

THE CURRENT SITUATION

The End Goal - Those who work in the Church know that the goal of our ministry, apostolate, work and lives is to encounter Jesus Christ and allow that encounter to transform our hearts and motivate us into mission. Pope Benedict eloquently said it in his first encyclical *Deus Caritas Est*, “Being a Christian is not the result of an ethical choice or a lofty idea, but the encounter with an event, a person, which gives life a new horizon and a decisive direction.”¹ Pope Francis has continued this teaching in his first encyclical, *Evangelii gaudium*, calling us to be “people who have chosen deep down to be with others and for others” in light of this relationship with Jesus Christ.²

There is beauty, richness, and happiness to found in a life lived in relationship with Jesus Christ within the Catholic Church. There is nothing more we should want to work for than to make this reality known to our Catholic teens. We trust that the Holy Spirit is guiding the good work being accomplished in the Diocese of Madison, from our parishes and schools, to Camp Gray, Love Begins Here and all of the incredible apostolates working for the sanctification of our young people. However, there is still much work to be done.

Today’s Situation - A quick look into our own experience or around the country will tell us the same thing: by and large, our Catholic teens are not practicing the Catholic faith into their adult years. We recognize that a large part of this falling away happens during their childhood years, as families do not experience the fullness of life within the Church. The situation grows increasingly dim as they move beyond their high school years. In the book *Forming Intentional Disciples*, Sherry Weddell points out the fact that “*Catholics who leave, leave early... Nearly half of cradle Catholics who become ‘unaffiliated’ are gone by age eighteen, and 79% have left by age twenty three.*”³

The Vision for High School Formation - To turn the tide around, we must rethink and recommit our energies to high school youth formation, so that we, together as a Diocese, create a generation of missionary disciples in our eleven counties and beyond. In order to raise up mature, intentional disciples in the Church, we must provide ample opportunities for evangelization, conversion, catechesis and discipleship formation throughout their high school years. There will not be one standard program or event that fits all parishes and young parishioners, namely because “the work of discipleship is inherently individual and customized.”⁴ While there is not a standard that will suit all needs, we are confident that a parish striving to meet the needs of their teens will engage adult volunteers, focus on creating small group environments, and encourage participation in larger opportunities emphasizing conversion, community and mission. These efforts will be distinct from and in addition to providing top notch Confirmation preparation.

The Sacramental Life and Confirmation - On our quest to create missionary disciples among our high school teens, we must think about how the Lord will give them grace and gifts through their sacramental lives. Without a doubt, our teens will grow and change most through their encounters with our Lord in the Eucharist and through his merciful love in Reconciliation. Beyond helping our teens establish regular sacramental lives, they will be strengthened by the Holy Spirit through Confirmation. Confirmation is clearly not the end of high school formation, nor should it be the driving force of all high school activity in the parish. Formation leading up to the reception of Confirmation should be a time of deepening conversion and immersion in the life of prayer. When our teens receive the sacrament, we hope that it is a true initiation into further study and the life of the parish community, as they continue being formed throughout their high school years.

¹ *Deus Caritas Est*, Pope Benedict XVI, 1

² *Evangelii gaudium*, Pope Francis, 273

³ *Forming Intentional Disciples*, Sherry Weddell, 33

⁴ *Becoming a Parish of Intentional Disciples: Rethinking Youth Ministry*, Jim Beckman, 126

HIGH SCHOOL YOUTH FORMATION VISION

Goals for High School Youth Formation

In our Diocese, we want to work to form disciples, ready for mission, amongst our high school teens. Our goals are the same as the USCCB defines, for high school youth formation:

- To empower young people to live as disciples of Jesus Christ in our world today.
- To draw young people to responsible participation in the life, mission, and work of the Catholic faith community.
- To foster the total personal and spiritual growth of each young person.⁵

Who Provides High School Youth Formation

In order to focus youth formation on these goals, we must give our teens not only engaging catechesis and Confirmation preparation, but an immersion deeper into the fulness of the Catholic faith during their four years of high school. In order to create a holistic formation program, in which we are able to foster real growth in holiness, our parishes need to raise up a community to support it.

- First and foremost, parents must be invested in their kids' faith journey and deepening relationship with Jesus Christ through the Catholic Church. Parent involvement is essential in helping encourage teens to receive grace in the sacraments, stay involved in the life of their parish and embrace opportunities to grow in faith.⁶
- Second, pastors and the parish staff have to be on board with this vision, along with making decisions to use financial resources to support their teens.
- An essential part of the parish staff team is a dedicated staff member or committed volunteer who leads high school youth formation. While one person is not capable of discipling every teen in the parish, it is important to have one person with the vision to keep the parish united in serving the high school population well.
- The parish community, at large, plays an important role in forming high school teens, as they witness to their alive relationships with Jesus Christ. Particularly, high school youth are best served by a group of adults giving of their time as volunteers, not limited to but including serving as catechists, small group leaders, and chaperones for retreats or mission trips.

