Definition: confirmation from Philip’s Encyclopedia

Sacrament of the Christian Church by which the relationship between God and an individual, established by baptism, is confirmed or strengthened in faith. Candidates for confirmation take the baptismal vows previously made on their behalf by godparents, and confirm the intention to keep them.

Summary Article: confirmation from The Hutchinson Unabridged Encyclopedia with Atlas and Weather Guide

Rite practised by a number of Christian denominations, including Roman Catholic, Anglican, and Orthodox, in which a person who has undergone infant baptism confirms the promises made on their behalf, and is admitted to full membership of the Christian community. In Reform Judaism there is often a confirmation service several years after the bar or bat mitzvah (initiation into the congregation).

In Christian confirmation, a previously baptized person ‘confirms’ that they wish to be a member of the church. Confirmation is believed to give the participant the gift of the Holy Spirit. The service is usually conducted by a bishop. In the Anglican Church it involves the laying on of hands, while in the Roman Catholic Church the participant is anointed with oil. Confirmation can take place at any age, though most denominations require the person to be old enough to understand the significance of their promises; in Anglican and Roman Catholic churches, candidates are usually at least 12 years old. Candidates attend a series of confirmation classes, which teach them about the faith and Christian responsibilities. Until recently, preparation included learning by heart a series of questions and answers known as a catechism.

Gift of the Holy Spirit For Christians, the gift of the Holy Spirit at confirmation is described in the Gospels (Acts 1:4–5, 8, 2:3–4). Christians believe that, when Jesus left his disciples, the first Christians were promised and received the Holy Spirit. Acts 8:17 describes how believers receive the Holy Spirit through the ‘laying on of hands’.

Confirmation service In the Anglican Church, confirmation involves the laying on of hands by a bishop, while in the Roman Catholic Church the bishop anoints the participants with oil. Sometimes girls dress in white, like brides, for their confirmation, a custom that is more common in Roman Catholicism.

During the service, the confirmation candidates are asked to reaffirm the questions about their faith answered for them by their sponsors or godparents during their infant baptism. Before confirmation takes place, the bishop asks the candidates to affirm their belief in God. Those being confirmed then kneel in front of a bishop who places his hands on the head of each in turn. He blesses them and prays for them to receive the Holy Spirit. He makes the sign of the cross on their foreheads, just as in baptism, and wishes them peace. In the Roman Catholic and some Anglican churches the bishop will put oil on their foreheads as a sign of the gift of the Holy Spirit. From this time on they can take full part in the worship of the church and receive Holy Communion (the Eucharist or Mass). Anglicans usually receive Holy Communion straight after the service of confirmation.

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In the Roman Catholic Church, the First Communion takes place when a child is about eight years old. Following a period of instruction, the child is allowed to share in the Mass before being confirmed. This is seen as an important link and preparation between baptism and confirmation.

Methodist and United Reformed churches do not have a service of confirmation, but hold services where young people can publicly testify to their faith and become full members of the church. Methodists also sign a covenant (agreement) of belief and intent.

In the Orthodox Church, confirmation is part of the ceremony of Chrismation, which follows an infant’s baptism. Once the priest has anointed parts of the infant's body with holy oil, the baby receives Holy Communion and can receive Communion from then on.

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