

Open

Journal for Associated Parishes for Liturgy & Mission

Special Edition

GENERAL CONVENTION 2012

FROM THE EDITOR

*You are a member,
but not quite. Excuse me?*

Members of minorities recognize exclusion tactics a mile away, particularly when we are asked to do more in order to be “included,” as if our baptism were not quite legit, or enough. One of the great achievements of the Book of Common Prayer 1979, however, was to recover the ancient understanding of the church as the community of those baptized. As members of the church, the baptized are equally members. No one is more baptized, nor “more a member” than anyone else, and we all have access to all the sacraments, unless grave reason is given to deny them.

From time to time, however, well intentioned folks try to add more and more requirements for this, that and the other thing, more and more hoops to jump through. Should a person have to be confirmed in order to serve in the Vestry? *cont'd pg. 2*

The water is fine

Baptism is full Initiation

by Ruth Meyers

“Holy Baptism is full initiation by water and the Holy Spirit into Christ’s Body the Church” (BCP 1979, p. 298). These words encapsulate a key liturgical principle that undergirds the entire Prayer Book: baptism is the foundation for Christian faith and life. We spend our lives as Christians living into our baptismal death and resurrection with Christ. “We have been buried with Christ by baptism into death,” says the apostle Paul to the Romans, continuing, “so we too might walk in newness of life” (Romans 6:4).

Our baptismal life includes participation in ministry. Not only does the Baptismal Covenant conclude with questions inviting commitment to active Christian discipleship in the world – proclaiming the gospel by word and example, seeking and serving Christ in all persons, striving for justice and peace – the Prayers for the Candidates ask God to “teach them to love others in the power of the Spirit” and “send them into the world in witness to your love.”

What then of confirmation? It no longer completes our incorporation into the Church. Rather, it is a pastoral rite of renewal or reaffirmation, a part of Christian life. One’s ministry begins in baptism; confirmation and the related rites of reception and reaffirmation are responses to significant turning points in one’s journey as a Christian. We trust that the Holy Spirit works through these rites to strengthen an individual for Christian service, but the primary commissioning for ministry has already occurred at baptism.

If baptism is the beginning of Christian ministry, why do the Canons require Episcopalians to be confirmed in order to hold office in The Episcopal Church? As revised since 1979, *cont'd pg. 2*

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The
Water's
Fine



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Should it be required that a member of the household of God, involved in the life of a congregation and elected by it, reaffirm his or her faith in Confirmation, a personal decision, in order to serve?

Some leaders have suggested that Confirmation makes a person more aware of "Anglican identity." This is voodoo theology - wishful thinking out of desperation. My experience of over twenty years of ordained ministry is that Confirmation and its preparatory classes are in no way any guarantee that the confirmed will have even the most basic knowledge of Anglican history and polity, nor of Episcopal governance. And rightly so, for it is inappropriate to expect this from what is designed to be a pastoral rite of a person's mature affirmation of Christian faith.

Confirmation does not give the church the appropriate tools it needs for forming leaders in Anglican and Episcopal polity. Resolutions A041-044 do that. Vote for them.

*The Rev. Dr. Juan Oliver
Assistant for Hispanic Ministry
St. Bede's Santa Fe NM,
and Interim Editor, OPEN*

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*Editor: Todd Townshend
GC Edition Editor: Juan Oliver
Layout: Pamela Rayment
APLM President: Jay Koyle*

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Although we cannot guarantee publication, all submissions (preferably Word files sent electronically), cartoons, letters, and other communications may be sent to djk@tablesong.com

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the Canons make this extraordinarily complicated. First, Canon I.17.1 reiterates the expectation of the Prayer Book that adult Episcopalians will have made "a mature public affirmation of their faith and commitment to the responsibilities of their Baptism" and have received the laying on of hands by a bishop. That sounds simple enough. But the Canon then continues by spelling out a variety of ways by which a person can be considered for the purpose of the Canons "as both baptized and confirmed." Discussions with my students over the past two decades tell me that bishops implement this Canon in vastly different ways, and when students begin hearing the many and varied ways their classmates have been confirmed or received, they are extremely confused.

The complicated definitions of "both baptized and confirmed" reflect different understandings of confirmation as well as a need to ascertain who is confirmed and so eligible to hold office. If we eliminate the requirement for confirmation in order to take office, we would not need such bewildering definitions. Instead, we could use confirmation, reception, and reaffirmation as ritual expressions of renewed and deepened commitment to Christian faith and life, as the 1979 Prayer Book intends them to be.

What about those elected or appointed to office in The Episcopal Church? Certainly we want to ensure that they are committed Christians who carry out their lives in faithful response to their baptismal vows. But is the requirement of confirmation the best way to do so?

Is not a person's commitment to Christ and to The Episcopal Church evident in regular partic-

ipation in the life of the Church? Canon I.17.3 defines a "communicant in good standing" as one who is faithful in corporate worship and in working, praying, and giving for the spread of the kingdom of God. Earlier sections of the Canon define a communicant as a member who has received communion at least three times in the previous year, and a member as one whose baptism has been duly recorded in the Episcopal Church. "Communicant in good standing" might thus be a better measure of one's fitness for office than confirmation, which for some takes place at age twelve.

