

Wondering about Confirmation

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Part 1 - Opening exercise:

Our Insights and Experience with Confirmation

Today's reality is people have different understandings and experiences with confirmation. This diversity is a gift to explore, so let's get started by sharing some of our ideas. Each person has a notecard. (There is no need to put your name on the card, as you will be turning it in later.) On the notecard, write the following:

1. Write a definition of confirmation (1-2 sentences).
2. Name two practices important to confirmation and share why.
3. Share one personal experience you have had with confirmation (as a student or leader).

When you are finished find one person you do not know and share your responses. Pairs have 5 minutes to share. When you are done, turn the notecards in to the leader.

Leader Note: Start with something interactive and that *lifts up the diverse experiences* leaders have with confirmation, allowing them to *reflect on what was meaningful and what was not helpful*. This is an opportunity to use this information later on in the session if you use this option.

Optional Icebreaker:
Confirmation Bingo (see Appendix A)

Leader Note: Share some of the definitions and practices with the participants. If time allows, use them to ignite a conversation about the diverse understandings and practices of confirmation.

Part 2 - Learnings for this session:

As we wonder about confirmation, there are four ideas we want you to walk away with from this session.

1. Within the Lutheran church, confirmation **is not a sacrament**.
2. Confirmation **is a ministry with a rich and varied tradition** within the Lutheran church.
3. Confirmation **has been an adaptive ministry**, adjusting to the needs of the church and its context.
4. **What do this mean for us today?** as the ELCA? as synods? for our congregation? Might confirmation be a treasure worth rethinking? Let's wonder about confirmation today.

Part 3 - Varying Perspective on Confirmation:

In an effort to expand our understanding of confirmation, this section will offer four different perspective on confirmation: *the*

Leader Note: Use all or part of this section depending on the audience and time allotted. You may also make this available to leaders as a resource to take home.

ELCA definition, a theological, historical, and missional.

#1) ELCA definition of confirmation

Did you know the ELCA has **a definition of confirmation**? Well it does!

Adopted at the 1993 Churchwide Assembly,¹ the ELCA says:

“Confirmation ministry is a pastoral and educational ministry of the church that helps the baptized through Word and Sacrament to identify more deeply with the Christian community and participate more fully in its mission.”²

Discussion:

How does this definition of confirmation fit with your understanding?

What would you add or change?

The ELCA intentionally offers a definition to provide a shared purpose for confirmation. It does not, however, prescribe a particular set of practices, decide the age or length of confirmation, or dictate a curriculum. The ELCA provides a definition in order to give the church a common conversation point while also giving congregations the freedom to discern the practices most fitting for their location.³

The hope of confirmation is described in the ELCA's **vision of confirmation**.

Confirmation ministry is an opportunity for congregations to renew the vision of living by grace, grounded in Baptism. This vision is especially important for ministry with young Christians, but it also has lifelong implications. Through identity with the baptized community, we grow in mission, discipleship, and our vocations in daily life.⁴

This vision places confirmation within a larger commitment to discipleship and connecting faith with daily life for people of all ages. Therefore, if congregations are to push toward this vision, wondering about confirmation ministry is not enough. Confirmation ministry has to be put

¹ *The Confirmation Ministry Task Force Report* – adopted by the third biennial Churchwide Assembly of the ELCA on September 1, 1993.

² *Confirmation: Engaging Lutheran Foundations and Practices*. Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1999, 266. This definition was modified only slightly from the 1970 definition: “Confirmation is a pastoral and educational ministry of the church which helps the baptized child through Word and Sacrament to identify more deeply with the Christian community and participate more fully in its mission.” *Ibid.*, 61.

³ *Ibid.*, 268.

⁴ *Ibid.*, 270.

into conversation with other faith formation ministries and in light of the question, “How can congregations help all people grow in faith?”

Too many confirmation ministries are focused on creating Lutherans. What if we expanded our imagination about confirmation? What if the vision of confirmation was to help people discover a Christian way of life rooted in our baptismal identity? That vision seems like a more compelling. So what if we asked:

“What is the role of the congregation in affirming youth in Christian faithfulness with an emphasis on lifelong learning and discipleship?”⁵

Discussion:

- ❖ What are some ways your congregation is affirming youth in their Christian faith?
- ❖ What is difference between seeing confirmation as an end to learning versus one step in a lifelong process of learning?
- ❖ How would you help students discover what it means to live as a disciple of Jesus?

