

TOTALLY OVERWHELMED BY INFORMATION?

High School Youth Leader Claire Willett Answers Parents' Top 15 FAQ's

1. Why is Confirmation such a major time commitment?

At All Saints, the main theme of our Confirmation program is this: "How do I live my life in the real world as a faithful Catholic, with all the pressures against that?" All of us – teens and adults – are pulled in a million different directions and it can be so easy to let God drop to the bottom of the list. But if we want these teens to be people of faith, living their Christianity out loud (both now and when they're adults), then it's vital to have the experience of making God a priority in your life in high school. We asked parents and sponsors of last year's class about this specific issue, and they unanimously agreed it was worth it. Here are just a few of their comments:

"It is difficult to imagine adding one more thing to the schedule when your teen is already juggling school, sports and other activities. Regardless, Confirmation is absolutely doable, and what your teen gets in return for her time cannot be measured. Sure, there is a significant time commitment, but it is a necessary component of the Confirmation journey. If your child is truly ready to start down that path, the time involved becomes a non-issue." --Sophomore Parent

"I thought that the time commitment was well worth the final product . . . I felt that we had a lot of meaningful exercises that stretched the kids' minds to examine what their faith means to them and how they can live it every day of their life . . . I really felt in the end that the kids understood what the sacrament was really about and took it very seriously and wanted it." -- Sponsor

2. How can I get more involved?

Why, what an excellent question! Since parents are the #1 catechists of their children, we want you and your family as engaged in the process as possible. The most important thing, of course, is to pray for (and with) your teen and share your own faith with them. If you want to read session outlines beforehand or read along in their book, if you want us to help you with discussion topics or questions you can ask your teen about what they learned, if you want youth ministry resources, or if there's any way that Monica or I can be a support to your family in this process, don't hesitate to let us know. In terms of practical items, there are a number of volunteer opportunities for parents and sponsors. We need parent volunteers to help us prepare meals for the teens at each session, as well as to help host the reception after the Confirmation Mass. You can help us drive teens to the retreat and the rally. There are lots of ways to get involved!

3. What is covered in the fee? It seems like a lot!

We know. If we had a million dollars and could offer all youth programs for free we TOTALLY would. We promise that Confirmation will not nickel-and-dime you; that one-time \$200 fee is IT. It covers expenses for every session, the fee for the INCREASE youth rally, the costs of the retreat, the expenses of the Confirmation Mass, and books and materials. We will not ask you for another cent for this program. Please let us know ASAP if this fee presents a financial hardship so we can work with you. No teen is ever turned away from ANY youth ministry program because of lack of funds.

4. Do we have to pay extra if my teen also wants to do Life Teen this year?

Nope! Life Teen is covered in the Confirmation fee. They're welcome to do as many sessions as they like. Some Life Teen socials may have extra fees but for regular Life Nights all your teen's expenses (including food) are totally covered.

5. Why do the teens have to attend Life Nights?

A lot of parents ask us this. The best way to answer this question is to tell you to ask a parent whose teen was confirmed last year and goes to Life Nights. They'll tell you that their teen benefits greatly from being part of an affirming and positive peer community where it's okay to ask questions about their faith, share their struggles, and support each other. This isn't about me and Monica wanting more teens at Life Nights, this is about giving the teens a place to be with each other. Confirmation only meets once a month, so this is a way for them to deepen their relationships, build community, and discuss topics that augment and enhance what's covered in Confirmation sessions. Our youth are ONE community, not The Life Teen Kids vs. The Confirmation Kids. In my six years running this program, it wasn't until we started making Life Nights part of Confirmation that I really saw a bridging of the traditional gap between the Youth Ministry Kids and the Life Teen Kids.

6. What age do you have to be to do Confirmation? Can both my kids do it together?

At All Saints, Confirmation is open to all high schoolers, though the group tends to be primarily freshmen and sophomores, so that is how our program is structured. Middle schoolers are not eligible.

