

Our Lady of Mercy Catholic Parish
L.I.G.H.T. Senior High Youth Ministry

Sacrament of Confirmation



Facilitator Guidebook

**OUR LADY OF MERCY
L.I.G.H.T. SENIOR HIGH YOUTH MINISTRY**

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“...Confirmed by the gift of the Spirit, that they give witness to Christ by lives built on faith and love...”

General Intercession from the
Rite of Confirmation

Welcome to the wonderful world of youth ministry and Confirmation preparation! You have chosen to respond to this particular call to ministry. Congratulations!

What is Confirmation?

The Sacrament of Confirmation....

- welcomes us and deepens our belonging to the faith community
 - deepens our relationship to God, as Creator, Redeemer and Spirit
 - strengthens us as disciples
- **A Sacrament is part of the way that God loves us and calls us.** A Sacrament is God’s love expressed as free, undeserved gift.
 - The Gift within Confirmation is that of strengthening us for discipleship and deepening our belonging to the faith community through the Trinity.
 - **God uses visible signs to communicate invisible love.** To communicate God’s love, God uses our senses: eyes, ears, touch, smell, and taste, and elements of our world.
 - In Confirmation, the signs we will celebrate include being anointed with oil and the laying on of hands as we remember the water of Baptism and the nourishment of Eucharist.
 - **God calls and invites; we respond.** An attitude of openness communicates a “yes” to God’s invitation to a deeper relationship. This “yes” does not mean we know that we will always be faithful or that we are worthy of the gift. “Yes” means we are open to be strengthened by God who calls and loves us.
 - In Confirmation, we have the opportunity to say “yes” through the various responses in the prayer.
 - **The community witnesses to and celebrates the sacraments.** A sacrament is a powerful sign that God is alive and present in the world. As Church, we are called to be sacrament, that is to be God’s hand and healing touch in the world. At the same time, we celebrate the sacraments as our most important prayer. This community that celebrates sacraments is global, reaching to other faith communities throughout the world and joined in a common bond. The community is also local as a diocese or archdiocese, as a parish and as a community of faith in families.

🌟 In Confirmation, the community witnesses our celebration and provides a sponsor who represents the love of the community for us.

What is my Role?

Good question. What is your role? What you “do” in the Confirmation preparation program will be important. But it may surprise you that what you do “for the program” is not the primary concern. Your commitment to this preparation is concerned less with the job or leadership function you will fulfill and more with *who you are* as a person of the Gospel. This commitment that you have made to offer your gifts to the young people of this parish will take you to new and exciting places in the life of faith. Faith penetrates the heart of the matter – at the heart of *this* matter is the awesome breath of the Spirit who has been, is, and always will be present.

Minister with Youth

In your role with the Confirmation preparation program you are a minister with youth. You are a part of an exercise in building relationships. These relationships allow young people to know adults who care about them and who are willing to walk as fellow pilgrims on a life-long journey of faith. How exciting for you to be a part of this moment of our young peoples’ journey!

Nurturer and Supporter of Faith

In your role you are a nurturer and supporter of faith for young people. The integrity with which you live your faith and take care of its growth is as important as any job you will do in the program. You have chosen to share that faith is a gift freely given by God, and that our response to that gift is the challenge of us all as members of the Body of Christ.

Being Present

In your role you will be present in a variety of ways to young people. The relationships you establish with youth have the potential of creating very sacred space between you and them – holy ground. While you will be helping youth grow in faith, it is our hope that at the same time your own faith will be challenged to grow through the mutuality of the relationships with your peers and with the young people.

Keys to Understanding Confirmation

Correlated with *“The Catechism of the Catholic Church”*

Key One: Confirmation *welcomes* us as a Sacrament of Initiation.

- Confirmation is linked to Baptism and Eucharist.
- Confirmation is part of our initiation into the faith community.
- Confirmation honors the spiritual maturity of the individual.

1285 Baptism, the Eucharist, and the Sacrament of Confirmation together constitute the “sacraments of Christian initiation,” whose unity must be safeguarded. It must be explained to the faithful that the reception of the Sacrament of Confirmation is necessary for the completion of baptismal grace.

For, by the Sacrament of Confirmation, (the baptized) are more perfectly bound to the church and are enriched with a special strength of the Holy Spirit. Hence they are, as true witnesses of Christ, more strictly obliged to spread and defend the faith by word and deed.

1308 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. St. Thomas reminds us of this:

Age of body does not determine age of soul. Even in childhood man can attain spiritual maturity: as the book of *Wisdom* says: “For old age is not honored for length of time, or measured by number of years.” Many children, through the strength of the Holy Spirit they have received, have bravely fought for Christ even to the shedding of their blood.

Implications

Our preparation process should communicate the link between the sacraments of initiation at the same time that we consider the distinctive gift offered in Confirmation. We are challenged to remember and renew our Baptism and to live Eucharist more faithfully at the same time that we prepare for the gift of Confirmation.

Therefore, *Confirming Disciples...*

- | |
|--|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"><input type="checkbox"/> attends to an environment of hospitality<input type="checkbox"/> includes reflection on Baptism and Eucharist<input type="checkbox"/> provides for diverse starting points and individual needs |
|--|

Key Two: We are Confirmed in the name of God, the Creator, the Redeemer and the Holy Spirit.