Confirmation ministry *can be* a critical ministry for the church in nurturing faith. With a rich tradition, there is much to build upon. But the work of crafting a meaningful confirmation ministry rests primarily with each congregation as they recognize the particular needs and gifts of their community.

#2) Theological Perspective:

Within the Lutheran church **confirmation is not a sacrament**. Lutheran's understand sacraments to be an *earthly element made holy by God* commanded by *Christ* that serve as a *means of grace*.⁶ These four elements are critical for discerning what makes a sacrament and what is a Christian practice.

Lutherans have two sacraments, *Baptism and Holy Communion*, both commanded by Jesus. Other traditions, like Roman Catholics (who have seven - Baptism, Holy Communion, Confession, Confirmation, Marriage, Ordination, and Extreme Unction or anointing with oil before death), understand sacraments differently.⁷ So Lutheran's view confirmation not

⁵ Ibid., 266.

⁶ For a concise understanding of sacraments and other foundational Lutheran ideas, see *Lutheran Basics for Teachers*, Minneapolis: Augsburg Fortress, 1998.

⁷ For more see the Small Catechism. For a great online resource see: <http://smallcatechism.org/Unit4/unit4-aa.htm>.

as something commanded by God, but as a ministry practice with a long tradition.

But just because confirmation is not a sacrament does not mean it isn't rooted in Lutheran theology. So, what can be learned about confirmation ministry from a theological perspective?

First, **a theology of confirmation grows out of our understanding of baptism.** In baptism God names and claims us as children of God. In baptism we join in Christ's death and resurrection and receive the gift of salvation. And in baptism we are welcomed into Christian community.

*Justification by grace through faith,
this is not something we can do on our own, it is a gift from God.*

One key theological commitment of confirmation comes from our theology of baptism - **God is the primary actor in our life of faith.** God claims us and gives us our identity. God, through Jesus Christ, justifies us and extends grace. And God invites us to live in Christian community. So confirmation ministry, first and foremost, is grounded in God's love for us and God's gift of grace.

Second, **a theology of confirmation is connected to our understanding of Word and sacrament.** Lutherans center our communal living around two things: the living Word and the sacraments of baptism and communion. The promises made at baptism are proclaimed again and again in God's Word. God's people, the body of Christ, are shaped and formed as they continually gather around water, wine, and bread.

*God's word is both law and gospel, command and promise, judgment
and mercy.
And the sacraments "make visible the word of God."⁸*

A second key theological commitment of confirmation comes from our understanding of church - **God is revealed to us through the means of grace.** We are people loved and forgiven, created to live in community. And we need to continually be reminded of who and who's we are. Therefore in the midst of Christian community God's Word and the sacraments are the "channel through which God's grace comes to us."⁹ Therefore a Lutheran view of confirmation must not only be grounded in

⁸ *Confirmation: Engaging Lutheran Foundations and Practices*, 91.

⁹ *Ibid.*, 90.

grace, it but also be deeply connected to God's Word, the sacraments, and the body of Christ.

Third, **a theology of confirmation emerges out of our understanding of God's mission in the world.** Claimed by God, we receive our identity from God. Formed and shaped by Word and sacrament community, we are formed and shaped as disciples. Called to love God and our neighbor, we discover purpose and mission as we participate in God's mission in the world.

*God's mission is to bring the gospel of Jesus Christ to all people.
As subject of God's love, we are invited into
God's creative and redemptive mission in the world.*

And third key commitment of confirmation helps us understand how to live - **Christians are invited to participate in God's unfolding mission in the world.** What does living on the "other side" of baptism look like? It looks like a life with a mission. Made new in Christ, Christians "are no longer our own, but ... belong to Christ, so that we now walk in faith and hope."¹⁰ Loving and serving the neighbor is our response to God's love for us. It means welcoming strangers, caring for the earth God made, and comforting those who mourn. All aspects of our life are places we can be agents of God's love.

The Christian life is not about knowledge, rituals, or church membership, it is about loving God and loving our neighbor. Hence, *the point of confirmation ministry is living a life of faith based on loving God and loving our neighbor.* This vision shapes our time gathered in community around Word and sacrament and our time scattered in the world.

Discussion:

Using these three theological concepts, name some practices that would be important to confirmation ministry.

How are these theological concepts similar or different to your understanding of confirmation?