Resolutions A042 and A043 would amend the Constitution and Canons to require those taking office to be communicants in good standing without specifying whether they must also be confirmed; Resolution A044 asks for a study of whether confirmation should also be removed as a prerequisite for ordination. An essential complement is Resolution A041, which would amend Canon I.17 to require anyone accepting any office in the Church to complete instruction in the history, structure, and governance of the Episcopal Church. I suggest that this is a much stronger requirement than confirmation because it addresses directly the knowledge Episcopalians need to serve faithfully as leaders in their Church.

Adopting these resolutions would restore confirmation, reception, and reaffirmation as pastoral responses to occasions of renewed or deepened faith in Christian life. Adopting these resolutions would make the Canons congruent with the 1979 Prayer Book understanding of baptism as the defining sacrament of Christian life and the foundation for Christian ministry.

*The Rev. Dr. Ruth Meyers
Hodges-Haynes Professor of Liturgics
Church Divinity School of the Pacific*

What about the youth?

How passage of A042 could benefit youth ministry

by **Matthew Johnson**

At the first gathering of youth for confirmation preparation I ask the participants why they want to be confirmed. By far the most common answers are “because my parents are making me” and “so I can be a full member of the church.”

Although the Book of Common Prayer says that baptism is “full initiation by water and the Holy Spirit into Christ’s Body the Church” (BCP 298) and that confirmation is an opportunity for those baptized at an early age to “make a mature public affirmation of their faith and commitment to the responsibilities of their Baptism” (BCP 412), when I’ve talked with parents many make the same response as the youth about confirmation being the rite through which one becomes a full member of the church. I suspect that parents hold this view about confirmation because that’s what they were taught as youth. Church policies such as those addressed by this resolution, policies that require confirmation for various offices and duties, serve to foster that mistaken notion and undermine the understanding of baptism and confirmation expressed in the Prayer Book.

As one who works with youth, the question I’m left with is how the church can help youth to experience the reality that through their baptism they are already full members of the church. Deleting references to confirmation in our canons is the first step. We also have to acknowledge that, although the expectation that our youth will be confirmed is often well-intentioned, confirmation has become a crutch for getting youth into church. Knowing that many youth, even if they’re not involved in the church in any

other way, will come for confirmation preparation has contributed to a complacency in youth ministry. Instead of meeting our youth where they are and developing creative ways of engaging with them, we’ve sat back, confident that we can count on them to come to us for confirmation. Unfortunately many of these youth, once confirmed, won’t return to church until they want to get married. And who could blame them? The de facto requirement that they be confirmed conveys that they aren’t full members and that we don’t value them for who they are; it says that only if they learn (through confirmation instruction) how to be a part of the church on adult terms will we respect them as full members.

It will take some time to reverse these trends regarding the “requirement” of youth confirmation. The potential of doing so

is great: without confirmation as an easy way to get our youth into church, we’ll have to be more creative in our ministry with youth. And going to youth instead of expecting them to come to us will help them to know that they’re full members of the church and that they don’t need confirmation or anything else to earn that membership. Then, for those youth who, secure in the knowledge that the church respects them and acknowledges their full membership, want to go deeper in their faith exploration and make a mature and public affirmation of their baptismal promises, confirmation will still be available for the use it was intended.

*The Rev. Matthew Johnson
Associate Rector,
St. Stephen’s Episcopal Church,
Richmond VA,
and Member-at-large,
APLM Executive Committee*

A National Conference not to be Missed!

The Associated Parishes for Liturgy and Mission
and
The North American Association for the Catechumenate
present

Stirring the Waters: Reclaiming the missional, subversive character of Baptism

Techny Towers in Chicago,
June 27-29, 2013

The conference will gather and equip those who are passionate about careful, deep formation for Christian discipleship, and longing to rediscover the implications of baptism’s centrality in the church’s faith and practice. It will feature inspiring and insightful addresses by leading Episcopalian speakers, practical workshops led by creative and experienced practitioners, and opportunities for focused conversation.

More specific details about the conference will be available this fall at
associatedparishes.org

Until then, mark June 27-29 on your 2013 calendar!

Confirmation is no guarantee of Anglican Identity

an excerpt from a letter to the Bishops of the Episcopal Church from the Anglican Colloquium of the North American Academy of Liturgy

We share your particular concern for formation of an Anglican identity, especially for those who serve in leadership positions, such as warden and vestry. Specific education in Anglican polity is crucial to effective lay leadership and participation in the church. We do not believe, however, that the pastoral rites of confirmation and reception, or the education preparatory to those rites, ought to be the primary vehicle for that formation of Anglican identity.

