

Confirmation more than just business as usual! A guide for assessing and strengthening your present confirmation ministry program

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If you are looking for a "cookie cutter" approach to confirmation ministry you may be at a loss. They can be found. But again, present practices show that effective faith-shaping congregations periodically assess the needs of their people and the realities of their context to plan for experiences and programming that will truly accomplish their vision for confirmation ministry. This resource is a tool to help you and your confirmation ministry planning team:

1. assess your present confirmation ministry practices,
2. reflect on six confirmation ministry approaches being modeled by congregations of the ELCA,
3. consider and weigh the value of ten elements found in many confirmation ministry programs, and
4. strengthen, enhance and perhaps even reinvent your confirmation program to more fully reflect your vision for this ministry.

You have permission!

Nike has strategically changed it's logo from Just Do it to I can. Congregations can and must take that same attitude as they plan for a confirmation ministry that builds on our rich Lutheran heritage while at the same time boldly seeks ways to "strengthen the spirit" as it affirms Christian faithfulness, discipleship and lifelong learning.

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Fortunately, congregations do not have to be permission-seekers. The ELCA's 1993 Confirmation Ministry Task Force Report strongly affirms the individual congregation's role in shaping a vision for confirmation ministry in its particular setting. This culmination of a five- year study does not attempt to prescribe what congregations should be doing. Instead it offers an understanding of what confirmation is; provides practical, concrete suggestions for creating an effective confirmation program in the parish; and clearly lays out the following understandings and recommendations:

Understandings

- ◆ Everything involved in confirmation ministry flows from Baptism.
- ◆ Confirmation happens in a living community of faith and is the responsibility of the whole congregation.
- ◆ Effective confirmation ministry involves use of a variety of persons and approaches.
- ◆ Young people benefit from confirmation ministry programs that include diverse models of learning.

Recommendations

- ◆ That confirmation ministry be Gospel and grace centered both in content and in approach.
- ◆ That confirmation ministry be tailor-made with an emphasis on community building and faith to convey the Gospel in the congregation's particular context.
- ◆ That congregations designate a confirmation ministry team to give shape and direction to the planning and coordination of a pastoral and educational confirmation ministry.
- ◆ That synods, the churchwide organization and seminaries be in partnership with congregations in developing a broad variety of support resources such as materials, networks and leaders.

Six Approaches to Confirmation Ministry

A review of present confirmation ministry practices in congregations of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America reveals that there are six broad "umbrella" approaches to confirmation ministry. The defining lines for these approaches are not hard and fast and congregations may draw from several models as they shape their program. It is helpful to think of the approaches as a framework around which a variety of elements are used to build a confirmation program that meets the needs of the young people, their families, the congregation and the community in which they live. The acronym L-U-T-H-E-R is an easy way to remember the different approaches. Each description is followed by a vignette from a congregation utilizing that particular format.

Large group-small group Approach

This approach reminds us that healthy relationships are an important component to faith growth. In most cases, the confirmation session begins with a total group gathering of youth and adult leaders. This is often a time for worship and introductory activities that set the stage for the session's theme. The large group gathering can also be a time for skits, singing, video viewing, crafts, a meal, games, announcements, planning or project work. Typically, small group time follows during which four to eight youth and one or two adult leaders gather for a continuation of the session's theme through discussion, personal sharing, activities and prayer. Small groups will sometimes meet independently for field trips, service projects or fellowship activities. In some instances the large group will meet monthly and the small groups will gather more frequently and even in homes. The way the small groups are configured can also vary. Sometimes youth will stay with the same small group each year of confirmation instruction. Other congregations see the value of mixing the groups up annually each year or even more frequently. In some cases, only the adult leaders rotate. Grade or gender specific groups are yet another option. Some congregations even invite older youth to be small group leaders.

Hosanna Lutheran, Lakeville, MN is a congregation totally immersed in the small group model. Leadership is not recruited. Instead, discernment of gifts and prayer play an important role in matching skills and abilities to the call to ministry. Affirmation of Baptism takes place in ninth grade. Although traditional elements such as memory work, attendance requirements, and even final tests exist in this program, they are surrounded by an engaging, innovative framework built on small group relationships.

