

# *Here & Now*



## *Confirmation in Tikanga Pakeha*

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### *Here & Now: Confirmation in Tikanga Pakeha*

A Report Prepared for the Tikanga Pakeha Ministry Council of the Anglican Church in Aotearoa, New Zealand and Polynesia – Te Hāhi Mihinare ki Aotearoa ki Nui Tireni, ki Nga Moutere o te Moana Nui a Kiwa, by the Reverends Brian and Kirsten Dawson.

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# INTRODUCTION

*“We believe there is a need to refocus, renew and re-establish confirmation as [a] rite that is made available to all young people in the Anglican Church.”<sup>1</sup>*

For centuries confirmation has been a rite immersed in questions. The old saying that it is “a sacrament in search of a theology” remains as apt today as it did whenever the phrase was coined. Debates about the nature and meaning of confirmation have existed since before there was a rite of that name, and they continue in one form or another throughout many churches today. It is into that swirling tide of constant and often rephrased queries that we toss this attempt to gauge the ‘lie of the land’ in early 21<sup>st</sup> century Aotearoa New Zealand.

## The Confirmation Project

This project had its genesis in 2005 when the Professional Anglican Diocesan Youth Staff (PADYS) wrote to the Diocesan Ministry Educators group (AMEN) expressing concern about a “perceived downward trend of interest in and promotion of Confirmation, especially among young people.”<sup>2</sup> Over the next two years the issue moved to the Tikanga Pakeha Ministry Council, where it was formed into a specific project.

In early 2008 we accepted the task of undertaking the Confirmation Project on behalf of TPMC, with original terms of reference including two primary objectives:

- (A) To produce a resource that is both available to and accessible for parishes and other faith communities (including church schools) that are looking for assistance with and information on:
- Confirmation – especially preparation materials useful in specific contexts and situations.
  - Ritual – with a particular emphasis on rites of passage and inclusion for young people.
  - The theological and liturgical understandings that undergird our rites and rituals.
- (B) To provide TPMC with a broad, well-researched and documented overview of the current ‘state of play’ as far as confirmation and rites of passage and inclusion are concerned within Tikanga Pakeha and the wider Anglican Communion, including current practices, opinions and understandings.

In late 2008 these were revised, with the second of the two becoming our first priority.

## Methodology

Much has been written about confirmation through the centuries, but little of it is from an Anglican perspective and even less from an Anglican perspective in Aotearoa New Zealand. Nonetheless we have waded through as much written material as was possible and pertinent, with a particular focus on contemporary thought and scholarship.

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<sup>1</sup> John Heberton and Michael Treston on behalf of the 2005 PADYS group. Letter to AMEN, 2005.

<sup>2</sup> Heberton and Treston.

It became clear during our research that many people (both clergy and lay) had little or no knowledge of the historical and theological backgrounds to what we call ‘confirmation’. Having considered several possible approaches, we made the decision to produce the resource (now our second priority in this project) and this report as two separate yet interrelated documents. The former is designed for anyone interested in learning a little about the framework our approach to confirmation has been built around. We hope it will prove a useful tool both for those engaged in confirmation and preparing people for it, and those who are simply intrigued. We also hope that the resource document will be used as a companion piece to this report. There are various points below on which we have provided an expanded explanation or exploration in the resource.

This report, on the other hand, is focused on the ‘here and now’. In this document we explore what is happening, where it is happening, and how. Occasionally we write bluntly and perhaps with less diplomacy than in the resource. This is because we intend this report to be about the facts, rather than a sales pitch in favour of the status quo.

We are indebted to the work and thoughts of those who have wrestled with this topic in our own church and place, in particular Rev’d Mark Chamberlain, who has provided access to his work towards a Master of Ministry degree through Otago University.<sup>3</sup>

For the most part this project has relied on personal interviews and conversations, both one-to-one and in groups. To this end we have met with groups of clergy in most dioceses, lay people in several dioceses, the bishops of all three Tikanga, the PADYS, the TPMC Executive and a wide variety of others over a two year period.

Alongside the interviews and conversations we have produced and publicised two online surveys, one for clergy and one for those who have been confirmed during the past five years. In total ninety-one clergy and forty-six ‘recently confirmed’ responded.

While most of our research has focused on *what* people are doing, *how* often and with *which* resources, we have also spent some time exploring *why* they are doing it. This takes us to the “*what is confirmation*” question – a question we have been advised not to dwell on. While we have taken that instruction on board and attempted to focus primarily on *what is happening* instead of *why it is happening*, two considerations have led us to do some exploration of the *why* questions and include our conclusions within this work:

1. Any attempt to produce a list of resources for preparation and include information on their type and helpfulness demands some understanding of what it is that is being prepared for. A variety of Roman Catholic resources, for example, are excellently structured and produced, but the confirmation they are preparing for is not the confirmation many would understand our church to be offering.
2. People want some answers. Throughout our conversations and interviews it was the question “*what is confirmation?*” that came up most often and most passionately, with or without prompting from us.

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<sup>3</sup> Stephen Mark Chamberlain, *Forming Faith: A comparative study of two methods of confirmation preparation and the ways they facilitate faith formation in candidates*. M.Min. Thesis, Department of Theology and Religious Studies, Otago University, 2008.

## **A Part, Not All**

This is, as prescribed by the terms of reference, a Tikanga Pakeha project. While we do address some points within Tikanga Maori and Pasifika, the focus of this work is squarely on Tikanga Pakeha and, as will become clear, that alone provides variety enough.

The distinction between a *part* of the church rather than the *whole* is important. There are, as we note below, major differences in understanding and practice between our three Tikanga and while these are both allowed for and enshrined within our Standing Resolutions, they will make any future movements difficult.

It is also important to note that this is an *Anglican* project. Some mention is made in the resource of other denominations, and in particular the widening gulf between us and them concerning confirmation, but little effort has been made to fully explore the contemporary movements in confirmation practice that are most definitely occurring in other churches.

## **Rites of Passage**

A note about this in the introduction to this report seems important as there are some significant issues surrounding it. We address these below, so suffice to note here that our discussions and efforts to clarify the matter over the past year and a half have led us to believe that what is being sought does not strictly meet the criteria for ‘rites of passage’.<sup>4</sup>

What the terms of reference cited above ask for are resources focused on “Ritual – with a particular emphasis on rites of passage and inclusion for young people.” It has been made clear during this project that what this means is specific *rituals* or liturgical events focused on significant life events. These might more usefully be described as ‘rituals of passage’ and we have to state from the beginning that we have not provided these resources.

In an interim report to TPMC we recommended that the terms of reference be revised “with an eye to making the study of rites of passage and inclusion a separate project.” Our reasons for doing so were three-fold:

- It was clear that there is more than enough work to do on confirmation alone without adding another subject to the mix.
- One of the complicating factors in the common confusion surrounding confirmation is the question of whether it is a rite of passage or not.
- Our understanding of this aspect of the project is that it was intended to be primarily a collating task; that is we were to find appropriate resources already available to assist those preparing for confirmation and / or other ‘rites of passage’ and list them with notes about their focus, suitability for large or small groups, timeframe, etc. Very early on in this project it became obvious that any existing resources offering rituals of passage (for young people or anyone else) were few and far between if they existed at all.

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<sup>4</sup> For more on these criteria see below. Also Chamberlain, p. 23, and David E. Crean, ‘Journey to Adulthood’ in Susan Kajawa, *Disorganised Religion: The Evangelisation of Youth and Young Adults*. (Cambridge: Cowley, 1998), 121ff.

At the conclusion of this project our concerns about the first two points remain and the third has proven entirely accurate. To date we have received *no* examples of such rituals of passage, despite having requested them wherever we have been. Anecdotally it seems that there *are* some examples of such rites in use within our church, but clearly, for whatever reasons, people have chosen not to provide them for wider scrutiny or use.

This of course raises another issue of which we also made TPMC aware at an early stage: Any such ritual that is in use within the church would require episcopal authorisation as an experimental liturgy unless it were adopted for use by the whole church at General Synod level. There are undoubtedly plenty of potentially helpful liturgies available in works provided by such authors as Dorothy McRae McMahan and in resources such as *Human Rites*,<sup>5</sup> however none of them have been authorised for use in Anglican contexts.

Collating liturgical resources and producing them are two very different tasks. Our recommendation was and still is that the Tikanga Pakeha Liturgical Working Group be asked in consultation with others – including the Anglican Youth Network and Schools Office – to produce and promote a series of liturgical celebrations for key points in people’s lives.

## **The Report**

Our goal in this report is to provide as detailed an account as possible of the current ‘state of play’ concerning confirmation in Tikanga Pakeha. We have attempted to do this, but wish to strongly note that what is happening now only makes sense with some knowledge of what has happened before and why. In the accompanying resource we have sought to provide this information, and in doing so offer a brief introduction to the frameworks and foundations around and upon which our current practice and understandings are based.

In the broadest possible terms, this report follows the following outline:

- **What’s Changed?** We begin by comparing confirmation statistics over a forty year period.
- **What Are They Saying?** We look at the responses we have received from those we have met with and spoken to, and those who have responded to our online surveys.
- **What Are They Doing?** We explore what is happening in terms of preparation and what people are looking for by way of resources.
- **What Does It All Mean Anyway?** Against advice perhaps, we look at what understandings people have of confirmation and how these shape their entire approach to it.
- **Rites of Passage.** We explain why this is an unhelpful approach to confirmation and what sort of rituals people are asking for.

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<sup>5</sup> Hannah Ward and Jennifer Wild, *Human Rites: Worship Resources for an Age of Change*. (London: Mowbray, 1995).

Throughout this report we have attempted to note questions and issues as they arise and, on occasion, some thoughts on the implications of what is being suggested.

### **In Closing**

It is inevitable that there will be some points, issues and understandings that we have missed or glossed over too briefly in some people's opinions. The reality is that academics and practitioners have been studying confirmation for centuries and still new insights and ideas are being generated. One of us has been studying this issue for nearly twenty years and will tell you he has only just begun to scratch the surface of what is undoubtedly a complex and often confusing subject.

Throughout our work we have tried to remain focused on the goals set for us and the aspiration behind them that, somehow, this will lead to some practical, tangible outcomes for the Church of today and tomorrow. Hopefully, to some extent, we have succeeded in providing the beginnings of those outcomes.

Finally, it must be noted that while we have some considerable amount invested in this topic – and some relatively firm views and opinions that go with such an investment – we have endeavoured as much as possible to avoid unduly overlaying our own preferred theological, liturgical and sociological interpretations on this work. Where we have put forward strongly ideas and ideologies very similar to those we hold ourselves, we have also tried to include, with equal strength, the opposing points of view. The result, therefore, is not a clear-cut argument for or against any one position, although some may well find such an argument herein. Our focus is to put forward the facts as we find and interpret them, their use or otherwise is now in the hand of others.

Brian and Kirsten Dawson  
September 2009

## WHAT'S CHANGED?

Who we are and what we do is largely shaped by who we were and what we did. One does not need to be a historian to know that there are fewer confirmations now than there were 'back then'. Of course, working out just what the difference is, and when exactly 'back then' might have been, is a slightly different matter.

