.

2) The great Pope John Paul II, continuing the call of Vatican II, encouraged the Church to look at our pastoral programs and to reflect upon them in light of Christ so that we might live more deeply the Paschal Mystery and bear witness to the Gospel before the world. In the Diocese of Tyler, we have labored to carry out this renewal by fostering the processes of Christian Initiation, Liturgical Renewal, and the Call to Holiness. This experience has brought to light a number of questions regarding the meaning and practice of the Sacrament of Confirmation in our diocese. To find suitable answers, it is essential that we consider both the authentic theology of the Sacrament of Confirmation and concrete pastoral practices. I believe that in our diocese Confirmation has suffered from some inadequate pastoral practices and theological rationales that have tended to isolate Confirmation from its relation to the other Sacraments of Initiation in the mission of the Church. I wish to invite the Diocese of Tyler to take a fresh look at Confirmation as a Sacrament of Initiation as it impacts the public worship and witness of the Church in East Texas.

3) Because the Sacraments of Initiation are the foundation of our life in Christ, the Church desires that all her members should receive and live these Sacraments at the deepest level in the liturgy and throughout their lives. This is the only way the Church continues her apostolic mission of evangelization, announcing the Call to Holiness to the whole world. Vatican II observes “the classes and duties of life are many, but holiness is one—that sanctity which is

cultivated by all who are moved by the Spirit of God, ..." (LG 41) The fullest participation in the Christian life finds its most sublime liturgical expression in the celebration of the Eucharist, in which the Church, in all her members, is united in a singular fashion in Christ's saving sacrifice of love. For this reason, the celebration of the Eucharist may be called "the source and summit" of the Church's life and evangelical witness. (see SC 10)

4) Perfect union with God through Christ is the fulfillment of every human heart and mind. Apart from this communion we are lost and can never find rest. God has chosen to express His love for us and to open the way to communion with Himself through the saving events of Christ's life, death, and resurrection. It is this truth and love of God, at work in Christ, which is the origin and goal of our lives and anchors our freedom. God has chosen to convey to us a participation in this love by uniting us to Christ and His saving work. This love comes to us by the power of the Holy Spirit when we are sacramentally initiated into the Paschal Mystery of Christ; whereby dying with Him to our former way of life, we rise to a new life sharing the glory of His resurrection and ascension. We live this mystery by our daily Christian life of prayer, self-denial, and works of mercy. By living out the dying and rising of Christ in this way, we bear witness to God's love and grow in holiness.

5) We can see, then, the relationship of the Sacraments of Initiation to the liturgy and to the Call to Holiness. The sacraments draw humanity into the truth and love of God revealed in Christ, thereby disposing the faithful to live this love more deeply in their daily lives of Christian freedom and witness. The celebration of the sacraments are themselves supreme witnesses to the truth of the Gospel. Above all, this is true of the Eucharist, during which the Gospel message and the Church are made manifest (see SC 6-8, LG 26). The relation of Baptism and Confirmation to the Eucharist becomes clear; each prepares a person to take his appointed place within the life of the Church. Baptism makes one a member of Christ's Body, the Church, sharing in the apostolic mission as a child of God offering Him spiritual worship (see CCC 1213). Confirmation is given to strengthen the baptized that they might be more perfectly bound to the Church and, as true witnesses of Christ, spread and defend the faith by word and deed (see CCC 1287). Like Christ, the confirmed have been anointed by God to "bring glad tidings" (see Luke 4:18). In the Eucharist, those who have received the baptismal priesthood and the anointing of confirmation publicly proclaim the Gospel in union with the whole Church as they participate in the Lord's own sacrifice (see CCC 1322). Thus, fully-initiated Christians render glory to God, grow in holiness, and announce the Good News until Christ comes again in glory.

Confirmation in relation to the Eucharist

6) From the days of the early Christians the great sign of being joined together as the community of the Church was their communion in the celebration of the Eucharistic Sacrifice, the "Breaking of the Bread." Eucharistic communion, along with acceptance of the apostolic teaching and manner of life, was a sign of the communion of life for the early Christians (see Acts 2:42). This communion of believers was based on their having been baptized and confirmed by the apostles. Early Christians noted that "communio sanctorum" could mean both "the communion of saints" and the "communion of the holy things." It was recognized that

communion in the holy things of Christ was the foundation of communion with each other in the Church. Holy Communion in the Eucharist expresses and fosters the Holy Communion which is the Church. It is in sharing in the sacrifice of Christ that we are saved.

