

**A STUDY OF
YOUTH
CONFIRMATION
&
FIRST
COMMUNION
IN THE
LUTHERAN
CHURCH
-
MISSOURI
SYNOD**

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A STUDY OF YOUTH CONFIRMATION AND FIRST COMMUNION IN THE LUTHERAN CHURCH - MISSOURI SYNOD is the result of a year long effort to explore what is happening in youth confirmation ministry in LCMS congregations. A random sampling was done asking for responses to 45 questions about youth confirmation practice in local parishes. Of this sampling, a second random sample was done asking for longer, more expansive answers to 16 “essay” type questions. The results of those samples and the observations of the Confirmation Task Force are the subject of this report. No statistical study of confirmation practice has been made in the LCMS since 1986 and no study of confirmation practice has really been made since 1968 when a report titled “Confirmation and First Communion” by Frank W. Klos was released. This later report was the result of a joint Lutheran project of the LCMS together with the then Lutheran Church in America and the American Lutheran Church. That study was commended to LCMS congregations for study at the 1971 LCMS synodical convention.

The subject of confirmation is often raised with questions and inquiries about how to build effective youth confirmation programs, how to teach adolescents in a meaningful way, how to make confirmation a significant event in the lives of young people, how to develop support among families and congregation members. “What kinds of curriculum that work are available?” is also often asked. At the top of the list of concerns, there seems to be a large degree of frustration about disinterested young people and non-supportive families.

This report offers observations and comments but no strong directions at this time. The latter is due in part to the reality that most congregations feel the matter of youth confirmation is a responsibility of the local congregation and not something to be prescribed by synodical directive. This study provides information about what is happening and what the questions are. It raises more questions and sets us on a course to seek answers to help pastors, other Christian educators and congregations build effective youth confirmation programs.

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*For additional information about insights into the faith lives of adults and youth in the LCMS and identifying qualities of congregational life that nurture the faith, the reader is encouraged to read **Congregations At Crossroads**, copyright 1995 by Search Institute, Minneapolis, MN and available from the Board for Congregational Services, The Lutheran Church - Missouri Synod.*

YOUTH CONFIRMATION - THE CHALLENGE AND THE HOPE FOR THE CHURCH TODAY

For Lutherans, youth confirmation ministry has always been and continues to be a high priority. Many congregations continue to perform that ministry very much the way their parents and grandparents did in previous generations. Other congregations are trying new ways to reach and teach young confirmands. Both groups have this in common: They want to do the best job that they possibly can. They are united in their commitment to the Lord's Great Commission. And they love their children as God's gift to them and to the church.

So what are Lutheran congregations currently doing in confirmation ministry? To seek answers to that question the Department of Youth Ministry of The Lutheran Church - Missouri Synod recently conducted a survey among LCMS congregations. They also formed a task force to study these results, compare the results to previous surveys and to offer observations and suggestions to congregations for consideration as they seek to improve their youth confirmation ministry.

The task force shares its consolidated report of the survey together with their suggestions with the prayer that these will stimulate congregations to develop an even better confirmation ministry to serve the congregation's young people and their families.

A BRIEF GLANCE AT YOUTH CONFIRMATION MINISTRY IN THE CHURCH TODAY

A representative group of those surveyed were asked to respond to a more extensive, longer answer questionnaire. What they said indicates both the frustrations and the joys of those entrusted with teaching in the youth confirmation program of a church.

The Cry for More Parental Involvement

Greater parental involvement was the universal cry of the instructors. Many felt that the often negative attitudes of their students too often reflected the attitudes of their parents. Responders reported conflict with parents over timing of classes, length of instruction, family involvement in support for confirmation, participation and encouragement. Too many parents seem to feel that they have no responsibility in the process. It's up to the pastor and church to get adolescents confirmed.

Resistance to Change

There seemed to be a desire by a significant number of the teachers to make changes in the method of instruction in order to make it more interesting and meaningful. In some instances, there was desire to add to the content of the course to make it relevant. So why not make these changes? While sensing the need for change, some were unsure how to actually initiate these changes. Some knew change was called for but were unclear as to what actual changes needed to be made. A large number of teachers indicated that the congregation and the parents would resist any significant change if they tried to make it.

Teachers with a Heart for Youth

Instructors expressed a genuine desire to help equip youth in the faith journey. Helping youth gain a good understanding of basic Christian doctrine and developing a strong relationship with the Lord and with the Christian community were frequently stated teacher goals.

First Communion Before or After Confirmation?

When asked for *practical* reasons for offering communion prior to confirmation, respondents said, "To develop the practice of communing regularly earlier in life." . . ."To develop a focus on communion away from confirmation." . . ."We noted an increased participation of youth in worship and at communion among those communing earlier." One respondent raised the question why requirements for confirmation for children were so much greater than those for adults.

Some respondents who gave practical reasons for waiting with communion until after confirmation indicated that youth need to be able to examine themselves. Others expressed fears that youth who communed prior to confirmation would never get confirmed. Still the most frequent response given for communing after confirmation was "it is the tradition of the congregation."

When asked for *theological* reasons for offering communion at an earlier age, respondents shared comments like these: "The faith of young people is being tested. The Holy Spirit can strengthen their faith

through the Lord's Supper." "They are able to discern the body and blood for forgiveness." "Confirmation is not needed - only baptism, faith and understanding to receive communion."

Most of the responses to the question asking for theological reasons for waiting to offer communion until after confirmation centered around the need for youth to be able to "discern the body of Christ" and to be able to "examine themselves." They indicated that these concerns were better served at the seventh and eighth grade level. The importance of great knowledge and understanding were mentioned in many of the responses. Some argued that there were no theological reasons and that tradition rather than theology dictated the practice of communing after confirmation in The Lutheran Church-Missouri Synod.

Who Makes the Decisions on Confirmation Issues?