Our first task here is to work out how many people are being confirmed today and compare that to some fixed points in the past. For our purposes we are beginning with 1965,<sup>6</sup> the tail-end of the so-called 'baby boom' and beginning of the 'Generation X' years. We are also looking at 1985, two decades later, five years after the General Synod decision to formally remove confirmation as the 'gate-way' to communion, and the year that the International Anglican Consultation's first meeting called for baptism to be the only point of entry to the eucharist. Finally we will compare those previous two eras with the latest statistics available from each diocese before offering some observations concerning factors that have influenced these results.

### 1965

<b>Total Confirmed:</b>	<b>Dunedin</b>	<b>Christchurch</b>	<b>Nelson</b>	<b>Wellington</b>	<b>Waiapu</b>	<b>Waikato</b>	<b>Auckland</b>
	665	1837	444	2257	1487	1366	2701

This swift glance at the 1965 figures shows a rite in common use (and some rather busy bishops). Not all dioceses are able to break down their statistics from the 1960s, but where that is possible we can see clearly that the vast majority confirmed in or around 1965 were under 18 years old. Other trends are obvious also.

	<b>Dunedin</b>	<b>Christchurch</b>	<b>Nelson</b>	<b>Wellington</b>	<b>Waiapu</b>	<b>Waikato</b>	<b>Auckland</b>
<b>Under 18</b>			339	1698	1212	1031	
<b>Over 18</b>			105	559	275	335	
<b>Male</b>		800	181	1019	646	622	
<b>Female</b>		1037	263	1238	841	744	
<b>School Confirmation</b>		195		78		182	
<b>Parish Confirmation</b>	665	1642	444	2179		1184	

While it would be helpful to see the Auckland break-downs in particular, there are nonetheless some interesting trends evident. The predominance of young candidates and women is no surprise; confirmation has traditionally been seen as a rite for youth and the fact that more women are involved in the church than men will shock no one. The low numbers of school-based confirmations compared to parishes is in stark contrast to the perception that schools confirm more candidates than parishes. This figure may be misleading, however, as the statistics only show how many were confirmed *in* schools, not how many students from and prepared by church schools may have been confirmed at a parish church or cathedral.

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<sup>6</sup> In each case we have used the figures supplied by the diocese. There are some disparities due to differing recording practices and year-ends.



There seems little doubt that confirmation was popular in 1965, but an important comparison figure is that for baptisms:

<b>Total</b>	<b>Dunedin</b>	<b>Christchurch</b>	<b>Nelson</b>	<b>Wellington</b>	<b>Waiapu</b>	<b>Waikato</b>	<b>Auckland</b>
<b>Confirmed:</b>	665	1837	444	2257	1487	1366	2701
<b>Total Baptised</b>	964	2655	829	3622	2549	2140	4041

There are obviously more baptisms than confirmations. The significance of this is that 1965 represents the end of the post-war baby boom, so numbers in the 12 – 15 year age range were high. It is almost impossible to quantify precisely, but if we were to take the 1965 figures and extrapolate them into future, we could argue that approximately 64% of those baptised went on to confirmation, either as young people or adults.

### 1985

<b>Total</b>	<b>Dunedin</b>	<b>Christchurch</b>	<b>Nelson</b>	<b>Wellington</b>	<b>Waiapu</b>	<b>Waikato</b>	<b>Auckland</b>
<b>Confirmed:</b>	198	507	130	1339	367	173	768

What a difference twenty years can make! The 3482 confirmations in 1985 represent a 63% decrease over two decades. Clearly this is the result of more than just ecclesiastical changes, and the break-downs show further trends. Again, not all dioceses could supply the information requested.

	<b>Dunedin</b>	<b>Christchurch</b>	<b>Nelson</b>	<b>Wellington</b>	<b>Waiapu</b>	<b>Waikato</b>	<b>Auckland</b>
<b>Under 16<sup>7</sup></b>		128 <sup>8</sup>	172	979	141		351
<b>Over 16</b>		56	43	360	275		184
<b>Male</b>	71	224	55	817	116	67	
<b>Female</b>	127	280	75	522	251	106	
<b>School Confirmation</b>		123		473		49	233
<b>Parish Confirmation</b>	198	384	130	866		124	535

We can see the downward trends in almost all categories, *except* the schools. The addition of the Auckland statistics makes a significant difference here, but aside from Waikato - which sees school-based confirmations fall by 73% - most hold reasonably firm, with Wellington, largely on the basis of Wanganui Collegiate, leaps up by more than nearly four hundred candidates. Otherwise, the male / female statistics remain relatively static as do those for over / under sixteen year olds.

It should be remembered that this is five years after the formal decision to remove confirmation as a prerequisite for first communion, and fifteen years after Waiapu diocese became the first to begin experimenting with admission to communion prior to confirmation. During that time major upheavals were happening within the Church both theologically and liturgically, and Christian initiation was at the centre of the storm.

<sup>7</sup> By 1985 returns had changed from over/under 18 to over/under 16.

<sup>8</sup> Not all the Christchurch returns show ages.

In the wider society, the late 1960s ushered in the ‘God is dead’ movement and the mid to late 1970s saw the beginnings of a downward trend in church attendances across the board. The baptism figures for 1985 witness to the effect of this on the Church.

<b>Total</b>	<b>Dunedin</b>	<b>Christchurch</b>	<b>Nelson</b>	<b>Wellington</b>	<b>Waiapu</b>	<b>Waikato</b>	<b>Auckland</b>
<b>Confirmed:</b>	198	507	130	1339	367	173	768
<b>Total Baptised</b>	384	1120	296	1846	1365	775	1980

Of course, a major reason for the drop in baptism numbers was the end of the baby boom in the mid-1960s, however a clear trend is emerging of baptism numbers declining compared to the birth rate. Even clearer, however, is the downward trend in confirmations. By 1985 there were 55% fewer confirmations than baptisms, compared to 36% in 1965, this despite the fact that many parishes and clergy were still requiring confirmation prior to first communion.<sup>9</sup>

### Latest Available Year

We asked each diocese for its most up to date statistics, and which year that was depends on which diocese you are referring to. In general the following figures are from 2007 or 2008, but some are from 2006.

<b>Total</b>	<b>Dunedin</b>	<b>Christchurch</b>	<b>Nelson</b>	<b>Wellington</b>	<b>Waiapu</b>	<b>Waikato</b>	<b>Auckland</b>
<b>Confirmed:</b>	7	101	9	65	31	52	189

Between 1985 and the latest available figures the total number of confirmations has declined by 87%. Diocese by diocese, the percentages are:

	<b>Dunedin</b>	<b>Christchurch</b>	<b>Nelson</b>	<b>Wellington</b>	<b>Waiapu</b>	<b>Waikato</b>	<b>Auckland</b>
<b>1985</b>	198	507	130	1339	367	173	768
<b>Latest</b>	7	174	9	65	31	52	189
<b>Down</b>	96.5%	76%	93%	95%	92.5%	70%	75.5%

Breaking down the figures further reveals more trends emerging. Again not all dioceses could provide this information:

	<b>Dunedin</b>	<b>Christchurch</b>	<b>Nelson</b>	<b>Wellington</b>	<b>Waiapu</b>	<b>Waikato</b>	<b>Auckland</b>
<b>Under 16</b>	2				14	22	85
<b>Over 16</b>	5				17	30	104
<b>Male</b>	1	73			10	15	92
<b>Female</b>	6	101			21	37	97
<b>School Confirmation</b>		17 <sup>10</sup>		11	9	10	72
<b>Parish Confirmation</b>	7	157		54	22	42	117

<sup>9</sup> As we note in the resource accompanying this report, it was not until the 1990s that Tikanga Pakeha achieved virtually 100% standardisation over this.

<sup>10</sup> This figure does not include candidates from Christ’s College or St Margaret’s College. The confirmations for these schools now take place in the Cathedral with other candidates from parishes.

These figures clearly show significant decreases across the board, including in schools. A stark example is that in 1985 four hundred and fifty candidates were confirmed at Wanganui Collegiate, while in 2008 there were five.<sup>11</sup> It is also clear that, generally speaking, the provincial dioceses have seen a greater decline than the metropolitan ones, although, as we shall see below, there are some significant social factors influencing that difference.

With confirmations falling by between 70% and 97%, we should see a corresponding drop in baptisms:

<b>Total Confirmed:</b>	<b>Dunedin</b>	<b>Christchurch</b>	<b>Nelson</b>	<b>Wellington</b>	<b>Waiapu</b>	<b>Waikato</b>	<b>Auckland</b>
	7	101	9	65	31	52	189
<b>Total Baptised</b>	69	677	89	412	202	241	655

These figures show a drop in baptism numbers of approximately 70% since 1985, just slightly lower than the percentage drop for confirmations. Looking at the wider statistics, however, we should note that both the population and the birth rate have risen significantly since 1985, making the decreases more significant, particularly considering that the percentage of confirmations to baptisms sits at just 19%.

### **Influencing Factors**

As already noted, we must not underestimate the effect the social and cultural upheavals of the past forty years have had on baptism and confirmation. During that time we have witnessed a quantum shift from modernity to post-modernity and an almost complete reordering of our society, especially within the Pakeha spectrum (indeed the word ‘Pakeha’ itself would have been seldom heard in 1965). Added to this have been shifts in population bases with the continuing ‘urban-drift’, rises and falls in the birth rate, a significant increase in overall population and a major decrease in average church attendances.

Cultural shifts alone cannot account for the decreases in confirmation, however, especially over the last twenty years. It is clear from the declining number of confirmations compared to baptisms that the rite itself is becoming less ‘popular’, or at least, less-practiced.

The resource we have produced to stand alongside this report outlines some of the shifts in Christian initiation and confirmation between 1970 and the 1990s. There can be no doubt that removing confirmation as a barrier to communion has had a major effect on the practice of both rites. Anecdotal evidence suggests that the admission of unconfirmed children to communion was well entrenched by the late 1980s and universal by the mid 1990s. This remains the case today, yet statistically there is an emerging slight upwards trend for confirmation. In Waiapu diocese, for example, there were 16 confirmations in 2002 compared to 31 in 2008. The rise is slight numerically, but proportionally it is a 94% increase in six years. Obviously not all dioceses have had the same experience, but anecdotal evidence reinforces the impression that confirmation is regaining some prominence.<sup>12</sup>

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<sup>11</sup> The former figure is unusually high, even for 1965, but there appears to be no reason other than that to doubt its accuracy.

<sup>12</sup> This was certainly the view of the majority of bishops spoken to during the course of this project.

Before we declare a revival, it is worth taking another look at the latest figures and some of the factors influencing them. One of these is the renewed push for younger ordination candidates in most dioceses in recent years. With the percentage of confirmations to baptisms dropping steadily since the 1980s, there is a high likelihood that a significant percentage of those seeking ordination twenty years later will not have been confirmed as adolescents, but canonically they will have no choice but to go through a confirmation rite prior to being ordained. When we consider that a number of those ordinands have come from other denominational backgrounds where confirmation is either non-existent or even less common than for Anglicans, the potential for a spike in confirmation figures increases. We have not gone down the track of collecting all these statistics, but it has been clear in our conversations and interviews that this has been a factor.

