

**Address of Archbishop Samuel J. Aquila
Federation of Diocesan Liturgical Commissions
Erie, Pennsylvania
October 9, 2013**

Your Excellencies, Reverend Fathers, Religious men and women, and dear lay people,

Thank you for offering me the chance to speak to you this afternoon about a topic that is important to me and to the life of the Church we are all blessed to be a part of.

I would like to begin by pointing out that we are only one month away from the close of the Year of Faith, a period that Pope Emeritus Benedict described as “a moment of grace” and a time to commit ourselves to “a more complete conversion to God, to strengthen our faith in him and proclaim him with joy to the people of our time.”¹

As many of you know, the Year of Faith was launched on the 50th anniversary of the opening of the Second Vatican Council, and that fact was not missed by Benedict.

The “...age in which we live continues to be marked by forgetfulness and deafness towards God,” he said as he began the Year of Faith this past October. And then Benedict added, “I believe, therefore, that we must learn the simplest and most fundamental lesson of the Council: that the essence of Christianity consists in faith in God.”²

“The Second Vatican Council is a strong call for us to rediscover the beauty of our faith every day, to nourish a deeper understanding of it, a more intense relationship with the Lord, to truly live our Christian vocation.”³

Dear fellow liturgists, we are quickly nearing the close of this “window of grace,” and we must all ask ourselves some important questions: ‘Are we closer to Jesus? Do we know him more deeply? And have we done everything we can to allow God to give us the gift of deeper faith, not to mention helping others receive that treasure?’

These important questions lead me to my topic for today.

My goal in our time together is to explain why I think that the age of Confirmation and the order of the Sacraments of Initiation should be restored to their original order, as the Second Vatican Council envisioned, and to show how this will help more people meet and know Jesus Christ.

Some of you know that this is not just theoretical for me.

In August 2002, when I was the Bishop of Fargo, I consulted with the clergy and laity of my diocese and issued a pastoral letter on the sacrament of Confirmation, titled *Send Forth Your Spirit*. As bishop I restored the order of the sacraments of initiation for those children baptized as Catholics in infancy.⁴

Education played a very important role in the process as many of the faithful were unaware of the history of the sacrament of Confirmation and especially of Church teaching over the past 40 years. The restored order of the reception of the sacraments of Reconciliation, Confirmation and Eucharist in the Diocese of Fargo

was: the sacrament of reconciliation in the 2nd grade, and the sacraments of Confirmation and First Eucharist in the 3rd grade, celebrated during the same Mass by me during the Easter Season.⁵

Throughout my priestly ministry, I have experienced many different approaches to the celebration of Confirmation. After my ordination in 1976, I leaned towards Confirmation as a "sacrament of maturity" that should be reserved to high school students only. However, the more I worked with the sacraments of initiation, and experienced children, who entered the Church at the age of 7 by being baptized, confirmed and admitted to the Eucharist at the Easter Vigil, I began to question the wisdom of placing the sacrament of Confirmation in high school and junior high.

My questions about the ordering of the sacraments of initiation grew when I took graduate studies in sacramental theology at the Pontifical University of Sant'Anselmo in Rome from 1987-1990. As I studied the history and the theology of Confirmation it became clear to me why the Fathers of Vatican II called for the revision of the Rite of Confirmation so that "the intimate connection which this sacrament has with the whole of Christian initiation is to be more clearly set forth."⁶ Furthermore, I began to recognize that placement of Confirmation after first Eucharist only muddied the primacy of the Eucharist as the completion of initiation into the Church and the life-long nourishment of the relationship established with the Trinity and the Church in the sacraments of Baptism and Confirmation.

My aim today will be to offer you an overview of the sacrament's historical development in the life of the Church, an examination of Confirmation and its place among the sacraments of initiation and a look at the effects of the sacrament. I will then highlight the Church's recent teaching on the sacrament, before sharing

some of my observations, experiences and conclusions about the current praxis in the United States.

Historical Development

So that we can appreciate how the Church in the U.S. decided on when to confirm its members, I will begin by offering a brief overview of Confirmation, beginning with the early Church.