- Confirmation is part of the welcoming initiative of God the creator.
- Confirmation unites us more firmly to Christ.
- Confirmation strengthens us with the Holy Spirit.

1286 In the Old Testament the prophets announced that the Spirit of the Lord would rest on the hoped-for Messiah for his saving mission. The descent of the Holy Spirit on Jesus at his Baptism by John was the sign that this was he who was to come, the Messiah, the Son of God. He was conceived of the Holy Spirit; his whole life and his whole mission are carried out in total communion with the Holy Spirit who the Father gives him ‘without measure.’

1303 From this fact, Confirmation brings an increase and deepening of baptismal grace: 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....

1309 Preparation for Confirmation should aim at leading the Christian toward a more intimate union with Christ and a more lively familiarity with the Holy Spirit — his actions, his gifts, and his biddings — in order to be more capable of assuming the apostolic responsibilities of Christian life.

Implications

As we strive to prepare young people for Confirmation, we draw from young people their story of God’s love and call; we join youth to the person, the presence and the ministry of Jesus; and we awaken within youth the Spirit among us.

Therefore, *Confirming Disciples...*

- focuses on God’s loving call
- promotes learning about and conversion toward a life in Christ
- initiates exploration of the Spirit in action today
- includes reflection on one’s personal faith journey through journal and prayer opportunities

Key Three: Confirmation strengthens us for discipleship, mission and witness to our faith.

- Confirmation empowers us to witness to our faith.
- Confirmation links us to the ministry of Christ and the mission of the Church.
- Confirmation initiates young people into the adventure of discipleship.
- Preparation for Confirmation is a moment of conversion which includes celebrating the sacrament of Reconciliation.

1287 The Spirit is a gift given in fullness first to Jesus, the Messiah, yet meant to be communicated to “the whole messianic people.” On several occasions Christ promised this outpouring of the Spirit, a promise which he fulfilled first on Easter Sunday and then more strikingly at Pentecost. Filled with the Holy Spirit the apostles began to proclaim “the mighty works of God” ...those who believed in the apostolic preaching and were baptized received the gift of the Holy Spirit.

1302 It is evident from its celebration that the effect of the sacrament of Confirmation is the full outpouring of the Holy Spirit as once granted to the apostles on the day of Pentecost.

1303 From this fact, Confirmation brings an increase and deepening of baptismal grace: ...it renders our bond with the Church more perfect; it gives us a special strength of the Holy Spirit to spread and defend the faith by word and action as true witnesses to Christ, to confess the name of Christ boldly, and never to be ashamed of the Cross:

Recall then that you have received the spiritual seal, the spirit of wisdom and understanding, the spirit of right judgment and courage, the spirit of knowledge and reverence, the spirit of holy fear in God’s presence. Guard what you have received. God the Father has marked you with his sign; Christ the Lord has confirmed you and has placed his pledge, the Spirit, in your hearts.

1309 Preparation for Confirmation should aim at leading the Christian toward a more intimate union with Christ and a more lively familiarity with the Holy Spirit — his actions, his gifts, and his biddings — in order to be more capable of assuming the apostolic responsibilities of Christian life.

1310 To receive Confirmation one must be in a state of grace. One should receive the sacrament of Penance in order to be cleansed for the gift of the Holy Spirit. More intense prayer should prepare one to receive the strength and graces of the Holy Spirit with docility and readiness to act.

Implications

We prepare youth for lives of discipleship by our ministry of love and challenge. We help young people to live lives in a pattern of relying on God’s strength and nourishment in times of trial as we join in mission together. We also help young people to name and claim the gifts they bring as young disciples.

Therefore, *Confirming Disciples...*

- focuses on discipleship
- includes celebration of the sacrament of Reconciliation
- provides follow-through resources that continue active discipleship

Key Four: Confirmation is a celebration of the community of faith.

- Confirmation joins us to the ministering community.
- Confirmation is received by individuals and celebrated as community.
- Preparation awakens a sense of belonging to the universal Church and local parish.
- Preparation includes a sponsor who represents the wider faith community.
- Preparation provides an opportunity to partner with families as communities of faith.

1301 The sign of peace that concludes the rite of Confirmation signifies and demonstrates ecclesial communion with the bishop and with all of the faithful.

1303 ...it renders our bond with the Church more perfect.

1309 Preparation for Confirmation should aim at leading the Christian toward a more intimate union with Christ and a more lively familiarity with the Holy Spirit — his actions, his gifts, and his biddings — in order to be more capable of assuming the apostolic responsibilities of Christian life. To this end catechesis for Confirmation should strive to awaken a sense of belonging to the Church of Jesus Christ, the universal Church as well as the parish community. The latter bears special responsibility for the preparation of confirmands.

