

# Confirmation Sunday Sermon

## “Confirm What?”

### Questions To The Confirmands

**As our Confirmands answer these questions of faith and commitment, we invite you to follow along, and use this as a moment for your own re-commitment of faith and service!**

Will you...

Hate what is evil,  
Cling to what is good,  
Love one another,  
Be joyful in hope,  
Patient in affliction,  
Faithful in prayer,  
Rejoice with those who rejoice,  
Weep with those who weep,  
Live in harmony,  
Do what is right,  
And overcome evil with good? (Romans 12:9-12)

Will you...

Love your neighbor as you love yourself? (Matthew 19:19)  
Love God with all your heart? (Matthew 19:19)  
Turn the other cheek? (Matthew 5:39)  
Walk the extra mile? (Matthew 5:41)  
Be the peacemakers, God’s treasures as children? (Matthew 5:9)

Will you...

Welcome God’s Holy Spirit to guide you? (John 16:13)  
Accept Christ’s example to serve others? (John 13:14-15)  
Allow God’s presence to be creative in you? (Genesis 1:27)

Confirmation Sunday is a good Sunday to explain, what is it? And why is it important? It's certainly a big deal in our church in almost an old-fashioned way. The kids get dressed up big time. Parents and siblings and relatives circle the day and come in big numbers. Gifts are given, celebrations are held. It's not a "ho-hum" day in any way.

At the 10:30 service we actually experience Confirmation, beginning with an impressive procession where the young people walk the aisle, much like a graduation day.

Various prayers and promises take place all building to that moment when each youngster, one by one, kneels before Alida and I, their mentor behind them, all three of us place our hands upon their head and Alida does her by now legendary ritual of describing each one with three distinctive adjectives. She then proclaims the unique gift each brings to our church, our world, our age.

I bless them, and together we confirm them. But what are we confirming? And, why? Two Bible stories tell us. The first we just heard, where St. Paul compares a church to the human body. We are all made up of different parts, aren't we, and sometimes we function like a smooth-running machine:

our mind is sharp,

our feet are fast,

our hands are strong,

our health is good,

our bones don't ache.

It's a good day.

That's church at its best – Everybody doing their part, doing it with vigor, with enthusiasm, with joy; and yes, with faith. It really is a beautiful thing, and our young people make it even more so. If, as St. Paul says, “the Church is the Body of Christ,” then today's young people are a shot of adrenalin or a nutritional supplement. We are stronger and healthier because of them.

Well, then, Confirmation Sunday is good news for everybody! For the kids, officially called “Confirmands.”

They're done.

They're finished.

They did it.

Ecclesiastically and theologically, they are now adults. They are now responsible and accountable for their lives and behaviors and beliefs.

When young Jewish kids have their Bar Mitzvah or Bat Mitzvah, they are no longer treated as young Jewish kids. They are now spiritual adults. And when our young Christian kids are confirmed, we can no longer think of them as just young Christian kids, how cute! By confirming them we confirm that they are spiritual adults.

When I was growing up, and the same for many of you, we couldn't have Holy Communion until we were confirmed. On Communion Sunday, in those days, those trays of little pieces of bread and little cups of grape juice would just pass us by, and the church was filled with the sounds of parents and ushers slapping away the hands of kids who dared reach for the bread or juice! "It's not for you!!," we were told. The idea was that you weren't old enough to understand, to fully appreciate the significance, to think for yourself, to make decisions for yourself. We no longer treat little kids that way in our church. We all take Communion; we all understand it at our own level. But still, with Confirmation Sunday we do look at our Confirmands in a new light, with new respect. We welcome them as our ecclesiastical equals. Their votes and ideas or anything about church count as much as everyone else's. And we trust them:

their thoughts,

questions,  
doubts,  
affirmations,  
beliefs,  
their understanding.

Their “take” on matters of faith, matter to us. We will take all that – and them – seriously. So that’s the good news: this is a big day.