We see the first references to the sacrament in the Acts of the Apostles when Peter and John pray that the Holy Spirit comes down upon the Samaritans.⁷ Though the Samaritans were baptized, they had not yet received the Holy Spirit.

As the early Church grew, the sacraments of Baptism and Confirmation were celebrated in one continuous rite of initiation leading up to the reception of the Eucharist. In his late 2nd-Century work *On Baptism*, Tertullian describes a structure of initiation that began with catechumenal formation. Once that unspecified period was completed, the believer was anointed with oil and confessed the faith three times, which was followed by a threefold immersion in water. After that, he or she was anointed with chrism, the sign of the cross was made, and hands were laid upon the person while invoking the Holy Spirit. The initiation was completed with the celebration of the Eucharist.

This is still the current practice in the Eastern Rites of the Church, where the faithful are fully initiated as infants.

After the fifth century, in the west with the principal of the bishop as the celebrant of Confirmation, it became difficult for a bishop to travel to the parishes in his diocese to baptize and confirm all at once. Because of this, the separation between

Baptism, Confirmation and the Eucharist grew. Infants were baptized and given communion by the priest and later the bishop would come to administer Confirmation. Over time, the infant reception of communion ceased and Confirmation received less attention.

In the Middle Ages, admission to the Eucharist was held off until well after the age of discretion. While Confirmation was conferred at the age of discretion, the Eucharist was delayed until the ages of 11 or 12. The order was restored to the practice of the early Church.

However, in France, during the mid-1700s, it was decided by a local ordinary that young people would be confirmed only after they had received first Eucharist. This was a shift, as it was not for the practical reason of the lack of the availability of the bishop but rather was based on adequate instruction. This change soon spread to other dioceses in France. Rome, however, did not approve the practice and in 1897 Leo XIII called for the practice to end and the celebration of Confirmation to be held at the age of reason.

The latest displacement of Confirmation within the order of Christian initiation was unintentionally begun in 1910 when Pope Pius X lowered the age of first communion to seven. Interestingly, he said nothing of Confirmation in his Letter, *Quam Singulari*, but his main concern was that children have all the resources they need to live a rich spiritual life in order to carry out their mission as Christians in the modern world.

Thus, the custom began of receiving First Communion as a 2nd grader and later receiving Confirmation in middle or high school. This continues to be a recent practice in the life of the Church and throughout much of the United States.

Vatican II's Reforms and the Order of Initiation

The natural question for this gathering is: What does Vatican II say about the order we use today?

In *Sacrosanctum Concilium*, the Council Fathers called for the revision of all of the sacramental rites so that that the faithful would understand them better and more frequently tap into the “stream of divine grace”⁸ found in the seven sacraments.

When the Council Fathers considered Confirmation, they specifically said that the “intimate connection which this sacrament has with the whole of Christian initiation” must be set forth “more clearly.”⁹

In the Apostolic Constitution for the Rite of Confirmation which resulted from that call for reform, one finds the following order for the sacraments:

“The faithful are born anew by baptism, strengthened by the sacrament of confirmation, and finally are sustained by the food of eternal life in the Eucharist. By means of these sacraments of Christian initiation, they thus receive in increasing measure the treasures of divine life and advance towards the perfection of charity.”¹⁰

But the movement toward a restoration began before the Council was even convoked. Already in 1948 one finds references to the restoration of the order of the sacraments of initiation in the work of the renowned liturgist- scholar Benedictine Father Godfrey Diekmann.

In an essay published in *Orate Fratres*, Diekmann wrote with the underlying presumption that the order was restored, and that the opportunity given by Pius X only increased the potential for receiving the grace needed to live a life of holiness.

The Benedictine liturgist asserted that since “*Agere sequitur esse*: Action follows being; Christian living is possible only because of Christ’s life within us.”

“God’s image has been impressed on us in baptism and confirmation,” he stated, and God’s image “is constantly being nourished renewed and deepened in us by Holy Communion.”

It is quite significant that this paper was published in *Orate Fratres*, which was founded by Virgil Michel, a key promoter of the Liturgical movement in the United States. In hindsight, we know that the Liturgical movement had already laid the foundation for the reform that was discussed and then promulgated in an Ecumenical Council through the Constitution on the Sacred Liturgy.