As noted in the accompanying resource, while some member churches in the Anglican Communion have relaxed the rules regarding confirmation and the eucharist, a number have not, especially within the Pacific, Asian and African churches. This is significant when we consider the swift rise in immigration figures over the past twenty years, especially from Asia and Africa. Many clergy have reported to us that the majority of the requests for confirmation they receive come from immigrant families wanting their children confirmed before they receive communion.

Seen through this lens, the latest available figures begin to make some sense. The metropolitan dioceses, especially Auckland and Christchurch, have seen a markedly lower drop in confirmations compared to Dunedin, Nelson and Waiapu. Correspondingly, these are two areas of high Asian and southern African immigration. Auckland also has several parishes straddling Tikanga Pakeha and Tikanga Pasifika, with the latter still commonly requiring confirmation prior to first communion.

It is very hard to quantify, but from our research and conversations it seems clear that a further factor influencing the practice or otherwise of confirmation is the emphasis placed on it by the local bishop. If a bishop encourages confirmations, more confirmations happen. If a bishop says nothing, an increase is less likely.

Finally, and this really goes almost without saying, the data clearly indicates that confirmation is still regarded primarily as a rite for youth. While the change in recording procedures from 18 to 16 has had a significant effect, the reality is the percentage of confirmands between 16 and 18 remains high, with far fewer in the 30 plus age range. There is simply no getting around the fact that we have fewer young people in our church and churches today than we did twenty, thirty or forty years ago. With confirmation continuing to be encouraged primarily among the young, fewer young people mean fewer confirmations. It may not be quite that simple, but it certainly is a major factor.

The data is clear and not at all surprising. Both confirmations and baptisms have been decreasing steadily over the past forty years as our church and culture has rapidly changed. Statistics, of course, can only tell us so much. To get a better picture of what's actually happening we need to talk to those involved.

## WHAT ARE THEY SAYING?

While the resource accompanying this report offers a wide range of background literature and information, in preparing this report we are relying substantially on anecdotal (albeit intentionally gathered) evidence to back up the statistics in the previous section. Apart from Mark Chamberlain's work on confirmation preparation, there is very little research to draw on from our context.

To get the information we needed we met with and interviewed groups and individuals from throughout the country. Alongside the personal contact, we also undertook a survey of both clergy and lay people who had been confirmed within the past five years. In total, 46 lay people and 91 clergy responded to those surveys.

In this section we will explore the responses of those spoken with and surveyed, as well as looking at where they come from and – in the case of the recently confirmed - the context of their confirmations. Many of the questions posed related to preparation for confirmation and we will look further at those responses in another section. At this point we will focus on the confirmation experiences of those who responded and, in the case of clergy, how well resourced they felt. We will look at the lay and ordained responses separately as each represent some unique features.

### The Recently Confirmed

As already noted, 46 people who had been confirmed within the previous five years responded to the survey. As this was a voluntary survey, we had no real control over where the respondents came from. In the end, all but one diocese was represented.

Dunedin	Christchurch	Nelson	Wellington	Waipapu	Waikato	Auckland
2	6	3	15		9	11

44% of respondents described the parish or ministry unit in which they were confirmed as *suburban*, 21% *small town*, 20% *rural*, 13% *inner city* and 2% *school*.

65% described the parish or ministry unit in which they were confirmed as *vicar supported*, 20% *local ministry* or *mutual ministry*, 13% *school*, and 2% *cathedral*.

When confirmed, 18% were aged between 10-12, 26% 13-16, 13% 17-20, 10% 21-29, 33% 30+.

These age ranges are of significant interest. There were several 10 year olds among the respondents and in our wider gathering of recent statistics we came across a number of 11-12 year olds and a single 9 year old. Confirmation at 12-14 was common pre-1980, but the original guidelines for confirmation following the advent of admission to communion recommended 16 as a minimum age. While this is no longer a formal guideline for our church we were surprised to find so many under-16 year olds given what confirmation is normally considered to be in our church today (more on this below).

In terms of the confirmation experience, most respondents reported that the confirmation service was a highlight for them, with sharing something of their testimony and the actual

laying on of hands coming through as the two most common high-points. It is clear that for most respondents confirmation was a significant experience. This is not greatly surprising, of course, as those for whom it meant little would be unlikely to respond to our request for information. We also relied on clergy to advertise and distribute the survey forms, which may have skewed some results.

8 respondents reported that confirmation had made little or no difference to their life, while 5 failed to answer this question. The majority, however, reported some change, with several noting a significant difference. Comments included:

*Gave me a new fire for God*  
*It has given me a sense of belonging and made me a stronger person who sticks to what they believe in*  
*Lots of spiritual growth to where I am now helping children in our parish & supporting others searching [for] God & asking questions.*  
*A great feeling of being closer to God*  
*It has helped me to become more focused and serves as a constant reminder to me of what I promised.*

3 respondents also reported that the main difference was that they could receive communion.

As we shall explore below, research has shown a correlation between the experience of the confirmand and the method of preparation utilised. This is borne out in the responses to our survey. The inclusion of a significant number of very young candidates raises some questions.

**The Clergy**

As noted above, 91 clergy responded to our online survey representing all 7 Tikanga Pakeha dioceses. We also spoke to numerous clergy both in groups and one-on-one over the course of eighteen months. As the survey asked specific questions we will explore those results first.

The number of respondents from each diocese differs considerably, although overall it probably is not too far off being proportionally accurate:

Dunedin	Christchurch	Nelson	Wellington	Waiapu	Waikato	Auckland
1	19	9	11	9	13	29

40% of respondents described their setting as *suburban*, 19% *small town*, 19% *rural*, 17% *inner city* and 5% *other*.

74% of respondents described their ministry context as *vicar supported*, 11% *local ministry*, 9% *school*, 6% *other*.

19% of respondents reported that they had *last* prepared candidates *less than 6 months ago*, 21% *in the last year*, 16.5% *1-2 years*, 13% *2-4 years*, 21% *5-10 years*, 9.5% *more than 10 years*.<sup>13</sup>

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<sup>13</sup> Given that it is more likely that those responding would have had some recent experience these figures are not overly surprising.

When asked how many candidates they had prepared over the past 5 years clear differences emerged between those from school contexts and others. Answers from the school contexts (most likely to be chaplains) ranged from none to 300. Two reported 20+ but the interesting figure is the 5 who responded *none*, representing 55.5% of the total school respondents. From this group 3 were among those who reported it had been 5 – 10 years since they last prepared a confirmation candidate, and 2 more than 10 years.

These figures strongly challenge the notion that confirmation is still widely practiced in church schools. While the figures quoted in the previous section indicate that there are still a steady number of school-based confirmations, it appears this statistic is being held up by a few schools confirming significant numbers, while a number of others do few or no confirmations at all. In total school-based respondents accounted for 631 candidates prepared over the past 5 years.<sup>14</sup>

From among the other respondents, all who reported preparing 10 or more candidates for confirmation in the past 5 years were from vicar-supported or cathedral contexts. In total the breakdown of candidates was:

School	Vicar/Cathedral	Local Ministry	Other
631	404	5	9

In terms of candidate’s ages, clergy reported a spread from 9 to 72. As many clergy only provided age ranges rather than a breakdown we cannot accurately state the percentage of adult-youth confirmations. The wider (official) statistics from diocesan year books show that under 20 year olds are still the most common age group for confirmation, but nowhere near the percentage they were two decades ago. Those official figures show that this remains true when school-based confirmations are subtracted from the total. This, however, is not so much the case in our survey results, with confirmations for those over 25 outnumbering teens and adolescents after the school results are removed.

Many of the most interesting responses from clergy related to preparing candidates for confirmation, and we will explore this below. In terms of how well trained clergy believe themselves to be for confirmation in general, 65% reported that *no* time had been devoted to confirmation during their training for ordination, 23% *very little*, 8% *some*, and 4% *a lot*.<sup>15</sup>

When asked if their diocese had any guidelines for confirmation, 60% either did not answer the question or chose *don’t know*, 15% *no*, and 25% *yes*. Within these answers every diocese is represented in *all categories*!<sup>16</sup> When further asked whether their bishop had made her or his expectations concerning confirmation clear, 45% failed to respond or said *don’t know*, 33% *no*, and 22% *yes*. All dioceses were represented in the no, don’t know or failed to respond groups and 5 in the yes responses.

When asked how important they *personally* believed confirmation to be, 5% responded *essential*, 61% *important*, 13% *not very important*, 4% *of minor importance*, and 1% *a waste of time*. 16% of respondents answered that they believed *some form* of personal affirmation,

<sup>14</sup> Note, however, that 300 of these came from one school.  
<sup>15</sup> A question we failed to ask was how long they had been ordained. All those reporting they had received a lot or some training in confirmation were from vicar-supported parishes.  
<sup>16</sup> Including our own, where, to the best of our knowledge, no such guidelines exist.

commissioning or “faith reinforcing” service was very important, but not necessarily confirmation. This was a theme that was repeated often in our conversations, as we shall discuss below.

When asked what they hoped would be the *outcomes* of this project, clergy responses included:

*To have a wide discussion about the purpose of rites of initiation into adulthood for our communities.*

*Fairly full raw data to be available for participants to view rather than abbreviated less than transparent results/ summary.*

*I'd like to see Confirmation become a more important rite of passage for people as young as 11.*

*Renewed awareness of Confirmation.*

*To change canon law to require confirmation to be a member of vestry, Lay leader, etc.*

*A bishop's directive regarding the place of confirmation and guidelines for processes if necessary.*

*Clarity of the biblical & theological significance of confirmation in the context of 21st century society.*

*Stats on how many people are being confirmed - is it still relevant?*

*A resource which is applicable to a wide range of people wanting confirmation (I am often asked for resources in my role and have to say there isn't much out there (apart from the old Christian Initiation Kit)).*

*A deeper understanding of the importance and significance of Confirmation.*

*An updated resource. Some uniformity in preparation and approach.*

*Clarification of what it is , moving it away from the teen years and making some other rite for the exploration of faith for those in their teens who want to make some preparatory commitment An attachment to the rite which speaks of the unfolding of the understanding of the nature of commitment to the community. A clear understanding that it is not just a rite to reassure parents or grandparents. That it is full blown adult commitment which then has implications for ethical life and choices. That something akin to the catechumenate be involved here and its locus is in the Paschal cycle.*

*More resources available for Confirmation preparation, and perhaps some clearer theology! With so many people coming to the Anglican church from other traditions it is helpful to know what we are doing and how this ritual might support people on their faith journey.*

*I'd like to know to what extent confirmation is seen as a part of baptism - or at least linked to baptism - or if confirmation is seen more as 'classes to teach how things are done in the (Anglican) Church.'*

*Clarity after a few decades of blurring!*

*A consistent national policy and standard expectations across the Anglican Church in this country.*

*Having clear guidelines.*



*Some agreed statements about the value of Confirmation for the various age groups to whom it is offered.*

*Either promote confirmation or dump it but don't leave it as a legacy of yesterday.*

*Clarify just what is appropriate for acknowledging ones faith with a ritual(s). Still have child baptisms but a ritual that enables a commitment to ones faith in the church community as an adult. So a reaffirmation of baptism as an adult makes sense to me and the Bishop doesn't need to be involved, but still recorded and the bishop informed of the intentions.*

*An in-depth examination of the efficacy of this ceremony*

The list (which is not exhaustive) makes interesting reading and bears out much of what has also been said to us face-to-face. Many of the other responses to the survey requested assistance with preparation while some suggested preparation options that are patently unsuitable for confirmation. We shall explore these below.

