

Confirmation: A Commitment for Life

LEADER'S GUIDE FOR GRADES 9-12

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INTRODUCTION

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A little girl was drawing quite earnestly with her crayons when her mother asked what she was doing. "I'm drawing a picture of God," she answered.

Her mother seemed a bit skeptical. "No one knows what God looks like," she said.

"Well," said the girl with confidence, "they will after I'm done with this picture!"

Though the little girl's plan might be a bit overly ambitious, in the pouring out of the Holy Spirit, we are made into the image of Christ so that people might see in us and in our lives a "picture of God."

The New Testament describes the Holy Spirit as the unseen power at work in all the efforts of the people of God. The Holy Spirit unites us; it prays within us; it teaches, guides, and inspires us; it frees us; it empowers us to proclaim the gospel with our lives.

It is the power of the Holy Spirit—the very breath of God in us—that both calls us and enables us to be what

we were always meant to be: the continuing presence of Jesus in the world. This video is by no means a comprehensive look at the Holy Spirit, the sacrament of confirmation, or the faith development of adolescents. It does, however, touch upon a number of life issues that confront our young adults. The activities in this booklet are designed to help "flesh out" these issues and make them real in the lives of all participants.

I recommend that you use one vignette per class session. Make sure you watch the vignette prior to class and read through the questions in this guide. In addition to using the other activities in this *Leader's Guide*, some time should be spent encouraging the students to name ways in which they see the Holy Spirit at work in each of the vignettes.

May this same Holy Spirit guide you in your efforts to prepare those in your care who will soon be confirmed.

—Father Joe

Instruction on the Use of Each Vignette

This *Leader's Guide* is to be used in conjunction with the video. The vignettes are best shown one at a time, with a period for discussion and reflection following each one. We encourage the leader, the educator, the student, or the parent to use discretion concerning the questions provided. Some of the "class options" may be more relevant or useful than others for your particular group.

Please read through all the options first as you prepare for each session. Be sure to let the group know ahead of time when preparation is necessary on their part.

At the end, after each vignette has been viewed and discussed with the class, we encourage the leader to show the entire video to the class. Invite the group members to share experiences from their own lives that relate to what they see and hear in the video.

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VIGNETTE ONE

Scene: *Fr. Joe is teaching a confirmation class. (Time: 8:03)*

Synopsis: Fr. Joe asks the questions: “What is a real man?” and “What is a real woman?” These questions lead the group into a discussion about the commitment of confirmation.

Class Options

Who is the Ideal Man or the Ideal Woman?

Preparation: A week before showing this first vignette, ask the students to bring a picture from a popular magazine of the “ideal” woman or the “ideal” man for the following week’s activity. Students may choose instead to bring music or an article that depicts our culture’s view of the ideal woman or the ideal man.

Discussion questions:

- What or who are the idols in our lives?
- What or who are the idols in our teen culture that we kneel before?
- What is our “little bottle” (a reference to the vignette)?
- What or who are the false gods that we bow before in our particular teen culture?
- What are the powers-to-be in our lives?

Some of the people, situations, and ideas in our lives to which we assign a lot of power are popularity, wealth, success in sports, success with people, success in school, and success in our jobs. Other “gods” we worship might include power, control, admiration, privacy, or separation. We may place importance on being autonomous, attending parties, cultivating a particular friendship, attracting a member of the opposite sex, or being physically attractive.

Consider these questions:

Are these false gods worth the power I give them over my happiness? Can I be happy without them? Won’t they all “break” in the end, or will they last? Won’t they rust and corrode?

What Do I Fear?

Invite the students to list five worries they think most teens have. These worries should be listed on a piece of paper at their desks. After the students have listed five worries, collect the papers and write all the worries on the board. Now ask the students to choose and write down their five biggest worries or fears. Assure them that nobody will see this paper; this is their acknowledgment that five of these worries are their own. Ask the students if anyone would like to share with the class which worries on the board appear most similar to their own.

Questions for thought and discussion/reflection:

Describe how it helps or doesn’t help to worry. Is worrying worth it?