By far the majority of those answering the survey indicated that decisions about confirmation and communion belong to the local congregation. Those same respondents said that the congregation looked to the pastor and to Synod to guide them in their decision making process. It appears from comments that within the congregation at a practical level, the pastor and the board of elders and/or the board of education guide the congregation.

Is Uniformity Among Congregations Important?








While a uniform approach to confirmation throughout Synod might be desirable, the responses indicated that the greater need was to be responsive to that which best served the local congregation and its youth. Most asked instead for broad guidelines and for flexibility.

Attitudes Can Be A Problem

Attitudes toward the confirmation program by youth, parents and the congregation as perceived by those surveyed varied widely. Some youth resent being forced by their parents to attend the instruction classes. Other students look forward to the opportunity to grow in the faith. Many parents see the confirmation program as the best opportunity for their children to be taught the faith and are themselves ready to help in the process. The attitude of other parents is to "let the pastor do it." Some congregations are viewed as supportive and open to change. Others seem to say, "Let the pastor do it the way we have always done it in this congregation."

Hope Springs Eternal in the Hearts of the Teachers

"What is your personal vision for youth confirmation ministry?" was the question that stimulated the most uplifting responses.

-  "To set youth on a path of growth in discipleship, giving them momentum for their (faith) journey."
-  "Encourage more discovery of Bible truth (rather) than lecture."
-  "Instill a desire to continue in Bible study after confirmation."
-  "Congregations assisting the parents in their instruction and encouragement of their child's faith development."
-  "This is an opportunity for pastors to spend quality time with the young people of the congregation."
-  "That each person will know and trust God's love in Jesus."
-  "Strengthen the relationship with Jesus, with each other and with me, the pastor."

These are only a few of the remarks but they are representative of the entire group of responses and they reflect the inner hope of those who teach the young people of the church.

A VISION TOWARD

The task force offers the following consideration:



THE FUTURE

observations and suggestions for consideration:

Teachers Express Their Chief Concerns

The survey identified seven primary concerns expressed directly or implied by those teaching youth confirmands:

1. **COMMUNITY:** What can I do to build good relationships between the students and myself and between the students and themselves?
2. **CLIMATE:** How can I create a teaching climate that will help students develop a positive attitude toward the confirmation program?
3. **COOPERATION:** How can I gain the support and the participation of parents in the learning process of their children?
4. **CHANGE:** How do I overcome the resistance of the congregation and some of the parents when I want to make changes that I think would be helpful to the student's?
5. **CURRICULUM:** What are some confirmation instructional materials that are meaningful, interesting and helpful in developing the faith life of these young disciples?
6. **COMMUNION:** If our congregation chooses to offer communion before confirmation, how do we best prepare young adolescents for the reception of the Lord's Supper?
7. **CATECHISIS:** What are the theological and church polity considerations behind confirmation itself and the offering of communion before the rite of confirmation?

Setting the Vision

It is important for the pastor to meet with the parents of youth beginning confirmation instruction and for parents and pastor to develop together their vision for the expected outcome of the confirmation learning and Christian growth process. Parents share what they hope will be accomplished. And, the pastor shares his vision. Parents and the pastor commit to work together in the nurturing of these young Christian disciples. Including representatives from the board of elders and the education committee can enhance such a discussion between parents and pastor. It should be clear to all from the beginning what the youth confirmation program strives to accomplish.

Emphasizing Relationships

The focus of confirmation ministry should include a strong emphasis on relationships. These include the youth's relationship to God, to parents or guardians, to others in the class, to the instructor, to the Christian community and to all people. While teaching Christian doctrine is highly important, so is the development of relationships among children of the heavenly Father. This is exemplified by our Lord's own relationship to those who followed him during his earthly ministry.

The class instructor will want to place considerable emphasis on his or her personal relationship with the young people. Using fifteen to twenty minutes at the beginning of each class to talk about what is happening in their lives can go a long way in building these relationships. The class leader facilitates this process. The students do the talking. The leader listens. Taking opportunity for one-on-one conversation, taking the class on retreat, engaging in athletics and games - these all can help the relationship process.

Choosing the Setting for Learning

Confirmation instruction can happen in a variety of places, including the classroom, the sanctuary, a camp, a retreat setting or a servant event through which service to others is performed. Consideration could be given to periodically changing the setting. When the class consists of only two to four youth, the sessions could be held in the home of a parent or in the pastor's home with one or more parents providing refreshments and participating in a supportive role in the learning process. Learning experiences outside of the classroom setting often lend themselves to the nurturing of relationships between participants. They also place the teacher in a somewhat different relationship to the students.

The Longer Journey

Confirmation ministry should be viewed as only one of the stages of discipleship in the life-long journey of growing in relationship to our Lord and in service to all people by sharing the Gospel of Jesus Christ and demonstrating love and care in his name. Care must be directed to helping youth and their parents not to see confirmation as the "end" or "graduation."

Choosing the Curriculum

Make certain the curriculum is effective. Consider what activities seem to be helping youth to learn? What activities are encouraging them to share their doubts and their faith? What activities are encouraging them to grow, not simply in knowledge, but also in their relationship to their Lord and the body of Christ? At various intervals during the year, the instructor may want to involve the students in oral and written evaluations of the learning process. What is especially helpful? What is missing? What changes would they suggest for consideration? Regular evaluation of curriculum is essential. If it's not working, don't be afraid to change.

A Rite of Passage

Confirmation has the potential for being a significant singular event in a young person's life and connection to God and church. It should not be sloughed off or treated casually. Regular evaluation needs to ask questions. To what extent is the confirmation learning experience linked as a rite of passage to the greater involvement of these young people in the congregation's mission? What confirmation activities introduce these young disciples to participation in congregational ministries? What makes the experience meaningful to the students? What will they remember is significant about confirmation? And what are they passing on to? What will be different about their relationship with the rest of their congregation after they are confirmed?