Individual or self-paced Approach

The term individual or self-paced instruction rarely means that a young person's confirmation experience takes place totally independent of others. In fact, a congregation that using this approach needs to be very intentional in providing many venues for the young person to be engaged in learning and social activities that involve peers, family and strong connections with the wider faith community. The idea of self paced instruction is based on the educational premise that experiences are maximized when the learner has control over what, how and when learning takes place. This approach often incorporates a "university style" of learning in which there are a certain set of core experiences one is required to complete. This is

balanced with opportunities to choose electives based on interest, skills and spiritual gifts. Typically, core learning involves the Old and New Testament, the catechism, worship and liturgy, and the life and ministry of Martin Luther. Electives might include a visit to a Jewish synagogue; a group project which has young people creating a drama on Luther's life for Reformation Sunday worship; an independent undertaking using computer skills for the congregation's newsletter; or community service opportunities. In some instances, congregations give the young person and their family options to begin confirmation at any time (usually sometime after third grade) and regardless of how long it takes, the rite of affirmation of baptism occurs when the young person is ready and has completed the required work. Other congregations define the parameters more closely. The individual or self-paced concept can also be a viable option within other models when barriers such as distance, scheduling and physical disabilities exist or for any other reason that the congregation's confirmation ministry cannot meet the needs of an individual and family.

Zion Lutheran, Deerfield Beach, FL, uses a self-motivated, self-paced program that is richly steeped in journey imagery. Anyone in the 4th grade or older is invited to begin the journey at any time. It begins with prayer. When the young person feels ready he or she writes a letter to the pastor stating why they are ready to begin. This is followed by a meeting with the youth, pastor and parents. Class work, worship, service to the church and community, written expressions and relationships with a mentor are all a part of the required expectations. Upon completion, the young person still makes the decision if and when she/he is confirmed. For this reason, the rite of affirmation of baptism happens several times throughout the year.

T r aditional Approach

Make no mistake, the term "traditional" does not imply a program that is dull, deadly, archaic or lacking in faith-shaping experiences. It refers to a basic framework of context and content which, by its nature, is wide open to a multitude of innovations. A traditional confirmation program typically meets weekly in a classroom style setting utilizing a primary teacher who shares content with students. The content generally emphasizes a study of the Bible, the catechism and perhaps the life of Martin Luther. With this basic picture in mind add pieces like mentoring, computer learning, guest speakers, an occasional field trip or retreat, independent projects, service opportunities, and units on sexuality, aids, discipleship, vocations, spirituality and current culture. Add to this possibility cluster learning with other Lutheran congregations or neighboring ecumenical partners, and soon this snapshot of a traditional approach does not look so conventional.

An effective confirmation ministry program based on this approach relies heavily on good, solid principles of Christian education such as: Each lay catechist or pastor feeling assured of God's presence and guidance in their teaching Attitude and atmosphere that sets the stage for safe, affirming learning and relationship building regardless of the setting Considering the learning style and unique gifts each young person brings to the learning environment Planning interactive activities that call upon all the senses and thereby invite, enhance and fortify learning Encouraging regular sharing of personal faith stories Providing for variety in content and delivery that is balanced with repeated rituals and patterns

Confirmation at Martin's Lutheran church, Casselton, ND begins with a vision statement for confirmation ministry grounded in discipleship. While the confirmation class activities led by the pastor and volunteer leaders may appear to be traditional at first glance, their program is clearly described as a seven-fold response to the command to make disciples. Confirmation classes (called Discipleship training), family devotions, Sunday school, youth group activities, worship, mentoring relationships, and community servant opportunities comprise the seven mission elements within their traditional approach.

