



Diocese of Belleville
Office of the Bishop

Sacrament of Confirmation

GUIDELINES for Choosing the Names of Saints

There is a long-standing tradition that when young people are confirmed they symbolize this deeper initiation into the Church by selecting the name of a saint as their Confirmation name. This is an expression of the newly confirmed person's commitment to Jesus Christ. It is also a very effective way of introducing our young Catholics to the Catholic tradition of the veneration of the Saints.

Those who are preparing candidates for Confirmation are asked to make sure that the selection of a Saint's name is part of Confirmation preparation. There are many pastoral benefits from maintaining this valuable custom. The most important benefit might be the opportunity to remind our young people that by baptism they are called to be saints. **For this reason, if their baptismal name is the name of a Christian Saint they should be encouraged to keep this as their Confirmation name.** However, it cannot be assumed, if their baptismal name is Thomas or Elizabeth that they know who these heroic examples of faith were. It may simply be their grandfather's or grandmother's name. It can be very fruitful to encourage parents to be actively involved in helping their son or daughter decide upon an appropriate name so they will know which Saint Thomas or Saint Elizabeth they have chosen.

If the idea of selecting a Saint's name is introduced early enough in the preparation, the candidates will have ample time to find out about the Saint and to select one who is interesting and challenging to them personally. There are many concise introductions to the lives of the Saints available. Making use of such resources will help the Confirmation candidates decide for which Saint Thomas or Saint Elizabeth they wish to be named. It will also make it less likely that large numbers of students will select the same Confirmation name.

Many students select from a very narrow list of names. They seem unaware of the saints from Asia, Africa, and Eastern Europe nor are they aware of saints who lived in more recent times whose lives are well documented and not overlaid with legends. Three outstanding examples would be Saint John XXIII (November 25, 1881-June 3, 1963),

Saint John Paul II (May 18, 1920-April 2, 2005) and St. Teresa of Calcutta, (August 26, 1910-September 5, 1997).

The focus should not primarily be on the saint as the patron of a particular activity such as hunting; nor on what the saint is going to do for them. The focus should be on what the *Confirmandi* are going to do for God and others by imitating their saint. The process of selecting a Confirmation name can be an easy way to clarify the Church's teachings concerning the liturgical year and the Church's reason for keeping the lives of the saints before our eyes as we contemplate the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ.

Only canonized saints are appropriate as patrons for Confirmation names. Names of Blesseds and Venerables, while often inspirational individuals, are not appropriate choices for a Confirmation name. The names of Old Testament figures may not be chosen since they were not Christians and, therefore, cannot serve as models of the Christian life. The names of angels are not appropriate as they are not human and cannot serve as models for a human life. However, if their baptismal name is the name of an angel, they may use it. *Confirmandi* may choose a patron saint of either gender regardless of their own gender.

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