What insights do you have about confirmation when you connect the ELCA's definition of confirmation and these three theological concepts?

#3) Historical Perspective:

¹⁰ Ibid., 269.

Luther Lindberg in *Confirmation: Engaging Lutheran Foundations and Practices* notes that historically, “confirmation has been a tangled web, a maze of confusion, a complicated and controverted practice since the beginning. Even though its practice has been taken seriously – perhaps too seriously – for centuries, its theology and meaning have seldom been clear.”¹¹

From a historical perspective, confirmation has not been one thing. Within the Lutheran tradition, confirmation has been a historical practice that has adapted to the needs of the church and context over time. In some eras, confirmation did not get much attention. In other eras, confirmation was much more front and center.

The freedom connected with confirmation is a gift of the Lutheran church and also makes confirmation ministry confusing. As a ministry of the church, confirmation lacks a “canon” (or agreed upon content) and includes a constellation of practices. Some places confirmation may focus exclusively on the Small Catechism while other places focus more on Bible Stories. In some congregations confirmation is three years long, with many learning components. In some congregations confirmation is a nine month class taught by the pastor.

Leader Note: If you would like a timeline of confirmation in the church with themes of main events and key learnings with greater detail see Appendix B.

Looking at confirmation over time “shows that while numerous clusters of interpretations of confirmation come and go, strong threads of consistency and continuity have persisted.”¹² Of the **clusters of understandings** that have emerged, we will address three.

The first connects confirmation with baptism and **lifts up the role the individual has in embracing or committing to a life with Christ.** Be it a focus on joining the church, making a public decision to embrace the faith they were baptized in, or emphasizing a personal relationship with God¹³ confirmation within this view tended to emphasize an intense period of instruction and public rite or confession.

The second is more about God and focused on **the confirmand receiving the Holy Spirit.** With an emphasis on God, the laying on of hands by the pastor or community is what is important and confirmation celebrate “the

¹¹ Ibid., 43-44.

¹² Ibid., 44.

¹³ Ibid., 45.

life of the Spirit”¹⁴ within the confirmand. Less emphasis is placed on instruction and personal commitment in this view.

The third view is about **reaffirmation of baptism and the unfolding life of faith within the confirmand**. Seeing adolescents as an important time in life (or perhaps other transition times in a person's life), confirmation affirms the baptismal covenant and recognizes how the life of faith changes over time. In this view “Reaffirmation of Baptism” is a repeatable rite or practice the body of Christ engages.¹⁵ While it may or may not be accompanied by a period of instruction, the focus is a recognition of what has already happened *and* marking a significant moment in one's faith.

Small Group Activity: Take the cards from the opening activity, mix them up, and redistribute them among groups. Have people within the groups read the definitions and discern which of the three views that definition would fall into. When finished discuss:
How did these definitions align with the ELCA's definition? How did they differ? What insights did you learn about confirmation?

#4) Missional Perspective:

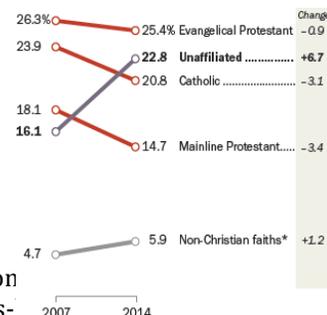
Confirmation ministry has been an **adaptive ministry**. It has changed over time, it has changed based on contextual realities, and it has changed based on ministerial needs. This adaptive aspect of confirmation is as important today as it was for the early church and in the time of the Reformation. Perhaps this is a time for rethinking confirmation.

The United States finds itself in a time when faith formation needs to be intentional. The religious landscape in the United States has shifted. Fifty years ago the culture supported Christian values and ideals. In this era the church had a role in faith formation but they were not the only voice concerning the Christian faith.¹⁶

Today the Christian church finds itself in a different place. No longer a central voice within the culture (see the chart)¹⁷ the Christian church is having to learn new ways of being community and forming faith. Ministry within an environment that does not reinforce a Christian way of life has added new pressure on the church, and ministries like

Changing U.S. Religious Landscape

Between 2007 and 2014, the Christian share of the population fell from 78.4% to 70.6%, driven mainly by declines among mainline Protestants and Catholics. The unaffiliated experienced the most growth, and the share of Americans who belong to non-Christian faiths also increased.



