

Building Confirmation the Congregational Way



**A Tool for Preparing Young People
for Faith, Freedom and Fellowship
in Congregational Churches**

Written and Compiled by
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Sponsored by
Christian Education & Spiritual Resources Subcommittee
of the Church Services Commission
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Introduction

Welcome to a new Congregational Confirmation Curriculum! In my experience, this curriculum is unique for a number of reasons:

- Celebrates the many strands of thought and practice that exist in Congregational churches
- Amazingly flexible so that it may provide assistance to churches and confirmation leaders regardless of experience (See the “Quick Start Instructions” when you turn the page.)
- Designed to accommodate different church and confirmation class sizes
- Tremendous wealth of different ideas and approaches gleaned from several experienced confirmation leaders
- Carefully organized and indexed to allow easy access to the information you need as quickly as possible
- Also published in an electronic version that includes a terrific search engine and additional course design material

As you have noticed already, this curriculum has two strong biases: First, it is Christian, not Buddhist, Muslim, Jewish, atheist or any other faith. Because this curriculum aims at helping students confirm the Christian faith for themselves, we will stick to a very broad understanding of *Christian* faith. Second, it is Congregational. Many denominations and other associations have their own confirmation material, and some of them are quite interesting even helpful. Ultimately for Congregationalists, some perspective is always lacking. Because this curriculum is Congregational, it begins from the premise that once we have said, “Jesus is Lord”—whatever that means for each of us in our experience—Congregationalism is primarily (though not exclusively) a way of *organizing* (polity), not a set of *beliefs* (theology). In particular, this curriculum supports the view of the local church as created by God, congregationally autonomous and interdependently related churches who seek to follow Jesus Christ in the way of the covenant.

Our hope (mine and that of those who have supported the production of this curriculum) is that over a few successive editions, we will achieve a wide diversity of viewpoints and extraordinary volume of ideas. We look forward to drawing from sometimes widely divergent theological backgrounds and belief systems. Isn't that great! As Congregationalists, we are gifted with each other and our different approaches to worship and relationship. These differences make truer worship and service possible than any one theological or liturgical or missional perspective could yield by itself. The result is an incredible collage that reveals the beauty and power of the Christian faith in general and the Congregational Way in particular. My great gratitude to all those whose thoughtfulness make this collage what it is. (For a full listing of contributors, see later in this introduction.)

Of course, this collage approach has far-reaching implications:

1. Expressions of faith and theology will shift from contributor to contributor. A coherent approach to faith expression defeats one of the main purposes behind this curriculum.
2. Each contribution is the work of that contributor and reflects the views and faith experience of that contributor alone. Each contributor may or may not identify with the faith expression or theology of any other contributor. That's okay!
3. This curriculum is not complete. As new resources from other perspectives become available, they will be included in future editions (print and electronic).

For more than twenty years, only one curriculum existed specifically for National Association Churches. As the editor and contributors began to put this curriculum together, we found ourselves returning again and again to Rev. Tom Richard's curriculum for ideas and wisdom. With his permission, many of those ideas have been adapted to the new millennium. Our thanks to him and the others who labored on the previous curriculum and its second edition, both of which have deeply influenced NA confirmation leaders.

Each of the contributors is an active member and/or staff person in a local church (or was when the curriculum was compiled). Thanks to each of these local churches for their on-going support of confirmation. Thanks, too, to the confirmation students over the years who have tested many of the ideas found in this curriculum. Perhaps my personal thanks to my local church would be indicative of the thanks others would wish to extend: to the members of North Shore Congregational Church, my great thanks for all the ways in which you have given me and my family warmth and companionship (and a really good challenge) along the way. Without your strong support and principled understanding, this project would never have become a reality.

Finally, as editor of this curriculum in progress, I have found that my inspirations have come at odd and sometimes inconvenient times. So thanks to my wonderful and patient wife and to my enthusiastic (but not quite understanding) children who have loved me enough to support my efforts. I am quite humbled by the love each of them continues to bear for me in spite of my nutty hours and assorted foibles. Truly, I owe them more of a debt than that, for only through them did I truly understand what grace meant. In the movie, *Hook*, an aged Peter Pan is unable to fly until he finds his happy thought. Cynthia, Morgan and Hannah—you are each my happy thought!

Playfully submitted,
Rev. Doug Gray
Associate Minister
North Shore Congregational Church
Spring 2001

A Plea for Your Ideas

As noted in the introduction, our hope is that many people of divergent theologies will contribute to this curriculum. All those involved believe those differences make us as Congregationalists stronger.

The spectrum of opinions represented herein is undoubtedly incomplete, however. If you feel that you can add more perspective to confirmation with suggestions or with contributions of your own, please address them to National Association of Congregational Christian Churches office in Oak Creek, Wisconsin. For future editions (print and electronic), we will review and try to add the best of the new material we receive.

Contributors

Rob Fredrickson (RCF)

Rob is currently the Director of Youth Ministries at North Shore Congregational Church just north of Milwaukee, Wisconsin. Rob is a graduate of Garrett Theological and has served in numerous leadership positions at the local, regional and national levels. Rob enjoys tennis, keeping his finger on the pulse of our time, and trivia of all kinds. Rob has been doing youth ministry in one capacity or another for more than 15 years.

Doug Gray (DLG)

Currently the Associate Pastor at North Shore Congregational Church, Doug is married and has two children and lives just outside of Milwaukee, Wisconsin. In addition to his passion for teaching (and making learning fun), Doug's interests include science (his undergrad degree is in chemistry), baseball, playing games, and random acts of silliness. He's been doing confirmation for going on eight years and has led youth for more than 13 years.

Lynn Merkel (LYM)

Lynn Merkel has been involved with youth programs in several NACCC churches over the past 25 years and has taught Confirmation Classes for 12 years. Lynn is currently a member of Gurnee Community Church in Gurnee, Illinois, where she is again active in youth ministry leadership and working with the pastoral staff in teaching Confirmation. Lynn is a passionate proponent of incorporating Confirmation class components into a two-year program, and earnestly encouraging young people to make a life-long commitment to their faith.

Tom Richard (TR)

Tom Richard has expressed his passion for confirmation all his ministry, notably as senior minister in Marshalltown, Iowa and later, on Nantucket. His approach to confirmation emphasizes teens choosing elective projects. Many of the handouts bear his mark. Tom is currently Executive Secretary for the National Association for Congregational Christian Churches.

Quick Start Instructions

Concerned about teaching confirmation for the first time?

Read “Help! I’m a Confirmation Teacher!” (p. 4) Take a few moments from being panicked to answer the questions.

Read other articles of interest in the *Leader’s Survival Guide* (p. 1)

1. Work through “Understanding Teens and Teen Culture” in the *Leader’s Survival Guide* (p. 9).
2. Spend some time exploring *Leading Small Groups: A Beginner’s Guide* (p. 13). Then talk with someone who leads groups in your area or your church (your pastor for example) and ask them whatever questions have come to mind while you have been working.
3. Jump into *How to Design a Congregational Confirmation Curriculum* (p. 25). This is the meat of designing a confirmation program and planning for it.

Brand new to leading small groups and/or youth?

1. Work through “Understanding Teens and Teen Culture” in the *Leader’s Survival Guide* (p. 9).
2. Spend some time working through *Leading Small Groups: A Beginner’s Guide* (p.). Then talk with someone who leads groups in your area or your church (your pastor for example) and ask them whatever questions have come to mind while you have been working.
3. If you need to design a confirmation program from scratch, turn to *How to Design a Congregational Confirmation Curriculum* (p. 25).

Already have an existing confirmation program?

Four places are going to be most interesting to you:

- *Topical Lesson Plans* (p. 49) for ready-to-go lessons on all the basics of confirmation (and some more in-depth material too).
- *Activities, Games and Simulations* (p. 163)
- *Sample Curricula* (p. 193) to see some three different plans for confirmation
- *Appendix A: Beyond Survival* (p. 255) to get some new philosophical and theological ideas. I have also included some short explanations of what confirmation is, where it comes from, and why we do it.

Want new resources for yourself or your church?

Check out the *Annotated Bibliography* (p. 231). Full of helpful recommendations from a number of experienced youth workers and confirmation leaders, this bibliography not only takes you “to the bookstore” but can be your “expert advice” as you try to sort out what will be work best for you.

**Building Confirmation
the Congregational Way**

Leader's Survival Guide

Overview

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Introduction

In the next few pages, you are going to get a crash course in confirmation. Does this describe you?

- Someone asked you to teach confirmation.
- There was no one else.
- At least you like teens...but you don't understand them!
- You have no formal training in "god stuff" or "church stuff."
- Your heart is beating fast just thinking about the prospect of teaching confirmation.

If you resonate with one or more of the above statements, this crash course is designed for you. Others may find useful information here, perhaps filling in holes here and there, and that's great. But we wanted something to help the new person to confirmation.

What follows is divided into sections meant to be "bite-sized" mental chunks. Try to read each chunk at a single sitting. Feel free to take notes in the margins or underline what seems helpful to you.

When your survival seems more certain, try looking at the sections that talk about the basic questions about confirmation. If you need a pep talk on why teaching confirmation is one of the most important things you will ever do, check out "A 'New' Way to Look at Confirmation" (p. 259). It will really get your blood pumping!

"Help! I'm a Confirmation Teacher!"

"Egads! I've been drafted!"

You have a good heart and a sincere desire to help your church and young people...and now look what's happened! You're teaching confirmation! It's OK...really. Take a deep breath and then read on for the good news that will help you sort things out. Take it step by step.

1. Make peace with your abilities. In the space below or on a separate sheet of paper, list what you're good at (e.g., gardening, cars, story-telling, helping others, etc.). Make sure to include the areas/ subjects about which you know quite a bit (e.g., astronomy, roses, football, etc.). If you run out of space, find another piece of paper and keep going.

Whew! Good for you. Look over the list. Do you see all your hobbies and interests on it? If not, tack them on to the end.

This list includes many of your strengths, things that will be assets to you as you lead confirmation. God has given them to you for a reason, and God has also placed before you the extraordinary opportunity to touch the lives of each young person in your confirmation class! Your strengths and your opportunity and God will work together to change the lives of the young people in your class.

2. What do you think are the most important qualifications for working with young people? List 5–10 and then prioritize them below.

In your class, you don't have to be something you are not. You may not be able to be a pastor, a church history scholar, a biblical scholar, but you can be you. That's all that anyone (including God!) can ever ask. Although you have listed what you think are the most important qualifications for working with young people, these may need some "adjustment." In talking with many confirmation teachers and students over the years, I have found some consistent qualities in the great confirmation teachers. I have phrased them as questions:

"Help! I'm a Confirmation Teacher!"

- Do you love God?
- Are you trying to know God and follow God better?
- Are you still learning new things?
- Are you willing to be yourself with others?

If you can say yes to one or more of the questions above, you have a lot going for you. Do you see any differences between your thoughts on qualifications and the question/answer combinations above? The bulleted questions above begin to get at who you are as a person (not what you can do). For your confirmation class, what you say will not be as important as who you are, how you live and the relationship you begin and cultivate with each young person. Don't worry so much about what you are going to say and what you don't know. The two best sentences you can use with your confirmation class are:

- "I don't know, but I'll try to find out."
- "What do you think?"

To be sure, you may have some learning to do, but everybody does...even those who are pastors and scholars. So make peace with your abilities and draw on the strengths God has given you for this task.

Jesus' Idea of a Job Interview

...Jesus said to Simon Peter, "Simon son of John, do you truly love me more than these?"

"Yes, Lord," he said, "you know that I love you."

Jesus said, "Feed my lambs."

Again Jesus said, "Simon son of John, do you truly love me?"

He answered, "Yes, Lord, you know that I love you."

Jesus said, "Take care of my sheep."

The third time he said to him, "Simon son of John, do you love me?"

Peter was hurt because Jesus asked him the third time, "Do you love me?" He said, "Lord, you know all things; you know that I love you."

Jesus said, "Feed my sheep..." Then Jesus said to him, "Follow me!"

from John 21:15-19

"Can I Really Teach the Bible?" (Yes!)

Of course you can! Do you have to be an expert? Of course not! How can this be? What is important?

- You are still learning about the Bible. Though the Bible itself does not change appreciably, the way we understand it continually changes, and hopefully improves. Regardless of how much or how little you know, you will always be a student of the Bible.
- We have the promise of the Holy Spirit to help us. Jesus promised us the Holy Spirit "to lead us into all truth." (John 16:13) Trust that. Trust that God will help guide you and the group to a better understanding.
- A person who is trying (yourself) is always more impressive and real than someone who knows all the answers. You may have an advantage over pastors and teachers with years of training!
- As Congregationalists, we have a long history of people reading the Bible and trying to figure it out for themselves. You stand in marvelous footsteps!

Going for the Big Screen

I love watching movies. One of the problems with watching movies on TV is that when the manufacturers put movies on video tape, they have to eliminate 10–20% of the viewing area to fit things on the TV. Sometimes because you can't see the big picture, you miss a sense of space and even miss the whole point of a scene.

To learn about the Bible, it helps to have some sense of the "big picture" of the Bible. How does it fit together? How is it organized? What are some of the questions I should be asking? If I learn a couple main ideas, will I be able to understand the rest better? Yes!

Two books that do a marvelous job of giving you the big picture are:

30 Days to Understanding the Bible, Max Anders. A terrifically well-organized approach. I have heard someone say, "I never had the big picture of the Bible before. Now I understand how things fit together."

Bruce & Stan's Guide to the Bible, Bruce and Stan. Easy to understand. Very easy to get into. Asks and answers questions that many people might ask.

You will have plenty of time to find out the cool details about the Bible, but getting the big picture can really make a difference in how you understand the details. You might find yourself getting excited about the Bible in a way you may not have felt before! (For more ideas, see the *Annotated Bibliography*, p. 236)

"Can I Really Teach the Bible!" (Yes!)

Let yourself gather confidence from the Presence and Promise of the Holy Spirit and from the examples of others (including your Congregational roots). (If you would like to rummage in the Congregational memory book, check out some of the resources in the *Annotated Bibliography*, p. 242).

That said, you may want to brush up on what you do know and have forgotten, and pick up some things that will help you. Much of this you can pick up in a relatively short period of time.

1. If you do not already own one, pick up a study Bible, preferably in a translation you find readable. (See "Picking a Good Study Bible" below.)
2. Read the Bible every day for at least one week. A good place to begin is with the Gospel of Mark. After that, try one of Paul's letters.

Yes, you can teach the Bible. Indeed, your own willingness to learn from the Bible, may be the best lesson you could offer!

Picking a Good Study Bible

If you struggle to read your King James Version, try something else. Bible study is confusing enough without adding strange words and sentence structure. You may find you have an easier time hearing God too. A good study Bible will have these elements:

- a clear and informative introduction at the beginning of each book of the Bible (if you can understand it and you find it moderately interesting, good!)
- notes to the text on each page (bottom or in the margins)
- a concordance (if you have ever wanted to find a passage and could only remember one or two words, you're in luck! That's what a concordance is designed to do. If you want a simple crash course in using one, just ask your pastor or someone who has a study Bible already.
 - Bonus: maps, charts, time lines, articles of interest, question and answers, subject index, ways to apply what you read to your life, devotional readings, and others.

The study Bible that's right for you will probably also be appealing enough that you feel a sense of being invited in. To learn more about some of the different study Bibles available, check out the *Annotated Bibliography*, beginning on p. 236.

"Can I Really Teach Anyone about God?" (Yes!)

The other reason most people avoid teaching in the church is that they don't feel "worthy" to teach anyone about God. On the one hand, please know that anyone with an ounce of humility feels the same as you do, including the authors of this guide and its curriculum! Probably if you sat down with all the people you think have the most to teach about God, each of them would say that she or he finds God so utterly mysterious that they have given up trying to truly understand God. That's good! God is beyond any of our limitations and boxes and definitions. Much of who God is and how God works is a mystery at the best of times. To be the person others look to for better understanding of God is a scary and humbling experience. All the greatest people of faith have acknowledged this at one time or another. So rejoice! Your humility does you credit and places you in great company!

On the other hand, you are undoubtedly better qualified than you feel. If you have not worked through the worksheet under "Help! I'm a Confirmation Teacher!" above, why not take a look at it now. In particular, look at the bulleted questions. Ask these of yourself and ask God to share the answers with you. At the end of John's Gospel, Jesus turns to Peter and asks him, "Do you love me?" To which Peter said, "Yes, Lord." Jesus said to him, "Feed my sheep." (See "Jesus' Idea of a Job Interview" earlier in this guide.) If you can answer yes to God's asking you the same question Jesus asked of Peter, then trust God to help you feed his sheep.

I have heard many times (and experienced it too!) that you never really learn something unless you teach it. Consider this: by doing your best to teach humbly about who God is and how God works, you actually grow in your own faith. Perhaps this is even part of God's plan to take you deeper into your life with God in ways you could not have foreseen. Teaching about God often reminds me of my own failings and encourages me to do better. Teaching about God has also forced me to trust God when I don't feel particularly spiritual. Perhaps God wants to teach you through your teaching!

If you *still* don't feel you are qualified, talk to your pastor or whoever asked you to teach. She or he must have a reason for thinking of you when "teaching confirmation" came up. Perhaps knowing that reason will help you.

Understanding Teens and Teen Culture

The next most important preparation you can do for teaching confirmation is to embark on a short course of trying to understand teens and their culture. "Teen culture" is different from your culture in some significant ways, and it is always changing. Try some of these things:

- Ask some teens (preferably the ones in your confirmation class) what radio stations they listen to. Make a practice of listening to their music when you are driving around.
- If you have access to cable television, try watching some of the music video channels (MTV, VH-1, etc.). This may be an eye-opening experience!
- If a local school district will allow it, visit a school your confirmation student(s) attend. Offer to chaperone a school event or volunteer to help in the lunch room. Watch the teens. Notice what they wear, how they do their hair, who hangs out together. Listen to them. Note what they talk about and how they treat each other.

A Great Key to Understanding Teens

Set aside a period of time to reflect on *your* life as a teen. If you're having trouble remembering, why not sit down with some old friends and reminisce together.

- What were the exciting times you had as a teen?
- Who were some of your friends?
- What did you enjoy doing with your friends?
- What were some of the things you worried about?
- What was going on at home for you between you and your parents, between you and your siblings, between you and others?

You may be surprised by what you rediscover!

- If you are not able to get into a school, find out where teens go on Friday or Saturday nights. Why not go there? Follow the suggestions for visiting schools. Enjoy the cross-cultural experience!
- Go to the movies! You can go to the theater or watch movies that are very popular. (Note: "Popular" does not mean they win Oscars!)
- Read one or more of the books in the resource list on understanding teens provided with the curriculum (p. 234).
- If you have access to the internet, pick one of the website resources in the *Annotated Bibliography* (p. 235). Some of these sites (Group Publishing and

Youth Specialties are good examples) have “teen culture watches” that track trends among teens.

While it is true that youth culture is very fluid and changes constantly (don't assume that what you knew even five years ago works now), the issues that you dealt with as a teen are ones that teens today deal with too. In fact, the more you read about young people in the past, the more you realize that only the surface of being a teenager changes; the joys and sorrows at the heart of being a teen have been the same for centuries.

Work at the above suggestions (even one or two), and you will feel much more confident about leading confirmation, but more: you will be able to use examples and perhaps even language your students will understand more clearly than those from your past. Understanding teens and teen culture is a vital step in being able to truly educate confirmation students.

Nuts and Bolts: Setting Up the Course

“Good gracious! I don’t even know what I’m doing and you’re starting with the nuts and bolts of setting things up. Don’t you have this backwards?”

Yes! But this is a *survival* guide, so you need an outline of what needs to be done first. Then worry about what goes into the course itself. For each step in the outline I will suggest an optimum time frame and a compressed time frame (i.e., when you don’t have the optimum, how much time will it take if you work your tail off).

Regardless of the variables in course design a number of things will consistently be true.

Get the Help You Need

Time Frame

Optimum: 6–9 months before the first class session

Compressed: Two months

For details, see *How to Design a Congregational Confirmation Curriculum*, p. 28.

Begin the Design Process

Time Frame

Optimum: 3–6 months

Compressed: 6 weeks

See *How to Design a Congregational Confirmation Curriculum*, p. 29.

Send Out Invitations to Potential Confirmands

Time Frame

Optimum: 2–3 months

Compressed: 4 weeks

To see what some other churches have done for a confirmation curriculum, see *Sample Curricula*, beginning on p. 193.

**Building Confirmation
the Congregational Way**

**Leading a Small Group:
A Beginner's Guide**

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7 Steps to Healthy Groups

Unless your confirmation class is only one student—which does happen at times—you will be a small group leader! You will have a number of confirmands and, if you are blessed, perhaps even one or more adults to help you. (Please note: for your sake and the young people's, make every effort to have a second adult present. This adds a measure of safety and perspective to everything you do. A growing number of churches require this.)

Before we get down to specifics, think about the groups you have enjoyed (e.g., classes, choirs, clubs, churches, etc.). What was it about the way the group worked that made it enjoyable for you? Did the way things were organized contribute to your enjoyment? How about the way decisions were made? Describe what contributed to your enjoyment in the space below.

These are “group dynamics”—ways a group works or what is happening on a social, emotional and spiritual level—that you will want to cultivate in your group. Watch out! What may work well in a “grown up” group may not work at all with teens! A deeper look at what a church is and how it works will also be helpful here. A few positive group dynamics you could draw from the Bible are:

- Everyone feels valued.
- Everyone participates and contributes to the group.
- Each person is of equal value in God's eyes—impossibly precious.
- People have fun together.
- People have a genuine concern for the welfare of other group members.
- People praise others for the good things they do.
- People listen to each other and truly hear what the other says.

You could undoubtedly add more to this list. Indeed, the “master” group leaders seem to have an uncanny ability to work anything, even negative factors, into these and other positive group dynamics.

What things contribute to group dynamics in a confirmation class setting? Are there ways in which we can “set up” good group dynamics? Are there things we need to be aware of *while* we are leading that require changes? How do you know what changes to make?

Leading Small Groups in a Nutshell

1. Know your group members.
2. Know your meeting place.
3. Know your meeting time.
4. Know your group.
5. Have a plan.
6. Welcome change.
7. Know when to stand up to a group dynamic.

Step One: Know your group members

Who are they? What grade are they in? How old are they? When are their birthdays? What are they interested in? What are their likes/dislikes? What do they like to eat? What are they like as people? Do they want to be in confirmation? If you are so inclined, develop a file or list on your class members. This information is what enables you to demonstrate your care for them and to tailor your course/classes to their individual needs.

Step Two: Know your meeting place

Are you going to have a regular meeting place? Are you going to have different meeting places? Where you meet affects your group's dynamics. Here are a few ways in which this works:

- Meeting in a large empty room on folding chairs may make it hard for a very small group to participate in discussions, but make taking notes easier.
- Meeting in a fair-sized room with carpet and comfortable chairs may make it easy to have discussions, but hard to take notes.
- Fixed seats or benches (e.g., pews) are great for listening, but not for sharing.
- Movable seats arranged in a circle is often a good formation for discussion.
- A cold or unfriendly room will tend to make the class difficult. A warm and friendly room, perhaps with something to drink or eat, helps people to open up and participate.
- A familiar place will tend to reinforce a particular pattern of thinking and behaving. A classroom will tend to orient folks toward class. A gym will tend to orient folks toward play.

Leading Small Groups

Step Two: Know Your Meeting Place

As you can see, this list could go on and on. How do you decide? In general, seek a place:

- where you and your class will not be disturbed for the time of the class. Interruptions make it hard to keep everyone on the subject.
- where you and your class can be comfortable without getting sleepy. Couches, for example, sound attractive but often work against careful thought. How well you can hear and concentrate on each other should also be a factor here.
- where you and your class can do different kinds of things easily (discussion, games, activities, crafts, write on flip pads, skits, etc.)
- where, if possible, you can personalize the space by putting up things on the walls or ceiling, leave up charts and information, post announcements, etc.

What About Meeting Outside?

Meeting outside is enjoyable, but many people find it hard to stay focused outside. The exception to this rule is if what people are seeing/experiencing is part of the point.

Example #1: You want to talk about Jesus walking on the water so you go down to a nearby lake, climb into a boat and do the bible study away from shore. Asking for people's thoughts on the experience in that setting may make for a livelier, more memorable discussion...especially when you ask for volunteers to try walking on water themselves! (Note: you may want to check to make sure none of your students are afraid of boats or water.)

Example #2: For the session dealing with God's grace, you hold the class locked in the county jail. The idea that grace is like a "get out of jail free" card has a much greater impact in that setting!

Step Three: Know your meeting time

If you have a regular meeting time, try to find out what your students are doing right before they come to your meeting. This will affect both what you can do with them and how you can do it.

Example #1: Confirmation is Sunday night after youth group. The teens come to confirmation bouncing off the walls. You cannot lecture to this group! (Actually, you can, but you and they will be *very* sorry! They will be frustrated with sitting still and you will be frustrated that they are not paying attention.) Start off with something that can either ease them into quieter time (e.g., two or three gradually quieter games/activities that help them slow down) or act as a separator between youth group and your activity (e.g., singing some songs that start out rowdy, having something to eat, etc.).

Example #2: Confirmation is Sunday after church. The teens have been sitting in church or Sunday School. They are somewhat tired, somewhat hungry and a little wiggly. They are already in the mood for learning (if church and Sunday School have not been overly oppressive), but they are likely to get increasingly squirrely if you do not deal with their hunger. Having a snack available and starting with something they can listen to while eating, followed by light activities will transition you nicely between church and confirmation class. Avoid lecture! They are tired enough—especially after having something to eat—that they will fall asleep on you!

Example #3: Confirmation is on Wednesday nights at the end of your very longest day of the week. In fact, you come straight from work, often without getting something to eat. You may find yourself feeling rushed and short on patience. In this case, your context is what affects the class. You may want to move some of the things you normally do on Wednesday to another day so that you can have a little bit of “decompression” time before class begins. If you are a high energy person and you tend to get cranky when you are hungry, you will want to allow time for a meal of some sort. If you cannot modify how you feel when you come to confirmation class, then consider changing the meeting time or day. You and your students deserve you at your best.

Whatever your meeting time, your teens (and you!) come from a context. The more you understand that context the more you can tailor the design of your meeting so that your students can learn better. Don't be afraid to change the meeting time if you find that a particular time does not work.

Step Four: Know your group

Do they know each other at all? What chemistry (if any) is there between class members? Do they trust each other? What is their general activity level—quiet, medium or bonkers? As a group, are they more inclined to read books or play football? Do you have more girls than boys or more boys than girls? As a group, what's the average age? Do you have an exception to the general make-up of the group?

Here are some ways these considerations may affect your group dynamics.

