

Reflections

by the
Most Reverend Thomas J. Murphy



Celebrating Life with Young People

One of the great joys that is mine as Bishop is to celebrate the Sacrament of Confirmation with the young people of our Diocese. In so many ways, these celebrations are a call to new life, new faith, new hope. Over and over again, I have been impressed with the response of our young people to their reception of this sacrament as well as the tremendous preparation given them by the priests, religious women and laity of the parish communities in Eastern Montana.

At the moment, a discussion is going on within the Church and within our own Diocese about the best age at which this celebration should take place. Until some resolution of this question is reached, I have left this decision with the local pastor which means that the age of those receiving this sacrament will range from 8th or 9th grade to Juniors and Seniors in High School.

There are good arguments and reasons on both sides of the question when it comes to the question of the best age to receive the Sacrament of Confirmation. However, in the experience I have had over the past two years, there is a marked difference of maturity and preparation on the part of Confirmation candidates when they are older. This is to be expected because of their age and experience. At the same time, our belief in sacraments as sources of grace and strength offers the person beginning his or her teenage years this rich resource of God's help.

However, no matter what the age at which Confirmation is celebrated, there are certain expectations which are asked of the Christian community when this sacrament is shared with others. The Sacrament of Confirmation should be a community celebration involving not only the candidates, but the entire parish. As the candidates prepare for this gift of the Spirit, the parish community should also be prepared through prayer and study. Moreover, the preparation for Confirmation should be part of the ongoing growth and development of young people, and not isolated to a six or eight week program or a weekend retreat.

Confirmation also calls for the commitment of those receiving this sacrament to continued study and growth in their faith tradition. One of the real tragedies prevalent in the minds of many is to think that Confirmation marks an end to religious formation and education. In reality, it marks a new beginning. Confirmation furthermore is a celebration involving a total family in which parents as well as brothers and sisters have a part.

As I celebrate this sacrament with the people of our Diocese, I pray with you that we may grow in an appreciation of Confirmation as a grace and blessing for all of us. Have a good week!