7) The early Christians entered the communion of the Church through baptism and the laying on of hands. Baptism and Confirmation introduced Christians into the life of the community and prepared them to celebrate the Eucharistic sacrifice and to share in the One Bread and the One Cup. Receiving the Body of Christ in the Eucharist, they became fully members of His Body, the Church.

8) Living and celebrating the Eucharist is the summit of an authentic program of Christian initiation, of liturgical piety, and of the Call to Holiness. To live as a Christian means to put the gift of baptismal rebirth into effect, a gift which is strengthened in Confirmation and nourished through regular participation at Mass (see synod #16). Full participation in the Eucharist and the life of the Church therefore entails having been confirmed.

9) Why, then, are not all those who participate in the Eucharistic sacrifice and banquet confirmed members of the Church? This situation is at the root of the pastoral questions facing the Diocese of Tyler

I. Confirmation in relation to the Christian Life

Confirmation in relation to Baptism

10) Like all Sacraments, Confirmation was instituted by Christ. In the early Church we hear that after Baptism the Apostles would impose their hands upon Christians for the reception of the Holy Spirit (Acts 8:14-17; Hebrews 6:2). Confirmation corresponds to this laying on of hands, which in time came to include an anointing with Sacred Chrism. In the first centuries, this usually meant that baptism and confirmation were celebrated in unison. From the earliest times, then, Confirmation has been closely connected to the Sacrament of Baptism and to a sense of apostolic mission. These connections have been maintained across the centuries despite diverse cultural and pastoral situations.

11) Our practice in the Western Church has preserved in a strong way the connection with the apostolic laying on of hands. As it became more difficult for the bishop to visit the many distant parishes of his diocese and personally to baptize all new Christians (many of whom were newborn infants), the celebration of Confirmation began to take place at some time after baptism when the bishop could be the celebrant. In this way, each person's baptismal process was completed by the father and the visible head of the particular Church. It must be clear that the ordinary minister of Confirmation is the bishop. The priest confirms only when given the faculty to do so by the bishop. The role of the bishop in the Western Church as the ordinary minister of the sacrament is important as a sign of the visible communion of the confirmed with the local and universal Church.

12) The majority of Eastern Rite Catholics (and most Eastern Orthodox) have preserved the close connection between Baptism and Confirmation, which they call Chrismation, by celebrating the two sacraments at the same time. Typically, the celebrant is a priest rather than a bishop. The apostolic aspects of the sacrament are maintained by the use of "Myron" (chrism oil) consecrated by the bishop and by the fact that the priest exercises the apostolic ministry because of his ordination at the hands of the bishop. The simultaneous celebration of these two sacraments, theologically and pastorally legitimate for Eastern Catholics, is not kept as such in the Latin Rite because of our unique history and canon law.

13) The ordinary pastoral practice in the Latin Church is for Confirmation to be administered by the bishop at some point after a child reaches the age of reason in accord with Church law. The Catechism of the Council of Trent (published in 1566 by decree of Pope Pius V) indicated that there was good reason for the Sacrament of Confirmation to be given at the age of reason (at least seven years old) (Roman Catechism, p.208) Presently, in the USA the age for Confirmation is "between the age of discretion and about sixteen years of age," as established by the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops and approved by the Holy See (USCCB, 2002) One should note that the use of reason was never considered essential for the validity of the sacrament and, in fact, priests have permission to administer Confirmation to any baptized person in danger of death regardless of age or use of reason. This provision indicates that the Sacraments are gifts which we receive and which perfect us, not in any way rights which we have earned or expressions of changes that we ourselves have initiated. Even the soul of a child a year or two old benefits from reception of the perfecting grace of Confirmation and should not be deprived of it in the face of death. Pastoral situations have arisen at various times and places in the Latin Rite of the Catholic Church which have led to priests being authorized to confirm infants at the time of baptism routinely, although this is not the case in the United States.

14) With the introduction of the Rites of Christian Initiation for Adults in 1974, priests in the United States have been delegated the faculty to confirm adults being baptized and baptized adults entering into full communion with the Church with delegation from the local bishop. The RCIA process is appropriately applied to all children over the age of reason, and in recent years this has become the common practice in much of the United States.

