

Welcoming and nourishing

All groups have ceremonies for welcoming new members. Sometimes the ceremony is simple where the welcome, perhaps for a new employee, involves a handshake. At other times the ceremony may be elaborate, like a graduation, with ritual dating back to the Middle Ages and a lot of dressing up. The moment of joining the new group is important and is marked in a special way.

Joining the church often has two steps. Baptism marks the entry of a baby or young child into the community of faith. In the sacrament of baptism, parents bring the child into the church and God's love for the child is celebrated. Before the child knows, the grace of God is at work in his or her life. Baptism celebrates God's action in the life of the newly born and their incorporation into the community of faith.

In the believing community, the child is nurtured in the faith of Christ. This begins in the family and the church supports the parents in this. The hope is that the community of Christ will also play a role in the child's growth in faith. Sunday School and activities for young people provide an environment in which the seed of faith may grow and blossom.

Embracing faith and belonging

Christian faith is always personal, but never individualistic. It is in the rich common life of the local Christian community that faith is nurtured. Those on the journey toward faith in Christ are surrounded by those who have embarked on the Christ-shaped life. Our prayer is that the baptised will come to share this vision. The local community of faith provides support, encouragement and affirmation of those being drawn into the life of faith.

Confirmation marks a point along the way in the spiritual growth of a person. The teaching of Jesus has taken on significance for them. His parables open a world of grace. The cross and resurrection of Jesus Christ begin to reveal the love of God. Reconciliation always has a cost and in the cross we see God accepting the cost of restoring relationships. There will be growing appreciation that the resurrection of Christ is a sign of what God intends for each person and all creation. Within all of this there is a sense of being claimed as a disciple.

When a teenager or adult reaches a moment when they say, "Yes, this faith that I was baptised in, is the faith that I want to live by," then they are at a point when they may wish to consider confirmation. It marks a completion in the process of belonging. It is a public declaration that the one seeking confirmation has come to the conviction that they will find in the story of Jesus, their life's direction, meaning and fulfillment.

Preparation and commitment

There follows a period of study and formation. Usually a group will be formed and those considering confirmation will examine the foundations of Christian faith in some depth over a period of weeks. The major themes of scripture will be examined. The nature of faith will be probed. The church's history will be outlined. Opportunity is provided to explore particular questions about the central stories of scripture and the faith of the church.

There will also be consideration of what it means to be a Christian in the Methodist tradition. The life and witness of John and Charles Wesley will be introduced. Their emphases in Christian teaching and spirituality will be traversed. Our heritage will come alive in the study of the prayer and hymns of the church.

Preparation of candidates will also involve asking what it might mean to be a Methodist Christian in Aotearoa New Zealand at this time in our history. The priorities established by the Methodist Church in recent years will be discussed and engaged with.

Those who choose to be confirmed do not pretend that they have arrived, or that they possess all the answers to life's questions. Rather they simply say that they desire to make Christ's vision their own, be open to God's grace and, in Christian community, seek to grow in Christian maturity.

Service of Confirmation

In the liturgy of Confirmation, each candidate is encouraged to profess their faith in Christ in their own words. This is an opportunity to give testimony to the grace of God as experienced in their life. The presiding minister lays hands on each candidate, praying that the Holy Spirit will enable them to live as a disciple of Christ.

The service invites those being confirmed to accept spiritual disciplines that will allow their lives to increasingly have the pattern of Christ. This will involve devotion to scripture, study and prayer, participation in worship, Holy Communion and the group life of the church.

Finally, the liturgy of confirmation is a celebration of gifts. In preparation for confirmation those who are to make their commitment are helped to identify the gifts that God has given them. In the service of worship those confirmed make promises to employ the gifts that they have received in ministry in the name of Christ. The service offered takes many forms – it is the vocation of the church to support many vocations.

In the context of worship the candidates for confirmation are surrounded by the praise of God, the proclamation of the gospel, the prayer of the church and the inspiration of the community of believers, past and present.

A step along the way of Christ

Joining and committing, belonging and thanking, detecting grace and identifying gifts for ministry, make confirmation an exciting time of celebration. It is not only for the young, but can be embraced at any age. Could confirmation be the next step in your Christian discipleship?

If you would like to know more about confirmation, contact your minister or your local church office.

This *Little Essay* by Terry Wall is made available within the Methodist Church by The Faith & Order Committee.

The Methodist Church of New Zealand
Te Hahi Weteriana o Aotearoa

Confirmation

- a step along the way of Christ.



Are you ready to take a step in commitment?