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Confirmation Basics: Purpose, Design, and Leadership

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What does this mean? is a typical confirmation question and an appropriate one to ask The Confirmation Project[1] researchers at the end of this project. Translating the learnings from our research into the practices of ministry was a shared commitment of the steering team, so three of us were charged with bridging three big ideas of our research—purpose, design, and leadership—with the realities of ministry on the ground. This article focuses on the basics of confirmation,[2] offering congregational leaders a process for custom designing and contextually adapting confirmation to their settings. We invite you to read holding three questions in mind. What ideas can I integrate into my current approach to confirmation? What practices will help my congregation discern our best pathway

How do a congregation and its leader(s) go about forming or reforming a confirmation program? Here is a basic outline of how to bring about such a task, written from the experience and learnings of the leaders of the Confirmation Project.

[1]The Confirmation Project, directed by Richard Osmer and Katherine Douglass and generously funded by Lilly Endowment, Inc., researched confirmation and equivalent practices in five denominations: Evangelical Lutheran Church in America, United Methodist Church, Presbyterian Church (USA), Episcopal Church, and African Methodist Episcopal Church. For more information see: www.theconfirmationproject.com

[2]*Confirmation* is used here to refer to the term *confirmation and equivalent practices*, which was the language used in the study to allow for the various understanding of this ministry within denominations and congregations. The overall understanding of confirmation and equivalent practices was ministry that focused on the faith intensification and integration of young people into the body of Christ.

for moving forward? Who are the people in my setting I could invite to join me on this journey?

The Purpose of Confirmation

Our research discovered the most commonly expressed purpose of confirmation was "maturing in faith," generally understood as a process of integrating religious knowledge, belief, and behavior into a confirmand's identity and daily life. Starting with some familiarity with the Christian story, Christian practices, and the church's theology, this maturation happened as young people engaged in learning activities within a community of faith and concluded with them making a personal commitment while participating in a public rite. Within this purpose was a range of goals that reflected the theological and patterned variance of the denominations. The (embedded and deliberative[3]) theology and inherited practices of each congregation and their denominations influenced the language used to describe the goals of confirmation, shaped the view of knowing (head, heart, hands), prioritized methods, and influenced how maturity was assessed. Dedicating time for reflecting on and understanding the purpose of confirmation is critical.

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Being able to articulate a clear purpose for confirmation within a congregation takes time and effort. We assure you it is time well spent. When youth, parents, mentors, lay leaders, and clergy can articulate the goals of their confirmation ministry, significant growth among confirmands follows. When congregations are vague about the purpose of confirmation, even if well intentioned, confirmands are also vague about their relationship to Jesus and the church.

Understanding the purpose of confirmation is for the sake of the young people who will participate, but clarity around confirmation ministries can also transform congregations. As congregations participate in confirmation, they bear witness to the redemptive love of God and the covenant of grace into which all Christians are baptized. As they do this, confirmation has the potential for deepening relationships with God, the congregation, and neighbors.

[3]Howard W. Stone and James O. Duke, *How to Think Theologically*, 3rd ed. (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2013).

Designing Confirmation

To have a dynamic and faithfully effective confirmation program, it is vitally important for congregations to engage in an intentional process of self-assessment. This process begins by defining the purpose and desired outcomes, but must also include developing a leadership team, understanding the ministry context, discerning content, outlining the learning, and implementing and evaluating the ministry. What follows is a process that addresses these key areas offering possible steps to take and ideas for further exploration.

Confirmation Champion and Stakeholders

Congregations that take confirmation seriously have committed leadership and someone to champion the ministry. Who is, or could be, your confirmation champion? Who is committed to confirmation? Which adults in your congregation believe in discipling young people? And who could lead others and this ministry? This decision may already be made in your setting. This might also be the chance to revisit your current practice and give careful thought to who your confirmation champion should be.

