

August 2009

To All Parents of 7<sup>th</sup> and 8<sup>th</sup> Graders:

Fasten your seatbelts. This letter announces a few exciting changes to the Confirmation and Youth programs at St. Mark's Church.

After spending a good portion of the summer listening to youth and parents, studying the Master Plan for the parish, and consulting with the clergy and other colleagues, it has become clear that, in order to maximize our potential, we should modify our 7<sup>th</sup> and 8<sup>th</sup> grade programming. Changes can be difficult because they challenge us to think in new ways, but I am confident these changes will help us better serve our young people and that Christ will do great things through us. I'll lay out the changes first and follow them with a few explanatory and concluding remarks.

### **Changes to Confirmation**

- Confirmation classes will not be offered for 7<sup>th</sup> graders this Fall. Starting in the Spring of 2011, St. Mark's will begin offering Confirmation classes as a component of the Sr. High Youth Program. These classes will be available to high school Juniors and any Seniors who did not elect Confirmation in the Junior year.
- This year's 8<sup>th</sup> graders will be confirmed in the Spring as scheduled, but their Confirmation classes will begin in January, not September. In the Fall, 8<sup>th</sup> graders will be regular members of the Jr. High Youth Group.
- 8<sup>th</sup> Grade Confirmation classes will be held from 6-7pm on Sunday evenings, beginning in the Spring. (Confirmation is offered for 8<sup>th</sup> graders this year for the sake of fairness to those who began the program last year.)
- Following current best practice throughout the Episcopal Church and other churches, the Confirmation curriculum at St. Mark's will shift from a modern, academic pedagogy to a post-modern, experiential pedagogy. (Liturgy, Field Trips, Mission Work, Reflection, Study, Prayer)

### **A New Jr. High Youth Group!**

- Instead of beginning Confirmation classes, 7<sup>th</sup> graders will—along with the 8<sup>th</sup> graders—become members of the inaugural Jr. High Youth Group (to be renamed by the kids) which will meet every Sunday from 4-5pm.
- The focus of the Jr. High Youth Group will be to increase “bonds of peace” (Ephesians 4) by having some serious FUN. Think games, skits, field trips, and so forth, all designed to center the kids within the Christian heritage and help them to develop a more loving relationship with God, each other, and the world.
- 7<sup>th</sup> and 8<sup>th</sup> graders will be encouraged to stay after Jr. High Youth Hour for the 5pm Sunday Eucharist, which will be informal and contemporary enough for the kids, but reflective and

mysterious enough for all persons. *Your presence at this service would lend a strong degree of support to the program.*

- A Snack Supper for the youth will follow from 5:30-6pm each week.

### **The New Sunday Night Schedule:**

4-5pm- Jr. High Youth Hour for all 7<sup>th</sup> and 8<sup>th</sup> graders  
5pm- Informal Eucharist in the chapel  
5:30-6pm Snack Supper in Morrill Hall  
6-7pm- Sr. High Youth Hour  
6-7pm- 8<sup>th</sup> Grade Confirmation classes/ (Jan-May)

### **Why Are We Doing This?**

- We want to give Wednesday nights back for family time, homework, and rest.
- 8<sup>th</sup> graders, as a group, are usually not spiritually ready for Confirmation. This opinion is supported by our cumulative experience, current literature on the subject, and the best practices of the Episcopal Church, including the advice of the Bishop of Connecticut.
- By offering Confirmation to Sr. High youth, we increase the likelihood that Confirmation will be for our young people a “**mature**, public affirmation of their faith and commitment to the responsibilities of their Baptism” (BCP 412).
- However, 7<sup>th</sup> and 8<sup>th</sup> graders, in general, are perfectly ready for participation in a fun Jr. High youth group. This group will provide a safe place for community and a foundation for more meaningful future participation in Sr. High Youth group and Confirmation Class.
- By moving all programming to Sunday, we preserve the Lord’s Day as the principal time set aside for Church. Further, by scheduling Youth around the 5pm Sunday Eucharist, we emphasize liturgical participation as a *foundational* component of the Jr. High and Sr. High Youth programs.
- The goal is a youth program which exists in harmony with the overall life of the parish and within a comprehensive structure for nurturing lifelong Christian formation.

Thank you for reading this letter. Please recycle it. If you have questions, feel free to contact me at the church. 203-966-4515, ext. 104. My cell phone is 203-644-0815. I hope you will join me in daily prayer for these programs and for the mission and ministry of St. Mark’s Church.

Peace,

Joshua Ashton Hill  
Director of Children’s and Youth Ministries