Choosing a Date for the Rite of Confirmation

There is no one perfect date for confirmation. The task force is intrigued with holding the rite of confirmation on Reformation Sunday. This allows the rest of the school year for a program designed to assimilate newly confirmed young people in the congregation's ministry, especially into their youth ministry program. It also gets confirmation away from the late April/May time of year that many associate with end of school year/graduation which, in turn, may contribute to confirmation being seen by many as "an end."

First Communion Prior To Confirmation

If your congregation offers first communion prior to confirmation, consider celebrating the first communion on Maundy Thursday. The young adolescent often connects more readily to the awesomeness and mystery of spiritual things -- more so than an older youth. Maundy Thursday directly connects the youth's first communion to the night on which Christ instituted the Lord's Supper and celebrated it with his disciples. That connection can be truly significant. The six weeks of Lent can be used to prepare the youth and their parents for the first communion.

FOCUSING ON THE PURPOSE OF CONFIRMATION

Before designing a confirmation program, those involved need to have agreement on the purpose of confirmation for those youth who generally are between thirteen or fourteen, but also as young as ten to eleven years of age. Reflecting on the comments by the task force on this subject may help you in preparing your own purpose statement with specific measurable objectives.

From the study, the task force identified the following components. The purpose of confirmation is to help confirmands:

- ✦ Personally confess Jesus Christ as their Lord and Savior and take personal ownership in declaring, by the power of the Holy Spirit, their own allegiance to Christ;
- ✦ Eagerly explore the awesomeness of God and the mysteries of faith;
- ✦ Identify themselves as members, as a unique and special part of the body of Christ, as Lutheran and members of a local congregation.
- ✦ Regularly participate in public worship and the reception of holy communion, engage in personal and group Bible study and its application to life, strive to lead God-pleasing lives and offer services to God by serving others;
- ✦ Celebrate the relationships that they have with God as their personal God who loves them graciously, their pastor and other confirmation staff people, their peers participating in the confirmation process, their family and other members of their congregation.

Developing A Vision for Youth Confirmation Ministry

Developing a vision statement for confirmation ministry helps give congregations direction in designing a program to make the greatest possible impact for Christian growth in the lives of young people as well as for the life of the congregation during this time of preparation for the rite of confirmation.

Young people engaged in confirmation ministry spend a significant number of hours with their pastors and other confirmation staff members. The opportunity for faith formation is rarely greater than during this time. The lifelong journey of faith that begins at baptism can be influenced during these formative years by those more mature in the faith. The result? Young people are affirmed in their roles as maturing followers of Jesus Christ and responsible members of his church.

The Attainment of Knowledge

While growing in knowledge of the Holy Scriptures and the application of their truth are lifelong tasks, the church can, during the confirmation years, help its young people:

- ✦ Solidify their understanding of the biblical narrative and its themes of salvation by grace through faith, the calling of the people of God, the life of Christ and the culmination of history in the end times;
- ✦ Attain a basic knowledge of the Six Chief Parts of Luther's Small Catechism;
- ✦ Become grounded in Scriptural teaching through the memorization of key biblical texts, Luther's Small Catechism, hymns and prayers; and
- ✦ Grow in knowledge of the unique history of the Lutheran reformation and of the Lutheran Church in North America.

The Acquisition of Skills

Our Lord commands obedience to his will by all of the faithful. The church in its catechesis of young people can teach basic skills of discipleship and spiritual discipline. These skills include the beginnings of competence in such areas as:

- ✦ **BIBLE STUDY:** learning to read God's Word for understanding in a personal devotional life and in group study with other Christians;
- ✦ **PRAYER:** learning to pray for the needs of others, for personal needs and for the mission of the church;
- ✦ **WORSHIP:** learning how God blesses his people through the divine worship service and how they can

express praise and thanks to the Lord through a variety of worship forms, including the historic liturgy of the church, learning to make profession of faith with fellow believers, to listen to the exposition of God's Word and to comprehend and apply it to daily living;

✦ **WITNESS:** learning to express the Gospel of Christ in a winsome and meaningful way and to share what God in Christ has done for them;

✦ **SERVICE:** learning to recognize the needs and hurts of those in the world around them and to be a part of helping, healing service,

✦ **COMMUNITY:** learning to relate to other Christians as students, friends, caregivers and teachers.

✦ **FAMILY LIVING:** learning to be a representative of Christ in the roles of youth, sibling and possible future spouse; and

✦ **LEADERSHIP:** learning to use their God-given gifts and abilities in a manner that strengthens the mission outreach of the church.

The Development of Attitudes

During the developmental years of adolescence, attitudes are shaped that greatly influence a young Christian's life in the church for years to come. Through the proclamation of the Gospel, the Holy Spirit creates faith that results in a love for God and neighbor. The church, through its Spirit-led Word and Sacrament catechesis, can assist in the development of the attitudes that maturing disciples of Jesus Christ will carry with them throughout their lives. These attitudes include:

- A vision for the church as the Lord's chosen bearer of the message of salvation in Jesus Christ;
- Respect for the pastoral office and for their own pastor(s);
- Respect for parents and other family members, also for the members of the whole family of God;
- Concern for those who are lost in their sins without the knowledge of the hope of salvation in Jesus Christ;
- Compassion for the needy and hurting;
- A desire for lifelong growth in the Christian faith.

The Rite of Confirmation

At the conclusion of confirmation instruction, young persons traditionally make a public profession of their faith in a public ceremony. The rite of confirmation is a time of celebration for the congregation as it receives the confession of these young people and affirms and encourages them in the continuation of their faith journey. The congregation should be overflowing with praise to God for the gift of these young people. These are saints of God marking a significant milestone in their personal and spiritual lives. It is a time for the congregation (together with all the company of heaven) to explode in joyous celebration!

First Communion

First communion in The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod has traditionally taken place after confirmation. In some instances it has taken on the appearance of a carrot dangled in front of confirmands as a reward for completing two or three years of instruction. Achieving that often becomes tantamount to graduating. In the minds of many, completing the confirmation course of study is viewed as having completed their formal training in God's Word.

