

UNDERSTANDING CONFIRMATION, REAFFIRMATION AND RECEPTION

What is Confirmation?

Confirmation is a pastoral rite in The Episcopal Church, which means it is not a rite that notes some fuller initiation into the Church, the Body of Christ. A person is a full member of the Church through Baptism. Confirmation, as defined in The Book of Common Prayer is "a mature public affirmation of faith and commitment to the responsibilities of Baptism." At Confirmation, an individual receives the laying on of hands by the bishop, thereby affirming their own faith and visibly connecting to the broader Body of Christ.

What is the difference between Confirmation, Reaffirmation, and Reception?

Confirmation is "a mature and public affirmation of faith and commitment to the responsibilities of Baptism" (BCP). *Reaffirmation* means that you choose to re-state your commitment to Christ in The Episcopal Church, honoring your growth in faith throughout your spiritual journey. For many people, their path has wandered in and out of various denominations. Reaffirmation is a way to honor their journey and their previous public commitment as an adult while also making this definitive sacramental gesture. *Reception* is common for people who have been active throughout their lives in other denominations. Often, individuals who made a public profession of faith in a faith tradition such as the Baptist Church will choose to be Received into The Episcopal Church.

"I was baptized as an infant in another denomination, and then my family stopped attending Church. I only began attending again as an adult with my family. I want to join The Episcopal Church, but I don't know if I need to be confirmed, reaffirmed, or received."

I would suggest that you be confirmed, because you have not made a mature affirmation of the faith. Your Baptism, once registered in the parish office, makes you a full member of The Episcopal Church. In terms of the sacraments, Confirmation is a way for you to reaffirm your faith and remain deeply connected to the Baptism of your childhood.

"I was baptized as an adult in another denomination. Should I be confirmed in The Episcopal Church?"

I would recommend that you be received into The Episcopal Church. Since Confirmation is a "mature and public affirmation," it would really be redundant for you to make another mature and public affirmation; you made such a affirmation at your Baptism. And, The Episcopal Church honors your commitment to faith. Reception would mean that the bishop publicly recognizes the faith that has been present in your life, and you would be formally welcomed into The Episcopal Church through the laying on of hands. You may want to consider Reaffirmation if you feel your faith has grown substantially in the past few years. Remember that Confirmation is a pastoral rite of the Church, so its sacramental nature should connect with your present relationship with God.

What is the meaning of the bishop laying hands on those who are confirmed, reaffirmed, or received?

The bishop is the individual who, symbolically, represents the unity of the entire diocese. The basic "unit" of The Episcopal Church is the diocese, and the bishop as a person is a visible means of reminding us of our common bond in Christ within The Episcopal Church. When the bishop lays hands on your head during the service, it is a very tangible way for you to experience your own faith journey being welcomed into the larger journey of the Body of Christ. For many people, this portion of the sacramental service is very meaningful. A sacrament is "an outward and visible sign of an inward and spiritual grace, given by Christ as sure and certain means by which we receive that grace." In this way, the touch experienced in the laying on of hands forever remains in your memory as an experience of grace through the Church.

Am I a "full member" of The Episcopal Church without being confirmed?

Yes. The Book of Common Prayer defines Baptism as "full initiation by water and the Holy Spirit into Christ's Body the Church. The bond which God establishes in Baptism is indissoluble." Confirmation is a *pastoral rite* not in an initiatory rite. This means that the sacramental nature of confirmation connects with our growth in faith and in relationship with God. Through Holy Baptism, we join Christ's Body, either as infants or adults.

Is confirmation ever required to participate in certain aspects of the Episcopal Church?

Yes. God may call some individuals, through the Church, into positions of guidance and leadership. For example, The Canons of The Episcopal Church state that Confirmation is required for certain leadership positions, such as Vestry members, and for some service positions such as Eucharistic Visitors, but this in no way precludes an unconfirmed individual from being considered a full member of the Body of Christ. Confirmation, in cases of leadership and guidance, emphasizes one's public affirmation of faith within the tradition of The Episcopal Church.