- Know each other? A group that has grown up together and knows each other very well already has some firm dynamics in place. If you don't like the way they treat each other, you have to jump on it right away and never stop hammering (e.g., everyone enjoys insulting each other in a way that leaves people hurt, everyone enjoys picking on a particular person). If a group does not know each other, you will have to include exercises that help them learn to trust each other.
- More girls or more boys? A group with more girls may tend to be slightly more mature and have good discussions, but watch for "cliquing" (a small group of girls who exclude everyone else) and sniping (one or two girls "slyly" insulting others). Negative group behavior can devolve very quickly into hurt feelings and grudges. A group with more boys will tend to be much more active and require teaching by activity and simulation more than discussion, but watch for bullying and for excluding. The extremes in behavior are particularly evident in 6th through 8th grades.
- Exception to the group. If you have one person who is older than the rest of the group, you have a great set of opportunities before you! She or he will probably bring some much needed maturity to the group and raise the level of everyone's involvement. Try asking him or her to be your helper/assistant rather than making them part of the class as a whole. If you feel comfortable doing so, give them some responsibilities for the class. This will short circuit the older teen feeling left out or isolated and perhaps offer you a chance to develop a stronger relationship.

So many different things can feed into this area of group dynamics that a complete list is impossible. Everything you know about the group will have good and bad parts to it. Your goal as a group leader is to maximize the positive dynamics and minimize the negative ones. One of the positive parts about having an additional adult or more involved is that you can check out your impressions with him/her. Is he or she seeing/hearing/experiencing the same things you are? Does s/he have any ideas for what might help?

Step Five: Have a plan

For each meeting and for your confirmation program as a whole you need a plan, not just for your own sake, but for your teens' sakes as well. You will be amazed at how much more secure and confident you and your students will feel even if all you have is an outline of the meeting. How do you do plan a meeting? (For more specific ideas about how to use this curriculum to put a meeting together and for another approach on doing so, see *How to Design a Congregational Confirmation Curriculum*, p. 43 and 45.

1. Know your purpose. How do you hope your teens will be different when they leave the confirmation session? For a weekly meeting, you should be able to put that into a single sentence! (Example: I want them to have a basic idea of what the Bible is and how to find things in it. Example: I hope they will understand and appreciate each other better.) If you can't put it into a single sentence, then consider whether you are trying to do too much in this one session, especially if you have an hour or less. For a retreat, try to have one overarching goal (Example: learn more about church history and each other) and a separate goal for every program segment (Examples: get to know each other, appreciate God's providence in preparing the way for Jesus, relaxation & potty break, understand how early Christians felt about persecution, "blow-off-steam" games, worship, etc.).
2. "Block out" the meeting into segments. For an example of what this process is like, please turn to the *How to Design a Congregational Confirmation Curriculum*, p. 43. In general, the more senses you can engage in your program, the better people will remember what you want them to remember. The more actively involved people are in each segment, the more they will enjoy and remember the point.
3. "Flesh out" your outline. Figure out the details of each meeting segment in at least rough terms (which game you are going to play, what announcements you need to make, what songs you want to sing, etc.). For the main program segment, list the activities or discussion you want to happen. As you're going, take note of the supplies you will need for each part. Attach approximate time allowed to each major part of your main program.
4. Take out 20%. Take a look at your outline. Most people tend to put in too much. So, unless you are very familiar with how your group (and yourself) works, avoid scheduling more than 80% of your meeting time. By that I mean allow about 20% more time for each main program segment. Plan too tightly and all it takes is one really good question to completely derail your entire meeting schedule. Since you want your teens to ask those really good questions, give yourself a little extra time. Working with these time constraints may not sound very romantic, but it accomplishes two things:

first, it helps you focus (you may not be able to fit two thousand years of church history into a single hour) which will make your program better; second, it helps you relax the pace of the meeting (you and your teens will do and feel better if you are not rushing all the time).

5. Contingency planning. Unless you know something is going to work (and which one of us can truly predict the future?), try to have two contingency plans.
 - a. "Bomb shelter." It happens to the best leaders. You plan a program and it just crashes and burns. No one is interested. Your group is fading out on you. Now what? (By the way, I have also heard this called "Flaming Death" after the scene from the movie, *A Bug's Life*, where a circus ringmaster has to get his audience to stay in the tent.) Have something in your bag of tricks that is foolproof. Question: if your "bomb shelter" is really that good, should you make that your plan?
 - b. "Bonus round." What if everything goes so well you can't believe it? You finish very quickly or people are really responding to the topic. Now what do you do? Make it something that will either reward people for their focus and concentration (a game is a great reward for teens), or will help them go deeper into the topic. *Know how much time it will take!!!* If you have to run five minutes over, cool. But if it will run you further, consider something else. Suggestion: remember that 20% you took out in the step before? Sometimes those items make for great bonus rounds. Storytelling (about yourself or anything else) can be a great bonus round.

Step Six: Welcome change

Change is not an option. Everything changes all the time. The question is how will we handle change. We have three choices for handling change.

1. We can deny that change is happening (and get run over by it or passed by).
2. We can oppose change (and find ourselves fighting a losing battle).
3. We can seek to guide the change (and be blessed by it).

Almost anyone who has worked with young people will tell you this last course is the only sane and constructive path. More, if we are open to change and willing to adapt, we often find God has prepared unexpected blessings for us on the way. Some guidelines for guiding change in your confirmation class:

- If something is not working, change. “Insanity is doing the same thing over and over again and expecting different results.” (Stephen Covey, *First Things First*) What kinds of change would help the situation? Is there a creative path that can use what is frustrating you to make something startlingly helpful for your students?
- If something unusual happens, ask yourself: Is this a unique opportunity to teach something?

In general, leading a small group is a lot like trying to cross a rushing river. Swimming against the current of what people want or are open to is tiring and usually more trouble than it's worth (but not always!). By and large, you will do better to go where the general current of people's lives, interests, and inclinations are going and find ways of gently, gradually turning to cross the current the way you want to go. At times in a discussion or meeting, the direction you want to go may be different from where the group wants to go. If the group is not running counter to its purpose (“Oh come on, let's just play games. No one really wants to learn anything tonight.”), consider going the direction the group is headed. Has the discussion moved from talking about King David and Bathsheba of the Old Testament to talking about adultery in general or teen pregnancy or a politician's indiscretions? Perhaps this is an opportunity to talk about making choices and facing consequences or other life truths, applying the Bible to real life. At times I have made the choice to “go with the flow” without knowing where it was going. Almost always the result was a blessing to the group. At these moments, I believe the Holy Spirit was active and leading, and I am thankful for the nudge out of my plan and into God's.

Step Seven: Know when to stand up to a group dynamic

A few sentences ago, I said that “Swimming against the current of what people want or are open to is tiring and usually not worth the effort (but not always!).” Talking about the “but not always” is a precarious thing, but you may face one or more of these times and need to be prepared. From time to time, the current of the group wants to go in a way that will destroy the group, negate its purpose or harm its members in some fashion. At these times, you must stand against the current. Some examples may help:

- The group only wants to play games, and not engage in any constructive activities. Resist the tendency to play games for no other purpose than sheer fun. Perhaps playing games that have a purpose (see *Activities...*, p. 163) will be a great asset to you with them. Perhaps even make everything a game, but don't let them bully you into giving up the purpose of the group: learning enough to be confirmed. Once you give it up, you will be hard pressed to recover the group's purpose. Remind the group why it exists. If the group or an individual won't abide by the purpose of the group, end the meeting and call the parents. When they are ready to buy into the group's purpose, then reconvene. You are better off not meeting than meeting for the wrong reasons. (Yes, I have done this!)
- The group enjoys belittling or reviling a group member. This is wrong! If you don't stand up to it, the person belittled or reviled could be hurt, perhaps scarred. Your group is part of a church and needs to reflect God's love in it. Those who refuse to work at reflecting God's love in the group should be warned. If some refuse to change their behavior, they may even need to be excluded from the group until they are willing to change. Talk with your pastor or someone else in the church if you are concerned about something this serious.
- In group prayer time, no one takes it seriously. If people are being disrespectful, stop the prayer time and ask the students to respect God and the time that they have with God. Without your help, they may never understand that this is special time and space in their lives. Having said that, don't expect quiet meditative prayer from teens! Seek the *happy* medium between the extremes.

Generally speaking, trust your intuition; God often works through it. If you run up against a situation and are not sure how to proceed, make sure you bring someone in—pastor, deacon, trusted friend—on your difficulties. You are not alone! Let people with wisdom help you. The more time you spend working with small groups, the quicker you will recognize behavior that will tend to take the group down a negative path and put a stop to it.

Summary

Leading a small group can be one of the most exciting, sometimes frustrating, often fulfilling things you will ever do. By taking a few precautions, setting the stage in time and place, and occasionally going with the flow instead of your plan, you will offer your confirmation students perhaps a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity to experience a truly caring community. To recap the main points of leading a small group,

- know your group members
- know your meeting place
- know your meeting time
- know your group
- have a plan
- welcome change
- know when to stand up to a group dynamic

Remember, Jesus didn't start a church, he gathered a small group of twelve disciples and spent time with them—traveling, teaching and rebuking them. May your small group be as blessed (and a lot less trouble!) than his!

**Building Confirmation
the Congregational Way**

**How to Design a
Congregational
Confirmation
Curriculum**

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How to Begin: Get the Help You Need

Is there a reason you are working on this all by your lonesome? If you can, get others to share the setting up process. People you might want to invite to a planning meeting include:

- yourself (you are teaching it after all)
- any other adult leaders for the Confirmation Program
- one or more parents
- perhaps, one or more students.

Others who might need a voice depending on your situation

- the pastor(s)
- deacon(s)
- representatives from your Board of Christian Education
- older students who have been confirmed in your fellowship

A group with 3–7 members can usually work well. If you are in doubt about whom to invite, get some experienced person in the congregation to give you a hand.

How NOT to Get the Help You Need!

By the way, a general request in a newsletter or in front of the congregation—"Who wants to help with confirmation?"—rarely if ever works. For one thing, you may not get any volunteers. For another thing, you may not get the volunteers you really want. I have had people volunteer who were supremely unsuited for the task. I had to come up with a viable reason they couldn't help or a way in which they could help without interfering. This was not good for me nor for the volunteer. Ask your pastor or another person savvy in your congregation's ways for advice on this. My suggestion is to pick the people, check to make sure they are not too involved, and extend a personal invitation.

To set up the course, you have some basic questions you need to answer. I have broken the process into four parts. First, you come up with the basic outline of the course (and most likely enjoy some healthy discussion about the "who, what, why, and when" of it all). Second, choose whether to include special program elements and pick them. Third, choose meeting topics (the "theme") of each session. Fourth, choose the meeting activities and firm up the details.

Outlining the Course

Step One: What Should Confirmation Be?

Two of the questions that get at this are:

- What do you want the teens to get out of confirmation?
- When a confirmand finishes confirmation, how are they different?

Start out listing all your objectives without criticizing or prioritizing. Then find the top ten. Try to narrow the field to five and prioritize them. Everything in your confirmation program should address one or more of these objectives. If something does not address one of these goals, think about whether it's really worth doing. Remember that the shorter the course, the fewer objectives you can have. The flip side is that if you have many objectives that are important to you and your church, you will need more time to address them. For some ideas, see *Sample Curricula*, p. 193. See also the concluding sections of the *Leader's Survival Guide*, p. 11.

Step Two: How Old Will the Students Be?

On the one hand, the older the confirmands are as a rule, the more rationally and logically they can approach the topics and the less active they *have* to be. Older confirmands also tend to be better able to make a reasoned faith decision. On the other hand, younger confirmands bring great energy and creativity to all they do. The younger the confirmand, the less able she or he will be able to listen attentively and think seriously. Don't think that they are not taking things in, however! You may hear surprising things from them when you least expect it! Some churches have a certain grade at which young people are confirmed. Others are willing to confirm any interested youth over a particular age. If your church does not currently have a "traditional" age for confirmation, consider your choice very carefully because you are potentially setting a precedent for when your congregation thinks confirmation should be done.

Step Three: Will There Be Requirements?

As mentioned in Step One, each requirement should contribute to achieving a course objective. If a requirement does not work on any objective, then consider whether it is necessary. Some questions that will help you are:

- How intensive or demanding will the course be? How often will the class meet?
- Will there be homework? Quizzes or tests? Outside papers or projects? (Remember that someone is going to have to look over and track all the

assignments the students turn in.) How many of these are necessary to meet the objectives? How much space will there be between assignments?

- Are there events/things you want your students to experience? Should you do that as a group or individually?
- How important is attendance and/or participation? Is there a point when someone has missed too much?

Requirements help students know what to expect and what is expected, but they also help you focus on what is important.

What to Do If a Student Does Not Fulfill the Requirements

Some options are:

- Requirements schmirments! Confirm them anyway!
- Confirm the students but require make up work after. (Be prepared for students that may want to renege on their commitment. What incentive do they have to complete the tasks after the church has confirmed them?)
- Confirm the students when they have completed the requirements. (This will mean that you may have more than one Sunday on which your church confirms people.)
- Refuse to confirm a student who does not complete the requirements. (This is the “pass/fail” approach and the student has “failed” confirmation. Think about what that idea might do to a confirmation student’s impressions of faith, church and God. I have talked with adults who found that a real stumbling block to their faith lives.)

As you might be able to tell, I favor confirming only those students who fulfill the requirements set in our confirmation program. My experience suggests that you either have no requirements or you enforce them. Otherwise, students will decide there are no real requirements and won’t take the class seriously. I also know pastors (whom I respect a great deal) who refuse to “fail” anyone to avoid putting a stumbling block before a young person. You (and your team) will have to decide for yourselves.

Step Four: How Long Will the Course Be?

How long does a reasonably diligent confirmand need to meet the requirements?

Some typical time frames are:

- Six-week course (often during Lent)
- Year-long course (either school-year or calendar year)
- Two-year course (either school-year or calendar year)

Often a church already has a “tradition” about this. Consider if a different time frame would work better. Sample schedules for each of these time frames are included in *Sample Curricula*, p. 193.

Step Five: Want Any Special Programs?

Over the last few decades, some very creative people have come up with some great new ideas and revamped some tried and true ones. You can find a short list of these in the next section and more complete information in *Special Program Elements*, p. 179.

Step Six: How Long and How Many Meetings?

Will you meet weekly, monthly, quarterly? Will you meet for an hour, two, a morning, etc.? Are there special meetings that will help you and the confirmands reach your objectives? (Examples: introductory meeting, retreat, etc.)

Step Seven: How Are We Doing?

You’ve planned your course! How good is it? Test it in one or more of these ways:

- List the dates for the class, writing down how many hours you will have for each class. Take into account holidays and other special events in your life, the life of the church, and the life of the students. (For longer events such as a retreat, only use the hours you spend “learning,” e.g., a particular topic, a particular project, etc.) Does this seem like it will work given what you can find out about how active your students are in outside activities?
- List all the other requirements for the class and some approximate time a student would spend on each one. For special program elements, total the time over the course of the entire length of the course. Example:

Old Testament worksheet	1 1/2 hours
New Testament worksheet	1 hour
Mentoring	10 hours
Memorize Psalm 23	1 hour

Does this seem like it will work given what you can find out about how active your students are?

- Look at what you have so far. Does this course look hard to you? If you aren't sure, grab a parent or a teacher of a person in the age group you'll be working with and ask her or him to give you an opinion on how hard it is. What you hear may make you adjust or rethink the course a bit. If what you have designed is too hard or demanding, try dropping some of the requirements, perhaps even some of your course objectives. If what you have seems kind of wimpy, consider adding some more meat to the menu.
- To see what other courses are like, look at the sample course outlines that begin on p. 193.
- Ask someone who has taught confirmation for a while to take a look at it. It's probably great!

Choosing Special Program Elements

A century ago, confirmation was mostly lecture with occasional question and answer sessions. “Spiritual formation” was less important than “information.” Confirmands memorized many things, from scripture to catechism. In the last few decades, some marvelous new ideas and rediscovered good ideas have surfaced. Many of these ideas can add depth and power to an already good confirmation program. Below are a few summaries of the best and most common. For more details, see *Special Program Elements*, p. 179, and *Appendix B: Alternative Models for Confirmation*, p. 269.

Church “Visitation”

What better way to appreciate one’s own faith tradition than to experience a different one. Confirmands visit other churches even other “houses of faith” (e.g., synagogues, mosques, etc.) and participate in worship as observers. Explaining the worship is a critical part of any visit.

Objectives: Learn what other people believe, gain better understanding of one’s own beliefs.

Advantages: Engages all the senses (good learning!), increases cross-cultural awareness and understanding, relatively easy to set up, most worship leaders of other churches and faiths are happy to explain what they believe and why.

Disadvantages: few confirmation leaders have enough knowledge of other religions or where different religious practices come from to explain them, attending some worship services means taking confirmands away from their home church’s worship, introducing impressionable young people to other faiths.

Mentoring

An ancient and honored practice in Christian faith, mentoring pairs a person of some Christian experience with a person with little Christian experience.

Although typically a one-on-one experience, in some models, mentors oversee a small group of “mentees.”

Objective: Give confirmands a chance to see and experience Christian faith in the life of someone else.

Advantages: provide an adult relationship in the church besides family and pastor, give confirmands a chance to ask questions of someone outside of class and home, provides someone who can encourage the confirmand in the confirmation process, when it works mentoring can be the best part of confirmation.

Disadvantages: Can be difficult to set up a mentoring program, busy schedules make mentoring challenging, when it doesn’t work it becomes a major hindrance for the spiritual lives of mentor and confirmand alike.

Retreat

Another classic Christian practice, retreats have enabled Christians to remove themselves from “ordinary” life in order to gain perspective and (hopefully) a deeper awareness of God’s presence.

Objective: Gain perspective on “ordinary” life, learn about God.

Advantages: Opportunity to cover one or more segments of the confirmation program (depending on the length of the retreat), builds group trust and relationships, can be extremely memorable for confirmands, other advantages are possible depending on how one sets it up.

Disadvantages: Time-intensive to prepare, definitely need additional adult help, can be expensive, can be intense to lead.

Sermon Note-Taking and/or Worship Analysis

One of the difficult transitions confirmands need to make is from a generally unaware, youth participant into a generally aware, young adult, worshipping member. Many confirmands take worship for granted and pay little attention to the meaning and purpose swirling around them. Taking notes on sermons and thinking about the other elements that go into worship (the architecture, sense of space, type of music, where people stand, what people do, how people do it, who is worshipping, etc.) encourages confirmands to begin gathering meaning more intentionally from the world and worship around them.

Objective: Become more aware of and more open to the meaning of worship.

Advantages: Encourages independent thought in confirmands, builds sense of *koinonia* with church body, may open eyes of confirmand to meanings/he never perceived before, opportunities abound in one’s own church or in others, when combined with “Church Visitation” above can encourage thinking about many aspects of faith, theology and church history, simple to adapt to accent different program emphases, might promote family conversation about worship.

Disadvantages: Not a “group” activity in the usual sense of the word, responses may reflect what the confirmand thinks the instructor wants to hear, requires ability to think and articulate somewhat clearly what one is perceiving, may backfire if family does not reflect enjoyment of worship to confirmand.

Service/Mission Project

Service has always been part of the Christian life and work, starting with Jesus coming to serve rather than be served. Project intensity (how hard are you going to work on it at a stretch), difficulty and length can vary and can be done as an individual or as a group. One could even combine this with the retreat (see above) on a mission trip of a couple of days or more.

Objective: Give students a chance to practice serving (arguably the essence of following the example Jesus Christ).

Advantages: If nothing else, you have done something good for others, makes service by confirmands more likely after confirmation, could be good for

group relationships and relationships with other adults, works very well with those who have trouble concentrating in a typical “classroom” setting.

Disadvantages: Can be difficult to set up and/or do, might make teens think that a Christian’s value is determined by what s/he does, may offer little or no opportunity to cover other material, one program may not appeal to or meet needs of each person.

Service/Fellowship Hours

A variation on the Service/Mission Project is the requirement that students participate in a specific number of hours either serving others or participating in the life of the church. (Regular worship should not be counted since that is just part of being in the fellowship.)

Objective: Give students a chance to practice serving and encourage teens to participate in the life of the church.

Advantages: A great way to get a “foot in the door” with confirmands whose families are marginally involved, confirmands can serve/participate in what they are interested, easy set up.

Disadvantages: Have to track their hours, offers no opportunity to discuss/debrief experiences.

Worship Design and Leadership

Someone has said that worship is the heart of the church. Confirmation students who design and lead worship (whether for the class or youth group or the whole congregation) have a stronger sense of what worship means and why it is important, not just in abstract terms, but for themselves. Can be as simple as lighting the candles in the advent wreath or reading the scripture on Sunday morning, or as complex as having a whole worship service organized and led by the confirmands.

Objective: Help confirmands understand worship from the inside out, not as performance, but as a reflection of a living relationship with God.

Advantages: Gets teens involved, helps them begin to draw on and develop their gifts for the greater good of the fellowship, builds confidence, helps teach the congregation to value the contributions of young people (not just on Youth Sunday).

Disadvantages: Can be challenging to organize, may require plenty of advance planning if you are participating in your fellowship’s main worship, may require worship practice outside of regular meeting times, some teens are so nervous about being in front of others that it can sour the whole experience, the responses of adults in the congregation may be mixed.

Writing a Statement of Belief (“Credo”)

Many confirmation programs require that confirmands write a statement of what they believe. (Note: the word, “credo,” is Latin for “I believe.”) An outline of topics to be discussed in such a statement often helps confirmands structure their thoughts.

Objective: Help students think about what *they* think and believe, not just what someone else says.

Advantages: Independent project, requires some thought on the part of each student, can encourage dialogue with parents about spiritual matters, can act as a “comprehensive final exam” for a confirmation program.

Disadvantages: some teens parrot what other adults tell them is a good belief, difficult project for teens younger than 8th grade, also potentially devastating if the teen feels his/her beliefs are judged or “graded” by the instructor(s).

For other special program elements or for more details about the components listed above, *Special Program Elements*, p. 179.

Choosing Meeting Topics (or Planning the Perfect Meal)

A good confirmation course is like a good meal. In a good meal, you want some vegetables, some fruit, some meat, some dairy, some starch, some dessert. A really good meal not only balances the food groups, but also balances color and texture. For most people, confirmation aims at giving students a good basic introduction to Christian thought and life. That's a pretty tall order! Many people have worked on confirmation over the centuries and in general, these are the spiritual "food groups" they have said were important for a balanced "meal" of confirmation.

- Bible (what it is, what's in it, how to find things, how to read it, etc.)
- Theology (who's God, who's Jesus, whether God is one or three, etc.)
- Church history (what the early church was like, what is a Protestant, etc.)
- Worship (what it is, why we do it, what is communion/baptism, etc.)
- Church (what is a church, what is Congregationalism, our role in them, etc.)
- Membership (what it means to be a member, life after confirmation, etc.)

Step One: How Big a Menu Do You Need to Plan?

As with any meal, the first thing you need to decide is how many dishes will be part of the confirmation "meal." Are you going to have three or seven or ten different foods you will prepare? In this case, you need to know how many different "program slots" you will have. (Definition: A program slot is a unit of time devoted to learning. If you have hour long classes, then you probably have one program slot for each hour you meet. It's hard to really develop a topic if a program slot is less than an hour.) To find out, take the lists from "Step Seven: How Are We Doing?" (p. 31). Set aside the special meetings (e.g., introductory session, review session) and look at your revised list. This is how big your "menu" needs to be, the number of classes you have to accomplish your objectives.

Step Two: What Will Be the Largest Portions?

What subject material is either most important or most needed for your confirmation program? If you have a really strong Bible component to your Sunday School, your teens may come to confirmation with a lot of Bible already. Perhaps you give them material from a different/more challenging level, or perhaps you choose to have more of something else. If your church does lots of missions work, you may want to have the confirmands involved in learning more about missions and how to serve than about something else. If your church does not emphasize the Trinity, perhaps that's something you skip and focus on other theological issues.

Some advice in this regard:

1. Just because something is not considered important in your church does not mean your students don't need to learn enough about it to make their own decisions about matters of faith.
2. As I and the other contributors have tried to do in this curriculum, consider presenting multiple viewpoints on different issues even (perhaps especially) if those viewpoints are not represented in your group or your church. At some point in their lives, these teens may encounter these ideas anyway. When they do, will confirmation have prepared them for the challenge?
3. Remember that your confirmands may have no other source for the information you are covering! It's scary, but true that many families do not teach these things at home, that many churches do not teach them adequately in Sunday school, and that many teens simply forget everything they have ever been taught.
4. Where else will they get a spiritual perspective on things? At school the students will get history, perhaps even the Reformation. That does not mean that they will know about the Reformation from a spiritual perspective. (A possible school version: "In the 1500s, political and social changes came about, pushed in part by the learning of the Renaissance and the invention of the printing press." A possible confirmation version: "Isn't God amazing? In some ways, God "set up" the Reformation, starting a hunger for more knowledge, fueling it with more information available because of the printing press. The Truth was at work, and it broke out in several different places at the same time. It was almost in the air people breathed...")
5. Sometimes you can combine some of the topics and special meetings in interesting ways. For example: a retreat on worship might discuss communion in the context of Reformation-style debates, mentoring could include attending other churches followed by discussion about worship styles over pizza, issues of poverty, culture, and economic justice and the Christian approach to them might be discussed following a movie about St. Francis of Assisi, issues of racism can go with the story of the Exodus (and watching *The Prince of Egypt*), etc.

So now you have thought about some of these issues. Put brackets around the sessions devoted to each general category. Label any special events. Include rough outlines of theme or creative ideas for the meetings as they come up. Avoid criticizing or nit-picking ideas to death at this point (this is the time for putting together not taking apart).

Step Three: Get Out the Cookbooks, Honey!

One of my favorite parts of cooking is getting out the cookbooks and seeing what is out there. How else do you know what the possibilities are? And it's much easier to cook from a recipe.

You need a chance to find out what kinds of delightful recipes are out there. Take a look through the curriculum, perhaps gathering ideas for one topic before moving on to the next. (Hot tip: Work from the beginning of the year toward the end. That way if you get bogged down and you only get the first part done, you still have time to work on the rest.) As you are going, do look for what intrigues you, but temper that with what will appeal to the age, maturity and interests of the confirmands. When you find something that you think will work, put it into one of the slots.

A Note About Using Other People's Ideas (even ours)!

Remember that these ideas may have worked some place with some teens, but that place is not your place and those teens are not your teens! Please, please, *please* take pretty good ideas or nifty ideas that aren't quite right and change them so that they will be great ideas and be right for you and your group. All of the contributors have gathered all sorts of ideas from everywhere and fiddled and tweaked them until they worked. We hope you will do the same!!!

A Further Note About Using Other People's Ideas (even ours)!