But there’s even better news, for the Confirmands AND the parents.

They’re really done.

They’re all finished.

They are perfect little Christians.

They are perfect religious people.

Nothing more to add, to learn, or to do. Right?!?

In my career, I have actually heard parents say that: “Just do your Confirmation, then you never have to go to church again!” Or even more honestly, more bluntly, “Listen, do your Confirmation – make your grandmother happy then do whatever you want.”

Even in the best of ways, Confirmation is treated like you reached the finish line. Let's imagine applying that to other aspects of these kid's lives. They are 13, 14 years old, right? About to start high school. So, next Fall, shouldn't they go up to the football coach, field hockey coach, lacrosse coach, and say, "Listen, I'm confirmed, I'm a fully formed and perfected human being. Just put me on the Varsity, let me be a starter. I don't need tryouts or practices.

Then go to the English teacher and say, "I've already had 8 years of English, plus I got confirmed, I know all I need to know, so I don't need any more instruction." Oh, don't forget the school orchestra, jazz band, and acapella choir. As parents, just write the music director, assure them that your child took some piano lessons, sings in the shower and most important, has been confirmed!! They are all done with all that preparatory, learning stage, working on it kind of stuff. They are ready for a starring role.

Of course, none of us think like that, thank goodness!! But intentionally or not, we act like that. We tend to treat the beginning as if it's the end. When the truth is, life is about to get harder. Our Confirmation class ends with a sort of mini retreat, we had it last Monday night. And by the way, let me brag a bit about the level of commitment these young people bring. We had 29 out of 30 at that retreat, that's a 97% attendance rate. There's nothing in life that gets a 97%

attendance rate, but these kids showed up, all year long, their parents got them there, on Mentor nights we'd have 95-100% attendance week after week, parents and youth and adults stayed committed. And once in class, these kids engaged in a depth of conversation and dialogue, taking it all in, willing to work through it all, whatever the topic.

But anyway, back to our closing meeting.

Yes, they had pizza.

Yes, ice cream.

Yes, they came over to our church to practice.

But we began out in the Memorial Garden, all gathered around the huge cross back there for the annual "David Rowe

Grouchy old man

The world is a dangerous place.

You better watch out,

Be careful,

Lean on us.

We're always here for you.

Positive

Smiley-face

Uplifting message.”

And it really is a mixture of all that. We're sitting in that beautiful, idyllic garden, just about to spring forth in bloom, a place that is both a cemetery and a playground, all of life's experiences encapsulated in the burial placements in the stone wall.

It is a harsh yet beautiful reality, a beautiful yet harsh reality. The perfect place to say, "life is about to get harder." We don't like saying that to a 14-year-old, we want childhood to retain its innocence, and joy and naivete and unbridled optimism as long as possible.

But we also want them ready. Life IS about to become harder, more complicated, greater threats, more temptations.

We just finished the NFL draft. All those superstar college players will soon be in pre-season football camp and by Labor Day playing in the NFL.

Meanwhile, in baseball, there's lots of shuffling as Minor leaguers get promoted to the Majors and play in Yankee Stadium or Fenway Park for the first time. And if you listen to interviews with those newly minted NFLers and newly



arrived Major Leaguers, they all say the exact same thing: “the game is much faster up here.”

By faster, they don’t mean “speedier.” They mean everything takes on added weight: pressure, timing, expectations, audience, consequences; they all come at you in a whirl.

Now, sticking with that sports analogy, all those rookies in the NFL and the “call-ups” in baseball, they all hear the exact same advice from coaches and veterans. “You gotta slow the game down.” So, on one level, “the game is faster up here” and the antidote is to “slow the game down.” That’s youth ministry at Greenfield Hill Church. All our young people, from middle school through college, are facing a much “faster” world.

Name whatever topic you want – it comes at today’s kids faster than in your day, say 25 years ago; or my day, some 60 years ago. The world comes at us faster. We need to slow it down. That’s where our partnership matters. Hear me: that’s where our partnership matters. You. Plus, the young people. Plus us, pastors and church.