* Includes Jews, Muslims, Buddhists, Hindus, other world religions and other faiths. Those who did not answer the religious identity question, as well as groups whose share of the population did not change significantly, including the historically black Protestant tradition, Mormons and others, are not shown.

Source: 2014 Religious Landscape Study, conducted June 4-Sept. 30, 2014

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¹⁴ Ibid., 46.

¹⁵ Ibid.

¹⁶ For more on this see the two articles in Lifelong Faith on faith formation

¹⁷ <http://www.pewforum.org/2015/05/12/americas-changing-religious->

confirmation. In addition, families are less equipped to share their faith and engaging in fewer faith practices in the home. Habits of faith, perhaps familiar at one time, are losing their meaning. And active engagement in faith communities is become more and more counter-cultural.

And not only is forming faith within such a culture more challenging, so is living one's way in daily life. Without the support of culture, and less support for Christian values and practices, people of faith are needing new skills to navigate the challenges they face. **How can the church help people discover a Christian way of life in the 21st century?**¹⁸

As a whole, confirmation ministry assumes students are baptized as infants or children. Is that still a fair assumption? What role does/might confirmation ministry have in a world where fewer infants/children are baptized? Might people be coming to the Christian faith by other means and at various stages of life? What does it mean to live Christian in a religiously pluralistic world? Are we, the church, preparing people for such a way of living? What does it require to help people share their faith with others who practice other religions and hold other beliefs?¹⁹

Discussion:

What shifts are you seeing in your context? What impact are those shifts having on faith formation?

How is your congregation adapting to the changing culture? What might those adaptations mean for confirmation?

¹⁸ Anthony Robinson sums up the effects of Christendom with six shifts: "1. *Conversion* and *formation* declined because a person was Christian by virtue of citizenship, birth, and residence. This meant that the Christian faith was a social given rather than a choice or conscious commitment. 2. Christianity no longer found its primary embodiment in *congregations*, but in *territories* and *nations*. 3. *Mission* was not an inherent characteristic of every congregation that belonged to all its members; rather, mission was something done by specially designated 'missionaries' in territories or nations that were not Christian. 4. The *purpose* of a church was to provide religious services to a particular local population. 5. The ministry of the church increasingly was performed by and belonged to *religious professionals*, whose roles was in many ways comparable to that of civil servants or government officials. 6. *Society* (or culture) and *faith* (Christianity) overlapped to such an extent that being a good Christian and being a good citizen were equivalent, and each defined the other." Anthony Robinson, *Changing the Conversation: a third way for congregations*, Grand Rapids: Eerdmans Publishing, 2008, 21.

¹⁹ John Roberto, in *Faith Formation 2020*, identifies eight driving forces which are impacting the church and faith formation. These forces are: declining number of Christians and a growing number of people who identify with "no religious affiliation," increasing number people who identify as of "spiritual" but not "religious," decreasing number of people participating in Christian churches, increasing diversity and pluralism in the United States, increasing impact of individualism of Christian identity and community participation, changing marriage and family life patterns, declining socialization of family religiosity, and increasing impact of technology and digital media. For more, see *Faith Formation 2020*, Appendix, 26-39.

What would it entail to rethink confirmation within this environment?

Part 4 - Some Areas to Wonder about Confirmation:

Thinking about confirmation ministry today, the question remains, **what does all of this mean?** How would you, as a church leader, address this question in light of what you have learned:

“What is the role of the congregation in affirming youth in Christian faithfulness with an emphasis on lifelong learning and discipleship?”²⁰

Leader Note: This section is intended to be expanding and open. Participants are to choose one of the four areas and discuss confirmation for today and in the future as they walk through the three sections.

There are many ways our wondering could be directed - based on the past (and our history), our future (with an eye toward the vision), and/ our present realities (based on our missional age and current research). As we finish this session, here are **four areas to wonder about regarding confirmation ministry**. Choose one, most intriguing to your ministry context, and explore it in light of rethinking confirmation as a vibrant ministry for your congregation's future.

1. **confirmation as *beginning*, rather than completion** – bridge into Christian way of life (based on baptismal theology, the practice of the catechumen, and the vision of lifelong discipleship and learning)
 - a. *Questions to discuss:*
 - i. What comes to mind with this view?
 - ii. How would this view be different than what your congregation does now?
 - iii. How would this view tie to commitments your congregation has for faith formation?
 - iv. What would be the biggest obstacle in your congregation if you made this shift?
 - b. *Ideas:*
 - i. The unit on discovering your spiritual gifts and exploring ways to use those gifts in ministry.
 - ii. Commissioning confirmands into a ministry as part of the confirmation service.
 - iii. Pair students with mentors that bridge the end of confirmation with the next stage of faith and learning,

²⁰ Ibid., 266.

