



Episcopal Diocese

— OF CENTRAL FLORIDA —

Confirmation, Reception, and Reaffirmation

The Rt. Rev. Dr. Justin S. Holcomb

The Service

The service of “Confirmation with forms for Reception and for the Reaffirmation for Baptismal Vows” is found on pages 413-419 in the *Book of Common Prayer*. Rectors, vicars, and clergy-in-charge, please read “Concerning the Service” on page 412 of the *Book of Common Prayer*.

As stated on page 412: “When there is no Baptism, the rites of Confirmation, Reception, and the Reaffirmation of Baptismal Vows are administered in the following form.” If Holy Baptism is to be included in this service, please read “Concerning the Service” on page 298 and follow the form on pages 300-314.

The service may be done as Rite I or Rite II. The bishop does not have a preference.

The opening acclamation is determined based on the season. The versicle and response from Ephesians 4:4-6 in the rites of Holy Baptism and Confirmation follows. As stated on page 412: “If desired, the hymn Gloria in excelsis may be sung immediately after the opening versicles and before the salutation ‘The Lord be with you.’” As the rubric states: “the Collect and Lessons are properly those of the Day.”¹

The bishop will preach. The presentation and examination of the candidates immediately follow the sermon. The Nicene Creed is not used at this service. After the sermon, if there is a prayer-desk (also known as a “prie-dieu”) it will be moved to the center. The bishop will explain briefly to the congregation the significance of confirmation, reception, and reaffirmation.

The bishop will then ask the candidates to stand. After the presenters move to be next to the candidates, the bishop says “The Candidates will now be presented.”

The bishop will ask all the candidates two questions and the candidates reply in unison:

Question: “Do you reaffirm your renunciation of evil?”

Response: “I do.”

Question: “Do you renew your commitment to Jesus Christ?”

Response: “I do, and with God’s grace I will follow him as my Savior and Lord.”

¹ *The Book of Common Prayer*, 412.

The bishop will ask the entire congregation to stand and asks them: “Will you who witness these vows do all in your power to support these persons in their life in Christ?”” The response is “We will.”

The bishop then leads the entire congregation in “The Baptismal Covenant” (pages 416-417). Following the renewal of the baptismal covenant, someone from the church will lead “Prayers for the Candidates” (pages 305-306 of the *Book of Common Prayer*), which are the prayers from the service for Holy Baptism.

After the prayers, the entire congregation may be seated, including the candidates. The bishop will invite each candidate to come up individually to the prie-dieu or altar rail. Candidates may stand or kneel.

The bishop will state the person’s name and why they are there (confirmation, reception, or reaffirmation) and invite the congregation to pray silently for that person. He will place his hands on the candidate’s head and prayer in silence before praying the assigned prayer. At this time, any sponsors and the clergy may lay hands on the shoulders of the candidates.

There are two options for the prayer for confirmation: strengthen and defend.² The bishop invites each candidate to select from those two prayers.

Once the individual prayers for each candidate are completed, the bishop asks the congregation to stand. He will pray the concluding collect on page 419 and then the Peace is exchanged.

The service then continues with the Offertory of the Eucharist, at which the bishop will serve as the celebrant.

Regarding the dismissal, churches are to obey the rubrics in the *Book of Common Prayer*, which clearly and repeatedly state that only “[f]rom the Easter Vigil through the Day of Pentecost ‘Alleluia, alleluia’ may be added to any of the dismissals.”³

Practical Considerations: Colors and Vestments

Liturgical Colors

The service for confirmation, reception, and reaffirmation may be celebrated in red, following the invocation of the Holy Spirit, or in white, following the baptismal character of the rite. There is no expectation, however, that a parish change the color of the day. Keeping the color of the season is entirely appropriate, on the liturgical principle that the season takes precedence over the occasion, particularly in Advent and Lent. The bishop has no preference among these options.

Vestments

² *The Book of Common Prayer*, 418.

³ *The Book of Common Prayer*, 340, 366, 523, 535, and 547. With regard to the Daily Office, a similar rubric states: “From Easter Day through the Day of Pentecost ‘Alleluia, alleluia’ may be added to the preceding versicle and response” (*The Book of Common Prayer*, pages 59, 72, 102, and 126).