In many congregations (nearly 25% of LCMS parishes) first communion has been separated from confirmation. After a period of instruction in the mysteries of the Sacrament of the Altar, a child and his or her parents together with their pastor make a determination that the child is ready to commune. They have observed that the younger child is more often still connected to the awesomeness and to the mystery and power of God. They believe the Sacrament makes a stronger connection with the younger child and often inspires a stronger and more lasting commitment to active participation in the church.

The matter of when to offer first communion is entirely up to the local congregation. The injunctions of Scripture that the person who communes should be able to discern the Lord's body and should be able to examine herself or himself is to be taken seriously. It is important that the young person receive instruction, encouragement and support from both their parents and their church as they prepare to become worthy communicants. Communing, whether prior to the rite of confirmation or after confirmation, is never to be taken lightly. Those congregations that offer holy communion prior to confirmation should have in place a strong

program to nurture these young people spiritually during the period between first communion and confirmation.

SMALL GROUP APPROACH TO CONFIRMATION

At Holy Cross Lutheran Church in Flushing, MI the congregation takes seriously their role and the role of parents in the faith development of their young people. Directors of Christian Education, Carolyn Bira and Shar Kleinedler were concerned about the high dropout rate of kids after the rite of confirmation. So, five years ago they developed a new confirmation instruction program which has made a difference!

Holy Cross was in the process of restructuring their congregational ministries around a small group model, so Carolyn and Shar decided to create a confirmation program which also made use of small groups. "The program is called 'LIFE: Living in Faith Everyday'" and focuses on sharing of faith in small groups. "The bonds which are made through the small groups keeps the kids coming back, even after confirmation," reports DCE Carolyn Bira. The program begins in the fifth grade with an emphasis on the Old Testament. In sixth grade the small groups study the New Testament and Church History. In grade seven the focus is on catechetical material and discipleship. Eighth graders learn more catechetical material and develop faith statements in their final year of confirmation.

Small groups of 6-8 young people and a facilitator meet on Wednesday nights for one hour and 15 minutes. Most of the facilitators are parents, but the important factor in selecting facilitators is to find an adult who can provide significant faith role models for the young people. The facilitators are trained in small group process, theological material and how to lead a discussion. They are provided with leaflets on the topic of the night and resources to enhance their discussions. Monthly meetings help keep the facilitators on top of concerns, materials and schedules.

Because the material is totally dependent on small groups, this is a great program for even the smallest churches with few confirmands!

More information about the confirmation program at Holy Cross in Flushing, MI, can be obtained by contacting DCE's Carolyn Bira and Shar Kleinedler at cfbcib@aol.com.

CONFIRMATION CAMP CONCENTRATES ON CATECHETICS

Busy schedules, end-of-day "brain drain" and general overload of staff and students caused Trinity Lutheran Church in Roselle, Illinois to look at "another way" of doing confirmation instruction. For close to a decade, the staff of Trinity has held a confirmation camp for those entering seventh and eighth grades. Though the program was designed for a much smaller group, 225 kids attended camp last summer.

Two different sessions give families a choice of times to send their children. Each session is two weeks (10 days) from 8:00 a.m. - noon on Trinity's church/school campus. Each day has a theme which is carried out through devotions, community building and small group (10-15 students) learning sessions of catechetical material. Each of the daily themes focuses on one of the summer's objectives. A special emphasis is made on missions--international and local.

To supplement the camp throughout the year, fellowship events, retreats sponsored by the Northern Illinois District (attendance at one is required), Sunday morning classes which apply Scripture to life (attendance at ten is required) and Saturday morning instruction in the fall (attendance at three is required) are all part of the confirmation program. Research papers are required each year as well as a memory work component in the summer program. Prior to the rite of confirmation at the end of 8th grade, students are required to go on an overnight campout where a focus on commitment is made.

More information on "confirmation camp" can be obtained by contacting DCE Mike Heinz at Trinity Lutheran Church in Roselle, Illinois.

A PROCESS FOR CONGREGATIONS TO REVIEW AND RENEW THEIR YOUTH CONFIRMATION MINISTRY

Many congregations are continually in the process of review and evaluation of their confirmation ministries as they strive to serve the youth of the church. The survey shows many congregations use a variety of creative methodologies and approaches. Our congregations are asking important questions. How do we know if or when it is time to change? What changes should be made? What hopes and dreams do we have for confirmation ministry that are going unfulfilled?

The task force recommends that in a congregation a small committee be formed. That committee could be comprised of the pastor, any other instructor in the program, a couple of parents, a representative from the board of elders and the board of education and two youth who were recently confirmed. The committee then distributes the questions below to the appropriate people in their group and solicits their written replies.

Questions for the Pastor and Catechists

The pastor and the teaching staff are asked to consider the place of confirmation ministry in light of the congregation's entire program for the faith development of its members. They are asked to give consideration to both the educational and relational dimensions of their work with young people. These are the questions to be answered:

1. What is my vision for youth ministry?
2. What is my vision for the congregation's Christian education ministry?
3. What do I expect confirmands to know, do and feel about their Christian faith?
4. How could confirmation ministry strengthen my relationship with young people and their families?
5. What have I learned this year as a pastor or catechist that can help me in planning for future classes?
6. What is my role in confirmation ministry?

Questions for Parents

Parents are asked to reflect on their formative experiences during confirmation as well as their goals in rearing Christian children who are ready to face the world and by their words and actions to impact the world for Christ. The questions for parents are:

1. Why is confirmation important to my family?
2. What do I expect from my congregation and my pastor in confirmation ministry?
3. What are the most meaningful aspects of my faith?
4. How do I plan to communicate these aspects of my faith to my child?
5. What is my role in confirmation ministry?

Questions for Elders

The elders of the congregation are asked to consider how confirmation ministry can help to raise up future generations of adult leadership for the church and how to involve youth in the work of the church today. The questions are:

1. What spiritual qualities in our adult members are highly valued?
2. What spiritual qualities will be most important for the church leaders of tomorrow?
3. What perspectives, attitudes and abilities of young people can best contribute to our congregation's pursuit of its mission today?
4. What is our role as elders in confirmation ministry?

