

Unity and Order of the Sacraments and the Catechumenate (RCIA)

Baptism, Confirmation and Eucharist were celebrated together in the early Church. After the Baptismal washing and anointing of the whole body (usually by deacons or presbyters), the bishop anointed the forehead with chrism. The new Christians were then welcomed into the assembly for participation in the Eucharist. This sequence has been preserved to the present day in the liturgy of the Eastern Churches. As recently as 2007, Pope Benedict XVI reaffirmed the importance of the unity of the three sacraments of Christian initiation. (*Sacramentum Caritatis*, 17-19)

In the West, the sequence of Baptism, Confirmation, and Eucharist remained almost entirely intact until the twentieth century. While the sacraments were separated in time, the sequence remained the same. Baptism was separated from both Confirmation and Eucharist by a period of about ten years. In 1910 Pope Pius X mandated that children be welcomed to the table by the age of seven, but no mention was made of when Confirmation should be celebrated. The result was that the order of the sacraments of Confirmation and Eucharist was inverted in many parts of the world. (One should note however that the practice of celebrating Confirmation before Communion was maintained in some places, such as parts of Latin America. The Code of Canon Law also has consistently referred to the sacraments of initiation in their traditional order.)

In 1971, the new *Rite of Confirmation* reiterated the traditional order: "The faithful are born anew by Baptism, strengthened by the sacrament of Confirmation, and finally are sustained by the food of eternal life in the Eucharist." The whole process of initiation culminates in the celebration of the Eucharist. The ongoing life of faith is then continually nourished on the sacrament of the Eucharist.

The *Apostolic Constitution on Confirmation* stresses that:

. . . Confirmation is so closely linked with the holy Eucharist that the faithful, after being signed by holy Baptism and Confirmation, are incorporated fully into the body of Christ by participation in the Eucharist.

In 1972, the *Rite of Christian Initiation of Adults*, 206- 207, gave further support to this sequence, as did the *Catechism of the Catholic Church* (1994, 1997), 1233, the *General Directory for Catechesis* (1997), 91, and the revised *National Directory for Catechesis* (2005), 36.

The *Rite of Christian Initiation of Adults* states the purpose of celebrating the sacraments of Baptism and Confirmation together, in this way:

The conjunction of the two celebrations [Baptism and Confirmation] signifies the unity of the paschal mystery, the close link between the mission of the Son and the outpouring of the Holy Spirit, and the connection between the two sacraments through which the Son and the Holy Spirit come with the Father to those who are baptized. (RCIA 215)

The celebration of the Eucharist that follows, then, is the event in which ". . . the newly baptized reach the culminating point in their Christian initiation." (RCIA 216)

This sequence—**Baptism, Confirmation, and Eucharist**—is followed both in the initiation of adults and in the initiation of children of catechetical age. . . . **see RCIA 206.**