Each person has certain things s/he does really well as a group leader. I love brainstorming and visual aids. Another contributor thrives on crafts. Another likes going on field trips to different places for different programs. Another loves music. Each of us draws on our gifts and remakes confirmation in ways that allow us to *a)* do it and do it well, and *b)* like doing it. Whatever ideas you see here, please take them and make them so they fit your gifts not ours!

Remember we are planning a delightfully balanced meal of confirmation classes, so even in the different categories, you want to keep some balance. Example: In the Bible unit, you don't want to focus only on either the Old or the New Testament without discussing something from the other. In the Worship unit, you don't want to focus only on communion and never talk about baptism.

This step is potentially the most time-consuming step of the process. You will have to decide how much research you need to do. If you do not have much time for the planning process, try adapting one of the sample curricula.

Step Four: Checking the Cupboards and 'Fridge

When I want to make a special meal, I make a list of ingredients I need for the meal and then I check the refrigerator and cupboards to make sure I have the ingredients I need. With our confirmation menu plan in hand, we need to take a few minutes to make sure we have what we need for the programs we plan to run.

- **Leadership resources.** Do we know enough about the topic to teach it? Should we find someone else to teach a particular lesson? (Example: Maybe the pastor would like to lead the sessions on theology or worship. Maybe the moderator or the chair of deacons would be a guest speaker for the sessions on membership.) Think creatively. Don't be afraid to get help on a topic that would be easier for someone else to lead.
- **Facility resources.** Wherever you are having your meetings, make sure the facility is available at that time! If you are having a retreat, plan to reserve your site at least 3 months and more like 6–12 months ahead. If you have a special trip (movie theater, jail, hospital, funeral home, bowling alley, etc.) make a note to yourself about it and put a deadline date next to it. Try to set the deadlines far in advance of when any normal human being would have them, so that you aren't having to scramble at the last minute. If a facility is *not* available, you will want to know soon enough change.
- **Equipment resources.** What equipment do you need for your regular meetings? Do any of your meetings require something different or special? Make sure these will be available before you set the schedule. (Examples: TV and VCR are essential to watching a movie. An earthball could be borrowed or rented to play games associated with a mission emphasis. Sumo-wrestling bodysuits may be necessary for understanding the armor of God!)
- **Assistant resources.** Find help. This serves lots of great purposes:
 1. You won't feel so lonely.
 2. You may have more fun, since planning and doing things with another person are often much more entertaining.
 3. The teens are exposed to at least one other person of faith besides yourself, making it more likely they will find someone with whom to identify personally.
 4. If a teen claims you said something wacko, you will have another adult there to back one of you up (maybe you did say that wacko thing and you didn't remember it!!).
 5. You will have backup if an emergency comes up.

With the exception of assistant resources which you almost certainly have available if you look carefully, some of these resources just may not be available to you at all. That's ok! If you can make an adjustment (using marshmallows instead of

gumdrops), great. If you can't (those sumo-wrestling suits were a great idea for teaching about the armor of faith, but they really smelled), maybe you need a different idea.

Step Five: Finding Out When Dinner Will Be Served

Perhaps you (and your planning group) can set the time and day of your meetings. If you do not already have a prescribed time (during the Sunday School hour on Sunday mornings for example), a model that works well is having an introductory meeting at which you set the days and times for future meetings. Go with what works for the most people (but make sure it works for you too!) This is a good way to set the dates and times for special meetings too. In general, if you want other people to come, you need to include them in this part of the planning process. Otherwise you may get all your dates/times in a row and then no one shows up.

Step Six: Cooking the Meal

Different people cook differently. I have a friend who has all the ingredients portioned out in the appropriate amounts on the counter before she starts. She basically choreographs her culinary experience and she is a wonder to watch. And her cooking? Yum! I find that doesn't work for me. For one thing, I start to get impatient and start throwing in dabs of this and drops of that. For another thing, when I know where I'm going and I have a pretty good idea of how to get there, I don't want to take the time to get every tablespoon and teaspoon of stuff ready. My grandmother? She didn't even make sure she had the ingredients first. I got some very strange cookies from her kitchen and occasionally something truly marvelous.

You have a preferred way and amount of planning you like to do to be comfortable. Some people like to have a full script of every word and action they will do during a meeting for which they are responsible. Others are happy with an outline of a few points. Still others just want to jump in and see what comes out. (I don't recommend this particular approach. Like my grandmother's cooking, you may get some absolutely spectacular meals, but you are more likely to get spectacular wipe outs and spectacularly bizarre meetings.) Know how much planning you need to do to feel comfortable, and do it.

Some suggestions for preparing the marvelous "meal" for confirmation classes:

- If you are not used to planning for and running a small group, you may want to take a glance through *Leading a Small Group: A Beginner's Guide* (p. 13)
- Remember how we weren't going to analyze and critique ideas before? Now is the time. Get as many of the details right as you can. Try to imagine the things that are likely to go wrong.
- Think of each class session as something that meets people where they are and helps them move to where you want them to be. In other words, if you

just jump in and tell your confirmand(s) what they should know at the beginning, they will probably not be as ready to hear you as they would be if you had “set them up” or prepared them to hear you. For some examples of what I mean here, please see the sample class sessions beginning on p. 49.

Don't “overcook your meal!” When you have done your best planning a good idea, try it. You can double and triple-guess your creativity into a strait-jacket. Try what you think will work. Trust God to be present in what you have faithfully put together. You may find something goes better than you expect. You may bomb out. But if you don't try, you'll never get better.

Choosing Meeting Activities

Like many things with meals, you have lots of choices: make it yourself from scratch (great fun but lots of work and you have to know what you're doing), buy the ingredients for the meal and cook them based on a recipe (lots less work than fixing from scratch and inventing your own recipe, but still satisfying), buy it ready made (just heat and serve).

If you know enough to make up your confirmation classes from scratch, you may just want some great ideas that you can run with on your own. Great! Skip this and go to it!

With a little thought and work (and a lot less raw knowledge), you can take the "ingredients" of activities, sample curricula and add-on material and adapt them into a remarkable confirmation curriculum that will impress parents and pastors and, by the grace of God, change the lives of some teenagers. (For more information on adapting lesson plans and activities, see the section above, "A Note About Using Other People's Ideas (even ours)!" (p. 39).

Especially if you are new to teaching confirmation, you are in luck because you can make a few simple changes to any activity in this curriculum and have a good solid confirmation program. Congratulations! If you haven't already looked at the *Leader's Survival Guide* (p. 1), you may find that will help you feel better about what you are doing. There's a reason you are teaching confirmation, and it wouldn't surprise me if God was going to do something extraordinary through you!

So how do you choose what activities should go into a meeting? How do you know what will work with your group? How do you know what adjustments to make to what you find in this curriculum?

On the one hand, the clues are peppered throughout this *How to Design a Congregational Confirmation Curriculum* and in the *Leader's Survival Guide*. The best clues have to do with trying to understand your confirmand(s), what fits with their ages and their maturity as individuals and as a group, and perhaps even geography and local culture. Because different people approach the planning process differently, to some degree you will have to figure out how to do this for yourself. (Now come on! Don't throw up your hands yet. Read on for something more substantial.)

On the other hand, the only way you will really develop your intuition about what works with your confirmand(s) is to try a couple of activities and see how they work. Each year I do confirmation, my group is a little different. I find that the groups are sometimes different enough that a program that worked great one year may bomb the next.

These caveats aside, here are some general rules of thumb to help you choose meeting activities. To help you see what this is like, I'm going to plan a sample meeting for you as we go along.

Setting the Stage

1. Know what your general topic category is (e.g., Bible, Church, Worship, etc.) If you're not sure, spend some time with "Choosing Meeting Topics" above, especially Steps One and Two.)
2. Know what your "theme" for the program slot is. See "Choosing Meeting Topics" above, Step Three (p. 39). For a definition of program slot, see Step One (p. 37)
3. Know your goal/objective for the session. You should be able to put into one sentence how you hope your teens will be different at the end of the program. If you find yourself writing more than one, figure out how to focus your idea better. If you have this really clear in your head, your teens will have a much easier time getting it clear in their heads!
4. Know how much time you have for this program slot.

Designing a Sample Meeting: Setting the Stage

For our sample meeting, we are working on the Bible category, specifically on the New Testament. The objective is to help teens understand the Good News of Jesus. A secondary objective is to help teens understand some of the reasons Christianity spread so quickly in the first century. We have 90 minutes.

How Many and What Kind of Activities Do I Need?

5. Carve your program slot into 5–20 minute segments, depending on the attention span of your confirmand(s) and the size of the group. A fairly average 8th grader can pay attention for 5–7 minutes listening to a reasonably interesting speaker, 10–12 minutes on a quiet activity, and about 15–20 minutes in something that has moving around. A senior in high school can probably pay attention for 15–20 minutes listening to a reasonably interesting speaker, up to 30 minutes on a quiet, thoughtful activity, and 45–60 minutes on active learning. Watching a moderately interesting video segment is something 8th graders can do for 15–20 minutes and seniors can do for 45 minutes. Thus, for a group of 6th graders you may want 10 program segments in an hour, 6 program segments for 8th graders, and maybe 3 segments for seniors.
6. Change your pace frequently. Each change of pace acts as a distraction and is something fresh. As I mentioned earlier, if you have older or mature people, you may be able to focus on things a bit longer and so not change the pace very often. If you have too many changes of pace with older teens, they will

start to feel rushed and may even start to feel the meetings are shallow. Give them the meat they deserve in longer, concentrated segments!

Designing a Sample Meeting: Program Slots and Pace Changing

Our sample confirmation class is for 4 rowdy, 8th-grade boys and 2 active 8th-grade girls. Because they are rowdy / active 8th graders, I am going to have 9 program segments.

Segment	What happens	Activity level	Time (mins)
1	Game or rowdy singing	Medium to High	5–10
2	Discuss the beginning place for the theme	Quiet	2–5
3	Active learning project	Medium	5–10
4	Discuss / present project	Quiet	5
5	Short presentation	Quiet	10
6	Small group discussion	Medium	10
7	Small groups present skits	Medium	5–10
8	Wrap up theme	Quiet	
9	Conclude with singing and prayer	Medium to High	5

Notice two things about this: First, the pace changes seven times in 90 minutes(!), giving wiggly 8th graders a chance to move around and interact. Second, notice that they are doing something different every 5–10 minutes. This plan will not tax most 8th graders' attention span and yet engage them.

Choosing and Planning the Activities Themselves

7. The "Eh" vs. "Ooh" Factor. Go hunting through your resources (like this curriculum) to find interesting ideas to fill in the slots that you need help with. As a rule, if you have a choice between two pretty good ideas, one you look at and say, "Eh...that would be ok," and the other you read over and say, "Ooh...that sounds kind of cool," always choose the "Ooh" activity. True, it may be a better program in general, but more, when something resonates with us, we are more enthusiastic about teaching it and almost always do a better job.
8. Find the key. In every meeting plan there is a key, the main activity or core idea that drives the whole meeting. In the above meeting outline, I would

design my meeting around the active learning project (segment 3) and the application (segment 5). A two part project would be the best because it would help the teens remember things better.

9. Find the twist. Make it interesting. Put a twist on the activity that's only yours, something that may take your "Ooh" idea to a "Wow" idea. I have seen pretty average ideas become fabulous, memorable meetings when a leader added something funny, unique or bizarre.

Two Twisted Examples

Using Your Head (of Cabbage)

A leader of 9th and 10th graders had an overnight retreat in which he planned bowling, pizza and some active learning games. (OK, but...Yawn!) To spice it up, he decided to really advertise a special guest. When the teens got to the meeting, they found out the special guest was a head of cabbage decorated with eyes, nose and mouth! The rest of the evening they took pictures and made video tape of their adventures with "Ernest." The evening provided a great opportunity to discuss how to include strange guests in the group and talk about peer pressure at school that excludes people who are different!

Jesus Was What?

Instead of "Today we're going to talk about the New Testament." (I'm not sure most adults would find that interesting!) Look for something different like, "Anyone here radical? Who are the people who are really radical at school? What are they like? Today we're going to learn about potentially the greatest radical and rebel of all time...Jesus!" This opening is not only a bit more interesting, but sets you up to talk about how Jesus' radicalness is different, and potentially how following Jesus can be radical (in an even better way than the radicals at school).

10. Final tweaks.
 - a. See if there is any other adjusting you want to do in the program itself or the outline of what you plan to talk about. If you are someone who has trouble speaking spontaneously in front of groups, you may want to write out your part. Try to avoid reading it in front of the teens (it's a real turn off and keeps you from making eye contact which encourages people to listen).
 - b. Fill in the details. In the meeting outline above, I would make sure I knew which songs I wanted to sing or which game I wanted us to play.

Letting People Know

11. You have a dynamite meeting planned. You have all your ducks in a row and only good things happen during the meeting. But your meeting flops. Why? Only 2 of the 7 confirmands showed up! Do yourself a favor and make sure people know about the marvelous meeting well enough ahead of time so that they can be there. A good practice is to publish a schedule of the entire course at the beginning. If you have to change a day here or there, you can do that later, but this way everyone knows what's coming and when. If you change anything, publish a revised schedule. If you have a very forgetful bunch, think about sending out a postcard the week before. I once had a group who was so absent-minded that I called them every week to remind them for the first four times we met.

Ready to Serve!

You're ready to go! Take your incredibly healthy spiritual menu plans, your well thought out choices and your delectable ingredients and go to it. May it be a sweet smell to God and make your students' spiritual mouths water!

Designing a Sample Meeting: The "Ooh" and a Tweak

We could play just any old game to start with, but in this case let's sing something instead. This helps gather and focus the group. Since it's rowdy songs, that helps get some of the wiggles out.

Segment	What happens	Activity level	Time (mins)
1	Rowdy singing Pharoah Pharoah That's Why We Praise Him Seize the Day Prayer	Medium to High	5–10
2	Starting place for the theme Ask the question: What's the best news you ever received?	Quiet	2–5
3	Active learning project Cure for Cancer Simulation	Medium	5–10
4	Discuss/present project Each small group tells its ideas to the whole	Quiet	5
5	Short presentation on the 5 factors that spread Christianity and defining the gospel as "good news"	Quiet	10
6	Small group discussion: what are the exciting things about our time? How could they be used to help spread God's caring and message of caring? Work on skit.	Medium	10
7	Small groups present skits	Medium	5–10
8	Wrap up theme	Quiet	5
9	Conclude with singing and prayer	Medium to High	5

Instead of talking about the NT and its times straight off, ask the teens what was the best news they ever got. The active learning project is a simulation in which teens (split into small groups of 3–5) find the cure for cancer and spread the word. (See the *Activities...* p. 168, for details.) The "ooh" is not only the activity (how cool that you could cure cancer!), but recognizing that God is doing exciting things to set up our futures as well. The tweak came as I was looking over this plan and realized that I had too many quiet things in a row and had to add the skit.

**Building Confirmation
the Congregational Way**

Topical Lesson Plans

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Introduction

In the section that follows, you will find a treasure trove of ready-to-go lesson plans for confirmation (or even adult education)! These lesson plans are divided into the “basic spiritual food groups” outlined in “Choosing Meeting Topics” (p. 37).

For each topic, a number of lesson plans are offered. The topic’s lesson plans are divided into two sections:

Basic. The Basic Lesson Plans are lessons dealing with the essentials of the topic that would most likely be done as a first (or one-time) lesson on the topic. (For example: Basic presentations of the Bible could talk about the two testaments, the kinds of material you will find in it, God’s love over time, the most important events of the Bible and perhaps a few most important ideas.) The first lesson presented in each topic is designed for the “Six-Week Course” described beginning on p. 194.

Bonus. For those who want to go beyond the basics, Bonus Lesson Plans are offered as resources when confirmation leaders have the opportunity to lead more than one session on a given topic. While the material in these lesson plans is appropriate even important, it offers more detail than is probably essential for a basic understanding. This material will be especially useful if you have older teens and can cover more material in each lesson. Because of the “advanced” nature of the material, in some places only lesson outlines will be provided, requiring confirmation leaders to “flesh out” the meeting for themselves. For notes on how to flesh out a meeting, see “Step Five: Have a plan” in *Leading a Small Group* (p. 20) and “Step Three: Get Out the Cookbooks, Honey!” (p. 39) in *How to Design a Congregational Confirmation Curriculum*. For additional resources to help you flesh out these lesson plans, please refer to resources on the given topic in the *Annotated Bibliography* (p. 231).

Many people have contributed to these lesson plans and I have tried to give credit where credit is due. At times, because of copyright restrictions, we cannot include the actual material, but when this happens, we will include the information on how to find it for yourself. Because many of us who have contributed have been doing confirmation for a long time, occasionally we have adapted someone else’s material and no longer remember where we found it. If we have neglected or been unable to give you credit, we ask for your forgiveness. Please let us know so that we can give you credit in future editions and on the website.

Conventions Used in This Section

Small Groups

Where you see this notation, divide up the entire group into small groups of 3 or 4. Because people tend to sit next to those they know the best, I often have group

members number off (“You’re a one. You’re a two. You’re a three. You’re a one. etc.).

Large Group

Gather the group together and have a larger discussion. At times, a leader may choose to write group responses down. “Large group reporting” invites the individual small groups to tell the larger group what they came up with in their discussions.

Kick-Off Meeting

Contributor: DLG

Having some kind of orientation to confirmation is important for three reasons:

1. Leaders can get some understanding of what teens and parents hope confirmation will be like.
2. Class members and parents will understand what the leader expects from the course. Because they hear the expectations, parents and potential confirmands who continue with the program will, in effect, have bought into those expectations.
3. If the orientation is done well, parents and teens will be put more at ease with the leader and with the course as a whole.

The result raises the excitement level about confirmation as well as get parents and teens ready to invest themselves in the confirmation process.

Here are some things you may want to do to prepare for this lesson:

- ***Four weeks before the orientation:*** Some churches purchase and distribute Bibles to confirmands, often as the gift upon confirmation. If this is your church's practice, consider buying the Bibles and distributing them at the beginning of the course. The students will always have the Bible as a gift (even if they withdraw from the course later). As a leader, your job of making sure everyone is on the same page is easier. Also, many study Bibles come with wonderful study helps like time lines, maps, charts and concordances that can make leading Bible studies and encouraging Bible-reading easier. If you do decide to hand out Bibles, make sure these are on hand for the orientation. (This may require ordering them a few weeks before hand.)
- ***Two weeks (and four weeks or more is better) before the orientation:*** send out invitations to the orientation. Be sure to invite parents as well as teens.
- ***The week before the orientation:*** If you do not hear back from people you invite, give them a call to confirm their interest or lack thereof.
- ***The week before orientation:*** Gather all the materials you will hand out. If you are going to give lots of handouts to the class, consider compiling them in a notebook or folder to make distribution easier.
- ***Pray.*** Take some time to be quiet with God in the week, day and hour before the orientation session. This will serve a multitude of useful purposes: reminding you Who is the One who makes confirmation work, calming your spirit if you are one of those people who gets on edge before leading something, and opens you and your class to the Presence of God. Pray for each of the confirmands and their families as well.

Time Allotted: 60–90 minutes

Objectives: Introduce the idea of confirmation to parents and teens.
Share expectations for confirmation (parents, teens, leaders).
Help teens and parents know confirmation will be fun too.
Solve any scheduling issues for the year.

Outline of the Meeting

Prayer and brief introductions
Get to Know You Games
Introduction to Confirmation
Scheduling and Housekeeping
Close in Prayer

Preparation

Construction paper, markers and yarn for name tags.
Cut the yarn into 2–3 foot sections.
Have index cards and writing utensils handy.
Lay out the materials for games and activities. Make sure you have enough if more than one parent for each family attends.
Set up the room for the session. If you have a choice of how the seating is arranged, make a circle with the chairs. If you need something from which to speak, make sure a music stand or rostrum is available.
If you are handing out special things like Bibles and notebooks, make sure those are available.
Make sure you have something to record people's thoughts (newsprint/markers, chalkboard and chalk, etc.).

Copy Handouts

(these may be put in folders or notebooks)
Goals and Requirements
Course Schedule
Class Covenant

Prayer and Brief Introductions (2-5 minutes)

Pray
Welcome everyone.
Introduce yourself.
Introduce the course. Tell them what they have to look forward to about this session. (We're going to have fun. You will have a taste of what confirmation is going to be like during the rest of the year.)

Get to Know You Games (20 minutes)

Mingle. See *Activities...* (p. 172) The last time through, break people into groups of 4–8 people.

Name Tag Fun. See *Activities...*(p. 172)

Introduction to Confirmation (15-30 minutes)

Gathering Information

Handout index cards. Invite confirmands to write the following information:

Side One: Full name and whether or not you've been baptized

Side Two: One thing you're looking forward to about confirmation.

(Note: Additional material may also go on their cards. Example: If you have a mentoring program and are giving the teens a choice of mentors, you may want to ask the confirmands to list three Christians who go to your church.)

Expectations

Ask: Let me ask the confirmation students first. What do you expect from Confirmation? What do you hope will happen over the course of confirmation?

Write down the answers they give.

When the students seem to run dry, ask: Let me ask some of the parents the same question. What do you expect from Confirmation? What do you hope your son or daughter will get out of this process?

Write down the answers they give.

What Is Confirmation?

Going to be fun — by and large no lecture

Very intense — We're trying to cover in one year what seminaries don't completely cover in 3!

Not just head knowledge, but what's it like from the inside

Try out what following Christ is like.

Say: Those of you who were baptized as infants, do you remember any of it? I bet your parents do. On that day, your parents made promises to bring you up to know God. In a sense, you were becoming part of the family of God *on their promises!* Confirmation is about you deciding what you believe and why, and choosing to confirm the faith for yourself.

Goals and Requirements

Hand out notebooks or other sheets that list the goals and requirements for the confirmation course.

Discuss goals and requirements of the class (include any special program elements)

Ask for any questions or concerns.

Housekeeping and Scheduling (15-30 minutes)

Everyone baptized? Any questions or concerns?

Look over schedule of dates and topics. Set dates for any special events, trips or retreats. Let people know that the dates will be set at the next meeting of the confirmation class.

Draw people's attention to the covenant for the class

- The idea of covenant. (Promise, solemn agreement, modern example is marriage, stronger than a contract because in a contract if one side reneges on their part of the deal the deal is off, in a covenant both sides are still bound even if one side breaks it)
- Encourage them to take the covenant home and think about it.
- "If you and your parent or parents agree, both parent and confirmand should please sign."
- If not, return the notebook and bible next week — no problem.

Take final questions.

Close with Prayer (5 minutes)

See "Closing Circles" in *Activities...* (p. 166).

Basic Bible 1: The Bible at a Glance

Contributor: DLG

If you have not spent much time with the Bible lately, you might want to do some additional preparation before leading this session. I find it helpful to do a dry run of the lesson and do some thinking about the topic before I turn it loose on the teens.

- Make sure you can find all the passages listed in this section. Read them carefully. Look at what comes before and after the passages. This is the context and it will help you better understand what the author really wanted you to get out of it.
- Take a moment to look at the handouts on the Old Testament and New Testament. Open up your Bible to the Table of Contents. Take note of where the different kinds of books are in each testament.
- Take a look at a time table for the events of the Bible. (See “How to Pick a Study Bible,” in the *Leader’s Survival Guide*, p. 7)
- Take a look at “The Cycle of the Covenant” handout. Think about your own walk with God. Can you think of times when you were really close to God? What were those like? Can you think of times when you know you were not doing what God wanted you to do? What was that like? What snapped you out of that? Where are you now in your walk with God? Is it what you hoped it would be? Is it what God wants it to be? Take a few moments to pray about what is going on in your life. When you have finished your self-examination, take a few moments to pray for those who will be in the meeting with you, both adults and teens. Ask God to be present with you all.

Time Allotted: 120 minutes

Objectives: Help students grasp the “big picture” of God’s love in the Bible.
Help students learn how to find their way in the Bible.
Help students get to know each other better.

Outline of the Meeting

Get to Know You Games
Main Ideas of the Bible
 The Covenant Cycle
 Covenant
Bible Scavenger Hunt
Finding Your Way Around the Bible
Scripture Races
Wrapping Up

Preparation

You will need something for groups to write on and something to write with. (Paper and pens, newsprint and markers, chalkboard and chalk.)

Make sure Bibles will be available for each confirmand (one per student).
 Draw up a covenant for you and your confirmands to sign.
 Prepare for Bible Scavenger Hunt (See *Activities...*, p. 165).

Copy Handouts

The Covenant Cycle
 Great Stories of the Old Testament (Some of these are shocking!)
 Books of the OT
 Books of the NT
 Other handouts you may find helpful or interesting
 Making of the OT
 Making of the NT
 Old Testament Rap

Get to Know You Games (15 minutes)

Choose from *Activities...* (p. 163). Suggestion: If you have rowdy, outgoing teens, start with a high energy game. If you have somewhat quiet or hesitant teens, start with something of medium energy.

Recommendations:

 People-to-People
 Wink
 Knots

Main Ideas of the Bible (20-25 minutes)

Break into small groups of 3-5 people.
 Have each group come up with what it thinks are the Top Ten Ideas of the Bible.
 Have them choose the Big Three (the three most important) from their list and put them in order (#1 being the most important). If a group gets done early, have it put all ten ideas in order (#1 being the most important).
 Come back as a whole group.
 Discuss the big ideas of each group, perhaps listing them on newsprint or a chalkboard. If groups list the same thing more than once, put a checkmark or asterisk next to repeated items.

The Covenant Cycle (5-10 minutes)

Pass out the handout, "The Covenant Cycle"
 Draw on newsprint, chalkboard or overhead
 God says, "I love you, I love you, I love you!"
 People fall away from/forget God and get into trouble. ("I love you, but...")
 God sends people to remind the people about God ("Hey, don't forget...I love you."
 People return to God. ("I love you, God!")
 God says, "I love you!"
 What are the "I love yous" of the Bible?
 What is a covenant?

Promise or agreement (5-10 minutes)

Difference between a contract and covenant

Based on love and respect, not on enforcement

Modern example: marriage, church membership, agreement between friends

This cycle or pattern is repeated all through the Bible.

Adam and Eve, Noah, Abraham and Sarah, David. The whole ebb and flow of the Book of Judges has this rhythm. One good example is Moses (God rescues the people out of Egypt and gives them the 10 commandments, the people make a golden calf, Moses tells them they are wrong, the people repent, God restores them)

Jesus is a great example of someone God sent to remind people they were not on the path with God, that they needed to relate to God in a new way. The difference between Jesus and other prophets is that one could argue that he redefined the human possibilities of relationship.

This pattern is also repeated in many people's lives. (Every person I have talked to about this has agreed, but I hesitate to say that it applies to everyone's life.) We will come back to this idea in the wrap -up.

