



Episcopal Diocese of Western Michigan

Customary for Confirmation, Reception & Reaffirmation

Confirmation, Reception, and Reaffirmation is a conscious choice for those who wish to commit, in a public way, to a life lived in Christian community “in the world but not of the world.” ~ The Rt. Rev. Robert R. Gepert, VIII Western Michigan

I am grateful to God—whom I worship with a clear conscience, as my ancestors did—when I remember you constantly in my prayers night and day. Recalling your tears, I long to see you so that I may be filled with joy. I am reminded of your sincere faith, a faith that lived first in your grandmother Lois and your mother Eunice and now, I am sure, lives in you. For this reason I remind you to rekindle the gift of God that is within you through the laying on of my hands; for God did not give us a spirit of cowardice, but rather a spirit of power and of love and of self-discipline.

*Do not be ashamed, then, of the testimony about our Lord or of me his prisoner, but join with me in suffering for the gospel, relying on the power of God, who saved us and called us with a holy calling, not according to our works but according to his own purpose and grace. This grace was given to us in Christ Jesus before the ages began, but it has now been revealed through the appearing of our Savior Christ Jesus, who abolished death and brought life and immortality to light through the gospel. For this gospel I was appointed a herald and an apostle and a teacher,*and for this reason I suffer as I do. But I am not ashamed, for I know the one in whom I have put my trust, and I am sure that he is able to guard until that day what I have entrusted to him.* Hold to the standard of sound teaching that you have heard from me, in the faith and love that are in Christ Jesus. Guard the good treasure entrusted to you, with the help of the Holy Spirit living in us. 2 Timothy 1:3-14*



“We are made Christ’s own by virtue of our baptism. And then in confirmation, Christ becomes our own, as a visibly manifest transformative force determining the character of our whole lives.”
Kathryn Tanner, “Towards a New Theology of Confirmation”

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Dear People of God,

Following the Easter Season, 2008, the annual time in our diocese for Confirmation, Reception, and Reaffirmation, I expressed my concern regarding the readiness of candidates being presented for Confirmation to the clergy of our diocese during our monthly Council Meetings. At that time, I described for the clergy my observation that a number of the younger candidates for Confirmation were not at a point in their lives of making a commitment to living into their baptismal promises. I also shared that I felt uncomfortable providing the “laying on of hands” under these circumstances. I asked for their counsel. This “counsel” resulted in the following action:

1. A Task Force was established to organize a process for clergy participation and input from the laity concerning the development of common standards regarding Confirmation, Reception, and Reaffirmation.
2. The declaration of a moratorium on Confirmation, Reception, and Reaffirmation until, as a diocesan community, we had an opportunity to define more clearly what common standards we want to employ as we prepare people for the “laying on of hands.”
3. Because clergy are charged by the Canons of the Church with providing Christian education and formation, clergy were invited to a clergy day for the purpose of teaching about Confirmation and for the Task Force to receive input.
4. The Task Force produced a draft document largely based on the Diocese of Connecticut’s document and implementing the concerns of clergy in our diocese.
5. The draft document was sent to an expanded group of people, including the laity, for additional comments and feedback. It was also sent to me for review.
6. A second clergy day was scheduled so that clergy could hear my views and hopes for the way that Confirmation, Reception, and Reaffirmation can become opportunities for the People of God in our diocese to become more fully converted in their life in Christ, pledge allegiance to the Church, and live a radical Christian life in this secular world by committing themselves to their baptismal promises.
7. The final document is being presented to you today and the moratorium is hereby lifted.

This study of Confirmation, Reception, and Reaffirmation should not be seen as a condemnation of previous ways of preparing people for the laying on of hands, but rather as a way of seeing ourselves more and more as a diocesan community and becoming more discerning of the maturity necessary to be able to live into our Baptismal Covenant with the greatest amount of integrity. *The Book of Common Prayer* teaches us that,

*In the course of their Christian Development, those baptized at an early age are expected, **when they are ready** and have been duly prepared, to make a **mature** public affirmation of their faith and commitment to the responsibilities of their Baptism and to receive the laying on of hands by the bishop. Those baptized as adults, unless baptized with the laying on of hands by a bishop, are also expected to make a public affirmation of their faith and commitment to the responsibilities of their Baptism in the presence of a bishop and to receive the laying on of hands. (p. 412, emphasis mine)*

Because *Holy Baptism is full initiation by water and the Spirit into Christ's Body the Church.* (BCP, p.298), no other rite is necessary. This makes Confirmation, Reception, and Reaffirmation a conscious choice for those who wish to commit, in a public way, to a life lived in Christian community "in the world but not of the world."

