

Owning the Covenant: Confirmation

By the Rev. Doug Gray

Worship in Confirmation

Confirmation is more than a class. Confirmation needs to be a way that teens can experience the faith in such a way that they can put their stamp of approval on it: "This is what I believe!" If this is so, then we need to find ways for teens to experience all the elements of faith experience we can in whatever period we have.

Worship is one of the cornerstones (some would argue, the only real foundation) for what the Church is universally and locally. How can we help confirmands experience authentic worship with their peers as well as grownups?

Winding Up Confirmation

How a church winds up the confirmation process says a great deal about its meaning and significance for the church and its members. If your fellowship has a confirmation program, then chances are it will benefit from a dramatic and ringing conclusion.

Why? First, Confirmation is a big deal! Confirmation is the culmination of a long journey for confirmands, parents and the local church. If parents brought their infant to the fellowship for baptism, then the church and the parents almost certainly made promises to bring up their children to know and love God, to be part of a Christian community until they reached an age when they might confirm the faith for themselves. A fourteen-year journey is concluding! A big celebration is definitely in order for those who complete it!

Second, Confirmation is a big deal! Confirmation is a rite of passage more important than getting one's driver's license, on a par with a bar-mitzvah (in which a Jewish boy marks his becoming a man). Confirmation marks the coming of age of a young Christian in the fellowship

Third, Confirmation is a big deal! In most churches, confirmation marks a teen's joining the fellowship's covenant as an adult. Confirmation is the training necessary to certify that a young person is mature enough to stand for God in all the ways appropriate for an adult. Sure, a teen does not have the life experience of a fifty-year-old, but each teen has gifts as important as those of any other adult. Indeed, confirmed teens have a perspective that is a gift in itself for any fellowship. If your fellowship does not have any young people in positions of leadership, your fellowship may need to consider why that is. Are there any other sections of your membership who are not represented in leadership? What are areas in which teens could contribute a strong and important voice? Some churches include teens in leadership positions on Boards of Christian Education and Benevolence, even on Search Committees.

Fourth, Confirmation is a big deal! What does your fellowship do for new members? Do that for your confirmands too—they are after all joining the church—then do more! If your church includes pictures of adult new members in your newsletter, confirmands should have the same honor. If your church gives name tags to new adult members, the confirmands should get them too. Why not have a photographer take pictures of families and their confirming teen to remember the day? What could you do to make confirmation a bigger deal than it is right now?

Fifth, Confirmation is a big deal! One of the goals of confirmation is to touch each teen's life in a positive way that will stick with them all their lives. If they are not "graduating from church," give them an experience so memorable that they will always look back at it as one of the most important moments in their lives!

For these reasons among others, winding up the confirmation process in grand style is a worthy effort.

Some ideas to consider for concluding Confirmation include:

- A final examination of some kind (perhaps before a board or committee overseeing the process; perhaps a public examination at a given time) either oral, written or both (Note: the goal of a confirmation examination is to help reinforce the positive experience, not try to weed out "bad" students). For examples of quizzes and tests, see the Sample Curricula, p. 203.
- Recognize all those groups who have had a part in the teens' coming to this point in their lives (parents, extended family members, mentors, Sunday School teachers, etc.)
- At least one party thrown by the church, even if that is just a reception after worship. The members of the fellowship need a chance to bless the confirmands, and the confirmands need a chance to be blessed!
- A gift from the church for their future journey with God, something special they will cherish for many years to come, perhaps all their lives. Jewelry would be appropriate, prayer books, Bibles, pins, etc. (Note: if your church usually gives confirmands a Bible, consider giving them the Bible at the beginning of Confirmation so they can get a year's good use and familiarity with it!)

The following is a sample rite of confirmation:

FIRST RITE OF CONFIRMATION

Assoc. Minister: Why do we baptize? And what is confirmation?

Sr. Minister: Baptism is the outward expression of the inward reality in which Jesus Christ washes away a person's sins and the person invites Jesus to become Lord of his or her life. In the Congregational tradition, parents often baptize their children as infants, taking the vows of baptism for their children. At some point, however, the children need to make these vows their own if they are to continue to grow and mature as followers of Jesus Christ. That is why we have Confirmation.

Assoc. Minister: The following persons have been instructed in the Christian Faith and fulfilled the requirements set forth by this congregation. As your name is read, please step forward to be confirmed in your faith. (List confirmands here.)

Sr. Minister: My friends, when you were baptized, our Lord Jesus Christ marked you as His own and introduced you into the family of God that is the church. You have expressed a desire to confirm your baptism and join with this congregation. Do you freely choose to confirm your baptism today?

If that is your decision, simply say, "I so choose."

To the parents:

Would the parents of these young people please stand. (pause)
Years ago, you took the Vows of Baptism for your children who now stand here today. You promised before God and His people to bring your children up within the church and to teach them to love God and to serve him with their lives. You hoped, as all Christian parents do, that some day they would remember their Baptism, and be confirmed in their faith and take for themselves the lifestyle and faith of a follower of Jesus Christ.

Today, by their own choice, they stand ready to assume their rightful place in the Church of Jesus Christ as baptized and confirmed followers of Our Lord.

On behalf of this congregation and the Church Universal, I say to you and to those who have supported you, "Well done!" You have fulfilled your vows and will now enter into a new relationship with these young people as fellow Christians. May your lives be richly blessed, for your efforts are bearing fruit.