- iv. Have a ministry that welcomes confirmands *into* a small group ministry helping people discover what it means to live Christian in their daily life.
- v. Others????

2. **confirmation as a *ministry of the congregation (or connecting ministry), rather than an isolated ministry*** – (based on the idea that this is the church's shared calling and part of a life of faith is participating in the church's mission, imaging confirmation not as church membership but as ongoing engagement with the church community)

a. *Questions to discuss:*

- i. How are the goals of participating in the church's mission and engagement in the church community similar or different to the goals your congregation currently has for confirmation?
- ii. What would leadership of confirmation with this viewpoint entail? Who might be included on the leadership team?
- iii. If connecting is a priority of confirmation with this view, what assets exist in your congregation that might be natural places to connect to confirmation? How would connecting them contribute to the overall learning within confirmation?
- iv. How open is your congregation to seeing themselves as part of confirmation ministry? How learning might need to take place to make this view of confirmation work within your congregation?

b. *Ideas:*

- i. Have confirmands talk about how ministry takes place within your congregation, have confirmands apprentice in areas they are interested in, and then talk about what you learned as a group.
- ii. Worship is a central part of congregational life. Create meaningful ways for confirmands to participate and lead worship.
- iii. Congregations are always facing challenges. Present one of your congregation's current challenges to the confirmands and have them wrestle with it and lead the congregation in an experiment of facing that challenge.
- iv. Some congregations have church council members interview confirmands before they are confirmed. They have a series of questions (given to both the council

members and the confirmands) that guide their conversations. Imagine such a practice in your congregation were the conversation is an opportunity for congregational leadership to learn about the church from the viewpoint of a confirmand and for the confirmand to learn about the church from the viewpoint of a church council member.

v. Others?

3. **confirmation as catalyst for lifelong faith formation, rather than the whole encyclopedia** – (based on the commitment that faith formation is ongoing, this shifts confirmation from trying to “teach it all” to inviting people into a lifelong journey of faith)

a. *Questions to discuss:*

- i. How would confirmation be different in your congregation if it started with confirmands questions rather than a set of concepts that had to be covered?
- ii. The ways people learn is shifting in this information age. What would it take to create a curious learning community in your congregations? What assets does your congregation have to help with this? What obstacles are there to such an approach in your congregation?
- iii. If confirmation is one moment of faith formation, what is most critical in this one moment and why? What are other moments of faith formation that are important in your congregation? What are moments you could lift up or enhance as opportunities for enhancing faith formation?
- iv. Content is important in faith formation and confirmation ministry. How might learning content be framed within this view of confirmation?

b. *Ideas:*

- i. Model that learning about faith is lifelong by having people of various ages lead the learning throughout confirmation.
- ii. Have confirmands create their own resource guide (electronic or paper, personal or communal) for helping them address real questions of faith they have. (I.e. where to go to figure out the difference between various denominations, guides for understanding the Bible, resources for prayer...etc.) Perhaps even make this resource available to the whole congregation.

- iii. Have confirmands “teach” other groups on areas they are studying. This could be young kids, Senior adults, and/or cross-generational groups.
- iv. Video record people in the congregation about the role faith has had in their lives. Create a library of videos over the years and have confirmands watch them periodically. (They can also be the ones making the recordings.)
- v. Others?

4. **confirmation as communal endeavor, rather than individual journey**

– (based on the theological commitment that our Christian identity is a communal identity, being a person of faith is not just a personal one, but one lived in relation to other Christians and in the world. What would confirmation be in light of a call to the neighbor, both within Christian community and in the world, look like?)

a. *Questions to discuss:*

- i. How does your congregation balance the personal and communal aspects of confirmation? What would strengthening the communal aspect entail? What would strengthening the personal aspect, recognizing the communal aspect, entail?
- ii. How are the issues of the world, and/or your immediate context, impacting confirmation? How might confirmation ministry provide a way of thinking about our Christian calling to serve our neighbor?
- iii. How does confirmation in your congregation help confirmands become a community embodying our Christian commitments? What are practices important to making that commitment a reality?
- iv. Is confirmation ministry open and inviting to “the other” or people not like each other? How might confirmation help confirmation discover what it is like being in relationship with people different than themselves?

