

**Trendsetters: A Confirmation Sermon**  
**The Monroe Congregational Church**  
**Rev. Jennifer Gingras**  
**June 4, 2017**

*Acts 2:1-4, Galatians 5:22-26*

One of my favorite things to do here at MCC is to teach confirmation. I love spending time with teens and watching them grow as we explore faith together, and this year with Becky and Jess has been a delight. The creativity that our young people bring to their final confirmation projects always inspires, this year it was a piece of mixed media art and a beehive cake. Mostly, I enjoy the meaningful conversations that happen over the course of the year. And who doesn't love a good public blessing?

But all of these wonderful moments hardly resemble what confirmation was created to be. In the early church, on the night before Easter, adult initiates were baptized and the Bishop confirmed that it happened. After Christianity was made the religion of the state, there were so many people joining the church that Bishops were unable to be present at every one, so they separated baptism and confirmation from each other to make the service shorter.

Then to complicate matters, the church began to baptize babies, who obviously could not answer the confirmation questions for themselves. Over time, infant baptism became the norm. Confirmation was pushed until later, when the person was mature enough to say "yes" to belonging to Christ's Church Universal for themselves.

Some of you have heard me say that at age 13 I said "no" to confirmation. After the one mandatory meeting with our pastor I still wasn't sure what I was saying "yes" to!

In a way, I am still saying "No" AND "Yes" to some things about confirmation. Here are a few:

**No to Testing Our Young.** In one of the churches I belonged to, there was a "test". Confirmands would study, try and memorize different scriptures, creeds, names of disciples and books of the Bible. On the night before the big day, each one stood before 12 deacons and took a verbal exam. Their concern was that the young people don't know enough about the Bible or about the Church to be members.

I believe faith grows and changes as people grow and change, and using a “test” as a gatekeeper might stunt the growth of faith in the future. Besides, we do not test adults, further than the questions we use when they formally join the church in worship. My opinion? Let it go.

**No to Only One Way to Belong.** The fastest growing religious group in the US is the group that checks “none” in the survey box for religious affiliation. This doesn’t necessarily mean that people are turning away from faith, but it may mean that they are unable to be present on Sunday morning.

Perhaps we need to be open to more than one way of meaningful belonging. As we face declining numbers and a world of pluralism, churches like ours need multiple points of entrance and connection.

I say this with the firm belief that Christ’s Church still has a role to play in the 21st century that can touch the lives of our young people. It’s all about what we say “Yes” to...

**Yes to Meaning Making.** Belonging to Christ’s Church still provides a container for life’s meaning making. Our religious language, imagery and Biblical story give people of all ages a mechanism to talk about their lives, especially when theirs is are falling apart.

**Yes to Service.** Belonging to Christ’s Church teaches us about caring for the poor and marginalized. Jesus, himself, was not only compassionate with the poor and outcast, he was one too. When we care for those that Jesus cared about, and our precious world, we answer God’s call.

**Yes to Ritual.** Belonging to Christ’s Church provides rituals as moments that honor life changes. I believe that confirmation is a life affirming rite of passage into adulthood; something that our secular culture does not do very well. Confirmation says to the young person that we celebrate them on their faith journey and that we trust God has been and will be with them in every part of their life.

**Yes to Belonging.** Belonging to Christ’s Church is still a way to give a larger sense of belonging in an isolating and individualistic world. For teens, belonging is one of the most compelling parts of what we do as church. To know that we have a group of people that will pray for us in dark time and who love us, no matter what, is foundational to the Church’s survival.

The story of Pentecost reminds us that the power that pushes us onward is the breath of the Spirit, the same breath that blows over the primordial soup at the beginning of Genesis, the same breath that inspires the prophets, that descends upon Jesus at his baptism. The Spirit of God is what changes and feeds our lives as people of faith -- if we let it.

Look at all the hatred, fear and alienation in the world right now, some of it imposed by racial, ethnic, political or religious bias. Wars and threats of wars seem to float around us and we are frightened. We rail at our elected leaders to keep their promises because we feel powerless as individuals to affect any change.

But somehow, in the midst of our fear we are reminded that we possess this amazing gift - the ability to affect change for the better. Individually, we may not be able to stop wars, but we can change the attitudes and actions which demean other people. Together, we can proclaim the good news of hope and a vision of peace for the future.

Today, confirmands, my hope for you is that you continue to be trendsetters of peace and hope. Actually, no, wait, that's my dream for all of us.

But it will take some commitment. What will be yours be today? Will you take one hour out of your busy week to help someone? Will you seek to support ministries of peace and reconciliation? Will you feed the hungry, clothe those who are in need; visit the sick and those imprisoned? Will you welcome the stranger? What will you do? Everyone here can do something.

The disciples were empowered by receiving the Holy Spirit, they went out into the world and changed countless lives with the message of good news. They became vessels of love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, generosity, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control. Mark my words - we can choose to do the same. May it be so, and may it be soon. Amen.