The parish must be invested in this mission of forming their high school youth and aware that the faithful are the parish's greatest resource. The faith is communicated best in a relational, personal way. Investing in the people who are willing to give of their time and talent to discipling high school youth of the parish will yield the best return.

Basic Movements of High School Youth Formation

- **Evangelization**

We need to seek out the lost among the high school population in our parish communities and proclaim the good news of the Gospel to them. This means being present where they are, beyond the walls of our church buildings. Adults who want teens to encounter Jesus Christ must go out to meet them where they are: where they study, where they socialize and where they live, while being willing to communicate the faith in a language relevant to their place in life.

- **Conversion**

In the midst of the programming, classes, retreats, and mission trips offered, we must continually invite our teens into an intentional relationship with Jesus Christ. We must teach them, through our words and witness, that this relationship in the Catholic Church means saying no to sin and yes to happiness, according to God's plan. Every time we can bring our teens to the Sacrament of Penance, there is a new opportunity for them to turn away from sin and to Jesus Christ, once again.

- **Catechesis and Ongoing Formation**

Once our youth have said yes to living in this relationship, they need to be provided an organic, systematic

⁵ *Renewing the Vision: A Framework for Catholic Youth Ministry*. USCCB. 1997.

⁶ "Teens 'mirror' their parents' faith to an astonishing degree. If teens don't like church, it might be because they see one of their parents not liking it, particularly their father." *Becoming a Parish of Intentional Disciples*, Jim Beckman, Chapter 7

catechesis in the faith, as well intentional formation in prayer, community life, and mission. This ongoing formation must address relevant topics in their lives, especially questions of morals and living as Christians in the world today, while answering their questions and providing hope in the midst of the many anxieties they are experiencing.

Basic Methods for High School Youth Formation

- **One on One Relationships:** As teens grow and mature as disciples, accompaniment by faithful adults will be crucial to their development and journey. In particular the formation of small groups and opportunity that affords adults to invest in the lives of teens will create space for deepening of these relationships.
- **Small Groups:** In small, intentional communities teens gather with adults (parish staff and/or volunteers) to study the faith and deepen their understanding of discipleship. Small groups are crucial to keeping teens accountable, as well as giving them personal attention and allowing adults to care for them intentionally.
- **Large Group Parish Events and Involvement:** Along with providing small group environments, it is ideal that teens have an opportunity to gather with the larger population of their peers in the parish. Lifeteen style, catechetical events, service nights and community fun can add up to successfully creating a community among a parish's teens.
- **Diocesan Offerings:** In addition to the activity happening around teens in the parish, it is ideal that they see themselves as part of the Diocesan community. Participating in Frassati Fest, Camp Gray Adventure Days, and Love Begins Here, as well as Diocesan events and liturgies, can help introduce them to a wider community of teens serious about becoming intentional disciples. These larger opportunities for engagement will also support the parishes in their work, most especially in providing platforms for evangelization and conversion.

To support the work of the parishes, the staff of the Office of Evangelization and Catechesis will increase offerings for youth formation specific training for both parish staff and volunteers. They will also offer mentorship and support to pastors and parish staff working to implement this new vision. The OEC staff will continue coordinating and promoting Diocesan wide events, focusing on providing excellent opportunities for evangelization, conversion, and discipleship formation. Particular to the Confirmation preparation process, the OEC will continue to help the Bishop's office schedule Confirmation dates, as well as help coordinate Confirmation retreats at Camp Gray, including time with the Bishop.

While this vision for high school youth formation is exciting and will help create more intentional disciples, it has implications for other areas of parish life. Among them are the formation of middle school youth and the evangelization of adults in a parish.

- In order to successfully build a culture of participation among the high school youth of a parish, there must be an emphasis on engaging formation of the middle school youth. Dry middle school catechesis experiences in the classroom, lacking in evangelization and/or opportunities to engage in fun community events with their peers, will only make this movement towards intentional, holistic high school youth formation more difficult.
- This vision for high school youth formation depends heavily on adult participation, most especially from parents. In order to cultivate an enthusiastic, faithful group of adults to lead the teens, parishes will need to consider how they are reaching out and evangelizing the adults of the parish, as well as providing ample opportunities for deepening conversion, study, and discipleship formation.

Suggested Reading

Becoming a Parish of Intentional Disciples: Rethinking Youth Ministry (Chapter 7), Jim Beckman and Sherry Weddell, Editor

Rebuilding Youth Ministry: Ten Practical Strategies for Catholic Parishes, Christopher Wesley

Lifeteen, www.lifeteen.com, Blog Content

FORMATION LEADING TO THE SACRAMENT OF CONFIRMATION

The following chart is based on Confirmation occurring during Spring of 9th grade or Fall of 10th grade. The goal is to complete initiation of Confirmandi into the Catholic Faith and provide ongoing high school discipleship formation in the parish.