b. *Ideas:*

- i. Engage in experiential learning by moving learning out of the church building and into the world. Go to the police station and talk with police officers and then talk about law and gospel or the 10 commandments. Visit a funeral home and talk about life and death. Invite teachers from a neighboring school to talk about the issues important to their school.
- ii. As part of a regular prayer practice, read through the newspaper (or better yet have students bring concerns

- they encounter throughout the week) and pray for concerns in the world.
- iii. Connect confirmands with someone in the congregation and commit to pray for each other once a week. Periodically reflect on how that practice has impacted their relationship.
 - iv. Whenever someone in the congregation has a death, have the confirmands write a note and send it to the family.
 - v. others?

Part 5 - Take Home - Contextualizing

Know - there is *more than one right answer to confirmation ministry!* What the ELCA shares are a common purpose, theological commitments, and a shared calling to youth discipleship. Yet each congregation has the freedom and responsibility to integrate these ideas into the realities and opportunities our congregation faces.

Use this "worksheet" to take home and think about confirmation ministry in your setting. (See Appendix C.)

Resources:

Around what's happening today and rethinking confirmation:

- theconfirmationproject.org – website for Lilly Foundation grant studying confirmation and equivalent practices in five Protestant denominations.
- Word & World – *Rethinking Confirmation*, available Fall 2016 and videos at Luther Seminary's YouTube - There are eight total. Here is mine on looking at confirmation ministry within a larger congregational system. https://youtu.be/Mw9emwHe_iU

Around the various perspectives:

- *Confirmation: Engaging Lutheran Foundations and Practices*, Minneapolis: Augsburg Fortress, 1999 – in particular for the theological section see chapter 4 and for the historical section see chapter 3 and Appendix A.
- 1993 ELCA resources – *Six Models of Confirmation Ministry and Tools for Teaching Confirmation* by Ken Smith – is a good resource that translates the 1993 study for congregational leaders, giving both history and practical tools.
- Elton, Terri, "What is Faith Formation in a Missional Age?" in *Lifelong Faith Journal*, vol. 7.4, winter 2013. <http://www.lifelongfaith.com/journal.html>

- Shallue, Diane, "Faith Formation in a Missional Age – Continuing the Conversation" in *Lifelong Faith Journal*, vol. 8.3, spring/summer 2015. <http://www.lifelongfaith.com/journal.html>

Appendix A Confirmation Bingo

Mill around the room and find people who have had the experiences named on the bingo card. Once you find someone with that experience and have them initial that box. People can only initial one box per bingo card. Once you have a full row (horizontal, vertical, or diagonal) yell bingo. The center box is a free spot.

Went to Confirmation Camp	Memorized Luther's Small Catechism	Raised issues about faith in the world	Helped discover my gifts	Confirmation included a retreat
Learned different forms of prayer	Used <i>Free to Be</i> curriculum	Had a musical component (worship or singing)	Used Faith Inkubator's material	Served as a confirmation leader
Wrote a faith statement	Included a parent/family component †	Free Spot Saved by Grace	Involved a service component	Included field trips – to other churches, funeral home, etc.
Had a mentor	Took Worship Notes	Grew in faith	The pastor was your confirmation teacher	It was meaningful
Participated in a Special Confirmation Service/ Affirmation of Baptism	Confirmation had a large group/small group format	Memorized Bible Verses	Created deep relationships	Had to meet with the church council

Appendix B Historical Timeline of Confirmation

Leader Note: This section offers a timeline highlighting confirmation in each of these periods of the church noting themes of main events and key learnings.

Here is a quick overview of the development of Confirmation

All references are from: *Confirmation: Engaging Lutheran Foundations and Practices*. Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1999

Stage 1 - Early Church – catechumenate, baptism, bishops, and separate rite – In the first several centuries confirmation was part of the “**rite of baptism**” and **connected to the adult catechumenate**. (48) By A.D. 1000, the **rite of confirmation became fully separated from baptism** and was “performed by a bishop.” (50) Yet practically it was hard to live this commitment out, as bishops did not have easy access to parishes. *Therefore many parishes ignored it.* (50)

Stage 2 - Pre-Reformation period – confirmation completes baptism, sacrament, and less catechetical instruction - Confirmation was an official action of the church done by bishops in which “Christians grow in grace and are strengthened in faith.” (50) By the eighth or ninth century, the time between baptism and confirmation grew longer and confirmation became seen as “a **completion of what was begun in infant baptism.**” (85) During this period confirmation became to be viewed **as a sacrament**, and in fact, became “fixed as doctrine” (86) through the Council of Florence (1439) and the Council of Trent (1547).