This document provides for us clarity concerning what we hold in common with the Church at large as well as a diocesan community. It is a tool for us to become aware of living into all levels of Christian community and an opportunity for us to shout "Yes!" to the committed life our conversion to the Gospel and our Baptismal Covenant requires of us.

May God continue to bless us with by increasing in us the awareness of the Spirit bestowed upon us at our Baptism.

Faithfully,

Robert R. Gepert
VIII Western Michigan

“In the course of their Christian development, those baptized at an early age are expected, when they are ready and have been duly prepared, to make a mature and public affirmation of their faith and commitment to the responsibilities of their Baptism and to receive the laying on of hands by the bishop.” ~ 1979 Book of Common Prayer, p. 412



ADULT CONFIRMATION, RECEPTION and REAFFIRMATION

- ❖ These rites are truly sacramental as an outward and visible sign of an individual's spiritual renewal. Persons presenting themselves are experiencing spiritual growth and want to respond to the movement of the Spirit within them in a concrete and public way.
- ❖ Confirmation, Reception and Reaffirmation invite participants to make a personal commitment to nurture and practice their faith in daily life.
- ❖ Components of preparation should include extensive study and activities in three areas:
 - Education - Scripture, the 1979 Book of Common Prayer, and Episcopal polity
 - Spirituality - prayer, moral decision making, stewardship and theological reflection
 - Mission and Ministry – service and the life of the baptized
- ❖ Persons presenting themselves for Confirmation are those who have been baptized with water in the name of the Trinity and now desire to live their faith within the fellowship of the Episcopal Church.
- ❖ Persons presented for Reception, per national canons (Title I, Canon 17, Section 1(c) are those who, “after appropriate instruction, will have made a mature public affirmation of their faith and commitment to the responsibilities of their Baptism and will have been confirmed by a Bishop of a Church in communion with this Church, and now desire to live their faith within the fellowship of the Episcopal Church.
- ❖ Preparation for Reception should include how one practices the faith in the Anglican Communion and how we as Episcopalians live out our Christian mission in community.
- ❖ Reaffirmation is suitable for persons who have already made a mature public declaration of faith and are now experiencing a call from God toward a new growth in faith, commitment or service. Reaffirmation is a repeatable rite and should be used with sensitive pastoral discernment.
- ❖ Every congregation should have a means for all adults to continue their journey of faith formation.

YOUTH CONFIRMANDS

- ❖ The rite of confirmation is truly sacramental, as an outward and visible sign of and individuals' spiritual growth. Youth presenting themselves are experiencing spiritual growth and want to respond to the movement of the Spirit within them in a concrete and public way.
- ❖ As children move through adolescence to adulthood they are developing their individual identity physically, emotionally, socially, intellectually and spiritually. This time of search involves questioning, judging critically and experimenting through the use of reason and argumentation in addition to feelings and experiences. To find a faith of their own, and not merely accept the faith of their parents, adolescents need to doubt, question and test what has been handed down to them. The church can play a pivotal role in assisting young people move through these tasks.
- ❖ Confirmation is the making of mature commitment to follow Christ and have one's faith be relevant and responsive in genuine and authentic ways. Per national church canons, Title I, Canon 17, section 1 (b) , candidates will be at least 16 years of age by the date of confirmation.
- ❖ If a rite of puberty is desired for youth before they have reached the age of 16, clergy might consider special recognitions, such as Rite 13's “Celebration of Manhood and Womanhood” in the context of congregational worship to mark an individual's milestones.

- ❖ Each person should be supported in their decision to be confirmed or not, and to be confirmed only when ready to make that personal and independent commitment. Not all persons who participate in Confirmation preparation will be ready to make a commitment to a lifelong faith decision.