Who are stakeholders in confirmation? Stakeholders are people who have a reason to care about this ministry. They might care about this ministry because they care about the young people—for example, parents, grandparents, and adults who are already connected with youth. Stakeholders might be people who have a history with confirmation or a passion for teaching others about faith. Their wisdom and skills are invaluable. Young adults might also be tapped to invest in this team. With their youthful perspective and fresh ideas, their insights and experience could be helpful in customizing confirmation to your context. Whomever you identify as stakeholders, each confirmation ministry needs a team (we suggest three to six people) who bring different gifts, abilities, and perspectives to the table; are willing to invest in young people; and are open to praying for and joining in this faith formation process.

Some ideas: Name two or three people who could be champions of confirmation and one reason why. Write out the gifts of the person who is currently leading confirmation. Make a list of as many potential stakeholders as you can. After you have exhausted your brainstorming, review the list and star the names that most excite you. (We will revisit these lists at the end of the article.)

A Process

With a team ready, it is time to outline a process. The approach we have chosen is the ADDIE (Analysis, Design, Development, Implementation, and Evaluation)

Process of Educational Design.[4] The team will walk through each of these steps within a time line you have set.

We are aware that the process we are suggesting takes time, more time than some ministry leaders have, at least at the onset. Begin by being realistic about your time line. If you do not feel you have the time to do all of the work as a team, create phases or have the champion work on some components with strategic meetings set along the way. While an abbreviated approach would not be our first choice, it does work and could be a first step in inviting others into leadership.

Intro Meeting(s) Goals. Learn who is on the team, make sure everyone understands the process, discuss the format and pattern of your meetings, and discern the purpose of confirmation. We encourage you to open your meetings with prayer or a spiritual practice, set clear and realistic deadlines, and assign roles to group members (e.g., notetaker, scheduler, facilitator). Spend time getting to know each other and talking about the purpose of confirmation within your congregation and denomination. This work can take place in two shorter meetings or one longer one.

Some ideas: Invite the team members to remember their own confirmation experiences or share stories of how they came to faith in Jesus Christ and joined the church. Listen to each other's stories with an ear toward how the events enhanced (blessed) and/or hindered (became an obstacle to) faith formation. If confirmation in your congregation already has a defined purpose, bring that to the meeting. You might also discuss the purpose of confirmation in your denomination and/or other congregations. Read through these descriptions as a way to "open up" thinking and give team members a sense of the variety of understandings and examples of how others have understood this ministry before crafting (or reaffirming) your own purpose statement.

Analyzing Your Context

Perhaps a bit counterintuitively, faithfully effective confirmation means leadership should not immediately jump to program planning or shopping for the best curriculum. Instead, start by asking some questions and conducting a little empirical research of your own. Getting a handle on your context involves gathering information from several sources. Congregational histories, confirmation enrollment and retention numbers over the past five years, documents related to confirmation in the recent past, and interviews with church leaders, pastors, parents, and past confirmation participants all provide invaluable information about the existing confirmation program. In addition, developing a basic congregational profile (using freely available US census data and/or regional real-estate websites) helps leaders situate the congregation in its larger social location. It makes a difference

[4]There are many resources available in print and online about the ADDIE process. A particularly useful step-by-step guide for those new to the process can be found in Robert Maribe Branch, *Instructional Design: The ADDIE Approach* (New York: Springer, 2010).

if, for example, your congregation is serving a community with an unusually high birthrate (more young people) or high unemployment numbers (fewer financial resources, high levels of household anxiety).

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Maybe some of you are saying at this point, "Really? This is not what I signed up for." That may be true, but taking the time to get a sense of what confirmation has been like in the past, what expectations people have today, and what impact it had on students is very important work. Doing the digging now, asking good questions, and really listening to people's desires pays off down the road.

Developing and administering a brief congregational survey focused on confirmation can also prove useful, particularly if the survey simply asks people to list the strengths and limitations of the current program along with suggestions for ways to improve it. A simple, carefully designed survey can both improve your appreciation of your context and engage a wider circle of stakeholders.