Bible Scavenger Hunt (10-15 minutes)

See *Activities...* (p. 165)

What is a "testament" anyway?

By the way, the word for "testament" means "witness." It's a legal term and the need for it comes from the Bible. In Deuteronomy, the writer makes sure that people understand the importance of a witness: "One witness is not enough to convict a man accused of any crime or offense he may have committed. A matter must be established by the testimony of two or three witnesses." (Deuteronomy 19:15; the rest of the section talks about the importance of truthful witnesses.) In Matthew, Jesus says that having two or three is important for helping solve problems in churches (Matthew 18:16) and for the minimum number of people for being a church and worshipping together (18:20). We quote this one a lot in the Congregational tradition: "For where two or three come together in my name, there am I with them." So having two testaments is important. We can't do without either!

Finding Your Way Around the Bible (15-20 minutes)

Ask: Was it easy or hard to find the clues in the Bible? Why?

Say: Right now we're going to take a few minutes to learn our way around the Bible better. Would you open up your Bibles to the Table of Contents.

Some things to help your students realize:

- The Bible is a book of books, really an entire library!
- The Bible is divided into two sections: Old Testament & New Testament.

The Old Testament has different kinds of books. (Pass around “Books of the OT” handout): Law, history, wisdom and poetry, prophets.

The New Testament has different kinds of books, too. (Pass around “Books of the NT” handout): Gospels, history, letters, revelation (or apocalypse)

If everyone has study Bibles, look at some of the special features in them: timeline, concordance, subject index, maps, etc. Take a few moments for each of these to show them something from your discussion. (Example: if you talked about the Exodus, show them where that is on the Time Line, show them the map in the back that shows the route of the Exodus, etc.) For the concordance, ask the student(s) to share a passage they remember from the Bible. (Example: “The Lord is my shepherd, I shall want.” Show them how to look that up in the concordance.)

Scripture Races (5-10 minutes)

See *Activities...* (p. 175)

If you use the below passages, you can ask them what place on the Cycle of Covenant they think that passage falls.

Isaiah 55:1-5	“I love you.”
Exodus 14:21	“I love you.”
Luke 23:39-43	People return to God.
1 Samuel 8:5-9	People say, “I love you, but...”
Hosea 6:1-6	“Hey, did you forget? God loves you.”
1 Corinthians 10:29	“Hey, did you forget? God loves you.”
2 Samuel 12:7	People fall away from God.
Revelation 3:20	“I love you.”
Amos 5:10	People fall away from God.
Nehemiah 8:1-3	People return to God.
John 19:30	“I love you.”

What’s interesting about some of these passages (and probably others) is that you could argue effectively it occupies more than one place on the Cycle. So don’t worry if you think a passage falls in a different category.

Wrapping Up: The Cycle in Our Lives (10-15 minutes)

Settle people down from the races.

Ask each person to share one thing s/he learned that was new or cool to them.

Say: We talked about The Covenant Cycle in reference to the Bible and people in the Bible, but it may apply to us too. Would you pull out the sheet “The Cycle

of the Covenant” for me? Take a moment to look at each of the steps there. Where do you see yourself in this cycle?

Discuss this for a few minutes. If some intrepid souls want to share this with you or the group that could be really great. Perhaps share an experience in your life that you think clearly illustrates one of the places in the cycle.

Say: One of the amazing things about this cycle is that every step has something in common. Can you think what it is? (Take answers from the class.) It’s God’s love. God always says, “I love you” to us, no matter what we may do, no matter how far away we may feel from God. God is always thrilled to have us turn back to him and always welcomes us with open arms.

(Pass out the copies of the covenant you have drawn up.)

Say: We are going to have a covenant this year for our class. I want you to take a look at it with me. Is there anything you would add or take away from it?

Discuss this with them.

Say: Like the Covenant Cycle on the sheet, we hope that all year we would be in the “I love you”—you saying and living it to me, me saying and living it with you. There may come times when you are struggling to do everything you want to do for this class. Because we are in this covenant together, you know that I will look out for you, even when you are not fulfilling your part of it. I will remind you of what you promised and do everything I can to help you come back to feeling good about confirmation. You have your part to do too.

Make any additional comments.

The Man Who Tried to Throw Out the OT

Early in the life of the church (ca. 140 AD), a man named Marcion read the Bible. As he read the OT and NT, he started to ask questions about why God seems so different in the OT from the NT. He concluded that they were two different gods! The god of the OT was a god of justice and the Law. The god of the NT was a god of love and forgiveness. So Marcion completely ignored the OT, and opted to get rid of Matthew, Mark, John and a bit of Luke (it was contaminated by the ways of “the old god”), and a few of Paul’s letters (anything that seemed contaminated by the god of the Hebrews. This left him with some of Luke, the Acts of the Apostles, and a few letters (Galatians was one of his favorites). As the early Christians thought about Marcion’s ideas, they became convinced that he was wrong: Jesus was the Messiah foretold by the prophets of the Old Testament. The God of the OT was also a God of love and forgiveness (look at how God freed the Hebrews from slavery in Egypt, think of how many times God accepted the children of Israel back from straying to worship other gods, remember how God made and kept promises to Abraham and David), and the God of the NT was also one of justice (think of Jesus’ words to the Pharisees for example, or elements of John’s vision in Revelation). One God, two testaments. For more information on Marcion, check out one or more of the basic books on church history in the *Annotated Bibliography*, p. 240.

Close in Prayer (5 minutes)

See "Closing Circles" in *Activities...* (p. 166).

Bonus Bible 1: Old Testament 101

Contributor: LYM

See handout titled “Old Testament Books Brief Descriptions” for more details on each book.

I. What is the Bible?

- The word of God
- Ancient historical literature
- Law
- History
- Poetry
- Prophecy
- Truth

Two Parts

Old Testament – 39 books

New Testament – 27 books

What is the Old Testament?

- The revelation of God to the people of Israel, God’s chosen people
- The historical account of Israel’s existence from the Creation to Jesus
- The prophecy of God pertaining to the future of Israel
- Poetry pertaining to God’s revelation to humans
- Laws pertaining to life as one under God’s rule

What is the New Testament?

- The “revelation” of Jesus
- The account of his life, death, and resurrection as it pertains to faith and belief in him
- The accounts of the beginnings of the church and the mission of the Apostles following Jesus’ earthly existence

II. The Old Testament - The Revelation of God

A. Who wrote the Old Testament?

Many authors contributed including Moses, Isaiah and the other prophets, David, Solomon. Check any study Bible for more detail.

B. How was it written?

The ancient stories were passed down through oral tradition until they were finally written down. The histories of the kings, the Psalms, Proverbs, and prophecies may have been written nearer to their creations.

C. Are the stories true?

This is a question all believers must answer for themselves.

III. The Old Testament - Law and History

- A. The Law = first 5 books of the Old Testament = “Pentateuch” or “Torah”

Contains the laws which Jews are expected to follow and live by

What famous passage would you expect to find here?

(The Ten Commandments)

Not all of the Pentateuch is law. It is mostly historical narratives but history that is relevant to the development of Israelite law.

Examples of Law:

Genesis 6:13–14

Exodus 20:1–4

Leviticus 11:1–8

Deuteronomy 5:6–8

- B. History = next 12 books of the Old Testament

If you read them straight through you would read about the history of Israel beginning with the death of Moses through the return of the Israelites from Babylon.

Examples of History:

Judges 16:26–31

1 Samuel 17:31–35

2 Kings 15:1–7

IV. The Old Testament - Poetry (or Writings)

Job, Psalms, Proverbs, Ecclesiastes, Song of Songs

- A. Psalms

1. 150 Psalms

- A book of religious poetry containing poems, hymns, songs
- A book of theology that describes God
- Divided into 5 sections, each section concludes with a doxology

Book I	Psalms 1–41	Doxology:	Psalm 41:13
Book II	Psalms 42–72		Psalm 72:18–19
Book III	Psalms 73–89		Psalm 89:52
Book IV	Psalms 90–106		Psalm 106:48
Book V	Psalms 107–150		Psalm 150 (whole psalm)

2. Psalms of David

- Associated with King David’s name
- 72 Psalms total (Psalms 3–41, 51–72, 108–110, 138–145)

3. Types of Psalms (and examples of each)

- a) Lament
- b) Communal (Ps. 79)
- c) Individual (Ps. 102)
- d) Thanksgiving Song (Ps. 107)
- e) Affirmation of Faith (Ps. 23)
- f) Hymn (Ps. 100)

- g) Royal Psalm (Messianic Psalm) (Ps. 2, 89)
- h) Wisdom Psalm (Ps. 1, 49)
- i) Liturgy (more than one voice or sets of voices) (Ps. 91)

Creative idea for students

After looking at several Psalms and learning about the different types of Psalms, have students each write their own Psalm, or poem, to God. Collect and print them for the entire class to see. Maybe even share them with the congregation in worship or newsletters.

B. Wisdom Books

- Proverbs, Job, Ecclesiastes, and wisdom Psalms (37,49,112,127,128)
- God gives wisdom. Read Proverbs 2:6
- The wisdom of Proverbs is different from the wisdom of Job or Ecclesiastes

"Proverbs seems to say, 'Here are the rules for life, try them and find they work.' Job and Ecclesiastes say, 'we did and they don't.'" —David A. Hubbard

1. Proverbs

- Provides models, examples and standards to compare with your life.
- Three types of literary forms in Proverbs
 - Sentence literature – Proverbs 25–29
 - Teaching discourses – Proverbs 22:17–24:22
 - Poems and Numerical sayings – Proverbs 1:20–33; 6:16–19

2. Job

- Deals with innocent suffering and how to handle it
- The secret found in the book of Job is that only God has wisdom (ch.28) and the closest humans can get to it is to fear God and live accordingly.

3. Ecclesiastes — Concludes that:

- Humans cannot find what is good for them to do. (7:1–8:17)
- People do not know what will come after them. (9:1–11:6)
- God is inscrutable. Life is unpredictable. (8:17; 8:14)

4. Song of Songs (or Song of Solomon)

- A series of love songs
- It affirms human sexuality as something from God
- Wisdom literature speaks about sex and right and wrong sexuality. This book is a divine message about human sexuality.

V. The Old Testament - Prophets (17 Books total)

Major Prophets – *Isaiah, Jeremiah, Lamentations, Ezekiel, Daniel*

Minor Prophets – *Hosea, Joel, Amos, Obadiah, Jonah, Micah, Nahum, Habakkuk, Zephaniah, Haggai, Zechariah, Malachi*

A. The Prophets

What is a prophet?

- Someone who speaks for God
- Someone who foretells or predicts the future

Look at these Scriptures for descriptions of a “false prophet.”

Jeremiah 28

Micah 3:5

Isaiah 9:14–15

What is prophecy?

- Foretelling, prediction, words spoken by individuals regarding the future.
- Each prophet was considered to be speaking for God. Prophetic accounts begin with the prophet saying, “Thus says the Lord” or “The word of the Lord came to me.”
- Most of the prophets were speaking to a particular people in a particular time, but some spoke of the distant future.
- Prophets speak of things to happen “around the corner,” or very soon, but God’s fulfillment can happen centuries later. (e.g. Micah 3:12 says that Jerusalem will fall, even though it didn’t happen for two centuries.)

B. Isaiah

- Really has three different parts
- Spoken to three different audiences

<u>Passage</u>	<u>Theme</u>	<u>Audience</u>
Isaiah 1–39	Foretells of Judgment	Pre-Exilic
Isaiah 40–55	Foretells of Salvation after the judgment	Exilic
Isaiah 56–66	Salvation begins but more judgment could come	Post-Exilic

- “Messianic” prophecies foretell of the coming Messiah or Christ.

Isaiah 7:14–17

Isaiah 9:2–7

Isaiah 53

These messianic prophecies take on different meanings depending on whether the reader is looking forward with Isaiah or backwards from the New Testament

C. Amos

- Structure of Amos

- 1:1 Heading

- 1:2 Motto/slogan for the whole book
Message of Judgment

- 1:3–2:16 The Nations on Trial

- 3:1–5:17 Oracles

- “Hear this word...” (3:1; 4:1; 5:1)

- 7:1–9:10 Nine Visions and Oracles

- 7:10–16 Secret of the whole book

- 7:17–9:9 Confrontation between Amos and Amaziah: Amos is banished yet at the same time he is the winner of the confrontation.

- 9:11–15 Renewal Promised

- Message of Salvation (a happy ending)

- The message is that judgment is not the last word; salvation and blessing will follow.

- Key words in Amos are Justice and Righteousness (5:4–7; 5:24; 6:12)
What is Justice?

- Justice grounds righteousness in the Law and a fair legal system.

- What is Righteousness?

- Righteousness is fair play and right dealings.

D. Prophets and the New Testament

- Are the Old Testament prophecies fulfilled in the New Testament?
- According to *Bruce & Stan's Guide to God*, approximately 2000 of the 2500 prophecies, which appear in the Bible, have been fulfilled without errors (including those regarding the messiah). The remaining 500 concern events that have not yet occurred.
- *Bruce & Stan's Guide to the Bible* (p. 215–216) lists these seven prophecies specifically about Christ.
 1. He will be born in the village of Bethlehem (Micah 5:2).
 2. He will be born to a virgin (Isaiah 7:14).
 3. He will triumphantly enter the city of Jerusalem (Zechariah 9:9).
 4. He will be rejected by His own people (Isaiah 53:1–3).
 5. He will be tried in court and found guilty (Isaiah 53:8).
 6. He will be beaten and spit upon (Isaiah 50:6).
 7. He will die as a sacrifice for man's sins (Isaiah 53:5–12).

Bonus Bible 2: New Testament

Contributor: DLG

While there are some interesting things to learn about the New Testament, part of what makes the New Testament exciting and interesting is its context. This session helps students get a feel for what it was like to be in the first century, and also to think about the commonalities between the first century and the 21st century.

Here are some ways in which you can prepare for this session:

- Why did you decide to become a follower of God/ disciple of Christ?
- What are the ways in which God has been Good News in your life?
- In a study Bible, read the introduction to the book of Acts. Did the Christian movement stay in one place? If not, what direction(s) did it move? How long did it take for the message to reach Rome, the heart of the Roman Empire?
- Read the introduction to one of the gospels. Why are there four gospels? When were they written? Why were they written so long after Jesus died and rose again?
- Read through “The Five Factors That Spread Christianity” below. Does it seem that God set up the first disciples for success?
- Did you know that the four gospels were some of the first works published in a new form? Up to the first century, almost all writing was done on scrolls. In the first century AD, people started writing in books. What does that say about the Christian faith seeking new forms of expression?
- Look again at “The Five Factors.” Are there similar factors at work in our society? How has God “set us up” for success as spreaders of the Word?

Time Allotted: 120 minutes

Objectives: Help students think about how Jesus and his way was and is “Good News.”

Help students consider how Christianity might use the tools and factors of today to communicate the “Good News.”

Outline of the Meeting

Opening
 Best News
 Cure for Cancer Simulation
 Gospel as “Good News”
 The Five Factors That Spread Christianity
 Application: What About Now?
 Wrap Up Theme
 Closing Circle

Opening

Rowdy singing (5–10 minutes)
Pharoah Pharoah
That's Why We Praise Him
Seize the Day
Prayer

Best News (2-5 minutes)

Ask the question: What's the best news you ever received?

Cure for Cancer Simulation (20-30 minutes)

See *Activities...*(p. 168)

Gospel as "Good News" (5 minutes)

Say: The people of the early church believed they had found the cure for death! Jesus had risen from the grave and was coming back any time. It's one of the reasons the gospel writers did not write anything down for many years after Jesus' death and resurrection...they didn't think writing was worth their time!

The Five Factors That Spread Christianity (5 minutes)

1. Conquest and Rule of Alexander the Great.
Greek colonies are scattered all over the Asia Minor and the Middle East. Greek language and culture become common throughout the whole area.
2. The *Pax Romana* (The Roman Peace)
Declared by Caesar Augustus in 27 BC, the Pax Romana held until 180 AD, under the Emperor Marcus Aurelius. This peaceful period was marked by general lawfulness and order which meant travel was safer. Safety and peace mean that many people were having their basic needs met and could turn their thoughts to things other than simple survival. The Roman army was not really challenged by outside threats during this period.
3. Roads
The Romans were great builders. Wherever they went, they built things to last. They were especially fond of roads. To this day, if you know where to look, you can find old Roman roads. The Roman road system was their low-tech version of the internet: they connected everywhere with roads, making travel, commerce and information exchange easier and faster.
4. Diaspora
During the Exile (586–510 BC), Jews developed the idea of worshipping in synagogues because they had no access to the Temple in Jerusalem. Even when the Exile was over, the Jews spread out across the Middle East, Asia Minor, Greece and eventually the entire Roman Empire. Wherever they could get ten Jews together, a synagogue would form. Synagogues were a key place

for introducing the Gospel to others because they already understood the idea of Messiah and knew the Old Testament prophecies.

5. Tremendous religious interest

The first two centuries after Jesus birth were a tremendously exciting time spiritually. People were open to many different types of religion. They liked to practice their “religion”—make sacrifices, follow rituals, etc. This basic curiosity meant people wanted to understand what the early Christians knew about this guy, Jesus.

Application: What About Now? (5-15 minutes)

Small group work

Ask: What are the exciting things about our time? How could they be used to help spread God’s caring and message of caring?

Have small groups develop skit for how they might be used

Small groups present skits (5-10 minutes)

Wrap Up Theme (5 minutes)

Summarize the meeting, pointing out the exciting ways in which God is at work through people today. Conclude by challenging the students: “God doesn’t have any grandchildren. Every generation must figure out how to communicate the Good News of Jesus to its generation. What part will you play in translating God’s love so that your peers can hear it?”

Close with Singing and Prayer (5 minutes)

Bonus Bible 3: New Testament 101

Contributor: LYM

I. What is the New Testament?

- The “revelation” of Jesus
- The account of his life, death and resurrection as it pertains to faith and belief in him
- The accounts of the beginnings of the church and the mission of the Apostles following Jesus’ earthly existence

II. The New Testament

A. How is the New Testament organized?

(See “New Testament Books” handout)

- 27 books in the New Testament
- 4 sections
- Gospels Matthew, Mark, Luke John
- History Acts (or Acts of the Apostles)
- Epistles Romans through Jude
- Apocalyptic Revelation

B. Who wrote the New Testament?

The Gospel writers: Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John (Luke also wrote Acts).
The Epistle writers: Paul, James, Peter, John, and Jude

C. How was it written?

Most of the epistles (letters) were the first books written. They were written to established churches or individuals and then probably passed on to other Christians to read. The Gospels and Acts were written later (between 30 and 60 years after Jesus’ resurrection) as a way to record the stories about Jesus’ life and the early church.

III. The Gospels

A. What is a Gospel?

What does the word “gospel” mean?

“Good News”

What type of literature are the Gospels?

Is it history? *No*

Is it biography? *No*

Is it a letter? *No*

Is it prophecy? *No*

- ❖ It is bits and pieces of Jesus’ life, all of which pertain to having faith and believing in Jesus as the savior of the world. So, the Gospel is the “Good News” of Jesus Christ. The Gospels are eyewitness accounts that tell the story of the good news of Christ’s life, death, and resurrection.

(Read John 20:30–31)

B. Why were the Gospels written?

After Jesus' resurrection and ascension, the people thought he would return soon, as he said he would. But, as time passed, the people who had seen Jesus living began to die off. In order to preserve the messages of Jesus for future generations, the Gospels were written

C. Are all four Gospels alike?

- Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John are alike in that they each tell of Jesus' life, ministry, death and resurrection. They are four accounts about the same thing.
- They are different in that some have certain accounts while others do not. Some stories are found to be almost exactly the same in two or more of the Gospels.

Note for teachers: You may want to obtain a copy of *Gospel Parallels* or a *Synopsis of the Four Gospels* and photocopy a few pages for the students to see. See *Annotated Bibliography*, p. 237.)

Some passages to highlight:

- The Baptism of Jesus, which is recounted in all four gospels
- Serving Two Masters, found nearly word-for-word in Matthew & Luke
- The healing of the Demoniac in the Synagogue, found in Mark and Luke
- The Cleansing of the Leper, which is found in Matthew, Mark, and Luke

D. Description of each Gospel

(See *Bruce & Stan's Guide to the Bible*, chapter 8, for more detail. For more information about *Bruce & Stan's Guide to the Bible*, see the *Annotated Bibliography*, p. 238.)

1. Matthew's Gospel: *Jesus the Messiah*

- Attributed to one of the Apostles, Matthew, a Jewish tax collector.
- Written to the Jewish community to prove that Jesus was the Messiah.
- Written about A.D. 60–80.
- It is the first Gospel in the New Testament because for many years it was believed to be the first one written. Also, this gospel begins with a direct connection to the Old Testament with the genealogy of Jesus.

2. Mark's Gospel: *Jesus the Servant*

- Written by Mark (or John Mark), who was not an Apostle of Jesus, but was a close friend of Peter.
- Written to Romans who were not interested in the Old Testament prophecies. Mark's Gospel is the shortest of the four, beginning with Jesus' baptism, not his birth.
- Written about A.D. 50–70, and is believed to be the first Gospel written.
- Mark presents Jesus as a servant: as God in the Person of Jesus Christ, serving humankind by being a sacrifice for sin. Mark indicates that believers must also pay the price of servanthood if they want to be followers of Jesus.

3. Luke's Gospel: *Jesus the Son of Man*

- Written by Luke, who was not an Apostle but was a physician and a student and comrade of Paul.
 - Written to the Gentiles (non-Jewish community)
 - Written about A.D. 60s–70s.
 - Luke emphasizes the human side of Christ’s nature, beginning with the well-known birth narratives. When Luke refers to Jesus as “the Son of Man”, it means that Jesus was human just like us. Luke further shows Jesus caring for humanity in the stories of Him spending time with individuals, particularly the outcasts of society. Jesus is also portrayed as the hope of humanity, come to seek and save the lost.
4. John’s Gospel: *Jesus the Son of God*
- Written by the Apostle John, one Jesus’ closest followers. John refers to himself as “the disciple whom Jesus loved.”
 - Written about A.D. 80–90, the last Gospel written.
 - John’s Gospel is very different from the other three. It is less concerned with historical detail and more concerned with simply revealing Jesus as the Christ. John selected seven events and seven sayings to prove that Jesus is God. (*Seven Signs...*)

E. The Synoptic Gospels

1. What does “synoptic” mean?

The synoptic Gospels are Matthew, Mark, and Luke. The word, “synoptic,” means “with one eye.”

These three Gospels are very much related to each other. Biblical scholars believe that the authors of Matthew and Luke already had Mark’s Gospel to refer to when they wrote their own. Furthermore, because there are passages found in Matthew and Luke, but not in Mark, scholars believe there may have been another document, which they have named “Quelle” (meaning “source”), that provided Matthew and Luke with some accounts.

2. How much are the Synoptic Gospels related?

Mark has **661** verses.

Matthew contains **606** of Mark’s verses.

Luke contains **350** of Mark’s verses.

The language (words) in these verses correspond with each other

73% in the 606 verses in Matthew

66% in the 350 verses in Luke

IV. The Acts of the Apostles

Who wrote the book of Acts?

Luke wrote the book of Acts to a Greek official. He states in Acts 1:1

In my former book, Theophilus, I wrote about all that Jesus began to do and to teach until the day he was taken up to heaven, after giving instructions through the Holy Spirit to the apostles he had chosen.

Acts is the second half of Luke's Gospel.

A. The Structure of Acts

The book of Acts tells the story of how the Christian church spread from Jerusalem to Rome. The church spread in a series of steps.

Acts 1:1–6:7	The Jerusalem Church
Acts 6:8–9:31	The Church in the rest of Palestine
Acts 9:32–12:24	The Church moves into Antioch of Syria
Acts 12:25–16:5	The Church moves into Asia Minor
Acts 16:6–19:20	The Church moves into Europe
Acts 19:21–28:30	The Church moves into Rome and beyond

B. The Content of Acts

The book of Acts contains accounts of adventures of the Apostles and it shows how the church is not just for the Jews but for the whole world. It is an amazing story of power and miracles and the explosive growth of Christianity. Jesus had given his followers the **Mission** to “go into all the world” and then provided the **Means** “by the power of the Holy Spirit” to proclaim the **Message** “that anyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved.”

Examples of accounts in Acts:

Pentecost – Acts 2

- The “birthday” of the Christian Church
- The reversal of the Tower of Babylon (everyone can now hear and understand the mighty deeds of God)

Conversion of Paul – Acts 9

- A sovereign act of God's grace by God's initiative
- Comparable to the calls of the Old Testament prophets

Cornelius – Acts 10

- Conversion of a Gentile
- Peter's sermon in Acts 10:34–43 shows that the good news is for everyone

V. The New Testament Epistles

A. What is an epistle?

An epistle is a **letter**. The New Testament epistles are personal letters written to churches and individuals in cities throughout the Mediterranean region, giving further instruction about God and godly living.

B. Who wrote the Epistles?

Paul wrote 13 of the 21 epistles. Seven others epistles are named after the authors: James, Peter, John, and Jude. Hebrews is the only epistle written by an unknown author.

C. Why were the Epistles written?

Paul and the other writers wrote about Christian theory (i.e., how faith in Jesus frees you from sin), as well as the practical reality of being a Christian (i.e., how the Holy Spirit can transform believers). *Bruce & Stan's Guide to the Bible* (ch.10) lists the "Top Six Epistle Topics":

1. How To Be A Christian
2. If You Wanna Live Right, You Gotta Think Right
3. You Can Experience Inner Peace
4. Secrets To Lasting Friendships
5. All In The Family
6. How To Build A Church

D. The Apostle Paul

- Saul of Tarsus was a Pharisee during Jesus' time
- A great persecutor of the early church – Acts 8:1–3
- Saul was converted on the Road to Damascus – Acts 9
- Changed his name to Paul
- After his conversion, Paul began to travel around the Roman Empire, preaching and starting churches
- Paul preached about Jesus to Christians and non-Christians – Acts 13:13–17
- While traveling, Paul also wrote letters to the churches he had visited.
- Paul wrote most of the Epistles

E. The Pauline Epistles

Fall into four categories according to when they were written and their content:

1. 1 and 2 Thessalonians deal with **Eschatology** (end times)
 - Written in early A.D. 50s
2. 1 and 2 Corinthians, Galatians, and Romans deal with **Soteriology** (salvation)
 - Written in A.D. 53–57
3. Ephesians, Colossians, Philippians, and Philemon deal with **Christology** (who Christ is)
 - Written in A.D. 58–60

- Also known as the “Prison Epistles” because they were written while Paul was in prison
- 4. 1 and 2 Timothy, and Titus deal with **Ecclesiology** (church order)
 - Written in A.D. 60s
 - Also known as the “Pastoral Letters” because they address issues of church leadership and conduct

F. The Other Epistles

Hebrews – Written to Jewish Christians, Hebrews is like a Bible within the Bible. It covers most of the OT’s major themes and people.