H ome and Family Approach

Regardless of which approach for confirmation ministry your congregation uses, the home must always be considered as "first church" and parents as primary partners in faith nurture. In fact, Martin Luther

wrote the small catechism as a guide for parents to help their children learn about the Christian faith. The defining characteristics of this approach are the specific roles parents play in the confirmation experience and the extent to which the family is expected to participate. The range of possibilities of how this is played out are numerous. In some cases, a home packet is prepared and almost all the confirmation instruction is carried out at home or through family-based projects. Other congregations invite parents to participate and learn right along side their child, expecting them to attend all instructional sessions and retreats and share in all projects and worship opportunities. Some confirmation programs host several learning events throughout the year that parents and families are called upon to plan and carry out for the entire group. Sometimes families form small group clusters to work together on specific learning units or projects. Family expectations for memory work, written assignments, home devotions, service projects, and participation in congregational events offer still more possibilities in giving parents opportunities to carry out the promises made at baptism.

Grace Lutheran Church, Upland, CA was eager to put confirmation instruction back into the hands of their parents by finding a better balance between home and church. Parents provide instruction working with a take-home packet that allows them to be attentive to their own schedules and their child's preferred style of learning. Socialization, bonding and discussion of faith topics with peers takes place several times each month in more relaxed, recreational gatherings.

E xtended Approach

For most congregations of the ELCA, middle adolescence is still the time for some form of concentrated emphasis on learning and activities related to faith development. The extended approach (sometimes referred to as "longer and later") finds expression based on an understanding that confirmation ministry need not be regarded as something that is only limited to the junior high years. A number of congregations mark each year a young person grows with an identified event such a first communion instruction in fifth grade or younger or a presentation of a Bible and a special course on the Bible in 3rd grade. Other congregations have carefully laid out a lifelong process that begins even before baptism and continues on through high school as the parents, child and congregational community share in the responsibility of lifting up repeatable affirmations of baptism along the faith journey. In some situations, congregations have addressed the "confirmation as graduation" attitude by moving the rite of affirmation of baptism to the 10th, 11th or even 12th grade, thereby avoiding the junior to senior high transition. Congregations using an earlier and/or later framework will draw heavily from any of the other approaches listed here. Small group settings, individual projects along the way, traditional learning, retreats, intergenerational events, and of course a strong church-home connection all may be included at some point in the extended approach to confirmation ministry.

Calvary Lutheran, Grand Forks, ND call their extended approach "Growing in God's Family". This congregation takes seriously the partnership of congregation, parent and child in the faith journey. Beginning in Kindergarten, specific opportunities for parents and children to grow in faith are outlined at each age. A choice of a mentor is made in 9th grade. In the fall of the 11th grade, students work on their personal faith statement and Affirmation of Baptism is held on All Saints Sunday.

R etreat, Camp or Event-based Approach

The key to effective confirmation ministry is how well it matches the needs of the youth, parents and faith community. To do this, a congregation must be attentive to the culture and environment in which the congregation exists. A number of congregations struggle with their confirmation ministry due to the pressures of time and commitment placed on youth and parents from school, work, extra-curricular activities and the community. Some congregations have faced this reality by asking "what if we ask our youth and parents to commit to less frequent, more intense opportunities for learning and relationship building?" There are a number of obvious advantages to this approach. A concentrated time allows for in-

depth and creative teaching techniques that are often not possible in shorter time frames. People may be more likely to accept leadership responsibilities if they know the commitment is confined to a specific time frame, resulting in a potential broader based of catechists. Add to this that many adults and youth point to their Christian camping experiences as one of the most profound faith-shaping factors in our lives.. While camp, retreats, and specific events can be included in any of the previously named confirmation ministry approaches, what makes this model unique is that these venues become the primary context for teaching and learning. Some of the ways this approach gets expressed include: □ a series of monthly retreats (using a variety of overnight, day-long or weekend formats), □ participation in one or more week-long or partial-week confirmation camps, □ participation in overnight or weekend learning opportunities sponsored by the congregation, community, synod or region. The downside to this approach is that if a young person misses an event, a significant amount of learning and relationship nurture is lost. A plan for make-up work or alternative experiences needs to be in place when a congregation works with this approach to confirmation ministry.

