

spirit of joy and delight in your service. In current liturgies other words are used such as the spirit of goodness and gentleness.

- + Think about each of these gifts. What do they mean?
- + What changes do these gifts make in our church and community?

The congregation by its affirmation receives a new member. Confirmation is the act by which the candidate is admitted to full membership of the Church with the rights and obligations that brings with it.

- + Consider what rights and obligations membership brings.
- + What does membership to the body of Christ mean?

3. Commitment to service

The commitment in confirmation is not only by the Church to the candidate but also the candidates commit themselves to service in the name of Christ. There is a strong link between belief and action. "But be doers of the word, and not merely hearers" (James 1:22 NRSV). Mother Theresa said, "We put our hands, our eyes, and our hearts at Christ's disposal, so that he will act through us".

- + Can you think of examples where deeds follow from belief?

The commitments at confirmation are often contained in the vows. They may include:

- to serve Christ seeking to live by his teachings
- to the Church by use of talents, giving of time and money
- to the Community serving where there is need
- to the Gospel enabling others to learn of the love of God.

- + What do you understand by a commitment to service?

CONFIRMATION IS PART OF THE JOURNEY

There is a Chinese proverb that says, "A journey of a thousand miles begins with one step". Confirmation is one more step on the journey we are making with God. Confirmation is not the beginning of that journey. We begin our walk with God before we can crawl. Many steps lead us to know God and there are many new discoveries to be made following the commitment of Confirmation. But this is an important landmark where the public declaration is made of our willingness to follow Christ and serve the Church and the community.

This resource draws on a booklet written by Graeme MacRaid in 1991. The complete booklet can be obtained from:

Presbyterian Church of Aotearoa New Zealand,
Courses and Resources, P.O. Box 9049, Wellington.

Being Part of the Story



The Theology and History of Confirmation

A brief background paper

A resource in preparation for confirmation

A SHORT HISTORY OF CONFIRMATION

(abridged from a leaflet by Rev. Graeme MacRaild)

The early church, very early in its development, practiced infant baptism, and argued over its use. The church has practiced many different rites, sometimes elevated to sacraments, to mark the start of adult faith.

The earliest information suggests baptism and confirmation were part of a single ceremony and required the presence and blessing of a Bishop. Baptism was recognized as a sacrament because its practice was attested in scripture as a part of the life of Jesus. As Priests began to offer baptism separate from but under the authority of a Bishop, the sacrament of Baptism was separated from confirmation, which remained the prerogative of a Bishop. Alongside this confirmation developed as a sacrament separate from but a completion of baptism.

In the Presbyterian Church of Aotearoa New Zealand infant baptism is affirmed as an expression of the entry into the church even of tiny children. This is incomplete however without a strong emphasis on adult confirmation for we do not recognize the minority practice of infant confirmation. We recognize confirmation as a rite of the church rather than a sacrament, but in all respects it is the completion of the sacrament of baptism. This is not to imply that baptism is conditional, but an adult may come to complete their own baptismal vows that have been made on their behalf as infants. In these terms confirmation can never be confused with conversion but is the culmination of the infant baptism process or the personal highlight of adult baptism. Confirmation requires conversion, preparation in the faith, personal acceptance of the vows of baptism, public profession of faith and the symbolic actions of the church that recognize the giving and receiving of the Holy Spirit.

Baptism and confirmation are rites of initiation of a person into the church. They are symbolic means of recognition of a person's acceptance by God (grace) and welcome in the church. Early documents of the church refer to laying on of hands, foot washing, and use of special white clothing, all as part of its symbolism. Confirmation has become a "rite of passage" indicating personal profession of faith in a public domain. It is therefore an aspect of church life, which is strengthening of public and communal faith.

Confirmation is a rite of the church, bringing together significant points of faith in a believer's life (baptism, conversion, profession). It stands at the heart of the Spirit of God moving and being within the church. It is a process not an action, involving time for preparation and recognition of significant stages with appropriate community events of worship and tradition. Through these events of community recognition, confirmation is a means by which people "older in faith" may come regularly to reaffirm their own confirmation. It becomes a means of building and renewing the community of faith.

Confirmation is a practice ... in which, after a period of formal instruction in the essentials of the faith, the candidate professes their faith (usually public in the presence of the congregation) and is by an act of consecration admitted into the full membership of the church. Confirmation means 'to confirm'; the confirmant affirms their acceptance of the faith into which they have been reared, the baptism already bestowed and pledges their loyalty to Christ and the church.
Vergilius Ferm A Protestant Dictionary

THINKING ABOUT CONFIRMATION

In its simplest terms confirmation is the adoption of baptismal vows made on our behalf for ourselves.

Confirmation encompasses three main factors:

1. Affirmation of faith in Christ

At its root confirmation creates a link between the current faith of the candidate with the act of baptism and the vows made on their behalf at that time.

- ✚ Think about your baptism.
- ✚ Who would have been involved?
- ✚ What may have been said at that time?
- ✚ What does it mean to you?

That past is now linked as fresh vows are made to affirm our faith.

Faith has various meanings. It can be:

- Trust in God
- The Faith – the received doctrines and practices of the Church
- The experience of God in our lives

- ✚ What do you understand by affirmation of faith at Confirmation?

2. Affirmation of the Church

Confirmation takes place within the context of worship in the presence of the congregation. This is important because the affirmation of faith needs to be witnessed. Those present are able to rejoice in the declaration

- ✚ Think of some of the things that we have reason to celebrate in a confirmation.

As part of the liturgy hands are laid upon the candidate giving the blessing of the Church and the invocation of the Spirit. The traditional words give seven gifts of the spirit – the spirit of wisdom and understanding, the spirit of counsel and might, the spirit of knowledge and wonder in your presence, the