

Components for Preparation

- *Will you continue in the apostles' teaching and fellowship, in the breaking of bread, and in the prayers?*
- *Will you persevere in resisting evil, and, whenever you fall into sin, repent and return to the Lord?*
- *Will you proclaim by word and example the Good News of God in Christ?*
- *Will you seek and serve Christ in all persons, loving your neighbor as yourself?*
- *Will you strive for justice and peace among all people, and respect the dignity of every human being?*

The Baptismal Covenant, 1979 Book of Common Prayer, p. 304-5

Both students and leaders are members of the Body of Christ, exploring the content of the Christian revelation and learning from each other. While the transmission of content (as listed below) is important, the joint exploration of the Gospel and what it means in our life is vital. It is the Church's job to help support and sustain a life of faith put into practice, yet fun and friendship are part of the abundant life of Christ. Even the hard work of preparing people to live that life is work done in joy.

Scripture:

The goal of studying scripture in a confirmation program is to ensure candidates have an understanding of our Salvation History so that he/she/they can articulate "who they are" and "whose they are." The ability to reflect on The Story in relationship to Our Story and My Story is an important component in making a mature affirmation of one's Baptismal Covenant. Understanding the key themes, characters, and stories of both the Old and New Testaments help us understand how God is in relationship with Creation and how we are called to build upon that relationship with God, through Jesus Christ and each other. The Great Vigil of Easter is an expression of our faith journey as a people of God; the retelling of the Passover Story every year makes it Our Story. These particular stories share the essences of our Salvation Story.

Being intentional in studying the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ in a faith community allows us to answer the questions, "Who do you say that I am?" or "Who is Jesus in your life?" This is a vital question that one who comes before the bishop for confirmation, reception, or re-affirmation should be able to answer.

The Book of Common Prayer:

In order to articulate that we are as Episcopalians, candidates should be familiar and have experienced *The Book of Common Prayer* (Morning Prayer, Evening Prayer, Eucharist, Baptism, etc.). The Apostles' Creed and Nicene Creed are statements of our beliefs, so each should be explored and discussed. *An Outline of the Faith* (The Catechism) in the prayer book and our Baptismal Covenant should be key elements of a preparation program.

Service & The Life of the Baptized:

Putting faith into practice and connecting the Gospel to our daily life is how we live out our Baptismal Covenant in the world. To do this, besides being committed to the Gospel, we need to recognize the spiritual gifts that have been given to us. Exploring those gifts and talents and how they can be used in the day-to-day life of a Christian in the world should be part of confirmation preparation. An individual can share these through ministry in a congregation *and* in the community. Most high schools have service components and requirements for graduation. Confirmation preparation can support that service, faithfully reflecting on what has been observed, experienced, and learned. Service is not to be seen as “doing for someone” but as “being in relationship” with another for a common purpose, respecting the dignity of all of God’s creation.

The life of the baptized is centered on being Christ’s disciple in the world. Discipleship lies in our personal experience, understanding our relationship to God, in Jesus, and with the Holy Spirit. Discipleship lies in our small intimate relationships with family and friends, also in the larger arena of our interaction with the world: in school and places of work, with peers, colleagues and co-workers, and in our towns and cities.

Mission & Community:

The Church’s mission is to restore all people to unity with God and each other in Christ. We do this as we pray, worship, proclaim the Gospel, and promote justice, peace, and love. Mission is an essential component of our life as we connect the teachings of the Church with who we are as individuals. Being able to answer such questions as, “How are you Christ in the World?” “What is your rule of life?” and “What have you done on a daily basis as a disciple of Christ?” is part of re-affirming one’s baptismal promises. How we offer opportunities for prayer and work is paramount during a time of formation and preparation.

Mission trips and/or experiences help the individual know Jesus Christ in a new way. Why do young people have to go outside the congregation (even their own town, state, or country) in order for this to occur? As one youth stated, “I needed to be stretched and taken out of my comfort zone.” We need to be people who fully rely on God on a day-to-day basis . . . being with those whose only hope is God helps us take the risk of trusting the way they must trust. The moment our dependence shifts from the self to God, the Gospel becomes real. Our culture is one in which the theology of glory prevails, and thus the theology of the cross is difficult to access. How does the candidate connect with Christ crucified?

Youth mission trips put us in touch with the distinction between faith as “trust in God” and faith as “assent to doctrinal positions.” Curricula and learning what it means to be an Episcopalian can often be separated from experiencing the power of the living God. Short-term mission trips stimulate discernment and encourage the recognition of one’s gifts with ministry in the world. Our faith is connected to real life issues and a realization of what people gathered together in God’s name can do.

Life-long formation involves equipping ourselves for mission. This occurs through sermons, being in community, and experiencing God incarnationally in others. It is an opportunity for mutual spiritual enrichment. Through mission we can make two-way connections in our life-faith journey, respecting the shared wisdom and faithfulness of all God's people. Mission trips do not have to be miles away – mission is often at our own doorstep.

Prayer:

Prayer includes both individual and common prayer, and both are staples of a lively spirituality. There should be opportunities to learn and experience different kinds of prayer. Prayer is the common thread that should be woven into all aspects of confirmation preparation.

It is recommended that a spiritual retreat occur at the beginning and near the end of preparation. This can take the form of a deanery/region event, visit to a monastery or retreat center, through mission work, or a pilgrimage. It can be a time to leave other concerns behind and be open to God. The reason for including a retreat is to let the group experience yet another way of living in Christ and finding out where one can go for this kind of experience – building resources for the rest of their lives.

Keeping a journal is another means for spiritual growth and nourishment. Each of us learns and experiences the Holy in different ways. Tapping into the variety of prayer experiences through multiple intelligences will allow each person to learn more about themselves and develop lifelong practices.

Faith & Practice

A balance of “doing” and “being” is at the heart of baptismal living. The five promises at the end of the covenant are about how we live our faith in everyday life. By living according to those standards, we become Christ's people in the world. Being able to reflect theologically on the events of our lives and find God in them assist in putting faith into practice. Participation in the sacramental life of the faith community, attentiveness to scripture and prayer, and having a sense of the presence of Jesus keeps us mission focused. Diversity and anti-racism training, as well as stewardship education, should be included. Being in community, we as Episcopalians have a connection with others that goes beyond our individual parishes. Each congregation needs to develop a program that both includes the elements listed above and meets the needs of its own community.

To assist in the integration of faith into daily practice, suggest each candidate answer the following questions toward the end of the preparation process.

1. What have you learned from your preparation that has been most important to you?
1. Who is Jesus in your life? How would you respond to His question, “Who do you say that I am?”
2. Why do you want to want to confirm your baptismal vows?
3. How do you plan to live as a mature and faithful Christian in the Church and in the world after you are confirmed?

Episcopal Polity:

Being an Episcopalian involves understanding that we find authority for our lives in Scripture, Tradition, and Reason. The ministries of the laity and clergy (bishops, priests, deacons) should be explored, as well as parish, diocesan, and church-wide governance. Representatives duly elected by the people hold decision-making authority in the Episcopal Church. Being conscious of what it means to be an Episcopalian in today's world, to include the diocese, the entire Episcopal Church and the worldwide Anglican Communion is a foundational issue to be discussed throughout a program of preparation. (*Please note:* The Episcopal Church has churches and dioceses located in across the globe, so the term "national" church is not accurate.)