

## Father Tim's Thoughts on Confirmation for Older Teens

In light of the diocesan policy (see below), and my own experience with confirmation classes over the years, having a minimum confirmation age seems like a natural progression. As much as I feel confirmation should be an adult rite (it is, after all, a “*mature* public affirmation of faith” as the Prayer Book notes) there are pastoral reasons to offer confirmation class as early as 10<sup>th</sup> grade. I would ultimately like to see this rite driven solely by those who desire to make a public commitment to Jesus Christ (something that transcends age). But I also understand that we as a parish, as a diocese, and as a Church are not there yet. Liturgical and theological change is best undertaken slowly, prayerfully, and pastorally.

I further realize there is some confusion surrounding confirmation. This is partly due to the fact that the Episcopal Church's understanding and theology of confirmation has shifted in the past generation. For some who grew up in the Episcopal Church, confirmation was required before the reception of communion. This changed with the Prayer Book revision of the 1970's which put greater emphasis on the sacrament of baptism (getting back to the ancient roots of the early church). This also means that confirmation does not “complete” baptism or make anyone any more of a Christian. Baptism is the full initiation rite of the Christian church – baptized members of the church, regardless of age, are full members of the Christian community. Confirmation is a way of “confirming” the baptismal vows made on behalf of those baptized as infants or the vows made by those who could speak for themselves. Still, for some, change from what they experienced as children regarding confirmation can be disconcerting.

But I also want to be clear that confirmation is not a “puberty rite;” it is a rite of *commitment*, not a rite of *passage*. One that must be driven by the individual Christian rather than parental pressure.

Through my own experience with 10<sup>th</sup> grade confirmation classes I know I can get into deeper spiritual and theological conversations with 10<sup>th</sup> graders than with 7<sup>th</sup> or 8<sup>th</sup> graders. This doesn't mean all 10<sup>th</sup> graders are ready to make a mature public affirmation of the faith; nor does it mean that all middle schoolers are uniformly unable to make such an affirmation. But having some guidelines takes the guessing out of the equation and provides some clarity.

At the heart of any confirmation class are the relationships. Relationship with God, relationship with adult mentors (both clergy and lay), and peer relationships. This, of course, transcends the rite of confirmation and these relationships are all life-long ones. Effective confirmation preparation for teenagers requires full commitment from the candidates' families. This includes regular church attendance, participation in the life of the faith community, and the modeling of Christian faith and practice. Anything less works against the desired outcome of helping our young people live out committed lives of faith.