### **The Conversations**

In our face-to-face conversations, the variety found in the survey responses was as great and, in many cases, even greater. The majority of those spoken to were older clergy (50+) who were trained and ordained either prior to the 1980 General Synod decision or not long afterwards. Many spoke of the differences since confirmation was removed as the official 'gate-way' to the communion rail, and some remained convinced this was a mistake. As one priest put it, "we did all the right things theologically and all the wrong things pastorally." This summed up the attitude among some that the removal of the confirmation – eucharist link has led to confusion and a loss of meaning around confirmation.

While many clergy report an increase in adult confirmations (meaning mostly 30+), there is still the general attitude that this is a young person's rite, with a significant number talking about the perceived potential for confirmation to become an evangelistic tool for use with teenagers. Some talked about the difficulties arising with the varying ages of confirmation candidates. One captured this issue neatly; "There's a big difference between 12 and 18, and an even bigger one between 18 and 50!" However, others described this as an advantage with a 'coming together' of old(er) and young(er).

A number of those spoken to equated confirmation with church schools, with many uncertain whether this was a helpful thing. There were questions about how those being confirmed in schools were being linked to the wider Church in general and local parishes in particular and a common belief that the majority of school confirmands do not continue their church involvement post-schooling. Others noted that this was also the case with some confirmed in parishes, so it may not be necessarily a 'school issue'.

Several clergy raised the issue of regular reaffirmations / renewals of baptismal promises. How many parishes make a point of doing this at *every* baptism and, at least, at Easter? It was noted that other provinces have provided guidelines for appropriate feast days where baptisms should be reaffirmed,<sup>17</sup> and some questioned whether this would be a more appropriate way to offer opportunities for such. Others felt this would not provide a 'special'

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<sup>17</sup> In the accompanying resource we discuss the approach to this in the Episcopalian Church prayer book.

enough occasion, and that the importance surrounding confirmation because the bishop was there added to its significance. This also led to some comments about the inclusion of renewals alongside confirmation and whether this detracted from the importance of the confirmations, especially when bishops invited anyone who wanted to renew their baptism to come forward, regardless of whether they had gone through the same preparation as the confirmation candidates.

Several people (both lay and ordained) questioned the word *confirmation* and some associated terms such as *catechumenate*. They thought these sounded like very ‘churchy’ words and maybe they should be re-thought. This leads to a separate conversation about *who* confirmation is for? Is it for those already part of the Church – and supposedly familiar with the ‘churchy’ words – or is it for those on the edges or just coming in? Historically the answer to this (officially) has been the former, but is this still the case? A number of people (clergy and youth workers especially) described their use of confirmation as a tool to connect the relatively un-churched, often as a culmination of an Alpha course experience. Others believed this was an inappropriate use of the rite. We would argue that it depends what you think confirmation *is*, a subject further explored below.

The question was raised several times; “what’s the point of confirmation if you were baptised as an adult?” Again, this depends on what you think confirmation is.

As with those who responded to our survey, our conversations revealed that most believe confirmation is still of some importance. There is no great consensus, however, on who it is most important, or appropriate, for. A significant number see it as largely an adult rite, for those 25+, others argue it is an important *rite of passage* for youth (see below), while some do not want to lose the opportunity to offer something similar to adolescents. A reasonably large minority question whether confirmation has any value at all, although without exception they all believe there needs to be *some* form of liturgical rite for those baptised as infants to reaffirm their faith and commitments. Over and over again these discussions came back to meaning.

### **The Role of the Bishop**

In the resource accompanying this report we note that Anglicans are now alone in requiring a bishop for confirmation, and the recommendation of the 1991 International Anglican Liturgical Consultation – moved by our own Archbishop of the time – was that bishops be given the authority to delegate this role to a presbyter.

Several people followed this viewpoint in our conversations. In our discussion with the PADYS in particular this was a strongly voiced belief from one person, who actually seemed to argue that we should go a step further and remove the requirement for *any* ordained leadership in the rite of confirmation.<sup>18</sup> Others were more inclined to follow the IALC position, although none appeared to be arguing from the same rationale as the 1991 Toronto Statement.<sup>19</sup>

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<sup>18</sup> To be fair, however, he was describing confirmation in ways never encountered within Anglicanism.

<sup>19</sup> In that case a significant concern was that the confusion between confirmation and Christian initiation was sometimes exacerbated by the episcopal requirement.

Most people we talked to, however, believed the involvement of the bishop to be an important aspect of the confirmation experience. They described this in terms of the wider Church connection the bishop represents and the significance his or her presence adds to the occasion. Those recently confirmed also often described the bishop's involvement as significant, with several describing it as a highlight for them.

An interesting point made in one meeting in particular was the role of the bishop in *prompting* confirmations. One clergyperson reported that the bishop's visit every second year was a time for confirmations because they knew that was what the bishop expected, so some candidates needed to be "rounded up" for the occasion. Others noted that their bishop had expressly encouraged them to promote confirmation and made clear the expectation that every parish would put forward some confirmands. It certainly seemed clear that there were more confirmations happening – or at least, more awareness of confirmations happening – in dioceses where the bishop had made such an expectation clear.

### **The Bishops**

We met once with the bishops collectively and it should be noted that this was a three Tikanga gathering, not just Tikanga Pakeha.

Not surprisingly, most of the bishops were more aware of the background to confirmation than others we spoke with. They acknowledged the decisions of General Synod in 1980 and 1990 *and* the allowances made for differing practices with regards to admission to communion. Two of the Tikanga Maori bishops noted ongoing conversations about this within their hui amorangi, while also reporting an ongoing steady stream of confirmation candidates whenever they visit.

The bishops generally agreed that they see issues surrounding preparation for baptism as a concern prior to those surrounding confirmation. Some bishops noted that they are aware of clergy omitting the words in the baptism liturgy which name the expectation that the baptised child will be confirmed, and that in some cases the understanding of baptism put forward is not conducive to an appropriate understanding of confirmation. This may be especially the case among those unhappy with infant baptism, favouring instead an initiation rite that includes the personal response of the baptismal candidate. This of course also raises the issue of confirmations among those baptised as adults, with one bishop in particular arguing that such baptisms should be performed by bishops anyway. He did not explain whether this would *negate* the need for confirmation, or simply allow for confirmation to follow on immediately from baptism. The bishops generally acknowledged the issues surrounding confirmation after an adult baptism, and noted that it still remains an expectation, despite what some clergy think.

There was also discussion about the ongoing requirement for confirmation prior to ordination and whether removing the requirement from all offices may have been a mistake. It was agreed that this was an open question. They also acknowledged the wide variety of approaches within the Anglican Communion. Several bishops spoke about the significance of using chrism oil at confirmations, a point we will address below.

### **Is It Happening?**

Among clergy and laity there are mixed impressions about whether confirmation is dying out, staying steady, or experiencing new growth. The bishops are of a mind to opt for the latter,

but note that it may not be so much an *increase* in confirmations, as more parishes *offering* confirmation as an option. Their experience is that they are doing more confirmation services and that these are happening in virtually all ‘flavours’ of parishes (evangelical, liberal, and everything in between).

While some bishops seemed satisfied with where things stand, others were not, and the majority of clergy and laity spoken to felt that confirmation needs either more attention or doing away with. It is important to note, however, that with the exception of one or two events and discussions, our conversations took place at open invitation events, so naturally the majority of those present had some interest in the subject. Anecdotal evidence suggests such interest is the exception rather than the rule, and while more parishes are offering confirmation in some places, in general they remain the minority.

So what are people saying? We have received many different responses, but those that are most common would be:

*There are not enough guidelines or explanations about what confirmation is and how it should be approached.*

*Opportunities for making affirmations and commitments are important.*

*We need help with resources and preparation.*

The first two of these will be addressed later in this report, but we will turn to the latter next.

## WHAT ARE THEY DOING?

In the resource prepared as part of this project we open our section on preparing for confirmation with a quote containing Tertullian's famous statement that Christians "are made, nor born." We also note that Tertullian was referring to baptism at the time.

The point is an important one as we want (and need) to avoid any suggestion that one's Christian identity is conferred at confirmation. Confirmation was for most of our church history the 'completion' of baptism – an essential 'second stage' as put forward by Gregory Dix in the middle of last century. We along with others, however, have officially rejected this position, so the way we approach confirmation becomes particularly important.

Issues of doctrine aside, the concept of *building faith* remains an important one and how the preparation done prior to confirmation might assist with this must be a question at the heart of any attempts to put together such a programme.

As noted above, one of the most frequent concerns raised during our conversations and surveys has been the lack of available resource material and guidelines for preparing people for confirmation. Alongside those requests sit the results of our research, which raise, in our minds at least, serious questions about both the *standard* of confirmation preparation in this country and the *resources* being used for it.

In this section of the report we will explore *what* preparation is being done, by *whom*, using *which* resources and over *how long* a period. We will also look at what people have said to us about preparation, their experiences of it and what they would like more of.

### What's Happening?

Of the 91 clergy who responded to our survey, 57% either did not answer or said *no* to the question 'Did you use a publically available preparation programme or resource?' While the remaining 43% answered *yes*, a follow-up question asking what that programme or resource was called paints an interesting – and perhaps disturbing – picture.

Two respondents said they had forgotten the name of the resource, one noted their candidate was prepared overseas, and a further two did not answer the question. Of the remaining respondents, 16% named only the prayer book and/or catechism, and 22% the *Anglican* series of information sheets from Genesis Publications. Among the remaining resources used were *Alpha* and/or *Youth Alpha*, *Going to the Supper of the Lord*, *The Road to Emmaus*, *The Forty Days of Purpose* programme, and *The Bible*. Just 3 people said they had used a formal confirmation preparation programme, those cited being *This is Our Faith* and *The Confirmation Experience*, both Church of England resources.<sup>20</sup>

Without wanting to judge any resource in and of itself, we view with some concern the use of programmes such as *Alpha* and *Emmaus* for confirmation preparation.<sup>21</sup> Firstly, neither of

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<sup>20</sup> One other cited a resource called *To Be Confirmed*. While difficult to find, we did eventually identify this as a confirmation resource published in 1977. Given its age, we would not recommend it for general use.

<sup>21</sup> With the latter, however, we would note that this is in reference to the *Road to Emmaus* programme, not *Emmaus: The Way of Faith*, which is a separate programme that does include a module for potential

these programmes is designed for use as a confirmation resource, but more significantly – with *Alpha* especially – they represent a move in some quarters to use confirmation as an evangelistic tool. *Alpha* courses and the like are generally aimed at the ‘un-churched’ or at least uninvolved in the Church for a significant period of time. Is confirmation right for those with no or little previous Church involvement? We would suggest this is an important question.

Of similar concern is the use of programmes such as *Going to the Supper of the Lord*, a resource designed specifically for preparing children for admission to communion. Its inclusion suggests some, either deliberately or without realising it, are still connecting confirmation to the eucharist, with all the potential issues that implies. While there is certainly a place for discussing the eucharist in any well designed confirmation programme, it would not be helpful or appropriate if that were the *primary* focus.