Questions for the Education or The Youth Committee

The congregational committee responsible for the larger youth ministry of the church will want to consider its relationship to confirmation ministry as part of the total ministry of the congregation with a focus on ministry to, by and for its young people. Questions for consideration are:

1. What attitude toward the church on the part of recent confirmands would we like to see?
2. How can we help build the bridge from confirmation ministry to a full participation in the church by those in high school?
3. In what ways can we influence our congregation to be more youth friendly?
4. What is our role in confirmation ministry?

Questions for Youth

Recent confirmands or current members of the confirmation class are encouraged to respond honestly. Their responses are very important in this evaluation of the congregation's confirmation ministry. The questions are:

1. What questions do I still have about the Christian faith?
2. What are my hopes and dreams for the church?
3. In what ways can I and other youth help our church fulfill its mission?
4. Two ways in which I would like to serve in this congregation are. . .
5. Two ways in which I think the church can help me and other youth share their love for Jesus with others are. . .

Questions for the Confirmation Study Committee

After compiling the responses from the various individuals, discuss the results in your group. Compose a series of general observations based on these replies. Then as a group discuss the following questions:

1. What in our current confirmation program do we want to affirm?
2. What do we want to modify?
3. What do we want to add or drop?
4. How can we best implement changes?
5. Who in our congregation has the attitudes, gifts and skills to assist in confirmation ministry? What specifically would we ask them to do? How can we best recruit them?
6. What do we see as our continuing role in confirmation ministry?

In Summary.

The committee should prepare its report and/or revised plan for confirmation ministry and present it to groups such as the education committee, the elders, the church council, parents and youth for their response, suggestions for refinement and to solicit their support.

During the year and again at the conclusion of the year, the committee solicits evaluations by the confirmands, the parents and the instructors. Based on these evaluations some new changes may be considered and implemented.

Confirmation ministry is one of the more challenging ministries in the church. It is also one filled with great promise for today and for the future in the church.

Confirmation is not something that can be or should be dictated. It is a vital ministry of a congregation. Vision and planning need to be intentional and focused to help adolescents grow in the faith. In most places what worked 40, 30, 20, even ten years ago doesn't work today. It's okay to change methodology and curriculum so long as youth are served and God is glorified.

RESULTS OF THE LCMS YOUTH CONFIRMATION SUR- VEY

A total of 364 congregations (a valid sample) responded to the survey questionnaire conducted by the Department of Youth Ministry of The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod.

Congregations across the U.S.A. were selected randomly. Seventy percent of the respondents classified their community as suburban or small town. Fourteen percent were rural and another 15 percent were urban. Thirty percent have fewer than 100 people in worship on Sunday. Another 45 percent have between 101 and 250 at Sunday worship. Five parishes have a worship attendance over 1000. Fifty-five percent of the parishes had five or fewer confirmands in 1996. Twenty eight percent have a Lutheran school or are affiliated with one.

In the tradition of Martin Luther we have chosen to share the results of this survey through a question and answer format. A set of tables for the total responses to all questions asked is published at the end of this report.

What grades are involved in confirmation instruction?

Ninety percent begin confirmation instruction at the 5th, 6th, or 7th grade level and continue the instruction for either a two or three year period. The largest group, 59 percent, begin at the seventh grade level.

What is the length of the instruction?

Ninety-three percent of the churches have 21-40 weeks of instruction per year. Fifty-seven percent have 31-40 weeks and 36 percent have 21-30 weeks of instruction per year. Rural parishes tend to have more weeks and longer periods of instruction. Those churches with one year or less for instruction tend to be small congregations (under 200 baptized) in urban settings with a Lutheran school.

When are confirmation classes conducted?

A little over 80 percent of the congregations conduct their instruction during after school hours. Congregations which conduct confirmation instruction during the Sunday school hour tend to be suburban parishes. Sixty-five percent of congregations with Lutheran schools have public school children attend class at the same time as Lutheran school students.

Who teaches the confirmation class?

In almost all congregations (94 percent) the pastor is primarily responsible for the instruction. In the remaining instances a Director of Christian Education, a Lutheran school teacher or a lay person has that responsibility.

The pastor is involved as an instructor in 97 percent of the congregations. Ten percent use male Lutheran teachers; 6 percent use male DCE's; 3 percent use male public school teachers and 28% use other male lay persons. Female Lutheran school teachers, DCE's or public school teachers are used as instructors by 22 percent of the congregations and 33 percent involve some other female lay person in the program.

Of those congregations that participate in a consolidated Lutheran school, 34 percent have one person do all the instruction. Another 44 percent leave the decision to the individual congregation, while the others have different instructors take turns teaching the class.

Ninety-five percent of congregations with both public and Lutheran school students have all students taught by the same person.

What is the primary content for instruction?

Ninety-three percent of the congregations use Luther's Small Catechism and 92 percent use the Bible. Fifty-four percent use material published by Concordia Publishing House. Fifty percent use material developed by the instructor. Four percent use materials from non-Lutheran publishers. Large parishes are more likely to use materials developed by the instructor as well as materials by non-Lutheran publishers. Sixty percent require some service project by class participants and 61 percent require sermon summaries. Suburban congregations rank highest in both categories.

What are the memory work requirements?

Fifty-four percent of the congregations require students to memorize all Six Chief Parts of Luther's Catechism including Luther's explanations. Another 19 percent require memorization of the Six Chief Parts only. Sixty-five percent require the memorization of one to three Bible passages per week. Seventy-one percent require students to name the books of the Bible. Twelve percent require the memorization of some hymn verses. Those who confirm in the eighth grade or later require more memory work.

What methods and styles of instruction do teachers employ?

