

What is Confirmation?

In our congregation, we are blessed to have youth and families from many different religious traditions and backgrounds. The act of Confirmation means lots of different things in different settings, so I thought it might be helpful to share a bit about what Confirmation means to me.

First, I think Confirmation is a powerful and important coming of age ritual. Being a teenager is hard work. Kids struggle as they move from childhood into adulthood. I'm guessing this has always been the case and most cultures have created rituals to aid that transition. I think Confirmation is one of those rituals. It is a time where we publicly bear witness to the fact that these children, whom we have known and loved since they were babies, are growing up. They are becoming adults. We give thanks for that reality and celebrate it together.

Second, churches like ours are congregational in polity. This is basically a fancy churchified way of saying we are democracies. We make big decisions by voting. We vote to elect our officers, approve our budget, call our pastor, and make other major decisions in congregational meetings. At Confirmation, youth who have been confirmed are initiated as full members of the church and are invited to vote in future congregational meetings.

Third, I see Confirmation as an opportunity for the church to, once again, confirm what we know to be true: that God knows and loves each of these youth, that God blesses their lives, and that nothing can break that bond. We confirm that we, the church, are committed to loving them during this time of transition from childhood to adulthood. We accept them for who they are. We recognize and celebrate their gifts. We know they will make mistakes, just like us, and we will love them through it. We are confirming them in our continuing love, which is rooted in the love of God.

Those of you who grew up in the Church and were confirmed may notice something is missing here. I didn't say anything about Confirmation as a time for kids to recite a catechism or make a profession of faith. In many traditions, Confirmation is seen as a time where the pastor teaches confirmands "what we believe as Christians" and then the youth decide whether they agree. If they do, they are confirmed. If they don't, they aren't. In some traditions, youth are invited to, instead, write their own statement of faith. Regardless, Confirmation is primarily about "what we believe" and whether or not you want to opt in and be a part of us.

I'm not a fan of this (in case you couldn't tell!). First of all, I think it is laughable to try and define "what we believe" as Christians because there is such a diversity of belief. Second, I think what each individual believes is evolving over time. It's not that we won't talk about what we believe - we will, of course, but, to me Confirmation is more about being a place to open up and begin those conversations that will (hopefully) last a lifetime. Not a place to come to final conclusions. Perhaps more importantly, I don't think Confirmation is about deciding who's in and who's out. We're all in, of course.

Regardless of our beliefs or actions, we are all loved by God and it is my sincere hope that Confirmation can be a time when the youth realize this even more fully.

A final note and then I'm done! Confirmation is also an amazing opportunity for me, as the Pastor. It is a privilege to be able to sit with these wise young-old souls and learn with and from them. It is a joy to get to know these people more fully. In a position where I am often pulled in several directions at once, I cherish the opportunity to more fully focus on the youth as they are confirmed and spend uninterrupted time with them.

Pastor Caela