

Frequently Asked Questions

Guidelines for Confirmation, Reception & Reaffirmation

Where did these come from?

Bishop Smith appointed a Task Force in January 2003 to explore and develop guidelines for Confirmation in the Diocese of CT. This was in response to questions raised at a Fall 2002 Clergy Day in addition to the desire to update the current Policies & Guidelines that were written in 1990. The Task Force (members are listed on the introductory page of the Guidelines) met regularly for two years.

How were they developed?

A survey was taken of parishes (through Christian educators & youth leaders and clergy) regarding the ages, practices and materials used for Confirmation preparation. Clergy were invited to share their practices. Individuals that were known by Task Force members to have unique and successful aspects of their preparation were contacted. (Many of these ideas can be found in the Appendix). Research of what other dioceses are doing, as well as National Church studies were completed. Curriculum was reviewed. Roundtable discussions were held with the bishops. Guidelines were developed; Addenda to offer an explanation and rationale were written to support their implication and presentation to parishes. In addition, a compilation of resources was developed.

Do I (and my parish) have to follow these?

These are guidelines and are meant to assist congregations in the preparation of candidates for Confirmation. They are offered as a resource, hoping parishes will develop a plan to implement as many of the components as possible according to each one's needs and resources. It is an opportunity to engage the entire congregation in exploring what Confirmation really means for the individual.

When do they go into effect?

There is no timetable set for full implementation. For many parishes this is a paradigm shift especially in regard to the age recommendation, preparation length and suggestions that move away from the model of "six weeks of study with the rector."

Will the Bishop turn away a candidate who is under 16 years of age?

No.

What does the Bishop expect?

That every candidate who comes forward for Confirmation, Reception or Re-Affirmation is able to state (and understand) that he or she is willing to "follow Jesus Christ for the rest of my life."

Parents want their child Confirmed sooner rather than later because they are afraid they will "leave the Church."

Confirmation does not "keep one coming to Church." Statistically, those confirmed between the ages of 12-14 have a lower retention rate of church attendance. For most of those young people, Confirmation was a decision made by their parents – not the individual. This is also true for those who are about to move onto boarding or prep school. For many parents, Confirmation continues to be seen as a completion of Baptism, which is contrary to what The Protestant Episcopal

Church USA believes. Our bishops desire that each individual be able to personally state they are willing to “follow Jesus Christ for the rest of my life.”

Many parents want their children Confirmed before they go away to boarding school. This is a pastoral need. How do the Guidelines address these issues?

Parishes need to address these types of pastoral issues at the local level. The Task Force contacted several Episcopal boarding schools for their input. In Connecticut, a Bishop visits many schools for the Rite of Confirmation each year. Chaplains regularly meet with students and are very supportive of clergy from ‘the home parish’ contacting them about the student. Most boarding schools are eager for communication and on-going relationship between church, home and school. If the boarding school does not have a chaplain, the rector is encouraged to contact the clergy in an Episcopal parish near the school. If a young person truly desires Confirmation, they should be able to participate in any preparation within the faith community of which they are a part of, even if it is ‘far from home.’ (Note: Bishop Curry contacts college chaplains regarding incoming Episcopal freshman when notified by parishes).

My parish is small. I don't have enough adult leadership for all this!

Although the rector is ultimately responsible for preparation, it is also a responsibility affirmed by the whole congregation at Baptism when they promise to “do all in your power to support these persons in their life in Christ.” The participation of many adults in the various portions of preparation allow for the sharing of ministry – a model we desire to lift up as important to the life of the Church. Part of our responsibility as a Church is to provide opportunities for adults to proclaim their faith. This is one such opportunity.

Each year we have only one or two candidates. How can we implement these suggestions?

There are several options to explore. Develop a two or three year system in which preparation occurs with a variety of ages together (like 8th, 9th & 10th graders). Bring candidates to the bishop every three years instead of every year. Collaborate with a neighboring parish or other parishes in your deanery. A combined group will offer more adult leadership and experiences for all.

We are using the Journey to Adulthood program. How do these Guidelines affect us?

If following the sequence of Rite-13, J2A and YAC, it would be appropriate for Confirmation preparation to occur during the end of the J2A or beginning of the YAC program. Many of the components for preparation suggested in our Guidelines are already incorporated in this faith formation program, however there are areas in our Guidelines that go beyond J2A, such as mentors, Episcopal polity, and components of faith and practice.

Why can't I use the curriculum I am already using, such as “I Will, With God's Help” or “Making Disciples”?

While these curricula make use of exploring our Baptismal Covenant, Scripture and prayer they are lacking in many areas the Task Force felt was important for preparation: mission, service, Episcopal polity, fellowship with others and the wider community. Print curricula tend to focus on the ‘feeding of information’ and in teaching such material, leaders often take the role of teacher instead of companion along the way. If candidates have been involved in on-going education and formation throughout their childhood, such materials are excellent for review and ‘pulling it all together.’

Why one or two years of preparation? Young people (and parents) will only come (commit) to a 6-10 week period of preparation. What about sports and other school commitments?

We are all given choices in life. Confirmation is putting Christ at the top of the list. If one is serious about re-affirming their commitment to Christ before the community (and Bishop), one should be willing to spend the time in serious reflection and preparation. If preparation time is held over an extended period of time, other commitments can still be attended to. Many churches in Connecticut have already begun extensive time in Confirmation preparation and find it very beneficial.

Many young people return to church at the time of Confirmation instruction for our traditional Confirmation classes. How will this affect them?

If we are to lift up the integrity of Confirmation in the Episcopal Church, we will encourage participation in the life and worship of the community before one commits to attending Confirmation preparation. Developing parish policy and communicating this through adult education and parish newsletters, bulletins, etc. will help.

The Guidelines suggest mentors for each candidate. How can we implement this and still follow "Healthy Church Practices"?

Mentors can still meet individually with candidates! Gatherings can occur when all meet together, in various areas of the church or parish hall for conversation. Public meetings can also be arranged – a local diner, McDonald's, library. What is most important is that the adult and young person should not meet privately and away from visible contact with others. The mentor should not drive the candidate, but arrange to meet somewhere in public. Two mentors and two candidates can meet with one another. Parents can provide transportation if necessary. Permission slips are also advisable. Mentors and candidates can also sit with one another at worship and parish events.

What about Holy Baptism and Holy Eucharist preparation?

In addition to the Confirmation Guidelines, updated guidelines for Holy Baptism and Holy Eucharist are now on the Diocesan website, listed before the Confirmation materials. Holy Baptism is the only prerequisite for participation in the Lord's Supper. There are also suggested resources listed for congregational use with children and adults. The diocesan Christian Education office has numerous resources to borrow.

Is there on-going help available for implementing these Guidelines?

Yes. Besides numerous resources for borrowing, Sharon Ely Pearson, Christian Education Coordinator (spearson@ctdiocese.org 860-233-4481x126) and Emily Anna Perow, Youth Ministries Coordinator (eperow@ctdiocese.org 860-233-4481x128) are available for consultation, gatherings and support.