- Does worrying add anything to your life?
- If it does, what does it add?
- Does worrying take anything away from this moment and its goodness?
- Is it beneficial to be pulled into the future by worry?

Ask the students to consider these ideas:

- Life is what happens when we are not worrying.
- Most of what we worry about happening really would not kill us if it did.

Sacred Scriptures may be used at the end of this discussion—quotes from the Bible in which Jesus addresses fear, worry and anxiety. For example: “Peace I leave with you; my peace I give to you” (John 14:27); “So do not be afraid...” (Matthew 10:31); and “Can any of you by worrying add a single moment to your life-span?” (Matthew 6:27).

A quote from Deuteronomy citing the first commandment may be appropriate here: “I, the Lord, am your God...You shall not have other gods besides me” (Deuteronomy 5:6, 7). Are we giving too much power to things that, in the end, don’t matter, things that will pass away? Quote St. Paul in his first letter to the Corinthians, where he says that in the end, “...faith, hope, love remain, these three; but the greatest of these is love” (1 Corinthians 13:13). In the end, everything will pass but love, but God.

What Are My Gifts?

Preparation: Bring to the session enough crayons and papers for each student.

Group Activity: Supply the students with crayons and a piece of blank paper. Instruct them to fold the paper in half however they choose. It could be folded diagonally, lengthwise, or even in a perfect square. On one half of the folded paper, ask the students to draw an animal that represents some of their own attributes. On the other half of the folded paper, they should draw an orchestra instrument that might characterize them.

Discussion: After they have had ample time to draw these two things, break the class into small groups. Each student should hold up his or her picture in silence. Invite the other students to describe what it is this person drew and why the person drew it.

The person who drew the picture must say nothing, only listen to what the other members of the group say (for example, “You drew a tiger because you see yourself as strong,” or “You drew a cat because you see yourself as warm and cuddly”). Follow the same process with the drawings of orchestra instruments. Encourage the students to consider how others perceive them.

After the students have had a chance to explain their drawings and why they see themselves as that particular animal or musical instrument, reflect with them on which particular gifts each picture represents.

At the conclusion, talk about how all of the animals together make up the animal kingdom, and all the instruments together make up the orchestra or the beautiful symphony. Each must play his or her part to make the whole happen, and together we give glory to God with all of our gifts, all of our uniqueness, and all of our distinctions.

D. Do I Believe That God Is Really in Me?

Father Joe says in his vignette that “God is already in each of us.”

Discussion questions:

- Is that true? How do we know?
- What Scriptures in the Bible help me to believe that God is in me? How do I know to trust that?
- Do I trust personally that God is in me?

At the very end, have everyone stand in a circle and pray the Our Father or sing an appropriate song.

VIGNETTE TWO

Scene: *Fr. Joe is presiding at a wedding ceremony.*
(Time: 7:03)

Synopsis: Fr. Joe speaks on the three stages of love and notes that true love demands a constant decision. This leads to a discussion of choosing to be confirmed.

Class Options

Describing the Three Stages of a Relationship

Activity: Invite the students to go for a walk outside for ten minutes. During the walk, ask them to find a symbol for each of the three stages in a relationship that Fr. Joe describes in this particular vignette. The first stage mentioned is the infatuation stage. The second stage is the stage of disillusion and discouragement. The third stage is the stage of choosing and making a decision to love another person.

Discussion: These symbols could also be drawn or brought to the following class meeting for discussion. Gather the students to “show and tell” what they have found.

Writing on a Relationship

Activity: Ask the students to write about a relationship in their lives (a friend, mom, dad, brother, sister, priest, neighbor, coach, teammate, etc.) and how that relationship has gone through any or all of the three stages that Fr. Joe described.

Reflection: Allow time for the students to journal on the following questions.

- Is your relationship with a group of people in your parish?
- Have you ever experienced the three stages Fr. Joe described in your relationship with God?
- Have you experienced the three stages Fr. Joe described in your relationship with Jesus?

My Living Tradition of Faith

Preparation: Ask the students to write their answers to the following questions.

