



Confirmation as youth ministry

Nike strategically changed its logo from *Just Do It* to *I Can*. Perhaps this shift is reflective of a generation of risk-takers who, in the face of the establishment, want to simply get the job done.

Congregations can and must take that same attitude as they plan a confirmation ministry that builds on our rich Lutheran heritage and boldly seeks to "strengthen the spirit" as it affirms faithfulness, discipleship, and lifelong learning.

Confirmation ministry is a pastoral and education 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. —1993 ELCA Task Force on Confirmation Ministry

Fortunately, congregations are free to shape their confirmation ministry to fit the personality, needs, and gifts of their people and context. In the past, congregations viewed *education programs* and *youth ministry* as two ships passing in the night—Wednesday nights or Sunday mornings. Today, the two are woven together. As relationships are built and faith is strengthened through a variety of creative ways, folks are realizing that confirmation *is* youth ministry.

The ELCA task force, that for five years studied confirmation, came up with these suggestions for creative and effective confirmation ministry:

Confirmation

- flows from baptism
- is the responsibility of the entire congregation
- involves a variety of people and approaches
- benefits young people best when there are a variety of models and learning

It is crucial for congregations to be able to identify at least one element of their program that they can name with pride. That element doesn't have to be glitzy or unique, but it should match the needs of the young people, parents, and extended family of faith.

Umbrellas

Using the acronym **LUTHER**, here are approaches to confirmation:

Large group—small groups

Healthy relationships are critical to faith growth. Often, the session begins with youth and adults gathering for worship, a common meal, or community development activities, followed by small groups.

Individualized or self-paced

Although learning doesn't take place as independently as the name implies, congregations with this approach need to be intentional about providing other venues for learning and social activities with peers, family, and the community of faith.

Traditional

This shouldn't be interpreted as a dull, archaic snoozer. Classroom learning may be in traditional form, into which are woven mentors, retreats, and service opportunities. A traditional classroom can also become a lively, creative place of learning and growth.

Home and family-based

Regardless of approach, home and parents are considered primary teachers of the faith. Instruction is carried out in the home or through family-based projects. Often parents attend sessions with their children.

Extended

Sometimes referred to as the "longer and later" approach, this umbrella suggests confirmation isn't limited to the junior high years. Congregations plan intentional teaching and affirmations for each year. Often, the rite of affirmation of baptisms is later in high school.

Retreat/camp/event-based

This approach pays special attention to the pressures of time, commitment, and interest placed on youth and parents. Often, opportunities for learning and relationship-building are less frequent, but more intense. A concentrated time allows for in-depth and creative teaching techniques.

Elements Under Each Umbrella

Obviously, some congregations draw from several models. In addition, confirmation ministry often includes these elements under each umbrella:

- **Mentoring**

Young people are linked with an adult member of the congregation for conversation, prayer, recreation, or service learning.

- **Recognizing gifts**
Help young people recognize and use their gifts to fulfill their call and mission in the congregation and community.
- **Community service**
Social action for young people can be transforming as they see life through new eyes or experience a diversity of cultures and settings.
- **Memory work**
Memorizing the catechism, books of the Bible, scripture passages and stories, and parts of the liturgy help young people retain their faith and Lutheran identity. Remembering scripture or a prayer can provide something significant to draw upon in times of need, difficulty, discussions, or wondering.
- **Computer learning**
While not a substitute for relationships, computers challenge the church to embrace technology and the realities of computer-based and on-line learning.
- **Congregational connections**
When youth are known by name, prayed for, and called into ministry alongside adults, young people are connected to the body of Christ rather than isolated from it.
- **Parents as partners**
Parents are encouraged to lead and participate along with their sons and daughters. They are asked to take seriously the promises they made at their child's baptism to raise that child in the faith.
- **Projects**
Projects focus on experiential learning to help young people better understand the church and its mission.
- **Worship and music**
Worship is the center of the faith community for all ages, but confirmation offers other opportunities and settings for worship—retreats, trips, and service learning.
- **Cooperative clustering**
Isolation can be an issue when numbers are small or leadership is not available. Clustering with other churches for sharing leadership, simple camaraderie, or resources benefits everyone.

Confirmation ministry requires ongoing nurture and evaluation. To revisit or revamp your program, begin by selecting a confirmation ministry team that includes a pastor, church council members, parents, youth, a teacher, and a youth leader. Evaluate, dream, and develop. Not only do you need to *just do it*. You can do it!

For resources and ideas visit the ELCA Christian Education Web site at <http://www.elca.org/christianeducation/>.

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