Some ideas: Use Survey Monkey or Google Forms to develop a simple five to six question survey. Email the survey to students and/or parents from the last five years. Some sample questions: When were you in confirmation? What was the purpose of confirmation? What were the most impactful aspects of the program? If you could change one thing, what would it be? In what ways did confirmation connect you with the congregation? What impact did confirmation have on your relationships with your peers? What impact did confirmation have on your relationships with family members? Congregations can do less formal exploration by having team members call a few previous confirmands. A simple process is to come up with a list of ten to twelve recent confirmands and divide the list among the team members, having each call two or three people. Using a similar set of questions, as listed above, have each team member call their young people before the next meeting, jotting down notes (perhaps in a shared Google Doc) and reviewing the findings at the next meeting.

A Note about Your Learners. Along with an assessment of the context in which confirmation is to take place, learning about the needs, interests, and prior knowledge of particular learners makes sense. Learners themselves are not all alike. Even learners who share identical features of race, class, gender, and/or sexual orientation (to name a few) differ in their particular life experiences, prior knowledge of the faith, and motivating interests. The more confirmation leaders know about the learners, the better able they are to develop an approach that maximizes learning. One of the best ways to obtain a working knowledge of potential confirmands involves simply talking with them prior to confirmation. Conversation with young

people about their questions and learning interests related to Christianity can take place through a visit to a church school class, youth group meeting, or an informal conversation around a table at a church dinner. A brief survey could be designed for incoming confirmands asking what they know and would like to know. Talking with parents, church school teachers, and youth group leaders is another way to provide helpful information.

After a few weeks of information gathering about the social context, practice of confirmation, and confirmands in your congregation, the information can be analyzed for key themes, opportunities, and challenges. It is important to receive all data input with as little preconceived judgment as possible. Trust the process and trust God's abiding presence in it.

Analysis Meeting #1 Goals. Decide how your team will analyze your context and learners. How will you gather this information? Discuss the time frame, set deadlines, and assign tasks. Name the expected depth and breadth you are looking for. Note what changes have taken place over the past few years. Take those factors into account in making your decisions. Know that however one goes about gathering information, it is imperative to involve as many of the stakeholders as possible, as well as representative confirmands from the past and future.

Analysis Meeting #2 Goals. Reflect on the purpose of confirmation based on the information gathered. Present your research findings. What are the themes? What stands out? How does this information impact the purpose of confirmation you discerned at the previous meeting? (This meeting could take place in two parts—one with the core team and a second with an expanded team interested in the findings.) We recommend you end this meeting by dwelling on this question, How will we know if confirmation, as we have now defined it, "works"? Or, What impact would we hope to observe in individual confirmands and the wider congregation at the end of confirmation? Be specific. This feedback will allow the program designers to establish specific desired outcomes and methods for continuous assessment.

Resources

How was confirmation understood by survey respondents in The Confirmation Project?

It is an appropriate time to:

1. Ask questions about faith
2. Strengthen personal faith
3. Learn more about God and faith
4. Develop a personal view of faith

How does The Confirmation Project define confirmation?

Confirmation provides an important opportunity for young people to encounter the gospel anew in ways that strengthen their understanding of the faith, deepen their experience of the Christian community, and equip them to discern their calling to join in God's mission to the world.

Sample denominational statements about confirmation:

> ELCA: 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. (The Confirmation Ministry Task Force Report, adopted by the third biennial Churchwide Assembly of the ELCA on September 1, 1993)

> Episcopal: Confirmation is the rite in which those who were baptized at an early age [and those baptized as adults without the laying on of hands by a bishop] are expected to make a mature public affirmation of their faith, recommit themselves to the responsibilities of their baptism, and receive strength from the Holy Spirit through prayer and the laying on of hands by a bishop. (*Book of Common Prayer*, 412)

Designing a Confirmation Program in Your Context

A strength of confirmation across the country is the diversity of approaches congregations and denominations have. All aim at fostering deep learning of basic Christian beliefs and Christian practices, but the way they carry out this work varies considerably across denominations, regions, community type, and size of congregation. Confirmation does not take place in universal generalities soaring above the ground, nor is there any such thing as "one size fits all" in confirmation, even within the same denomination. From the diversity of approaches, we learned that confirmation works well only when leaders tailor programs to their specific learning contexts. The culture(s), history, demographic profile, and denominational identity of each setting has to be taken into account in order to develop and execute a vibrant program. Having an informed understanding of your context, learners, and purpose, the program design process can commence.

