

Models for Confirmation

Unlike our Jewish or Catholic siblings, mainline Protestant denominations do not have a sacramental way to denote a teenage rite of passage. Confirmation, which often occurs for youth in their middle school/junior high years, comes close. It is an opportunity for youth to gather, discover more about themselves and their peers, and most importantly, their faith. It is a snapshot of where your youth are at this moment in time. Confirmation is often presented as a class, where the youth (referred to as "Confirmands") of similar age gather to learn more about their Christian faith and the traditions and rituals which are a part of their denomination. At the end of the "class," youth are asked to make a public profession of faith. For those in the PC(USA), [the Book of Order](#) does not dictate the age or grade, instead it says:

"When those who have been baptized as children are ready to make a public profession of faith and accept the responsibility of life in the church (sometimes called "confirmation"), the session shall provide an opportunity for them to do so. They are to be instructed in the faith, examined by the session, received as active members, and presented to the congregation in public worship."

Moreover, Confirmation is a time where young people get to hear they are loved and cared for by a congregation, where congregations have the opportunity to affirm baptismal promises for their young people, and where young people have the opportunity to engage in their faith community in a deeper way. This QuickSheet will outline ways to gather youth for the formative time of education, and connection. No matter how many youth are in your community, there are creative ways to design a Confirmation journey for your youth. Below you will find ideas on how to gather, curricula, and questions to ask your faith community as you design your Confirmation experience.

Questions to ask about your context:

Starting with context is always important. Even within the same denomination, each ministry has its own context and its own history.

- Are all of your youth baptized? When forming your group, talk to families about this. If not, plan a separate conversation with each family about the sacrament of Baptism and how yes, youth can be baptized in the same service, before they are confirmed if that is what they choose.
- How many youth will be participating?
 - A Confirmation class could be 2-4 youth or it could be 10+ youth. For example, if you plan to offer this class for 7th-8th graders, consider increasing the age spread to increase opportunities for youth who have recently moved to your area or joined your congregation.
 - If your faith community has 1-2 youth who can participate, consider joining up with other churches in your Presbytery. (Timing and structure options are below).
- Including "Confirmation partners" is a great way to increase the intergenerational connections in your faith community and give your youth an opportunity to learn with adults outside of their

family system. Ask youth to name a few people they want to be partnered with as a way to give the youth agency to choose their own partner.

- Do you need to offer a separate time for older youth?
 - One way to expand your Confirmation opportunities is to offer older youth an opportunity to join an adult class. Ask a Confirmation Partner to journey alongside the youth in this class to provide extra support.

Structure and Timing:

Often people want to discuss what is the “best” structure and timing for a Confirmation class. Again, it comes back to context: What works best in your community? Whatever model you choose, be sure to include opportunities for service, worship, and community building throughout your time together as a group.

- **Offer Confirmation every other year.**
 - Especially for smaller or mid-size churches, this conserves volunteer energy and increases your chances of having a larger group.
- **The Confirmation retreat/weekend model:**
 - This model includes retreating to a camp or conference center (You can find Presbyterian Camp and Conference Centers [here](#).) and offering education and faith formation interwoven with opportunities to play, worship, and explore Creation together. Perhaps it is a Presbytery-wide offering, which gathers Confirmands from smaller churches in order to connect your youth, your leaders, and form relationships. It is a shortened timeframe which is still a powerful offering. [As Rev. Dr. Rodger Nishioka outlines](#) in his now classic assertion about “groupness,” when a group spends 17 continuous hours together, it leads to deeper group building and retreats are a perfect way to ensure this will happen. One resource to have handy as you design your retreat is the resource [Confirmation in the Spirit, Bread for the Journey](#). It is likely difficult to communicate *all* of your content in one weekend, so you may need additional sessions to make sure your Confirmands are ready.
- **The 9-month long weekly class model:**
 - This model looks like a “traditional Sunday school” model where youth gather for an hour, for weekly faith formation opportunities as they work through a particular curriculum. Because of the longer timeframe, you can create small group opportunities throughout the year, invite guest speakers, and you can include interfaith class trips or visits to different denominations.
- **The semester model:**
 - This model is helpful for youth who have busy schedules or for smaller classes. The commitment is shorter, which makes it appealing for busy families and it might be offered off a Sunday morning.
- **The combination model:**
 - Some churches gather in the Fall for a Confirmation retreat, or service opportunities and then hold Confirmation classes January-April, confirming their youth in April or early May. Other churches offer various models, who then gather for a Confirmation retreat with their Presbytery in the winter. Confirmation is truly an opportunity to discuss different models with your families and determine what is best for your community or region.

Curricula Options:

There are several different options when it comes to Confirmation curricula. Often, Youth Directors and clergy give similar answers when asked about Confirmation — they take a curricula and adapt it as needed! Below are some curricula to help you get started.

- [Big God, Big Questions](#)
- [Changing the World: Confirmation for the Missional Church](#)
- Sparkhouse: the [Re:Form](#) and [Colaborate](#) curricula
- Building Faith has more ecumenical options [here](#).

Faith Statements:

Often, youth are intimidated by writing several paragraphs outlining what they believe. It is important to emphasize that Confirmation is just one milestone on the faith journey, it is not the destination.

Some youth need to express their beliefs in ways beyond the written word. Encourage youth to play to their strengths and express their faith in creative ways, such as: a poem, a painting, a piece of art or music. I once had a Confirmand share his faith statement as a PowerPoint presentation. Whatever medium a youth chooses, it is helpful to ask youth to share their faith with a small group of adults, and for Confirmation Partners to be present for support. This lessens the intimidation factor while also encouraging the adults to ask thoughtful follow-up questions.

Additions to the “class” time:

Beyond time spent learning with their leaders and from each other, there are helpful additions to class time for youth, which bring learnings about faith and community into focus:

- Visiting other denominations or other faith services and discussing the similarities and differences as a group
- Inviting community or church leaders into the classroom to share their faith journeys
- Participating in service projects together
- Attending a dinner at an older church member’s home to hear more about their life and their faith
- Attending a Session meeting as a class to see how discussions and decisions are made
- Holding an “ask anything” session with the Pastor — ask the youth to write their faith and theological questions anonymously and, after reviewing them, ask the pastor or faith formation leaders to pick some randomly and respond with all Confirmands present. This helps your young people see clergy and staff as leaders and builds trust.

Additional Resources:

These resources are helpful to have on hand as you are designing your confirmation offering:

- [100 Things Every Child Should Know Before Confirmation](#)
- [Confirmation project](#)

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