Ninety-two percent use lecture and discussion. Seventy per cent use audio-visual aids: 53 percent use small groups; 30 percent use special projects

and 28 percent use role-play, puppets and drama. Twenty-four percent take the youth on retreats for instruction and for the development of relationships. Suburban churches are the highest users of styles other than the lecture and discussion method.

Thirty-seven percent use individualized plus small group study. Two percent use only individualized instruction. Some type of family covenant is required by almost half (46 percent) of the congregations.

Those who permit communing before the rite of confirmation require more retreats, fellowship events for building relationships, service projects, arts and craft projects. Fewer of them ask for sermon summaries. They are also less likely to have an exam prior to confirmation.

Do congregations still have a public examination prior to the rite of confirmation?

Twenty-one percent of the congregations have an examination in a public worship service. Forty-three percent have an oral exam before the pastor, pastor and parents, elder and pastor, or pastor, elders and parents. Twenty-one percent use a written exam. Four percent use some other form of examination. Eleven percent do not have an examination prior to the confirmation rite. Almost one half (46 percent) of rural parishes have public examination.

At what grade level do congregations confirm?

Ninety-two percent confirm at either the seventh or eighth grade level.

On what day is the rite of confirmation celebrated?

For about 80 percent of the congregations the rite of confirmation is observed on or between Palm Sunday and Pentecost. Palm Sunday is the most common choice for rural parishes. One congregation celebrates the rite on Reformation Sunday.

At what age level do congregations commune young people?

In three-fourths of the congregations the youth receive their first communion on the day of their confirmation or at the first communion service after the day of confirmation. Among congregations surveyed, 3 percent commune children before the fifth grade, 10 percent in the fifth grade, 9 percent in the sixth grade, 13 percent in the seventh grade, 64 percent in the eighth grade and one percent in the ninth grade or later.

What is happening in congregations who offer communion before the rite of confirmation?

Among congregations who offer communion before the rite of confirmation, 95 percent have a program of formal preparation. In half of these congregations the preparation is done solely by the pastor. In the other half the pastor and the parents do it.

The formal preparation for communing before confirmation includes three sessions in 21 percent of the cases; four to six sessions in 58 percent of the cases; 7-12 sessions in 9 percent of the congregations; over 13 sessions in 11 percent of the congregations.

What happens when youth that commune prior to confirmation in one congregation transfer to a congregation whose practice it is to commune after confirmation?

Forty percent of the respondents said those youth would be permitted to commune in all instances. Thirty-six percent said, "In some cases." Eighteen percent said, "In very few cases." Six percent said, "In no case." Most of the "no" and "very few" responses came from rural congregations.

How great is the need for additional or new instructional material?

One third said they need more material for first communion preparation. Forty-four percent want more curriculum material for confirmation instruction. Thirty percent want assistance in developing policies on first communion and confirmation. Another 48 percent would ask for a synodical presentation on the theological and polity considerations which relate to confirmation and first communion.

What is the attitude of instructors of confirmation classes toward their role as teachers in the class?

Almost 40 percent view this hour with the confirmands as the best hour of their week. Almost half find the hour "tolerable." Only two percent said, "I dread it," all of whom use the lecture and question method as their style of instruction.



SUMMARY OF TOTAL RESPONSES

The following is the total response to each of the survey questions. Percentages do not indicate any "no response" responses.

Question #1: Type of community

A. Rural, farm	13.7
B. Small town	39.1
C. Urban, central city	14.5
D. Suburban	31.4

Question #2: Size of community

A. Rural, open country	7.9
B. Place of less than 2500	15.0
C. 2500-9999	16.7
D. 10,000-24,999	14.8
E. 25,000-99,999	20.5
F. 100,000-249,999	8.2
G. 250,000-999,999	9.8
H. 1,000,000+	5.5

Question #3: Baptized membership

A. Under 200	24.9
B. 200-499	42.1
C. 500-999	22.7
D. 1,000+	9.8

Question #4: Confirmed membership

A. Under 200	36.3
B. 200-499	42.9
C. 500-999	13.1
D. 1,000+	6.8

Question #5: Average worship attendance in your church on a weekend?

A. Under 100	30.1
B. 101-250	45.4
C. 251-500	17.5
D. 501-1000	5.2
E. more than 1,000	1.4

Question #6: Number of youth confirmands in 1997

A. None	8.5
B. 1-5	46.4
C. 6-10	26.2
D. 11-20	11.7
E. 21+	5.7

Question #7: Does your congregation operate a parochial day school or is it affiliated with an association school?

A. Yes	27.6
B. No	71.9

Question #8: At what grade level does confirma-

tion instruction begin?

A. Fifth	10.1
B. Sixth	21.9
C. Seventh	58.7
D. Eighth	2.2
E. Ninth	0.0
F. Other	4.9

Question #9: Length of confirmation instruction required for young people.

A. Under one year	0.5
B. One year	3.3
C. Two years	74.9
D. Three years	14.5
E. More than three years	5.2

Question #10: At what grade level are young people confirmed?

A. Fifth grade	0.0
B. Sixth grade	1.9
C. Seventh grade	9.8
D. Eighth grade	82.2
E. Ninth grade or higher	3.6

Question #11: When are confirmation instruction classes held? Check all that apply.

A. Before school	0.5
B. As a part of the school day	13.1
C. After school hours	81.4
D. On weekend	13.4
E. As a part of Sunday school	15.3
F. As part of a retreat or summer camp	9.6
G. Other	4.4

Question #12: Number of hours per week instruction is given

A. Less than one hour	1.4
B. One hour	28.1
C. One and one-half hour (90 minutes)	47.8
D. Two hours	15.6
E. Three hours	2.5
F. Four or more hours	3.3

Question #13: Number of weeks per year instruction is given

A. 20 or less	2.2
B. 21-30	36.1
C. 31-40	56.6
D. More than 40	4.1

Question #14: If you operate a school or are a part of an association school, do non-students meet at a time different than the school students?