Learning Outcomes. The design process begins with the "end" in view. What are the few big concepts, skills, and dispositions you want learners to take away from the confirmation experience? Many educational leaders begin with the curricular content "to be covered" and focus on what the teacher does. The unintended consequence of this approach to educational design can be too much emphasis on content and too little emphasis on connecting with the learners, sometimes called the "content tyranny trap."

Many educational leaders begin with the curricular content "to be covered" and focus on what the teacher does. The unintended consequence of this approach to educational design can be too much emphasis on content and too little emphasis on connecting with the learners.

Education design specialists Grant Wiggins and Jay McTighe offer a way out of the "content tyranny trap." Begin by articulating intentions for how the learners will be different as a result of having gone through the confirmation experience.[5] Of course, there is no guarantee confirmands will achieve all of the desired learning outcomes, but letting these outcomes inform and shape the confirmation experience makes them meaningful and relevant to the learning of confirmands.

Design Meeting #1 Goals. Name three to five learning outcomes for confirmation. Remember the final question in your Analysis Meeting #2. Let those responses ignite your imagination about the desired learning outcomes you want, in order to live out the purpose of confirmation in your context.

One way to discern what you want to happen is by creating a character of the student you *don't* want. To do this work, give the group four minutes to write down attributes that describe what they don't want a student to leave confirmation with (e.g., hating the Bible, not knowing anyone else in the class, believing worship doesn't matter.) Go around the group and have each person share one of their bad characteristics and write it on paper. Then repeat the process, but this time have members turn the bad characteristic into hoped for characteristic (e.g., desire to learn more from the Bible, feeling connected to two or more people in the congregation because of confirmation, worship taking on a more meaningful role in their life.) Use this exercise as the "picture" of the confirmand who had a meaningful confirmation experience and draw your outcomes from it.

Learning Components. With a well-chosen set of learning outcomes, confirmation leaders can fully enter into the design process with confidence. Open-ended questions characterize the early stages of the design process and spark the educational imagination of the team. "What would it look like if we did this?" Or, "What if we tried . . ." Building on the identified strengths of your congregation and desired learning outcomes, imagine the students and the environment (remembering to think beyond the classroom). What church events, community service, or traditions might you incorporate in confirmation? What denominational gatherings, camps, or leadership experiences might you include in the design? Begin by brainstorming components without worrying about how they fit together. Once a series of components has been identified, try putting them together in several iterations. Land on a number of possible designs, including ones that you might have only playfully considered, so the group can see how the pieces and the whole work together. Make sure you keep in mind your learnings about the context, learners, and desired learning outcomes.

This process often goes better when a group of leaders share in this creative work. If your setting requires one person put the design together, make sure to get feedback and suggestions from a group before moving forward into the development phase of the process.

[5]Grant Wiggins and Jay McTighe, *Understanding by Design*, expanded 2nd ed. (Alexandria, VA: Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development, 2005).

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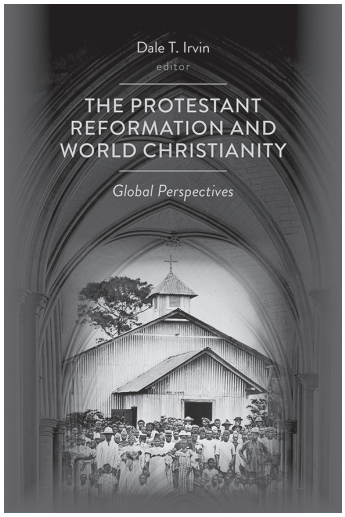