Further telling figures emerge when we consider how long people are spending on confirmation preparation. Again, of the 91 clergy who responded to the survey, 43% said they spent less than a month on preparation, 30% between 1 and 2 months, 23% 3-6 months, 2% 6-12 months and 2% over a year. Only one person said they used a “catechumenal process” for their preparation (although the same person failed to list any specific resources). Both the resources being used and the time spent doing preparation suggest the majority are still approaching this as an educational period (a la the traditional *confirmation classes* approach) rather than a formational process.

We also asked those recently confirmed what stood out for them from their preparation time. The responses are revealing:

*Not much fun.*

*It was awkward.*

*Being able to prove my knowledge of the bible.*

*The retreat.*

*Helpful but a little dull.*

*We discussed the foundations of Christianity and what it means to be a Christian, which is important when going into Confirmation.*

*Can't remember.*

*The freedom to ask any questions and not be scared. I felt fully supported.*

*Understanding what confirmation actually means as a formal, public declaration.*

*The helpfulness of the Vicar and the friendliness of the congregation.*

When asked what else they might have liked in their preparation most failed to respond. Of those who did, their comments included:

*A bit more fun.*

*Going over the actual service.*

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confirmation preparation. For more information see this programme listed in the appendix of the accompanying resource.

*Fuller discussion of baptism vs confirmation.*

*Its significance was not emphasised - to the extent that the other person confirmed with me left the Church a month later so I suspect she did not fully realize what she was doing when she was confirmed.*

As noted above, preparation and resources featured strongly in our conversations in each diocese. In general clergy were unsure where to find appropriate resources and most cited the prayer book as their primary source. A significant number said they had used *Going to the Supper of the Lord* and the *Anglican* leaflets, although most acknowledged the limitations of both. Several people argued strongly in favour of *Alpha* or similar programmes. Without exception these were people approaching confirmation from an evangelical perspective and seeing it as a potential tool for connecting people to the Church.

There were two points that stood out from our discussions with clergy about preparation. One was explicit; a general frustration with the lack of any indigenous resources offering a 'total package' approach to preparation. Many were unaware of *any* specifically confirmation-focused resources, and we commonly heard the phrase that they 'just made it up.' The other stand-out point was an underlying uncertainty about how to approach the task of preparing someone for confirmation. Most agreed that their own experiences of being prepared for confirmation had been either less than helpful or not appropriate in a contemporary context, but they had been given neither training nor guidelines in the years since.

Among those spoken to and surveyed who had been recently confirmed, most agreed that the preparation period had been a helpful time for exploring their faith. Some reported spending specific periods looking at and discussing the sacraments (baptism and eucharist) and a few had focused on their own potential calling to ministry (both lay and ordained). Of those spoken to, none had spent much time on the 'traditional' preparation points for confirmation; memorising the Apostle's Creed (although one group had discussed the creeds), the Lord's Prayer, the Ten Commandments and the 'articles of faith'. Similarly, while all reported meeting with the bishop prior to the confirmation service (usually very briefly), there were mixed responses as to how meaningful this was and none reported being 'tested' or even strongly questioned about their readiness for confirmation. Some clergy spoken to felt it was too easy to be confirmed and, recalling their own experiences of some being turned down the first time, questioned how seriously the bishop took the exercise.

There were a small number of clergy – and one or two lay people – who believed confirmation should be offered 'without strings' as an act of hospitality. These respondents displayed a sacramental understanding of the rite and argued from a similar theological stance to that taken in the baptism liturgy in *A New Zealand Prayer Book – He Karakia Mihinare o Aotearoa* (ANZPB) – i.e. a sacrament of grace freely offered by God without need for a response. Three respondents in particular used this argument to suggest that preparation was not essential, with the understanding that the experience of confirmation would hopefully be meaningful enough to encourage those confirmed to explore their faith further.

The school chaplains spoken to were all using some form of formal preparation resource, although some (as discussed above) were not entirely appropriate for the purpose. A standout resource was the *Voyager* programme being offered by Kings College. In a similar way to the

American J2A programme,<sup>22</sup> *Voyager* offers confirmation as a point within the larger context of the programme. The continuing high number of confirmation candidates from Kings is testament to the success of this resource, which is unique to the school.

A number of people commented on their wish to adopt a more catechumenal approach to preparation. With ministry education in general appearing to shift to a more formational approach in most dioceses, this is obviously having a flow on effect on other programmes. Again, however, many felt unprepared or uncertain about how to put such an approach into action. The few that had attempted a catechumenate programme spoke highly of its value, but all had either received some training in the catechumenate (through the former diocesan catechumenate groups in Christchurch and Wellington, or other churches) or followed a specifically catechumenal pre-prepared programme. These conversations always drew much interest from others who expressed a desire to learn more about the catechumenate process.

Several discussions about the lack of resources and people trained to properly use them led to conversations about the possibility of regional or district confirmation preparation groups. A few dioceses already have such groups operating, as do some schools. A number of clergy expressed some unease with this approach, as they identified confirmation and preparing for it as a point of committing to a specific place or church. There were issues raised about where the confirmation service for such a group would take place and whether cathedrals are good venues for confirmation (or just handy places for bishops). Several people reported having candidates involved in a joint preparation session who then returned to their own parishes for (separate) confirmation services. This in turn raised issues about groups preparing together wanting to be confirmed together.

We had a few discussions with people who had used, or attempted to use, some of the confirmation resources listed in our accompanying resource, or similar programmes, often with catechumenal approaches. An issue here was the size of the groups. Some people reported preparing groups of just one or two, and many three or four. Some felt that the resources available were geared to larger groups and difficult to adapt for fewer participants. For many the 'perfect' resource would be:

*Catechumenally structured;*

*Using indigenous concepts (e.g. discussions about the three Tikanga church and Maori culture, and a southern hemisphere understanding of the church seasons);*

*Flexible enough to encourage some adaptation, but solid enough to be able to be used without much experience;*

*Variable in its approach depending on the size of the group;*

*Cheap!*

To the best of our knowledge such a resource does not exist, although aspects of most of these points can be found in several available programmes.<sup>23</sup>

It is important to note that several researchers have recently underlined the importance of an extended formal period of faith formation, especially for those baptised as infants. Mark

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<sup>22</sup> See the accompanying resource.

<sup>23</sup> The issue of group size, for example, is addressed in Susan Sayer's *The Confirmation Experience*.



Chamberlain states that this importance “was evident no matter what method of confirmation preparation was employed.”<sup>24</sup> Chamberlain goes on to state, albeit with some surprise, that his research revealed only minor differences in experience between those prepared using a catechumenal approach and those attending a more traditional ‘confirmation class’. He does note, however, that the ‘successful’ examples of each approach demonstrate similar characteristics, identified most clearly by Peter Ball’s template (included in the resource accompanying this report). For Chamberlain these findings reinforce those of a number of researchers whose work has determined that a catechumenate-like process (although not necessarily following the precise dictates of the traditional catechumenate programme) represents the most effective approach to confirmation preparation in terms of participant experience.<sup>25</sup>

While several clergy spoken with expressed concern that a more demanding preparation programme might ‘put off’ young people from participating, Chamberlain’s work has shown virtually the opposite, with participants reporting pride in the completion of such a process.<sup>26</sup> Other elements reported on positively by those recently confirmed following similar preparation periods include; the involvement of ‘mentors’ and ‘sponsors’, especially where those people were drawn from the local congregation; the use of guest speakers such as clergy and lay people from other parishes; visiting churches different to their own and experiencing unfamiliar forms of worship; and learning more about Anglicanism. This latter point was raised by many as a potentially helpful aspect of confirmation in terms of ‘binding’ the participants to the Church and helping them feel more included.

### **Preparation is a Biggie!**

There is no doubt in our minds that confirmation preparation is a big issue, both for those who are expressing frustration over the lack of resources and / or training in how to use them, and those who think they have it all worked out, but continue to use material unsuitable for the purpose. Almost without exception, preparation resources were one of the two major issues people we talked with wanted to discuss.

As we have noted in our accompanying resource, the only significant programme we have found designed specifically for confirmation preparation in our own context is in the now fairly dated *Christian Initiation* kit prepared by the Theological Education by Extension (TEE) unit in the early 1990s. Other resources such as *Anglican* offer helpful information to feed into a wider programme, but are not designed to be used by themselves. Likewise, the prayer book, and especially the catechism, are important resources and should most definitely be included *within* a wider ranging preparation programme.

It seems clear to us that there would be great benefit in the provision of indigenous preparation resources. If TPMC, or another church body, were to take responsibility for this it would ensure that they are grounded in both our geographical and denominational contexts. It would also, hopefully, mean that more people would be aware of them than is currently the case with existing overseas resources.

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<sup>24</sup> Mark Chamberlain, *Forming Faith*, 65.

<sup>25</sup> Chamberlain, 66f.

<sup>26</sup> Chamberlain, 66.

Of even more benefit, however, would be the revival of the catechumenate and the groups that once encouraged and resourced those interested in using such an approach. It is profoundly disappointing that those groups have ceased to operate, however those involved are (mostly) still around and their knowledge and experience is still available to be put to use.

During this project, alongside our research and conversations, we have also managed to *run* a confirmation preparation programme, with the specific goal of comparing what sounds good in theory with what works well in practice. Our programme was designed around those suggested by Brian Dawson in his 1994 project for the Methodist Church<sup>27</sup> and Mark Chamberlain in his recent study on Anglican confirmation.

Our personal experience of confirmation preparation backs up the findings above. Good, formation-focussed preparation significantly heightens the likelihood of a positive experience for those being confirmed *and* (very importantly) their continued engagement with the Church beyond confirmation. If our goal really is ‘building Christians’ then time and money spent ensuring we have the right tools will be a good investment.

Of course confirmation preparation is (or should be) only one aspect of formation / education in the Christian life. In the accompanying resource we offer some comments on the lack of a sustained focus on Christian education in our prevailing church culture. It is no wonder many people feel some sense of urgency about confirmation preparation when there is a strong likelihood that, for many at least, it will be the *last* (and possibly *only*) formal education or formation they receive in and from the Church. This must surely be a cause for much greater concern than just how it affects confirmation? If building Christians is what we are about, then should it not be what we are *constantly* about, rather than just in the weeks or months leading up to confirmation?

As noted above, preparation was one of the two issues virtually *everyone* wanted to discuss. Next we look at the other.

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<sup>27</sup> Brian Dawson, *In Search of Meaning*. See the accompanying resource for more details.

## BUT WHAT DOES IT ALL MEAN?

As noted previously, we have been told not to focus on what confirmation *is*. In fact, it was indicated that TPMC was not interested in the *meaning* of confirmation, and, as we were not going to find a consensus, we should not waste time exploring the question. If it is true that TPMC members are uninterested in confirmation's meaning, they are most certainly in the minority.

Regardless of the group, what confirmation is came up strongly in every conversation we had, even where we had pointedly *not* raised the issue. Time after time we have found that people are not just *interested* in what confirmation is, they urgently want to know, and perhaps for good reason.

The reality is that the response to many of the issues already addressed in this report will depend almost entirely on what confirmation is and does. Is confirmation worth encouraging and promoting? It depends what it is. How should we prepare people for confirmation? It depends on what we are preparing them for.