In the intervening years since the Council, there has been tension in the universal Church between the approach of delaying Confirmation to increase religious education and the model that emphasizes the interconnectedness of the sacraments and the order of grace.

However, it must be noted that the Church insists that children who enter the Church through the Rite of Christian Initiation of Adults receive the sacraments of initiation in the order of Baptism, Confirmation, and Eucharist, if they have reached the age of reason. That is the age of 7.¹¹

The Rite notes, this form of the rite of Christian initiation “is intended for children, not baptized as infants, who have attained the use of reason and are of catechetical age.”

It was not until Benedict XVI’s 2007 exhortation *Sacramentum Caritatis* that a clear criterion was offered for assessing the two different orders of initiation.

He noted, “It must never be forgotten that our reception of Baptism and Confirmation is ordered to the Eucharist. Accordingly, our pastoral practice should reflect a more unitary understanding of the process of Christian initiation.”¹² He addressed the centuries-long difference of the manner in which the sacraments of initiation are celebrated in the east and west, noting that these differences are not from the dogmatic order but are rather pastoral.¹³

The criterion that Benedict proposed in *Sacramentum Caritatis* was, “which practice better enables the faithful to put the sacrament of the Eucharist at the center, as the goal of the whole process of initiation.”¹⁴ He called on Bishops’ Conferences throughout the world to “examine the effectiveness of current approaches to Christian initiation, so that the faithful can be helped both to mature through the formation received in our communities and to give their lives an authentically eucharistic direction.”¹⁵

Confirmation as a Sacrament of Initiation

I would now like to spend some time reflecting on why I think Confirmation must always be seen as a sacrament of initiation that is placed between Baptism and the Eucharist.

Even though it is related closely with Baptism, Confirmation is more than an appendix of Baptism; indeed, it is a sacrament in its own right.¹⁶ In Baptism the Holy Spirit is truly given, but in Confirmation he is given in a way that completes the graces of Baptism and imparts special strength upon the recipient.¹⁷

The relationship can be made clear by making an analogy with salvation history. “Confirmation puts the seal on Baptism as Pentecost completes Easter.”¹⁸ “In fact, whereas Baptism is rooted in the mystery of the death and resurrection of Christ (cf. Col 2:12), Confirmation is based on the gift of the Spirit granted to the disciples at Pentecost, thus inaugurating the life of the Church and the mission of the apostles and believers in the world.”¹⁹

Confirmation is anticipated by Baptism, but the full strength and mission given by the Holy Spirit is lacking without Confirmation. This strength that is conferred permits the unique character of Confirmation to emerge.

The gift of the Holy Spirit given in Confirmation is ordered to the life of worship. St. Thomas Aquinas affirms that the seal given in Confirmation qualifies the Christian to participate in worship.²⁰

Aquinas states that Confirmation plays a role in enabling one to actively participate in the Eucharistic liturgy and become a true worshipper of the Father, united to Jesus in his own worship of the Father. Aquinas notes, “The Holy Spirit is Author and Master of our holiness; it is he who gives us the power to be 'true worshipers [of] the Father in spirit and truth' (Jn 4:23).”²¹

Thus, the completing gift of the Holy Spirit given in Confirmation is a strength that orders the person to a more perfect integration into the life of the Body of Christ, both as one who is a witness and one who worships the Father in spirit and truth.

In this context, one can come to understand how Confirmation is ordered to the Eucharist. It would be odd to have a person participate in the Eucharistic life of the Church, which has the building up of ecclesial unity as one of its goals, if he or she has not received the seal of the Holy Spirit, which perfects their personal bond with the community.

The Jesuit scholar Father Arturo Elberti notes in his work *Witness of Christ in the Spirit* that an “intrinsic dynamism exists between the three sacraments of initiation, as a result of which the one leads to the other, while the sum of the catechumenal and initiatory process has its culmination in the Eucharistic mystery, centre and form of the whole life of the Church.”²² The “intrinsic indivisibility between the three sacraments demands a certain order of succession.”²³

The *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, which introduces the sacraments according to the restored order, notes in paragraph 1285 that the unity of the sacraments of Christian initiation “*must be safeguarded*” (emphasis added). It must be explained to the faithful that the reception of the sacrament of Confirmation is necessary for the completion of Baptismal grace.”²⁴

Effects of Confirmation

Now I would like to examine what the effects of Confirmation can tell us about where it should fall within the order of the sacraments of initiation.