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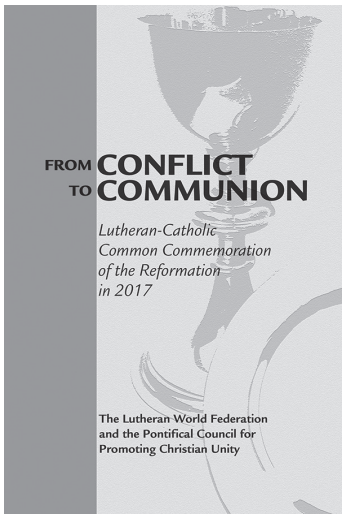

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Design Meeting #2 Goals. Name the learning components, identify learning experiences unique to confirmation, identify possible connections with existing learning experiences, and sketch one or more designs of how the components fit together.

Some ideas: Use the brainstorm session to invite a large group of people to use Post-it Notes to write down their ideas and, together, create a visual constellation of possibilities. Placing the notes on the wall, in various iterations, helps the group visualize how the components might work together to make the whole. Begin the session by naming the pieces and putting them up on one wall. On another wall, provide a month-by-month layout of the year. Select and place Post-it Notes with seasonal components on the calendar first, and then fill in the rest.

Developing Your Confirmation Program

Once the educational design has been decided, the next phase entails putting the meat on the bones of the design skeleton. This phase involves roughing out and sequencing the various sessions of learning, always with an eye toward serving the learning outcomes for the learners. If you have not already, put your desired outcomes into conversation with the imagined length of your confirmation program. In addition to duration, name other constraints or parameters that are important to keep in mind. It is important that these elements are aligned, for when the program structure and pedagogies clearly support desired outcomes, confirmands report transformative and lasting learning.

Sessions/Units. Dividing subject matter up into chunks and units helps leaders organize and sequence material in a way that makes sense to all involved. Due to the general tendency toward "content tyranny" and forgetting to plan for what the learners will take away, it may work best to cover only material essential in helping confirmands achieve the intended learning outcomes. This is hard for many leaders, especially given our personal experience, but this approach leaves room for confirmands' questions and Holy Spirit-driven adaptations. Aiming for more deep learning and practice of key principles rather than surface learning of a mass of disconnected bits of information is the better way to err. Remember, confirmation is not a destination, it a season of faith intensification.

Program development requires thinking as much about the ways learners will encounter the subject matter as much as the subject matter itself. Ideally, the content and methods of instruction should match and reinforce each other, cultivating a climate of continuous and responsive learning. (For more on teaching and learning methods, see "Rethinking the Classroom," "From Magic Curriculums to the Interplay of the Workbench," and "Movements toward Engagement in Confirmation" in this issue.)

Design Meeting #3 Goals. Add content to the design skeleton, naming topics or units to be covered in each learning component. Bring units or lessons from previous confirmation programs to this session, placing them alongside the purpose, desired learning outcomes, and components. Discern which topics could be

eliminated, which ones are critical, and what might be missing. One important learning from our research was that topics fell into the following general categories: catechism and Word and Sacrament,[6] social issues and well-being of others,[7] and immediacy with God.[8]

One approach to discerning topics is to place the topics of previous confirmation programs on index card (one per card) and create a set of cards for each team member. With the purpose of confirmation and the desired learning outcomes displayed on the wall, give members five minutes to separate the cards evenly into three piles: keep, optional, eliminate. After five minutes, have members share the topics in their keep and eliminate piles.

A Word about Teaching. If it is not clear who the teaching team will be, this is an important time to make that decision, as they should be part of this process. If a pastor or paid staff person is a primary teacher, no matter what size confirmation program you have, we encourage you to invite others to be part of the teaching team. Why? Because teaching styles align with the teacher's gifts, and diversifying teaching styles will enrich the teaching and learning experience for all involved.

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The default mode for teaching in confirmation tends to be direct instruction (for example, lectures and showing video clips). While there are times when a well-crafted lecture is helpful, research on learning shows that a variety of learning methods best promote deep learning. During the development phase, those teaching may want to familiarize themselves with resources on effective teaching methods.[9] And remember to imagine beyond the classroom.

