

SOMETHING TO THINK ABOUT: 16th August

Ritual in the church community

We have two young women being confirmed this Sunday, and next Sunday a little person will be baptised. Such events bring to mind questions around what these rituals of confirmation and baptism represent in the life of the church and in the lives of the people concerned. Does the baby have to wait till he is confirmed before he becomes a full member of the Church? It takes effort to remember that the church has rethought its practice in relation to these rituals of baptism and confirmation. In the 1960s the changes that took place in theology and worship saw the church reframe baptism as the one and only rite of *full membership* into the church (irrespective of denomination). Body images are used in talking about becoming a 'member' of the Church, the 'Body of Christ'. Membership of any body, or organization or community - sports clubs, play-centre, local school - brings some rights and privileges and some responsibilities. Initiation as a member of the Body of Christ through baptism does the same. With full membership comes the right to participate in the central sacrament of the church, the Eucharist. So once baptised, infant or adult, you are invited to receive the bread and wine of communion in friendship with others of the 'body' and are encouraged to grow in understanding of the responsibilities of being a follower of Jesus. Some people have not caught up with all this and still delay the fullness of the rights of baptism until after confirmation: they wait until they are confirmed to participate in the thanksgiving meal with others of the Body of Christ. Contrary to this delayed approach, confirmation is a rite with its own integrity. It is not the second half of baptism. It is a public event in which those who have reached a mature decision to declare their intention to align their lives with Jesus' invitation to seek justice and to live with compassion can make an adult commitment to this effect. In this way they are embarking on a responsible life of ministry in the way of Christ. To sustain ourselves in this way of life, the practice of prayer and active engagement with the stories of faith are fundamental. Young or old, at any stage in the life of ministry, faith and spiritual growth, we need the love and support of one another in our journey. **Susan**