We’re here, together, as one, just like St. Paul said, a whole body attached in flesh and bone, and in spirit, we’re here, together, to “slow the game down.”

There's a place to go that is calm, that is peaceful, that is safe, that is light  
itself, love itself.

That's what we've been teaching them, that's what we are confirming  
today: that this is a place, and we are a people where they can know God's love  
every day, no matter what.

We see evidence of this all the time with our young people,

When "bad things happen to good people,"

When Grandma is sick,

When friends are in trouble,

When decisions have to be made,

When a cause or purpose come to mind,

When there's a joy to be shared,

They come in here to light a candle,

They speak up at youth group,

They text Alida,

They organize an action.

I told you at the start of the sermon that Confirmation here is rooted in two  
scriptures. The first, the Church likened to a human body, with every part

important and each part doing its job well. The second comes from the early days of Christianity as it was just about to spread its wings. Christianity as a movement, at its beginnings as an organized religion was totally rooted in Israel, mostly in Jerusalem, entirely Jewish.

But then, one day, the Disciples like Peter and John, leading early Christianity from Jerusalem, heard an amazing rumor. Way up in Greece in the city of Antioch, Greek pagans were believing all the good news about Jesus, “turning to Jesus,” is what the report says. They heard about his death on the cross, they heard about his resurrection from the dead, they heard about him feeding the hungry, healing the sick; and heard about Jesus providing a whole new way of life, attitude, ethic, about grace and forgiveness and a whole lot about love.

Love:

Living it,

Being it,

Giving it,

Receiving it

Love.

Those people up in Greece, they liked what they heard, and they wanted to live it, too. But the Disciples were suspicious. How could those untrained, inexperienced, no-nothing newbies up in Greece be accepted into Christianity as full-fledged, adult, mature Christian people, like they are one of them?!!

So.... they sent one of their most trusted leaders, a guy named Barnabas, they sent Barnabas up to Greece to confirm, yes, to confirm, that what was taking root in those people was real, genuine, substantive, thoughtful.

And it was. The Bible says, “Barnabas saw the evidence of the grace of God, and he was glad, and he encouraged them all to remain True to Christ, with all their hearts” (Acts 11:23).

That’s what today is all about. This year, 30 kids were delivered into our hands. Sure, there was some parental pressure, some peer pressure, even. Plus, tradition. It’s what 8<sup>th</sup> and 9<sup>th</sup> graders do. It’s what 13- and 14-year-olds do, their Catholic friends at St. Thomas on Post Road are doing it, their Jewish friends at B’nai Israel are doing it; it’s a “rite of passage.”

For Alida and I, it's part of our job description, so we do it. For the 13- and 14-year-olds, it's part of growing up, so they do it. But then the magic happens. The Bible calls it the Holy Spirit. God's presence. Some inexplicable mystery, I don't mind calling it "magic." God's magic. That's what happens when this cranky old man who can barely stay awake most nights, and Alida, who never sleeps, and has already worked 12 hours that day – we meet up with these Confirmand kids who have been in school for eight hours, plus two hours of after-school sports and music lessons, and they've done homework and had no time for dinner. We are all thrust together where I make them sit on the floor in front of me, really, because I can't get down on the floor, and the only other option is the couches, and those are too far away so I make them sit on the floor. And when Alida takes over for activities, they mostly lie on the floor, or sit on cushions and we end up talking about...

God

Ethics

Jesus' Parables

Jesus' miracles

The Sacraments

Church stuff

Moral dilemmas.

Evil

Death

Sorrow

Injustice

Christlikeness

Incarnation

Resurrection

And they don't roll their eyes.

And they don't zone out.

And they don't quit.

And the magic happens.

And we "see the evidence of the grace of God...and we are glad...and we encourage them all to remain true to Christ with all their hearts."

That's what Confirmation is. And why.