



## ARCHDIOCESE OF BALTIMORE

320 CATHEDRAL STREET • BALTIMORE, MARYLAND 21201 • 410-547-5437 • FAX: 410-547-8234

OFFICE OF THE ARCHBISHOP

January 22, 2025

Dear Brothers and Sisters in Christ,

Some time ago, I asked that the Archdiocesan Policies and Guidelines for the Sacrament of Confirmation be reviewed. I did so out of a deep pastoral concern that young people are disaffiliating from the Church at an earlier age and that often parents are at best minimally involved in their children's preparation for Confirmation.

In pondering this pastoral concern, I asked: "Precisely when in the life of a young person is the most fruitful moment to receive the fullness of the Holy Spirit?"

I knew that I could not, of myself, answer this question. So, with the help of co-workers, I undertook a broad consultation. In seeking to answer it, we knew that no precise age is right for everyone. Each person's individual circumstances and experiences need to be taken into account. That said, some guideline, some norm, is necessary. In trying to determine what it should be, we took into account the theology of the sacraments of initiation as well as the wisdom culled from the social sciences, developmental psychology, the experience of other dioceses, and the experience of pastors and parish leaders engaged in Confirmation preparation. In addition, several parishes piloted confirmation programs at the earlier age. They reported good results, especially the fruitful engagement of parents and family in the formation of candidates for confirmation.

These explorations yielded two key findings: 1) We often underestimate the zeal and readiness of the youngest of our disciples; and 2) the role of parents and family is, in fact, the decisive factor when it comes to our young people growing into adult disciples.

With that in mind, after more than two years of intensive study, consultation, and prayerful discernment, I have made the decision to lower the standard age of Confirmation to 9 years old in the Archdiocese of Baltimore.

I realize that this is a significant change from current practice. Thus, it will be implemented in three waves, beginning in the 2025-2026 Catechetical Year / Formation cycle. By the Spring of 2028, all parishes and pastorates in the Archdiocese are to offer Confirmation for children at age 9.

Each parish or pastorate will complete the transition over the course of a one-to-three-year period. The pace of implementation should be discerned with attention to factors such as demographics, the current state of Confirmation preparation, progress along the pathway of family faith formation, the presence of a Catholic school, and the capacity of leadership to manage the change, given current responsibilities.

I acknowledge that changing the standard age of Confirmation cannot, in isolation, remedy the complex realities that have led to the disaffiliation from the Church in such great measure. However, we now know that purposeful engagement of families in the formation of their children is essential in our formation efforts. Therefore, it is my sincere hope that, by more actively engaging parents in the preparation of their children's Confirmation, the graces of the Sacrament will take root in these young people's lives - sealing their missionary identity in the Spirit and sending them forth.

To be sure - strengthened by the Holy Spirit - these young disciples will be better equipped to face the challenges of adolescence today, but they will demand no less care, support, and intentional accompaniment. For this reason, parishes must redouble their youth ministry efforts in a manner that is richly mystical and supports their growth in the Christian state of life.

In the coming months, the Office of Family, Youth, and Young Adult Ministry will provide you with more specific guidance on this change and work with parishes and pastorates individually to implement this important shift carefully and in a manner that respects pastoral considerations. Further, our Auxiliary Bishops and I are prepared to clear additional time in our schedules to confer the Sacrament of Confirmation more frequently in the coming years.

As we move into this new era, please know of my deepest gratitude for all that you do to evangelize and catechize our young people and their families. Let us together pray for an outpouring of the Holy Spirit among our young people, their families, and those who, like yourselves, minister to and with them.

Assuring you of my prayers and asking a remembrance in yours, I remain

Faithfully in Christ,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "William E. Lori". The signature is written in a cursive style with a small cross at the beginning.

Most Reverend William E. Lori  
Archbishop of Baltimore