Cross Reference in 1309 regarding the Role of Parents:

The initiation of children into the sacramental life is ordinarily the responsibility and concern of Christian parents. They are to form and gradually increase a spirit of faith in the children and, at times with the help of catechism classes, prepare them for the fruitful reception of the sacraments of Confirmation and the Eucharist. The role of the parents is also expressed by their active participation in the celebration of the sacraments. (*From the Introduction to the Rite of Confirmation, II, # 3*)

1311 Candidates for Confirmation, as for Baptism, fittingly seek the spiritual help of a sponsor. To emphasize the unity of the two sacraments, it is appropriate that this be one of the baptismal godparents.

Implications

Confirmation preparation needs to involve the community and attend to the renewal of the faithful at the same time that we consciously make room for the gifts, the insights and the diversity of the newly confirmed members. We partner with families in preparing youth for Confirmation by respecting family life and providing resources that allow preparation efforts to be an echo between home and Church. Confirmed youth stand with a sponsor who represents the community as guide and support.

Therefore, *Confirming Disciples...*

- utilizes the resources of the community in preparing candidates
- includes worship resources to celebrate with the community
- includes resources that empower effective sponsors
- provides family resources that engage parental involvement
- provides follow-up resources that continue community involvement and ministry

Summary of Confirmation Principles

Key One: Confirmation **welcomes** us as a sacrament of Initiation.

- Confirmation is linked to Baptism and Eucharist.
- Confirmation is part of our initiation into the faith community.
- Confirmation honors the spiritual maturity of the individual.

Key Two: We are Confirmed in **the name of God, the Creator, the Redeemer and the Holy Spirit.**

- Confirmation is part of the welcoming initiative of God the creator.
- Confirmation unites us more firmly to Christ.
- Confirmation strengthens us with the Holy Spirit.

Key Three: Confirmation **strengthens us for discipleship**, mission and witness to our faith.

- Confirmation empowers us to witness to our faith.
- Confirmation links us to the ministry of Christ and the mission of the Church.
- Confirmation initiates young people into the adventure of discipleship.
- Preparation for Confirmation is a moment of conversion which includes celebrating the sacrament of Reconciliation.

Key Four: Confirmation is a **celebration of the community of faith.**

- Confirmation joins us to the ministering community.
- Confirmation is received by individuals and celebrated as community.
- Preparation awakens a sense of belonging to the universal Church and local parish.
- Preparation includes a sponsor who represents the wider faith community.
- Preparation provides an opportunity to partner with families as communities of faith.

Effective Sacramental Preparation

- Confirmation preparation is nourished and informed by the directives of Christian Initiation. Effective sacramental preparation:
 - attends to the individual faith journey of the adolescent
 - links the liturgical year with the preparation process
 - involves the faith community

Context for Confirmation: Comprehensive Youth Ministry

- Effective Confirmation preparation is situated within comprehensive youth ministry.
 - Ministry with youth is comprehensive.
 - Ministry with youth recognizes that young people learn, experience faith and grow in faith in many ways.
 - Ministry with youth includes faith formation and faith education.
 - Ministry with youth is the responsibility of the community and draws young people into participation in the ministry efforts of the Church.
 - Ministry with youth respects and honors the role of parents in the faith development of young people.

Foundations of an Integrated Model of Confirmation Preparation

Confirmation Keys	Therefore...	<i>Confirming Disciples....</i>
<p>Key One: Confirmation welcomes us as a sacrament of initiation</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Our preparation process communicates the link between the sacraments of initiation at the same time that we consider the distinctive gift offered in Confirmation. • We are challenged to remember and renew our Baptism, to live Eucharist more faithfully at the same time that we prepare for the gift of Confirmation. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • attends to an environment of hospitality • includes reflection on Baptism and Eucharist • provides for diverse starting points and individual needs
<p>Key Two: We are confirmed in the name of God the Creator, the Redeemer, and the Holy Spirit</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • We draw from young people their story of God's love and call. • We join youth to the person, the presence and the ministry of Jesus. • We awaken youth to the spirit among us. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • focuses on God's loving call • promotes learning about and conversion toward a life in Christ • initiates exploration of the Spirit in action today • includes reflection on personal faith journey through journal and prayer opportunities
<p>Key Three: Confirmation strengthens us for discipleship, mission, and witness to our faith.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • We communicate to youth who disciples are by our ministry of love and challenge with them, we prepare them for lives of discipleship. • We help young people to live lives in a pattern of relying on God's strength and nourishment in times of trial as we join in mission together. • We help young people to name and claim the gifts they bring as young disciples. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • focuses on discipleship • provides for reception of the sacrament of Reconciliation • provides follow-through resources that continue active discipleship
<p>Key Four: Confirmation is a celebration of the community of faith</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Confirmation preparation involves the community and attends to the renewal of the faithful at the same time that we consciously make room for the gifts, the insights and the diversity within the newly Confirmed members. • We partner with families in preparing youth by respecting family life and by providing resources that allow preparation efforts to be an echo between home and church. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • utilizes the resources of the community in preparing candidates • includes worship resources to celebrate with the community • includes resources that empower effective sponsors • provides family resources that engage parental involvement • provides follow-up resources that continue community involvement and ministry

Spirituality and Skills for Adults in Youth Ministry: Making Room in Our Hearts, Our Lives, Our Prayers

Tom East

One of my greatest joys in youth ministry was seeing an adult volunteer flourish in their new found ministry. Often when I would mention to the volunteer what a wonderful job they were doing, the leader would say that they wanted to get involved years ago but they didn't think they had anything to offer. Somehow in the midst of trying to communicate to parish communities that youth ministry is an important and specialized ministry, adults have gotten the message that it is complicated.

