

## Frequently Asked Questions About Confirmation

(BCP = Book of Common Prayer)

*What is Confirmation?*

**What is Confirmation?** Simply, Confirmation is a public reaffirmation of one's baptismal promises. It occurs during a sacramental rite that evolved in the Church under the guidance of the Holy Spirit, in which we express a mature commitment to Christ, and receive strength from the Holy Spirit through prayer and the laying on of hands by a bishop (BCP, 860).

**What are the responsibilities of Baptism?** These promises are stated in the Baptismal Covenant (BCP, 304-305).

**Is confirmation a sacrament?** No, in the Episcopal Church there are two sacraments: Holy Baptism and the Holy Eucharist. These are given by Christ to his Church (BCP, 858).

**What does "confirm" mean?** In regard to confirmation, it means to verify or affirm what one believes.

**What is the purpose of confirmation?** To make a public, mature reaffirmation of one's baptismal promises.

**What are the requirements to be confirmed?** One must be baptized in any Christian tradition. In the course of their Christian development, those baptized at an early age are expected, when they are ready and have been duly prepared, to make a mature public affirmation of their faith and commitment to the responsibilities of their Baptism and to receive the laying on of hands by the bishop.

**Is confirmation the completion of baptism?** No. In the Episcopal Church, Baptism is full initiation into the Church. Confirmation is a mature reaffirmation of one's baptism in the presence of a bishop for the laying on of hands. One does not need to be confirmed to be a member of the Church or the local Episcopal congregation.

**What do the Episcopal Church's Canons say about confirmation?** "It is expected that all adult members of this Church, after appropriate instruction, will have made a mature public affirmation of their faith and commitment to the responsibilities of their Baptism and will have been confirmed or received by a Bishop of this Church or by a Bishop of a Church in communion with this Church. Those who have previously made a mature public commitment in another Church may be received, not confirmed." *Canon I.17.1(c)*

**Does one need to be confirmed to receive Holy Communion?** No. Baptism is full initiation into the Body of Christ and one may receive communion thereafter, no matter one's age. The Episcopal Church recognizes all baptized with water and in the name of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit as members of the One, Holy, Catholic and Apostolic Church. Those whose baptisms

have been registered in The Episcopal Church are considered baptized members. *Canon I.17.1(c)*

**Does one become an adult when they are confirmed?** No. Upon reaching 16 years of age, baptized members are considered adult members. *Canon I.17.1(c)*

**Where does confirmation come from?** Bible passages such as Acts 8:14–17, 9:17, 19:6, and Hebrews 6:2 talk about the laying on of hands and presence of the Holy Spirit.

**Is confirmation a “coming of age” ceremony, like a Jewish Bar/Bat Mitzvah?** No, it is a public reaffirmation of one’s baptism and not tied to any rite of passage or age level.

**What is the age when one should be confirmed?** The only guidance that is given in the Book of Common Prayer is that one be “mature.”

**How many times can you be confirmed?** Confirmation is a one-time occasion. Individuals may reaffirm their commitment or be received (from another denomination if confirmed already such as in a Lutheran or Roman Catholic Church). However, at every Holy Baptism we reaffirm our baptismal promises as a congregation. *Canon I.17.1(c)*

**Is confirmation required to be a member of an Episcopal church?** No. Anyone who is baptized is a Christian and in the Episcopal Church they are a member of the Church. *Canon I.17.1(c)*

**Why do people get confirmed?** Hopefully it is the decision of the individual to seek to renew their baptismal promises made on behalf of them when they were an infant or child.

*The Rite of Confirmation:*

**What happens during the Rite of Confirmation?** Confirmands will answer two questions posed to them by the bishop, reaffirm the Baptismal Covenant along with the congregation, and received the laying on of hands by the bishop. This service takes place in the context of the Holy Eucharist.

**What questions are asked of the confirmand during the Rite of Confirmation by the bishop?**

1. Do you reaffirm your renunciation of evil? *I do.*
2. Do you renew your commitment to Jesus Christ? *I do, and with God’s grace I will follow him as my Savior and Lord.*

**What does a bishop do during the Rite of Confirmation?** The bishop will ask that the candidates be presented, ask them two questions, invited the congregation (including the confirmands) to reaffirm their baptismal promises (in The Baptismal Covenant), and perform the laying-on-of-hands on the candidates. He/she may also preach and give the blessing at the Holy Eucharist.

