

To the Confirmation Candidates of the Church of St. John the Evangelist in Topsail

Good morning. I speak to you today on what would have been your day of confirmation in the Church of Saint John the Evangelist in Topsail. I regret very much that we are unable to be together in person and I deeply regret that confirmation day will be delayed until we are able to come together in public worship once again. Reverend Jolene has asked me to share a few words with you today and I thank her for her fine leadership in the parish and diocese and for her involvement in the confirmation program this year in Topsail. I also thank the confirmation leaders and parents for their support. I ask everyone to hold firm; there will be a service of confirmation in Topsail, but we are unable to set a date for that right now. I very much look forward to seeing everybody then.

I also thank everyone connected with the Church of St. John the Evangelist for your continued faithfulness and support during this very strange time. Your rector and your parish have risen to the challenge and offer worship online every week and I know that pastoral care continues through the telephone and in other ways. We will have to continue in this way for some time yet, however, this too shall pass, and we can all look forward to a future time when the familiar and much-loved activities of church life will resume. On this Sunday we offer worship to God and we continue to pray for everyone affected in any way by COVID-19 as we pray for an eventual end to this pandemic and a new beginning when this is past.

I want to reflect a little upon this day in the life of those young persons who would have been confirmed at this time. Although it is not the sort of day that any of us expected, it is still important for us to remember what might have been, and give thanks for the journey thus far, as we look to the future in hope for what will still be a wonderful confirmation celebration in a few months.

I am now in my seventh year as Bishop in the Diocese of Eastern Newfoundland and Labrador and during that time I have participated in many Celebrations of Confirmation across this vast church of ours. The smallest number of candidates in a service was 1(!) and the largest was 46! In every place there have been large crowds and I have also noted many family members and friends from across Newfoundland and Labrador. Gifts are given and many get-togethers happen with much food as part of the occasion. Almost all the persons I have Confirmed were young, about 11 years of age or so.

I also note that there is often much emotion during confirmation services, while I am speaking directly to the candidates as I always do, and then again as I lay my hands on their heads with the prayer: ***Defend O Lord, your servant N, with your heavenly grace, that they may continue yours forever, and daily increase in your Holy Spirit more and more, until they come to your everlasting kingdom.*** Confirmation is a wonderful sacrament, filled with meaning, and one of the best opportunities we have in the Church to do some serious teaching about the faith.

Confirmation is a very important step along the way of a person's spiritual journey. It is a time when young people are able to claim their Christian faith for themselves and make promises to do their best to follow Jesus. Confirmation marks an important moment with many other important moments to follow. Confirmation is not a graduation even if some are tempted to think that when they're Confirmed, they are ready to leave the church behind. Would you believe that I encounter adults who admit to me that the last time they remember being in church for anything memorable was when they were Confirmed, sometimes 20 and 30 years earlier?

Confirmation is not the end of anything. It is, much rather, the beginning of something new in a young person's life when they have hopefully made a mature profession of faith and begin to assume greater responsibilities as Christians. I often tell the young people I Confirm that this is the day their church treats them as adults ... old enough to make promises for themselves. But not yet old enough to leave home – neither the home they share with their parents nor their church home.

In a curious way, all of the people who would have been confirmed today are blessed in two ways. You are blessed as you give thanks on the day of your *almost-confirmation*, knowing that you can still look forward to a full and wonderful confirmation celebration in person with your family and friends down the road. I look forward to it also.

It is my prayer for all of you that when you look back on *this* day, *and* the day of your Confirmation still to come you will remember it with a sense of thanksgiving and joy. In our Confirmations we both reflect upon the first part of our journey as Christians while at the same time begin the next part of our journey as we move into adulthood.

In that sense, Confirmation is both an end *and* a beginning.

But the journey continues ...

May God bless you along the way!

+*Geoff*