*During this period where confirmation was a sacrament there was more emphasis on the rite of confirmation and **less emphasis was placed on catechetical instruction.***

Stage 3 - Reformation time – tradition, rethinking sacramental nature, and multiple understandings – The Reformation offered the opportunity to **rethink confirmation**, not only in practice, but also in theology and theory. Reformers were in agreement on keeping confirmation, because of the **tradition** confirmation held before the Reformation, but not making it another sacrament (because it was not a practice in Scripture). Yet the Reformers viewed confirmation differently and this led to “a wide variety of views of confirmation” both in practice and in purpose during the Reformation. (51) **Clusters of understandings** emerged, four in the sixteenth century and two in the next two centuries. Today “reflections of

each of these six ... may be found in Lutheran congregations in the United States and across the world." (51)

Lessons to be learned from confirmation in this stage. First, *the clusters of views share four elements: universal rejection of confirmation as a supplement to baptism (a notion common at the time of the Reformation), an educational or catechetical component, some association with baptism and communion, and done at a young age (rarely higher than 12). Many of these assumptions lie beneath the surface of confirmation practices in Lutheran congregations today. (54)* Second, *the one theme they share is "the Reformers saw Medieval confirmation handed them as a gross misunderstanding and misuse of baptism in that it made confirmation into a sacrament."* (52) And third, *a contribution of the Reformation era was the common use of catechisms. While catechisms were used before this time, Luther simplified and strengthened catechisms. (56)*

Stage 4 - Confirmation in the US and the coming together of the ELCA (1970s) – shaped by immigrants, educational focus, role of pastor, graduation, and call for study definition- This era of Lutheran history is **shaped by the immigrants** that made up American Lutheranism. In 1910 American Lutherans were separated into 24 bodies. (56) During this time, ethnic and geographic influence, and the fact it's always been done, greatly impact the practice of confirmation.

Three themes were present: *education was primarily the role of the pastor, reference to baptism was common, and the process and rite were viewed as preparation for first communion. (57)*

In addition, confirmation was commonly aligned with **school graduation** (about 13 or 14) and end of formal religious education. (57) Palm Sunday the most common date, connecting it with Holy Week. (57-58) And because of all of this diversity, and the number of merges taking place within Lutheran bodies, there was a desire (nationally and internationally) to study confirmation. In the early 1970s the commission **offered this definition:** "Confirmation is a pastoral and educational ministry of the church which helps the baptized child through Word and Sacrament to identify more deeply with the Christian community and participate more fully in its mission." (61)

Highlights – *shared definition, is a ministry (process) rather than just a rite (event), parents or sponsors given responsibility, and first communion was separated from the rite of confirmation. (62)*

Stage 5 - Confirmation in the ELCA (post 1970) – definition affirmed, three needs, six common models, and four recommendations - The

Confirmation Ministry Task Force reported to the ELCA Churchwide Assembly in 1993 Presented this **definition**: “Confirmation ministry is a pastoral and educational ministry of the church that helps the baptized through Word and Sacrament to identify more deeply with the Christian community and participate more fully in its mission.”²¹ With the vision that “Confirmation ministry is an opportunity for congregations to renew the vision of living by grace, grounded in baptism.” (65)

Three needs were identified: The need for self-worth and personal identity, the need for relationships, and the need for time. (273-274) And as the task force listened to congregations around the Lutheran church, they discover **six models** which general reflected confirmation in the church: longer and later, meeting of young people, the confirming community, the catechumenal parish, the renewed school, and the vow-driven catechesis. (276-277) And **four recommendations** were put forth: Congregational confirmation ministry by gospel-centered, grace-centered both in content and approach, confirmation ministry be tailor-made with an emphasis on community building and faith to convey the gospel in the congregation’s particular context, congregations create/designate a confirmation ministry team to give shape and direction to planning and coordination of a pastoral and educational confirmation ministry, and synods, churchwide, and seminaries partner with congregation in developing resources and supporting congregations. (66-67)

Today confirmation ministries are becoming more diverse, drawing on an increasing number of resources with increasingly diverse approaches. Congregations have worked with several of the recommendations the task force noted, but more work could be done for seminaries and synods to resource congregations in this area. And the freedom of confirmation ministry within the ELCA is still a gift, as it is also makes this ministry confusing.