Some observations on pastoral practice

15) In the beginning of the twentieth century, children would have received First Communion very near the time of their Confirmation, generally at about the age of twelve. When Pope Pius X defined the age for First Communion to be as young as seven, the same age of reason that was in use for the celebration of First Reconciliation, it was designed to increase liturgical participation and the living of the Christian life and one can imagine it was an innovation that surprised some. In *Quam Singulari*, Pope Pius X set forth that children in fact had an obligation toward both confession and reception of communion at the age of reason. While the age for First Communion was lowered, the celebration of Confirmation did not seem directly affected, and it was left at about age twelve. This further strained in practice the connection between Eucharist and Confirmation. There were some places that celebrated a "First Solemn

Communion” at the time of Confirmation, four or five years after "First Holy Communion” at the age of reason, but even where this was done, the catechesis did not focus on a conscious connection between these Sacraments.

16) Throughout the latter half of the twentieth century, the common pastoral approach to Confirmation in our diocesan territory in Texas emphasized coming into maturity of faith by embracing life as a “soldier for Christ” or affirming one's personal faith in Christ. These approaches were certainly not without reason. At a time when fewer people completed high school and many people were going into the workplace before they completed eighth grade, age twelve or thirteen may have seemed a natural point of maturity and appropriate for Confirmation. In keeping with this perspective, many places in the United States increased the age of Confirmation during the last forty years to the end of high school. This has only exaggerated the gap between Confirmation and Eucharist. Sadly, as the age of Confirmation moved higher, fewer people availed themselves of this important Sacrament. The result is more people participating in Mass and daily life without being fully sacramentally initiated into Christ and the Church. Despite variations in the timing for the celebrating the Sacraments, theologically the order of the Sacraments of Initiation has remained the same: Baptism, Confirmation, and the Eucharist, which is preceded by the Sacrament of Reconciliation.

Confirmation in the life of Grace

17) The Sacrament of Confirmation completes the baptismal grace. That is, the Holy Spirit, first received in Baptism, now strengthens the Christian, binding him more perfectly to Christ and the Church so that, as a true witness of Christ, he might spread and defend the faith by word and deed (see CCC 1285). Thus it is not accurate to connect Confirmation to maturity in the psychological sense so that it would best given at an age of social maturity. The Sacrament of Confirmation strengthens the person to bear witness, rather than expresses the person's determination to bear witness, to his faith. This strengthening is something that can be fittingly given at any age. By the reception of Confirmation, the Christian is given the grace to take his place in the life and apostolic mission of the Church. That mission is, first of all, to go out to all the world and witness to the Gospel of Christ. This witness is carried out in word and deed, in sacrament and service, by the power and inspiration of the Holy Spirit, with the guidance of the Apostles and their successors. The premier expression of the Gospel, the great act of Witness, the prolongation and fulfillment of the apostolic mission, is the worship of God and the salvation of man effected in the Paschal Mystery celebrated in the Eucharist. For a Christian publicly to take his place in the Eucharistic assembly is the greatest participation in the apostolic mission of the Church that is imaginable. The greatness of the Martyrs is found here: in their daily lives they lived fully what they celebrated at Mass. The two Sacraments at the service of communion, Holy Orders and Matrimony, serve to build up the people of God in living out of this great Mystery in their Call to Holiness.

18) It is through the grace of Baptism and Confirmation that the Holy Spirit and the Church prepares a person for full communion in the Holy Eucharist. Reception of the Eucharist prior to receiving the Sacrament of Confirmation may create some confusion in the community or in the person. Anyone who professes the true faith and participates in the sacrifice of Christ, receiving

the Body and Blood of Christ, should be a fully initiated Christian through both Baptism and Confirmation, in as much as they are participating in the full, public worship and witness of the Church. They are fulfilling the apostolic mandate given by Christ: "Do this in memory of me." They are sharing in the pre-eminent work of Christ Himself, the first and greatest work of the Church: proclaiming the Paschal Mystery until Christ comes in glory to bring it to completion (SC 7-8). They are responding to the Call to Holiness. They ought, therefore, to be fully prepared for the life and mission they now share by being confirmed in the Holy Spirit prior to being initiated into the Eucharist. This participation does not depend on human gifts, talents, or age; it depends on truth and love. We can only love because God has first loved us. God conveys His love through Christ, the way, the truth and the life, by the power of the Holy Spirit, and chief among the instruments He uses are the Sacraments of Initiation.

