

Confirmation: A New Venture

What is Confirmation?

You have joined this year's confirmation class. You are starting a new venture and you aren't sure what to expect. You will experience numerous opportunities for personal and spiritual growth through a variety of activities including engaging course work, experiential learning through hands on service work, sermon discussion, interfaith worship and learning and personal reflection. You are about to embark on a journey during one of the most important times for youth. You will have fun together, learn about the Bible, the significance of church membership and explore the meaning and depth of your personal faith. The confirmation class begins with a retreat to have fun and bond as a group. We engage in mission work and community service throughout the 8 months of study to put words into action.

Confirmation is the affirmation of baptism. Through baptism you entered (or will enter) the worldwide community of the Christian church. In confirmation you affirm this. You give yourself wholeheartedly to God and seek to know God's will for your life. You take Jesus as your Lord and Savior, whom you will follow all the days of your life. You let God's Holy Spirit guide you in all you do. The word *confirm* means "to make firmer or stronger." When you are confirmed,

1. You will make firmer or stronger the baptismal vows taken for you (or that you took for yourself), and you will agree to live by them all your life.
2. God will make firmer and stronger claims on you.
3. Your membership in the church will be made firmer or stronger.

A good summary of confirmation as described in the Evangelical Catechism is "Confirmation is the renewal of the baptismal covenant. The baptized children, having been instructed in the Christian faith, publicly confess their faith in the Savior Jesus Christ, promise obedience to [God] until death, and are received by the church into active membership."

Why Does Our Church Have It?

The act of confirmation is very old and very sacred. For many centuries boys and girls and men and women have become full members of the Christian church very much as you will when you are confirmed. Confirmation goes back to the time of the first-century church, when Christians were being persecuted in Jerusalem. Many left and went to other cities. Phillip went to Samaria. There...but you might as well read the story in your Bible. Turn to Acts 8:9-17. In Samaria, Peter and John "confirmed" the baptism given by Phillip, and the people "confirmed" their faith in Jesus Christ.

In the early church confirmation came right after baptism, and there were two parts to the rite. In the first, the confirmand was anointed with oil; in the second, the minister prayed for the confirmand and laid hands on the confirmand's head. As the years went by, confirmation was usually separated from baptism, and the first part of the rite was used less and less. Our own church only uses the second part.

Most of you were baptized when you were babies. Your parents or guardians probably brought you to the church and there dedicated you to God. It was then that you "joined the church." But you were too young to make your own promises of loyalty, so your parents or guardians made them for you. Now you are old enough to make them for yourself.

What Will Confirmation Mean to You?

The day of confirmation has been a truly great day in the lives of many people in many lands through many ages. Many years ago around the Mediterranean Sea men and women, young and old, received the blessing of confirmation with "prayer and the laying on of hands." On the evening that you become confirmed, or on the weeks surrounding that time, thousands around the world will join you in making confirmation vows and in kneeling for the same blessings with "prayer and the laying on of hands."

The twentieth-century edition of the Heidelberg Catechism also offers an explanation of catechism, one that emphasizes God's role in the service. It explains that "while you thus confirm your baptismal vows, God on [God's] part, through this laying on of the hands of [the] minister, claims and accepts you as [God's] own, renews [the] covenant with you, and assures you of present and future needful grace. Confirmation, the laying on of hands, is God's act of love to you."

When your name is called by your pastor and you go forward to receive the blessing of confirmation, that step should mean primarily two things to you:

1. That you are making a public announcement of your decision to follow Jesus Christ, and
2. That you are assuming full responsibility as a member of the church.

You never may have said publicly that you intend to follow Jesus Christ. Now you will be going on record before God, your family, your friends, and the members of the congregation that you mean to follow Christ, that you are answering his call to you with an audible yes, that you mean henceforth, as far as you are able, to trust in God, to care for others, to care for yourself, and to seek the realm of God.

In different words, you will be saying what Patrick, the great missionary to Ireland, said back in the fifth century:

*Christ be with me, Christ within me,
Christ behind me, Christ before me,
Christ beside me, Christ to win me,
Christ to comfort and restore me,
Christ beneath me, Christ above me,
Christ in quiet, Christ in danger,
Christ in hearts of all that love me,
Christ in mouth of friend and stranger.*

You are growing up in the eyes of the church. You are no longer to be regarded as a child, but as an adult.

Your Confirmation Will Mean Much to Others Also

There are others to whom your confirmation will mean a great deal. No greater joy can come to Christian parents who brought their children to the church in baptism than to see these children accept for themselves the responsibilities of full church membership. Church school teachers, too, take real satisfaction in the confirmation of those whom they have taught. For most ministers the high point of the year is the moment they lay their hands in blessing on the heads of those whom they have come to know and love through many hours of study together. The members of the congregation generally see their numbers and strength growing with these new members, and they look back with solemn memory to the day when they themselves were confirmed.

God we believe rejoices at the sight of people being confirmed, and God's spirit goes forth to them in many ways to bless them and guide them and strengthen them. Your confirmation will mean even more to you if you remember all that it means to others.