The best volunteers aren't necessarily the ones who come to the ministry knowing what they want to do with youth or even knowing what they could do. Great volunteers start with a real desire to serve young people and a zeal to see youth living their faith in action. The various ways to lead and serve get sorted out as we go. This leads us to the questions: What do we look for in volunteers? and what qualities do we nurture in adults who minister with youth?

A Leader in Ministry with Youth Loves Young People

It is important for us to remember that God is the One who invites us to ministry and begins our initiation by making room in our hearts for young people. We start caring, paying attention and noticing. We catch ourselves hurting when we hear of young people in pain and celebrating with them in their latest accomplishment. The room in our heart is followed by a *practical role* to serve young people. We follow then by making room in our lives, our time, our schedule and our prayers.

When we consider ministry from this perspective of making room in the hearts of people who begin to care about youth then the heart of youth ministry is truly the heart of the one who ministers with youth. When people discount their involvement in youth ministry because they can't *do* anything they miss the bigger opportunity to *be* someone with youth. There are so many adults who want youth to do something; buy this, join this, be like this. It is truly a gift for a young person when an adult takes on a ministerial stance; as minister, we stand with youth inviting, loving, encouraging, caring, and challenging but never manipulating or burdening. Such a stance assumes that as adults we will have our support systems and adults that we go to for friendship and counsel. We care enough about young people not to burden them with adult confusion or struggles. A parish volunteer brought this point home when she met with her youth ministry coordinator upon her realization that she was in a faith crisis. She was torn because she didn't want to abandon the young people but she found herself feeling cynical and negative about the Church. Together, they discerned that she would take a time out from an active part in youth ministry to seek out her questions and focus on her own faith life. She stayed connected to the adult community involved in youth ministry and after several months she returned to her ministry full of a renewed peace and zeal for service. If our primary gift to youth is being with them during this time of transition, we need to pay attention so that we can stand with them freely and focus upon the agenda of their heart.

- Make room in your heart.
- Assume a ministerial stance.
- Set appropriate boundaries.
- Approach youth as gifted and growing.

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Confirmation Facilitator Guidebook*

A Leader in Ministry with Youth Grows Spiritually

Within the safety instructions given by attendants on airplanes the following message is usually included: “In case of emergency, remember to attach the oxygen mask to yourself first before assisting children or others around you.” Similarly, we need to attend to nourishing our spirituality as leaders who minister youth so that we can draw from a well that is full in our sharing with young people, their families and other adults. Gerard Broccolo states that “Spirituality is a way of viewing life and a way of experiencing life.” In this understanding, spirituality is our lens and perspective. To nurture ourselves as Catholic leaders, we take time to “clean the lens” personally through prayer, reflective reading, meditation, nature and other means for communing with God. We are also fed when we take time as part of a community to pray, share and serve others. Following the Spirit to peace, resolution, balance and joy becomes our adventure. Our ministry is part of this journey and flows from our search for wholeness in our relationships to self, others and God.

- Develop and nurture your personal spirituality.
- Journey as part of a faith community.
- Model a life of joy, balance and authenticity.

A Leader in Ministry with Youth Discovers Gifts and Shares Generously

As leaders, we start with a love for young people and a commitment to walk faithfully. To serve youth, we begin connecting our gifts, interests, capabilities and experiences with *practical* ways for young people to be involved in Church. When many parishioners think of volunteering with youth, the primary image that comes to mind is standing in front of a class of youth teaching. Most people don't feel comfortable in that role. Youth benefit from a diversity of gifts, leaders and opportunities. There are limitless possibilities for ways to share gifts with youth. One way to find a connection is to seek out your truest gift, something you love to do and delight in sharing with others. A couple in a parish that I worked in operated a diner in town for many years. When they retired, they were looking for some way to be involved in Church. Someone connected them to youth ministry where they started greeting young people at the variety of events and activities. There they were using the same gifts that made their business successful: remembering names, making people feel comfortable, and using humor to set people at ease. In another example, a recent convert to Catholicism was deciding how to get involved in ministry. She remembered that before setting out on her business career she had been an actor and had longed to continue in drama as an actor and director. She brushed off those dusty dreams and invited youth to join her in a dramatic presentation of the Stations of the Cross for Good Friday. Her budding dramatic interest and experience connected with her practical desire to serve the Church and be with young people. When we remember what we are excited about and what we can share, the ways to use those gifts are only limited by our creativity!

- Use your interests, involvements, and talents to discern gifts.
- Match the gift of self with diverse ministry opportunities.