A. Yes	14.2
B. No	26.8

Question #15: If yes, when

A. Before school	3.6
B. After school	13.1
C. On the weekend	1.4
D. As a part of Sunday school	0.3

Question #16: What male instructor/staff do you have (check all that apply)

A. Pastor	94.8
B. Day school teacher(s)	10.1
C. Director of Christian Education	5.7
D. Public school teacher(s)	3.0
E. Lay person (other)	27.6

Question #17: What female instructor/staff do you have (check all that apply)

A. Day school teacher(s)	11.5
B. Public school teacher(s)	4.9
C. Director of Christian Education	6.0
D. Lay person(s)	33.1

Question #18: What person is primarily responsible for the confirmation program?

A. Pastor	91.3
B. Associate Pastor	2.5
C. Director of Christian Education	2.5
D. Day school teacher	0.5
E. Lay person volunteer	1.1

Question #19: Materials currently being used (check all that apply)

A. The Bible	91.8
B. Luther's Small Catechism	93.4
C. LCMS/CPH prepared/published materials	63.9
D. Instructor prepared material	49.7
E. Other Lutheran publishers	33.6
F. Other non-Lutheran publishers	3.8

Question #20: To what extent do you require memorization?

A. No memorization required	5.2
B. Require 10 Commandments, Apostle's Creed and Lord's Prayer only	19.4
C. Require all Six Chief Parts	19.1
D. Require all Six Chief Parts with Luther's explanations	53.8

Question #21: Additional memory work requirements (check all that apply)

A. 1-3 Bible passages per week	65.3
B. Four or more Bible passages per week	4.4
C. Hymn verses	12.3
D. Books of the Bible	71.0
E. Prayers (e.g. Luther's Morning and Evening prayers)	24.9

Question #22: Are there other required elements**in your confirmation instruction? (check all that apply)**

A. Retreats	23.5
B. Fellowship activities	22.7
C. Service projects (ushering, VBS helper, acolyte, servant events)	65.6
D. Arts and crafts or other special projects	10.1
E. Essays	34.4
F. Sermon summaries	60.9

Question #23: Do you require any kind of family contract, covenant or commitment?

A. Yes	45.6
B. No	53.3

Question #24: Do you have any kind of summer confirmation program?

A. Yes	9.8
B. No	89.1

Question #25: Do you do any individualized confirmation instruction?

A. Our program is entirely individualized	2.2
B. Our program includes classroom and individualized instruction	37.4
C. Our program is entirely classroom	59.0

Question #26: What sort of classroom methodologies do you include in your teaching?

A. Lecture	92.3
B. Small group discussion	53.3
C. Class discussions	92.3
D. Special projects	30.3
E. Use of audio visuals	69.7
F. Role playing, puppets, drama	27.6

Question #27: Are confirmands examined prior to confirmation?

A. Yes	67.2
B. No	10.7
C. We require a written essay instead of exam	19.4

Question #28: If yes, in what forum does the examination take place?

A. In a public worship service	21.0
B. Before pastor and parents	4.6
C. Before elders and pastor	7.1
D. Before elders, pastor and parents	24.6
E. Pastor only - written	6.8
F. Pastor only - oral	5.5
G. Other	6.8

Question #29: Our normal day for the rite of confirmation is

A. Palm Sunday	21.3
B. Pentecost	22.7
C. First Sunday in May	15.6

D. Another Sunday in May	18.9	
E. A Sunday in the Fall		0.3
F. Reformation Day	0.5	
G. Other	15.3	

Question #30: If your children attend a consolidated/affiliated parochial school, how is confirmation instruction arranged?

A. One person instructs all children from all churches	3.6	
B. Children are instructed in small groups	0.8	
C. Different instructors take turns teaching	1.4	
D. Confirmation is not offered in school curriculum but left to individual congregations		4.6

Question #31: Are public and parochial youth taught by the same persons?

A. Yes	44.3
B. No	2.2

Question #32: The earliest the congregation permits first communion

A. As an infant	0.3
B. Before 5th grade	2.5
C. 5th grade	9.8
D. 6th grade	9.0
E. 7th grade	12.3
F. 8th grade	62.0
G. 9th grade or above individual congregations.	0.8

Question #33: Youth participate in their first communion

A. One or more years before confirmation	18.3	
B. Twelve months or less before confirmation	2.5	
C. On confirmation day		53.8
D. During the first week after confirmation	9.3	
E. On the first communion Sunday after confirmation	11.5	
F. Other	2.5	

Question #34: Changes made in first communion/confirmation practice in the past five years. Check all that apply.

A. No changes	76.2
B. Lowered confirmation age only	7.4
C. Permitted first communion before confirmation	7.4
D. Raised the age of first communion	1.6
E. Raised the age of confirmation	1.9
F. Other	3.6

Question #35: Has your congregation ever experimented with an earlier first communion but then later returned to the practice of preparing children for the simultaneous confirmation rite and first communion?

A. Yes	3.8
B. No	82.8
C. Not applicable	11.7

Question #36: Check one statement which comes closest to your understanding of the central purpose of confirmation.

A. Preparation for the reception of the Lord's Supper		5.5
B. To receive Holy Spirit through laying on of hands	0.0	
C. Identify/participate more fully in life & mission of adult Christian community	25.4	
D. Renewal of one's baptismal covenant	10.1	
E. To commit one's self to Christ	4.1	
F. To become an adult member of a congregation	0.0	
G. A rite preceded by intense instruction	8.2	
H. Public profession of faith in which confirmands were baptized	39.9	
I. Other	3.6	

Question #37: If you practice first communion prior to confirmation, is there any formal preparation?

A. Yes	24.9
B. No	1.4

Question #38: If yes, by whom?

A. Pastor	10.9
B. Pastor and parents	11.2
C. Other	1.4

Question #39: If yes, how many sessions?

A. Three or less	5.5
B. Four to six	14.2
C. Seven to twelve	2.2
D. Thirteen or more	2.7

Question #40: What materials are used?