To the teachers:

Church Official: Many other people have helped these families keep their promises through the years. If any of you here have taught Sunday School or led organizations that improved the lives of any of these young people, please stand.

On behalf of this congregation and the Church Universal, I say to you, "Well done!" Your teaching has made a difference in the lives of these young people. May your lives be richly blessed for your teaching is bearing fruit.

To the congregation:

Church Official: You have influenced these young men and women by example in word and deed. They have chosen to confirm their baptism in your presence. I ask you, therefore:

Do you accept them and their decision and do you promise your continuing and constant support through Jesus Christ?

If so, please answer: "We accept you and promise our support through Jesus Christ."

To the class:

Minister: Are you prepared to make a public personal profession of your faith?

Response: I am.

(Then to each individually)

Do you turn away from sin and evil?

Response: I do.

Do you turn towards God and take Jesus Christ as your Lord and Savior?

Response: I do.

Will you promise, depending on God for strength, to take responsibility for your growth in the Christian Faith? Will you strive to serve God and build up the Body of Christ that is His Church? Will you support the members of this local church in their walks with God?

Response: I will.

To the congregation:

Church Official: You, the members and friends of this congregation have heard their responses. Will you support them in their walk with God?

Congregation: We promise to walk with you in the Way of God, and to pray for you in all things.

Rite of Confirmation

Prayer

Father, these, your children have been received into the Family of God through baptism and now by personal declaration. Affirm their place as heirs to Your Kingdom. Lord, increase their awareness of Your Presence, their faith in the face of struggle, and their faithfulness in all of life. Touch them deeply now, Lord, and make them witnesses to the faith, hope and love they have through Jesus Christ, Your Son. Amen.

Laying on of Hands

_____, on _____ you were baptized, remember today your baptism and receive in a fuller and more fulfilling way the Spirit of God. And may God's Spirit within you guide your way, lifting you when you are low, humbling you when you are convinced of your own righteousness, and finally raising you up so that you may live a full and fulfilled life for eternity. In the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit. Amen.

Seal of the Covenant

_____, you have declared yourself accountable, and the Church has affirmed your confirmation. Now, receive this Seal of the Covenant, and choose to grow within it. (Anointing with oil or giving a gift would be appropriate here.)

Prayer

We give You thanks, Father, through Your Son and the presence of Your Spirit, for these young people who have chosen Your Way. Enable them to fulfill their covenant with You and us so that their lives will be a blessing through Jesus Christ. Amen.

Blessing

Paul said it well in his letter to the believers at Philippi:

[May] your love abound more and more in knowledge and depth of insight, so that you may be able to discern what is best and may be pure and blameless until the day of Christ, filled with the fruit of righteousness that comes through Jesus Christ-to the glory and praise of God. Amen.

Affirmation of the Church Covenant

Welcome and Presentation of Certificates

SECOND RITE OF CONFIRMATION

Recognition of Mentors [Team Leader for Mentoring Ministry Team]

Recognition of Parents [Confirmation Leader]

Introduction of Confirmands [Confirmation Leader]

Affirmation of Faith

Minister: Will you now affirm your belief in God, infinite in wisdom, goodness and love, as you understand that God made known in the life and teachings of Jesus?

Confirmand(s): (Loudly, with conviction) I will, God being my strength and help.

Minister: Will you now promise, with all here, to strive to know and to do the will of God made known to you through the Scriptures, your conscience and thought, and the counsel of parents and fellow travelers of the Way of Christ?

Confirmand(s): (Loudly, with conviction) I will, God being my strength and help.

Minister: Will you affirm your continuing journey of faith, seeking always to grow not only in knowledge but in the experience of being children of God, disciples of the One who taught the way of peace, justice and love of all humankind?

Confirmand(s): (Loudly, with conviction) I will, God being my strength and help.

Rite of Confirmation

[List full names of confirmand(s)]

Each confirmand will kneel and make the following profession:

Confirmand: O God, known to me in Jesus Christ, I give myself to you as your own, to love and serve you faithfully all the days of my life.

Prayer of Confirmation [Minister]

The Lord defend you with God's heavenly grace and by God's Spirit confirm you in the faith and fellowship of all true Christian souls. Amen.

Owning the Covenant and Reception into Membership

We confess our love for God, for Jesus Christ, and for our fellow men and women. We covenant with God, and with the church, to live in the fellowship of the gospel, to walk in the ways of the Lord-known and to be made known to us-to share in the worship and

work of the church, to cooperate with it in all good enterprises and to promote its service, its maintenance, its purity and its peace.

The Welcome by the Congregation (unison)

We, the members of this church, gladly receive you into our communion and welcome you with joy to our fellowship. We pray that in Christian friendship we may work together to build the will of God into the lives of men and women, and into the life of the world. We extend to you the right hand of fellowship.

Prayer for Each Other (unison)

Loving and gracious God, we pray that out of the treasures of your glory, you might grant us strength and power through the Spirit in our inner being, that through faith Christ might dwell in our hearts in love. With deep roots and firm foundations, let us be strong to grasp-with all God's people-what is the breadth and length and height and depth of the love of Christ-to know what is beyond knowledge! Now to the One who is able to do immeasurably more than all we can ask or even conceive, by the power that is at work among us, to that One be glory in the church, and in Christ Jesus from generation to generation, evermore! Amen!

Right Hand of Christian Fellowship [Moderator]

In the name of our congregation, we cordially welcome you into our fellowship and invite you to participate in all the duties and privileges of Christ's church.

Receiving of Gifts and Certificates