PREPARATION TIME for YOUTH and ADULTS

- ❖ Participation in preparation and formation activities (classes, retreats, developing one's rule of life, mission/outreach events, etc.) is required for all candidates preparing for Confirmation, Reception or Reaffirmation in the Diocese of Western Michigan.
- ❖ Due to the comprehensive and encompassing content and activities of formation, a minimum of one academic year (September–May) will be spent in preparation. It is preferred that candidates participate in formation for two academic years prior to being confirmed, received or reaffirming their baptismal vows..
- ❖ Candidates need adequate time for building community, learning, reflecting on and applying their faith. As noted by James Fowler, faith is a process in becoming.
- ❖ It is recommended that one be active in a congregation for one year prior to beginning preparation, but consideration will be given to preparation undertaken in a previous parish.

ROLE of the BISHOP

- ❖ *"The ministry of a bishop is to represent Christ and his Church, particularly as apostle, chief priest, and pastor of a diocese."* 1979 Book of Common Prayer, p. 855.
- ❖ The bishop is an integral part in the preparation of candidates for Confirmation, Reception or Re-Affirmation.
- ❖ The bishop meets with candidates at a retreat prior to candidates beginning their formal preparation.
- ❖ The bishop may also be available for deanery gatherings, diocesan youth events and mission trips, and parish visitations. Deaneries and parishes are strongly urged to contact the bishop's office to arrange a convenient time for the bishop's participation well in advance of any events being planned.
- ❖ The presence of a bishop as celebrant and preacher at Confirmation underscores the importance of this rite in the life of the Church. The laying on of hands at Confirmation is an outward sign of the presence of the Holy Spirit and forms a personal and physical link between the Confirmand and the one, holy, catholic and apostolic Church throughout the world and through time.

ROLE of the DEANERIES

- ❖ Coordinate a deanery, pre-confirmation preparation retreat with the bishop's office every 1-2 years. Include opportunities during the retreat for the bishop to teach and meet with those in preparation collectively and individually.
- ❖ Foster collaboration between parishes for preparation components such as retreats, mission/outreach events, and classes.
- ❖ Enhance candidates' sense of the larger church and expose them to the variety of Episcopal styles of worship through parish visitations within their deanery.
- ❖ Rotate the hosting of Confirmation, Reception and Re-Affirmation of Faith services within each deanery by their respective parishes.

ROLE of the PARISH CLERGY

- ❖ Oversee the preparation and presentation of candidates for Confirmation, Reception and Re-Affirmation.
- ❖ Identify a variety of persons to offer instruction and leadership throughout the preparation program. Provide specific support in the areas of Scripture and Anglican traditions.
- ❖ Coordinate the recruiting, training and support of mentors/sponsors for each candidate.

- ❖ Provide a safe, engaging and nurturing environment for participants to openly explore their questions of faith and service.
- ❖ Instruct the parish regarding the history and theology of Confirmation, Reception and Reaffirmation.
- ❖ Validate previous preparation for candidates transferring from another parish.

ROLE of the FAITH COMMUNITY

- ❖ Provide a safe, open and supportive environment for participants on their faith journey.
- ❖ Foster growth and ongoing formation in youth and other participants in the areas of education, spirituality and ministry service.
- ❖ Serve as a mentor sponsor with a candidate. To do so one is to have been an active communicant in good standing in the parish for a minimum of one year, be interviewed and assigned by the Rector, put faith in the Creeds and seek to live into the Baptismal Covenants of the Episcopal Church.
- ❖ Offer experiential and hands-on activities as participants discern their gifts and serve within the parish, community-at-large and/or on mission trips.
- ❖ Volunteer to assist with mission trips and other preparation activities and events.
- ❖ Include candidates in parish ministries to assist in their gifts discernment and service opportunities, as well as to build relationships with their brothers and sisters in Christ. Seek their input and opinions for parish planning.
- ❖ Assist candidates in deepening their sense of baptismal life.
- ❖ Provide financial support for mission trips and retreats.
- ❖ Attend the deanery confirmation service.
- ❖ Provide a celebration and recognition of their faith commitment at the parish during on the following Sunday.
- ❖ Pray for candidates and their sponsors privately and in corporate worship.