Pastor Gerhard Kraus of Grace Lutheran, Tampa, FL explains that their retreat centered program is based on monthly retreats including a week at Confirmation camp. Format and locations vary: overnights, lock-ins, day long events, weekend get-a-ways. Prior to the retreat, a study packet is sent to the home in preparation for the event. Two family service projects a year are a part of the expectations. They are using a variety of resources and are tailor-making each session. Pastor Kraus says the parents, youth and staff no longer dread confirmation ministry.

Ten Elements For Confirmation Ministry

Under each of the previously named umbrella approaches lies common elements that further shape a confirmation ministry program in a particular setting. The practice of ELCA congregations reveals at least ten elements that have been effective in enhancing faith formation through confirmation ministry. A brief description of each element follows with an illustration of how one congregation incorporates that particular element within its confirmation ministry.

1. Mentoring

Mentoring links a young person with an adult member of the congregation who exemplifies the Christian faith to share together in conversation, prayer and other activities such as projects, recreation or service opportunities. A mentor supports parents and is an advocate for youth in the congregation. Often the pastor identifies potential mentors and carefully links that mentor with a young person. In other cases, youth choose their own mentor. Sometimes older youth are trained to be peer mentors.

Pastor James Peters of Emmanuel Lutheran points to "mentoring" as a key, effective way to connect the congregation, youth and community in the faith nurture process in inner-city Racine, WI.

2. Spiritual Gifts Identification

A number of ELCA congregations place high priority on helping their young people identify and use their unique God-given gifts to fulfill their call and mission in the congregation and in the community. Some invite their young musicians into worship leadership roles. Others find creative ways to employ the gifts of their young athletes, writers, dancers, computer experts, artists, debaters, actors, cooks, story tellers and leaders in other areas of ministry in the congregation.

The confirmation program at Prince of Peace Lutheran, Dublin, OH is called Jubilation. It's identifiable mark is that on Sunday mornings, the youth participate in four rotations that allow them to use their own particular gifts in ministry. Each rotation has been given a name and lasts 8-10 weeks: "Disciples" study the Scripture and catechism; "shepherds" serve as classroom aides

for younger children; "deacons" serve in worship leadership as acolytes, ushers, readers, or nursery attendants; and "missionaries" participate in service to the broader community.

3. Community service

Young people are eager to engage in a community service where they can put into action what they are learning in confirmation, Sunday school and worship. Social action projects for young people can be life-transforming experiences as they see the world through new eyes or experience a diversity in cultures and settings unlike their own. Service learning happens not only when we provide youth and adults opportunities to work together but when young people recognize their call as ministers in daily life.

"Building a community of servants" is the theme St. Paul's Lutheran, Wilmington, NC uses to frame their service learning opportunities. These include a week-long service camp in the summer, quarterly projects for the congregation, and on-going participation in existing community programs (Salvation Army, Crop Walk, American Cancer Society).

4. Memory work:

Memory work is a valuable component in confirmation ministry for many congregations. They see memorizing the catechism, books of the Bible, selected scripture passages and parts of the liturgy as an important way to build a firm foundation for lifelong discipleship. Memory work by way of songs, games, cooperative contests, interactive learning activities and even the computer can contribute to strengthening Lutheran identity in maturing disciples.

The two small congregations of the Maynard-Wang Lutheran Parish, in Maynard, MN clearly lay out confirmation ministry memory expectations that begin in Kindergarten and continue through 9th grade. Daily devotions and daily prayer are expected. Gratitude journals provide a way to encourage prayer (each day young people list four things for which they are thankful).

5. Computer learning

While computers will never substitute for the spiritual formation that grows through relationships, the church as an educating community is challenged to embrace the technology and realities of computer age learning. There are a variety of ways congregations engage the multi-media learner through use of the computer in confirmation ministry: class instruction, individual self-guided work, leadership development, program planning and even on-line prayers.