A Leader in Ministry with Youth Learns Continuously

“Learning...the process of remembering what you are interested in”
Richard Saul Wurman

When I think of people that are the most vital and enjoyable to be with, one quality that they have in common is a zeal for life and a curiosity that keeps them learning and trying new things constantly. As adults, we are learning new things all the time: we learn how to manage our homes, we solve problems in the workplace, we learn how to be in relationship with others as friend, co-worker or parent. To continue learning in youth ministry, we need to see learning in new ways: not limiting growth to classroom situations, but focused more around creative problem solving. Our problem is we want to serve youth better, the solution is filling up the gap between what we now know and what we need to know to do an effective job. Some of the gaps could be around understanding youth and their families. Other gaps could be skills for specific ministry roles. We also have gaps in our understanding of the faith.

Once we identify the gaps between our present understandings and our role in effective service to youth, we have the beginnings of a learning plan. Our next step is to be creative about ways to fill those gaps. Are there others who need these same skills? Could we form a study group and share readings and reflections? Are there audio tapes or videos I could watch and reflect on? Can I interview or observe people who are effective and knowledgeable in this area? Can I work with someone and learn from them how to do this?

Learning is as natural for us as breathing. As leaders we need to keep growing in our knowledge, skills and faith so that we can serve youth effectively. We also seek out new ways to do things to keep us energized so that we reconnect with the spirit of adventure and discovery that probably led us to this amazing ministry in the first place.

- Seize diverse opportunities to learn and grow.
- Develop skills that enable your talents to reach young people.
- Seek out ways to continue to grow in faith.

How can we be a part of passing on the faith to a new generation of disciples? As adults, the answer to this question lies in the way we see ourselves more so than on a particular style, experience or personality trait. The gift we offer when we walk with youth is really nothing more than embracing our lives as adults in a healthy, creative and faith-filled way. It's just that easy and it's just that hard. This is a worthy challenge for all of us and an open invitation to other adults in the parish community: the African proverb states, it takes a village to raise a child. It truly takes a parish to minister to youth. One of the greatest services we can give young people is when we let the word out to adults in the parish that they can share and walk with youth and discover the treasure of this ministry.

A Leader in Ministry with Youth....

- Loves young people.
- Grows spiritually.
- Discovers gifts and shares generously.
- Learns continuously.

Try this....

- **Take time** to reflect and share your story for becoming involved with youth.
- **Consider your sources** of spiritual nourishment and your network of support. Make plans and time to get the support you need.
- **Reflect on your interests**, dreams, gifts and experience. Brainstorm about ways to connect with young people.
- **Identify where you need to grow** in knowledge, skills and faith and plan creative ways to learn and grow.
- **Tell the story and invite others** who could serve youth in creative ways!

Becoming a Youth Ministry Leader

So Now What Do I Do?

You are embarking on a journey with young people that will take you to new and exciting places. By assuming a leadership function in the Confirmation preparation program you are a part of your parish community's ministry efforts with youth. Here are just a few thoughts for the journey.

- ❖ Youth ministry, as you will discover, is primarily an exercise in building relationships — relationships that allow young people to know adults who care about them and who are willing to walk as fellow pilgrims on a life-long journey of faith. That means that you and your ability to relate to and share your faith with teens is more important than any program or event.
- ❖ Youth ministry is designed to give young people an opportunity to grow into a mature faith in surroundings that support that growth. Those surroundings, aside from their family, are primarily you and your fellow youth ministers. In helping teens grow to a mature faith there is a presumption that you are a person of mature and healthy faith. This means that it is just as important to take care of your own faith life as it is to nurture that of the youth with whom you work.
- ❖ Be comfortable challenging the teens that you work with. Share with them that faith is a gift freely given by God but it is our response to that gift that requires effort and commitment on our part. That effort is not always met with support by the world they live in. The Gospel is challenging and exciting! Communicate it to young people with interest, excitement, and challenge.

Relationships are difficult to build if you are not present to the people with whom you are building the relationship. Therefore **be there**. Being present in the lives of young people is essential to effective ministry with them. They need to learn to count on you. So it's important that you attend as many functions as you can, even if you don't have a specific role. Try to be involved in their life outside of church. Go to their games and concerts and plays. Stop by where they work just to say hi.

What Do I Need to Know About Youth Today?

Keeping up-to-date on youth issues and trends can be a full time job. Our goal is to give you some of the basics in understanding young people — things to be aware of as you work with them, things to watch and listen for, things that are normal for this age group. Knowing what to expect goes a long way to making us feel comfortable with youth. The following charts outline the most important developmental needs of young adolescents (aged 10-14/15) and older adolescents (aged 14/15-18/19). It is important to remember that both sets of needs are present in the high school youth population. Understanding each set of needs helps us work more effectively with young people.

Developmental Needs of Young Adolescents

- **Opportunities for Self-Definition:** to better understand, define, and accept who they are as growing adolescents.
- **Competence and Achievement:** opportunities to find out what they are good at doing and to know what they do is valued by others whom they respect.
- **Positive Social Interaction with Adults and Peers:** opportunities to develop interpersonal skills and form positive peer relationships, adult relationships, and new ways of relating to their parents as adolescents.
- **Meaningful Participation in Families, Schools, Churches and Community:** opportunities to participate in making decisions about activities that shape their lives *and* to contribute to the success of those activities as leaders or participants.
- **Physical Activity:** opportunities to utilize their energy and growing bodies through activities that require physical movement or expression.
- **Creative Expression:** opportunities to express to the external world who they are on the inside (feelings, interests, abilities, thoughts) through a variety of activities.
- **Personal Religious Experience:** opportunities to explore “the big questions” in life within the context of faith; opportunities for a deeper and more personal relationship with God.
- **Structure and Clear Limits:** provision of structure and guidance that helps young adolescents make decisions about their behavior, and helps them feel safe in their activities.