	Spring 9th Grade Confirmation	Fall 10th Grade Confirmation
Semester 1	Fall 8th Grade <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Teens regularly attend youth formation classes or small groups: 15 hours. - Hold initial parent meeting. - Retreats offered. 	Spring 8th Grade <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Teens regularly attend youth formation classes or small groups: 15 hours. - Hold initial parent meeting. - Retreats offered.
Semester 2	Spring 8th Grade <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Teens regularly attend RE/youth formation classes or small groups for 15 hours each semester. - Hold initial sponsor meeting; start providing regular formation for sponsors. - Facilitate sponsor/candidate conversations. 	Fall 9th Grade <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Teens regularly attend RE/youth formation classes or small groups for 15 hours each semester. - Hold initial sponsor meeting; start providing regular formation for sponsors. - Facilitate sponsor/candidate conversations.
Semester 3	Fall 9th Grade <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Teens regularly attend youth formation classes or small groups: 15 hours. - Hold second parent meeting. - Facilitate sponsor/candidate activities. - Immediate Confirmation preparation sessions: 6 hours. - Overnight Confirmation retreat. - One-on-one interviews with the candidate and Pastor, DRE, or Confirmation Catechist. 	Spring 9th Grade <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Teens regularly attend youth formation classes or small groups: 15 hours. - Hold second parent meeting. - Facilitate sponsor/candidate activities. - Immediate Confirmation preparation sessions: 6 hours. - Overnight Confirmation retreat. - One-on-one interviews with the candidate and Pastor, DRE, or Confirmation Catechist.
Semester 4	Spring 9th Grade <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Teens regularly attend youth formation classes or small groups: 15 hours. - Immediate Confirmation preparation sessions with sponsors: 6 hours. - One-on-one interviews with the candidate and Pastor, DRE, or Confirmation Catechist. - Confirmation rehearsal. - Celebration of the sacrament! - Continue attending youth formation classes or small groups. 	Fall 10th Grade <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Teens regularly attend youth formation classes or small groups: 15 hours. - Immediate Confirmation preparation sessions with sponsors: 6 hours. - One-on-one interviews with the candidate and Pastor, DRE, or Confirmation Catechist. - Confirmation rehearsal. - Celebration of the sacrament! - Continue attending youth formation classes or small groups.

Service or mission work should be available and encouraged during each semester.

Personal Expectations - In order to be Confirmed, one must be baptized, of the age of reason, suitably instructed, properly disposed (open to receiving the sacrament) and able to renew the baptismal promises (CIC 889). It is expected that individuals who are preparing for the sacrament of Confirmation are practicing the faith and obedient to the precepts of the Church.

Parent Commitment - Parents are the primary educators of their children in the faith. It is expected that every parent of a Confirmandi understand the preparation process and join in committing to help form their child(ren) during this process. (For example, parishes may ask parents to sign a commitment form at the parent information meeting, once they have reviewed the expectation to play a significant role in the Confirmation preparation process.)⁷

Period of Preparation - Preparation for the sacrament of Confirmation takes place two years prior to the reception of the sacrament. Throughout each of these years, teens are expected to engage in 30 hours of regular, religious education or youth formation. In addition to those 30 hours, in the two semesters leading to Confirmation, there should be 12 hours of immediate preparation for the sacrament of Confirmation in the home parish.

Curriculum & Materials - Every parish is expected to follow the curriculum guidelines for Confirmation. Also, a list of recommended Confirmation preparation materials will be available from the Office of Evangelization and Catechesis; the OEC staff will also make those materials available for review at (or via mail from) the Diocesan offices.

Sponsor Involvement & Formation - Each person who is seeking the Sacrament of Confirmation is to choose a sponsor. Confirmandi should choose a sponsor who will participate with them in this process of formation on a regular basis. (For example, they may attend formation sessions, go to Mass together, pray together at Adoration, make plans to go to confession together, and check in with each other regularly.). While it is preferred to pick a local sponsor, if a teen chooses an adult who does not live in the area, they may choose a confirmation mentor who will journey with them as they prepare; the sponsor can be present on the day of the sacrament.

Retreat - In order to help develop habits of lifelong discipleship, it is expected that all parishes offer those seeking the sacrament of Confirmation, at minimum, an overnight retreat in preparation for reception of the sacrament. The retreat must include Mass, an opportunity for individual Confessions, and formation in the life of prayer.

