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Transforming the Confirmation Journey

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Over the course of this semester, it has become more and more difficult to describe what exactly Confirmation is. Though there are some elements that each iteration of Confirmation seem to share (an educational aspect, a spiritual aspect, a public proclamation of faith and recognition in a service, etc.), the vast diversity in form, curriculum, and objectives has led to unpredictable outcomes. For some, Confirmation was a rite of passage for the youth in the church, an expectation and indicator that the youth was on "the right path." For others, the memory of Confirmation was either so uneventful that the even the spryest minds struggle to hold any recollection of the experience, or Confirmation was unconvincing, insofar as it failed to bolster a curious faith with the support of the church community that embodies the discipleship the youth was being asked to confirm. Regardless of the outcome, Confirmation became a process. More importantly, it became a process for youth of a certain age, which seems to have given the church credence to compartmentalize its existence under the auspices of youth ministry, and as such, ignore it all together, beyond the occasional announcement in the bulletin, and the small liturgy in a single Sunday worship service, once every year or two.

As the Presbyterian Church, USA, and each church within it, continues to look with "reformed and always to be reformed" eyes, it has become necessary to fix that gaze upon the Confirmation Process. Such conversations should begin with the question "what is confirmation?" followed quickly by a few subsequent questions: What are the objectives of confirmation? Who needs to be involved? What form does the process need to take? Having considered these things myself, the following is a proposal to a new way to envision the Confirmation process

Before getting into the weeds of the details, I think it is important to identify the objectives of this proposal. They are as follows:

1. *Engagement of the whole Church*

The heart of this proposal is the possibility for it to engage every single member of the church in the project of Confirmation. The process of Confirmation, in previous iterations, never seemed to embody the collective unity of the church, to which the youth were striving to become full members of.

1. *Intersectional with all of the Ministries of the Church*

This proposal looks to make Confirmation a holistic program, which touches and is affirmed in all of the ministries of the church, including worship, faith formation, and mission.

A Proof of Concept for Re-Imagining the Confirmation Process

*The congregation in mind when creating this concept is a medium-large size church (600-1000) members. I think small churches may lack the resources to full implement, but could use aspects of the concept and adapt as needed. Larger church can also scale appropriately to take into account an abundance of resources.*

Confirmation as a *Season of the Church*

When considering a new way of looking at Confirmation, the fear is that whatever is imagined is just a repackaging of the same program. Are we doing the same things we always have been, and just calling it something different? What is needed is a paradigm shift in how we see Confirmation. Instead of thinking of Confirmation as a program or process that youth of a certain age and the adults supporting them are undergoing, can we envision Confirmation as something the entire church is engaged in?

After considering this, the next questioned became is there something else the church does that can model the objectives and outcomes that I have imagined Confirmation needing. The answer was obvious: the liturgical seasons of the Church. If you walk into a church in the first week of December, it is likely to be covered with all of the trimmings of Advent, from the decorations of the Church to the programs being offered. The sermon series, the Sunday school classes, even the devotional materials all ooze the liturgical gusto of Advent. Why couldn't confirmation have the same impact on the church that the liturgical seasons do? Can Confirmation be a season of the church? What would that look like?

*Proof of Concept*

**The Season of Confirmation: I Believe; We Believe.**

General Outline

To begin, the "season of Confirmation" would occur over the course of 16 weeks, beginning in August and ending on Christ the King Sunday in November. Like the early Church, which did baptismal rites on Easter and Pentecost, Christ the King Sunday would make the end of the season of Confirmation, with the liturgy of Confirmation occurring as a part of that service. It seems appropriate given the first question of the liturgy is "Do you acknowledge Christ Jesus as your personal Lord and Savior?" During these 16 weeks, a curriculum, which focuses on Scripture, the Confessions of the Presbyterian Church, USA, and the activity of the Church, will serve as a guide for the group of youth who have chosen to explore a public confession of faith, and as inspiration for the other ministries of the church, including worship, faith formation, and outreach.

**For the Confirmands (Any youth between 12-14 interested in making a Public proclamation of faith)**

Weekly Meetings

Weekly meetings would focus on Bible study, study of the confessions, and spiritual care. They would last 1.5- 2 hours. Snacks should be provided. Curriculum should account for multiple intelligences and the leader should also engage the confirmands in the leadership of the class.

