



April 13, 2015

Dear parents, priests, deacons, youth ministers, faith formation staff, and Catholic school administrators,

I am writing this letter to invite you to take an active role by reading the articles regarding the plan to return the sacraments of initiation to their proper order in our diocese, that is: Baptism, Confirmation, and then First Holy Communion. A series of articles explaining the history of the sacraments of initiation, changes to the way children will prepare for these sacraments, and the importance of having comprehensive youth ministry programs in our parishes will be published in the next issues of our Catholic Herald. Education plays a most important role in this process, so I invite you to be part of the process. The proposal to return the sacraments of initiation to their proper order has already been discussed with the Presbyteral Council and the Diocesan Pastoral Council. Both groups strongly favored the plan.

If one looks at the *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, one notes that the first three sacraments are covered in the proper theological order. Our baptismal covenant with God is sealed in Confirmation; the two sacraments go together like Easter and Pentecost. Received third, the Holy Eucharist is then seen as the summit of initiation. “The Holy Eucharist completes our Christian initiation” (*Catechism* 1322).

Over the course of history in the Western (Latin) Church, great emphasis was placed on the importance of Baptism soon after birth, opening the door of salvation to our youngest members. Unfortunately, delays started occurring with the reception of Confirmation and First Holy Communion. Pope St. Pius X in 1910 addressed the problem of children receiving First Holy Communion at too late an age and directed that children be given Holy Communion at the age of reason, that is, about age 7. This resulted, however, in the sacraments being given out of order. Current practice is like counting 1, 3, 2.

Some may point out that we have been doing what we are doing for 100 years, so why change now? The reason is simple: What we are doing is not working very well. Confirmation is often experienced more as a graduation from the Church than as a free gift of God’s grace. Pope Francis acknowledged this: “There was this experience: the sacrament of Confirmation – what is this sacrament called? Confirmation? No! Its name has changed: the ‘sacrament of farewell.’ They do this and then they leave the Church. ... Many young people move off after receiving Confirmation, the sacrament of farewell, of goodbye, as I said. It is an experience of failure, an experience that leaves emptiness and discourages us. Is this true or not?” (September 22, 2013).

Sadly this is true in the Diocese of Honolulu, as it is true in many other places. While Confirmation programs do meet with success in many of our young people, who do become faithful disciples of the Lord, we are still missing the mark with many others. It is apparent that we are not accomplishing the goal of converting the hearts of all our young people to the Lord. Still the problem is bigger than that. A review of statistic shows that half of the children we baptize are never confirmed. Confirming children at the time of their First Holy Communion will increase the numbers of those being confirmed and receiving the grace of the sacrament. Some may fear that the children will not come back after that. Anecdotal evidence shows that family involvement is the most likely indicator of retention in faith formation programs, not the age of Confirmation.

The challenge, though, is not just to put the sacraments into their proper order. The challenge is to provide a transformed youth ministry approach that empowers young people to live as disciples of Jesus in our world today, draws them to responsible participation in the life, mission, and work of the Catholic Church, and fosters the personal and spiritual growth of each young person. The Church has a plan for this. It's called *Renewing the Vision* and information is available on the U.S. bishops' web site: [uscgb.org](http://uscgb.org). Just view it on the web, and you will see that it is quite comprehensive.

In looking at the eight components of *Renewing the Vision*, clergy, youth ministers and parishioners will see that they are already doing many of the components in their parishes – catechesis, engaging young people in the liturgy, service to the needy. Many of the components will simply shift from being part of a Confirmation program to being part of comprehensive youth ministry. It will be a matter of supplementing what is lacking. This will require work to achieve. It will require a new way of thinking. But it is worth it because it will help bring about the participation of greater number of young disciples in building up the Kingdom of God.

Such a plan requires that we trust in the Holy Spirit. We believe that Confirmation gives the gifts of the Holy Spirit – wisdom, understanding, counsel, fortitude, knowledge, piety, and the fear of the Lord. Young people need these gifts as they grow up, not when they are nearly done growing up. So we will need to trust that the Spirit will fervently work in our young people from an earlier age and work in all of us as we strive to engage our youth in the life of the Church.

Let me take this opportunity to thank the dedicated women and men of our parishes who give of their time and talent to prepare our youth for the sacrament of Confirmation and in other forms of youth ministry. By no means are we judging your work a failure, since all that is done for the Lord will bear fruit in its own time. Your dedication itself is a great witness to Jesus.

There will obviously be many questions about how we move from our present model to another model of restoring the sacraments of initiation to their proper order. In addition to the articles I mentioned above, our diocesan staff will be holding various listening sessions throughout the diocese to discuss these issues with you so that the design of our programs can be as effective as possible. The dates/times/locations for the listening sessions will be announced in the *Catholic Herald* and in our diocesan eNews at a later time. We look forward to seeing you at one of these sessions! It would be the time for us to hear from those who will be most directly impacted by this change.

May the Lord continue to bless you as you show forth the gifts of the Holy Spirit you have received!

Sincerely yours in Christ,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Larry Silva". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Most Reverend Larry Silva  
Bishop of Honolulu