Developmental Needs of Older Adolescents

- **Exploration and Experimentation:** opportunities to experiment with a wide array of behaviors, roles, attitudes, relationships, ideas, and activities as they develop their own identity and faith identity.
- **Adult Sexuality:** opportunities to understand their sexual growth and integrate their sexuality into their personalities in a holistic way; opportunities to develop healthy values and attitudes regarding their own sexuality.
- **Interpersonal Relationships:** opportunities to form positive relationships and experiences with peers in a comfortable and secure environment and to develop friendship-making and maintaining skills.
- **Meaningful Roles in the Community and Society:** opportunities to participate as full members and leaders in the community, society and church; opportunities for service, locally and globally.
- **Preparing for the Future:** opportunities to acquire the competencies necessary for adult roles, such as goal setting, problem solving, time management, and decision making; opportunities to explore life options and plan their futures (education, career) and to help them acquire the skills, knowledge and experience for their chosen fields.
- **Personal Value System and Decision-Making Skills:** opportunities to discuss conflicting values and formulate their own value system; opportunities to gain knowledge and experience in making decisions and to apply Christian moral values in making moral judgments.
- **Personal Faith:** opportunities to explore and question the faith they have been given by family and the faith community and develop their own faith identity; opportunities to explore what it means to be and live as a person of faith today and develop a more personal relationship with Jesus Christ.
- **Adult Mentors:** opportunities to develop relationships with adult Christians who affirm their journey and struggles, explore sensitive issues with them, listen to their stories and questions, share their own faith journey, and ask questions that encourage critical thinking and reflection.

But How Do I Share Faith?

Central to being a Confirmation leader is sharing with young people the worthy adventure of living a gospel-centered life. You may not feel equipped for this task, but don't worry, neither did the first disciples of Jesus! In fact, sharing our faith with each other is not a task, it is a way of life. We carry a particular identity with us, and into all of our environments because we are Catholic. One writer has said that the *walls* of her home growing up were Catholic, filled as they were with symbols of belief.

As a minister with youth, you are “being church” with a young person. What does this mean? The mission of church is three-fold. We *proclaim* the Good News, namely the saving action of Jesus, we offer ourselves as a group of people transformed by the Spirit into a *community of faith, hope and love*, and we bring *God's justice and love* to others through service. In its ministry with young people, of which you are a part, the Church works to foster the total personal and spiritual growth of young people and to draw them to responsible participation in the life, mission and work of the faith community. In addition, we empower young people to become disciples of Jesus Christ who witness to their faith by living and working for justice, peace, and human dignity. (*Vision of Youth Ministry* 3, 7)

Here are some simple strategies for “being church” with young people.

Have Faith Conversations: Witness to God's Presence in Your Life

Young people, particularly older adolescents, are exploring their beliefs and values. They are searching for a worthy adventure upon which to embark; an adventure that gospel living surely is. Here are several strategies that will help you initiate faith conversations:

- **Share stories with young people.** Stories have a tremendous impact. If all you do as a leader is share how God has been moving in and through your life, you have given young people a gift of tremendous value. Share with them the significant religious celebrations of your life, e.g. first communion, confirmation, marriage, etc. Help young people identify what is uniquely Catholic about their lives. Share as well significant life experiences in the context of the Catholic faith.
- **Affirm the actions of the young person which witness to the Good News.** Make direct correlation for young people between what you see them doing and how it is a value and action of Jesus. Relate how Jesus' teachings apply today.
- **Help the young people explore how the events of their lives are glimpses of the “vision of the glory of God.”** Be comfortable with their questions and challenges. In order for belief to be meaningful, for God to be meaningful, young people need the space to explore their questions and doubts. They need adults who will stand by them, be faithful to their searching, and not abandon them in their disbelief.

Explore Prayer and Celebration

Our tradition as Catholics is rich with ritual and celebration of God's presence and action in humankind. Prayer is relationship with God. Young people are exploring the meaning of Catholic ritual, and discovering their own unique spirituality and personal relationship with God. Walk with them on this adventure!

- **Challenge yourself and the young people to move beyond mediocrity in your spiritual lives.** Share your own struggles and successes with your prayer life. Help young people establish a regular pattern of prayer. Give them suggestions for making prayer a regular part of their day, e.g. placing a prayer/scripture reflection in an important place in their room and praying it each morning.
- **Help young people focus their prayer around significant events in their lives** (e.g., driver's license, death of a friend, finishing the semester).
- **Encourage young people to create a symbol** (poster, icon, picture of Jesus, candles, quotes from role model or saints) that they can place in a prayer corner at home.
- **Encourage young people to write prayers in the form of poems or journal entries.**
- **Pray with your group.**
- **Use Scripture in your ministry and read it aloud when appropriate.**

Explore Justice and Service Opportunities

Young people have a tremendous capacity for selflessness. In giving themselves through service and concern for others, they discover more about who they are and about the unique gifts that God has given them.