- Who is your favorite Catholic, living or deceased, whom you have known personally?
- Why is that person your favorite?

Discussion: Ask the students to share some of what they have written down. The purpose of this exercise is to have the students get in touch with the fact that it is no accident that they are Catholic. They have been called to be Catholic through specific people. They stand on the shoulders of other Catholics and are part of a long tradition. End the exercise with these words, “Wouldn’t it be great if, in twenty or forty years, a leader asked other students about their favorite Catholic and they wrote your name and talked about you?”

Why I Like Being Catholic

Preparation: *Copy and print the following list.*

What do I like about being Catholic?

- I like having a Catholic identity.
- I like the universality of the Church.
- I like the Church’s three thousand years of history dating back to Abraham.
- I like the saints.
- I like the Eucharist.
- I like the Bible.
- I like the pope.
- I like having Catholic friends that I see on Sundays.
- I like the fact that the Church teaches me what is important and challenges me and supports me.
- I like the service the Church gives to the poor.
- I like the opportunity the Church gives me for fun (sports groups, youth groups, dances, etc.).
- I like the Church’s help when I have problems.
- Other

Activity: Pass a copy of the list to each student. Ask them to write down from the list the top three reasons why they like being Catholic.

Discussion: Encourage students to share their responses.

The Church As An Institution

Discussion: Have the students name some of the institutions or groups of which they are a part (sports teams, school, family, job, etc.). Ask them: “What is good about that group? What is difficult?” After this discussion, tell the students that belonging to any institution, community, or group involves struggle and conflict because all groups contain sinful people. Can the students accept that Catholic people are both graced and sinful, holy and weak, strong and broken? Perhaps

you can conclude this discussion by reflecting that the Church is no better than any other institution. Each of us is broken and strong, graced and sinful, holy and weak. End this exercise by reading the parable of the weeds and the wheat from the gospel story (Matthew 13:24–30). Reflect with the students that, as with the weeds and the wheat growing together, salvation comes in the groups we belong to and in our own hearts. That is the mystery of salvation.

VIGNETTE THREE

Scene: *Fr. Joe is back with the confirmation class.*
(Time: 6:34)

Synopsis: Fr. Joe discusses the wedding with his confirmation class. He says that when we choose to love, we always have to make some kind of sacrifice. This leads to a discussion about following Jesus in confirmation.

Class Options

How Did the Saints Pay the Price?

Preparation: Each student will need to choose a saint for this discussion; it could be the patron saint for the school, the saint for whom they are named, or a saint with a story they find appealing. You may want to provide brief biographies of saints ahead of time, or ask the students to find information on a favorite saint.

Discussion: Ask each student to describe the price a particular saint paid for what he or she believed in. Some suggestions for follow-up questions and discussion include:

- Do they think that this was too high a cost to believe in Jesus?
- What price is too high?
- How far would they go to believe in Jesus?

Where Has Love Hurt You?

Preparation: Ask the students to write their answers to these questions:

- What price have you paid for love?
- Where has love hurt recently?

Discussion: Ask if anyone would like to share any part of what they wrote. Conclude with a passage from Scripture: “Then he said to all, ‘If anyone wishes to come after me, he must deny himself and take up his cross daily and follow me’ ” (Luke 9:23). [Emphasize daily.]

How Can I Help My Parish?

Discussion: Invite the students to respond to these questions:

- What are some situations in my parish that I think need to be changed? (Consider Robin’s parish in the vignette.)
- How can you bring about the change?
- What Price Do You Pay to Go to Sunday Eucharist?

Discussion: Open the conversation by asking the students to consider the “price” of getting up on Sunday morning and going to Mass. Possible “costs”:

- I have to get out of bed when I’m still tired after a long night.
- I’m very busy, and Mass is just one more thing that I have to do.
- I have to go to Mass alone, because nobody else in my family, dormitory, or neighborhood goes to Mass.

Is Being Different a “Price to Pay”?