Time of Reflection with the Bishop - Bishop Morlino would like to have an opportunity to meet with those who are preparing for Confirmation prior to the day of the sacrament. The Office of the Bishop is collaborating with Camp

⁷ The preparation of children for the reception of the sacraments is a work of cooperation between pastors and parents, each of whom has, in his own way, both the right and the duty of educating Christian children. The Church joyfully affirms that parents are the “principal and first educators of their children” (CCC 1653) and the “first heralds” for them of the Gospel (CCC 2225). Yet this primary right of parents to educate their children is not absolute. In matters of faith and morals, it is subordinate to the authority of the Church. For Christian education “belongs preeminently to the Church,” (Pope Pius XI, *On Christian Education*, 15) both because of the authority given to her by Christ to teach all nations (Matt 28:18-20) and because she is the spiritual mother of all those who are born of the waters of Baptism (Pope Pius XI, *On Christian Education*, 16–17). Just as parents have a natural right and duty to educate the children born to them by nature, so also the Church has a supernatural right and duty to educate all the children born to her by grace. All the Christian faithful have a right to receive the sacraments, and hence cannot be denied the sacraments as long as they fulfill the basic requirements of canon law. Parents and pastors together are responsible for ensuring that children receive suitable instruction prior to reception of the sacraments, but it is for the pastor to judge that the children are properly disposed and suitably instructed, in accord with the canonical norms, before allowing them to receive the sacraments.

Pastors and parents alike should not be content with merely fulfilling minimum requirements, but should seek to provide vigorous and robust catechesis aimed at a deeply rooted and lively faith. Parents and pastors are called to work harmoniously together in fulfilling the evangelizing mission of the Church, taking joint responsibility for the sacramental preparation of children, as well as for the the good of the whole parish. Thus, parents ought to carefully discern their call to enrich the parish community through their engagement and active participation in parish catechetical programs, and pastors ought to, while acknowledging and respecting the rights and freedoms of the family, gently encourage them to use their gifts for the advancement of the whole parish community.

Gray and the Office of Evangelization and Catechesis to be present at a number of Multi-Parish Camp Gray Confirmation Retreats, to give a reflection and have time with those preparing for the sacrament.

Missionary Formation - Being a Catholic involves a lifelong commitment to discipleship and mission. Confirmandi should be expected to participate in service or mission work as part of the preparation process.

Program Attendance & Final Interview - In order to ensure that confirmand have received suitable instruction and are properly disposed, it is appropriate to assess attendance throughout the two year period of Confirmation preparation and conduct a final interview with the pastor, parish catechetical leader or Confirmation preparation catechist.

Special Circumstances & Requests

Each parish should have in place a plan to accommodate special circumstances and requests. Situations that may arise include:

- celebration of the sacrament in the Extraordinary Form,
- celebration of the sacrament for a child above the age of reason and younger than the normative age,
- celebration of the sacrament for children attending Catholic high school or Catholic home school,
- and formation for the sacrament for individuals with varying abilities.

SPECIAL CIRCUMSTANCES AND REQUESTS

For the first two of these special circumstances and requests, pastors should contact the Bishop's Office on behalf of individual families.

Request for Confirmation in the Extraordinary Form

A request for reception of the sacrament in the Extraordinary Form can be done at any age, beyond the age of reason. A request for permission may be obtained from the pastor of the child's home parish; with that permission, communication should be made to the pastor of the Parish where the sacrament will take place in the Extraordinary Form. The home parish is responsible for the remote and immediate preparation for the sacrament.

Celebration of the Sacrament for a Child Above the Age of Reason and Younger than the Normative Age

Parents may request the sacrament of Confirmation for a child over the age of reason who is suitably instructed and properly disposed to receive the sacrament. Families requesting this permission must contact the pastor and parish catechetical leader responsible for Confirmation to learn about the appropriate steps to be taken. (As is the expectation for children preparing for their first Reconciliation and first Communion, they are to be enrolled in the parish religious education program, a Catholic school, or home school religion classes for at least one year prior to the immediate preparation for the sacrament.) These younger children will be confirmed with all others in their parish seeking Confirmation.

Celebration of the Sacrament for Children Attending Catholic Middle/High School or Catholic Home School

Parents may request that children forego remote catechetical formation (the expectation of formation for 15 hours each semester) for the sacrament if they are enrolled in a Catholic school or receive catechetical formation through home schooling. Catechetical leaders should work collaboratively with parents as they communicate preparation expectations in the parish, beyond normal formation, including that teens participate in the 12 hours of immediate, Confirmation preparation offered by the parish.

Formation for the Sacrament for Individuals with Varying Abilities

Individuals with disabilities are able to be formed and receive the sacrament of Confirmation. See the *Guidelines for the Celebration of the Sacraments with Persons with Disabilities* by the USCCB for more instruction. Materials for preparation are available in the OEC for review.