St. Luke Lutheran, Park Ridge, IL uses a modified large group-small group approach. During the small group time and over a period of six weeks, youth rotate through a series of learning centers including the computer center. Here youth have an opportunity to put to use the skills they use daily at school and at home as they delve deeper into the session's theme through available computer programs.

6. Congregation connections

A value modeled by many congregations is their passion for connecting the confirmation experience to the whole of congregation life. At baptism, the entire congregation welcomes the child to the family of God and publicly affirms a relationship born of the Holy Spirit. That assurance of belonging grows as a young person comes to know their faith community as a place where they are safe, loved, valued and respected. Spiritual growth is enhanced when youth are known by name, prayed for daily by others besides parents and the pastor and called into leadership, service and discipleship right alongside adults.

One tangible and interesting way the congregation of Taque Verde in Tucson, AZ surrounds its young people with love and affirmation is through their confirmation stoles. Various members of the congregation sew stoles to be worn at the service of

affirmation of baptism. The young person's name, date of confirmation, and faith symbols are embroidered on the stoles. Then at a retreat, the young people add other symbols identifying their own gifts and interests.

7. Parents as Partners

Families matter! Studies show that the most significant influence on a child's faith formation is a parent who models Christian values. Parents are summoned to take seriously God's call to be witnesses to their children and to grow in faith maturity along side of them. Many congregations invite parents to take leadership roles in the confirmation program. In some cases parents are expected to attend classes. Others are given family assignments for learning activities or service projects. A family devotional packet that includes prayer helps, scriptural suggestions, discussion starters and family activities is one of the most important ways parents can be equipped to nurture their child's faith while at the same time grow in their own discipleship.

Grace Lutheran, Corvallis, OR, lays out ten expectations for middle schoolers to be met over a period of three years. Expectations include such things as service, worship, confirmation camp and eight 16-hour courses (4 core courses and 4 electives). The unique aspect of this program is that parents are expected to attend the core courses along with the youth.

8. Projects

A number of congregations are enhancing their confirmation program by including "projects" that focus on experiential learning to help the young person better understand the church and its mission and to equip them for discipleship in their setting. Projects might involve learning about Lutheran heritage, worship, liturgy, community service, faith and daily life issues, social issues, such as Aids or pornography, or even self-selected interests. Projects can be done individually, in small groups or in family settings.

Grace Lutheran, Prosperity, SC has an innovative project centered approach within a traditional approach. Projects include a "scripture project", a "faith and life project", a "personal prayer project," a "statement of belief project," a "service project," a "fun and fellowship project," and a Baptism/worship project." Expectations include keeping a personal confirmation journal, attending and participating in occasional council meetings, committee meetings, home communion, synodical confirmation events and confirmation camp.

9. Worship and music

Worship is an important faith-shaper for a young person particularly when the parents model consistent Sunday worship patterns. Confirmation ministry can also be an opportunity for "youth-oriented", active music, worship and prayer. Many congregations begin confirmation sessions with worship, often planned and carried out by the young people. It's a time to learn new ways to praise God through contemporary Christian songs and to be drawn into a deeper comfort level with prayer. Retreats, service projects, trips and outdoor activities are all opportunities for creative and meaningful worship.

Our Saviour's Lutheran, Arlington Heights, IL invites high schoolers to work with adults in leading songs, prayers, skits and activities during the large group time Confirmation time. Musicians, vocalists, drama buffs and energetic leaders are called to use their gifts in worship and learning.

10. Cooperative clustering

Cooperative clustering with other Lutheran congregations or ecumenical partners for confirmation ministry is a viable and valued option in many settings. In places where numbers are small, leadership is unavailable, or isolation is an issue, confirmation clustering pools people and resources to benefit everyone. Some clusters rotate leadership by passing responsibility for the session to each leader in the

group. Others ask each leader to take a primary role for a particular session. In some congregations, clustering happens monthly or quarterly as a supplement to enhance what each congregation is doing separately.

