

St. Andrew's Anglican Church

Confirmation:

A brief overview & invitation for further reflection

The Rev'd J. Patterson

The opportunity to be Confirmed raises the following questions, which I will seek to answer (very briefly) in what follows:

- I. What is Confirmation (in the Anglican Church)?
- II. Who should be Confirmed?
- III. How does one prepare for Confirmation?
- IV. How does Confirmation relate to Holy Communion?

I. WHAT IS CONFIRMATION?

In the Anglican Church, Confirmation is a service in which a previously-baptized Christian who has undergone a period of instruction/study about the Christian Faith comes before a bishop, and (a) *confirms* (affirms and ratifies) the promises made during baptism, and (b) *is confirmed* (by God) in the Faith.

You will notice that Confirmation has a twofold nature involving not just what the confirmand does, but also what God does. (In this, we can see much the same pattern as marriage or ordination - we bring a willing submission to God's ordinance, make vows, and He promises the grace for us to fulfill the vows.) Philip Edgcumbe Hughes, a reformed and evangelical Anglican scholar summarized confirmation in this way:

"In the Book of Common Prayer the essence of confirmation is displayed as twofold: (1) the public ratifying and confirming 'openly before the Church,' by the candidates, 'with their own mouth and consent,' of the promises made for them in baptism; and (2) the prayer, with laying on of hands, by the bishop for the strengthening with the Holy Spirit of these candidates, already regenerated 'by water and the Holy Ghost.' In other words, confirmation is understood in two ways; firstly, as an act of the candidate who by public profession confirms (= ratifies) the vows of his baptism (the American Prayer Book has the excellent added question: 'Do you promise to follow Jesus Christ as your Lord and Saviour?' Answer: 'I do.'). and, secondly as an act of God who confirms (= strengthens) the candidate by the Holy Spirit."¹

I might summarize Confirmation as being:

- (1) an affirmation (by the confirmand) of the vows of baptism (which typically were made on his behalf by godparents and parents),
- (2) a sacramental act wherein God confirms the confirmand in the Faith and (through prayer and the laying on of hand) strengthens him with the Holy Spirit
- (3) a commitment to the Anglican Church in general (i.e. its doctrine and practice),
- (4) appropriate for those who desire to receive Holy Communion as "members" of the broader Anglican Church, and as members of St. Andrews in particular, and
- (5) appropriate for those who desire to serve as lay leaders at St. Andrews.

Find out more: The service of Confirmation is a beautiful and meaningful service and if you do not have a copy of the Book of Common Prayer (1662 or 1928) I would be happy to provide a copy of the confirmation liturgy to anyone who is interested. Reading the confirmation liturgy is an excellent place to start learning about Confirmation. Additionally, I can provide copies of some helpful resources to those who are interested in reading more about the meaning of Confirmation in the Anglican Church.

II. WHO SHOULD BE CONFIRMED?

(1) Adults who are baptized but not yet confirmed. Any individuals who fall into this category should get in touch with me about attending a series of adult confirmation classes (where we will talk about the basics of the Christian faith as well as the doctrine and practice of the Anglican Church).

(2) Children who have been baptized and are old enough to be properly instructed in the Christian faith should be confirmed as soon as they have undergone appropriate instruction. If your child fits into this category, please see me to talk about arranging a junior confirmation class or other suitable instruction.

If we have anyone (children or adults) who falls into any of the above-mentioned categories, please do let me know.

¹ Philip Edgcumbe Hughes, *Confirmation in the Church Today* (Eerdmans, 1973), 12-13.

III. HOW DOES ONE PREPARE FOR CONFIRMATION?

We will have a series of classes in which we talk about:

- (a) basic beliefs of the Christian Church,
- (b) Anglican distinctives, and
- (c) an explanation of the service of confirmation.

Note: You do NOT need to make a commitment to be confirmed to attend the “confirmation” class. The classes involve interesting discussion about the basics of the Christian faith, as well as those things that characterize the Anglican Church, even apart from preparation for confirmation.

IV. HOW DOES CONFIRMATION RELATE TO HOLY COMMUNION?

This can be a complicated question, as different Christian denominations and even individual churches within a denomination follow different practices. St. Andrews, in keeping with the long-standing Anglican tradition expressed in the BCP, allows baptized adults who have not yet been confirmed to receive Holy Communion if they intend in good faith to be confirmed when they are able (such as when a bishop will visit the church to officiate at a confirmation service).

Visitors to St. Andrews are welcome to receive Holy Communion if they are baptized Christians in good standing in another Anglican church or in another denomination (with whom the Anglican Church is in communion), without regard to their confirmation status.

If, however, you attend St. Andrews as more than a “visitor” you should only receive Holy Communion if you honestly intend to follow through and fully join this portion of Christ’s Church by being confirmed. The Book of Common Prayer says that “. . . there shall none be admitted to the Holy Communion, until such time as he be confirmed, or ready and desirous to be confirmed.” (BCP 1928, p.299).

Additional note re: Young Children and Holy Communion.

The typical practice of the Anglican Church (indeed of the Church in the West) is that only those who are both Baptized and Confirmed (and spiritually prepared) should receive Holy Communion. We have allowed some limited exceptions to this at St. Andrews, in so much as the young children demonstrate faith in Christ, some knowledge of the meaning of the sacrament and are desirous of being confirmed (when they are old enough). We do not allow infants to commune, nor do we allow young children to commune if their parents refuse to bring them to be confirmed when they are old enough so to do.

Questions about any of the above? I’d love to get together for a cup of coffee to talk more; just let me know!