The special outpouring of the Holy Spirit given in Confirmation increases the initial gift of the Holy Spirit given to us at Baptism, in a way that is similar to the increase of the Holy Spirit at Pentecost.²⁵ The new law of the Gospel is the Holy Spirit himself, and his sevenfold gifts provide the inspiration needed not just to

lead a good life, but an abundant life, fueled by the grace of God. These seven gifts perfect the same human faculties in which the theological and cardinal virtues reside²⁶ and animate our lives with the power of divine love.

Jesus reminds us, “Without me you can do nothing.”²⁷ We need the gifts of the Holy Spirit every day to live a life that gives glory to the Father, just as Jesus glorified the Father. The goal of the Christian life is neither a mere moralism where rules are followed, nor an ideological system in which truths are presented for one's assent; rather, it is a “living experience with the Lord Jesus in the grace of his Spirit.”²⁸

It is an encounter with Jesus, who presents us to the Father. And it is important to remember that encountering Christ is a teaching that has been stressed by Popes John Paul II, Benedict XVI and now Francis. In the encounter with Jesus and in our receptiveness to his love and teaching we discover our true identity as Christians, placing our faith in him and living a moral life.

In Romans, St. Paul reminds us, “For you did not receive the spirit of slavery to fall back into fear, but you have received the spirit of sonship. When we cry, “Abba! Father!” it is the Spirit himself bearing witness with our spirit that we are children of God.”²⁹ Our true identity is that we are beloved sons and daughters of the Father, children of God.

Paul further reminds us in Galatians, “the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control ... If we live by the Spirit, let us also walk by the Spirit.”³⁰

In Confirmation we are more deeply rooted in our true identity as beloved sons and daughters of the Father so that we may live and walk by the Spirit. Drawing on St.

Irenaeus' theological anthropology, one could say, "What Jesus Christ is by nature, we are by grace."³¹ Growing in receptivity to this identity as beloved sons and daughters of the Father is central to our spiritual lives and to the new evangelization in which we go to the outskirts of the world proposing the truth of Jesus Christ. Without the experience of God the Father loving me as his son, or as his daughter, it is difficult, if not impossible, to fulfill the personal mission God has entrusted to me to be a witness in the world and in the public square.

Experiencing the Fatherhood of God also enables one to enter into fuller worship and praise of Him in the celebration of the Eucharist.

It is interesting to see all the books in popular book stores focused on self-help and personal confidence. We long to be secure, so that our lives become successful, but this cannot come from mere positive thinking, or natural optimism, but only when one is enabled by the Holy Spirit to cry out "Abba! Father!" and deepen this relationship in personal prayer and the sacraments of the Christ and the Church. Only intimacy with Jesus can bring this experience about.

Confirmation enables this growth in relationship to deepen in those who receive the sacrament. The Catechism of the Catholic Church beautifully summarizes the effects of Confirmation, "it roots us more deeply in the divine filiation which makes us cry, 'Abba! Father!'; it unites us more firmly to Christ; it increases the gifts of the Holy Spirit in us; it renders our bond with the Church more perfect; it gives us a special strength to spread and defend the faith by word and action as true witnesses of Christ, to confess the name of Christ boldly, and never to be ashamed of the Cross."³²

Recent Church Teaching and Practice

In recent history, there have been interesting developments as well. In 1983, the new Code of Canon of Law was promulgated. The sacraments of initiation are set up around the traditional order culminating in the Eucharist. Canons 889 § 2 and 891 call for the Confirmation of children before the age of discretion who are in danger of death. Canon 891 calls for children to be confirmed at the age of reason, unless the Bishops' Conference has decided a different age.³³

In 1992, the *Catechism of the Catholic Church* was published. The restored ancient order is clearly stated in the presentation and order of the sacraments of initiation.³⁴ The age of reason is given as the historical standard for the age of Confirmation, and it is strongly stated that even the youngest in danger of death is to receive the sacrament of Confirmation and not “depart this world without having been perfected by the Holy Spirit with the gift of Christ's fullness.”³⁵

In 1997, the *General Directory for Catechesis* was published. It makes at least six references that indicate the ancient order is the general operating assumption behind catechetical work in the Church. In the general instruction for the Rite of Confirmation³⁶ it gives the age of reason as the suggested age for reception.