Eight congregations in the Mariposa Conference, Pacifica Synod, CA gather monthly for a day long confirmation event based on the seasons of the church year. Leadership rotates and the format and location vary according to the planned activities. They begin with an "Affirmation of Baptism" pool party and each liturgical season involves an interact field trip or event. For example, the Advent study took the group to a maternity ward. During Lent, the group engaged in a simulation game and other activities to raise awareness about homelessness.

To order this complete resource with planning tools and grids with resource references use the number and code listed below.

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Grace Lutheran Church, Upland, CA was eager to put confirmation instruction back into the hands of their parents by finding a better balance between home and church. Parents provide instruction working with a take-home packet that allows them to be attentive to their own schedules and their child's preferred style of learning. Socialization, bonding and discussion of faith topics with peers takes place several times each month in more relaxed, recreational gatherings.

Extended Approach

For most congregations of the ELCA, middle adolescence is still the time for some form of concentrated emphasis on learning and activities related to faith development. The extended approach (sometimes referred to as "longer and later") finds expression based on an understanding that confirmation ministry need not be regarded as something that is only limited to the junior high years. A number of congregations mark each year a young person grows with an identified event such a first communion instruction in fifth grade or younger or a presentation of a Bible and a special course on the Bible in 3rd

grade. Other congregations have carefully laid out a lifelong process that begins even before baptism and continues on through high school as the parents, child and congregational community share in the responsibility of lifting up repeatable affirmations of baptism along the faith journey. In some situations, congregations have addressed the "confirmation as graduation" attitude by moving the rite of affirmation of baptism to the 10th, 11th or even 12th grade, thereby avoiding the junior to senior high transition. Congregations using an earlier and/or later framework will draw heavily from any of the other approaches listed here. Small group settings, individual projects along the way, traditional learning, retreats, intergenerational events, and of course a strong church-home connection all may be included at some point in the extended approach to confirmation ministry.

Calvary Lutheran, Grand Forks, ND call their extended approach "Growing in God's Family". This congregation takes seriously the partnership of congregation, parent and child in the faith journey. Beginning in Kindergarten, specific opportunities for parents and children to grow in faith are outlined at each age. A choice of a mentor is made in 9th grade. In the fall of the 11th grade, students work on their personal faith statement and Affirmation of Baptism is held on All Saints Sunday.

Retreat, Camp or Event-based Approach

The key to effective confirmation ministry is how well it matches the needs of the youth, parents and faith community. To do this, a congregation must be attentive to the culture and environment in which the congregation exists. A number of congregations struggle with their confirmation ministry due to the pressures of time and commitment placed on youth and parents from school, work, extra-curricular activities and the community. Some congregations have faced this reality by asking "what if we ask our youth and parents to commit to less frequent, more intense opportunities for learning and relationship building?" There are a number of obvious advantages to this approach. A concentrated time allows for in-depth and creative teaching techniques that are often not possible in shorter time frames. People may be more likely to accept leadership responsibilities if they know the commitment is confined to a specific time frame, resulting in a potential broader based of catechists. Add to this that many adults and youth point to their Christian camping experiences as one of the most profound faith-shaping factors in our lives.. While camp, retreats, and specific events can be included in any of the previously named confirmation ministry approaches, what makes this model unique is that these venues become the primary context for teaching and learning. Some of the ways this approach gets expressed include: □ a series of monthly retreats (using a variety of overnight, day-long or weekend formats), □ participation in one or more week-long or partial-week confirmation camps, □ participation in overnight or weekend learning opportunities sponsored by the congregation, community, synod or region. The downside to this approach is that if a young person misses an event, a significant amount of learning and relationship nurture is lost. A plan for make-up work or alternative experiences needs to be in place when a congregation works with this approach to confirmation ministry.

Pastor Gerhard Kraus of Grace Lutheran, Tampa, FL explains that their retreat centered program is based on monthly retreats including a week at Confirmation camp. Format and locations vary: overnights, lock-ins, day long events, weekend get-a-ways. Prior to the retreat, a study packet is sent to the home in preparation for the event. Two family service projects a year are a part of the expectations. They are using a variety of resources and are tailor-making each session. Pastor Kraus says the parents, youth and staff no longer dread confirmation ministry.

