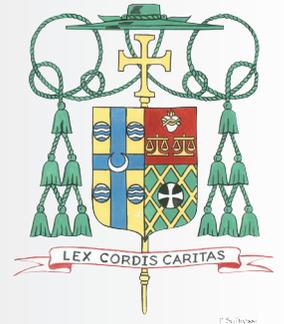




# LEX CORDIS CARITAS

## *The law of the heart is love*

**Bishop Thomas John Paprocki**  
Ninth Bishop of the Catholic Diocese of Springfield in Illinois



## Young people need the Holy Spirit at an early age

My dear brothers and sisters in Christ:

Previously we saw that the fifth declaration of our fourth diocesan synod addresses the life-long catechetical formation needed to prepare people to be disciples of our Lord and stewards of his creation. This relates to the proper sequence and age for receiving the sacraments of initiation, which is addressed in the sixth declaration of the fourth diocesan synod: "The sacraments of Christian initiation shall be offered in the proper sequence (baptism, confirmation and Eucharist) for children as well as for adults. To promote discipleship and stewardship as a way of life from an early age, those who are baptized as infants are to receive the sacraments of confirmation and Eucharist at about the age of reason, which in this diocese will normally be in their third grade of elementary school, after they have been properly prepared and have made sacramental confession."

This sixth declaration is in keeping with canon 891 of the *Code of Canon Law*, which states, "The sacrament of confirmation is to be conferred on the faithful at about the age of discretion unless the conference of bishops determines another age or there is danger of death or in the judgment of the minister a grave cause urges otherwise." Reflecting the diversity of pastoral practices in the United States, the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops decreed in 2002 that "the sacrament of confirmation

in the Latin rite shall be conferred between the age of discretion and about 16 years of age, within the limits determined by the diocesan bishop and with regard for the legitimate exceptions given in canon 891."

“Our youth face many temptations from the world around them . . . . Delaying their full initiation into the church until adolescence serves to deprive them of the grace they need at a crucial time in their lives.”

Discretion refers to the ability to make free acts of the will by which a person becomes morally responsible for his or her actions. In 1910, the Sacred Congregation of the Discipline of the Sacraments, with the approval of Pope Pius X, decreed that the "age of discretion, both for confession and for Holy Communion, is the time when a child begins to reason, that is, about the seventh year, more or less. From that time on begins the obligation of fulfilling the precept of both confession and Communion." This is reflected in the current *Code of Canon Law*, where canon 97, §2 says

that "one is presumed to have the use of reason with the completion of the seventh year," while canon 914 states that "children who have reached the use of reason are to receive their first Holy Communion as early as possible, preceded by sacramental confession."

This decree said nothing about the age for confirmation. The *Catechism of the Catholic Church* in paragraphs 1285 and 1306 affirms confirmation as the completion of baptism. The ancient tradition of the church regards confirmation as the second of the three stages of Christian initiation, the conclusion of which is reception of first holy Communion.

The transition to the restored order of the sacraments of initiation and their completion by the age of discretion in our diocese will take time and preparation. I have appointed a committee of clergy and laity to propose plans for this transition accordingly.

Restoring the original sequence of baptism, confirmation and Eucharist, in that order, with the latter two sacraments being received in third grade, shifts the focus of religious education for older children from sacramental preparation to formation for discipleship and stewardship as a way of life. Service projects, for example, can still be done by adolescents, but they are to be understood not as requirements to be completed in order to be confirmed, but as the way that fully initiated Christians live out their baptismal commitment by serving others.

Moreover, confirmation is correctly



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