

Minister/s and Elders will help in both the discovery and expression of your spiritual gifts.

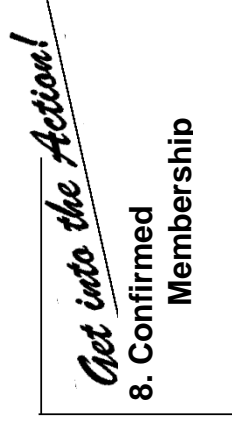
In this whole area I believe we must be much more sensitive and open than we have been – so that the Body can grow! The Church doesn't exist for the Minister/s to do his/her/their own thing either!

Where do We Go from Here?

At the beginning of these sessions, no assumptions were made. The choice to move forward into confirmed membership is over to you!

During these sessions, we have shared many things from God's Word. I remind you again of the necessity of regular, systematic study of God's Word.

Many people find the use of notes, such as those available from Scripture Union, helpful in stimulating and promoting this regular study. God bless you!



Today is our final session and we will be thinking specifically about the significance of confirmation and membership in the Uniting Church.

The readings suggested at the end of last week's session related particularly to the Church itself. It is important preparation for today's session that we share together the things we have learnt.

#1 I discovered as I read _____

The *Basis of Union* (para.12 and 13) relates confirmed membership to (1) a confirmation of God's promises to us, (2) to a deeper commitment to faith and service and (3) to an acknowledgment of gifts and involvement in ministry.

In our very first session, we noted that the *Regulations* of the Uniting Church expect that candidates for confirmation will be able to declare:

“acknowledgment of Jesus Christ as Saviour and Lord, determination to follow him in daily life, intention to participate actively in the fellowship of the Church and to support its work, and resolution to seek the extension of the reign of God in human society” (1.1.9).

Looking at Confirmation

In understanding the meaning of confirmation, it is helpful to study an order of service for confirmation. This particular order of service was written to enable inclusion of folk whose membership is being received onto the Rolls of Confirmed Members either by restoration or transfer, as well as those who are becoming members for the first time.

CONFIRMATION

(Confirmation shall take place as part of an act of worship at which Holy Communion is celebrated)

ELDER: *We are to receive as confirmed members of Christ's Church the following persons – (Candidates stand and come forward as their names are called)*

[We also welcome and affirm the following whose membership among us we now receive – (New members stand. If desired, they may also come forward to share with the Candidates as they affirm their vows)]

MINISTER: *Brothers and sisters, you have come, in the presence of God and of this congregation to affirm your acceptance of God's promises, to dedicate yourselves afresh to the Lord Jesus Christ, and to acknowledge the*

obligations of membership in his Church. I ask you – Do you believe in God, the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit?
I DO.

Do you acknowledge Jesus Christ as your Saviour and Lord, and do you determine to follow him?
I DO.

Do you promise to fulfil your duties as a member of the Church, to participate in public worship and in Holy Communion, to pray and to read the Bible?
WITH GOD'S HELP, I DO.

Do you promise to devote your life to the service of God and your neighbour?
WITH GOD'S HELP, I DO.

MINISTER (addressing congregation):
Let us join our brothers and sisters in affirming together the historic faith as summarised in the Apostles' Creed.
(**APOSTLES' CREED** is to be found on the second-last page of the Australian Hymn Book)

MINISTER: Brothers and sisters, at your baptism you were received as part of Christ's body, the Church. You have now heard his call to you, as he said to the first disciples, "Follow me." You have responded to that call and set out on the life of faith in him. You now come so that we may lay hands on you and pray that the Holy Spirit will fill you, confirm in you the promises of God and strengthen you to obey his will. Let us pray:

PEOPLE: ALMIGHTY GOD, OUR HEAVENLY FATHER, YOU HAVE REVEALED YOURSELF TO US IN YOUR WRITTEN WORD AND HAVE GIVEN YOUR SON, THE LIVING WORD, TO LIVE AMONG US, TO DIE

ON THE CROSS FOR US, TO BE RAISED TO LIFE AND GLORY AT YOUR RIGHT HAND. FILL THESE, YOUR SONS AND DAUGHTERS, WITH YOUR HOLY SPIRIT, AS YOU HAVE PROMISED. INCREASE IN THEM DAILY THE FRUIT OF YOUR SPIRIT, WHICH IS LOVE, JOY, PEACE, PATIENCE, KINDNESS, GOODNESS, FAITHFULNESS, GENTLENESS AND SELF-CONTROL. EQUIP THEM WITH SPIRITUAL GIFTS FOR THE BUILDING UP OF YOUR BODY AND FOR THE WITNESS AND SERVICE OF YOUR PEOPLE. THROUGH CHRIST OUR LORD. AMEN.

(The minister and Elder/s lay hands on each candidate in turn, the Minister or an Elder praying appropriately each time)

(The Candidates [and New Members] stand and face the congregation)
PEOPLE: WE, THE MEMBERS OF THIS CONGREGATION, WELCOME YOU AS FULL MEMBERS. WE WELCOME YOU TO THIS MINISTRY OF JESUS CHRIST. WE GIVE YOU THE RIGHT HAND OF FELLOWSHIP, AND PRAY THAT TOGETHER WE MAY BE BUILT UP IN FAITH, CONFIRMED IN HOPE AND MADE PERFECT IN LOVE.

(The Minister and Elder/s give the right hand of fellowship to the Candidates [and New Members]. Confirmation Certificates will be presented. Candidates [and New Members] will then move down the aisle and greet those people next to the aisle, as representative of the whole congregation. They then return to their places in the body of the church.)

In the service questions are asked whether you

Believe _____

Acknowledge _____

Promise _____

Promise _____

Note that it assumed that the candidate for confirmation has already been baptised. The *Regulations* of the Uniting Church make it quite clear that a candidate not previously baptised "shall be baptised either prior to or in conjunction with the confirmation" (1.1.8).

Note the emphasis on the ministry of the Holy Spirit. It is only through the ministry of the Holy Spirit that you have come to faith in Christ (John 16.8-11). By the Holy Spirit you have been "born again", born into God's family (John 3.5). The Holy Spirit is already at work in you to confirm to you the things of Christ and to guide you into all the truth (John 16.13-15). Our prayer as we lay hands on the

candidates is that they will be "filled with the Holy Spirit", that the Spirit may form, control and permeate their personalities – to the end that they will exhibit increasingly the "fruit of the Spirit" (Galatians 5.22-23) and also the "gifts of the Spirit" to be functioning parts of Christ's body, sharing in his witness and service (note Ephesians 4.11-13).

Membership of Christ's Body

Membership of Christ's Body, the Church, is a high privilege which also brings to us an active responsibility. It is tragic that many Christians see their membership as mainly passive – as if they are mainly there to "be ministered to", and not to be involved in ministry. Note carefully that Jesus was saying in Mark 10.35-45.

Think again about that passage from Ephesians 4 noted above. What gifts do you think God may have given you? In what ways do you think he may be equipping you "for the work of ministry, for building up the Body of Christ"?

My gifts for service? _____

Being part of the Body means we are inter-dependent and under the headship of Christ. We don't just rush off to do our own thing! Usually the