Regarding vestments, the Rt. Rev. J. Neil Alexander writes: “From the beginning of The Episcopal Church, two traditions of ‘raiment for the Lord’s Service’ have been prevalent among us. For bishops these two traditions parallel the traditions of presbyteral vesture: choir habit and eucharistic vestments.”⁴

Rochet and chimere are choir habit for bishops. Before the middle of the 19th century, it was common for Episcopal presbyters to celebrate the Eucharist in choir habit (cassock and surplice) and tippet. In the second half of the 19th century, colored stoles gradually replaced the tippet as standard practice in many places. In the second half of the 20th century, Eucharistic vestments (alb, stole, chasuble) has become the typical vestments for the celebrant.⁵

If the parish clergy regularly preside in Eucharistic vestments, the bishop may preside in alb, stole, and chasuble. The bishop may wear choir habit (rochet and chimere with stole) in those parishes where the Eucharist is celebrated by the parish clergy in cassock and surplice and tippet/stole. The bishop does not have a preference regarding vestments.

The bishop welcomes the opportunity to wear any vestments that belong to the parish. By wearing the vestments of the parish, the bishop is identifying with the parish as their pastor. Whenever possible, there is a theological and symbolic point to the bishop wearing the same vestments that the rector, vicar, and priest-in-charge wears.

Theological Considerations: Celebrating God’s Promises and Faithfulness

Confirmation, reception, and reaffirmation are rooted in Holy Baptism. In baptism, God makes promises and God keeps those promises. His faithfulness to us invites, establishes, and strengthens our response of worship and gratitude to him. Notices the promises in our liturgy for Holy Baptism:

Collect concluding the Prayers for Candidates:

“Grant, O Lord, that all who are baptized into the death of Jesus Christ your Son may live in the power of his resurrection and look for him to come again in glory; who lives and reigns now and forever. Amen.”⁶

Thanksgiving over the Water:

“We thank you, Father, for the water of Baptism. In it we are buried with Christ in his death. By it we share in his resurrection. Through it we are reborn by the Holy Spirit. Therefore in joyful obedience to your Son, we bring into his fellowship those who come to him in faith, baptizing them in the Name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit. Now sanctify this water, we pray you, by the power of your Holy Spirit, that those who here are cleansed from sin and born again may continue for ever in the risen life of Jesus Christ our Savior.”⁷

⁴ J. Neil Alexander, “The Down and Dirty Guide to Hats, Sticks, Vestments, etc.,” page 1.

⁵ As Alexander writes: “While the continued use of choir vestments is widespread in The Episcopal Church for assisting priests, deacons, and other liturgical ministers, the adoption of eucharistic vestments for the presider and deacon is almost universal” (page 2).

⁶ *The Book of Common Prayer*, 306.

⁷ *The Book of Common Prayer*, 306-307.

The Baptism:

“Heavenly Father, we thank you that by water and the Holy Spirit you have bestowed upon these your servants the forgiveness of sin, and have raised them to the new life of grace. Sustain them, O Lord, in your Holy Spirit. Give them an inquiring and discerning heart, the courage to will and to persevere, a spirit to know and to love you, and the gift of joy and wonder in all your works. Amen.”⁸

“You are sealed by the Holy Spirit in Baptism and marked as Christ's own for ever.”⁹

Holy Baptism is full initiation into the church, Christ's body, and confirmation, reception, and reaffirmation are prayer with episcopal laying on of hands for the renewal of baptismal life.

In confirmation, reception, and reaffirmation, we highlight and celebrate the foundation of God's relationship with us—that God plans for, initiates, and sustains the relationship. This emphasizes the movement of God toward us, which is highlighted in baptism. Notice God's actions reflected in the prayers at baptism, confirmation, reception, and reaffirmation:

- Deliver them, O Lord, from the way of sin and death.
- Open their hearts to your grace and truth.
- Fill them with your holy and life-giving Spirit.
- Keep them in the faith and communion of your holy Church.
- Teach them to love others in the power of the Spirit.
- Send them into the world in witness to your love.
- Bring them to the fullness of your peace and glory.