Benedict XVI has also made comments about the sacrament of Confirmation. In his Message for World Youth Day 2008, he affirms the ancient order and unity of the sacraments of initiation.³⁷

His 2007 Post-Synodal Apostolic Exhortation, *Sacramentum Caritatis*, noted earlier, is most significant for its call to recapture the primacy of the Eucharist in the sacraments of initiation. His concern is to maintain the centrality of the Eucharist, which in many parish catechetical programs is often given less attention

than Confirmation.

During my March 2012 ad limina visit with Pope Benedict, I shared with him the process I used to restore the sacraments of initiation to Baptism, Confirmation and then Eucharist. As I mentioned earlier, that involved Reconciliation taking place in 2nd grade and then Confirmation and Eucharist in the 3rd grade.

He listened attentively to what I said and then stated, “You have done what I always wanted to do.” This affirmation gave encouragement to me and made clear to me the need to continue to work for the restoration of the order of the sacraments of initiation.

Observations and Questions on Confirmation Celebrated after Eucharist

One common motivation for putting Confirmation later in adolescence is that it provides a way to keep young people involved in the faith and active with ongoing catechesis. Even though the experience of many is that Confirmation at a later age keeps children involved, it is not the only thing that will keep young people interested.

As Fr. Elberti notes, “A distinction needs to be drawn between what more properly concerns Confirmation on one hand and, on the other hand, what forms part of the wider pastoral care of pre-adolescence or adolescence, which goes well beyond the preparation for the sacrament and its followup.”³⁸

In other words, preparation for Confirmation is no substitute for youth ministry, or for the instruction and formation that parents should give their children.

The Church teaches that parents are the ones who are responsible for ensuring the faith formation of their children. It is their duty to make certain that they and their children continue to deepen their understanding of our Catholic faith.

But there are other pastoral factors that should be considered when determining the time of Confirmation.

Let me pose several questions concerning the pastoral factors. Should a free, unmerited gift of God, the sacrament of Confirmation, be treated as a reward, or worse, as something earned or deserved for attendance and work in a parish catechetical program? Should the fear of not receiving a sacrament ever be used as a means to keep a young person involved in the life of the Church? Should the gift and strengthening of the Holy Spirit be denied young persons in their most formative years? And, finally, is Confirmation, because of the special attention given to it and the length in preparation for its reception, perceived by many to be a more important sacrament than Baptism and Eucharist?

Also, Confirmation at times is spoken of by some, who advocate a later age, as a way for the young person to make a personal commitment to their faith at a time when they are mature and ready for mission. This view distorts the sacrament of Confirmation.

Confirmation is not marked by a choice to believe or not believe in the Catholic faith. Rather as disciples we are chosen by God to receive the fullness of the Holy Spirit, to be sealed with the gift of the Holy Spirit generously bestowed by God, and we are called to cooperate with that grace. Every Sunday we affirm our personal response of this election as we proclaim our faith through the Creed and say “Amen” to Christ in the Eucharist. Taking personal responsibility for one's

Catholic faith is something that is a habitual choice made by grace. Faith is a theological virtue, bestowed by a loving God, which grows over time, not something that is chosen once and for all at Confirmation.