Service Requirements

Over the course of the 16 weeks, Confirmands would be required complete two service projects of their own choosing. At least one must be a part of the church's outreach ministry.

Mentor program

Each confirmand will be matched with another member of the congregation. Mentors must pass a background check and adhere to child protection policies. Mentors will be expected to check in with their confirmand regularly and attend other Confirmation meetings as needed.

Activity of the Church

Confirmands will be required to attend a session meeting once in the 16-week season and at least one committee meeting.

Public Proclamation of Faith

The week before Christ the King service, each confirmand will have worked on crafting their own statement of faith. They will be given the opportunity to go before the session to present their statement of faith. After this presentation, confirmands will be presented with the liturgical questions. All of those who affirm the communal beliefs of the liturgical questions found in the Book of Order will be voted on by the session to be confirmed. At the Christ the King service, all youth who took part in the process will be celebrated, including those who will not be making a public proclamation. A small gift will be given to all those who took part in the process, not just those who made their public proclamation.

**For the Congregation**

Faith Formation

Sunday school, Bible studies, and devotional groups would be encouraged to build their lesson plans around the Confirmation scripture and confession for the week. Perhaps the Faith Formation committee can assist with additional programming around themes in the confessions, or a "What You Should Know About..." series.

Worship

*Space*

As with the liturgical seasons of the Church, the sanctuary and church itself should reflect the "season of Confirmation." Color will be particularly important because it is the most common visual cue for a season in the church. For Confirmation, I think a scheme around the color green would be appropriate. Green is often associated with growth. It is also symbolic of land or earth, which further affirms the ideas of the firmness of faith or foundations of faith. A congregational art installation, in a prominent place, perhaps the narthex, could also be constructed over the course of the season. The outline of the words "We Believe," would be taped or drawn on a bulletin board or some display board. Churchgoers would then be invited to write a "This I believe..." statement on a piece of construction paper and pin it inside the outline in the display. On Christ the King Sunday, the artwork would be put on display in the Sanctuary. The Confessional Statements of the Church should also be on display around the church.

*Liturgy*

Worship Committee and Pastoral staff will be encouraged to let the weekly scripture and confession inspire the liturgy used in worship that week. The confession of the week could be utilized in the affirmation of faith. The scripture reading and sermon could come from the confirmation scripture. Hymns could touch on themes from the scripture or the confessions for that week. Where some services have a minute for mission, during the season of Confirmation, members could be invited to share a brief statement on what they believe or what they think it means to be a member.

Mission

If possible, it would be good to have one community service day, in which the congregation would gather for worship, then go out and serve with the ministry partners the church already has relationships with. The Outreach or Mission Committee would be in charge of planning this day.

Spiritual Life

Like the liturgical seasons, a weekly devotional should be made available to the congregation to reflect upon the scripture and confession for that week. It should be interactive and collaborative, so that families or partners can do them together at home. Snapshots of the devotional can be pushed through social media and email, so that members who do not have a hard copy can still have access.

Tentative schedule for Weekly focus: Scripture, Confession, and topic

**The Season of Confirmation: I Believe. We Believe.**

*16 Weeks (Ending with the Christ the King service in Nov.)*

Week 1 (Pentateuch, Nicene Creed)

Week 2 (Joshua to 2 Kings, The Apostles' Creed)

Week 3 (Wisdom literature, The Scots Confession)

Week 4 (Psalms, The Heidelberg Catechism)

Week 5 (Major Prophets, The Second Helvetic Confession)

Week 6 (Minor Prophets, The Westminster Confession of Faith)

Week 7 (The Gospels, The Shorter Catechism)

Week 8 (Acts, The Larger Catechism)

Week 9 (Paul's Epistles, The Theological Declaration of Barmen)

Week 10 (Pastorals and other Epistles of the New Testament, The Confession of 1967)

Week 11 (Revelation, A Brief Statement of Faith)

Week 12 (Confession of Belhar, The Sacraments)

Week 13 (Individual Statements of Faith, The Book of Order)

Week 14 (Individual Statement of Faith, Our Church History)

Week 15 (Individual Statements of Faith, Session and Ministry)

Week 16 (Examination and recognition during Service)