- **Tap into the idealism of young people by encouraging participation in service opportunities and by expressing interest in what they are already involved.**
- **Discuss options for further direct service or exploring social justice issues.**
- **Take every opportunity to explore the needs of the world** (i.e., individual, parish, community and world) **and how the gifts of individuals and communities can meet these needs.**
- **Relate Jesus' teachings to the social issues of our day.** Talk about the social responsibilities of disciples in our world today.

Building Relationships with Youth One-on-One

25 Guidelines for Good Communication

Let's start with the basics — good communication is at the heart of effective ministry with youth. Here are 25 guidelines that capture the essence of effective communication. Study them, practice them, learn from them. Good Luck!

Be Committed

1. We must be committed to communication.
2. We must be convinced that we are a gift to be given, and that through their self-disclosure others are a gift offered to us.
3. We must be determined to be honest with ourselves.

The Successful Practice of Sharing Oneself (Speaking)

4. In sharing ourselves with others, we must always take full responsibility for our own actions and reactions. As a consequence of this, we will make "I statements," not "Your statements."
5. We must speak only for ourselves. In communicating I should make it clear that I am speaking only *my* truth, and not *the* truth.
6. We must share all our significant feelings with those to whom we are relating.
7. We must be courageous enough to share our personal vulnerability with one another.
8. We should express gratitude to our listeners.

The Successful Practice of Accepting the Sharing of Another (Listening)

9. We should be "present" and "available" to others who offer to share themselves with us.
10. We should accept others wherever they are.
11. We must listen attentively to learn the "inner consistency" of others.
12. We must not indulge in mind games by judging the intentions and motives of others.
13. We should register emphatic and reassuring reactions to others when they are sharing themselves with us.
14. We should clarify the message that is being delivered, trying always to understand accurately the meaning of others.
15. In the role of listener we should offer only suggestions and never directions.
16. As listeners we should avoid all blocks to communication.
17. We should explicitly thank those who have shared themselves with us.

General Practices that Promote Good Interpersonal Communication

18. Good communication requires that the communicators spend special or quality time together.
19. Touching is an important form of communication.
20. To become more effective communicators we must “stretch” beyond our “comfort zones.”
21. We must be ready to apologize when an apology is appropriate and helpful.
22. We must avoid a buildup of tension.
23. At times of crisis in communication we will need to use special approaches.
24. Whether speaking or listening, the motive of the good communicator must always be love.
25. We should pray for the enlightenment and the courage to communicate well.

Rules of Conversation

These are basic rules which may be shared with and modeled for your group as you begin a discussion. These will assist you in keeping on-track with a discussion and requiring “ownership” by the individual members.

- Always speak for yourself, never for someone else.**
“ I think . . .,” not we, he, she, they, some people think.
- When speaking of someone who is in the group, address them personally.**
Instead of “John over there,” say “You, John....”
- Don’t ask questions when you are really expressing your own opinion.**
Instead of saying, “Don’t you think that....”, say “I think that....”
- Humor has its place, but don’t use it to avoid an honest, serious expression of your own feelings.**
- For some people, answering a certain question may be too personal for them. Allow them to state their feelings about the question but then use your common sense in letting them pass.**

Guidelines for Small Group Behavior

Within a large group, young people often don't get a chance to or feel comfortable enough to share their thoughts and feelings. This is why small groups can be so valuable. (It's much harder to get lost or to hide in a group that numbers only eight.) As you know, much of what will be discussed and worked on will be within small groups. The following guidelines may help you and your group to get more out of the time you spend within the small group.

- ☑ If possible, **meet** the participants prior to the group gathering.
- ☑ Be **prepared** prior to the group gathering. Have all needed materials.
- ☑ Be sure that the **environment** is appropriate and supportive of the kind of activity or event that is planned.
- ☑ Be there as the group arrives. Unsupervised free time invites disruptive behavior.
- ☑ **Greet** the young people by name. Be genuinely happy to see them.
- ☑ Define the **expected behavior** for the kind of event they will be involved in.
(The difference between listening respectfully to a speaker or cutting loose during a wild game of volleyball.)
- ☑ Be **specific** when giving instructions and setting expectations.
- ☑ Ask for an agreement (verbal contract). *Ask whether everyone understands and accepts the guidelines for the experience. Give them the opportunity to opt out if they need to. Agree on any changes to the original plan before you begin and review the appropriate consequences for deviation from the agreed upon standards.*
- ☑ Remind the group of their agreement (if needed). *If disruptive behaviors arise, remind the group of the guidelines set at the beginning of the meeting. Do not single out one person to discipline. That is a nonproductive way to keep order. It also puts the young person on the spot in front of others and can be very frightening. Also, remind the group or individuals of guidelines with nonverbal cues: a serious look, a hand gesture, silence, etc.*
- ☑ **Affirm** desired behavior.
- ☑ Respond **appropriately** to disruptive behavior. *If the group's talking is unproductive or if you feel as if you've lost control of the group, try being silent and looking downward until the group quiets down. Often they will discipline themselves. Don't get into a power struggle. Don't give undo attention to an undesired behavior.*
- ☑ Don't forget to **pray!** Keep in mind why we're doing what we're doing.