The argument for maturity fails to make some crucial distinctions as well. Fr. Elberti asks, “When the discussion of maturity arises, the nature of the maturity must be specified before the discussion begins. Is it a biological, psychological, intellectual or spiritual maturity that we are speaking about?”³⁹

The *Catechism* reminds us, “Although Confirmation is sometimes called the 'sacrament of Christian maturity,' we must not confuse adult faith with the adult age of natural growth, nor forget that the Baptismal grace is a grace of free, unmerited election and does not need 'ratification' to become effective.”⁴⁰ The *Catechism* then cites Thomas Aquinas, “Age of body does not determine age of soul.”⁴¹

Children can be mature spiritually. I have found the 3rd graders to be most receptive to the gifts of the Holy Spirit and their childlike trust and wonder is beautiful to behold. Many times their ability to see the truth and have complete trust in God is strikingly better than our own. It allows for a deeper receptivity of the graces of the sacrament. We experience too many young adults, and older ones, who are not spiritually mature, but spiritually have regressed into a state of indifference or despondence toward God. This can be because of various reasons both within and outside of the scope of their own choices, but a fact nonetheless. Spiritual maturity cannot be identified with biological maturity and children do have the spiritual maturity necessary to receive Confirmation, just as they have the spiritual maturity to receive the Eucharist at the age of reason. If they are mature

enough to receive the Eucharist, the crown of the sacraments, are they not mature enough to receive a sacrament that is ordered to it?⁴²

In a secular culture that teaches relativism as a way of life, many young people are at a great disadvantage. Young people, like all Catholics, are called into mission by their Baptism and given further strength for it in Confirmation. It seems to me that encouraging the pastoral acceptance of administering the sacraments of confirmation and Eucharist around the age of reason, and maintaining the rightful order of the sacraments of initiation, will bring hope and grace to children who need to learn to live their lives differently than the society pressures them to.

On that note, it is worth pointing out that the average age of first exposure to pornography is 8, the age of reason, does it not make perfect sense that we need to provide children with “the armaments of battle.” They may not be ready to go to war, but they are already at the age of reason engaged in a battle with evil. And the strength of the sacrament of confirmation can assist them in that spiritual battle, accompanied by the nourishment of the Holy Eucharist.

Conclusion

With the Year of Faith drawing to a close, Pope Francis has asked all Catholics to bring their deepened faith to those on the outskirts.

This means those who are materially impoverished, but it also means those who are spiritually and culturally poor.

In a July 2013 meeting with priests, religious and seminarians at World Youth Day in Rio, Pope Francis mentioned another important need the Church must meet:

“promoting a culture of encounter” as the “culture of rejection” and exclusion spreads.

“Be servants of communion and of the culture of encounter!” the pope exclaimed. “Permit me to say that we must be almost obsessive in this matter. We do not want to be presumptuous, imposing 'our truths.' What must guide us is the humble yet joyful certainty of those who have been found, touched and transformed by the Truth who is Christ, ever to be proclaimed (cf. Lk 24:13-35).”

We are blessed as Catholics to be able to touch, to encounter Jesus in the sacraments and be completely, eternally transformed by him. We are called to proclaim him by our very lives and in the living out of Baptism and Confirmation in our ongoing reception of the Eucharist each Sunday or daily.

Confirmation is ordered to the reception of the sacrament that stands as the source and summit of our lives, the holy Eucharist. If we are to promote a culture of encounter and not exclusion, I believe that the inherent order of grace found in the sacraments of initiation, the reforms promoted by Vatican II and the increasing secularization of our culture all point to the need to restore the order.

At the parish level, I have seen how the restoration of the order of the sacraments of initiation helps local communities create effective and engaging catechesis that acknowledges growth in faith as a life-long process.

The change also makes the role of parents as the primary evangelizers and catechists of their children much more apparent. Children, who face much different challenges today than we did when growing up, receive the strengthening of the gifts of the Holy Spirit in Confirmation that will aid them as they grow up in the contemporary world. Parents are much more willing to be involved and active in

the catechetical formation of their children at an early age than when they are in junior high or high school. I have witnessed parents return to reconciliation and Eucharist after participating in catechetical sessions with their children in second and third grade.

May the Holy Spirit who came down upon Mary and the apostles at Pentecost, the same Holy Spirit we received in our Confirmation, stir up the grace of God deep within our hearts so that the Church may be fruitful in her mission of bringing Jesus Christ to our world.

NOTES

¹ Homily of Pope Benedict XVI on October 16, 2011 in St. Peter's Basilica, Vatican City.

¹ October 12, 2012 Wednesday general audience of Pope Benedict XVI in St. Peter's Square, Vatican City.

¹ Ibid.