...Confirmation is not a rite that signifies Anglican identity, still less an act of fealty to the local bishop. It is not an adolescent rite of passage. It originated in late antiquity, in a postbaptismal handlaying and anointing, performed in Rome alone among all the several churches. Through accidents of history, the rite of confirmation became part of the liturgical structure in much, but not all, of the Western church in the course of the middle ages. ... Confirmation, then, grew from a particular place in a particular time, has never been part of the universal church's experience, and has been variously applied even in Anglicanism.

The Fourth International Anglican Liturgical Consultation, meeting at Toronto in 1991, stated, "Confirmation therefore stands as a pastoral office in its own right, and not as a part of the initia-

tory process." This definition, commended by the General Convention in 1994 ... was itself an affirmation of the approach taken by the 1979 Book of Common Prayer, which teaches that confirmation is "a mature public affirmation of their faith and commitment to the responsibilities of their Baptism" with the laying on of hands by the bishop, and that the baptism affirmed in confirmation is itself "full initiation by water and the Holy Spirit into Christ's Body the Church." This is the initiatory theology that we teach in our seminary classrooms, and one that clearly prohibits confirmation from any role as a prerequisite for full participation in the life of the church or as an essential catalyst to the gifts of the Spirit received in baptism. We concur with the principle adopted by the 1991 Anglican Consultation that "confirmation and other rites of affirmation have a continuing pastoral role in the renewal of faith among the baptized but are in no way to be seen as a completion of baptism."

*Submitted by the Rev. Dr. Jim Turrell
member of the North American Academy of
Liturgy and Liturgics
Professor
School of Theology at the
University of the South, Sewanee*

The nine-year old's ministry

by Amy McCreath

A few Sundays ago, I began my sermon by asking the congregation about their experiences watching the Transit of Venus. "How did it make you feel to watch it?" I asked. Many of them had watched this amazing event, and about six people offered brief impressions. The final comment was from a nine year old boy who is an active member of our parish. His observation was that watching it "was like finding a four-leaf clover. You can't believe how lucky you are."

I went on to ask the congregation, "How does it feel to take communion?" The consensus in the congregation? It's like finding a four-leaf clover. You can't be-

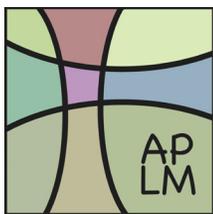
lieve how lucky you are.

That young boy exercised his priesthood that morning. In giving him voice and welcoming his gift, we allowed him to do what God called him to do in baptism. The congregation - which includes four priests, several PhDs, along with doctors, engineers, and spiritual directors - was blessed by his ministry. I hope that one day, that boy decides to be confirmed. But I am clear that God is already powerfully active in and through him, and I do not believe that his confirmation will make him holier, give him preferred status in our parish or in the kingdom of God, or make him more fit to lead. I wonder



how much ministry, how many blessings, how much revelation and gift we short circuit when we misguidedly make confirmation the ticket to authorized offices in our communities?

*The Rev. Amy McCreath
Priest in Charge,
Church of the Good Shepherd,
Watertown MA*



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The Associated Parishes for Liturgy and Mission is an association of people in the The Episcopal Church, the Anglican Church of Canada, and sister churches, who share a passion for liturgy that is vital and transformative, appropriate to the culture and context, and revelatory of God's lively mission in the world.

You can join online at:
<http://associatedparishes.org/joinaplm.html>
or visit the APLM booth at General Convention.

The first 200 new or renewed memberships at the APLM booth will receive an APLM flash drive containing a collection of our materials and resources.

Regular Membership

\$50 per year

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\$10 per year



Washing away stumbling blocks to ministry

by Jennifer Phillips

Like many congregations, ours has found that becoming a lector, intercessor, or Eucharistic minister is, for many youth, a bridge between the ministry of acolyte and other ministries typically exercised by adults within the church. This can actually lead some individuals, who otherwise might have drifted away, to desire confirmation.

The middle adolescent-adult years are often times when people are extra-sensitive about not being hypocritical, and about owning their doubts and skepticism, when maybe saying the Creed is difficult for them as they really pay attention to what they are saying they believe. I encourage such young members to take their time, not rush to be confirmed, but to keep coming and praying and serving until their adult faith takes firm shape (maybe for some at 30, not 16!) But they are baptized full members and their ministry is needed and should be wanted with or without confirmation.

Why should we throw up even small stumbling-blocks in the way of those who desire to learn and to serve?

*The Rev. Jennifer Phillips
Rio Rancho, NM*

Council of APLM

We are a network of Anglicans in North America, established in 1946 to promote liturgical renewal in the Episcopal Church and the Anglican Church of Canada. We also work ecumenically for the renewal of worship and mission in other churches. We develop and promote church practices joining the mission of the church and the regular gathering of the church community for worship so that liturgy shapes, defines, and empowers mission and mission liturgy.

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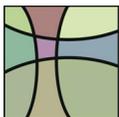
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Business Address



Associated Parishes for Liturgy & Mission
PO Box 543
Hughsonville, NY 12537

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