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The Holy Spirit and a lantern flame symbolizing the sacrament of confirmation are depicted in a stained-glass window at Sts. Cyril & Methodius Church in Deer Park, New York. (CNS/Gregory A. Shemitz)



by Laura Yeager

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January 25, 2022

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Many things made my son Jamie's confirmation in August 2020 unusual.

There was a small turnout. Our church holds roughly 800 people, and the day of the confirmation, there were approximately 325 people, all masked, in the pews. Each family had a pew of their own with an empty pew between each family unit. The celebrant was our pastor, not the bishop. The day of the confirmation was Aug. 16, not the original date of May 3. Before we took Communion, we had to use hand sanitizer.

This was a typical confirmation ceremony during the COVID-19 pandemic.

Even though it was a strange day all around, my husband and I were overjoyed that we were celebrating the fact that Jamie's confirmation journey was finally coming to fruition.

It had been a difficult trip to get to this moment for my son. For a kid with autism and anxiety, the road was rockier than usual.

Jamie was pretty much like every other teenage boy, but what made him a little different was that he, like many people who are autistic, didn't like new experiences. He adored routine. Anything out of the ordinary threw him off. He'd been used to his religious education meetings being held in the school, not the basement of the church. So when the day of the first confirmation class arrived in June 2019, he didn't want to go into the church hall on the ground floor. We coaxed him.

"Jamie, it's fine. It's all your friends. The meeting is just being held in a different place," his father said.

"How long is it going to last?"

"90 minutes," I said.

"What are we going to talk about?"

He had so many questions but I didn't have answers for him, and I was beginning to get frustrated.

"Honey, you're 15 minutes late. You have to go in."

"I'm not going," he said stubbornly.

Finally, my husband and I each took one of his hands and literally dragged him in. We plopped him down at his assigned table and ran out the door. Once we were gone, he relaxed a bit and got through it.

The next class, it got easier. Jamie was only five minutes late to this one.

All in all, there were six confirmation classes over the course of a year and weekly youth group meetings. By the end of the process, he loved all of these spiritual experiences and became one of the group's most valued participants. The people running the confirmation events said he had made great contributions to discussions and seemed to really grow up during the process.

Aug. 16 rolled around, and he was finally ready to be confirmed. But, COVID-19 complicated the situation and brought on new fears.

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My son was afraid to be confirmed in a church of 300-plus people because he thought he would contract the disease. For a while, we thought of giving up and going through the confirmation process the following year. But we were hesitant to do that because if that happened, Jamie would be confirmed with kids he didn't know. Part of the confirmation journey was making it with your friends, the kids who had your back and understood your quirks.

Jamie was not the only one who was afraid. His chosen sponsor, his 88-year-old grandmother, was also fearful of COVID-19 and had to bow out. I became her proxy. This didn't bother me; in fact, I was looking forward to the occasion.

My son chose a beautiful confirmation name — Anthony. He chose this name because we prayed to St. Anthony all the time to help us find lost items. We got him a stunning suit, a white shirt, a new tie and suspenders. Despite all the craziness of the times, he definitely looked the part. And I think he "felt" the part too. This is because the Spirit was there. I could feel the Holy Spirit circulating around the congregation. Nothing could keep the Spirit away, not even a pandemic.

"Anthony, be sealed with the gift of the Holy Spirit."

"Amen."

"Peace be with you."

"And with your spirit."

At the end of the ceremony, our son was happy and relieved that his time in the "spotlight" was over.

Pictures were taken on the altar with the rest of the confirmed kids in pretty dresses and suits, and, of course, with the pastor, who had, 15 years earlier, baptized our son. The continuity of our dear pastor who'd seen Jamie through baptism, reconciliation, first Communion and now confirmation was invaluable to us.

We all took a risk that day. I was ready for disaster. Conceivably, Jamie could have been too terrified to walk up to the altar and be anointed with chrism. Any of us could have gotten sick with COVID-19. And any other unexpected mishap could have occurred. But we were trusting in God to bring us through.

And he did.

Our son is now a full member of the church.

Jamie is a beautiful soul, and all those years of Catholic education paid off.

I'm so glad my son has Jesus to pray to in these troubled times.

A version of this story appeared in the **March 18-31, 2022** print issue under the headline: Confirming my son during the COVID-19 pandemic.