COMPONENTS for PREPARATION SPIRITUALITY, EDUCATION, MISSION & MINISTRY

- ☞ *Will you continue in the apostles' teaching and fellowship, in the breaking of bread, and in the prayers?*
- ☞ *Will you persevere in resisting evil, and, whenever you fall into sin, repent and return to the Lord?*
- ☞ *Will you proclaim by word and example the Good News of God in Christ?*
- ☞ *Will you seek and serve Christ in all persons, loving your neighbor as yourself?*
- ☞ *Will you strive for justice and peace among all people, and respect the dignity of every human being?* The Baptismal Covenant, 1979 Book of Common Prayer, pp. 304-5



Both students and leaders are members of the Body of Christ, exploring the content of the Christian revelation and learning from each other. While the transmission of content (as listed below) is important, the joint exploration of the Gospel and what it means in our life is vital. It is the Church's job to help support and sustain a life of faith put into practice, yet fun and friendship are part of the abundant life in Christ. Even the hard work of preparing people to live that life is work done in joy.

SPIRITUALITY

- ❖ *Prayer:* Prayer includes both individual and common prayer, and both are staples of a lively spirituality. There should be opportunities to learn and experience different kinds of prayer. Prayer is the common thread that should be woven into all aspects of preparation.
- ❖ It is recommended that a spiritual retreat occur at the beginning and near the end of preparation. This can take the form of a Deanery event, a visit to a monastery or retreat center, through mission work or a pilgrimage. It can be a time to leave other concerns behind and be open to God. The reason for including a retreat is to let the group experience yet another way of living in Christ and finding out where one can go for this kind of experience – building resources for the rest of their lives.
- ❖ Keeping a journal is another means for spiritual growth and nourishment. Each of us learns and experiences the Holy in different ways. Tapping into the variety of prayer experiences through multiple intelligences (See Addendum H) will allow each person to learn more about themselves and develop lifelong practices.
- ❖ Candidates are strongly encouraged to develop a personal Rule of Life as a spiritual discipline and as a means to articulate how they will intentionally integrate their faith into their everyday life.
- ❖ *The Book of Common Prayer:* In order to be able to articulate who we are as Episcopalians, candidates should be familiar and have experienced *The Book of Common Prayer* (Morning Prayer, Evening Prayer, Compline, Eucharist, Baptism, etc.) Our Creeds are statements of our beliefs, and thus should be explored and discussed. *An Outline of the Faith* (The Catechism) in the prayer book and our Baptismal Covenant should be key elements of a preparation program.

- ❖ *Faith & Practice*: A balance of “doing” and “being” is at the heart of baptismal living. The five promises at the end of the covenant are about how we live our faith in everyday life. By living according to those standards we become Christ’s people in the world. Being able to reflect theologically on the events of our lives and find God in them assist in putting faith our into practice. Participation in the sacramental life of the faith community, attentiveness to scripture and prayer, and having a sense of the presence of Jesus keeps us mission-focused.
- ❖ Safeguarding God’s Children, along with diversity and anti-racism training, as well as stewardship education should be included.
- ❖ Being in community, we as Episcopalians have a connection with others that goes beyond our individual parishes. Each congregation needs to develop a program that both includes the elements listed above and meets the needs of its own community.
- ❖ To assist in the integration of faith into daily practice, the Task Force suggests each candidate answer the following questions (adapted from the Diocese of Connecticut’s guidelines) toward the end of the preparation process. (See the Appendix for additional suggestions)
 1. What have you learned from your preparation that has been most important to you?
 2. Who is Jesus in your life? How would you respond to His question, “Who do you say that I am?”
 3. Why do you want to want to reaffirm or confirm your baptismal vows?
 4. How do you plan to live as a mature and faithful Christian in the Church and in the world after you are Confirmed?