²¹ *Confirmation: Engaging Lutheran Foundations and Practices*. Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1999, 266. The 1970 definition: “Confirmation is a pastoral and educational ministry of the church which helps the baptized child through Word and Sacrament to identify more deeply with the Christian community and participate more fully in its mission.” *Ibid.*, 61.

Early Church

separate

catechumenate

bishops

Separate rite

In the first several centuries confirmation was part of the "rite of baptism" and connected to the adult catechumenate. (48)

By A.D. 1000, the rite of confirmation became fully separated from baptism and was "performed by a bishop." Yet practically it was hard to live this commitment out, as bishops did not have easy access to parishes. Therefore many parishes ignored it. (50)

Confirmation was an official action of the church in which "Christians grow in grace and are strengthened in faith." (50)

confirmation history

Pre-Reformation

confirmation completes baptism

less catechetical instruction

sacrament
Councils of Florence (1439) and Trent (1547)

sacrament

By the 8th or 9th century, the time between baptism and confirmation grew longer and confirmation became seen as "a completion of what was begun in infant baptism." (85)

During this period confirmation became to be viewed as a sacrament and became "fixed as doctrine" through the Council of Florence (1439) and the Council of Trent (1547). (86)

During this period where confirmation was a sacrament there was more emphasis on the rite of confirmation and less emphasis was placed on catechetical instruction.

Reformation

rethink

tradition

rethinking sacramental nature

multiple understandings

The Reformation was an opportunity to rethink confirmation, not only in practice, but also in theologically.

Reformers were in agreement on keeping confirmation, because of the tradition, but because it was not in Scripture did not want to make it a sacrament.

Yet the Reformers viewed confirmation differently and this led to "a wide variety of views of confirmation" both in practice and in purpose during the Reformation. (51)

This era of Lutheran history is shaped by the immigrants that made up American Lutheranism. In 1910 American Lutherans were separated into 24 bodies. (56)

North America

connection to First Communion

education by Pastor

study and definition

define

3 themes were present: education was primarily the role of the pastor, reference to baptism was common, and confirmation was viewed as preparation for first communion. (57)

reference to baptism

Because of the merges taking place within Lutheran bodies, there was a call to study confirmation.

In the 1970s the church offered this definition: "Confirmation is a pastoral and educational ministry of the church which helps the baptized child through Word and Sacrament to identify more deeply with the Christian community and participate more fully in its mission." (61)

All references are from: *Confirmation: Engaging Lutheran Foundations and Practices*. Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1999.

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Appendix C Taking it Home

How is confirmation ministry going in your setting?
How might it be a robust ministry of faith formation for your congregation?

As you ponder those two questions, and have had the chance to view confirmation from various angles, consider taking one of the next steps:

1. **Create a team of people who will take a deeper look** at what you are currently doing in confirmation and think through how best to approach confirmation in the future.
2. Do a **confirmation ministry audit**:
 - a. define the current purpose and goals
 - b. describe the structure or aspects involved
 - c. name the various leadership roles and how they contribute to the various aspects of confirmation
 - d. name the contextual realities within and outside your congregation
 - e. name any hopes or desires for change as you look to the future
 - f. how does it fit with other faith formation ministries in your congregation?
3. Step back and look at the **history of confirmation** in your own congregation.
 - a. What's stayed the same? What's changed?
 - b. What stands out? Any surprises?
 - c. Describe the confirmands. Have their make-up changed? If so how?
 - d. How did it align (or not) with the overall congregation's work at that time?
4. **Explore confirmation in other ministries** - within the ELCA and outside the ELCA. (You can do this by visiting other congregations or talking with their leaders or by reading some of the portraits from The Confirmation Project.)
 - a. What is their goal? and What does confirmation entail?
 - b. Who's involved? What is their role?
 - c. What is interesting? What would work and what wouldn't work in your setting?
5. **Do a resource exploration.** Task a group of people to name areas covered in confirmation and then discover resources (people, websites, books, curriculum) that would fit into those areas.



**PRACTICE
DISCIPLESHIP**

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