Maybe you grew up in a Presbyterian Church, and you participated in confirmation in 8th grade. Or maybe you were Lutheran, and it was a two-year process. Or you were Catholic, and confirmation was a sacrament, on par with communion and baptism. Or you were a part of a church that practiced believer baptism, so confirmation wasn't even a thing. Or you weren't Christian at all, and so confirmation *really* wasn't a thing.

Every flavor of Christianity does (or doesn't do) confirmation differently. Even within our own denomination, the Presbyterian Church (USA), it can vary from congregation to congregation. At FPC, our next confirmation cohort is about to begin, so perhaps you'd like to know what we do and why…

At its core, confirmation is about confirming – agreeing with – one's baptism. (Not conforming – fitting into – someone else's faith statements.) We answer God's "yes" to us with a "yes" of our own to God. For people who were baptized as infants or even as children, baptism happened to them without their say in the matter. As Presbyterians, we believe this is a reminder of God's prevenient grace – divine grace that comes before we can ask for it. Confirmation is our response to that grace. It happens when the church trusts that a person is about the right age to agree with that sacrament and the grace it symbolizes. For a youth who hasn't been baptized, it's when the church trusts that a person might want to be.

We make a distinction between the confirmation class (or process) and getting confirmed. The process begins on Nov. 2 at 9:45 am, with our first class. From then until late May, we meet regularly, discuss and explore a variety of theological topics, craft statements of faith, and hopefully come together as a cohort. As the process is drawing to a close, each confirmands will have the chance to confirm their baptism and choose to join the church as an adult member (or be baptized, if they have not been). For those who just aren't there yet, either theologically or in terms of the church community, they are still celebrated and loved (and still on my weekly church emails!).

Like church, confirmation is a team sport, best done with others. While it's something of a personal decision at the end, having people to talk with, learn from, and experience it with is wonderfully valuable. Because of the size of FPC, that means we do confirmation every other year. For us, confirmands are 8th and 9th graders, as well as any sophomores, juniors or seniors who haven't done it before. This year, the class will be divided into two tables (small groups), led by the fabulous Cris Rivera (their 3rd time) and tremendous Annie Gentithes (past middle school faith formation teacher). Sometimes, we'll do things in tables, and others, we'll do things as a whole group. I am the lead teacher.

The confirmands also get to select Friends in Faith, who are adult members of the congregation who will walk alongside them, coming to a few classes and meeting

with them a few times. It is a wonderful thing to get to be a Friend in Faith – someone who a teenager thinks is cool enough, and appropriately faithful enough, to invite along for the ride.

In the class, confirmands take a deep dive into faith – both their own particular faith and that of the church (Christian, Presbyterian, First Pres.). We all inherit pieces of faith and doubt from our family, friends, churches, and others. In confirmation, we explore those elements, learn the faith that the church affirms, and jump into the Bible afresh. We start with a series of classes on *Story* – our Spiritual autobiography, the Bible, language for God, etc. Then we move to *Who God Is*, spending time on the three persons of the Trinity. We close with *Our Response*, which includes everything from worship and sacraments to vocation and Spiritual gifts. The capstone experience is writing a statement of faith, each for themselves and together as a cohort. (This group statement shows up on Confirmation Sunday and Youth Sundays.)

There will be a blessing of the confirmands coming up in worship on November 16. I hope you can join us to celebrate these youth as they begin this journey together.

Grace & Peace,
John