19) Confirmation not only strengthens us and sets us aside as witnesses to the apostolic mission. This strengthening by the Holy Spirit also helps us to overcome the tendency to sin which remains in each of us even after Baptism. The gifts of the Holy Spirit foster the formation of supernatural virtue as well as strengthening the natural virtues in the human person. Confirmation cannot be properly looked at as a single event, done and then forgotten, like some type of 'immunization' or 'graduation'. Confirmation establishes an ongoing relationship with God which animates the ongoing growth in holiness which is the vocation (or call) of all the baptized. The gifts and fruits of the Holy Spirit strengthen our souls by enabling a virtuous exercise of our will and our faculties for the Glory of God. Unduly delaying Confirmation for those who already receive Holy Communion fails to accord the person their proper role in the Eucharistic assembly, the life of the Church, and the strengthening of the sacraments. Worse than that, it could entail a denial of their right within the Church to receive the gift of the sacrament once they have met the conditions required by canon law: the age of reason and proper disposition of soul (i.e., in a state of grace and open to receiving the sacrament). (Canon 843)

20) Sometimes in our activist and production-oriented American society and culture we succumb to pragmatism looking at the Christian life and our sharing in the apostolic mission of the Church as a matter being able to "do" things for Christ, the Church or others. In fact, the Christian life is a gift and a call to truth and love given to us by God. It is first a matter of "being," of simply existing as a person created by God and redeemed by Him in Christ. We live out this truth and love in specific ways according to our age, talents, and unique vocation. At no point are the sacraments about what we have done or promise to do for God. They are God's free gift of grace to us. At the same time, these gifts of love entail an obligation to bear witness to God's love in word and deed by our collaboration in freedom with the grace given.

21) If one is not careful, service projects before Confirmation can seem to be demonstrating an ability to do things, and Confirmation becomes a type of graduation into an adult faith. This abuse of pragmatism can result in failing to recognize that the desire "to do" or to praise God is itself a grace, as is the capacity to do good (Weekday Preface IV).

22) These ideas reveal a common misunderstanding of Confirmation by some, and as Bishop I want to take this opportunity to address them. Confirmation is not about an individual deciding

to embrace the faith of Baptism. It is not a human act similar to that of non-Catholic Christians who, perhaps in their early teens, choose to publicly profess that they have accepted Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior. Sacraments are primarily about God choosing and embracing us not the other way around. In baptism, God marks us unconditionally as a member of His family and co-heir with Christ, children by adoption. (see Galatians 4:5-7) Once baptized, at whatever age, we can no more choose to cease being a child of God than we can choose to cease being the child of our natural mother. Confirmation is not our "confirming" Baptism or our faith in Christ; it is Christ confirming us in the Christian life we are already living. It is particularly important in East Texas that we avoid any sacramental catechesis that reflects the notion that Confirmation is a time for the person to individually embrace the faith or to become personally engaged in the work of the Church. It is in the Sacrament of the Eucharist, particularly at the offertory, that we present ourselves as a sacrifice to the Father. Indeed, each moment of daily life is a time to reaffirm the Call to Holiness by a commitment to love of God and neighbor. Each instant calls us to embrace Christ as He has embraced us. Above all, the celebration of the Eucharist is an appropriate sacramental moment for the individual to renew the commitment to service in the Church and in the community for the common good

Confirmation and the Sacrament of Penance

23) The Sacrament of Penance also allows us to renew our commitment to truth and service by restoring sanctifying grace and increasing actual grace in our souls. In Penance we become reconciled with God through the confession of our sins, desire to amend our life, and acceptance of acts of reparation. The Sacrament of Reconciliation is closely tied to Baptism, Confirmation, and the Eucharist, restoring the bonds of communion established by the Sacraments of Initiation that have been subsequently weakened by venial sin and imperfections or broken by mortal sin. The grace of repentance from our sins is necessary for salvation. The Sacrament of Penance is ordinarily needed for the forgiveness of mortal sin and the return to sanctifying grace and the Eucharist. This explains why the Sacrament of Penance was considered in the early Church a type of "second Baptism" that restores the life of grace and reorders the penitent to the life of the Church and the celebration of the Eucharist. Throughout the history of the Church, frequent Confession has been recognized as a premier means of renewing one's commitment to Christ and for growing in holiness. Without penitence, that ongoing conversion expressed daily in prayer, self-denial, and works of mercy, our personal salvation is in danger because without penitence we are not living the Sacraments of Initiation fully; we are not united to Christ in dying completely to ourselves out of love for God and neighbor. This ongoing conversion, fostered in a particular way by the Sacrament of Penance, is necessary for encountering and adoring the All Holy God in a spirit of truth and purity of heart.

