

CONFIRMATION FOR YOUTH, 2024-2025

ST. MARK'S EPISCOPAL CHURCH

Instructor: The Rev. John Kennedy (jkennedy@stmarksnewcanaan.org / 203-966-4515 x105)

Meetings: Sundays, 11:30am-12:30pm, Youth Room

“In the course of their Christian development, those baptized at an early age are expected, when they are ready and have been duly prepared, to make a mature public affirmation of their faith and commitment to the responsibilities of their Baptism and to receive the laying on of hands by the bishop.”

- Book of Common Prayer, p. 412

This Confirmation class is designed to guide youth confirmands on a journey of exploring and practicing a Jesus-centered life. Its structure and content is inspired by the book *Simply Christian: Why Christianity Makes Sense* by the British Anglican (Episcopalian) bishop and scholar N.T. Wright. There will be no assigned reading but confirmands as well as parents are invited to buy or borrow the book and read along with the class.

The class content will be divided into three parts, following Wright's structure:

Part One: Echoes of a Voice

We begin by exploring four universal human longings: the desire for justice, the quest for spirituality, the need for relationships, and the appreciation of beauty. These “echoes” suggest something greater beyond our immediate experience. Over four sessions, we'll discuss how these themes resonate with the deeper questions of life and point us toward the divine.

Part Two: Central Beliefs of Christianity

In this section, we delve into the foundational beliefs of the Christian faith. We will spend time understanding the story of Israel, the life and mission of Jesus, and the work of the Holy Spirit. This part will unfold over several weeks, allowing us to see how these elements connect and reveal the God who seeks to redeem and renew creation.

Part Three: Living the Christian Life

The final part focuses on what it means to live out the Christian faith. We will discuss the practices of worship, prayer, and engagement with scripture, leading into a broader conversation about the church—not as a building or institution, but as a community of believers following Jesus. This section will emphasize how these practices empower us to advance God's plan for the world.

Throughout the year, patience and openness will be key as we explore these themes and see how they intertwine to form a coherent and compelling vision of Christian faith and practice.

Class time will be structured as follows:

- Attendance and ice-breaker
- Prayer
- Short presentation of the day's topic.
- Group discussion, prompted by discussion questions
- The final ten minutes of each class will be for journaling. Each confirmand will be given a journal at the first class which they are to keep track of and bring to each class.

The hope of this class (and its instructor) is that this exploration will equip confirmands to discern whether they truly wish to say “yes” to the sort of life that they are asked to recommit to in the rite of Confirmation.

The decision to be confirmed should rest with the confirmand, and they should not be made to feel pressure to do so in order to conform to social custom or to be confirmed during a particular stage of life or school year, as there is no such expectation in the Canons of the Episcopal Church or our Prayer Book. Full initiation into the Body of Christ is complete with baptism, and, prior to the last century or so, the typical age for Confirmation has been near the entrance to adulthood rather than the onset of puberty.

Accordingly, this confirmation class is a process of discernment in which confirmands are encouraged to ask questions, seek answers, and explore their spiritual depths both in community and in quiet reflection and prayer. There is no expectation that a confirmand be confirmed at the end of this process, and it is entirely acceptable for a confirmand to decide that they would like to explore Confirmation at a later time.

Finally, it is hoped that this journey will be a joyful one for all who participate! The Gospel message is one of joy, a quality that is too often scarce in our world and, indeed, too many churches. Confirmands are invited and encouraged to come as they are, be honest and authentic, and have fun.

Requirements and Expectations

1. Consistent and engaged attendance at both Sunday worship and Confirmation class.
 - a) Sunday worship is a principal and essential means by which Christians express and deepen their identity as disciples of Jesus and members of the body of Christ. Therefore, in a Confirmation class that explores Christian practice, consistent participation in Sunday worship is of great importance. Please do not skip church and come only for Confirmation class, as this undermines the foundations of an authentic Confirmation experience.
 - b) Confirmands must attend confirmation classes. It is understood that perfect attendance is not always possible given the incredible demands made on students' time by school, extracurricular activities, and sports. However, to properly discern whether to receive the sacrament of Confirmation in our tradition requires that one know something about

it. There is no greater gift we can give our children than the knowledge that they are loved unconditionally by God and the life of grace and freedom that follows from it. Accordingly, attendance will be taken during Confirmation classes, and **students may be excused from four classes** for any reason. Additional absences will result in make-up work that is proportional in time and effort of the missed class.

2. Regular (at least monthly from October through May) participation in a liturgical ministry (i.e., serve as an acolyte and/or lector). Scheduling will naturally take into account availability.
3. Attendance of at least one of the following Holy Week liturgies*:
 - Maundy Thursday
 - Good Friday
 - Easter Vigil (Saturday night before Easter Sunday)
- Engage in a regular prayer or meditative practice at home. Resources and ideas will be provided during the first class. This component of the class will not be tested or examined; it is between each confirmand and God!
- Acts of charity, service, and outreach are essential to Christian living. Opportunities to serve will be provided through the St. Mark's Youth Group. Participation is encouraged but not required in acknowledgment that scheduling is sometimes a challenge.

If you foresee difficulty fulfilling these requirements this year, please keep in mind that confirmation classes are open to students in 8th grade *or older*. You may be confirmed any year in high school, or as an adult.

Confirmation Class culminates with the sacrament of Confirmation, which is administered by one of the bishops of Connecticut. This is provisionally set for **Saturday, June 7, 2025** at a place and time to be announced. It is also possible that Bishop Jeffrey Mello will administer the sacrament of Confirmation during his visit to St. Mark's the following day, **Sunday, June 8**. I will provide updates on this as I receive them, but for now please hold both June 7 and 8.

Class Schedule (October 2024 through January 2025[†])

Part One: Echoes of a Voice

1. October 6: Putting the World to Rights

October 13: No class; Indigenous Peoples' Day weekend

* In addition to Palm Sunday and Easter Sunday.

† Classes for February through May will be scheduled and announced as soon as possible during the fall. The scheduling of those classes depends on dates for St. Mark's vestry meetings, which have not yet been set for those months. There will be a total of approximately seven classes during this time.

2. October 20: The Hidden Spring

October 27: No class; vestry meeting

3. November 3: Made for Each Other

4. November 10: For the Beauty of the Earth

November 17: No class; vestry meeting

Part One: Staring at the Sun

5. November 24: God

December 1: No class; Thanksgiving weekend

6. December 8: Israel

7. December 15: Jesus and the Coming of God's Kingdom

December 22, 29: No class; Christmas break

8. January 5: Jesus: Rescue and Renewal

January 12, 19: No class; vestry meeting and Martin Luther King, Jr. weekend

9. January 26: God's Breath of Life

February, March, April, and May class dates to be announced.