Discussion: Open the conversation with the students by asking them to consider the “price” of living differently from others their age. This difference could revolve around the issue of sexuality (being a virgin or a “born-again virgin”), respecting people’s uniqueness (differences in race, color, or personality), or peer pressure (partying without using drugs and alcohol or going to Mass when others don’t).

Who Are Your Heroes?

Discussion: Talk with the students about their heroes. Have everyone comment on one person they consider a hero. What are the qualities they like about these particular men and women? Have these people made it through hard times? Describe some of their hard times. Perhaps at the end of the discussion the leader could point out to the students that they also become heroes when they survive hard times. Great difficulties can make one heroic.

The Gifts Of The Holy Spirit

Discussion: Invite the students to name and define the seven gifts of the Holy Spirit. Then ask them to name a teenager they know who demonstrates each of those gifts and explain how they do so.

VIGNETTE FOUR

Scene: *Fr. Joe's garage/gym and Andy's house. (Time: 5:01)*

Synopsis: Fr. Joe and Andy talk about life and its risk. It takes daring to continue to move ahead. In confirmation, we take a risk to move ahead with our spiritual lives.

Class Options

The Courage to Be Christian

Preparation: Ask the students to write a brief answer to this question to prepare them for the discussion (the papers need not be handed in): Does it take guts to be a Christian? Then, have them list three ways it takes tremendous courage or "guts" to be a Christian in this world.

Discussion: Encourage the students to share their answers. If you are comfortable, you might share one of your own experiences of needing to draw on courage to follow Christ.

What Is the Connection Between Daily Life and Confirmation?

Discussion: Open the conversation by asking the students to describe the difference between a person who has received the sacrament of confirmation and one who has not. You could use these questions:

- Is there any difference in playing sports if you are confirmed?
- Will confirmation make any difference in your concern for the poor?
- Will being confirmed make a difference in how you date, in the friends you have, or in how you will party?
- How will confirmation change how you relate to your parents?
- Will there be any difference in how you use your free time?
- Will you be more in control of your emotions after you are confirmed (for example: less angry, more loving, less worried, more peaceful)?
- Is there any reason that a confirmed person would have different attitudes than others who are not confirmed?

The Courage to Do What I Can

Preparation: The week before, ask the students to bring in pictures and articles showing the kinds of suffering we can do something about (crime, hunger, prejudice) and the kinds of suffering we can do nothing about (failure, death, illness, being limited in knowledge and capability, loneliness, having a friend move away, rejection).

Discussion: Allow each student to present his or her pictures with a brief description of what the picture represents. If time permits, have a short discussion centered on these questions: How do I grow from suffering? For example, how do I grow from failure, from hunger, from prejudice? How do I grow from loss? Can I learn more about God from loss in my life? Part of the purpose of this exercise is for the students to see that we don't just find God in the positive, in the sunshine, in the beautiful, but that we also can find God in times of loss or tragedy. Those are the times when God comes especially close to us. The wisest people we know sometimes are the ones who have suffered the most or who have lost the most. But tragedy is part of human life and it will never be different. Jesus pulls back the veil from loss to show that God is there. Give examples of how Jesus experienced the kind of suffering you can't do anything about and the kind of suffering you can.

A Prayer Service With the Parents

Activity: Perhaps the class could plan a prayer service for their parents. Issue a formal invitation to the parents to come and pray with the class on a particular evening. Have the students plan and execute the service, from inviting the parents to leading the worship service. It would be especially good to have this service during Advent or Lent, using darkness and light as images.

VIGNETTE FIVE

Scene: *Fr. Joe is back with his confirmation class.*
(Time: 11:00)

Synopsis: Fr. Joe asks his students if they are “weak” enough to be Christian and discusses with them what that means. They discover that, in confirmation, we can’t do it alone. We need to allow Jesus to be our partner.

Class Options

What Is Eucharist?

Preparation: Bring to class an outline of the parts of Mass or the Mass booklets from your church, if possible. You may want to consider inviting people from the parish who love the Mass and would be willing to share their thoughts with young people.

