

To: All Priests and Deacons

Date: May 23, 2008

Re: Directive for Celebration of the Sacraments of Initiation and the Sacrament of Reconciliation

In the Diocese of Tyler I want to reiterate specific points of clarification regarding the formation and celebration of the Sacraments of Initiation: Baptism, Confirmation and Eucharist. I will also address the pastoral practice for the Sacrament of Reconciliation.

1. For non-baptized persons who have reached the age of reason (about 7), who are in formation for these sacraments, they should celebrate Baptism, Confirmation, and Holy Communion for the first time at the same liturgy. These individuals should be formed through the Christian Initiation process.
2. For persons who are already baptized, those individuals in formation for completing the sacraments of initiation will celebrate Confirmation and Holy Communion for the first time at the same liturgy also. The Christian Initiation process as well as the procedure for baptized Catholics should be utilized for the formation for these individuals depending on their level of faith formation and integration into the community.
3. The Sacrament of Reconciliation is an essential part of faith formation. The formation for this sacrament should lead to the individual celebrating Reconciliation once a month for 10 months for those who are already baptized, prior to celebrating the sacraments of Confirmation and Holy Communion. Mystagogy for all Catholics should include regular monthly celebration of Reconciliation in order to avoid the tendency to sin which remains after Baptism for all of us.
4. These practices for celebrating the sacraments are to be implemented in every parish and mission with no exceptions. The priest must contact me for special permission if a particular situation warrants an exemption from these pastoral practices.

Having accomplished this pastoral adaptation, I wanted to hear from the clergy of the Diocese their experience and to affirm if this was the appropriate course for our continued efforts. For this reason, I called for a special joint meeting of Presbyteral and Diaconal Councils to consult on these issues. Both the priests and deacons were candid in benefits and challenges of this direction in pastoral practice, but both groups solidly encouraged we continue to move forward with this pastoral adaptation which they find to already be bearing good fruit in the lives of many people. However, there is still some false expectations that Confirmation is a sacrament of maturity and service.

It has been three years since I first met with the Priests and Deacons to consider and change the practice of celebrating Confirmation after First Communion. The implementation time frame called for all parishes/missions to begin forming young people for Confirmation prior to First Communion not later than January 2007 so that by May 2008 all our young people receiving Communion for the first time would also be Confirmed at the same Mass.

In my travels and discussions with people within our diocese and beyond, I find a remarkable interest in how well this pastoral adaptation has been received by the clergy and the people. Many of our priests and deacons recognize that our practice of celebrating Confirmation and First Communion at the same liturgy is an important part of the reform of the Church. The flexibility offered to individuals and families is bearing good fruit in many lives. The process is reported by many priests and deacons to be particularly well received by Hispanic families.

I want to thank the priests and deacons who have embraced this important reform in our diocese. Together with parents and lay leaders we are beginning to see significant growth in living the sacraments.

Yours in Christ Jesus,

+Alvaro Corrada, SJ
Bishop of Tyler