A. None	0.3
B. The Bible	18.3
C. Luther's Small Catechism	18.0
D. Instructor-prepared materials	15.6
E. Other published materials	13.4

Question #41: If a youth who communed at his/her prior congregation, but who is younger than your normal communing age, transferred into your congregation, would he/she be permit-

ted to commune in your congregation?

- | | |
|----------------------|------|
| A. In all cases | 37.7 |
| B. In some cases | 34.4 |
| C. In very few cases | 16.7 |
| D. Never | 6.0 |

Question #42: If your congregation communes youth prior to confirmation, do you note this when transferring these young people to other parishes?

- | | |
|------------------------------------|------|
| A. Do not practice early communion | 35.5 |
| B. Always | 15.6 |
| C. Sometimes | 4.4 |
| D. Never | 5.2 |

Question #43: There is a need for more instructional materials for (check all that apply)

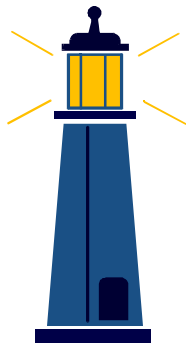
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|--|------|
| A. First communion preparation | 32.8 |
| B. Confirmation instruction/curriculum | 44.0 |
| C. Examination of congregational policy on confirmation/first communion practices | 30.3 |
| D. The theological and polity considerations behind confirmation and first communion | 48.4 |

Question #44: If you are a confirmation instructor, describe your feelings to the confirmation instruction process.

- | | |
|---|------|
| A. The best hour of the week. I love confirmation instruction | 39.1 |
| B. The hour I dread. Confirmation and youth ministry are not my thing | 2.2 |
| D. Tolerable. I know it's important but some times it's a struggle for me | 48.6 |

Question #45: I am a

- | | |
|------------------------------------|------|
| A. Pastor | 88.5 |
| B. Associate Pastor | 3.8 |
| C. Director of Christian Education | 3.0 |
| D. Christian day school teacher | 0.8 |
| E. Layperson | 2.2 |



NOTES

WORDS FOR GUIDING DISCUSSION ON CONFIRMATION MINISTRY

The Confirmation Ministry Task Force used the following definitions in its discussion. These definitions can be helpful in understanding the task force's report. They may also prove helpful for those involved in continuing discussions related to youth confirmation ministry.

CATECHESIS - All that the church does in the total education process from the baptismal font to the grave. Confirmation is one piece of that process, involving a relationship between a catechist and a catechumen around Holy Scripture and the catechism resulting in faith formation.

CATECHISM - A book containing systematic questions and answers to teach basic doctrines. In Lutheran circles the reference is to *Luther's Small or Large Catechism*. The task force used the term to refer to *Luther's Small Catechism* and distinguished it from *Luther's Small Catechism with Explanation*, also referred to by many as "the blue book" or the "synodical catechism." The explanations comprise four-fifths of the "blue book."

COMMUNICANT MEMBERSHIP - Those who have been declared eligible to receive the Lord's Supper. They may or may not have gone through the rite of confirmation. Communicant membership is distinguished from baptized membership or confirmed membership.

CONFIRMAND - A person preparing for confirmation. Also used to refer to those who have just been confirmed.

CONFIRMATION - A rite of the church in which a confirmand publicly affirms or confesses the faith into which he or she was baptized. This rite follows a period of instruction in the basics of the Christian faith.

CONFIRMATION MINISTRY - Youth confirmation ministry is a nurturing, educational and relational ministry of the congregation to help baptized children identify more fully with the Christian community and participate more fully in its mission, celebrated in a public rite.

CONFIRMED MEMBERSHIP - Those who have gone through the rite of confirmation; distinguished from communicant membership and baptized membership.

EXAMINE - The process by which a Christian deter-

mines if he or she is prepared to participate in the Sacrament of the Altar (1 Corinthians 11:28-29). Such examination usually consists of four questions: 1) "Am I a sinner?" 2) "Am I sorry for my sin?" [Or, "Do I repent of my sin?"] 3) "Do I believe that Christ is present in the Sacrament to forgive me?" 4) "Do I desire to amend my sinful life?"

FAITH FORMATION - The process by which people grow in maturity in Christ. (*Congregations at Crossroads*, Search Institute. Available from the Department of Youth Ministry.)

FIRST COMMUNION - When a baptized Christian participates in holy communion for the first time. Sometimes it is called early communion and refers to the practice of taking communion before the rite of confirmation.

HORIZONTAL FAITH - A type of faith marked by consistent commitment to serving others. (*Congregations at Crossroads*)

INTEGRATED FAITH - A type of faith that best reflects a mature Christian faith; one that blends both the vertical and horizontal dimensions of faith. (*Congregations at Crossroads*)

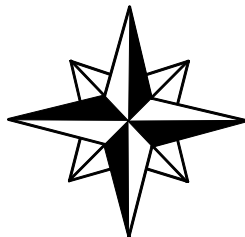
PUBLIC EXAMINATION - A process of asking youth confirmands questions based on their confirmation instruction, demonstrating their proficiency in Christian doctrine. May be written or oral in today's church. In many congregations it is no longer done.

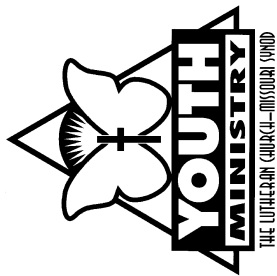
SERVANT - One who serves Christ. As Christians we have been bought with a price. Though freed by Christ from the bondage of sin, we freely bind ourselves as slaves to Christ under the bondage of love (2 Corinthians 5:14). Servants then render service as an expression of thanksgiving for all that God in Christ has done for them.

VERTICAL FAITH - A type of faith marked by the transforming relationship with God. (*Congregations at Crossroads*)



NOTES





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A STUDY OF YOUTH CONFIRMATION & FIRST COMMUNION IN THE LUTHERAN CHURCH - MISSOURI SYNOD