Activity: Beginning with the gathering song, go through the Mass with the students, elaborating on each part of it. (A good, inexpensive resource for this is the booklet, *What You Should Know About the Mass*, published by Liguori Publications). If you have guests from the parish, invite them to share with the students why they love the Mass and how they pray the Mass.

Follow-up: Instruct students to ask a relative or friend why they attend Mass. What is it about the Mass that draws them there? What do they hope for when they go to Mass? What are they left with after they celebrate it? What do they get out of it? Students should report back to the class what their relative or friend said.

Why Attend Eucharist?

Preparation: Ask the students to list five reasons to go to Mass. After they have completed their lists, invite each member to choose his or her strongest reason for going to Mass.

Activity: Record these reasons on a larger sheet of paper. Begin a discussion as the class looks at its “best” reasons. What is the “best” of the best reasons for going to Mass? Are these reasons different from their parents’ or grandparents’ reasons?

The Important Values of My Life

In the vignette, Fr. Joe talks about what is important in life.

Preparation:

Have the students make a list of the most important items in their lives. These items could be things like houses, cars, pictures, or rings. They could be values like honesty, education, or caring. They could be inner qualities like intelligence, friendliness, or a good sense of humor, or outer qualities like beauty or physical strength. These “items” could be people like parents, friends, teachers, or coaches.

When the students have finished listing their values, tell them that they have to give up all the items except one. If they could keep only one item from their list, what would it be?

Discussion: Encourage each student to share the one item he or she chose to keep, why they kept that item, and some of the items they gave up.

Sharing and Healing Hurt in My Life

Discussion: All of us get hurt or feel sad in our lives. Sometimes the hurt or sadness is so deep that we never tell anyone. Open the conversation with questions like these: What is an example of a hurt so deep that someone would be unable to share it? Who is the best person to share a hurt with?

God is the best person to share hurt with. Suggest to the students that, if they have any sadness or hurt in their lives that they have not shared with anyone, why not share it with God? Tonight, when they light their candles and say their evening prayers, encourage them to talk to God about the hurt and ask God to heal them.

VIGNETTE SIX

Scene: *A darkened room with one lighted candle.*
(Time: 3:00)

Synopsis: Each of the members of Fr. Joe's confirmation class steps forward to the candle and speaks heart to heart to other teens about confirmation.

Class Options

A. Who Spoke To Your Heart?

Discussion Questions: Which person in this vignette spoke to you, to your heart? What did that person say that touched you?

Why I want To Be Confirmed

Activity: Ask the students to write personal letters to God about why they want to be confirmed; then seal each in an envelope with the student's name and address on the outside. Follow-up: Mail the envelopes back to the students one year from their confirmation date.

How to Change the World

Preparation: Invite the students to write a list of three things they would change about the world if they could.

Discussion: Allow time for the students to compare their answers. Ask them what steps they can take to begin to change the world. Help the students see that they can effect change by acting in a manner that causes change. For example, a student may say, "My concern about the world is the violence everywhere." To effect a change, people can respond non-violently in their own relationships, especially at home. If their concern about the world is dishonesty, they can turn it around by being an honest young man or young woman in their lives right now. If their concern is the fact that people are too materialistic, they can begin to live more simply. This is how Jesus and the saints helped to create a better world—they acted in a manner that caused change.

Let's Dream A Perfect World

Activity: Invite the students to "dream" a perfect world.

- What would it look like?
- How would people relate?
- What would they do all day?
- What would make their lives meaningful?

Encourage the student to talk together about what Jesus' dream for the world was. Show them the prayer Jesus prayed on the night before he died. Jesus prayed that all would be one; he prayed with hope that, as the Father and Jesus were one, so the world would be one in them. Jesus dreamed for unity. Help the students see that the Catholic Church is about dreaming that dream for Jesus in our day. Help them to see that in confirmation they are taking on that mission, that dream, themselves; that the purpose of Jesus' life must be the purpose of the Church's life and, therefore, must be the purpose of their lives. Dream a better world.

A Time for Prayer

Setting the scene: *With photos or an overhead projector or film, present a group of nature scenes as the students sit quietly reflecting on the images. After several minutes, the projection ends or the photos are collected.* **(Time: 7:05)**

Opening reading: Read aloud Luke 6:12 and Ephesians 6:18.

