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WHEN TO CONFIRM, WHEN TO RECEIVE, AND WHY IT MATTERS

A CANONICAL INTERPRETATION

With some of the more recent changes in the Canons, there is significant confusion among the clergy as to when a person should be confirmed or received. The purpose of this memo is to explain the difference between the Sacramental Rite of Confirmation and the Rite of Reception, and to give you some practical information to assist you in identifying the correct rite that should be used.

THE SACRAMENTAL RITE OF CONFIRMATION

The Sacramental Rite of Confirmation is used when an adult member of the Church wishes to appear before the bishop to make a mature, public declaration of faith and to assume direct responsibility for the Baptismal Covenant promises that were made on his or her behalf at baptism.

From the Canons:

It is expected that all adult members of this Church, after appropriate instruction, will have made a mature public affirmation of their faith and commitment to the responsibilities of their Baptism and will have been confirmed or received by the laying on of hands by a Bishop of this Church....¹

Why is confirmation important? In addition to the spiritual importance of making an adult proclamation of faith in community, confirmation is required to do several things in The Episcopal Church. One must be a confirmed member of The Episcopal Church to:

1. Be a lay deputy to General Convention.²
2. Be a lay deputy to Provincial Synod.³
3. Be nominated to the Sacred Order of Deacons⁴
4. Be nominated for the Sacred Order of Priests.⁵
5. Serve on the Standing Committee.⁶
6. Serve on the Diocesan Executive Council.⁷

¹ TEC Constitution and Canons, Title I Canon I.17.1.c. (2022).

² TEC Constitutions and Canons, Article I.4; EDUSC Constitution and Canons, Title I, Canon 5.1.a.

³ TEC Constitutions and Canons, Title I, Canon I.9.8

⁴ TEC Constitutions and Canons, Title III, Canon III.6.2.

⁵ TEC Constitutions and Canons, Title III, Canon III.8.2

⁶ EDUSC Constitution and Canons, Title III Canon 1.1.a

⁷ Ibid.

7. Serve as Chancellor of the Diocese.⁸
8. Serve on the Disciplinary Board.⁹
9. Serve as the Church Attorney in Title IV matters.¹⁰
10. Serve as a lay delegate to Diocesan Convention¹¹
11. Serve on a Vestry or a Mission Committee.¹²
12. Serve as the initial Warden of a Mission.¹³
13. Vote at an annual parish or mission meeting.¹⁴
14. Serve in any of the following Diocesan licensed lay ministries: Pastoral Leader, Worship Leader, Preacher, Eucharistic Minister, Eucharistic Visitor, Evangelist, or Catechist.¹⁵

Who should undergo the Sacramental Rite of Confirmation? Any person who:

1. Was baptized as a child and is now an adult member of The Episcopal Church.¹⁶
2. Has received instruction in the Christian Faith.¹⁷
3. Is penitent for their sins.¹⁸
4. Is ready to affirm their confession of Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior.¹⁹
5. Does not meet one of the exceptions below.

WHEN THE SACRAMENTAL RITE OF CONFIRMATION IS NOT REQUIRED

The following persons do not need to undergo the Sacramental Rite of Confirmation and are considered already confirmed in The Episcopal Church:

1. Any person who was baptized as an adult by a Bishop of this Church.²⁰
2. Any person who is baptized in this Church as an adult and at some time after the Baptism receives the laying on of hands by the Bishop in Reaffirmation of Baptismal Vows.²¹

⁸ EDUSC Constitution and Canons, Title II, Canon 2.

⁹ EDUSC Constitution and Canons, Title VI Canon 2.1.

¹⁰ EDUSC Constitution and Canons, Title VI Canon 3.1.

¹¹ EDUSC Constitution and Canons, Title I, Canon 1 Section 4a.

¹² EDUSC Constitution and Canons, Title VIII Canon 3.2 (See definition of Good Standing in Title XII (21)).

¹³ EDUSC Constitution and Canons, Title VIII Canon 7.2.

¹⁴ EDUSC Constitution and Canons, Title VIII, Canon .2.1 (See definition of Good Standing in Title XII (21)).

¹⁵ TEC Constitutions and Canons, Title III, Canon III.4.1.a.

¹⁶ A “member” of the Church is defined as, “*All persons who have received the Sacrament of Holy Baptism with water in the Name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit, whether in this Church or in another Christian Church, and whose Baptisms have been duly recorded in this Church, are members thereof.*” TEC Constitution and Canons, Title I Canon I.17.1.a. (2022). “*Members sixteen years of age and over are to be considered adult members [of this Church],*” TEC Constitution and Canons, Title I Canon I.17.1.b. (2022).

¹⁷ (The Catechism, BCP p. 860).

¹⁸ Ibid.

¹⁹ Ibid.

²⁰ TEC Constitution and Canons, Title I Canon I.17.1.d. (2022).

²¹ Ibid.

The following persons do not need to undergo the Sacramental Rite of Confirmation and are considered already confirmed generally in the one, holy, catholic, and apostolic Church:

1. Any baptized person who received the laying on of hands at Confirmation (by any Bishop in historic succession [outside The Episcopal Church]).²²
2. Any baptized person who was confirmed in a Church in full communion with this Church.²³
3. Any baptized person who has previously made a mature public commitment in another Church.²⁴

THE RITE OF RECEPTION

The Rite of Reception is used when an adult member of the Church has already been confirmed or made a mature affirmation of faith in a Church other than The Episcopal Church and wishes to join this branch of the one, holy, catholic, and apostolic Church.

Any person who was confirmed generally in the one, holy, catholic, and apostolic Church should be received into The Episcopal Church, including:

1. Any baptized person who received the laying on of hands at Confirmation (by any Bishop in historic succession [outside The Episcopal Church]).²⁵
2. Any baptized person who was confirmed in a Church in full communion with this Church.²⁶
3. Any baptized person who has previously made a mature public commitment in another Church.²⁷

From the Canons:

Any baptized person who received the laying on of hands by a Bishop of this Church at Confirmation or Reception is to be considered, for the purpose of this and all other Canons, as both baptized and confirmed.²⁸

²² TEC Constitution and Canons, Title I Canon I.17.1.d. (2022). These include the Roman Catholic and Orthodox traditions.

²³ TEC Constitution and Canons, Title I Canon I.17.1.c. (2022). TEC's full communion partners include: The Evangelical Lutheran Church in America, the Moravian Church (Northern and Southern provinces), the Old Catholic Churches of the Union of Utrecht, the Philippine Independent Church, the Mar Thoma Syrian Church of Malabar, and the Church of Sweden.

²⁴ TEC Constitution and Canons, Title I Canon I.17.1.c. (2022). Any Christian church that has a rite where a baptized adult publicly proclaims their faith qualifies.

²⁵ TEC Constitution and Canons, Title I Canon I.17.1.d. (2022). See footnote 8.

²⁶ TEC Constitution and Canons, Title I Canon I.17.1.c. (2022). See footnote 9.

²⁷ TEC Constitution and Canons, Title I Canon I.17.1.c. (2022). See footnote 10.

²⁸ TEC Constitution and Canons, Title I Canon I.17.1.d. (2022).