EDUCATION

- ❖ *Scripture*: The goal of studying scripture in a preparation program is to ensure candidates have an understanding of our Salvation History so that he/she can articulate “who they are” and “whose they are.” The ability to reflect on The Story in relationship to Our Story and My Story is an important component in making a mature affirmation of one’s Baptismal Covenant. Understanding the key themes, characters and stories of the Old and New Testaments helps us understand how God is in relationship with Creation and how we are called to build upon that relationship with God, through Jesus Christ and each other.
The Great Vigil of Easter is an expression of our faith journey as a people of God; the retelling of the Passover Story every year makes it Our Story.
Being intentional in studying the life, death and resurrection of Jesus Christ in a faith community allows us to answer the questions, “Who do you say that I am?” or “Who is Jesus in your life?”
This is a vital question that one who comes before the bishop for Confirmation, Reception or Reaffirmation should be able to answer with ease and confidence.
- ❖ *Episcopal Polity*: Being an Episcopalian involves understanding that we find authority for our lives in Scripture, Tradition and Reason. The ministries of the laity and clergy (bishops, priests, deacons) should be explored, as well as parish, diocesan and national governance. Representatives duly elected by the people hold decision-making authority in the Episcopal Church. Being conscious of what it means to be an Episcopalian in today’s world, to include the diocese, the entire Episcopal Church and the worldwide Anglican Communion is a foundational issue to be discussed throughout a program of preparation.

MISSION & MINISTRY

- ❖ *Service & The Life of the Baptized:* Putting faith into practice and connecting the Gospel to our daily life is how we live out our Baptismal Covenant in the world. To do this, besides being committed to the Gospel, we need to recognize and affirm the spiritual gifts that have been given to each us.
Exploring those gifts and talents and how they can be used in the day-to-day life of a Christian in the world should be part of candidates' preparation.
- ❖ An individual can share their gifts through ministry in a congregation AND in the community. (Most high schools have service components and requirements for graduation to which preparation service can be applied.)
- ❖ Preparation can support that service, faithfully reflecting on what has been observed, experienced and learned. Service is not to be seen as “doing for someone” but as “being in relationship” with another for a common purpose, respecting the dignity of all of God’s creation.
- ❖ The life of the Baptized is centered on being Christ’s disciple in the world. Discipleship lies in our personal experience, understanding and relationship to God, in Jesus and with the Holy Spirit.
- ❖ Discipleship lies in our small intimate relationships with family and friends, also in the larger arena of our interaction with the world: in school and places of work, with peers, colleagues and co-workers, and in our towns and cities.
- ❖ *Mission and Community:* The Church’s mission is to restore all people to unity with God and each other in Christ. We do this as we pray, worship, proclaim the Gospel and promote justice, peace and love. Mission is an essential component of our life as we connect the teachings of the Church with who we are as individuals.
Being able to answer such questions as, “How are you Christ in the World?” “What is your rule of life?” and “What have you done on a daily basis as a disciple of Christ?” is part of re-affirming one’s Baptismal promises.
How we offer opportunities for prayer and work is paramount during a time of formation and preparation.
- ❖ Mission trips and/or experiences help the individual know Jesus Christ in a new way. Why do young people have to go outside the parish (even their own town, state or country) in order for this to occur? As one youth stated, “I needed to be stretched and taken out of my comfort zone.” We need to be people who fully rely on God on a day-to-day basis . . . being with those whose only hope is God helps us take the risk of trusting the way they must trust. The moment our dependence shifts from the self to God, the Gospel becomes real. Our culture is one in which the theology of glory prevails, and thus the theology of the cross is difficult to access. How does the candidate connect with Christ crucified?
Youth mission trips put us in touch with the distinction between faith as “trust in God” and faith as “assent to doctrinal positions.” Curricula and learning what it means to be an Episcopalian can often be separated from experiencing the power of the living God. Short-term mission trips stimulate discernment and encourage the recognition of one’s gifts with ministry in the world.
- ❖ Our faith is connected to real life issues and a realization of what people gathered together in God’s name can do.
- ❖ Life-long formation involves equipping ourselves for mission. This occurs through sermons, being in community and experiencing God incarnationally in others. It is an opportunity for mutual spiritual enrichment. Through mission we can make two-way connections in our life-faith journey, respecting the shared wisdom and faithfulness of all God’s people.