

How I “Invented” Dual Affirmation

I went to an Association of Interchurch Families conference and enjoyed a great weekend which, apart from declaring me to be the worst pool player ever, really got me thinking. I went home from the conference very enthused about ecumenism, and joint confirmation in particular – and promptly forgot all about it (the confirmation bit, that is, not the conference). At the time, it didn't really apply to me as I was too young to become involved in the confirmation process in my two churches, Anglican and Catholic. I had heard my parents and other AIF adults discussing the problems of getting married, baptism, first communion, and so on, and had even joined in with the older AIF kids in talking about confirmation, but it wasn't really my problem. Then suddenly the confirmation season arrived, and within three weeks I found myself enrolled in two sets of confirmation classes and becoming the bane of our local priests' existences. I was about to make a name for myself with the local churches.

I attended the classes in both the Anglican and Roman Catholic churches, and found them practically the same. I had been hoping that the classes would show me the differences between the two denominations, but all they did was to emphasise the similarities.

Once I had enrolled, I was very unsure about what to do next. I didn't really know what I wanted, or what I had a feasible chance of getting during the six months before the confirmation services. My brother had decided to “go with the flow” and be confirmed in the Roman Catholic Church, and I was tempted to do the same. I became a regular fixture in my Anglican priest's living room, where he helped to fill me in on what the church allowed and rejected. He advised me that I would always be welcome in the Church of England even if I was confirmed as a Roman Catholic, but that it didn't work the other way round. The Anglican priest was very helpful and supportive, though my Catholic priest was less so. I think he was rather confused about what I was trying to achieve, and wished that I would stop disturbing his careful plans. Who could blame him? I started to invent my own plans.

After a lot of soul searching, and some long, deep, and often surprising conversations with many different people, I decided that I didn't want just to be confirmed one way or the other. I wanted both, and why shouldn't I stand up and tell people what I wanted? I realised that a true joint confirmation was not going to happen within my six-month time-scale, so I “invented” affirmation. I went to the top and wrote to both my bishops.

I had to make up a part for myself in the two services. My Catholic bishop was great; when I wrote to him explaining what I wanted, I received in reply a very nice letter saying that what I suggested was perfectly acceptable. I rather flustered our poor Catholic priest by demanding that my name should be included on the list of confirmation candidates, so that he didn't brush me into a corner. Eventually it went into the programme with the other names, but in its own special “affirmation” category.

The service was really lovely. When the other candidates stood up and renewed their baptismal vows, I joined them. Then we went up as a family to the bishop where my brother was confirmed with the oil and I received a special blessing. In the Anglican church, one candidate was being baptised before being confirmed, and at that time I stepped forward and affirmed my faith. Again I went up to the bishop with the others and was blessed as they were confirmed.

I was really glad that I had made the effort to stand up for what I believe and show that I can fight for things I feel strongly about. It also proved to me that I am not a wimp! I hope that some day it will be possible for me to be confirmed in both churches, but for the moment affirmation is my first step.