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The quickie confirmation

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A friend of mine is thinking of getting a "quickie confirmation" for her son down in Mexico. For decades, Californians have raced across the border for quickie divorces in Baja -- but fast-n-easy sacraments are something new.

An article in Monday's *Los Angeles Times* spotlights one priest from Baja California who's gotten in trouble with his archbishop. Seems Fr. Raymundo Figueroa from Rosarito Beach in Mexico's Baja California has a special way of raising funds for his parish: he comes over the border to the U.S. and sells sacraments to time-stressed Americans. According to the *Times*, Fr. Figueroa charges up to \$180 for fast-tracked confirmations, baptisms and first communions.

No one accuses the priest of pocketing these proceeds -- he plows the funds back into his parish, which now has a stunning church that is the envy of all the surrounding towns. And maybe this would not be much more than an amusing tale -- except that it is apparently not at all unique.

I was at a holiday gathering of friends last night, at beach town south of Los Angeles. One friend, a mom, was talking about how tough it's been trying to convince or coerce her son to go to weekend confirmation classes at the local parish. He graduated from the parish school last year, is now a freshman at a Catholic high school -- and feels he has enough religion in this life, thank you very much.

Now, this wasn't a problem years ago, when confirmation occurred at the parish school level, and didn't require special Sunday classes. It was just part of the curriculum and another reason to throw a party and get some presents.

But in an effort to, among other things, keep adolescents involved in their parishes after eight grade,

confirmation has been pushed back into teen-age, requiring a couple dozen weekend classes over a two-year period.

Leave it to efficient Americans to find a way around this. My friend has just about given up trying to push her son into class -- but also doesn't want him to "skip" any sacraments. So, she's heard through family and friends in the Latino community about a simple, um, "alternative."

Drive into a heavily Latino parish, probably in East L.A. There, you will find a visiting priest from Mexico who will give you a (very) condensed run-down of confirmation requirements, do a lovely blessing, sign a piece of paper -- and you are done. He gets a nice "donation" (which often gets sent back to the home parish, just like Fr. Figueroa).

Of course, my friend's son won't get any of the actual benefits of the confirmation classes -- which usually grow into surprisingly thoughtful discussions about important issues involving morality and maturity.

But, hey, at least it's a time-saver.

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