7. What if my teen needs to miss a session or event?

A list of potential makeups for regular sessions is provided in the info packet, as well as what constitutes an excusable absence. We try to be as flexible as we can, but we also expect this to be a priority in your teen's life. Not everything can be made up – for example, the retreat and the INCREASE rally. Those are mandatory. There's nothing we can offer that comes close to making up that experience, so everyone needs to be there.

8. Why are the sessions so long?

In my six years as Confirmation Coordinator at All Saints, we've been all over the map in terms of what our calendar looks like. The current version – sessions roughly once a month from 3:30 to 8:30 – has been by far the most successful so we're sticking with it. Yes, the sessions are long, but there are fewer of them, which we've heard from parents makes scheduling easier; they're also by-and-large on the first Sunday of the month so you can work around them on the family calendar. The length of the sessions has many positive benefits; we get a full session to cover the "big picture" of a topic, then dinner and Mass together so the teens get some fellowship time with each other, and then another full session to really dive deep into the material and how it impacts our lives. The level of depth in our discussions and conversations, and the amount of time spent in community, is greatly enriched by this, as opposed to having a larger number of shorter sessions. The bonding in last year's Confirmation class was amazing, because they all had more time to get to know each other.

9. What kind of topics do you cover? Can I get the information from you so I know what's being covered?

Yes and no. We're happy to share topics, outlines, and activities with parents beforehand if requested. We will generally not share what is discussed in class with parents, in order to respect the teens' privacy and create a safe place for discussion. The exceptions, obviously, are for the teen's well-being and safety. We cover a wide variety of topics, from poverty and social justice to how to create an active prayer life.

11. What's with the reading homework?

We added *Blessed Are the Bored In Spirit* to the curriculum last year to give the teens access to a writer/speaker we love who covers important topics in a frank, funny and honest way. It also gives teens and sponsors something to read and discuss together throughout the year. The second book was added to give families a way to participate with their teen in the process. Both are easy reads; Monica and I would never recommend a book we didn't enjoy ourselves.

12. What if we don't go to Mass at All Saints?

Everyone is welcome, wherever you attend Mass or are registered. That said, because youth ministry is a program of the parish, and parishioners' contributions help us cover our costs, if you are either registered somewhere else, or you attend every week somewhere else, we would ask (on the honor system) that you help us cover costs by paying the out-of-parish fee. If you're registered here but you or your teen don't attend Mass regularly or at all, this is an excellent time to get back in the saddle and re-engage in your community.

13. Do we have to go to the Life Teen Mass?

Nope. We structure Confirmation around the Life Teen Mass for the same reason we encourage teens to attend Life Nights as often as they can – to help us bridge the gap between the "Confirmation kids" and the "Life Teen kids" so our youth are all ONE community. But outside of Confirmation sessions and events, whatever Mass your family attends is fine. We like the Life Teen Mass a lot, and we recommend it – but it's totally a family decision.

14. Can my teen's sponsor be her aunt who lives in Chicago?

Technically, yes. But we don't recommend it. If Cool Aunt Becky in Chicago can get herself back and forth to Portland for all the required events and is fine doing that, then great. If she can make it to the Rite of Confirmation but nothing else, your teen is responsible for bringing a proxy to all sponsor-required events. But I think the teens lose out on something special when the person standing up with them during the Sacrament to present them to the Archbishop is not the same person who has been at their side all along the way. But no, it isn't against the rules. There's a form in the info packet about choosing a sponsor, and your teens are welcome to come to me and Monica with questions.

15. What do I need to know about the overnight retreat?

Right now, just make sure it gets on your calendar, since it's mandatory and can't be replaced with a make-up; if your teen has gone on a retreat before, they can tell you it's not the kind of experience you can replace with a 5-page paper on Jesus. The community-building that happens on the retreat, and the way it impacts everyone's experience the rest of the year, means that even if ONE teen misses the retreat, everyone else loses something of their experience. In terms of logistics, packing list, etc., the parent meeting in December will cover all that stuff, and you'll get permission slips then.