James – James, the brother of Jesus, wrote this letter to emphasize that real faith produced good deeds. James describes the following:

- How to get wisdom (1:5–8)
- How to control what you say (3:1–12)
- How to keep from judging others (4:11,12)
- How to keep money in perspective (5:1–6)

1 and 2 Peter – The Apostle Peter wrote these two letters to Jewish Christians who were being persecuted for their faith. Peter points out that Christ in your life can give you the power to endure tough times.

1, 2, and 3 John – The Apostle John, who called himself “the disciple Jesus loved,” wrote more about Christians loving God and loving each other.

Jude – Another brother of Jesus, Jude wrote this letter to Jewish Christians to motivate them to defend the truth of the Christian faith against false teachings.

VI. The Revelation

Who wrote the Revelation?

The Apostle John wrote the Revelation. (Revelation 1:1–3)

Written about A.D. 95, making it the last New Testament book written.

Is it an Epistle?

Yes, it is an epistle in that it was written to seven churches. (Revelation 1:4)

Is it a prophecy?

Yes!

Revelation 1:1–3:22 – Things that are now happening

- Series of letters to seven churches in Asia Minor.

Revelation 4:1–22:21 – Things that will happen later

- Series of dramatic visions of the end of times.

What is an apocalypse?

- “Apocalypse” means revelation or uncovering or unveiling
- Claims to be a revelation of hidden knowledge
- It takes the form of dreams, journeys, visions
- Uses much symbolism (animals, colors, numbers)

Bonus Bible 4: Biblical Ideas of Sin/Atonement/Forgiveness/Love

The concepts of sin, atonement, forgiveness and love are so intertwined in the Bible (both Old and New Testaments) that trying to extract one part seems impossible. This lesson takes these difficult, wonderful and critical issues head on. While only 75–80 minutes worth of lesson is outlined, the discussions this topic will spark will almost certainly be the best part. Feel free to go where that discussion goes, but keep a steady eye on the clock so that you can get to the best parts!

The most important bits of this lesson are God’s love that comes to us first, before we ask for it and before we could earn it. God begins the relationship with blessing. By the way, this is true even in the Old Testament with the Ten Commandments. When we read the Ten Commandments, we normally start with Exodus 20:3. Take a look at the verse right before it: “I am the Lord your God, who brought you out of Egypt, out of the land of slavery.” God acted first, without any strings attached. Thus, keeping the Ten Commandments is *not* about keeping rules for the sake of the rules, but choosing to live one’s life within their boundaries because of the greatness and goodness of God! Though the teens (and we ourselves!) tend to focus on the negative things, make sure you give great importance to the ending sessions of this lesson. Indeed, if you need to rush a bit, rush the early sections *not* the later ones.

Here are some ways you can prepare yourself for the session:

- Look over the lesson. Can you think of better examples than the ones used here? Ask a thoughtful young person to help you come up with examples that make sense to them.
- Look up all of the Bible passages in this lesson. Spend some time with each of them. Consider discussing them with your pastor to gain her/his insights into these challenging and meaty topics.
- What are your own experiences with being “disoriented” from God? Can you name one or more times/ways you “missed the mark?” Can you name one or more times/ways in which you defied God outright?
- Are you “missing the mark” or rebelling against God right now? How? Is this something you want to continue? Consider talking with a trusted Christian friend about these areas of your life and what’s next for you.
- Have you ever felt an overwhelming sense of God’s love for you? When?
- Would you say you have experienced grace, “undeserved blessing,” from God? When and how would you describe that experience? Did anything about you change because of that experience?

Time Allotted: 120 minutes

Objectives: Help students think about spiritual realities and principles.
Help students understand the idea of atonement

Help students catch a glimpse of the great love and forgiveness that God desires to share with us.

Outline of the Meeting

Opening
House-Cleaning
Target Practice
Two Kinds of Sin
Spiritual Physics
Atonement
Forgiveness
Wrap-Up
Closing Circle

Preparation

Look the lesson over, especially the scripture.
Gather paper plates or paper, and markers.
Have a stack of newspapers from that day or that week.

Target Practice Activity (5 minutes)

See *Activities...*, "Target Practice," p. 176. Do the "Airplane Variation."
Discuss: What was easier when you were trying to hit the target: when you were facing it or when you had your back to it? Is it easier to follow God when we are tuned into God or when we are not?

Two Kinds of Sin (5 minutes)

The Old Testament talks about two different kinds of sin: Missing the Mark and Defiance. Both of them describe someone being "dis-oriented" from God. "Missing the Mark" is part of being human. We just aren't perfect in either our aiming for God or in our carrying out what we know God wants. Everyone "misses the mark" at one time or another. "Defiance" is refusing to try, or willful disobedience. Sometimes we know something is wrong and we do it anyway. That's defiance.

Spiritual Physics (5-10 minutes)

God made the universe and designed it to run in particular ways. So the universe runs by God's laws. When we go against those laws, someone pays the price.

If I were to climb the steeple and step off, what will happen? So I can defy the law of gravity, but I will still get hurt, perhaps seriously.

In the same way, when someone goes against God's laws, someone, somewhere pays the price.

If you throw a pebble in a pond, what happens? Can you stop the ripples from going out? Is there a way you can throw the pebble without getting ripples? Doing something against God's laws is like throwing a pebble into the pond of life. The ripples are like the consequences from it.

Examples (these are for illustration purposes only; choose something that is in current events that the teens all know about)

- Exxon Valdez wrecking and spilling oil into pristine Alaskan waters. The sins were the captain's (he was drunk and away from his post). The ripples included affecting the environment and the towns around it, the people who fished the area (and would not be able to do so for a time).
- President Clinton's affair with Monica Lewinsky. Both Clinton and Lewinsky were doing things they knew were wrong. But the consequences affected the people around them and eventually touched everyone in the country.

The Flip-Side Fails the Smell Test

Important Caveat: The converse of this law—if something bad happens to someone, then they must have done something wrong—is **not** true! Jesus himself was asked a question about this (Luke 13:1). Jesus' answer is instructive here:

"Do you think that these Galileans were worse sinners than all the other Galileans because they suffered this way? I tell you, no! But unless you repent, you too will all perish. Or those eighteen who died when the tower in Siloam fell on them—do you think they were more guilty than all the others living in Jerusalem? I tell you, no! But unless you repent, you too will all perish."

To understand what Jesus is after here, the meaning of "repentance" is critically important. The Greek word for "repent" is *metanoia* (meh•tah•noy' ah), and it means literally, "u-turn" or "turn around." Jesus, then, is less concerned with asking "why" (looking backward for understanding) as he is concerned with asking "what about you" and "what's next" (looking inward and looking forward). Jesus is quite clear that just because bad things happen to someone doesn't mean that person is a bad person. Instead Jesus turns the question back on the questioners, in effect asking, "What about you? Is your life in order? Would God be happy with everything you are doing?" Jesus' approach reminds us that we are all equal before God and restores our perspective.

Spiritual Law in Real Life (5-15 minutes)

Divide the confirmands into small groups (with a small group just do this together). Hand out newspapers and ask students to look for examples of "stones" (sins or things that are wrong) and "ripples" (consequences of things

being wrong). Have students present what they found, whether it is a “stone” or a “ripple,” and why.

Atonement (Romans 3:21-26) (5-10 minutes)

Atonement is literally, “at-one-ment” a way of “re-orienting” us to God, restoring the relationship, and makes being “at one” with God possible. How does atonement work in the Bible?

Have one group of students look up “atonement” in a concordance to find passages in the Old Testament. Talk about how the sacrificial system was designed to be an outward way to prove you were sincere and to remember not to do it again. Point out that, in practice, some people began to think that you could buy forgiveness without wanting to be different. (“If I make the sacrifice, then I’m OK. Never mind that I have no intention of being different.”) What the Old Testament approach makes very clear is that when someone does something against one of God’s spiritual laws, someone or something has to pay a price, consequences that often meant bloodshed.

Have another group of students look up “atonement” in a concordance to find passages in the New Testament. Talk about how Jesus made “atonement” an inward thing (see for example, the woman caught in adultery, John 7:53–8:11) Read Romans 3:21–26. How are we made “right with God?” We are “justified freely by [God’s] grace” (verse 24) and know that a right relationship with God “comes through faith in Jesus Christ to all who believe.” (verse 22) Or as many people have put it, we are justified *by grace through faith*.

What's with all this righteousness stuff?

“Righteous” is the English word most often used to describe someone or something that is in a “right relationship with God.” S/he is “in synch with” or in tune with God and God’s will, and acts accordingly. “Righteousness,” then, is *being* in right relationship with God. Another word we see in Romans 3:21–26 is “justified.” Though in English “righteous” and “justify” look different, in Greek they are clearly related which reminds us that “justify” means “make right with God.” Even today, we talk about “justifying the margins” of a document, and by that mean “making the margins straight and right.”

So what about Jesus’ sacrifice?

- God sent Jesus, not because we were good or perfect, but because we needed Jesus’ help...and because God loved us.
- It’s “grace” because it is an “undeserved blessing from God.” That is, it came as a gift, something we have not earned and never can.

- Jesus linked repentance and faith together. Being right with God happens on the inside. (Our gratitude to God is what leads us to support one another and do good.)
- Jesus is the one who paid the price.
- His atonement is once and for all. (2 Corinthians 5:14, 18–19)

Forgiveness (5-10 minutes)

Can you ever do something so wrong that God can't forgive you?

- A. God's promise of forgiveness (1 John 1:8–9)
- B. Do we have to be good in order to get forgiveness?
 - No, "while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us." (Romans 5:8)
 - But we do have to be sincere — in other words, don't expect forgiveness if you 1) are not truly sorry for what you have done and 2) intend to commit the same sin again
 - Truly wanting to be different is key (check out Psalm 51, esp. v. 17)
- C. Turns us back toward God or closes the distance between us and God
- D. Forgiveness is complete and total (2 Corinthians 5:14–21)
- E. Removes need for guilt
- F. Does not take away physical/emotional consequences, but does remove the spiritual problems (Example: If you steal something from someone, you might still face punishment in the courts, but you would be right with God, who would guide you and strengthen you through the case.)

Wrap-Up: Love (5 minutes)

Take questions.

What is sacrificial love? Can anyone give an example of that kind of love? Are all the best kinds of love sacrificial, that is, are they marked by someone's willingness to put someone else's needs before their own?

Close in prayer (5 minutes)

See "Closing Circles" in *Activities...* (p. 166).

Bonus Bible 5:

How Did It All Begin? How Is the Universe Supposed to Be?

Contributor: DLG

These are some of the essential questions for all humanity in every time. The Bible offers some answers to this, but many of the Bible's answers spark even more questions that teens are asking. This study provides a springboard for frank discussion about a number of these basic questions. This study was also designed to be led by a mentor or parent with one or more teens in the group. No previous experience with Bible studies is necessary.

Mentor's Notes

Is the Creation in Genesis historically accurate?

Three prevailing views exist, each based on a particular view of how and how much we should trust what the Bible says.

View #1: The Bible is inerrant and the only authority for life.

The Bible is 100% factually and historically correct and without mistake in every detail. People who support this view will generally look to the Bible as the basis for all truth. All actions must find a basis in the Bible.

View #2: The Bible is inspired, authoritative and essentially true.

The Bible communicates the essential truths of reality, but may or may not be correct in every detail. People who support this view will not generally be surprised when historical fact supports the Bible's recording of an event, but will not be devastated if it does not.

View #3: The Bible is a powerful source for moral and spiritual illumination.

The Bible is one of the great works of spiritual literature. It records many truths that can aid people in their spiritual journeys. People who support this view will generally give the Bible very little historical weight and may consider other spiritual works to be on a par with the Bible.

Here is how each of these groups might view the Genesis account of Creation:

View #1: Inerrancy — Might say: "Of course the Creation Account is true! It's in the Bible, isn't it? These chapters define human existence." People with this view generally do not support evolutionary theory and are generally able to establish a date for when the universe was created by working backward through the Bible's historical record. (See "What Is Original Sin?" below.)

View #2: Essentially True — Might say: "God created the universe in a fashion very similar in outline to the Genesis account of Creation. We don't know how long the days were—they are after all, God's days, not human ones—but the order is in line with what scientists tell us about the beginnings of the

universe." People with this view are likely to not have problems with the evolutionary theory.

View #3: Illuminating — Might say: "God created the universe, but the Genesis account of Creation does not seem to agree with the body of scientific fact. It does, however, accurately describe the way things are meant to be between people, God and the universe." People with this view might believe God created the universe, but support evolutionary theory and the scientific account of creation as a way God worked.

None of these views works perfectly in all respects—all of them have valid support and supporters—but the author will proceed from the "essentially true" perspective.

Are there two accounts of Creation?

Really, there are! The first is related in Genesis Chapter 1–2:3. The second is related in Genesis Chapter 2:4–25.

What's the difference between the two different accounts?

1. Extremely ordered. Repetitious and rhythmic. More cosmic in scope. God pronounces Creation "good." Humans are made in the image of God. The Creation stories of many other ancient Middle Eastern cultures are very similar.
2. More earthy, emotional and relational. Focuses on humanity and its relationship with God. Explains more of where Eden might have been and who and what Adam and Eve are meant to be to each other and to God. Usually coupled with Chapter 3 and called "The Creation and Fall." Humanity may have been created good, but quickly succumbed to temptation.

Were Adam and Eve real people?

That depends on your point of view. See "Is the Creation in Genesis historically accurate?" above.

Inerrancy: Yes. Absolutely.

Essentially True and Morally Illuminating: Anything from maybe (but who knows) to probably not.

Is "sin" an important concept for today's young people? Why?

Yes. "Sin" accurately reflects what is happening on the inside of people and throughout society at the deepest levels. Teens (and adults!) often feel a sense of "disconnect" between what they know is right and what they actually do. They generally understand that it affects them deep down. Without the idea of sin, Jesus' death and resurrection have limited meaning. Put another way, without sin, what does Jesus have to save us from?

What is the idea of original sin?

If you haven't read it already, check out the discussion under "Is the Creation in Genesis historically accurate?" above.

View #1: Inerrancy — Adam and Eve's sin permanently contaminated humanity. Every child is born tainted by their failure. Their sin is called, "original," not only because it was the first one, but because we have inherited and perpetuate it in our sins. Only God can make things right.

View #2: Essentially True — Adam and Eve's sin demonstrates the inherent flaw in humanity. Humans cannot achieve salvation, peace and fulfillment

on their own, and cannot mend this flaw without God's intervention.

"Original sin" means that human nature is flawed and if left to itself, will continually repeat itself. Only God can make things right.

View #3: Illuminating — Don't believe in "original sin." Humans were created good and generally try to do what is right, albeit with mixed success.

People can decide to good or evil.

Where does "original sin" come from?

The term, "original sin," does not appear in the Bible. Original sin does not seem to be present in its full-blown, traditional sense (as the inerrancy supporters reflect it today) in earliest Christianity. Though we have some inklings of it as early as the late 100s, not until St. Augustine (mid-300s) do we have it fully laid out. (The idea of original sin has drastically affected how people have viewed baptism and confirmation. See *Appendix A: Beyond Survival*, p. 261)

Top Three Ideas for This Lesson:

1. Goodness of God's design. God made the universe and "it was very good." God intends good for us and the universe. Indeed, we are made in the "image of God." Any evil that is in the world comes from a source other than God.
2. The nature of sin. Not a popular word these days. What is it?
 - a. separation or alienation of people from God.
 - b. disorientation from God, i.e., sin turns us away from God.
 - c. "dis-ease," i.e., sin makes us uncomfortable in God's presence.
3. God's love is stronger than sin. None of us can do anything so bad that God could not forgive us for it. Wow! What a great promise! Given the covenant God made with Adam and Eve (Gen. 2:16), God could have physically killed Adam and Eve for breaking the covenant. God chose not to do so, giving Adam and Eve the opportunity to continue in relationship with God. Adam and Eve still had to face the consequences of their sin, but they still had the sense that God was with them.

Overall Meeting Plan

Gathering and social time	15 minutes
Introductory activity/discussion	5–10 minutes
Passage	10 minutes
Study	15 minutes
Application	15 minutes
Prayer Time	15 minutes

Introductory Activities (5-10 minutes)

Option 1 — For any size group.

See *Activities...*, "Target Practice," p. 176. Do the "Airplane Variation."

Discuss: What was easier when you were trying to hit the target, when you were facing it or when you had your back to it? Is it easier to follow God when we are tuned into God or when we are not? Would you say our world is more or less tuned into God? Why?

Say: Today we're going to learn about a time when the whole world was tuned into God and what that was like.

Option 2 — For any size group.

Do you have a pond, large puddle or other small body of water near by where the water gets still enough that you can see ripples? Take the teens to it. And do the study there. When discussing how our mistakes have a ripple effect in the world, demonstrate by tossing something into the pool.

Say: Whenever we do something—good or bad—it affects other people which affects other people which affects other people and so on. Tonight we are going to learn about how what the world is supposed to be like.

Passage

Divide the group into two parts, each to read and discuss one of the following passages, followed by a few questions.

Genesis 1:1–2:3 — According to this passage, how did the universe begin? What does God think about what was created? What role do people play in creation?

Genesis 2:4–25 — According to this passage, how did the universe begin? What does God think about what was created? What role do people play in creation?

Study

Gather small groups back together. Have small groups report on their discussions.

Read Genesis 3.

From what kind of tree did God *not* want Adam and Eve to eat?

What did the serpent suggest would happen if they did eat from that tree?

In what ways was the serpent right? In what ways was the serpent mistaken?

Why do you think Adam and Eve ate the fruit?

What happened afterward?

Was God a God of Justice before they ate the fruit? How about after? Why do you think that?

Was God a God of Love before they ate the fruit? How about after? Why do you think that?

Application

What's one thing you've done that was really goofy or embarrassing?

Did you mean to do it, or did it just seem to happen?

Have you ever done something that you knew you were not supposed to do?

How did you feel about it? What did you do afterward?

Has someone ever done something that really ticked you off or bothered you?

What did you do about it?

What would the world be like if no one could do anything wrong?

What's one thing you do that you think is in tune with God and God's plan?

Prayer Time

See "Closing Circles" in *Activities...* (p. 166).

For more on this topic:

Kind of Interested?

Talk to some people you know well about the ideas of sin and original sin.

You can try questions like these:

- Have you ever done something you knew wasn't right before you did it...and did it anyway?
- Why do you think you did it anyway?
- How did you deal with the situation afterward?

Look up "original sin" in an encyclopedia.

Really Interested? Check out these resources.

Interpreter's Dictionary of the Bible.

Matthew Fox. *Original Blessing.*

Linwood Urban. *A Short History of Christian Thought.*

Bonus Bible 6: Who Were They? The Patriarchs...and Matriarchs Too!

Contributor: DLG

This lesson is a good example of active learning applied to two characters, rather than a single passage.* This study was also designed to be led by a mentor or parent with one or more teens in the group. No previous experience with leading Bible studies is necessary.

Outline of the Meeting

Introductory activity/discussion	5–10 minutes
Gathering and social time	15 minutes
Passage	10 minutes
Study	15 minutes
Application	15 minutes
Prayer Time	15 minutes

Mentor Preparation for the Hurried Mentor

Read Genesis 12:1–9.	5 minutes
Read Mentor’s Notes below.	15 minutes
Choose the activity options you will use.	10 minutes
Gather supplies and/or equipment.	15 minutes
Pray about the upcoming session.	As long as possible!

More Mentor Preparation If You Have Time to Spare

Consider reading larger chunks from Genesis. The Patriarchs have some of the best stories in the Bible! Some recommendations include

Abraham — Genesis chapters 15–16, 18, 21, 22

Isaac — Genesis chapter 24

Jacob — Genesis 25:19–34; chapters 27–33

Joseph — Genesis chapters 37, 39–45. (Joseph is not truly one of the Patriarchs, but this is a great story!)

Pray for your mentees.

Call or write your mentees to let them know you are praying for them! Include something that will increase their interest in the upcoming session, e.g., a moving sticker, a maze for them to do with their eyes closed, etc.

*Known in the lingo as a “character study.”

Mentor's Notes

What is a “patriarch?”

A patriarch is the male head of a family or clan.

When we’re talking about the Bible, “patriarch” means

- Abraham (Genesis 12–24)
- Isaac (Genesis 24–27)
- Jacob (Genesis 27–36)

When God introduces himself to Moses, God describes himself in terms of the patriarchs: “I am the God of your fathers, the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac and the God of Jacob.” (Exodus 3:6)

What about their wives?

Focusing on Abraham, Isaac and Jacob is partly right, but partly unfair because each of the patriarchs had a wife—Sarah, Rebekah and Rachel—who could not have children, who ran their households, and who each played a pivotal role in God fulfilling his promises. Through each of them, God proved he could do the impossible and proved he would keep his part of the covenant. They, too, trusted God in remarkable ways.

When did the patriarchs live?

Traditionally, Abraham is thought to have lived around 2200 BC (some scholars say closer to 1900). This roughly corresponds to what is called the Middle Bronze Age in the Middle East.

Were they real people?

Scholars are divided on this. On the one hand, the Bible’s portrayal of the patriarchs and their lifestyle is an accurate description of what we know of the cultural, political and economic features between 2300 and 1700 BC. On the other hand, no one has discovered any hard evidence of the patriarchs’ existence.

Is it Abraham or Abram, Sarah or Sarai?

Abram and Abraham are the same person. Sarai and Sarah are the same person. Until God made a binding covenant with them (See Genesis 17:1ff.), these two people were known as Abram and Sarai. When Abram, Sarah and their family committed themselves formally to God, God gave them new names. Abram, which means “exalted father,” became Abraham, “father of many” to reflect God’s promises to him. Sarai, which means “princess,” became Sarah which is another form of “princess” that accentuates her role as the mother of kings and a people. For consistency’s sake, I have used “Abraham” and “Sarah” as much as possible, except where referring to a particular scripture passage.

Why did God give them new names?

Up until the last two to three hundred years, many people changed their names to suit their understanding of their life in relation to themselves, their communities or their gods. When something changed someone’s life, the person might change his/her name to reflect what was different about his/her life’s direction. In the case of Abram and Sarai, accepting God’s promises and committing themselves to God added a completely new

dimension that God thought was important enough to make a name change necessary.

Top Three Ideas for This Lesson:

1. God's promises. God made promises to Abraham and Sarah that he had never made to anyone else before. God kept his promises, giving them the land and the multitudes of descendants and making the people of God a blessing to all nations.
2. Though Abraham and Sarah did not see the fullness of those promises come true, they still lived in light of them. This may seem obvious, but let us ask ourselves if we could work and live according to promises we would never see fulfilled. The promises were not fulfilled for more than 500 years after God first made them to Abraham and Sarah...but they were fulfilled!
3. The idea of a covenant. A covenant is a set of promises two people or groups make to each other. Examples include God's relationships with each of us, marriage vows, and "gentleman's agreements" made with a promise and a handshake. A covenant is not a contract (which always has an enforcement clause), but is held together by the integrity and good will of those who make it. Just because one person fails in their side of the covenant does not mean the other person can drop out of the covenant. Think of how many times Abraham, Sarah, and the rest broke their covenants, but God still kept his promises. Just because someone cheats on his/her spouse doesn't mean that the spouse should cheat on the cheater; the covenant/promises are still binding. (See the story of the prophet Hosea—it really happened...and Hosea welcomed his wife back!)¹ The idea of covenant is a really important one for Congregationalists for it describes the basis of all our relationships, including church membership and membership in wider associations.

Introductory Activities (5-10 minutes)

Option 1 — For any size group.

Preparation: 5 minutes

Prepare the goodies and refreshments in a place not immediately obvious to the confirmands.

As the confirmands come in, tell them to go to the place you will show them. (Don't tell them where you are going!) Take them to where the refreshments are by a relatively long, round-about route. If possible, lead them through at least one room where something they might normally stop for (TV, game, computer, etc.) is present.

¹Other places to find the ideas of covenant in the Bible: with David (2 Samuel 7, Psalm 89:1-38), with Noah (Genesis 6-7), between Laban and Jacob (Genesis 31), the friendship between David and Jonathan (1 Samuel 18:3; 23:18), the Ten Commandments (note what God says before he begins the commandments, Exodus 20), marriage (Malachi 2:14, Ezekiel 16:8). Modern examples of covenant include the Mayflower Compact and the Constitution.

Option 2 — For a large group.

Ask a few of the teens to come early. Show them how you want them to lead the activity above as the others come in. Encourage them to be mysterious about it.

A Twist: Try blind-folding people and directing their movements only with your voice.

During the refreshments, discuss the experience. Some possible questions are:

- Why did you follow me / my directions?
- How did you feel while we were on the way?
- When you went through the room that had the [TV, game, computer, etc.], did you want to stop? Why didn't you?
- What were you expecting to find at the other end?
- How did you know how far to go?

For Option Two: How did those who were leading feel while you were directing people? What were some of the difficulties you encountered? Did you have any strategies you used?

If you run into awkward silences, see if anyone there has moved from one city or state to another. Have them talk about their move and their feelings about it. What was different about the two places between which they moved.

Passage (5-10 minutes)

Say: Today we're going to learn about some people who had an experience like you just had. God told them to get up and go and they did. One of them was so tight with God, some people call him just "The Friend." (Arabs still refer to Abraham as *El Khalili*, "The Friend.")

Have the confirmands read the Bible passage for the day: Genesis 12:1-9.

Study (15-20 minutes)

Have any of you ever moved? What was that like? What did you have to do to get ready for moving? How did you feel about it?

What does God ask Abram to do?

How much direction does God give to Abram?

How will Abram and Sarai know when to stop?

What promises does God make to Abraham in this passage?

What is a covenant? (See the mentor's notes above.)

What is Abraham's side of the covenant in today's passage?

Why do you think did Abraham and Sarah trusted God?

Application (15-20 minutes)

What's the difference between a covenant and a contract?

What are some examples of covenant that we encounter today?

How important do you think it is to keep your promises?

What do you do if someone makes you a promise and then doesn't keep it?

What do you do if someone makes you a promise and not only keeps it, but does more than s/he said s/he would?

What are some of the promises that God has made to you?
If God were to ask you to start something without knowing how it would end,
what would you say?

Prayer Time (5 minutes)

See "Closing Circles" in *Activities...* (p. 166).

For more on this topic

Check out Hebrews Chapter 11. Why does the Bible consider Abraham and Sarah prime examples of faith?

Chapter 11 talks about how Abraham and Sarah followed God even though they never saw the promises come true? Why would they do that?

Have you ever done something for someone that would bring them good that you would not experience?

Can you think of an example of a movie in which someone acted selflessly?