Ten Elements For Confirmation Ministry

Under each of the previously named umbrella approaches lies common elements that further shape a confirmation ministry program in a particular setting. The practice of ELCA congregations reveals at least ten elements that have been effective in enhancing faith formation through confirmation ministry. A brief

description of each element follows with an illustration of how one congregation incorporates that particular element within its confirmation ministry.

1. Mentoring

Mentoring links a young person with an adult member of the congregation who exemplifies the Christian faith to share together in conversation, prayer and other activities such as projects, recreation or service opportunities. A mentor supports parents and is an advocate for youth in the congregation. Often the pastor identifies potential mentors and carefully links that mentor with a young person. In other cases, youth choose their own mentor. Sometimes older youth are trained to be peer mentors.

Pastor James Peters of Emmanuel Lutheran points to "mentoring" as a key, effective way to connect the congregation, youth and community in the faith nurture process in inner-city Racine, WI.

2. Spiritual Gifts Identification

A number of ELCA congregations place high priority on helping their young people identify and use their unique God-given gifts to fulfill their call and mission in the congregation and in the community. Some invite their young musicians into worship leadership roles. Others find creative ways to employ the gifts of their young athletes, writers, dancers, computer experts, artists, debaters, actors, cooks, story tellers and leaders in other areas of ministry in the congregation.

The confirmation program at Prince of Peace Lutheran, Dublin, OH is called Jubilation. It's identifiable mark is that on Sunday mornings, the youth participate in four rotations that allow them to use their own particular gifts in ministry. Each rotation has been given a name and lasts 8-10 weeks: "Disciples" study the Scripture and catechism; "shepherds" serve as classroom aides for younger children; "deacons" serve in worship leadership as acolytes, ushers, readers, or nursery attendants; and "missionaries" participate in service to the broader community.

3. Community service

Young people are eager to engage in a community service where they can put into action what they are learning in confirmation, Sunday school and worship. Social action projects for young people can be life-transforming experiences as they see the world through new eyes or experience a diversity in cultures and settings unlike their own. Service learning happens not only when we provide youth and adults opportunities to work together but when young people recognize their call as ministers in daily life.

"Building a community of servants" is the theme St. Paul's Lutheran, Wilmington, NC uses to frame their service learning opportunities. These include a week-long service camp in the summer, quarterly projects for the congregation, and on-going participation in existing community programs (Salvation Army, Crop Walk, American Cancer Society).

4. Memory work:

Memory work is a valuable component in confirmation ministry for many congregations. They see memorizing the catechism, books of the Bible, selected scripture passages and parts of the liturgy as an important way to build a firm foundation for lifelong discipleship. Memory work by way of songs, games, cooperative contests, interactive learning activities and even the computer can contribute to strengthening Lutheran identity in maturing disciples.

The two small congregations of the Maynard-Wang Lutheran Parish, in Maynard, MN clearly lay out confirmation ministry memory expectations that begin in Kindergarten and continue through 9th grade. Daily devotions and daily prayer are expected. Gratitude journals provide a way to encourage prayer (each day young people list four things for which they are thankful).

5. Computer learning

While computers will never substitute for the spiritual formation that grows through relationships, the church as an educating community is challenged to embrace the technology and realities of computer age learning. There are a variety of ways congregations engage the multi-media learner through use of the computer in confirmation ministry: class instruction, individual self-guided work, leadership development, program planning and even on-line prayers.

St. Luke Lutheran, Park Ridge, IL uses a modified large group-small group approach. During the small group time and over a period of six weeks, youth rotate through a series of learning centers including the computer center. Here youth have an opportunity to put to use the skills they use daily at school and at home as they delve deeper into the session's theme through available computer programs.