Finally, the development phase involves determining what personnel, resources, funding, scheduling, and communication will move the design from a sketch to a working educational plan in your setting. The nitty-gritty of administrative support details has to be thought through in order to implement the learning design successfully. The details of this phase vary greatly by size. Therefore,

[6]Topics in this cluster include baptism, Lord's Supper, worship services, and the Bible.

[7]Topics in this cluster include other religions, other denominations, justice and responsibility for others, drug abuse, love/sexuality, abortion, and gay marriage.

[8]Topics in this cluster include miracles, experiences of or encounters with God, death/resurrection, and the meaning of life.

[9]One quite recent and very accessible resources is Claire Howell Major, Michael S. Harris, and Todd Zakrajsek, *Teaching for Learning: 101 Intentionally Designed Educational Activities to Put Students on the Path to Success* (New York: Routledge, 2016). In this book, Major, Harris, and Zakrajsek helpfully provide practical descriptions of 101 effective teaching methods grouped into eight families: lecture, discussion, reciprocal peer teaching, academic games, reading strategies, writing to learn, graphic organizers, and metacognitive reflection.

we simply encourage you to work with existing administrative processes or create ones that best suit your situation.

This is a great time to pause and share the design with others. From this point, the design moves from development to implementation and evaluation. It also worth recognizing the first phase is complete!

Implementing Your Confirmation Program

The process so far has worked in the realm of future possibility. This phase involves moving from the "intended curriculum" to the "actual curriculum." The process of moving from the drawing board into actual learning experiences with leaders and learners has its own set of challenges that require a different exercise of educational imagination. Here, leaders have to navigate, somewhat improvisationally, the gap between what has been envisioned and the realities of the actual interaction in the learning situation. No educational plan ever goes completely according to plan. Pivoting and making adjustments in the moment always occur. The key to effectiveness has more to do with the quality of interactions between persons in the learning environment and the actual learning that takes place than on strict fidelity to the learning plan. Dancing amidst these complexities in the actual teaching and learning interaction brings together the teacher's knowledge of the content, the learners, the educational plan, and the contingencies of human relationships as they unfold in real time. Facilitating the learning of basic Christian beliefs and practices is as much art and experiment as science.

Generally, it is helpful to over prepare and have more content and learning activities than the central part of the session plan. Having a few alternate or enrichment activities up your sleeve will come in handy if your original plan doesn't work in the intended situation, or if the plan goes more quickly in execution than you anticipated. In other words, always have a Plan B in mind when executing a learning session. (Sometimes, you might even need a Plan C.) Knowing if, when, and how to make adjustments to the session plan is a matter of judgment on the part of the educational leader(s). Keeping the learning objectives in mind, knowing the learners, and having a backup plan or alternate activities tends to facilitate successful improvisation in teaching-learning situations.

Goal of Implementing Meetings. Make the learning experiences meaningful for the learner based on the stated outcomes. Given your configuration, discuss the role of this team in implementing meaningful learning. Decide the regularity of touching base and the goal of those sessions.

Evaluating Your Confirmation Program

Leadership in confirmation does not end with the conclusion of a particular session of learning or with the wrap-up of a sequence of learning events. Instead, the final and necessary phase of the ADDIE process begins *after* the

implementation phase. This phase involves reflecting on what worked, what did not work very well, and what might be done differently next time. Building in time and a basic structure for evaluation of what occurred in the gap between what was intended and what actually took place can provide fruitful insights. These insights aid short-term adjustments as well as ongoing efforts to contextualize confirmation in your particular setting. In essence, the final phase leads right back into the initial phase of the process. In this way custom-designed and contextually adapted confirmation has to be thought of as a perpetually unfolding spiral.

Confirmation leadership is a long-distance run, not a sprint, and it brings you back to the place you began. It can often take at least two to three years to get a confirmation program to a point of fit that maximizes the learning and the positive experience for all involved. The spiral nature of the ADDIE educational design process used in an ongoing way helps ensure that your confirmation program balances the tricky dynamics of continuity and change over time such that it can grow and adapt with the times.