In this section we are not so much going to attempt to answer the question as we are to explore the answers that others have given, the 'formal' answers of our church, and the implicit answers in our liturgy. We do so not to make a point, but to address the reality that this is something people want to know more about, whether we like it or not.

### Anglican Meanings

Largely because of the interest we have encountered, we have included a significant section on Anglican understandings of confirmation in the resource accompanying this report. In that resource we note that there has never been an Anglican *meaning* for confirmation. From the beginning our church has embraced (if not accepted) multiple meanings, *implicitly* at least.

For Cranmer confirmation was, it appears, almost a non-issue, with his focus resting more on baptism. Borrowing from Luther, however, Cranmer did, eventually, add an educational focus to the rite, with strict guidelines for preparation appearing in later prayer books. Continuing the pattern of an earlier Archbishop of Canterbury, John Peckham, Cranmer's prayer books included the famous *confirmation rubric*, requiring confirmation (or, in later versions, the *desire for* confirmation) prior to first communion. As noted in the resource, the evidence suggests that despite Cranmer's requirements, confirmation was seldom practiced at best and more commonly ignored until the late eighteenth century at least.

Reconsiderations of confirmation in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries may have heightened interest in the issue among academics and liturgists, but it was the renewal of the eucharist that brought confirmation into the hearts and minds of most people in the pews. As more frequent communion was encouraged, the requirement for confirmation was stressed, with this being all the more true as the second half of the twentieth century began. All those confirmations we saw in 1965 were in no small part due to the fact that many parishes were adopting a weekly eucharist as their main service, with a consequent pressure coming on those who were unconfirmed.

The resource discusses the debates surrounding confirmation and baptism in the mid-twentieth century, especially following the work of first Gregory Dix and then, in 1951,

Geoffrey Lampe, who argued in opposite corners over the role of the Spirit in both rites. Outside academic circles, however, confirmation for the ‘average Anglican’ remained primarily what it had been for four hundred years; the ‘gate-way’ to communion. When that requirement was lifted, first experimentally and later universally (albeit with ‘out-clauses’), questions about meaning moved out of the seminary and into the parish.

Without repeating what is described in more detail in the accompanying resource, Anglican understandings of confirmation have since the seventeenth century at least included the following (see the resource for more information on each):

*An essential ‘sealing’ or ‘completing’ of baptism.*

*A ‘strengthening’ by the Holy Spirit for Christian life.<sup>28</sup>*

*A ‘celebration of education’ recognising the completion of a period of Christian education (taken from the Lutheran approach).*

*A personal affirmation of baptismal vows (first introduced in the 1662 BCP).*

*A personal commitment to Christian service.*

### **What the Rules Say**

The only explicit definitions we have of confirmation are in the General Synod Standing Resolutions, which include the following guidelines:

- a) Preparation – the individual should be “helped to explore and understand the faith of their Baptism, and their calling as disciples.”
- b) The Rite - involves the individuals affirming their faith in Christ and being strengthened “for ministry as responsible Christians in the world” by the Laying on of Hands and prayer.
- c) The service is an occasion for reaffirmation by the whole congregation.
- d) A bishop presides at a confirmation.<sup>29</sup>

These offer some understandings of confirmation, but they must be read in conjunction with the wider Standing Resolutions concerning Christian initiation and the eucharist. In particular we note the shift to baptism being recognised as the only point of entry to communion, albeit with the ‘out-clause’ that “Variations in pastoral practice in relation to admission to communion may be found”, confirmation being specifically listed as one such ‘variation’.<sup>30</sup>

Nonetheless, the ‘official rules’ offer the understandings that confirmation is:

*The outcome of a period of faith exploration.*

*An affirmation of faith in Christ (as distinct from an affirming of baptismal vows).*

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<sup>28</sup> As we explain further in the resource, Cranmer at least does not appear to have subscribed to the medieval idea that the Spirit is not active as such within baptism. Mason and Dix attempted to reintroduce this idea in their two-stage rite but it would be untrue to describe it as an authentic Anglican viewpoint.

<sup>29</sup> General Synod Standing Resolution SRL4.2

<sup>30</sup> General Synod Standing Resolution SRL4.3.

*A 'strengthening' for ministry as a 'responsible Christian'.*

*An occasion for congregational reaffirmation.*

Unfortunately, during all the conversations we had, the only people who acknowledged an awareness of these resolutions were the bishops. As Anglicans, of course, we are far less concerned with what the *rules* say than we are with what the *prayers* say.

## **The Prayer Book**

As noted in the previous section, the prayer book – *ANZPB* – is one of the most common resources used for confirmation preparation. Unlike other examples, the catechism in our prayer book makes no attempt to define confirmation, other than to include it in the list of “*other sacramental actions*” the Church provides.

It is reasonably important to note that the catechism introduces, but fails to define, the term *sacramental action*. Thus, while we have been told that this means confirmation is clearly *not* a sacrament, we have talked with many who would argue it *is* (along with ordination, marriage, reconciliation and anointing), and the term ‘sacramental action’ is merely our way of saying ‘minor sacrament’. While some may choose to think that the lack of a definition allows for a typically Anglican ‘broad’ spread of opinions, it often just has the effect that the undefined point means whatever anyone thinks it means.

One (possibly unintended) point the catechism does make is in its inclusion alongside the term ‘confirmation’ of the phrase “*or commissioning for Christian work and service*”.<sup>31</sup> This focus on ‘commissioning’ occurs nowhere in the Standing Resolutions or the confirmation liturgy. It may well be a hang-over from an earlier American attempt to replace confirmation with an alternative rite (see the accompanying resource), or it may reflect the practice of some other churches, especially during the 1980s. Whether it is helpful is debateable, but it is not carried over into the Standing Resolutions or the prayer book.<sup>32</sup>

Once again, if left undefined, the references to confirmation in the catechism are of little help, and possibly even add to the confusion: but what about the liturgy? Again, we cover this in detail in the accompanying resource, so it suffices to say that from the beginning we have some issues.

The understandings of confirmation from the General Synod Standing Resolutions listed above make only one mention of baptism, and that is with reference to preparation rather than the rite itself. This is possibly a deliberate attempt not to continue muddying the waters between the two rites. Our prayer book, however, places the two not just together, in the same section of the book, but within the same liturgical framework. This alone creates the obvious impression that baptism and confirmation are closely linked, and possibly even intertwined. Some may wish to say this is true in as much as we are ‘claiming the faith of our baptism’, but is there not great potential for confusion here? Does this not also imply that

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<sup>31</sup> ANZPB,

<sup>32</sup> A late twentieth century movement towards defining confirmation in ways such as ‘ordination to the priesthood of the laity’ has been dismissed by most theologians and liturgists as unhelpful in terms of our more general theology of priesthood. For the most part those who advocated the commissioning or ‘lay ordination’ model have moved away from that position. Notably this would include Episcopalian scholar John Westerhoff, and less notably but more locally, Brian Dawson.

confirmation is the *second part* of baptism – something that our church has specifically rejected, yet nonetheless reflected in our liturgy?

The introduction to the *ANZPB Liturgy of Baptism and The Laying on of Hands for Confirmation and Renewal* includes one of the clearest definitions of confirmation we have. Tucked away in the notes to parents and godparents is the direction that the newly baptised child be encouraged “*to make a commitment to the Lord, and in Confirmation to receive, in the laying on of hands, the strengthening power of the Holy Spirit for witness and service.*”<sup>33</sup> The baptism rite goes on to add to this in the statement made to the child after the water-bath: “N, you are now a pilgrim with us. As a member of Christ’s body, the Church, you will be challenged to affirm your faith in God and receive the laying on of hands in confirmation.”<sup>34</sup>

Moving into the confirmation rite, we find the *strengthening* focus repeated in the prayer with the laying on of hands which follows the traditional prayer for the seven-fold gifts of the Spirit.<sup>35</sup> The greatest emphasis in the confirmation rite, however, falls on the theme of *commitment* to Christian service, which is repeated no fewer than four times in the relatively brief liturgy.

So, as we explain in the accompanying resource, by the time we explore our General Synod Standing Resolutions, the catechism, the introduction to the liturgy, and the rite itself, we are left with an understanding that confirmation is:

*A strengthening by the Holy Spirit for witness and service.*

*A personal commitment to the Christian life and service.*

*A personal affirmation of faith by the candidates.*

*A corporate affirmation of faith by the congregation.*<sup>36</sup>

There are still some outstanding issues with the lack of definition in the catechism and the implicit theological statement in putting the baptism and confirmation rites together, and, as we note in the accompanying resource, these are added to by the ongoing requirement for confirmation as a prerequisite for ordination and the insistence on a bishop presiding at the rite, both of which imply a degree of importance for confirmation that presents some issues for our baptismal theology. How close, however, are these understandings to those of the people we spoke to and surveyed?

## **The Clergy**

40% of the clergy who responded to our online survey either defined confirmation as, or included in their definition, the reaffirmation of baptismal vows. 20% understood it as a personal commitment to Christian service or the Christian life. 9% specifically defined confirmation as a commissioning for Christian service (and it is interesting to note that from their other responses these seem to come mostly from a more evangelical side of the church). 7% of respondents described confirmation as a ‘rite of passage’ (a term we have some issues

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<sup>33</sup> ANZPB, 382.

<sup>34</sup> *ibid*, 389.

<sup>35</sup> Although, as we note in the resource, it can be argued that the inclusion of this in the confirmation rite continues the Mason-Dix line of a two-stage sacramental initiation rite.

<sup>36</sup> We have deliberately ignored the sole reference to ‘commissioning’ as it is unsupported by any other document or statement.

with as we will explain below), although several of these did question its usefulness in this regard, describing it as ‘unnecessary’ and, in one case, “the churches attempt to replicate rites of passage for teenagers - the breaking down of ego and entry into a second, adult life marked by suffering - it kind of falls short!”

Despite the best attempts of some, 3% of respondents specifically referred to confirmation as a ‘sacrament’, ‘minor sacrament’ or ‘lesser sacrament’, as did a significant number of clergy we talked with in person. 8% mentioned ‘strengthening’ for service, with most specifically adding a reference to the Holy Spirit. While most using this term were clearly referring to being strengthened by the Spirit, several used the term ‘conferring of the Spirit’, which has explicit links to the old two-stage initiation rite concept.

The two-stage rite is definitely at centre stage for some respondents, with statements such as: “[Confirmation is] incorporation into the Body of Faith”, and, “the completion of the (especially infant) baptism process”. Equally as concerning (and challenging to our baptismal theology) are; “[confirmation confers] adult membership [in the church]”,<sup>37</sup> and “admittance to partake communion and full membership of an Anglican church”.

Only one survey respondent described confirmation specifically as ‘building Anglicans’, but this was also mentioned by several others we talked to during our conversations and interviews. Older clergy, in particular, often made mention of the adage ‘baptised a Christian, confirmed an Anglican’.

During our conversations we encountered a significant number of clergy who were reluctant to let go of the older understandings of confirmation as a ‘completion’ of baptism and a necessary prerequisite for communion. As noted above, these attitudes were sometimes couched in pastoral terms, such as a regret that young people today don’t get the ‘special experience’ of receiving communion for the first time at or following their confirmation service. For the most part it was the older clergy who were quite confident that they understood confirmation, despite their views sometimes being at odds with ‘official’ church doctrine.