Tips for Leading Effective Discussions

Discussions are an integral part of Confirmation preparation programming. Young people like being given the chance to express themselves and to seek out the opinions of others. They enjoy insightful and interactive discussions. They dislike being talked down to or having a discussion manipulated toward a pre-determined end.

Good discussions will give young people the opportunity to *think* about a question and *decide* how he or she feels about the topic. By encouraging participation in meaningful discussions you can help young people to open up, to find expression for those things they long to share, and to help them discover a community that is open to them and their ideas and dreams.

Here are some helpful hints for leading a discussion:

- * **Be familiar with the subject matter.** Take some time in advance to prepare or review the kinds of questions you want to ask.
- * **Give a brief introduction** to the subject matter if it has not already been done. Then ask the group questions, beginning with easy or non-threatening ones. Then move on to the more difficult or specific questions.
- * **Be sure to address everyone in the group by name.** If the participants are not already familiar with one another, be sure they have name tags.
- * **Ask focused or specific questions.** Try to frame your questions in the context of their lives. How something would affect their lives or the lives of their family or friends will elicit much more response than something theoretical or disconnected.
- * **Encourage the participants in the discussion to ask questions of one another.** This will keep from having the focus continually come back to you and will maintain the conversational tone of the discussion.
- * **Explore how the participants *feel* about the topic.** This will keep the conversation interesting and meaningful and away from simply reporting the facts.
- * **Avoid questions that require a simple yes or no for an answer.** If yes or no questions are necessary be sure to ask why or why not. The best tactic is to ask open-ended questions such as, “If you had to....,” “What do you think the most effective way...?,” “If it were up to you how would you have handled...?,” “What do you think or feel about this?”
- * **Understand and be comfortable with silence.** This might seem contradictory to maintaining a good discussion. But there will be times when the participants will fall silent. When this happens youth might be taking some time to think about their response. Another reason for silence is they may not have understood what you asked. Be aware and alert to their body-language and facial expressions in order to respond properly. Clarify when necessary.

- * **Avoid evaluating people's answers** with comments like “good answer,” “nice point,” etc. Help the other participants understand why responses should not be evaluated. This will serve to keep the atmosphere open and objective.
- * **When you ask questions, be sure to ask in kind and non-confrontational ways so as not to put anyone on the spot.**
- * **Do not take disagreements personally;** these are simply opportunities for the group to think about a variety of views on an issue.
- * **Be orderly and on target.** Beware of tangents; people should eventually be able to call the group to task when they stray from the topic or when the group gets too noisy.
- * **Give everyone a chance to talk, but don't exhaust the topic.** Watch for signs of boredom.
- * **Throughout the discussion, and particularly at the end, summarize all that has been said,** to check whether or not the subject was covered thoroughly and everyone had the opportunity to have their say. A variation on this idea is to ask if there are any participants who would like to summarize.

Six Ways to Discipline Teens without Losing Your Cool

Why should you read this? You said yes to your role to enjoy the company of teens on a shared journey of faith, not to keep them in line and out of trouble. Why should you have to be the *heavy*, just another adult who comes down on them and reminds them of their place?

Because they need it and because you *are* the adult, the one with more experience; and you are, after all, responsible for them. Besides, they'll love you for it. Find that hard to believe? Go and rent the movie *Lean On Me* and you'll get a sense of what we're talking about. Or stop and think of the adults in your life that you have admired or looked up to. Did they let you get away with whatever you wanted? Not a chance. They were undoubtedly people who helped you learn about yourself and helped you set and define the limits that allowed you to grow.

This is what your teens need from you. Here are a few tips to keep you from being the tyrant you (and they) fear or the "easy mark" that will keep you from being effective.

- ❶ **Set Clear Limits.** Establish what behaviors are and are not acceptable. If you are able to do this in concert with your young people, it gives them ownership and a sense of responsibility for maintaining those limits. Make sure that everyone knows what the limits are, and be consistent in enforcing them.
- ❷ **Set Clear Consequences for Exceeding the Limits.** Just as important as the limits you have set are the results for going beyond them. As with the limits, establish the consequences for unacceptable behavior with the teens. Be sure that the consequence is reasonable and relevant.
- ❸ **Disapprove of the Action, Not the Person.** It is important that you differentiate between not liking a negative behavior and not liking the young person who did it. Be clear about why the behavior is inappropriate and how it affects you and other people.
- ❹ **Use Mistakes as an Opportunity for Learning.** Help them work through the behavior and its consequences and give them the opportunity to explore the alternative options for the next time.
- ❺ **Be Patient and Realistic.** Remember they are still kids. It's important to maintain the standards but be sure to do it in a way that allows them the room to breathe and grow. Always remember you are the authority but it is not something you have to prove by coming down hard and heavy. A deft and good-natured touch will have a lasting impact. Keep your sense of humor healthy and don't sweat the small stuff.
- ❻ **Always Show Them You Love Them.** Be sure they understand that you set these limits because you care and that maintaining a relationship with them is very important to you.