24) This explains the role of the Sacrament of Penance. It is about living the Sacraments of Initiation in the face of sinful inclinations and actions. Confession fosters and, if necessary, restores the life conferred in Baptism and Confirmation and nourished in the Eucharist. We confess not only when we have committed mortal sin, but regularly because we may have committed venial sins and have imperfections and we acknowledge that we need the help of God's grace to fulfill our desire to love God and neighbor perfectly in Christ. This understanding

of Confession, which is that of the Saints and Doctors of the Church, is one that can be taught to anyone who has reached the age of reason regardless of whether they have received any sacrament beyond baptism. This understanding allows the Sacrament of Penance to emerge in its beauty as God's gift to us in our journey to Holiness rather than a painful process reserved for mortal sinners. It is seen for what it actually is an aid to living fully our sacramental lives.

25) It is fitting, then, that baptized Christians approaching Confirmation and the Table of the Lord be introduced into the fruitful celebration of the Sacrament of Penance as a regular part of the life of a Christian disciple. Preparation for the Sacrament of Confirmation requires the same spiritual readiness of being in the state of grace, and of responding to the constant call to conversion that is essential for our daily Christian life and the worthy reception of the Eucharist. Let us consider the special affinity between the Sacrament of Penance, which aids us in the struggle for holiness, and Confirmation, which strengthens the Christian to bear faithful witness. Both sacraments aid us in our efforts to “avoid the things that lead to sin” in the face of our tendencies to sin that remain within us after Baptism. A Christian who is awaiting Confirmation or the Eucharist would not want to receive either sacrament without the renewal of baptismal grace available in the Sacrament of Penance. When we are in a state of mortal sin, cut off from communion with Christ and dead to the Christian life, we should not dare approach these sacraments of the Christian life until we are restored to communion with Christ. It is through an act of repentance and the Sacrament of Penance that we are reconciled to God and others through the outpouring of the Holy Spirit.

II. Pastoral Considerations

Changes in the households of faith

26) In 1852, the First Plenary Council of Baltimore directed establishing parish communities as the locus for the celebration of the sacraments and the establishment of institutions of Catholic education. One hundred years ago, the Catholic Church in the United States was part of a society where the extended family was fairly strong and often immigrant. Most Catholic families became reasonably well-established in an urban or farming area and had relatives living near them, which offered them a natural faith community. Further, a greater number of Catholics attended church, and most had an education in their faith similar to their overall formal education. The American society in general was more religiously minded then, and Catholics lived in a more Catholic culture, supported by older relatives who were living the faith. This supported an organic religious formation for the children and the whole community.

27) Since the mid-twentieth century, for many reasons, there has been marked increase in the mobility of Catholics within the United States and a movement to a suburban style of life. At the same time, there has been a decline in the presence of Catholic schools and the stability of catechesis, further weakening the directives of the Councils of Baltimore. These changes have been so severe that many Catholic parents and grandparents are now hard-pressed to give an explanation of the faith to their children and grandchildren. Adult formation is imperative if we are to help Catholic adults live and share their faith. Truly we have reached the point that the

significance of celebrating and living the Sacraments has to be consciously put forward to the entire family, not just the children.

28) In the Diocese of Tyler, these cultural changes in the households of faith are often even more manifest. We are firmly located in the Bible Belt, an area noted for conservative Christian values, but not historically very open to Catholicism. Over the past fifty years many have come into the fullness of the truth by joining the Catholic Church. In addition, many more Catholics have moved into the East Texas area, and some Catholic families have put down strong roots in the East Texas soil. However, many of our Catholic families are comparatively new arrivals in the area and many have no extended families nearby. Moreover, there is not a strong native Catholic presence in most of our civil communities. Many of our parishes are new to the communities they serve and seek to evangelize.

29) East Texas also has an increasing number of new immigrants from rural areas of Mexico where people may have encountered a priest one or two times a year, or at most once a month. Often they need initiation into the Sacraments as well as needing to be integrated into their new Catholic communities and our society. These immigrants have to be introduced to the three processes of Christian Initiation, Liturgical Renewal, and the Call to Holiness as well as the proper reception of the Sacrament of Confirmation and the two sacraments at service of communion: Marriage and the Sacrament of Holy Orders.

