

Reprint: Bishop Love's Expectations on Confirmation and Confirmation Letters

September 23, 2008

Diocesan Update

My Brothers and Sisters in Christ,

With the fall season here, many of our Sunday School programs are beginning again, and we take on the responsibility of raising our young people in the faith of Jesus Christ in his church. Confirmation is an important sacramental step in the journey of any person who wishes to publicly profess faith in Jesus Christ, but it is especially important for our younger members. Research has shown that what we believe about Jesus by the age of 13 remains largely what we believe as adults (*Barna Research, November 2003*).

Most of the adults we now honor as church leaders are often continuing a tradition that was started in their lives when they were pre-teens—one researcher surveyed pastors, teachers and other leaders and determined that 4 out of 5 leaders had been involved in ministry programs as pre-teens and that these programs strongly influenced their lives. His point was that we can look around our Sunday School classrooms if we want to see most of the people who will lead our churches in the next twenty years. By letting our young people claim their faith and their role in ministry at an earlier age, we are letting them begin the process of relationship, service and commitment to God that we pray will last for their whole lives.

With this in mind, I have prayerfully decided to lower the age requirement for the sacrament of Confirmation to 13. I recognize that not all 13-year old students are ready for this, and I suggest that the rector of the church, the Confirmation instructors and the confirmand's parents should be in agreement about the readiness of the young people being presented. This is one of the reasons why I now require each Confirmand to write a letter addressed to me which both confirms their faith and indicates their desire to be confirmed by the Holy Spirit through the laying on of hands. Letters can be placed in a file and given to me when I arrive. Preferably, I would like to receive them ahead of time and they can be mailed to me at the diocesan office (the address is below).

The letters do not need to be long and they do not need to be typed, but Confirmands need to write about these things:

1. Tell me a little about your faith journey and about your faith in Jesus Christ as your savior.
2. Tell me about a mission trip you have taken or a ministry at your church in which you have been involved and why it has been meaningful to your life of faith.
3. Tell me about your on-going call to be a member of the Body of Christ—what new ministry will you do in your church, or what ongoing ministry will you continue?

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Basically, confirmands need to tell me how they know about God's love for them and how they can learn more, they need to talk about their own faith, and they need to show how all of this changes the way they will act in God's world: love, faith and mission. We will try to have some examples of these up on our website, and we will post the requirements there as well.

The educational requirements remain largely the same: Confirmands need to know essential information related to the Trinity and to the saving work of Jesus Christ, they need to be familiar with the prayers of the church which are included in the Book of Common Prayer (such as the Creeds, the Our Father, the Magnificat, etc.) and they need to have basic knowledge of our common Anglican heritage and history. And of course, confirmands need to have studied the sacred word of God contained in the Holy Scriptures, which means knowing the difference between the Old and New Testaments, knowing what portions of Scripture are read in our liturgy, knowing that the Gospels contain the eyewitness accounts of the life of Christ.

A complete curriculum for Junior High Confirmation is being worked on this year by Mother Laurie Garramone-Rohr and a team of committed leaders. We expect the program to be ready by Convention 2009.

As a kick-off to the new program, Mother Laurie and Tina Mitchell, Assistant Director for Youth Ministries, have scheduled a Confirmation Retreat for young people and their mentors. The Retreat will be held on October 3 – 5, 2008 at Christ the King Spiritual Life Center. More information about this can be found on our diocesan web page: www.albanyeiscopaldiocese.org Please contact Mother Laurie if you have additional questions about Confirmation or the Retreat. Participation is limited to 45, so register early.

I thank all of you for the love and dedication you share with our young people in this process. Your joy and your faith are powerful witness tools to each of them. While it is tempting to think that a mission field must be located somewhere on the other side of the world, much of our mission work is accomplished in our own churches, right in our Sunday school classrooms. Thank you for being a disciple who, by the grace of God, is willing to make more disciples.

Your Brother in Christ,

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