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Goals of Reflection/Evaluation Meetings. Process and learn from the teaching and learning process, working with formal and informal feedback, so that learners are moving toward the learning outcomes. Meet shortly after annual experiences, like retreats or summer camp, and in some regular pattern (monthly, quarterly, or twice a year). Gather the core leadership team that designed the confirmation ministry and those involved in teaching. Have the teaching team share what they are discovering is critical and ongoing work. Have the leadership team ask questions and think critically about the design. These annual meetings provide opportunities for adjusting the learning design, moving around content, and/or eliminating learning components. It is also the opportunity to "look ahead" and see if the next "class" of confirmands has particular needs that should be addressed.

Confirmation Leadership

As practical theologians, we think holistically. We recognize God is at work in the world around us as well as in the religious practices of individuals and faith communities. Therefore, it was not surprising to discover in our research that vibrant programs exist within an ecology of faith-forming practices in homes, congregations, denominational networks, and local communities. Confirmation ministries within such settings depend on able leaders who build dynamic systems of communication and mutual accountability within and beyond their particular

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ministry. In other words, vibrant programs are not only theologically rooted with clearly articulated goals and dynamic teaching methods, they are also part of dynamic faith community.

Leading vibrant confirmation includes more than designing learning environments, it also recognizes God's activity and invites participants to name God's presence in their lives and congregations. Ministries that accompany students in their maturing in faith believe God is active in their midst and trust God's ongoing work in forming faith within persons and communities. Leading in this way is as much about cultivating Christian community and tending to relationship as it is about designing pedagogical strategies and choosing curriculum. Such an approach makes room for the Holy Spirit as confirmands and leaders engage Scripture, gather in Christian community, and learn about God. Confirmation leaders also create opportunities for encountering God in the midst of others in ways that shape Christian identity and cultivate habits that connect faith and life. Hence, this section revisits the confirmation champion and the leadership team idea in light of this expanded understanding of confirmation leadership.

Champion and Team

It is worth repeating: every confirmation ministry needs a champion and a team. Having read through the process, who within your setting is the one to drive the work and pull together all the pieces? Is this the same person you thought of when you began this process? It is important to note that this person should have the ability to lead people through a process and pull a team together to design the learning, but most importantly they must believe confirmation has the capacity to disciple young people. This passion energizes the work and is contagious. And the champion needs a team, a cluster of stakeholders with diverse capacities and experiences.

The Work

The team's work is to shepherd the ministry. Walking through the design process is a wonderful way to draw the team together and create a shared understanding and ownership, but their primary work is more basic, committing themselves to discipling young people and participating in their own spiritual practices. In its most basic way, it is nurturing relationships and praying for young people. In its more sophisticated way, it includes teaching and mentoring, assessing and adapting current practices, and connecting students and their families to other ministries and the larger church. The work is varied and ongoing. Start with what you have, and build from there. Don't be afraid to start small and expand the team as you grow. Know this, whatever team you start with, the team will evolve. Team members will enter at various points in the design, implementation, and/

or assessment process and that is okay. This work quickly becomes iterative and is never ends.

> *Walking through the design process is a wonderful way to draw the team together and create a shared understanding and ownership, but their primary work is more basic, committing themselves to discipling young people and participating in their own spiritual practices.*

The gifts and skills of the people who come into the team are important, but not as important as the belief that confirmation ministry matters and team members who are open to learning and growing. Revisit the list of people you named in the opening phase. Think about their gifts and commitment to young people. Then invite a few to be part of this ministry in some way.

Below are some of the leadership capacities we discovered from our research. We offer these capacities not as the ideal or an exhaustive list but as a place to start thinking about who you might invite into this shared work.

- Listening well and asking good questions
- Reading and understanding the contextual realities
- Seeing the big picture of how confirmation fits into a congregation or lifelong faith formation
- Being able to offer an appreciative critique of current practices and reimaging old models
- Willing to risk, think strategically, and turn ideas into action.
- Collaborating, or working with others.
- Having a keen sense of God's presence within the lives of young people, the ministry, and the world.