30) The celebration of the Sacraments provides a natural opportunity to draw the entire household of faith, and the parish community, more deeply into the Mystery of Christ. At whatever age the Sacrament of Confirmation is celebrated, it will be important to continue to move catechesis away from merely preparing children in a classroom for sacraments and toward helping the parents and children to understand and live as a family the Christian life they receive in those sacraments.

Appropriate age and level of Catechesis

31) Pope John Paul II recalled in “Rise, Let Us Be On Our Way!” that “children are the present and the future of the Church. They play an active role in evangelization of the world and with their prayers help to save and improve it.” (Synod #17) The experience of the last one hundred years has demonstrated a tremendous spiritual and pastoral benefit from allowing children to receive the Eucharist at the age of reason. Today, this approach seems even more necessary because many children attain the use of reason and are subject to dangers and temptations at an early age. Reception of Holy Communion at the age of reason affirms the primacy of grace, which has brought great help to young people and great benefits to the Church. (Synod #17).

32) It is desirable to set the expectations for Catechesis for the Sacrament of Confirmation to an age appropriate level of maturity. Just as an adult has, hopefully, a better grasp of the mystery of the Eucharist than they did when they received Communion for the first time, one would not expect a seven year old to understand the Sacraments as deeply as a sixteen year old, nor as

deeply as an adult.

33) The process of the Call to Holiness requires ongoing growth and training in the faith. It will be important to expand our efforts to strengthen lifelong learning in the faith as a part of every Christian's life. This will be one of the major changes necessary for us. Catechesis of the young will have to move from being about preparation for receiving Sacraments to living the Sacraments they have received. This is entirely in keeping with the processes introduced in the Diocese of Tyler: Christian Initiation, Liturgical Renewal, and Call to Holiness. We will need to develop a Catechesis for the Call to Holiness. Such a catechesis, by its very nature, is not limited to children and does not end at eighth or twelfth grade but continues through our adult life and ends only with death. By God's grace, we are aided in this final passing through the Sacrament of Anointing, Viaticum, and the funeral liturgies which bring us to the Hope of Eternal Life.

The experience of the Christian Initiation process in the Diocese of Tyler

34) In the three years since the Christian Initiation process has been put forth in our Diocese, we have received many blessings as whole families have been brought into the Church, being initiated into the Sacraments and integrated into the community of faith. Initially there was resistance to the Church's norm that unbaptized children over the age of seven should receive Baptism, Confirmation, and Eucharist together with their parents when the family comes into the Church. By now, the experience of children coming into Full Communion at the age of seven with Confirmation and Eucharist has been very positively received in most parishes and missions in the diocese.

35) The Year of the Eucharist has brought our diocese to a deeper realization of the importance for every Christian to participate in the Eucharist by being fully initiated into the Paschal Mystery of Christ.

36) A tension is arising in our parishes and missions when non-Catholic children between the ages of seven and twelve enter the Church through the process of Christian Initiation, receive Confirmation and so participate fully in the life of the Church while Catholic children, baptized as infants, will not be confirmed until they are twelve to sixteen. This raises the question of whether in an area like East Texas, it would be better to initiate baptized Catholics through a similar practice. So we face the question: Should Catholic children, baptized as infants, celebrate the Sacrament of Confirmation before they receive the Eucharist?

Conclusion

37) In light of this reflection and the pastoral reality of the Diocese of Tyler, and having discussed this important question with the priests, deacons, and members of the lay faithful, as Bishop of the Diocese of Tyler, I am directing that our catechetical and pastoral practices shall encourage parents, as the primary educators of their children, to present their children for the Sacrament of Confirmation and then First Eucharist at about eight years of age after appropriate preparation. First Reconciliation shall be encouraged after they have reached the age of seven

and been prepared to begin regular celebration of Confession as part of the call to conversion and the Call to Holiness. The ongoing catechesis of both children and adults will focus on the apostolic mission of their Call to Holiness and their participation in the liturgical and apostolic life of the Church. As your Bishop, I ask for the cooperation of the clergy and laity as we seek to preserve the tradition of faith, morals, and the doctrine of the Church which has been handed down to us.

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