Younger clergy, and especially those trained post-1990, were more likely to express some confusion or uncertainty about confirmation. A number of these clergy had themselves been confirmed *only* because it was a prerequisite to ordination, and many of them questioned the value of what they considered to be an ‘old church’ rite. This was a view held by some older clergy as well, with a few words such as ‘irrelevant’, ‘outdated’, and ‘old fashioned’ used to describe confirmation, and one going so far as to state that he *refused* to encourage its practice.

There were also a few who saw in confirmation the potential for something quite different and, in their view, more helpful than what the rite has been and is. Some of these were approaching the issue from an evangelical perspective and, as noted above, were keen to have new (or old) tools for engaging with un-churched or ‘de-churched’ young people in particular. These ideas were also picked up by a couple of the PADYS we spoke with, who were very much focused on the ‘rites of passage’ idea that we shall explore further below. In at least three cases we encountered people who would like to remove confirmation, or at least the preparation for it, from the church environment altogether, and question the need for the

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<sup>37</sup> This is a common understanding in the Anglican Church of Southern Africa and, as mentioned previously, this is a group that is notably adding to the confirmation statistics.

service itself to involve a wider congregation or, in two cases, a bishop. These are views that really do diverge from any traditional or contemporary understanding of confirmation and tend to suggest an appropriation of the name only.

A significant number of those clergy we spoke to and 7% of those responding to our survey said they had no idea of the meaning of confirmation.

## **The Laity**

We did not get the opportunity to speak to large numbers of lay people in most dioceses, and those we did talk with tended to have a reasonably close involvement in confirmation preparation. Most of these described the rite in terms of ‘affirming faith’, and a ‘commitment to Christian service’, although one was quite clear in her understanding that this was a sacramental seal of baptism.

In our online survey we asked those recently confirmed how confirmation had been explained to them during the process. The answers are revealing, and include:

*Receiving a Sacrament.*

*A lesser sacrament.*

*A step taken to show the world my beliefs and to make a decision for myself to follow Christ.*

*We were given some examples of what had happened to some people, like feeling heat on the top of your head, etc.*

*It was described as a special service where I made a commitment to God but in doing so I could still have my own personal beliefs.*

*We were confirming the vows made for us at our baptism.*

*A traditional part of Anglicanism.*

*Being closer to Christ.*

*Something I needed to get done to be ordained, a tick the box activity.*

There are some obvious differences here from the clergy responses. Nowhere in the lay responses was there any mention of ‘strengthening’ or ‘commissioning’. 37% of those who responded said they were told it was reaffirming their baptismal vows or similar, while 15% said it was a commitment to God. However, no one described confirmation in terms of a commitment to Christian service.

Several responses from those recently confirmed indicated that an outdated view of confirmation was put to them, including three respondents who described it simply as ‘first communion’. 20% either did not answer the question or said ‘don’t know’.

It is clear from some responses that their confirmation experience was part of a wider programme inviting a personal faith commitment, in some possibly for the first time. What seems to be missing, however, are the key elements spelled out in both the liturgy and the (albeit seldom read) General Synod Standing Resolutions. The Holy Spirit is not mentioned by any lay responders to our survey, and the focus on commitment to Christian service so evident in the rite is absent also.



## So Where Does That Leave Us?

Any attempt to confine confirmation to a strict definition is doomed to failure, as it has been for the past thousand years. Where there may be some value, however (and even some urgency), is in defining what confirmation is *not*.

In the accompanying resource and the comments above we offer some examples of areas where there is either a clash between our stated doctrinal position and the understandings implicit in our approach to confirmation or the potential for it. Clear evidence of this appears in the responses to our questions from some clergy and lay people.

Of course, these clashes are also implicit in our approach to Christian initiation in general. In the accompanying resource we identify the differing theological understandings between our three Tikanga as a significant issue in any attempt to renew interest in confirmation. As long as there are some who hold to the view that it is an essential second stage to baptism, or a requirement before one can receive communion, there will be difficulty moving forward. Our ecclesiology quite literally begins with baptism, so finding a unity of understanding about the role of that fundamental sacrament is really an essential first step towards addressing all else.

Acknowledging the challenges and difficulties, it remains possible, however, to recognise within Tikanga Pakeha a general understanding of confirmation as a rite of strengthening and commitment, with reference to – but no effect on – our baptismal promises. This understanding places our approach to confirmation squarely in the *pastoral* camp from a theological perspective. We explore this more fully in the accompanying resource, but it suffices to note here that simply acknowledging that this is how we approach confirmation (as a pastoral rite of strengthening and commitment, and *not* a sacramental rite of initiation and sealing) has the potential to clarify the issue significantly for many. There are, however, some issues in the way.

The current structure of our prayer book initiation rites presents a major roadblock to ensuring that we preach what we practice. The wish to offer a unified rite of initiation (connecting baptism and confirmation within a eucharistic context) suits perfectly those who desire a return to the sacramental unity of baptism evident in the Early Church. If all those elements happen together (baptism, confirmation, eucharist), confirmation is clearly understood to be the sealing of the water-bath and conferring of the Spirit. If they happen at separate points, but still within one recognised liturgy, we are really picking up the Mason-Dix two-stage rite theology that insists on confirmation as an essential completion of the baptismal process. Neither of those approaches fits with our current (official) theology of initiation. To clarify what we mean, and bring our liturgies into line with our theologies, the only logical way forward is to physically separate the confirmation rite out from the initiation liturgy. This cannot be done easily, however, until there is agreement between the Tikanga concerning our baptismal theology.<sup>38</sup>

Our pastoral approach to confirmation also raises questions about requiring it pre-ordination. While some bishops expressed regret that we have removed confirmation as a prerequisite for church office, the reality is that a purely pastoral rite is by definition not an absolute

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<sup>38</sup> The Tikanga Pakeha Liturgical Working Group has recently asked the Common Life Liturgical Commission to request that General Synod initiate a Doctrine Commission to revisit our initiation theologies for this express purpose.

necessity for Christian life and service. In the same way that we do not demand those seeking ordination undergo the ‘sacramental action’ of reconciliation, we should rethink the reasoning behind the requirement for confirmation. Alternatively, if we choose to retain the requirement on the (potentially valid) basis that those engaged in leadership positions *should* be required to make a firmer commitment, surely, to retain the integrity of our theology of the ministry of all the baptised, we would want to advocate for a return to compulsory confirmation for all, or at least all who wish to offer leadership in the church.

A final point here concerns the use of chrism at confirmation. We note in the accompanying resource that this has been raised as a concern in the Episcopal Church, and several of our bishops have told us they routinely use chrism oil (blessed for use at baptisms) when confirming. There is some wonderful symbolism involved in the use of oil, and it can doubtless have a powerful impact on those being confirmed. It remains the case, however, that historically chrism has been used at confirmation with the understanding that it is *sealing* the candidate’s baptism. Liturgically chrism is intimately linked with the giving of the Holy Spirit, something our prayer book states happens at baptism (although unfortunately the use of chrism at baptism is only optional, not mandatory). It may be a lovely gesture and a potentially powerful symbol, but is the use of chrism at confirmation also continuing an unhelpful confusion over what is actually being done?

### **Us and Them**

The difficulty of defining our understanding of confirmation in pastoral terms is that, while it brings us into line with some protestant churches, it takes us out of step with both the Roman Catholics and a significant number of other Anglican provinces, who still regard confirmation in sacramental terms as a rite of initiation. This is inevitable if (and we would argue that we have reached this point in general practice already) what we call confirmation is founded on a fundamentally different theology to what they call confirmation. There is also the very real fact that in most protestant churches where confirmation is considered in purely pastoral terms, the rite has virtually vanished from what we would call ‘Pakeha’ practice.

Almost all of the clergy and laity we have spoken with have either asked for more clarity about the meaning of confirmation, or agreed that such would be helpful. This has been particularly strongly expressed where differing and often competing understandings have been expressed. People are receiving no training, few guidelines, and mixed messages, the result can only be a mixture of frustration and confusion.

As we discuss in the accompanying resource, some, following these points, argue that confirmation as a term should be abandoned, carrying as it does so much baggage from the past. There are good arguments in favour of this approach, although it is probably too radical for most to consider it. The fact is, however, that confirmation as we are generally practicing it today has no basis in the pre-medieval Church, little in the Church up to the Reformation, and only tenuous links to anything prior to the past one hundred years. That is not to say that something only a century old is not a valid and important work of God, it is just to point out that it is not ‘as it always has been’.

## WHICH RITES ARE RIGHT?

In the introduction to this report we noted that the request for ‘rites of passage and inclusion, especially for young people’ has been one of the most problematic parts of our work. In over eighteen months of asking we have still received *no* examples of such rites for us to collate into an available resource, and the only ‘Anglican’ examples we have come across are those in the TEE Christian Initiation resource folder from the 1990s. If such rites (or more accurately, as we describe below, rituals,) are to be provided they will need to be produced, and if they are to be made available to the wider church, they need to be submitted to the appropriate scrutiny beforehand. As noted in the introduction, we believe a more appropriate starting point for that work is the Tikanga Pakeha Liturgical Working Group.

As indicated above, we have some philosophical concerns with the use of the term ‘rite of passage’ to describe confirmation. In this section we will begin by addressing those concerns before providing some ideas from our research of what sorts of rites or rituals people might be looking for.

### Rites of Passage

A significant number of clergy (7%) but no laity in our online surveys described confirmation as a ‘rite of passage’. This was also a term used by many during our conversations and interviews throughout the dioceses. There appear to be two main reasons why it has become common to refer to confirmation in this way:

1. Because of the work of several academics in the late twentieth century which placed confirmation within a life development context in similar way to the Jewish ritual of *Bar Mitzvah*,<sup>39</sup>
2. Because confirmation has, for many centuries, been understood as a rite for youth and in the past one hundred years in the western world, as a rite for adolescents. This connection with the relatively modern concept of a transitional age between childhood and youth has led to further connections being drawn with *true* rites of passage from childhood to adulthood in other cultures.

Mark Chamberlain has offered a helpful outline of the anthropological theory of rites of passage drawing from the work of Arnold van Gennep who literally ‘wrote the book’ on the subject fifty years ago.<sup>40</sup> Such rites, he notes, exist in all cultures to assist with the shifts between various stages of life.<sup>41</sup> These rites traditionally give *names* and *meaning* to the process of change. Chamberlain quotes van Gennep’s definition of the essential elements of a rite of passage; *separation, transition* and *incorporation*.

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<sup>39</sup> Eminent names in this camp include John Westerhoff and Kieran Sawyer.

<sup>40</sup> Arnold van Gennep, *The Rites of Passage*. (London: Routledge, 1960).

<sup>41</sup> The most common example of a rite of passage in our own culture has been the betrothal – marriage process. The predominance of couples living together has challenged this in recent years, leading to a potential breakdown of the rite from a ritual perspective. This ‘collapse’ of a rite of passage has been evidenced in numerous cultures and it usually results in the rite losing what influence or authority it had. It could be argued this has already happened to confirmation.