**What is hand-laying?** Hand-laying was an ancient gesture of blessing. A core liturgical action in the Rite of Confirmation, it is the imposition of two hands upon the head of a confirmand while saying one of two prayers: “Strengthen ...” or “Defend ...” (BCP, 418) by a bishop.

**Will the bishop slap the confirmand?** No. Before the 1970s, some bishops would slap the cheek of the newly confirmed Christian as a reminder to be courageous in the work of evangelization. This is not a practice in the Episcopal Church today.

**What is the Baptismal Covenant?** The baptismal covenant is a crucial part of the Episcopal Church’s theology and practice and its recitation lies at the heart of confirmation’s purpose. It begins with a question/response form of the Apostles’ Creed. Then questions are asked that work out the implications of Christian faith in daily life of the church, all with the response, “I will, with God’s help.”

- 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 person, loving your neighbor as yourself?
- Will you strive for justice and peace among all people, and respect the dignity of every human being?

**Does the candidate choose a confirmation name?** No. One’s (first and middle) name conferred at baptism is the name with which individuals are confirmed.

*About Preparation:*

**Who is responsible for preparing candidates for confirmation?** Ultimately, it is the rector or priest-in-charge of a congregation who is responsible for preparing candidates. They may also share in this responsibility with other clergy or lay leaders, assigning roles and responsibilities as needed.

**How does a candidate prepare for confirmation?** Being “duly prepared” includes regularly attending worship, reading scripture, prayer, and participation in education and formation classes. It can also include taking on a ministry within the parish as well as participation in service opportunities in the greater community.

**What is a mentor?** A mentor is an adult who accompanies the candidate throughout the preparation process toward confirmation. Not quite the same as a sponsor or godparent, it is a multifaceted role with important responsibilities, including guidance and active listening. It can include affirming the strengths of the candidate and pointing out ways they can grow and become better in the practice of faith. It may involve some explanation of points brought up in the confirmation sessions. It is important that the mentor be an example of how to live a life of faith and is willing to share their faith journey, and who will actively listen to their candidate’s

thoughts and feelings about their journey of faith. Ideally, a mentor should be a confirmed Episcopalian who is an active member of the confirmand's parish.

**What is the role of parents in preparing their child (teen) for confirmation?** When infants or children are presented to the Church for Baptism, family members are reminded that they have the responsibility of raising them in the life of the faith (The Rite of Baptism for Children). The fact that family members know the candidate better than anyone else, places them in the best position to help the young person explore the questions they may have about their faith. Parents or guardians can make sure confirmands attend worship and preparation classes and support them in whatever decisions their child makes. Confirmation preparation is only as effective as the support received in the family.

**What is the official Episcopal curriculum for preparation?** There is no "official" curriculum authorized by the Episcopal Church for confirmation preparation. It is recommended that *The Baptismal Covenant* (BCP, 304-305) and *An Outline of the Faith* also known as The Catechism (BCP, 845-862) be a source for designing any program. There are several published curricula that are associated with the Episcopal Church.

**What is a catechism?** It is a series of questions and answers about the faith. It was once used as the primary teaching source used by clergy with those seeking to be confirmed.

**Is it important for confirmands to be involved in service or mission projects?** A full confirmation program calls for participation in apostolic witness and service. The call to discipleship received in Baptism is reaffirmed at Confirmation; service is a way of life for the disciple who is committed to participating in the kingdom of God. Intentional service is an essential part of confirmation preparation because through it candidates get a feeling and experience of service as a normal way of life for the fully initiated Christian.

**How long should a confirmation program be?** There is no required time frame (weeks, months, or years) and this is left to the discretion of the local church or diocesan bishop.

**What should topics should a confirmation preparation program cover?** Core topics of experiential preparation should include:

- Holy Bible
  - The arc of Salvation History from Holy Scripture
  - The life, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ
- Prayer
- Holy Baptism, including The Baptismal Covenant
- Holy Eucharist
- The Book of Common Prayer
- Other pastoral offices
- Episcopal Church polity
- A mission and/or service component