God's activity is also highlighted and reflected in the concluding collect for the Prayers for the Candidates of confirmation, reception, and reaffirmation:

“Almighty God, we thank you that by the death and resurrection of your Son Jesus Christ you have overcome sin and brought us to yourself, and that by the sealing of your Holy Spirit you have bound us to your service. Renew in these your servants the covenant you have made with them at their Baptism. Send them forth in the power of that Spirit to perform the service you set before them; through Jesus Christ your Son our Lord, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and for ever. Amen.”¹⁰

Confirmation, reception, and reaffirmation are our responses of gratitude to God for his promise-making and promise-keeping toward us. Our response is from us and toward God. Notice that our response is sustained and strengthened by God in the renewal of our baptismal covenant as “I will, with God's help” is repeated. This is a liturgical and theological application of Philippians 2:12-13:

“Therefore, my beloved, as you have always obeyed, so now, not only as in my presence but much more in my absence, work out your own salvation with fear and trembling, for it is God who works in you, both to will and to work for his good pleasure.”

⁸ *The Book of Common Prayer*, 308.

⁹ *The Book of Common Prayer*, 308.

¹⁰ *The Book of Common Prayer*, 417.

About confirmation, the *Book of Common Prayer* explains: “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.”¹¹

In the Episcopal Church, confirmation is not seen as the completion of Christian initiation, nor is confirmation a prerequisite for receiving communion: “Holy Baptism is full initiation by water and the Holy Spirit into Christ's Body the Church. The bond which God establishes in Baptism is indissoluble.”¹²

Leonel Mitchell writes: “Confirmation is the renewal of the baptismal covenant, not its completion. Confirmands affirm their baptismal commitment, and God renews the covenant and empowers them with the Holy Spirit to fulfill their baptismal promises and live the baptismal life to which they are committed.”¹³

This is why confirmation is viewed as “confirming” the covenant made at baptism and receiving the episcopal laying on of hands. Those being received into the Anglican communion have already been baptized and have received the laying on of hands. Those reaffirming have been confirmed or received and are reaffirming the baptismal covenant.

This theology of confirmation, reception, and reaffirmation is reflected in the collects “At Confirmation”:

“Grant, Almighty God, that we, who have been redeemed from the old life of sin by our baptism into the death and resurrection of thy Son Jesus Christ, may be renewed in thy Holy Spirit, and live in righteousness and true holiness; through the same Jesus Christ our Lord, who liveth and reigneth with thee and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and for ever. Amen.”¹⁴

“Grant, Almighty God, that we, who have been redeemed from the old life of sin by our baptism into the death and resurrection of your Son Jesus Christ, may be renewed in your Holy Spirit, and live in righteousness and true holiness; through Jesus Christ our Lord, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and for ever. Amen.”¹⁵

Appendix—An Episcopal Dictionary of the Church

Confirmation¹⁶

“The sacramental rite in which the candidates “express a mature commitment to Christ, and receive strength from the Holy Spirit through prayer and the laying on of hands by a bishop” (BCP, p. 860). Those who were baptized at an early age and those baptized as adults without laying on of hands by a bishop are expected to make a mature public affirmation of their faith, recommit themselves to the responsibilities of their baptism, and receive laying on of hands by a bishop (BCP, p. 412). Adults baptized with the laying on of hands by a bishop are considered to be confirmed.

¹¹ *The Book of Common Prayer*, 412.

¹² *The Book of Common Prayer*, 298.

¹³ Mitchell has a chapter on the meaning of Confirmation in his *Praying Shapes Believing*, pages 120-121.

¹⁴ *The Book of Common Prayer*, 203.

¹⁵ *The Book of Common Prayer*, 254.

¹⁶ <https://www.episcopalchurch.org/glossary/confirmation/>

The Prayer Book rite for Confirmation includes forms for Reception and the Reaffirmation of Baptismal Vows. In some dioceses, those who have already made a mature Christian commitment in another denomination are recognized as members of the one holy catholic and apostolic church, and received into the fellowship of the Episcopal Church and the Anglican Communion. In other dioceses, those who have been sacramentally confirmed in the Roman Catholic or Orthodox churches are received and others are confirmed. Those who have returned from a time of religious inactivity to an active practice of faith may publicly reaffirm their baptismal vows. Others who have experienced a renewal of faith or desire to renew their Christian commitment may also reaffirm their baptismal vows. Reaffirmation may be repeated, depending on the pastoral needs of the person. Preparation for Confirmation, Reception, and/or Reaffirmation should help the candidates discover the meaning of Christian commitment in their lives, and explore ways that their Christian commitment can be lived. This preparation may draw upon the baptismal covenant (BCP, pp. 416-417) and An Outline of the Faith (BCP, pp. 845-862).