Basic "God-Stuff" 1: God Who?

Contributor: DLG

On the one hand, this lesson is one of the few where you may want to defer to your pastor or a "wise elder" in the church. I know that some churches really want the pastor to do the teaching in this area. I also know that in some churches "God stuff" has been a really divisive set of issues. If this latter is true in your church, then I would definitely try to get the pastor to lead this session.

On the other hand, I do believe that anyone can teach about God (See "Can I Really Teach Anyone About God?" in the *Leader's Survival Guide*, p. 8) No fair chickening out if you don't have a *really* good reason! God may want you to lead this session for your own growth as well as the teens'!

Here are some ways you can prepare yourself for the session:

- Remember to encourage questions and give frank answers. Whether you do or don't believe in the Trinity or the Incarnation (or anything else for that matter), that's okay, but if you can, try to explain *why* it is that you believe what you do. Most teens will understand their own minds better if you can model some good thinking and reasoning on your part.
- Take a moment to look at the handout, "Who Is God?" What do you think about what you see there? Why do you think that?
- Think for a moment about you and God. What do you believe to be true about God? Make a list of the things you think are most important.
- Think about how you came to believe God or believe in God. What made you decide to "sign on" with God? What were your thoughts and feelings at the time?
- Where are you and God now? Where could you use God's help in your life?

Time Allotted: 120 minutes

Objectives: Help students think about God.
Help students understand one or more hard "God-concepts"
Help students think about how they can "stand" for God in the world.

Outline of Meeting

Get to Know You Games
The Search for God
God's Search for Us: Incarnation
Mixing Up Trinity Punch
Wrapping Up

Preparation

Purchase orange juice (already mixed works great), cranberry juice and ginger ale (lemon-lime soda works too).

Find a large clear pitcher or punch bowl in which to mix the drinks.

Find enough cups for everyone to try some.

Find a candle, candle holder and matches (that work).

You will need something for groups to write on and something to write with.

(Paper and pens, newsprint and markers, chalkboard and chalk.)

Make sure Bibles will be available for each confirmand (one per student)

Make sure it's OK for class members to be running around looking for items in "The Search for God"

Copy Handout: Who Is God?

Other handouts you may find helpful or interesting

Holy Spirit and Predestination

Get to Know You Games (5-10 minutes)

Choose from *Activities...* (p. 163)

Recommendation:

Stacking Game (*Activities...*, p. 175)

Note: Because the first activity is one of medium activity with some running around, you may not need much in the way of games to start with.

In the "They Get More Than We Think" Category

One year I did this discussion with what so far has been my hardest confirmation class ever. Joe the Radical Rowdy (I once caught him "flogging" a quieter teen with his belt which he took off while I wrote something on the board) came back from his "Search for God" like everyone else. Everyone else had pretty normal things (hymnals, Bibles, crosses, etc.). Not Joe. He came back with a huge box of plastic forks. When it was his turn we all laughed together at the wackiness of the item, then Joe said words I will never forget: "It's like God. He's strong and tough on the outside, but inside He's got good things." We went on to have more struggles, but my appreciation of him in that moment made a lasting impression. (By the way, if you ever get a chance, brag about your confirmands' understanding of God in front of "grown-ups." Some people have an undeserved poor opinion of teens. Maybe when they hear great things, they will be more supportive!)

The Search for God (15-20 minutes)

Ask each person to find one thing that something important about who God is and/or how God works. Tell them they have 5 minutes to find their

something and bring it back to the room (or if it is too big, to draw a picture of it).

Discussion: Have each person share their item and what they think it says about who God is or how God works. Especially with younger confirmands, a student may pick up an item (e.g., a hymnal) that they know has something to do with God without thinking about how it applies to the question. If a person seems stuck, ask others if they can see how the item might apply to the question. (Example: A hymnal tells us that people like to praise God and [maybe] God likes to be praised.)

Be careful with this discussion! When it works it may be some of the most creative and interesting discussion you will have all year. Do encourage teens to share openly. Do praise them for their thoughtfulness. Do *not* let yourself criticize or other people criticize the items or ideas someone has about God even if you disagree with them. Some teens are very sensitive to criticism and may associate God with other people's cruelty in Confirmation. What a terrible stumbling block to put before someone!

God's Search for Us: The Incarnation (15-20 minutes)

Small Group Work

Break into small groups of 3-5 people.

Have the groups work on this questions: If you had something really important that you wanted someone to know about you what are some of the ways you could communicate that to them? Which one would be the surest way to do it?

Have them write down their ideas on a sheet of paper or newsprint.

Large Group Work

Have each group present its ideas to the whole group.

When all the groups have presented, ask "Why did you decide doing that (whatever they chose as their surest way) would be surest?"

Most likely people will choose things that require going in person as the surest way to communicate.

Say: "That was God's idea too. For thousands of years, God had been trying to communicate God's love for people, and they had not really gotten the message in a way that changed everybody. So God chose to come himself in Jesus. God somehow poured himself into a little baby, had his diaper changed, puked all over his parents, went to school, had a blast playing with friends, climbed trees, had acne—many of the things you have experienced, Jesus did too. Now think about that for a moment. Why would the all-powerful God, the one who made the universe and everything in it, become a baby that needed its diaper changed?"

One answer: God wanted to know what it was like to be human, to be like you and me. God also wanted to make sure that we got the message of God's Divine Love for us. God wanted us to have hope that we can be better than we are, can be more like God.

The Big Word for the Day: Incarnation. Literally, "in the flesh." Think of words that have to do with meat or flesh: (carnivore is a creature that eats

meat, chile con carne is chile with meat, carnotaur is a dinosaur that is a "flesh-eating bull," a terrifically gory scene is "carnage")
Let's look at some of the places you find that idea in the Bible
Matthew 1:23 — from the Birth Story of Jesus (make sure you find the footnote at the bottom of the page in most Bibles that Immanuel means "God with us")
Isaiah 7:14 is another possibility. (It's actually the OT prophecy to which Matthew 1:23 refers.)
John 1:1-5, 9-14 — Verse 14 in particular talks about "the Word" becoming flesh and making "his dwelling among us."

The Virgin Birth: Real or Not?

If you use either Matthew 1:23 or Isaiah 7:14, you will raise the issue of "virgin birth" so you will have to think about what you think about it before you lead the class session. If you believe the virgin birth is important, then no problem. If you are not so sure about the virgin birth, you may want to recognize that most scholars agree that the word for virgin in both Hebrew and Greek can also mean "young woman" or "girl." So on the one hand, maybe it didn't have to be a virgin. On the other hand, is there anything God can't do if God wants it done? If the topic does come up, ask students what they think about the idea of a virgin giving birth. Feel free to share your thoughts on the matter if you can do so without judging your students and what they believe. Knowing what you believe about this is important, but being open to your confirmand(s) thoughts is perhaps more important. Your comfort in discussing the issue in a fairly mature way will help your teen(s) trust you and make further deep or sensitive discussions easier.

Discuss what might be different if God had not decided to be "Immanuel" ...God with us. For some ideas in directing this discussion, see the back of the "Who Is God?" handout. This discussion can go on for a long time! Keep an eye on the clock.

Mixing Up Trinity Punch (15 minutes)

Ask for 1-3 volunteers (each person can have a kind of drink if you like). Ask your volunteer(s) to describe the drink they have in his/her hand. If someone says, "It's orange juice." Ask her/him how s/he knows.

After discussing each of these drinks, pour them into a single pitcher or punch bowl in roughly equal quantities (or not as you choose). Stir thoroughly. Have your volunteer(s) be the first taste tester(s).

Ask these questions:

Can you tell there's orange juice? How?

Can you tell there's cranberry juice? How?

Can you tell there's ginger ale (or whatever you used)? How?

How many drinks are in this pitcher/punch bowl?
What would we call this bowl of liquid? (Punch!)

Say: So we have three drinks, but we really have only one drink? That's kind of how the idea of the Trinity works too. We have God the Father, God the Son, God the Holy Spirit. Three Persons...One God. The idea of the Trinity is a human model early Christians came up with to explain what they were experiencing. Did you know that the word, "trinity," doesn't appear anywhere in the Bible? It doesn't! The early Christians were trying to understand God, trying to come up with ways to talk about how they experienced God in some very different, but related ways—God the Father as the creator and provider, protector and judge; God the Son as redeemer and friend; God the Holy Spirit as comforter and teacher and power source—kind of like the way you can taste the tang of the cranberry juice, feel the pulp of the orange juice and see the bubbles of the ginger ale. Yet the early Christians experienced a likeness in God, a common thread of love and attention that was the same between the Three Persons. These early Christians also had to figure out how it worked to have "God in the flesh" (Jesus) dying on the cross and talking about the Holy Spirit and praying to God. So they came up with this idea of the Trinity. What do you think about this idea?

Have a good discussion, but keep an eye to the time so that you have a chance to wrap up. Invite the teens to help themselves to the punch during the discussion. A really thoughtful leader might even have some goodies to eat! When you are done, ask the teens to help you clean up the trash and/or wash their hands.

Wrap Up: The Light in the Darkness (15-20 minutes)

While the teens are cleaning up, light the candle and set the candle and holder in the center of whatever space you have. As the teens return, ask one to turn out the light and sit in a close circle around the candle. Encourage the teens to settle down and adjust the mood to more reflective thought. (Speaking in a soft voice is a good way to do that.)

Say: We've been talking a lot about God tonight. What is one thing you learned or thought was cool about tonight? (Enjoy their reflections on the evening. Laugh where that is appropriate, but try to keep the mood mellow.) One of the things the Gospel of John says about Jesus is... "In him was life, and that life was the light of people. The light shines in the darkness, but the darkness has not understood it.(John 1:4-5) What does that mean? Is there darkness in our world?

Have each person suggest a way that s/he might be able to be like Jesus, "light in the darkness?"

Say: "What we need to remember is that there is no darkness so dark that it can overcome the light. In the same way, no matter how evil and dark things get, God's goodness and love are greater!"

Topical Lesson Plans
"God Stuff" (Theology)

Close in Prayer (5 minutes)

See "Closing Circles" in *Activities...* (p. 166).

Basic Church History 1: Time Travel

Contributor: DLG

One of the most intriguing eras in all of Church History is the first few centuries after Jesus' death and resurrection. It was a time of phenomenal growth (from a handful of disciples following a wandering preacher in AD 30, Christianity became the official religion of the Roman Empire in the year 312 AD!) It was also a time of intense struggles inside the church and intense persecution from outside. One of the objectives of this session is to communicate the excitement (and danger!) of living in that time!

Here are some ways you can prepare yourself for the session:

- This is one program you definitely want to read ahead of time! Make sure all is ready before this one. It can be really neat!
- If you have a Sunday morning time slot for Confirmation, you may want to schedule this meeting as a special event some evening when it's dark. If not, it's still a cool program.
- Because of the amount of detail and relatively intriguing subject matter, if you can spice up the meeting with readings from actual historical texts and other anecdotes, you may not need much in the way of activities for this session.
- If you are finding the discussion is going well, skip the game. Perhaps "sneaking" through the dark church together to a previously set up place will be enough for your group. One model I have seen work is having an assistant stay with the group while you go off to set things up for the wrap up. Leave the church dark and have students search for you. When they find you they can stay.
- In your own experience, have you ever had a time (especially when you were a teen or young adult) when you felt awkward because you were a Christian? Perhaps someone wondered why you were praying over your food. Perhaps someone made fun of you for going to church. Perhaps someone challenged something you believed was important. What were the circumstances and how did you feel?
- Is it easy to be a Christian these days? What are the things that make it easier? What are the things that make it harder?
- How does God want us to respond when it's hard to be Christian? For some thoughts on the matter, check out the following verses Matthew 13: 3–9, 18–23; Luke 21:12–19; Romans 8:31–35, 37–39; 1 Corinthians 4:8–13; 2 Corinthians 4:7–12. Notice how the focus is not on ourselves (how much we are suffering), but on bearing fruit for God and looking after the spiritual needs of those who persecute us.
- If God could say a few words to encourage your confirmands when they are feeling awkward or left out because of their faith, what do you think God would want to say?

Time Allotted: 120 minutes

Objectives: Help students think about where our faith comes from.
Help students understand what it was like to be an early Christian.
Help students think about how they are part of continuation of that history of Christians

Outline of Meeting

Get to Know You Games
Challenges of Baby Church
Romans and Christians: The Game
Real-Life Hard Decisions
Wrapping Up: What About Now?

Preparation

You will need something for groups to write on and something to write with.

(Paper and pens, newsprint and markers, chalkboard and chalk.)

Make sure Bibles will be available for each confirmand (one per student)

Make sure it's OK for class members to be running around for Romans and Christians or Sardines.

Find a candle, candle holder and matches (make sure they work!).

You may want to familiarize yourself with the spoken parts that happen in the dark so that you won't have to read them. (It's really hard to hold a flashlight, read and keep the mood all at the same time.)

Get to Know You Games (5-10 minutes)

Choose from *Activities...* (p. 163).

Recommendation:

Lining Up Games (*Activities*, p. 171) or another "not too active" game if you are playing Romans and Christians or Sardines later.

Challenges of a Baby Church (10-15 minutes)

Small Group Work

Break into groups of 3-5 people, preferably with an even number of groups.

Assign each group a passage from the list below. If you have enough for only two groups, consider assigning one group the first and third passages and the other the second and fourth. If you have enough for only one group, take the passages one at a time in the order in which they are listed.

Acts 2:42-47

Acts 6:1-7

Acts 6:8-14, 7:51-8:3

Acts 15:1-21

Ask the groups to answer these questions, writing the answers down on paper or newsprint as they go.

What is the challenge the baby church faced in the passage?

Did that challenge come from inside or outside the church?
How did the baby church deal with the challenge?

Large Group Work

Have the small groups present their findings to the rest of the group.
Say: The baby church faced three kinds of challenges: to spread the Good News about Jesus (grow), to withstand persecution (external pressure), and to work through conflicts (internal pressure).

Game in the Dark (20-30 minutes)

Choose from one of the following:

Romans and Christians

See *Activities...* (p. 174)

Make sure you introduce the game with the historical background included in *Activities...*

Sardines

See *Activities...* (p. 174) The final time, you go to the place you want to do the next segment. (You will want to read ahead to see what that entails.)

See the initial notes at the beginning of this lesson for another idea.

Real-Life Hard Decisions (15-25 minutes)

As you near the end of *Romans and Christians*, set up the candle in a place that might feel like you were hiding from someone (one church I served in had an unfinished section of the basement that was very cool for this; a boiler room with space for people to sit could be good too) or in a place of worship (e.g., sanctuary or chapel).

Send the “Roman guards” to tell people the game is over.
Gather in the dark place with the candle lit.

Say: We are meeting in the dark to remember the early Christians who would gather in the dark like this. Beginning in 64 AD, to become a Christian was a dangerous step. Christians had to meet in secret. One place they found few people went were the cemeteries called catacombs—long, twisty tunnels underground with dead people stacked up like on bunk beds down the corridor. (If you have ever seen *Indiana Jones and the Last Crusade*, you will know what it looks like.) Because it was relatively quiet, they could hear someone coming from a long ways away. Almost always they could sing and pray and do Bible study completely undisturbed; non-Christians were superstitious about going into places of the dead. Christians knew that death was not the last word, that Jesus had been raised from the dead. They knew that God would be with them even when they died, so cemeteries were not as scary to them. In fact, the earliest Christian art was drawn on the walls where the Christians worshipped as they tried to make the catacomb more comfortable and inspiring. If you are ever in Rome you will want to visit the catacombs and see what it was really like. You can still go down and visit some real catacombs, some of which are still not

completely mapped. It was a dangerous thing to be a Christian. (Read an excerpt from an early Christian document. Perhaps Irenaeus, Bishop of Lyons — Read description of from *How to Read Church History, Annotated Bibliography*, p. 240) Christians were discriminated against, denied jobs and homes, avoided on the street, kicked and spat upon. As we discussed earlier, some were even killed. What blew people away was how Christians would die. Most people who are going to be killed get really upset (what a surprise!). But the Christians, all they did was sing songs, thank God for the chance to prove their love with their lives, and pray for their executioners!

Early Christian Mission Impossible

When a Christian would meet someone else for the first time, she would draw a line in the sand like this with their toe (if you are on a sandy or dusty surface draw in the sand or dust; if you are on a hard surface, e.g., a concrete floor, consider wetting your finger and drawing it that way)



If the other person was a Christian, they would draw a line themselves like this:



Do you see the shape? The fish was the symbol for the early church (they called themselves “The Way”) because the Greek word for fish stood for many things early Christians believed. The Greek word for fish is “ichthus” (pronounced ik’thoos) which stood for “Jesus Christ God’s Son Savior.”

<u>Letter</u>	<u>Name</u>	<u>Meaning</u>
I	Iota	Jesus
X	Chi	Christ
θ	Theta	Theou (of God; pronounced thay’ oo)
U	Upsilon	Uios (Son; pronounced whee’ oss)
S	Sigma	Soter (Savior; pronounced soh’ tair)

Cool Christian spy stuff! Your really rowdy boys will go gaga for this! Even grade school children will think this is cool. And they thought the fish symbols on the backs of cars were just for show!

That’s why people came up with the saying, “the blood of the martyrs waters the seeds of the Gospel.” Anyone know what a martyr is? We usually think of a martyr as someone who dies for what he believes in, but it really means “witness.” Can you think how the Christians who died singing or praying were

witnesses? Witnesses to what? (God's power. God's love. God's forgiveness.) People who saw these people die said to themselves, "Wow! How can they be like that? What do they know that I don't know." They would try to find out about Jesus Christ and often ended up becoming Christians themselves. When you think that often the people were killed in an amphitheater or coliseum filled with tens of thousands of people, you get the idea of how fast the church was growing, how God could take even the most horrible death and turn it to good. Do you know what the Christians were known for, even by many people who didn't believe? One writer put it this way, "See how they love each other!" That's what set the early Christians apart, and it is what can set us apart today, too.

Wrap Up: What About Now? (10-15 minutes)

Let me read you another story (get someone to hold the flashlight for you).

Choose one or more stories from the following resources:

How to Read Church History

Jesus Freaks

Early Church History

All of these resources are listed in the *Annotated Bibliography* (p. 240).

Alternatively, you could show the movie, *She Said, "Yes!"* about Cassie Bernall, about a young woman who died for her faith at Columbine High School in 1999. (This may ruin the "gothic" mood you have created however.)

After reading each story, ask: When do you think that happened? How about ... (whatever year is attached to the story you read)? Can you believe that?

Are there ways in which people would make fun of you if they knew you were a Christian? What if you prayed before you ate your lunch? What if you read your Bible in study hall?

God willing, none of us will probably ever face the question of whether or not to die for God, but every day we get an opportunity to show people how we are willing to live for God.

Close in prayer (5 minutes)

This is one occasion when praying the closing prayer yourself is a good idea. Things you might want to include in the closing prayer: helping us be less afraid of what other people think about us, helping us love each other more, for Christians who are being persecuted around the world, thanks for the people who have loved God before us (a long time ago and family and people in your local church). Feel free to add your own.

Bonus Church History 1: Back to the Future

Contributor: DLG and RCF

Increasingly, Christians are the subject of many forms of persecution. The video, *She Said, "Yes": The Unlikely Story of Cassie Bernall,* works on these and other issues. The video is frank and disturbing, but a terrific way to talk about issues of safety and faith in a neutral context.

Before the meeting, invite parents and students to a showing of the video about one of the young women who was shot and killed at Columbine High School in Littleton, Colorado. Make sure they understand what the video will be about. Make some decisions about how you want the discussion to happen.

- Do you want small groups? This will encourage more people to share their thoughts and feelings about issues the video raises. In general, having groups larger than ten will probably not work as well.
- Are you going to split parents and teens for the discussion? They do have different issues, but splitting the generations means the parents do not get to hear their children's discussion.
- Are you going to have the groups record their thoughts on newsprint to share with the larger group? Advantage: large group discussion will be easier. Disadvantage: some may be hesitant to share.

Preview the video yourself. Make sure you watch the music video by Michael W. Smith at the end, a song he wrote about Cassie and her decision.

Look through the discussion questions. Choose which ones will work best for your group(s). Note: if you have multiple discussion groups, you will need a discussion leader for each group. You may want to have separate sets of questions.

Outline of the Meeting

Welcome and Introductions
Watch video
Discussion Groups
Wrap-Up: Where do we go from here?
Close in Prayer

Welcome and Introductions (5 minutes)

Welcome everyone.
Introduce yourself and any other group leaders who will be assisting that night.
Pray for the gathering

Watch Video (45 minutes)

You have seen the video already, so from time to time, watch the reactions of those who are watching it for the first time.

Discussion Groups (20-45 minutes)

Split into the groups as you have determined before the meeting. Make sure each group leader has a copy of the questions.

1. The video we just watched was pretty heavy. What are some of your thoughts or feelings about it?
2. Did you know that the Center for Disease Control and many statistics report that the reality is that school is the safest place in a child's or teenager's day?
3. Do you feel more or less safe at school since the Columbine massacre? Why?
4. One of the things that surprised me in the video was learning about the negative path Cassie had been following. Why do you think that even in "good families" kids sometimes make the choice to go down this dark and destructive path?
5. Who is responsible for the choices students make — their parents, teachers, friends or themselves? Why?
6. Cassie's mom discovered Cassie's secret life by reading her daughter's private letters. Although this led her to get help for Cassie, did she have a right to "violate her privacy?"
7. If someone's parents were reading their mail, diary, etc. and they were truly not "on a negative path," what advice would you give?
8. In the video, Cassie makes some dramatic changes in her life as a result of a weekend youth retreat. Do you think Cassie would have made her "U-turn" without that weekend experience?
9. What happened to Cassie? How would you describe that U-turn?
10. Do you think she knew she was going to die when one of the shooters asked if she believed in God?
11. What do you think about that?
12. We do not use the word, "martyr," very often any more. Anyone know what it means?
13. Was Cassie a "witness" to God? Why or why not?
14. What is one thing you are going to take with you from this afternoon's video and discussion?

Wrap-Up: Where Do We Go from Here? (5-10 minutes)

Come back together as a large group. Discuss what people learned from the video and what they will take away from the meeting.

Close in Prayer (5 minutes)

If a pastor can be there, let them do this part.

Bonus Church History 2 & 3: Spiritual Earthquakes (Reformation)

Contributor: DLG

One of the most exciting times in the Church's history was the Reformation. Indeed, we can still see and hear the echoes of the Reformation today, almost 500 years later! To help your teens understand those echoes better (including Congregationalism), spend whatever time you can on the Reformation.

Typically I break the topic into two large chunks that I cover either on two evenings or on one evening in an extra long session. To see the lesson plan, turn to "Sample Retreat 3: Undernighter on the Reformation," p. 159.

Basic Worship and Sacraments 1: Why We Do What We Do

Contributor: DLG

Worship is the heart of the church and the heart of Christian life. Worship often happens in a church building (that's part of why the building was built—to accommodate the people of the church), but it would be incorrect to say that worship has to be all hymns, preaching and corporate prayers. In this lesson, you will have a chance to explore a broader understanding of worship and its purpose with your confirmands.

Here are some ways you can prepare yourself for the session:

- If you have a Sunday morning time slot for Confirmation, you may want to ask students to use one of the worksheets (See *Handouts*, “Listening to a Sermon” or “Analyzing a Worship Service”) that morning in worship. If possible, try to arrange a brief time afterward with the pastor so that the confirmand(s) can ask him any questions they have about worship that day.
- This lesson works really well with *Designing and Leading Worship* either in the main worship service at your church or as part of a Retreat (See *Special Program Elements*, p. 190).
- What are the things you enjoy most about worship? What do you enjoy most about worship at your church?
- If you were in a Christian fellowship as a teen, what did you like best about worship then?
- Did you ever worship outside of a church building (e.g., a youth group or family retreat, Easter sunrise service, etc.)? What did you like/dislike about the experience? If you compare your “in church” and “out of church” worship experiences, which stand out better in your memory? Why do you think that is?

Time Allotted: 120 minutes

Objectives: Help students understand the meaning and importance of symbols.
Provide basic knowledge about the sacraments generally practiced in Congregational churches

Outline of Meeting

Get to Know You Games

What Is a Symbol?

Symbol Search

Symbol and Mystery in the Bible

Symbol and Mystery in the Church

Wrap up: The Mystery in Our Lives

Preparation

You will need something for groups to write on and something to write with.

(Paper and pens, newsprint and markers, chalkboard and chalk.)

Make sure Bibles will be available for each confirmand (one per student)

Make sure it's OK for class members to be running around for the Symbol Search.

Pick out the scriptures you want to use for "Clues to the Great Mysteries."

Copy Handouts

Symbol Search

Get to Know You Games (10-15 minutes)

Choose a game from *Activities...* (p. 163)

Suggestion: The Game (p. 169)

What Is a Symbol? (5-10 minutes)

On newsprint, write the question, "What is a symbol?"

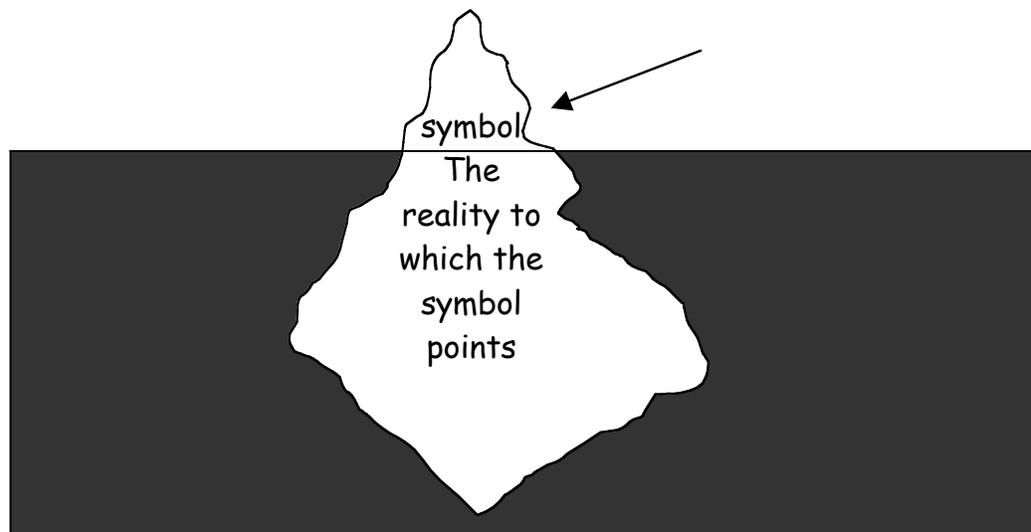
Say: Some things are so much a part of our lives that we don't think about them very much. Symbols are like that. They are all around us, but we don't think about them very much. Today we are going to spend some time thinking more clearly about symbols.