Synopsis: Fr. Joe leads us through a centering prayer about receiving the Spirit of God.

Closing Prayer

Setting the scene: *A darkened room with one lighted candle.* **(Time: 2:25)**

Synopsis: All of the students step forward to light their candles as prayers are shared.

ADDENDUM

Family prayer service:

Some parishes already have plans for involving the family in sacramental preparation. If your parish does not, or as an addition to the parish plan, you may want to add some type of prayer service with the family on the night before the confirmation ceremony. A possible format follows which could be provided to the families beforehand so they may be better prepared.

A musician plays quiet music to set a reflective mood.

Open the service by announcing that these young people seeking to be confirmed are already confirmed in love by their families.

Read Philippians 4:4–9.

Invite the family members to place their hands on the student's head and bless him or her with prayer. This could be done in silence, but a verbal blessing is preferable. The prayer, "Come, Holy Spirit," is one possibility:

Come, Holy Spirit.

Fill the hearts of your faithful
and make the fire of your love burn within them.
Send us your spirit and we will be created,
And you shall renew the face of the earth.
Oh God, you have instructed the hearts of the faithful
by the light of the Holy Spirit.
Grant that through the same Holy Spirit
we may always be truly wise and rejoice in your consolation.
Through Christ our Lord. Amen.

Have each family member state why they are proud that this family member seeks confirmation.

Close with the Our Father.

Meeting with the parents:

Here is a suggested agenda for a meeting with the parents of those to be confirmed. The purpose of the meeting must be more than just dealing with the details of where to be and what to wear. The purpose of the meeting is to stir up parental support for those preparing for confirmation.

I. Preparation:

Read through the following suggested agenda and decide what music (if any) to have ready. You may also want to ask for volunteers to read the intercessory prayers or to participate in other ways (for example, composing the prayers).

II. Introduction and initial activity:

When the parents have gathered and proper introductions have been made, begin the meeting with this activity: Give each parent a sheet of paper and a pencil. Have them answer the question: "Who is the most important Catholic in my life?" This could be someone living or dead, but it must be someone they know or have known personally.

Play soft reflective music as they write.

Break the parents into smaller groups and have them share with each other their answers to the question. After everyone has shared in the smaller groups, gather all the parents to come back together and share some of the small group responses with the larger group.

The purpose of this exercise is to invite the parents to get in touch with the fact that it is no accident that they are Catholic. They have been called to be Catholic through specific people. They stand on the shoulders of other Catholics and are part of a long tradition that they are now handing down to their children.

III. Presentation of Witnesses:

Invite three or more parishioners to speak to the parents about what it means to them to be a Catholic. You may wish to provide the following instructions for those giving the witness talks to the parents:

Witnesses should deal with the positive and negative aspects of being Catholic; they should note any struggle they may have with being Catholic and how they may have been hurt at some time by the Church, but they should also emphasize the warm regard they have for what the Catholic Church has given them in their lives.

Other topics covered by witnesses should include: the universality of the Church, the mission of sharing

in the Church, the purpose of the Church, the Eucharist, the Mass in their lives, community, meeting Jesus and God through the sacraments, and the role of Scripture in our daily lives.

IV. After the Witness:

Play some quiet, reflective music. After a few minutes, invite the parents to pray that during this time of confirmation, they may make a stronger commitment to the Catholic Church, to their faith, and to the Catholic vision. Ask the parents to reflect again on their child who is about to be confirmed. Have them picture in their minds their child's good qualities. What is it that makes this child of theirs lovable, endearing? What is it

they cherish about their child?

At this point, begin the intercessory prayers, to which all respond, "Lord, hear our prayer." These intercessions can center on the family, the Church, commitment, and the hope that these young people will continue to grow in wisdom, in age, and in grace. Let the intercessions be a way of entrusting the children to God.

Closing Prayer:

Invite the group to stand and pray or sing together the Our Father. If desired, end with a short blessing prayer.

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