*Separation* involves a ceremonial withdrawal from the current context (family, tribe, community, etc.). *Transition* (called the 'liminal' stage by van Gennepe) requires the learning of new values, roles and 'secrets'. As Chamberlain describes it, "This phase was often marked by curtailed freedom and hardship without the usual support structures that had previously pertained."<sup>42</sup> In other words, it is demanding rather than easy. *Incorporation* marks the re-entry into the original context and the conferring of a new status and / or role.

A cursory glance at these elements may find strong correlations between a rite of passage and confirmation. Candidates are *separated* into confirmation classes or programmes for a period of time, where they learn more about faith and the 'mysteries' of the Church in a *transitional* time between being unconfirmed and confirmed. Finally, in the confirmation rite, they are ritually *incorporated* back into the Church, no longer as candidates, but now the newly confirmed. No wonder people describe confirmation as a rite of passage. Case closed, surely?

A closer study of the theory underpinning rites of passage and our theology and practice of confirmation, seen in the light of the 'bigger picture', and especially our theology of baptism, begins to pick large holes in this understanding. We discuss this further in the accompanying resource, quoting John Westerhoff - himself once a proponent of the 'confirmation as rite of passage' theory - that "confirmation is not and never has been a rite of passage from one role and status to another. Confirmation is a rite of intensification, affirming role and status previously established at baptism."<sup>43</sup> It is this major difference that marks confirmation as distinct from a traditional rite of passage; the understanding that we take on our *role* and our *status* at baptism, while at confirmation we simply *affirm* and *recommit* to being what we already are. At confirmation, you might say, we do not become something new, we *intensify* what already is.

This is clearly not grasped by some we have spoken with and surveyed. A number of clergy and lay people have told us that they believe confirmation effects a *real* change - sometimes using almost the same ontological language often used about ordination. But what they describe is a change in the way they *feel* rather than who or what they *are*. At confirmation, then, I do not so much *become* a man, but rather *feel more like* the man I already am.

We have encountered a couple of somewhat disturbing uses of confirmation that have taken the rite of passage concept and magnified it (drawing, perhaps, on the men's and feminist movements of the 1980s) into a kind of celebration of masculinity or feminism. The former has already taken root in the form of the Promise Keepers movement, and similar aspects employed in that arena have been described in this approach to confirmation. These attempts to utilise confirmation in new and hitherto untested ways may be branded as 'creative' or 'radical' and perhaps they are. The fact remains, however, they use the term 'confirmation' to describe something completely removed from what it is, or ever has been, for reasons we remain somewhat unsure of.

### **Confirmation and Age**

Leaving aside the anthropological and sociological concerns about confirmation and rites of passage, the other important point here is that confirmation is no longer - in most places - a rite of adolescence, and it is becoming increasingly difficult to describe it as a rite of youth.

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<sup>42</sup> Chamberlain, 23.

<sup>43</sup> John Westerhoff in Arthur Kubick, *Confirming the Faith of Adolescents*, 160.

We have heard of a number of recent confirmation services where *no* candidates were under thirty, and more and more are in their sixties and older. As some of the baby boomers who rejected their parents' religion find their way back to church, we can expect to see even more confirmations of older adults, and it would be ridiculous to describe such events (as some have done) as a shift 'from a child's to an adult's faith'.

It is clear that those who instigated this project were certainly seeing confirmation as a potentially valuable resource for use with young people. That may be true, but to continue to try to identify confirmation as a point within the life-cycle is an increasingly difficult proposal. It *might* be argued that confirmation remains a rite of passage between the stages of *faith* rather than life (*a la* James Fowler), but this too is pushing the point.

We would argue (with Westerhoff) that confirmation is not and never has been a rite of passage and continuing to describe it as such is both unhelpful and confusing. Certainly we believe that if confirmation is to have a future it will not lie in this arena.

### **Rituals of Passage**

As discussed in the introduction, we believe this term more accurately reflects what people have requested; a liturgical celebration or acknowledgement of a change in life circumstances. As noted above, there are numerous examples of such rituals in books like *Human Rites* and the work of Dorothy McRae McMahan. Few of these, however, are Anglican, and none have gone through the process of being authorised for use in our church.<sup>44</sup> We have had anecdotal accounts of other liturgies floating around some Anglican contexts, but none have been made available to us, save those in the resource kit already mentioned.

They may not *officially* exist, but there is some interest in having them.<sup>45</sup> Examples of potentially useful (liturgical) rituals suggested to us are:

*A rite around the 21<sup>st</sup> and the legal drinking age.*

*Getting a driver's license.*

*Changing schools, going to university, leaving school, graduation.*

*'Women's rites' – eg puberty, first period, etc.*

*Rites for adolescence – moving from Sunday School to Youth Group.<sup>46</sup>*

*Putting a child on the parish electoral roll in their own right.*

*Marking a change in employment, or a promotion.*

*Admission to communion (this raises issues about baptismal policy).*

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<sup>44</sup> We are aware that some have little respect for the rules surrounding the authorisation of liturgies for experimental use, and in some places there is an evident culture of 'do what you like'. However, we believe a report of this nature must work within the rules as they exist, and moreover our own experience suggests that the rules regarding authorisation exist for good and proper reasons.

<sup>45</sup> *Demand* would be too strong a word here. We were only occasionally asked about a specific ritual of passage, and most of the time it was only when we pressed people that they came up with ideas that 'might be helpful' if they existed.

<sup>46</sup> A number of people mentioned the desirability of something for those in the 12-13 age range. The J2A programme described in the accompanying resource picks this up in its *Rite 13* with elements of a *bar mitzvah* and a liturgical celebration of adolescence and the heralding of a time of questioning and 'pushing the boundaries'.

*Commissioning into particular ministries.*  
*Handing over the farm and family home (from parents to children).*  
*Leaving the family home (going into rest home or retirement village).*  
*Wedding anniversaries.*  
*Renewing wedding vows (without having a pretend wedding).*  
*Betrothal ceremony for the recently engaged.*  
*A ritual for those moving in together.*  
*A naming ceremony for a baby.*  
*Retirement.*  
*Separation and / or divorce.*

As noted above, we believe it would be appropriate for the provision of such rituals to be explored by another group. It would be helpful in doing so if a little more research were done among the potential ‘target markets’ for such rituals to determine whether there really is a demand.

In our conversations we have also received a number of requests for *repeatable* rites for the reaffirmation of faith, especially, but not exclusively, for young people. On these occasions we have pointed out the appropriateness of renewing / reaffirming our baptismal promises regularly, at least at every baptism, but also, preferably, on certain feast days during the liturgical year. Some dioceses have baptismal policies that mention this, but they do not seem to be well known. Unfortunately the prayer book offers no suggestions, but it would be helpful if such possibilities were publicised.

### **Rituals of Inclusion**

This was the second part of the ‘rites of passage’ request and again, we have been offered no examples of such rituals during our travels.<sup>47</sup> There is, however, a clear demand for such liturgies, with specific reference to:

*Welcoming someone moving from another parish.*  
*Welcoming someone from another denomination, with an opportunity for them to ‘swap’ their affiliation.<sup>48</sup>*  
*Welcoming young people into the church (either as newcomers, or as those who are moving out of youth group age).*

### **The Usefulness of Rituals**

In the accompanying resource we note that another reason why confirmation fails to fit the definition of a rite of passage is because it has become seldom practiced in many places. ‘Successful’ rites and rituals are practiced regularly and are a visible expectation, or even mandatory, within the community.

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<sup>47</sup> The Tikanga Pakeha Liturgical Working Group has previously attempted to collate liturgical resources for ‘saying hello and goodbye’ with a similar lack of offerings,

<sup>48</sup> Such a liturgy does exist in the old ‘Blue Book’ from the 1950s. It is very dated however and would not be overly helpful today.

Any ritual that is seldom practiced or only utilised in some places and never in others will struggle to gain much traction and acceptance. If energy and resources are to be put into preparing any of the rituals suggested above, we would recommend that the results be widely distributed and their use strongly encouraged. For a rite to be truly useful it must be recognised as such and this usually only happens when it is universally applied. The real downturn in confirmation numbers began when this ceased to be the case.

## CONCLUSION

*We believe that the process of confirmation when done well may inspire a dying Church to rediscover her life and purpose through the sharing of a common experience when it is seen through 'younger' eyes.<sup>49</sup>*

We began by stating that confirmation has been the subject of continued questions for hundreds of years and nothing has changed. We conclude having probably answered none of those questions, and possibly posing several more. It seems appropriate, however, to draw us back to the point where this all began.

The PADYS broached this topic with high hopes and we are uncertain how much our work has lived up to them. Certainly there are areas where we have put forward ideas and arguments contrary to those they have written about (as with the focus on rites of passage for instance), but there are others where we think we have 'been on the same page'. In particular, the PADYS original letter recommended a catechumenal approach to confirmation preparation with an emphasis on relationally based formation as opposed to didactically based education, a suggestion we would heartily endorse!

It has yet, we suspect, to be decided whether there really is "a need to refocus, renew and re-establish confirmation as a rite that is made available to all young people in the Anglican Church." Our work has uncovered arguments both for and against such a move, with some arguing that confirmation carries too much baggage to be usefully redirected – or refocused – in the future, while others would claim it as a *taonga* of Anglicanism.

Whichever view one subscribes to, there can be no doubting the benefits of a formation-focused process offering people of *all* ages the opportunity to reaffirm their faith, review their place in the Church, and recommit themselves to our common calling as members of the Body of Christ. Indeed, we would argue that these opportunities should be offered constantly and consistently throughout our church. Confirmation, viewed within this ethos, may remain helpful and relevant, or then again, it may not.

As we noted in the introduction, we are certain some people will feel we have 'missed the mark' in this project, and some may be unhappy with the results. We can live with that. We have certainly done all we can to achieve what was achievable and be honest about what was not. It has been a privilege to have such in-depth conversations with so many people throughout the country; to hear heartfelt stories about personal experiences of confirmation, both old and new; and to listen to the frustrations and concerns of many who have wrestled with the same questions we have. We have appreciated the opportunity given and the confidence shown in us by TPMC, and offer our thanks to those who have helped and guided us on the way.

We do not pretend to assume what may or may not happen to this work from here. In our own diocese we are already working with others on a series of potential events designed to spread the knowledge contained within the resource that accompanies this report, offer some ideas and opportunities to those wanting to know more about the possibilities of the catechumenate, and work alongside those who are in a position to encourage or discourage

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<sup>49</sup> PADYS letter to AMEN, 2005.



potential future confirmands. There is, we are sure, scope for similar work in other dioceses and, potentially, the reinvigoration of the currently 'off-line' catechumenate groups in Christchurch and Wellington that represent such a valuable resource.

It may be, of course, that nothing much happens. In the course of our studies we have encountered a variety of reports and explorations, some containing potentially groundbreaking recommendations, the existence of which is known to few. Such is the way of churches and committees. If that proves to be the case here, however, we are sure that someday, maybe in a few years, maybe in a few decades, someone else will come along asking the same questions posed by the PADYS with the same concerns and frustrations we have encountered over and over again. There have been many times over the past fifteen hundred years when confirmation has been ignored, forgotten and all but counted out. Yet, here we are, again.