

PROPER DISPOSITION TO RECEIVE THE SACRAMENT OF CONFIRMATION



HOW TO PROCEED FOR ADULTS IN IRREGULAR UNIONS

**Proper Disposition to Receive the Sacrament of Confirmation:
How to Proceed for Adults in Irregular Unions
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Occasionally, baptized adults yearning to complete their sacraments of initiation or to be received into the Church are in an irregular situation creating conflict between their present state in life, and their desire to grow in faith and sanctity participating in the sacramental life of the Church. Conventional secular wisdom notwithstanding, God's children are continually drawn from the allure of the profane to the grace of Christ, to His Church and deposit of faith entrusted to it, and to the sacraments. Consequently, the question arises whether a candidate for confirmation can receive the sacrament before their irregular union is corrected. In short, the irregular situation must be corrected before administration of the sacrament of confirmation.

In general, according to the universal law, and set forth in *Lumen gentium*, the laity have the right, as do all Christians, to receive in abundance through the assistance of their sacred pastors the spiritual goods of the Church, "especially the word of God and the sacraments" (cf. *LG* 37; C. 213). "Sacred ministers cannot deny the sacraments to those who seek them at appropriate times, are properly disposed, and are not prohibited by law from receiving them" (c. 843 § 1). Certainly, the ecclesiastical law establishes a fundamental right to the sacraments of initiation. However, delaying the reception of certain sacraments at certain times is not only licit but an act of justice and mercy properly understood.

The question under examination concerns the disposition of adult *Christifideles Laici* requesting the sacrament of confirmation. "Apart from the danger of death, to receive confirmation lawfully a person who has the use of reason must be suitably instructed, properly disposed and able to renew the baptismal promises" (c. 889 § 2). Regarding the correct disposition to receive the sacrament of confirmation licitly, the candidate must not be in a state of mortal sin or, objectively, the occasion of sin, including those in irregular unions.

Care should be taken not to confuse those in an irregular union with the situation in which a couple preparing for marriage desire one or both to be received into the Church and confirmed. Assuming they are free to marry, the Particular Law of the Archdiocese of Denver highly encourages them to receive the sacrament of confirmation prior to celebrating holy matrimony (cf. AoD Pastoral Handbook, 5.3.4.1).

On the contrary, sacramental priority demands correcting the irregular union, accomplished by convalidation or separation, before eligibility to receive the sacrament of confirmation. On occasion, convalidation is all that is needed. More often, one or both parties need to first petition the proper ecclesiastical tribunal for a declaration of nullity of a previous marital union and await the tribunal's affirmative decision.

Nevertheless, this circumstance does not exclude discretionary judgment on the part of the pastor preparing those who would receive the sacrament, and it requires pastoral balance without harmful rigorism or unacceptable laxity. While proper disposition to receive the sacrament of confirmation is non-negotiable (i.e. being in a state of Grace), pastoral justice concerning reception of these sacraments of initiation exceeds mere legality, and "the diocesan bishop is obliged to take care that the sacrament of confirmation is conferred on subjects who properly and reasonably seek it" (c. 885 § 1).