⁴ The local bishop in each diocese is to determine the age of Confirmation for his particular Church. In accord with the norms set by the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops, that age may range from the age of discretion to about 16. Complementary norm to Canon 891 was approved by U.S. Bishops in 2000 and granted *recognitio* by the Congregation for Bishops on 9 May 2001.

⁵ In 2005, Bishop Thomas Olmstead in the Diocese of Phoenix restored the order of the sacraments of initiation for Catholic children baptized as infants. See *Gift from on High, Confirmation and First Eucharist, Completing the Initiation of Baptized Children*. There are about another 15-20 dioceses which follow a similar pattern, whether by establishing a diocesan wide norm or by allowing parishes to choose to restore the order on the local level.

⁶ Second Vatican Ecumenical Council, Constitution on the Sacred Liturgy *Sacrosanctum Concilium*, n. 71.

⁷ Acts 8:14-17.

⁸ Second Vatican Ecumenical Council, Constitution on the Sacred Liturgy *Sacrosanctum Concilium*, nn. 59,61.

⁹ *Ibid.*, n. 71.

¹⁰ Paul VI, Apostolic Constitution on the Sacrament of Confirmation, *Divinae Consortium Naturae* (15 August 1971), 1.

¹¹ *Rite of Christian Initiation of Adults, Christian Initiation of Children Who Have Reached Catechetical Age*, International Commission on English in the Liturgy, n. 306, 1988.

¹² Benedict XVI, Post-Synodal Apostolic Exhortation *Sacramentum Caritatis*, (February 22, 2007) n. 17.

¹³ *Ibid.*, n. 18.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*

¹⁵ *Ibid.*

¹⁶ Arturo Elberti, SJ, "Witness of Christ in the Spirit" in *Rediscovering Confirmation*, ed. *Pontificum Concilium pro Laicis* (Vatican City, 2000), p. 42. The 18th Plenary Assembly of the Pontifical Council for the Laity focused on the sacrament of Confirmation. In this talk I am indebted to the presentation made by Fr Elberti, S.J.

¹⁷ Paul VI, Apostolic Constitution on the Sacrament of Confirmation, *Divinae Consortium Naturae*, August 15, 1970. See also the *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, 1285.

¹⁸ Paul Haffner, *The Sacramental Mystery* (Trowbridge, UK, 8999) p. 72.

¹⁹ Elberti, SJ, "Witness of Christ in the Spirit", 52.

²⁰ Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologica* III 63.6 and 65.3.

²¹ Elberti, SJ, "Witness of Christ in the Spirit" 81.

²² *Ibid.*, 61.

²³ *Ibid.*, 59-60

²⁴ *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, 8285.

²⁵ *Ibid.*, 1302-1303.

²⁶ c.f. Jordan Aumann, OP, *Spiritual Theology* (Sheed and Ward, London, 2001), 96.

²⁷ Jn 85:5 (RSV)

²⁸ Elberti, SJ, "Witness of Christ in the Spirit," 65.

²⁹ Rom 8:15

³⁰ Gal 5:22-23, 25

³¹ cf. CCC 460, St. Irenaeus, *Adv. Haeres.* 3, 19, I: PG 7 /1, 939.

³² *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, 1303.

³³ See footnote 1 for norms for the United States.

³⁴ *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, 1212-1419.

³⁵ *Ibid.*, 1314.

³⁶ Congregation for Divine Worship, General Introduction to the Rite of Confirmation (August 22, 1971), II.

³⁷ Benedict XVI, *Message for 2008 World Youth Day*, (Lorenzago, 20 July 2007).

³⁸ Elberti, SJ, "Witness of Christ in the Spirit", 75.

³⁹ *Ibid.*, 68.

⁴⁰ *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, 1308.

⁴¹ *Ibid.*, 1308; c.f. *Summa Theologica* III 72.7.ad2.

⁴² It is good to note a 1999 response from the Congregation for Divine Worship in which parents of an 11-year-old child requested Confirmation from their bishop for their child. The norm in the diocese was sophomore year of high school. The dicastery asked the bishop to move forward as quickly as possible with the Confirmation and not wait until the sophomore year. cf *Notitiae* 35 (Nov.-Dec. 1999), Prot. n. 2607/98/L.