Ask: What is a symbol?

Represents something else, a visual "shorthand" as in a picture is worth a thousand words, a sign that points to a larger reality)

If students do not come up with all these, you may want to write them on the newsprint.

Say: One person (C.S. Lewis) said a symbol was like an iceberg—the part that is seen is only a small part of the total reality. (*While you are talking draw something like the shape below.*)



Just like what we see of the iceberg is only a small part of the total iceberg, so a symbol is only a small part of the reality to which it points. A good example of a symbol is a cross. (*Draw a cross on the newsprint.*)

Ask: What does a cross symbolize?

Answers may range from Jesus suffering, to forgiveness of sins, the importance of self-sacrifice, the apparent victory of evil, etc.

Say: So this symbol points to a huge unseen reality that lies behind it.

Symbol Search (10-15 minutes)

Small Group Work

Hand out the copies of the "Symbol Search" worksheet. (See *Handouts*).

Say: The world is full of symbols. When I give the signal, you have five minutes to find ten symbols. You have to fill in all three columns. The third column is entitled, "Significance." In that column, write what you think the symbol means and what makes that important. One great place full of symbols is the sanctuary. When you are done, come back here.

Take questions.

Give the signal.

Give the confirmands 5 minutes then encourage them to wrap up.

Large Group Reporting

Have each person (or group if the students did this in small groups) list two or three of their best symbols and what each means.

Clues to the Great Mysteries (15-20 minutes)

Say: In our church, we have some "super symbols" that represent realities so large and complex that we actually call them "mysteries." In a moment, I will give you some Bible verses that contain some of the clues you need to understand the mysteries.

Small Group Work

Divide up into small groups (if you have more than 8 people, divide up into an even number of groups). Assign scripture verses to the groups. Give the students something to write with and on.

Baptism

2 Kings 5:10-14

John 3:1-6

Romans 6:1-11

Hebrews 10:19-25

Communion

Exodus 16:1-4, 13-18

John 6:48-51

John 15:1-5, 8

1 Corinthians 11:23-26

Ask them to write the answers to the following questions:

- What great mystery or mysteries were your passages about?
- Why do you think that?
- What's so mysterious about that mystery?

Large Group Reporting

Ask the group(s) doing baptism to relate what they found, then do the same with the group(s) doing communion.

Because the exercise calls for a level of thinking that few people (even adults) find easy, you may have to help with the final question: what makes the mystery so mysterious.

What makes Baptism so mysterious?

Water cleanses and purifies. In baptism, we are cleansed and purified.

In Baptism, each of us is marked as God's child. No one and nothing can ever erase that mark. We are "sealed" to God.

Going under the water is like going down into the depths (i.e., like death), so symbolically when we are baptized our old self is buried.

Coming up again is like the resurrection, so symbolically we are born anew out of the water.

What makes Communion so mysterious?

Jesus had communion for his disciples. When we share the Lord's Supper, we have a sense that we are participating in the reality of that first night, the night Jesus was betrayed.

When we partake of the bread, we are "taking Christ in" to our selves. Christ becomes part of us!

The Body of Christ is one and as we partake of the bread, we are made one not only with Christ, but with everyone in the room...and all our other brothers and sisters around the world...and in all times! That's one reason some churches take the bread at the same time.

Jesus said of the cup, "This is the new testament in my blood shed for the forgiveness of sins." The word, "testament," can also mean "covenant" or "witness." In a sense, as we participate in communion, we are witnessing to what God can do—through Jesus, to be sure—but also through ourselves.

In times before good drinking water, the only sure way to stay healthy was to drink things with enough alcohol to kill the germs. Isn't that something of what the "new covenant in his blood" does for us?

Wine, in particular, was used at celebrations (remember Jesus' miracle at the wedding in Cana, John 2?). So, too, is the cup meant to be a sign of celebration to us.

The Great Mysteries in the Church (5 minutes)

Say: We have been talking about mysteries and symbols, but the big word we use to discuss the symbols that are mysteries is "sacrament." In fact, the Latin word for "sacrament" means "mystery." Our church has two sacraments—baptism and communion or the Lord's Supper. Things like confirmation, marriage and funerals are "rites," things we celebrate with ceremony, but they are not things Jesus did. Sacraments are mysteries that were part of Jesus' life and teachings. They are "outward, visible signs of an inward, invisible grace." So when we are baptized, the ceremony of baptism reflects what God has done on the inside.

Wrapping Up (5 minutes)

See "Closing Circles" in *Activities...* (p. 166).

Basic Worship 2: A Closer Look

Contributor: LYM

Preparation

- Paper and writing utensils
- Whiteboard or newsprint
- Markers
- Copy handouts
 - “Worship Analysis”
 - “Isaiah 6:1–8”
 - “Christian Year”
 - “Symbols in Worship”

I. What Are Your Thoughts?

Write these questions on white board or newsprint. Have students answer them on a piece of paper.

1. What is worship?
2. Why do we worship?
3. How do we worship?
4. Do we always worship in the same way?
5. Who do we worship?
6. What is my part in worship?

II. What Is Worship?

- Worship is the means by which we, as Christians, honor our God.
- Worship is defined as meaning to be “bowed down” before our God.
- Worship is something that can be done alone in the form of meditation, prayer, reading the Bible, etc. However, in our tradition, we also worship together as a “Gathered People.” Worship is something we share together in as we all look upwards toward God.
- Within the Christian Church there are many different ways people worship. We could experience these differences by visiting other churches. Worship is something not only Christians do, but also people of all religions worship in some form or another.
- Worship has a particular form.
 1. Call to come to worship
 2. Confession and seeking God
 3. Listening and hearing God’s word for us
 4. Responding to His word
 5. Going out to serve

III. Order of Worship

Hand out a copy of your church's order of worship and the "Worship Analysis" page. (See *Handouts*).

Discuss the meaning of the different parts of the worship service.

IV. Isaiah 6:1-8 (See *Handouts*, "Isaiah 6:1-8")

Read this passage and discover worship has not changed much since Isaiah's time.

V. The Christian Year (See *Handouts*, "The Christian Year")

The Christian year orders our worship and gives us guidance in the direction our worship should take throughout the year.

VI. Symbols in Worship (See *Handouts*, "Symbols in Worship")

Basic Worship 3: Focusing on God

Contributor: DLG

Focusing on God

Do “Target Practice” in *Activities...*, p. 176. Use the regular (plate) version, preferably with the target on the floor.

Ask: Which way did you get closer to the center of the circle? Forwards or backwards? Why?

Say: What I’d like you to consider is that this exercise is a lot like worship. The center area is great worship that fills our hearts, changes lives and makes God smile. If we go at worship without taking aim, are we more or less likely to get what we want? (Less) God wants us to have great worship because God shows himself to us in our hearts and minds in true worship. Today we are going to spend some time exploring how we might take aim at knowing God better through worship.

What Helps Us Focus?

Break the group into small groups of three or four.

Give each group a sheet of newsprint and a marker.

Have each group divide the paper into two columns. In the left hand column list the things we can do to “take aim” or focus our worship.

Some things that might be listed

- Singing
- Prayer
- Preaching
- Reading the Bible
- Listening to other people who know God
- Reading/studying other books
- Music
- Dance
- Symbols
- The space we worship (outdoors, church, etc.)
- Quiet
- Giving offering

In the right hand column, list how each of these helps us focus on God.

Example: The beautiful place helps us know that we are in separate space and time, set apart for God, beauty reminds us of God, etc.

Example: Singing gets our body focused on producing and hearing the music, gets our mind focused on the words and matching pitch, gets our spirit focused on what the words mean.

As groups get done, ask them to pick out their top three ways of focusing and be able to explain why.

What are parts of our worship that you find particularly meaningful, that you get the most out of?

When the groups are done, have them gather and report on their findings.

Prioritize the list. Why do you think your top three are more important than the others?

Worship of the Future (20-45 minutes)

Divide into small groups.

Question for discussion: If you could design a church so that your friends would want to come, what would it be like?

To encourage creativity, give each group a large piece of paper and one or more magic markers.

Allow 20 minutes for the exercise.

Have each small group report to the large group.

Wrap-Up (5 minutes)

In each generation, people who follow Jesus have to figure out how to communicate who Jesus is and why Jesus matters to those around them. The form may (indeed, it must) change, but the message (the Good News of who Jesus is and what Jesus means) is the same.

Consider having teens share their ideas with the Board of Deacons, pastor, or whoever is involved in determining the shape of worship in your fellowship. If any of the ideas seem workable, encourage the teens to participate in making the changes.

Closing Circle (5 minutes)

See "Closing Circles" in *Activities...*, p. 166.

Basic Congregational Church 1: Who Are We?

What does it mean to be a church? Up to this point, confirmation has dealt in general terms with what it means to follow God and how people have done that in the past. When we begin talking about what church is and how it works, that's where our theology and biblical understandings have their true application. Here Congregationalism diverges from Catholic and other Protestant understandings of church. While we all share the common foundation in Jesus Christ as Lord of our lives, how we relate to each other within the church and how we relate to the world outside the church is very different. In this lesson, we will explore those differences in some general terms.

Unfortunately, many Congregationalists have a mostly intuitive idea of what Congregationalism is and what being a member of a Congregational church means. While this intuitive knowledge is generally a good thing, intuition is very difficult to articulate. Here are some ways you can prepare yourself for this meeting:

- Look over the lesson and find all the scripture passages. Look at the context of each of them in the Bible. What else is going on around that passage?
- What does it mean to you when Jesus says, "wherever two or three are gathered in my name, there am I in the midst of them"? (Matthew 18:20)
- Find a copy of your church's covenant. Spend some time looking it over. In what ways does it encourage reliance upon God? Does it suggest how church members should relate to and treat each other? If you don't have a church covenant, what is the document(s) on which your fellowship was founded? Answer the above questions with it/them in mind.
- Consider: how you contribute to the goals of the covenant in your fellowship?
- In your fellowship, when someone says, "church," what comes to mind? The building? Or the people?

Time Allotted: 120 minutes

Objectives: Help students understand the nature of church
Help students understand how Congregational churches are different from other churches
Help students understand the roots of Congregationalism

Outline of Meeting

Essence of Church
Beginnings of Congregationalism
Church Start Simulation
Foundations of Congregationalism
Close in Prayer

Preparation

You will need something for groups to write on and something to write with.

(Paper and pens, newsprint and markers, chalkboard and chalk.)

Make sure Bibles will be available for each confirmand (one per student)

Make sure it's OK for class members to be running around for the "Essence of Church."

Copy Handouts

Church Start Simulation Handout

What Is Congregationalism?

Essence of Church (10-20 minutes)

Small Group Work

Divide the confirmands into small groups.

Say: We are going to explore what it means to be church. To help us, your small group is going to look for something that symbolizes the essence of church. You have five minutes to find that symbol and bring it back. You have two rules: first, your small groups have to stay together, and second, if the symbol is too big or permanently fixed, don't try to bring it back! Ready? Go!

Let the small groups search for their symbols.

Large Group Reporting

When the small groups have returned with their symbols, have them explain why the group chose that symbol as the essence of the church.

Beginnings of Congregationalism (5 minutes)

Say: In the Europe of the 1500s, people were reading the Bible in their own languages for the first time. One of the questions they asked as they read was, what is the essence of church?

Pass out the "What Is Congregationalism?" handout.

Say: For centuries, people had mostly understood church as episcopal in formation, that's the drawing at the top. It was shaped like a pyramid with the power and authority at the top (the Pope), trickling down to the people at the bottom. Now as they read the New Testament, some people saw that the church was organized around elders (people of integrity with experience with God) and ministers (people of integrity called by God to preach, teach and administer the sacraments). These people established Presbyterian churches, organized around "presbyteries," kind of like our government, where you have different levels of organization. Each level is represented in the level over it, all the way to the General Assembly. That's the middle diagram on the sheet. Methodists, Lutherans and, of course, Presbyterians are organized this way.

But there were other people who read the New Testament and saw something different. As they read the Gospels and Acts and Paul's letters, they didn't see a pyramid or presbyteries required to make a church real, all it took was people and Christ. Their favorite verse was Matthew 18:20. (*Wait while everyone finds the passage.*) Let's read that verse together. (The NIV translation reads, "Wherever two or three are gathered in my name, there am I in their midst.") Most people mark the first time a church like this gathered, the first Congregational church, in Scrooby, England in 1606. They met in the house of the local postmaster, William Brewster, because his house was the biggest. William Brewster and members of this church were the people we remember as the Pilgrims, who sailed on the Mayflower. They landed in America at Plymouth Rock in 1620. Those are probably dates to remember!

We're going to put their favorite verse to the test tonight. "Where two or three are gathered in my name, there am I in the midst of them."

What is so important about "two or three"?

Where did Jesus get the idea for two or three? Is it important or just a rough rule of them? Jesus got the idea from the Old Testament. In Deuteronomy 19:15, the author writes, "One witness is not enough to convict a man accused of any crime or offense he may have committed. A matter must be established by the testimony of two or three witnesses." (See also Deuteronomy 17:6.) "Two or three" is the number of witnesses necessary to prove something without a shadow of a doubt. The implication is that worship has serious consequences for our lives, consequences that require us to be sure of without a shadow of a doubt. Dr. Phil Spotswood once posed this question: "If someone were to put you on trial for following Christ, would there be enough evidence to convict you." I wonder if that have anything to do with the need for two or three to be gathered for worship.

Church Start Simulation (20-30 minutes)

Small Group Work

- Divide up into small groups again.
- Pass out the simulation sheet (see *Handouts*).
- Pass out writing utensils and newsprint.
- Give them 15 minutes to work on their church start project.

Large Group Reporting

- Have the small groups report on the high points of their church start.
- Look for things you like about their ideas. (The talking squirrels one teen suggested will certainly keep people's interest!)

Foundations of Congregationalism (10-20 minutes)

Say: You had lots of good ideas for your churches. But how do you know if a church is *Congregational*?

Lead a discussion on their answers using the following as guidelines. The five tests that (combined) separate Congregational churches from others are:

1. Jesus Christ is the Head of the Church. Jesus is Lord. People are seeking to follow Jesus' teachings and example. (That means Buddhists and other religions and cults cannot be churches in the Congregational Way.)
2. The church is made by two or more people gathered in Jesus' name. That was Jesus' criteria in Matthew 18:20. You can't do church by yourself; all church is about relationships.
3. The church is locally autonomous and makes decisions as a congregation. If a fellowship of believers does not make its own major decisions as a group, it has a different principle of organization than "congregational." Some "Congregational" churches are really run more like Presbyterian church, with "elders" making the decisions of the fellowship.
4. The local church is in relationship with other churches for mutual support and "building up." Many churches are locally autonomous, but because they are not in relationship with other churches they are not tied into the larger Body of Christ and so fail to accomplish part of their mission.
5. The Church is gathered around a covenant and uses covenants in its relationships with other organizations. (Those who do not have an explicit covenant almost certainly have an implicit one.) See "Basic Bible 1: The Bible at a Glance," p. 59

Examine the work of the small groups in light of these criteria. Some of the small group church starts may not have enough detail to tell whether or not it is Congregational. That's OK. Alternatively, you can draw up some pretend churches yourself and look at those.

Wrap-Up: Why Congregationalism? (10-15 minutes)

Ask: What do you think are the best parts of being Congregational?

Write the answers on newsprint.

Here are some of the reasons Congregationalism got started and continues to be such a wonderful way of doing church:

1. Respects and counts on everyone knowing God, having gifts and using them for God. Everyone's gift is just as important as everyone else's.
2. Flexible and very responsive to God's leading. In other systems, the people making decisions for the church are not always right in the community with the church. While some ideas may be fine for people in some places, they may not work at all in others. Congregationalists

- “tailor” the church to meet the needs of the local community, moving faster than a more complicated system could move.
3. Ministers are generally well-educated and are expected to model in their lives (as best they can) the example of Jesus.
 4. Worship can be as fresh and deep as the congregation wants. One of the reasons Congregationalism began was because they were tired of going through the same book of worship every year.
 5. The importance of the Word written (the Bible) and spoken (preaching). Early Congregationalists wanted to understand what the Bible meant and how to apply its lessons to real life.

Close in Prayer (5-10 minutes)

See “Closing Circles” in *Activities...* (p. 166).

Bonus Congregational Church 1: The 20th Century Question — Who's a Christian?

Contributor: DLG*

One of the most persistent and difficult questions for Christians of the last 150 years is “Who is a Christian?” followed closely by, “How do you know?” Differences had always existed in American Christianity, but the reductionistic approach** to biblical interpretation and the theory of evolution triggered a strong reaction in “conservative” Christian circles. A “fundamentalist movement” developed claiming that certain beliefs—among them the ideas that the Bible is without mistakes, that sin is part of being human, that Mary must have been a virgin—were fundamental to being Christian. In the 1920s, the fight over who’s a Christian polarized and then split many denominations, including Congregationalists and Presbyterians. Liberals developed their own litmus tests that included rational approaches to faith, accommodation of scientific and technological innovations, ecumenical movements, the “brotherhood of man and fatherhood of God,” and faith must be reflected in social action. So the Body of Christ in the United States became increasingly polarized for much of the 20th century.

At the end of the century, some began to question the validity of the terms, “liberal” and “conservative.” Particularly in Congregational circles, the efforts to polarize congregations and associations have been criticized as untrue to the spirit of the Congregational Way of following Jesus. Are our common bonds in Christ stronger than our differences? Can we make room for and encourage the beliefs of others, even when they are different from our own? Are we able to draw on our differences as strengths from which we all benefit?

This session looks to explore the differences of beliefs that polarized Christians in the 20th century and are still present today.

Here are some things you can do to prepare for this session:

* The lesson plan is Doug Gray’s, but the handouts reflect the collaborative discussion between Doug Gray and Rob Fredrickson.

** By “reductionistic,” I mean breaking wholes into their component parts. The theory is that by taking something apart and understanding the pieces, one can more clearly understand the whole. This approach has come up with some interesting theories—JEDP in the Pentateuch for one—some of which seemed to contribute little to gleaning meaning from a biblical text. Note: reductionistic is not the same thing as rational, for the Pilgrims and Puritans used some very rational approaches to Bible study (including something that approached the historical-critical method) that still form the core of most Protestant Bible study.

- In Jesus' life and ministry, he faced two different groups of people: those who were trying to be better and those who had no intention to change...ever. How does Jesus treat each group?
- In your own life, have you ever encountered intolerance? What were the issues and what happened in your life as a result?
- Read over the pair of handouts for this session, "Who's a Christian? What Many Fundamentalists Claim Are Essential Beliefs" and "Who's a Christian? What Some Liberals Claim Are Essential Beliefs." If some of the terms are unfamiliar to you, make sure you understand them better before the meeting.
- Meet with your pastor to discuss the meeting and its topics. What does your pastor think about the issues raised on the handouts? Consider inviting the pastor to attend and/or lead this session.
- Ask your pastor how s/he thinks parents will respond to discussing other viewpoints on God. Consider how you might include parents in the process. Do you need to invite parents to the meeting? Do you need to send the handouts home with the teens?
- Which of the issues on the sheets are "hot buttons" for you? What about the idea(s) gets your blood boiling?
- What do you think of people who are on the opposite side of issues you believe in?
- Have you been part of a group that has split over an issue? What was the issue? What was the result? Was the split inevitable? Was there another way?

Time Allotted: 120 minutes

Objectives: Help students think more critically about what they believe.
Help students understand that diversity is a truly positive aspect of Congregationalism.
Help students think about how they can "stand" for God in the world.

Outline of the Meeting

Opening
Housekeeping
Game
Introducing topic
Conservative/Liberal Activity
Worship
Closing Circle

Preparation

You will need something for groups to write on and something to write with.
(Paper and pens, newsprint and markers, chalkboard and chalk.)
Make sure Bibles will be available for each confirmand (one per student)

Copy Handouts

Who's a Christian: What Many Fundamentalists Claim Are Essential Beliefs

Who's a Christian? What Some Liberals Claim Are Essential Beliefs

If possible, copy these onto two different colored sheets. This study refers to red and blue sheets.

Opening (10 minutes)

Songs:

Pharoah, Pharoah

Where Do I Go?

Lord, I Lift Your Name

Open with Prayer

Housekeeping (5-10 minutes)

Hand back papers.

Make any announcements you need to make.

Game (5-10 minutes)

Choose from *Activities...* (p. 163).

Recommendation: Knots (p. 171).

Introducing Topic (10 minutes)

Trace Congregationalism through the following eras and issues briefly:

Industrial Revolution

Theory of Evolution and the scientific-reductionistic viewpoint

Social Gospel

Ecumenical Movement (becoming one church)

Say: The combination of different approaches to science and social situations and impassioned (sometimes extreme) supporters of both sides tended to push the groups to opposite ends of the spectrum. In fact, you can still see the effects of the fights of the last century in our society today. Tonight we are going to explore some of the different beliefs that have divided churches in the past. At some point in your life you will probably encounter all of the beliefs we will discuss and I want you to be prepared when you do.

Conservative/Liberal Activity (15-45 minutes)

Gather in a room with some wide-open space.

Stand in the exact middle of the room.

Say: We're going to have some fun thinking about different kinds of Christian beliefs. For each question, I will give you the two different ideas and point to one side of the room or another. Then when I say, "Go!" you will go to the place in the room that seems right to you. It's really important that you not criticize or make fun of people for what they believe. So we're only going to

make positive statements about people's beliefs. Let me give you an example of how this activity works. If you look at number one on the red sheet [you put in whatever color you have used], you'll see:

1. Inerrancy of the Bible in the original documents
That means "without error," no mistakes, even in matters of science, history, etc.

Now if you look at number one on the blue sheet [again, you put in whatever color you used], you'll see:

1. The Bible is a flawed book with great truths in it; not necessarily historically or scientifically accurate.

If you completely agree with the red sheet's statement, you will stand against the wall on this side of the room [hold out the red sheet toward one wall]. If you completely agree with the blue sheet's statement, you will stand against the wall on *this* side of the room [hold out the blue sheet toward the other wall]. If you are somewhere in the middle, find a place in the space between. If you are not sure what you think about the statement, come stand exactly in the middle. This side red sheet. This side blue sheet. [Hold the red sheet in the hand toward the wall you indicated earlier, and the blue sheet to the other wall.] Make sense? Ready...go!

Pick a person from the side with the blue sheet.

Ask: Why are you standing over here?

Pick a person from the side with the red sheet.

Ask: Why are you standing over here?

If you have anyone somewhere between the two extremes, ask: And why are standing there?

Some suggested guidelines:

- DO NOT criticize or make light of someone's beliefs. They are precious to that person and probably reflect not only their own values, but those of their family. Consider either encouraging all intelligent comments or letting teens statements stand on their own without comment by you.
- DO NOT let others in the room criticize or make light of someone's beliefs. This will undermine the group and runs counter to the purposes of this session.
- Consider alternating between starting with one sheet and starting with another.
- If you need to explain one or more of the concepts, consider using expressions like, "Some people believe..." or "I think someone who believed that would say..." As best you can, try to explain each side of an issue from the perspective of those who think that side is true.
- Avoid taking sides yourself. The teens look up to you. If you support one side over another, that will tend to invalidate the beliefs of those on the other side.

Worship (10-15 minutes)

Gather in a space where you can talk easily, with some newsprint.

Ask: Can you name some of the groups at school? (examples: jocks, brains, airheads, etc.) Write the names on the newsprint.

Are these names for the groups helpful or not? How?

Say: In the early church, Christians had a tough time with divisions. Most of the divisions came with names.

Read Ephesians 2:11–18.

Say: The two groups here were the Jews—called “the circumcised”—and the Gentiles—called “the uncircumcised.” In the early church, some people were making the argument that in order to be Christian, you first had to be a Jew. That meant keeping all sorts of rules (including keeping kosher). But here Paul reminds us that Jesus came not to put up barriers between people, but to wipe them out. What’s important are not the details or the labels of “liberal” or “conservative,” but do we follow Jesus? Because of Jesus, we are family for each other.

Ask: What is one way you could work against some of the intolerance you see/experience at school?

Close in Prayer (5 minutes)

See “Closing Circles” in *Activities...* (p. 166).

Close with a prayer (and if possible, a song about being family; one example is “Have You Seen Jesus, My Lord?” taking note of the verse that begins, “Have you ever stood in a family...”)

Basic Local Church Membership 1: Is There Life After Confirmation?

What does it mean to belong to a church? How does one function as a church member? Every local church must have answers to these questions. Sometimes churches put these expectations in writing, as in a covenant. Sometimes these are spoken, as in a new member class. Almost always there are unwritten and unspoken expectations as well. In many ways, these expectations define your church!

Before putting this session together, you may want to take a few minutes to prepare yourself. One or more of these ideas may prove useful:

- When did you join your church? Why did you choose this church instead of any other? What does being a member of your church mean for you?
- Choose one or more of the following passages about church to read and explore in your devotional time:
 - 1 Corinthians 12:1–31 (make sure you note where Paul is going at the end of the chapter!)
 - Romans 12:1–21 (What connects all these ideas and commands?)
 - Colossians 3:1–17
- What does this passage say about what people offer the church? What does this say about how we treat each other and why?
- What does your church do to “orient” new members? Is there a class? Does someone meet with people individually?
- Find whoever meets with people who want to become members. Ask them how they do the “orientation”. If the opportunity presents itself, ask if you can sit in on one of the “orientations.”
- Consider asking whoever “orients” prospective new members (often a pastor or elected laypeople) to come and be part of your class, perhaps even lead it.
- Find out who is in charge of “keeping track of members” or the “spiritual health of the congregation.” In many churches, the deacons and deaconesses fill this role. Why not ask one or more of them to come and contribute their thoughts on membership?
- Who are the people who receive the most joy from their relationship with the church? Who are the people who give the most joy as a result of their relationship with the church? (Hint: Generally the people who are at the church fit into this category, but *not always!* So balance the answer to the first with the answer to the second.)
- What are the expressed / unexpressed expectations of people who join your church? What is a new member “buying into” when s/he joins? (Examples: If a church is in the midst of building a new building, a new member is saying s/he is willing to be part of that project. If a church is known for its music program, probably the person joining likes music.)

- What is your church known for in the community? When the average person on the street hears the name of your church, what comes to mind? If you aren't sure, go to the supermarket closest to your church and ask a few people. Not that adventurous? Find two or three people you know who aren't members of your church and ask them.
- What are you really good at? List all the things you are good at on a sheet of paper? Allow only five minutes for yourself. Circle or highlight the ones you're really good at.
- What are your passions? What do you like to do? What gives you great joy? What do you like to spend your time thinking and dreaming about? (These are all different ways to the same answers.) Circle or highlight the one or two that about which you feel most strongly.