A Promise

Once, the foundation for confirmation came from a shared curriculum or approach. Now, the foundation comes from an unashamed reliance on God and a congregation's meaningful engagement with young people. This is sacred work and God creates, opens, and transforms, not us. God is at work no matter what approach or curriculum we use. Therefore, lean into the process. Be prepared to discover new approaches to traditional practices and do not worry about finding the silver bullet, magic curriculum, or perfect program design. For the students in your midst, this experience will likely be their only confirmation experience. Be present with them, listen to their questions, and believe God is in your midst. And as you do, they and you might encounter the gospel anew.

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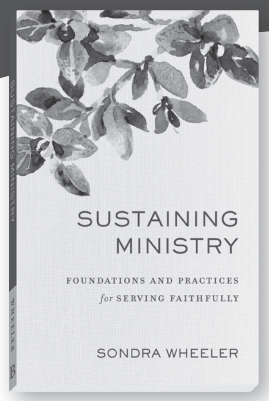

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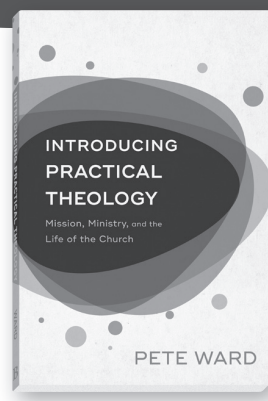

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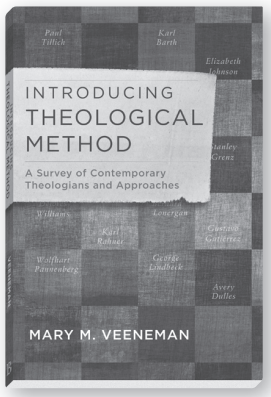

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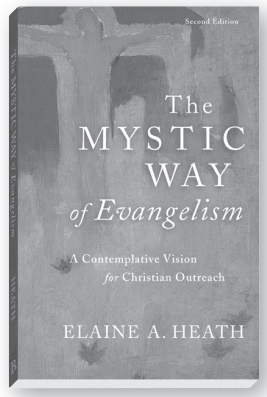

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Suggested Resources

Branch, Robert Maribe. *Instructional Design: The ADDIE Approach*. New York: Springer, 2010.

> Provides a step-by-step introduction to the process of instructional design. A resource for beginners and intermediate-level confirmation leaders and teachers.

Dirksen, Julie. *Design for How People Learn*. 2nd edition. Berkeley: New Riders, 2015.

> Using the principles of the ADDIE process, this book provides a fun and insightful way to work through the instructional design process that promotes deep learning and integration. Could be used in combination with the Branch book above.

Major, Claire Howell, Michael S. Harris, and Todd Zakrajsek. *Teaching for Learning: 101 Intentionally Designed Activities to Put Students on the Path to Success*. New York: Routledge, 2016.

> Worth its weight in gold, this resource describes over one hundred instructional methods organized into eight families. Provides a brief research summary about the effectiveness of each method and possible uses and pairings.

Roxburgh, Alan, and Fred Romanuk. *The Missional Leader: Equipping Your Church to Reach a Changing World*. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 2006.

> Offers perspectives and tools for helping congregations move toward missional engagement with a rapidly changing context on the basis of the gospel.

Stone, Howard W., and James O. Duke. *How to Think Theologically*. 3rd edition. Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2013.

> A helpful introduction to the process of theological reflection for those with little to no background in formal study of theology. Puts essential conceptual tools in the hands of confirmation leaders and teachers.

Wiggins, Grant, and Jay McTighe. *Understanding by Design*. Expanded 2nd ed. Alexandria, VA: Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development, 2005.

> The key resource for approaching educational design that promotes effective learning and avoids the trap of "content tyranny." Used widely in K-12 education and in higher education. The authors advocate for beginning with envisioned outcomes for learners and then engage in reverse engineering to design the entire learning experience.

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