

NATCHEZ PARISHES: St. Mary Basilica and Assumption Catholic Church

April 24, 2025

Dear Parishioners,

I am currently on silent retreat with the priests of the Diocese through tomorrow afternoon, but I have received a number of questions regarding confirmation and I wanted to clarify a few points.

In the Fall, I announced that the Diocese is transitioning the age of Confirmation from eleventh to eighth grade and that St. Mary has been asked to be the pilot parish for this move. I announced this from the pulpit on three consecutive weekends, it was published in the bulletin and on Flocknote, and discussed in the theology classes at Cathedral. This past spring, Jacob Ali and myself have facilitated different confirmation classes by grade level 8-12, and the class schedule has been published in every bulletin since December.

When I arrived in Natchez, one issue that both Fr. Mark and Fr. O'Connor brought to me was that parishioners had become accustomed to having children make their confirmation at a convenient year within high school rather than at the set age of the Diocese. With the move to eighth grade, St. Mary will no longer offer confirmation classes for ninth through twelfth grade beginning next year. It simply isn't feasible for the parish to offer classes to five separate grade levels on a long-term basis.

Normally, when a child has some extraordinary reason to not make confirmation at the set age, that child and his/her parents arrange something with the pastor to make the confirmation at a later age (either by private tutor or studying or by attending a different class). This will always be available.

However, parents need to have the mentality that the sacraments are not something we plan for at a convenient time. Children should receive confirmation at the age deemed by the Diocese as appropriate. That age in our Diocese is eighth grade and it

is incumbent upon parents, as the primary teachers of their children in the faith, to ensure that their child receive the sacrament at this age.

This is how we handle first communion. It is not normal for parents or children to decide their student make their first communion "around" second grade. Nor should it be normative that we have students make their confirmation "around" the age the Diocese determines appropriate. In all ordinary cases, children should be prepared for the sacraments at the age the sacraments are normally administered.

This year is an extraordinary situation since we had to make provision to confirm a large age group of students in order to allow us to transition to eighth grade next year. I am grateful to the parents who have been bringing their students to confirmation class regularly.

Still, I understand there are conflicts. In many cases, parents did not contact me regarding conflicts in the confirmation schedule and their child's extracurricular activities and, understandably, it has been difficult to plan class times to meet the needs of all students between 8-12 grade. So, I understand that not every child will ideally be ready this year. But, I want to emphasize that St. Mary will not offer classes for five grade levels next year.

Jessica Stubbs is assisting me while I am on retreat in contacting parents to determine the needs of students right now. My hope is that the eligible children will be confirmed this year. For those with extraordinary needs, of course some arrangement can be made with me for them to make their confirmation at a later time. But, it will no longer be the case in this parish that we see confirmation as something that is done at the most convenient time.

I hope that clarifies the issue. Know that I am praying for all of you while on retreat.

Thank you,
Fr. Aaron