The Restored Order of the Sacraments of Initiation

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At Pentecost of 2015, Archbishop Aquila formally announced that the Archdiocese of Denver will be moving toward restoring the order of the Sacraments of Initiation. This is often referred to with the single term: Restored Order. In his Pastoral Letter “Saints Among Us” he outlines his vision for the Archdiocese. With these changes, you may be wondering: what will this mean for you and your children?

The Sacraments of Initiation are Baptism, Eucharist and Confirmation. Most of us have experienced receiving these Sacraments in this order. However, as the name implies, restoring the order of the Sacraments means returning them to the order we, as Roman Catholics, used to receive them: Baptism, Confirmation, and then Eucharist. Really! We used to receive them Baptism, Confirmation, and then Eucharist! Baptism begins our life in Christ, making us members of God’s family. Confirmation perfects the grace of baptism, strengthening us with the gifts of the Holy Spirit. The Eucharist then feeds us for our lifelong journey to be Disciples of Christ.

Here at St. Thomas More, Sacraments are prepared for through the Church, and preparation occurs concurrently with attendance at religious education classes. Religious education classes include attendance at any of: a Catholic school, Faith & Family R. E., Shepherd’s Promise R.E., or the use of an approved religion curriculum in a homeschool program. It is through these various religious education classes that children learn of many aspects of our faith: the Trinity, the Liturgical Year, Saints, virtues, prayers, etc. In our Sacrament preparation, parents and the Church unite to educate the children on the reception of the particular Sacrament. No, these are not another weekly class – but parent meetings and parent with child workshops that are specific and focused to the Sacrament itself.

With the restoration of the order of the Sacraments of Initiation beginning at STM in 2016-2017, Sacrament Preparation at St. Thomas More will now be a two year process which includes the reception of three Sacraments. Children will need to already be baptized Catholic to begin preparation for these Sacraments. Year 1 will include participation in a religious education class and preparation for both parents and children to learn about the Sacraments and prepare for Reconciliation. The First Reconciliation ceremony will be celebrated during Lent. These same families will return for Year 2 which will include religious education classes again as well as preparation for Confirmation and Eucharist. Both of these Sacraments will be received at a single Mass scheduled sometime during or shortly after the Easter season. Since the ceremony includes Confirmation, the presider will now be the Archbishop or his designee. PLEASE NOTE: There will no longer be a way for children to receive their First Eucharist without receiving Confirmation.
What does this mean for our children? If a child has already received their First Reconciliation and First Eucharist, they will continue on our current path towards Confirmation. We offer preparation for middle schoolers, high schoolers and adults. Each has its own registration, preparation and schedule. Specifically, Middle School Confirmation registration will begin in February with preparation to begin in March 2017. You would enroll your child in this if they are currently in 5th, 6th or 7th grade and you want them confirmed in November 2017.

This year’s inaugural group of children who will prepare for the reception of Sacraments in the Restored Order will begin in October 2016. If a 2nd, 3rd or 4th grade child has NOT received their First Reconciliation and First Eucharist, but is baptized Catholic, they are also welcome to join the two year preparation beginning in 2016-2017. Registration is open and Informational Parent Meetings will begin in October 2016. Remember, for those already baptized, First Reconciliation must be received before the other Sacraments. (Catechism of the Catholic Church paragraph 1457) Once registered, children will prepare for and receive their First Reconciliation in Lent 2017, and then both their Confirmation and First Eucharist at a single ceremony in Spring/June of 2018.

**Year 1** Preparation for Reconciliation with Ceremony in Lent

**Year 2** Preparation for BOTH Confirmation and Eucharist with a single ceremony in Spring/June

Remember, all of us are called to continue our faith formation throughout our lives, deepening our relationship with Christ and His Church. This is especially true after we after have been confirmed. Children will still be expected to continue learning the faith through attendance at any of our faith formation opportunities. Living as fully initiated members of the Catholic Church, it is hoped that children would become more involved in the life and activities of the parish outside of a religious education class or attendance at Catholic school. These include such experiences as becoming altar servers or singing in the children’s choir, just to name a couple. Over time, as a parish, we will continue to explore and develop more ways for our younger confirmed members of our Church to live their faith in the community.

As we begin these changes at our parish, we will continue to communicate through our various publications. The 2016-2017 preparation year is our first with the Restored Order of Sacraments. This is an exciting time for our church and the Archdiocese. Please pray for our parish, our families and most of all our children that through the reception of these Sacraments they may be drawn even closer to Christ.

Further information is available at several websites: www.archden.org/saints includes a 30 minutes video explaining the reason behind the decision to restore the order of the Sacraments of Initiation, the text of Archbishop Aquila’s Pastoral Letter “Saints Among Us” and a Q & A section. Several articles are available to read in past issues of the More Informed which can be accessed at www.stthomasmore.org under the Latest Bulletin tab, click on the More Parish Publications button.

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FAQs

Restored Order of Sacraments

I need to register my children for the Restored Order of Sacrament preparation for 2016-2017. How do I do that? There are two ways to register: on-line at stthomasmore.org/registrations (please have your envelope number and a copy of your child’s Baptismal Certificate with you when you log in) or good ol’ fashioned paper forms available in the Church Information Cove or outside the Office of Catechesis. If you are a STM School family, please note that we will still need a copy of your child’s Baptismal Certificate. Once you supply a copy to the school, it is put in your child’s confidential academic records which the Church does not have access to.

If parents feel their child is not ready for Confirmation, can they wait? Absolutely! As Pope Saint John Paul II said, parents are the primary educators of their children and as such we honor parents’ wishes. However, please note that in delaying Confirmation, Eucharist is also delayed. Per Archbishop Aquila, there will not be an alternate path where children are allowed to receive Eucharist before Confirmation.

If the children will be preparing for 3 Sacraments, does that mean there are three ceremonies? No. Reconciliation will continue to have its celebration – and this will be during Lent of the first year of Sacrament Preparation. The Sacraments of Confirmation and Eucharist will be celebrated at the same Mass at the end of the second year of preparation with the Archbishop or his designee as the presider.

When I prepared for Confirmation, there were lots of components to complete. How will this work with children so young? Children will still choose a sponsor to walk the journey and a Saint name to ask for guidance through their lives. Emphasis will now be placed more on the reception of the grace of the Sacrament. One result is that children will not be attending a retreat that would look like what occurs at the middle school, high school or adult levels. Our current model with Parent/Child Workshops will be the retreat component.

What about service hours? Service hours will not be required; however, we will be incorporating a service project into one of the Parent/Child Workshops – similar to what we currently do with Eucharist preparation. It is important for us to model the idea of service since serving is to be a lifelong endeavor as a disciple of Christ.

What happens after children are confirmed? Since Confirmation is NOT a graduation from the faith, it is expected that children will continue to attend Mass, receive the Sacraments of Reconciliation and Eucharist, learn more of their faith and become active members of the Catholic community. Obviously we want all children to continue in their religious education, but active participation is also a component of our faith. This can include many different forms of education and involvement. As implementation of the Restored Order of the Sacraments of Initiation continues, we will continue to broaden the possibilities for the younger confirmed in our community to learn, serve and develop their relationship with Christ.

My child has special needs. Do you offer something for her? Yes, we work with parents to discover the best situation and environment for their children. Sacrament Preparation can occur through the parish-wide process or through the Special Needs R. E. classes. Each child is a unique gift from God and we want what is best for them and their families.