6. Congregation connections

A value modeled by many congregations is their passion for connecting the confirmation experience to the whole of congregation life. At baptism, the entire congregation welcomes the child to the family of God and publicly affirms a relationship born of the Holy Spirit. That assurance of belonging grows as a young person comes to know their faith community as a place where they are safe, loved, valued and respected. Spiritual growth is enhanced when youth are known by name, prayed for daily by others besides parents and the pastor and called into leadership, service and discipleship right alongside adults.

One tangible and interesting way the congregation of Taque Verde in Tucson, AZ surrounds its young people with love and affirmation is through their confirmation stoles. Various members of the congregation sew stoles to be worn at the service of affirmation of baptism. The young person's name, date of confirmation, and faith symbols are embroidered on the stoles. Then at a retreat, the young people add other symbols identifying their own gifts and interests.

7. Parents as Partners

Families matter! Studies show that the most significant influence on a child's faith formation is a parent who models Christian values. Parents are summoned to take seriously God's call to be witnesses to their children and to grow in faith maturity along side of them. Many congregations invite parents to take leadership roles in the confirmation program. In some cases parents are expected to attend classes. Others are given family assignments for learning activities or service projects. A family devotional packet that includes prayer helps, scriptural suggestions, discussion starters and family activities is one of the most important ways parents can be equipped to nurture their child's faith while at the same time grow in their own discipleship.

Grace Lutheran, Corvallis, OR, lays out ten expectations for middle schoolers to be met over a period of three years. Expectations include such things as service, worship, confirmation camp and eight 16-hour courses (4 core courses and 4 electives). The unique aspect of this program is that parents are expected to attend the core courses along with the youth.

8. Projects

A number of congregations are enhancing their confirmation program by including "projects" that focus on experiential learning to help the young person better understand the church and its mission and to equip them for discipleship in their setting. Projects might involve learning about Lutheran heritage, worship, liturgy, community service, faith and daily life issues, social issues, such as Aids or pornography, or even self-selected interests. Projects can be done individually, in small groups or in family settings.

Grace Lutheran, Prosperity, SC has an innovative project centered approach within a traditional approach. Projects include a "scripture project", a "faith and life project", a "personal prayer project," a "statement of belief project," a "service project," a "fun and fellowship project," and a Baptism/worship project." Expectations include keeping a personal confirmation journal, attending and participating in occasional council meetings, committee meetings, home communion, synodical confirmation events and confirmation camp.

9. Worship and music

Worship is an important faith-shaper for a young person particularly when the parents model consistent Sunday worship patterns. Confirmation ministry can also be an opportunity for "youth-oriented", active music, worship and prayer. Many congregations begin confirmation sessions with worship, often planned and carried out by the young people. It's a time to learn new ways to praise God through contemporary Christian songs and to be drawn into a deeper comfort level with prayer. Retreats, service projects, trips and outdoor activities are all opportunities for creative and meaningful worship.

Our Saviour's Lutheran, Arlington Heights, IL invites high schoolers to work with adults in leading songs, prayers, skits and activities during the large group time Confirmation time. Musicians, vocalists, drama buffs and energetic leaders are called to use their gifts in worship and learning.

10. Cooperative clustering

Cooperative clustering with other Lutheran congregations or ecumenical partners for confirmation ministry is a viable and valued option in many settings. In places where numbers are small, leadership is unavailable, or isolation is an issue, confirmation clustering pools people and resources to benefit everyone. Some clusters rotate leadership by passing responsibility for the session to each leader in the group. Others ask each leader to take a primary role for a particular session. In some congregations, clustering happens monthly or quarterly as a supplement to enhance what each congregation is doing separately.

Eight congregations in the Mariposa Conference, Pacifica Synod, CA gather monthly for a day long confirmation event based on the seasons of the church year. Leadership rotates and the format and location vary according to the planned activities. They begin with an "Affirmation of Baptism" pool party and each liturgical season involves an interact field trip or event. For example, the Advent study took the group to a maternity ward. During Lent, the group engaged in a simulation game and other activities to raise awareness about homelessness.