

# CONFIRMATION

These liturgies continue the threefold emphasis of the Anglican tradition on instruction, affirmation of faith, and the graceful action of God.

First, those presented are expected to be prepared for this sacramental rite (1979 BCP, p. 412). An “Outline of the Faith” is included in the 1979 prayer book (p. 845), for instruction and as a summary of the Church’s teaching for interested inquirers.

Second, it’s the expectation of the Church that both those baptized at an early age and those baptized as adults should make a public affirmation of their faith in the presence of the bishop and receive the laying on of hands. This is a significant moment in the lives of individuals and of their families and friends, approached in faith and penitence as the candidates are invited to reaffirm their renunciation of evil and to recommit to following Jesus Christ as their Savior and Lord. Jesus’ disciples are called to nothing less (1979 BCP, p. 860).

It’s also a significant moment for the whole assembled Christian community. Confirmation, like baptism, is a communal celebration. The reaffirmation is made in a particular Christian community. The congregation is not only invited to pray for the candidates but also joins them in the reaffirmation of the Baptismal Covenant. The presence of the bishop is a reminder of the significance for the larger community of this commitment made by individuals. The ministry of the bishop reminds us that the Church is larger than any single congregation, and that the Church is a community of disciples.

Third, the prayers and actions of the confirmation rite make plain that God is the principal actor in the liturgy. The outward and visible sign of this rite is prayer and the laying on of hands, but there is an inward and spiritual grace as well. The Holy Spirit is invoked upon those who receive the laying on of hands. They are sent forth in the power of the Spirit to perform the service God sets before them. As they engage in this ministry, the Holy Spirit will ever be with them. God’s grace, the free gift of his power and presence, is necessary for fulfilling this ministry.



**The Power  
of the Spirit**



THE  
LIVING CHURCH

We are a Christian ministry based primarily in the Episcopal Church, a member of the Anglican Communion. Since 1878 we have published educational resources of various kinds and *The Living Church* magazine.

**Confirmation has its origins in Holy Baptism, in practices that were associated from early times with the celebration of the sacrament. The New Testament contains examples of the apostles praying for and laying hands on the faithful, and asking God to grant the gift of the Holy Spirit. St. Peter and St. John were sent to the baptized believers in Samaria, and they received the Holy Spirit in this way (Acts 8:17).**

St. Paul baptized in Ephesus, and when he had laid hands on the newly baptized “the Holy Spirit came upon them” (Acts 19:6).

In the following centuries, one or more actions such as anointing with oil, sealing with the cross, and laying on of hands accompanied by prayer for the gift of the Holy Spirit seem to have followed immersion in the baptismal water, at least in some places. *The Apostolic Tradition of Hippolytus* from the early third century described these actions of the bishop after baptism:

**The bishop laying his hand upon them shall say the invocation: “Lord God, who hast made them worthy to obtain the remission of sins by the bath of regeneration, make them worthy to be filled with the Holy Spirit and send upon them thy grace, so that they may serve thee according to thy will.” ... Then, pouring some of the oil of thanksgiving in his hand and putting it on the head, he shall say: “I anoint thee with holy oil in God the Father almighty and in Christ Jesus and in the Holy Spirit.” And after having signed him on the forehead he shall give him the kiss and shall say, “The Lord be with thee.”**

St. Ambrose of Milan in the late fourth century told the newly baptized that at this point following their baptism, “God the Father has sealed you, Christ the Lord has confirmed you, and has given the earnest of the Spirit in your heart” (*de Myst.* 7.42).

In the first centuries of the Church, the bishop usually presided over the celebration of baptism (and over the Sunday Eucharist), but as the Church grew priests were given responsibility for celebrating baptism even in the absence of the bishop. In most of Western Europe, however, the imposition of hands with prayer and anointing with oil continued to be reserved to the bishop, and followed at some convenient time after baptism when the bishop was able to be present. In time this now clearly distinct rite became known as confirmation, and it often took place after a period of preparation, during which candidates learned the basics of the faith: at least, the Ten Commandments, the Lord’s Prayer, and the Creed.

At the time of the Reformation, the Church of England continued the practice of confirmation, with episcopal laying on of hands, and it retained the emphasis on preparation. The prayer book of 1549 contained a catechism that all candidates were to be instructed in before being confirmed by the bishop. This association of catechesis and confirmation was a sign of a growing realization in the churches of

the West of the importance of instruction and formation for members. Anglican prayer books regularly called for the instruction of the uncatechized at Evening Prayer on Sundays and Holy Days.

In the 1662 prayer book a question was also added to the liturgy of confirmation, asking the candidates to “ratify and confirm” the promises made in their name by their parents and godparents at baptism, promises “to believe and to do.” Infant baptism had been the norm in Christian churches for more than 1,000 years. The addition of this question added another dimension that had long been present in baptism: the affirmation of belief and the commitment to act. Anglican practice united these elements of Christian discipleship with the continuation of the pre-Reformation tradition of laying on of hands and prayer by the bishop.

Confirmation in the Episcopal Church’s 1979 prayer book contains a specific reaffirmation of baptismal vows and a reaffirmation of the “Baptismal Covenant,” including the Apostles’ Creed, that helps to define the Christian life. Modern prayer books and liturgies around the communion contain similar elements. In this way Confirmation’s relationship to baptism is clearly drawn out. Modern rites have retained prayers invoking the Holy Spirit and the imposition of hands on the candidates by the bishop.