Confirmation, Reception, and Reaffirmation are rooted in the baptismal covenant. Confirmation/Reception/Reaffirmation may be done at the service of Holy Baptism or at the Easter Vigil when a bishop is present (BCP, pp. 292, 309-310). When there is no baptism, the entrance rite for Confirmation/Reception/Reaffirmation follows the entrance rite for baptism (BCP, p. 413). Candidates for Confirmation, Reception, and Reaffirmation are presented in separate groups by their presenters. Candidates may have individual presenters who will support them in their Christian life by prayer and example. It is not necessary that the presenters be members of the clergy. The candidates reaffirm their renunciation of evil, and renew their commitment to Jesus Christ. They reaffirm the promises made by them or for them at the time of baptism. Those present in the congregation promise to do all in their power to support the candidates in their life in Christ. The bishop leads the congregation in renewing the baptismal covenant. The Prayers for the Candidates from the baptismal liturgy may be used as the Prayers for the Candidates for Confirmation/Reception/Reaffirmation (BCP, p. 417). The bishop lays hands on each candidate for Confirmation. The BCP provides specific prayers to be said by the bishop for Confirmation, for Reception, and for Reaffirmation. The bishop may shake hands with those who are being received to welcome them into this communion, and the bishop may lay hands on them in blessing. The bishop may also bless those who reaffirm their baptismal vows.

The Episcopal Church's theology of Confirmation has continued to evolve along with its understanding of baptism. Confirmation is no longer seen as the completion of Christian initiation, nor is Confirmation a prerequisite for receiving communion. Baptism is full initiation by water and the Holy Spirit into Christ's body the church (BCP, p. 298). Accordingly, Confirmation has been increasingly understood in terms of a mature, public reaffirmation of the Christian faith and the baptismal promises. Some dioceses require that candidates for Confirmation be at least sixteen years old to insure that the candidates are making a mature and independent affirmation of their faith. There is considerable diversity of understanding and practice concerning Confirmation in the Episcopal Church. Confirmation has been characterized as "a rite seeking a theology."

When Confirmation/Reception/Reaffirmation is celebrated on Sunday or a major feast, the propers (collect and readings) for that day are used. The BCP also provides special propers for Confirmation at other times."

Reception¹⁷

“Baptized persons who have been members of another Christian fellowship and who wish to be affiliated with the Episcopal Church may make a public affirmation of their faith and commitment to the responsibilities of their baptism in the presence of a bishop. The bishop lays hands on each candidate for reception and says, “We recognize you as a member of the one holy catholic and apostolic Church, and we receive you into the fellowship of this Communion” (BCP, p. 418). Candidates for reception normally have made a mature commitment in another Christian fellowship. Some dioceses have reserved reception for those candidates who have previously received sacramental confirmation with laying on of hands by a bishop in apostolic succession.”

Reaffirmation¹⁸

“The BCP refers to those persons already baptized who are presented to the bishop in the context of a service of Baptism or Confirmation to reaffirm their baptismal vows. These might be persons returning to the church after a period of unbelief or those who have entered a new level of spiritual life. The BCP does not specify who these persons are, and a variety of interpretation exists. The BCP provides a form to be used for reaffirmation of baptismal vows instead of the confirmation formula (BCP, p. 419). The word “renewal” rather than “reaffirmation” is used to describe the reaffirming of the baptismal covenant by the entire congregation at Baptism, Confirmation, or the Easter Vigil (BCP, p. 292).”

¹⁷ <https://www.episcopalchurch.org/glossary/reception-christian-commitment/>

¹⁸ <https://www.episcopalchurch.org/glossary/reaffirmation-of-baptismal-vows/>