Time Allotted: 120 minutes

Objectives: Help teens learn something about the history of your local church
 Help teens understand what being a member is like
 Help teens think about how they about how they will contribute their time and talent to your church
 Wrap up the Confirmation Classes

Outline of the Meeting

History Walk
 Membership Panel
 "Time and Talents" Survey
 Wrap-Up: Each of Us in Ministry
 Close in Prayer

Preparation

Because of the great opportunities for discussion, you will probably only have time for two of the three middle segments. Choose which two you will do. See the individual sections below for any other preparations.

History Walk (30-40 minutes)

Preparation

Pick 3–4 places in your church building that would give someone a sense of your church's history. Sometimes each place has more than one bit of history. If you can, pick places that have things the teens can touch or see that they might never otherwise see or touch.

- Example: One church I served in had a fireproof vault that I had someone open for the class. We spent part of the class (carefully!) looking at documents from the Civil War and other eras.
- Example: Another church in which I served had a special book (it served a similar function to a family Bible) in which people commemorated significant acts of the church. For this class, we opened up the glass case

and put the book out on the table where the teens could (carefully) page through it.

- Example: Does your church have a bell tower? Would it be safe for a teen to climb up into? Teens love climbing the bell tower if it's possible!
- Example: Many churches have what one pastor described as a "rogue's gallery," an arrangement of photos or pictures of former pastors or important people in the church. This can be a convenient way to talk about the important events in particular eras of the church.

If you don't know the stories or are not a good storyteller, ask someone who knows the stories and can tell them with flair to lead the walk for you. Make sure you give the person leading the walk the time parameters and your goals so that they will know how to prepare.

Do you have someone in the church who is the "church historian?" (This is often an unofficial title in a church.) Perhaps s/he would be willing to gather some historical documents or photos for you. Encourage him/her to have a broad range of times and to not focus only on the building, but on things the people have done together.

The Walk

Go from place to place starting with the earliest period of the church.

Take time to tell the stories and answer questions. Keep track of the time so that you know when to move things along. (A useful tool may be dividing the church's history into time periods. Count the time periods and divide 30–40 minutes by that number. That's how many minutes you have for each time period!)

After you have tried this once, you may decide this is all you have to do for your main program segment!

Process

When you have returned to the starting point or your regular meeting point, ask: What about our church's history stands out for you? Why?

Membership Panel (30-45 minutes)

Preparation

Pick three or four people who know the church well (perhaps from different eras of the church's history)

Invite them to come for this session of confirmation. Make sure they know the day and time. For more intelligent answers, give them a copy of the questions beforehand!

Spend some time thinking through the seating arrangements for the session. Will you have a slightly larger circle with panel members sprinkled throughout? Will you have the panel members gathered in one area? Will you have the panel arranged at the front of the group with chairs or behind a table?

Panel Questions and Answers

How long have you been a member?

Why did you join the church?

What do you like most about the church?

What is one story or experience you remember that might help someone understand this church?

What are your hopes/dreams for the church?

Time and Talent Survey (20-30 minutes)

Preparation

If your church does not have one, draw up a list of all the different groups and ministries in which your church is involved. (See *Handouts*.)

Gather paper and writing utensils, enough for each confirmand.

The Gifts

Read Romans 12:4–8.

Say: Each of us has at least one thing and often more than one thing that we are really good at. That ability is a gift from God and it is no accident. God has given you that gift to do something great for God! In the next 3 minutes, I want you to come up with as many talents or gifts as you can. If you need to use the back of the paper, go ahead. Ready? Go!

Give teens 3 minutes to complete the task. Check on them. If most are done, move along. If the teens are really into it or need more time, give them a couple extra minutes to complete their listings.

Ask: Was this easy or hard to do? Why?

Say: Now that you have your list, I want you to pick between one and five things on your list that you are especially good at. You not only do them, you do them with flair or exceptional ability. Star the 1–5 things at which you are exceptionally good. (Allow them time to complete their prioritizing.) These are probably areas that God wants you to use for the good of the fellowship.

The Passion

Say: Now in a separate place (or on a separate piece of paper), I want you to think of the things that you *love* to do. You may or may not be good at them, but when you do them you feel great joy. Come up with as many as you can in the next two minutes. Ready? Go!

Ask: How many of you noticed that what you enjoy doing has a lot in common with what you are good at? Was this easier or harder than coming up with all the things you are good at? Why do you think that is?

Say: God has given you particular gifts, but God has also given you one or more passions. God works through both our gifts and passions to help us figure out what to do to help God. In general, we should follow our passion, and use our gifts to support the passion.

For example: One famous Congregational minister (Eric Liddell in the movie *Chariots of Fire*) was good at preaching and teaching, but what brought him great joy was running fast, faster perhaps than anyone of his day! God used this minister's passion and gifts of preaching and teaching to help him reach people who would never have found out about God otherwise and to help teach people about the meaning of integrity. (Watch the movie sometime to better understand what I mean here.) Now one could also argue that his passion was serving God and he was merely really good at running.

Say: Following God is deep down good news. Jesus didn't come and say, "I have come that you might have life most boringly." Jesus said, "I have come that you might have life and have it abundantly or to the full." Jesus believed in (and demonstrated) living all of life to the utmost. In the same way, doing what God wants you to do often means experiencing joy in God's presence.

Handout the listing of all the ministries that your church offers currently.

Ask: Would you take a few minutes to look at this list of ministries? Would any of them blessed by your gifts and passions? If you have any questions about one, I'll be glad to answer your questions. If you don't see any that use your gifts and passions, can you describe what your perfect ministry would be that would draw on them? Make sure you put your name on the sheet.

Give them five minutes to complete the task. Then collect the sheets. Make sure you turn them over to someone who can and *will* use the information.

Wrap-Up: Each of Us in Ministry (5 minutes)

Ask: So what did you learn today?

Draw out some thoughtfulness by asking additional leading questions if the answers are too brief or if it seems there are some underlying good thoughts.

Ask: In our church, who is a minister? (Probably the students will list the pastor. If so, say: Really? Is the pastor the only person with a relationship with God in our church? Who else has a relationship with God in this church?)

Say: Each of us has a relationship with God. A relationship with God acts like a channel for God's power and inspiration. Since we each have a relationship, God can work through each of us...and that means each of us is a minister! That's part of what makes Congregationalism great!) We each need to follow our gifts and passions to serve God, and we each have a chance to help others who get good ideas about how to serve people for God.

Close in Prayer (5-10 minutes)

Because this is the last session, consider having a slightly longer prayer time. In addition to doing one of the activities in Closing Circles (p. 166), why not add your heartfelt prayers of thanksgiving for each of the young people gathered with you and the gifts with which God has blessed them. Try to make your prayer a real source of encouragement for the young people.

**Building Confirmation
the Congregational Way**

Retreat and Trip Plans

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Introduction

For all the planning and long hours, retreats still offer one of the best returns for the time invested. Retreats simultaneously allow groups to develop relationships, shared experiences, trust, deeper consideration of topics, removal from the distractions of ordinary life, and (with God's help) experience of true fellowship and God's Presence.

The traditional youth retreat for many years was the weekend retreat (Friday night through Sunday afternoon). While this model is still a great one (the first sample retreat is this format), the increasing busyness of students and adults makes this harder and harder to schedule. One new model is the overnight retreat. The sample "overnighter" included work for a local Habitat for Humanity project. Another new model is an "undernighter" in which students and adult advisors gather for three or four hours on a Friday or Saturday night. Both "overnighters" and "undernighters" are easier to schedule and are not nearly so energy intensive to run. The overnighter may be the worst of all possible worlds, however: students and leaders wear themselves out and take the trouble to travel, yet 6-8 hours of the 18 or so of the overnight are spent on sleeping not on program.

To give you an idea of what goes into a retreat and how one might do it, the first sample retreat includes all the supporting documents (flyers, consent forms, sign up sheets, to do lists, etc.) for an actual retreat.

Setting Up the Retreat: A Rough Timeline

Plan the date (3-12 months ahead)

Plan as far ahead as possible. If the retreat requires a retreat site away from the church, make sure the site is available and reserve it! Include the families of those who will attend in picking the date (unless you have a traditional date!).

Line up advisors (the first week or two after planning the date)

As soon as you have the date, look for your advisors. Though some teens may not like having parents as advisors, parents are a ready pool of volunteers. If possible, get volunteers at the same time as you pick the date. In general you need one adult for every four 7th or 8th graders and one adult for every six 11th or 12th graders. Make sure you have at least one adult of each gender.

Send out invitations (4-8 weeks ahead)

Include:

Dates and times

Place(s)

Fees (if necessary)

Person or place for registering

What to bring / What not to bring

Consent form

Emergency phone numbers for the group at the retreat
Name of the sponsoring group

Registration

Collect registration fees and consent forms
Check on attendees from whom you have not heard (1-2 weeks ahead)
Confirm that adult advisors are in fact coming (1-2 weeks)
Arrange drivers (see "Gather and Transport Supplies" below)

Supplies

Shopping (within a day or two of the retreat)
Gather supplies (within a day or two of the retreat)

On the Day of the Retreat

Transport supplies (within a few hours of the retreat)
If you can set up before the retreat, so much the better. If you need to transport teens and advisors and supplies, make sure you have enough space for everything that has to go. Oh yes, and make sure you have enough space to get all home again!
Double check that all registration fees are paid and consent forms in (before you leave on the retreat) Don't leave without a consent form for every teen!
Pray together before you go. If parents are available, have them join the prayer circle too.
Do a last head count before leaving to make sure all those going on the retreat are in the vehicles.

Running the Retreat

Before proceeding further, you will want to be familiar with *Leading Small Groups* (p. 13). In addition to the principles found in that brief discussion, some additional principles are important for retreats.

Principle 1: Have Clear Boundaries and Expectations

Very early on in the retreat, boundaries and expectations need to be established. You may be tempted to simply "lay down the law." For the completely non-negotiable boundaries, you can do this, but for the rest, be positive ("Do this...") rather than negative ("Don't do this..."). Having clear boundaries and expectations helps students and adults know how to function together and make it clear where the leaders will not compromise. (For one set of boundaries and expectations, see the first sample retreat.) Make sure one of these boundaries is that you will send people home if they are dead set on making life miserable for everyone. From time to time, you will have a teen who will push the boundaries to the point where you may find yourself spending more time disciplining than running the program. See below for what to do.

Principle 2: Discipline quickly, firmly and fairly.

A full treatment of discipline is impossible here. Some words for the wise:

1. Be prepared to enforce the boundaries and expectations you have set.

2. Confront teens as soon as you are aware of the problem. (Waiting only makes things harder and can hurt the group's dynamics.)
3. Confront the offending teen openly, honestly and straightforwardly. Don't beat around the bush. Tell her/him what you didn't like about what was done and why that is a problem, but affirm the teen as a person. You may not like the behavior, but the person is God's child and your ability to show your love for this person (even when s/he is driving you crazy!) will communicate God's grace better than any words you will ever use.
4. Try not to respond out of your strong emotions. Generally speaking, the more emotion you show, the harder it will be to appear fair and to make good decisions.
5. Make sure that what you say will happen *does* happen. If you don't, you will lose credibility with everyone on the retreat. In fact, you may be less able to discipline later if you do not follow through the way you said you would the first time.
6. Almost every leader has had a teen who was bound and determined to cause trouble. If you see someone is intentionally causing trouble, give them a warning. ("If you continue like this, I will do...") Then follow through. If they continue to cause trouble, move to the last bit of advice below.
7. Don't be afraid to send a teen home. A serious problem needs to get the teen sent home. It's a pain in the neck to arrange for sending someone home, but if you need to do it, don't hesitate. Consider whether your continual focus on the trouble-maker will cripple the retreat for everyone else. If you send someone home, take time the week following the retreat to have some debriefing time with the teen who caused the trouble, and perhaps the teen's parents. This will give you a less stressful situation in which to discuss what was going on in the teen's life and your appreciation for the teen independent of the behavior. For resources on discipline, please see the *Annotated Bibliography*, p. 234.

Principle 3: People value what they invest in.

If adult advisors do all the work on the retreat, students will develop the expectation that food will magically appear and messes magically disappear. The result is teens who take adult contributions for granted (generally without being grateful for it) and adults who feel taken advantage of. The solution is to have teens do most, if not all, of the work they are capable of doing during the retreat. With adult supervision, even eighth graders can prepare a meal! Students are also less likely to make messes willy nilly if they realize they will be the ones who clean them up, or that they will have a turn to clean up later on. A side benefit of this approach is that teens may return home with additional skills and appreciation for their parents! At the end of the first sample retreat, sign up sheets are included to show one way this might be approached.

Principle 4: Do as much as possible together.

One terrific reason for going on retreat is spending the time together. As much as you can, foster that by planning ways that you do many or most things together.

For example, if you have to make a stop on the way to the retreat site, try to make that a planned stop where all vehicles and students are involved in the chaos of finding restrooms and getting food together. Avoid situations that split the group. The exception to this is any free time. Students will be more amenable to having “together time” if they have some time when they can choose with whom they will spend time.

Principle 5: More structure is better than no structure.

Unstructured time during a retreat is at best a waste and at worst an invitation for trouble. Even for free time, give options for what teens can do and where. Adult supervision should be available for each option.

Principle 6: Exhaustion does not make retreats more fun.

Fatigue generally wreaks havoc with people’s judgment. If a leader is tired, s/he will not see things as clearly nor respond as appropriately. For a weekend or week-long retreat, fatigue is one of the surest ways to wipe out all your great plans—tired teens may have trouble mustering even a miniscule bit of enthusiasm for God. Make sure everyone gets to sleep relatively early the first night (or more in the case of a week or longer trip). At the leader’s option, allow the last night to be a later night than usual.

Principle 7: Watch for the “teachable moment.”

God puts us in particular places at particular times for particular reasons. Whether you believe that or not, opportunities will come for you to help people understand themselves and God better. These opportunities are moments in which people are often more open to learning than they are normally. Sometimes these moments are failures (the group is not able to succeed at a joint task). Other times they are great successes. What we do in these teachable moments is critically important because these are the moments people remember. (Sorry, the teens will probably not remember a single, brilliant word you say!) The question, “What would Jesus do?” has become so pervasive that it is almost cliché, but at teachable moments, count on the intuition and leading that question will give you. Where you have the opportunity to praise, praise. Where you have the chance to help someone understand why something didn’t work, give the help. If you need more help trying to figure out what to do, spend some time with 1 Corinthians 13:4-7.

Principle 8: Catch people in the act of doing something good.

From time to time, teens will do something wonderful beyond words. Stop everything and take that moment to help the teen (perhaps everyone) understand why that was wonderful. This is a particularly potent tool with teens who are inclined to be troublemakers. If you can catch them doing something great and tell them about it, you may change their lives and forge a great relationship for the future.

Winding Up the Retreat

Allow time for the group to clean up after itself.

Make sure you have everything you came with.

Load up the vehicles with everyone's stuff. Make sure you have room for the people!

Have Closing Circle. Encourage teens to express the parts of the retreat for which they are most thankful.

Double check to make sure all the group's gear is out and that everything is the way it needs to be.

Load the people into the vehicles.

Do a final headcount to make sure you have all the people who are headed home *before* you let any vehicles start back.

After the Retreat

How are you going to celebrate the retreat? (The corollary is: There is always something to celebrate. If you are having trouble finding that something, try harder or be creative.) People in your fellowship need to know about the great things that happened. Some ideas for celebrating:

- Appoint one or more people to take pictures during the retreat. Afterward, post these pictures on bulletin boards, in newsletters and on websites.
- Even if you can't take pictures throughout the retreat, consider taking a group shot. Why not give each teen a framed copy?
- During the retreat, make something or write something that the teens can keep afterward.

Every positive thing you and others say will increase the blessing of the retreat and continue its influence long after your return home.

Evaluation

Just as with a regular meeting, each retreat needs to be evaluated.

Make sure your plans, notes and evaluation are gathered and available for the next person who does a confirmation retreat.

Conventions Used in This Section

Small Groups

Where you see this notation, divide up the entire group into small groups of 3 or 4. Because people tend to sit next to those they know the best, I often have group members number off ("You're a one. You're a two. You're a three. You're a one. etc.).

Large Group

Gather the group together and have a larger discussion. At times, a leader may choose to write group responses down. "Large group reporting" invites the individual small groups to tell the larger group what they came up with in their discussions.

Sample Retreat 1: Worship & Christian Life Weekend

Contributor: DLG

Confirmation Retreat Schedule

Friday

- 7:45p Icebreakers and Orientation
- 8:30 What Makes a Christian a Christian?
- 9:15 Break
- 9:30 Jesus Is the Rock! (What Does Jesus Think About Music?)
- 10:15 Midnight Snack
- 10:30 Devotions & Movie: "The Prince of Egypt"
- 12:30 Lights Out

Saturday

- 7:30a Rise and Shine!
- 8:00 Breakfast
- 8:30 Free Time
- 9:00 Tapping the Power: Prayer and Meditation
- 10:30 Break
- 10:45 Turning Loose with God
- 12:00p Lunch
- 12:30 Free Time
- 1:00 Movie / Do you have to be crazy to follow God?
- 4:30 Snack break
- 6:00 Supper
- 6:30 Free Time
- 7:00 Planning the Church of the Future
- 8:45 Putting Things Together: Working on parts of the worship for Sunday
- 10:00 The Feast of Champions: Communion
- 10:30 Late Night Options: Video, Games or Sleep
- 1:00a Lights Out

Sunday

- 8:00a Up and at 'em
- 8:30 Breakfast
- 9:00 Clean up and pack up
- 10:00 Turning Loose with God II: Worship
- 11:00 Lunch
- 11:30 Final clean up
- 12:00 Closing Circle
- 12:30 Make like trees and leave

Opening Session

7:45 pm • 45 minutes

Singing

Pharaoh, Pharaoh
Lord, I Lift Your Name on High
That's Why We Praise Him

Icebreakers/Games

People to People
Points of contact
Electric Fence

Orientation

Welcome to the Confirmation Retreat!
Pass around sign up sheets for meals
Overview of weekend (hand out and post schedules)
Ground rules

1. We're here to spend time together and with God—we're going to play together, learn together, eat together, etc.
 - No optional activities except during free time. We're doing things together.
 - Unless we're doing it together, you need to be either inside the lodge or within sight of it, even during free time. If you want to be outside, one of the adults needs to know where you're going.
 - Under no circumstances will you go off Camp Whitcomb/Mason's grounds. I will call your parents and you will go home.
2. We're here to have fun and grow individually and as a group.
 - Respecting each other (not disrespecting)
 - If you are making people miserable and you won't stop, I will call your parents (no matter the time) and they will come and get you.
 - Alcohol and drugs are not part of the experience. If you drink, I call your parents and you go home. If you do drugs, I will call the police and you can call them from the police station.
3. We're here to grow better friendships.
 - Include people you may not know well in whatever you do.
 - Don't just hang out with the people you already know well.
 - Mentors: Will be coming in and out. Please include them in whatever is going on.

Opening Prayer

What Makes a Christian a Christian?

8:30 pm • 30 minutes

Preparation

Before the orientation session, find three “hams” to be “Dr. Brain,” “Dr. Stomach,” and “Dr. Heart” for the skit. Describe the skit for them. Encourage them to be creative.

Skit

Do: After everyone has gathered for the session, call for a volunteer.

Say: Our volunteer needs to have his/her faith removed for a checkup, but I’m not sure where to look to find it. So I’ve invited three specialists to give their opinion. Dr. Brain, what procedure would you recommend to remove the patient’s faith?

Each doctor will describe where s/he thinks faith is located and why they think it’s in that area of the body.

Conclude: What makes a Christian a Christian? Tonight we’re going to try to figure it out.

Christianary

Do: Divide into teams. Each team will take turns sending a member up to pick out a card, either from the Person or Action category. This person will then “charade” or act out the card, trying to get their team to guess what was written on it. Play 3 rounds.

Ask: How do you know someone is Christian? (You may hear responses like, “by what they do” or “by how they treat others.”)

Can Christians Have Fun?

9:00 pm • 20 minutes

Show video clip of the wedding at Cana from the movie, *Last Temptation of Christ*.

(This clip portrays Jesus as having a sense of humor. Feel free to show a different clip if you find one that works better.)

Say: What I like about this clip is that it shows that Jesus had a sense of humor. I think he really did, but many people make it seem Christians can’t have fun. In this next bit, we’re going to try to figure out if Christians can have fun and how.

Small groups

What’s the funniest movie you ever saw?

What’s the funnest thing you ever did? What was great about it?

What kinds of things do you think are fun for God?

Can Christians have fun? And are there limits to how Christians can have fun?

Large group reporting

Then say: This is what Jesus had to say about life and having fun

“I am the gate...I have come that you might have life and have it to the full.”
(read the whole of John 10:7-10, but above is the essence.)

“I have told you this so that my joy may be in you and so that your joy may be complete.” (John 15:9-12)

Say: God wants life to be full of joy and our sense of fun is one of the main ways we express our joy. To be sure, we want to be careful that our fun doesn't hurt someone or something, but even Jesus had a sense of humor. So all this weekend let's try to see the ways in which God wants us to have fun.

Song

Seize the Day or Abundantly

Jesus Is the Rock and Roll!

9:30 pm • 45 minutes

Rock 'n' Roll Relay

Do: Divide group into four groups.

Object: Run down, put on headphones, find and copy scripture, return. First team to complete task wins. Make sure the kids are facing away from sheets they have just written for the discussion.

Ask: Was it difficult? What song was playing? What was the song about? What was the scripture about? How often do you do stuff with music?

Say: Tonight let's think about how we relate to our music—what's good and what's not about the music and our relationship to it. In particular, I'd like us to think about how God would want our music and us to relate. The object tonight is not to say, “This music is bad.” Or “You can only listen to certain kinds of music.” We just want to understand music better.

Rating Game

Do: Get a volunteer

Divide into two groups again.

Give everyone in each group an apple, a marshmallow or piece of candy, and a piece of paper. Ask the teens to crumple their piece of paper, and to hold off eating the candy or marshmallow until the game is over.

Task: Play several secular songs (often the first minute or so is enough for teens to recognize the song) One group will rate the music by holding up the apple (“It's good for you. Nutritious and delicious.”), the marshmallow or candy (“It's fluff. Tastes good, but not much real value.”), or crumpled up piece of paper (“Trash. Not good in any way.”) The other group will rate the message in the same way. (Note: some teens will choose to “trash” music that other teens like. Make sure you ask the teens who “trash” music whether it is the

style of music that's the issue. If that's the case, say, "We want to think more broadly here than our personal tastes.")

For each song:

- Why did you choose the rating for music? For message?
- What makes this song? Music or Message? Explain.
- Can you understand the message? Why or why not?
- Do you agree with the message? Why or why not?

After all the songs are done, ask:

- What's most important for a song's success? Explain.
- If the message is lousy, but the music is good, will you listen to the song?
- Why or why not?
- If the message is good, but the music stinks, will you listen?
- Why or why not?
- Read Philippians 4:8.

"Finally, brothers [and sisters], whatever is true, whatever is noble, whatever is right, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is admirable-if anything is excellent or praiseworthy-think about such things."(NIV)

Ask:

- Can musical styles be morally right or wrong? Why or why not?
- What does God think?
- Some studies show that rock music is physically harmful. Does this mean that God is opposed to it?

Jesus (the Rock) on Rock 'n' Roll

Do: Divide into pairs.

One person: Cut out one of the scriptures from the relay.

Other person: Grab pencil/pen and paper.

Task: Apply the Bible passage to current music by having the teens rewrite it in their own words.

Example: "Finally, if a song's message is honest, uplifting, morally right, without sinful intentions, shows the beauty of life, is liked by people you respect and speaks of great and wonderful things in the world, listen to it."

When everyone has finished the exercise, invite the groups to read their group's passage together. After each group has finished reading, invite all the others to stand if they agree, sit if they disagree and crouch if they're not sure. If someone disagrees, ask them to explain why. Then have them sit down to listen to the next group's passage.

Ask: What are some principles for listening to music?

Rocking Prayer

Do: Divide into two or more groups.

Task: Write a verse of a song using the paraphrases from the previous exercise.

Set the verse to the tune of a current song.

Use these for your closing prayer for devotions that night.

Devotions

10:30 p.m. • 15 minutes

A good habit to encourage in all of us is the habit of beginning and ending each day with words from the Bible and some prayer. A retreat is a perfect time to model this discipline. Devotions represent a perfect time for other adults to share some of their spiritual insights.

Scripture

If you have someone else do the devotion, you can either give them a scripture verse or you can let them pick one for themselves. For this first one, a good scripture passage is Mark 6:30-32, when Jesus takes his disciples on retreat. Take note of the context—what are the disciples getting back from and reporting on?

Sing a quiet song.

They Will Know We Are Christians by Our Love
El Shaddai
Pass It On

Pray

Tapping the Power: Prayer and Meditation

9:00 a.m. • 90 minutes

Large group discussion:

Say: In our tradition, we may pray at church and we may say our prayers, but we don't talk very much about meditation.

Ask: What is meditation? Why do people do it?

An excellent resource for understanding meditation and prayer and the difference between them is Richard Foster's *Celebration of Discipline*, see the *Annotated Bibliography*, p. 241.

Say: The next question is...How?

How to meditate:

1. Find a quiet place where you can relax and put your body in a position it can relax in.
2. Quiet your body and mind.
 - Tensing and releasing.
 - Saying a phrase over and over.
 - Focus on breathing.
3. Let everything go and open yourself to God.

Say: We're going to do a guided meditation. [Note: if you have never tried meditation, you should try the guided meditation below before asking the teens to try it.]

Get them settled and relaxed.

Say (slowly, steadily, feel free to draw out the descriptions or steps, pause between questions and descriptions): Imagine you are standing in a hallway. Look around at the walls and the floor and the ceiling. Is there a source of light? What is it like? You start walking down the hall. In the distance, you see a door. You keep walking. When you come to the door, look at it. What is it made of? How is it put together? You open the door and behind it is a room. You go into the room and look around. What do you see? What is it like in the room? Take a few moments to explore the room. (After a few moments.) Now it is time to go. You say goodbye to this room, knowing that you can return to it again later. You walk back up the hallway. When you reach the place you started, you may open your eyes and lie there thinking about what you have seen.

Large Group

Invite people to share what they saw. Encourage them. Be careful not put down anything they describe. This is very personal! [Leader: This room may symbolize our innermost hearts. If that's the case, what does this suggest to you about the state of your innermost heart?]

Say: There are lots of kinds of meditation. Many kinds of meditation have their roots in eastern religions like Buddhism and Hinduism, which is fine. But there is a major difference between Eastern and Christian meditation: where both Eastern and Christian meditation encourage us to relax and empty ourselves, in Christian meditation, we empty ourselves so that we can fill ourselves...with God, God's Presence, God's Spirit.

Large group discussion:

What is prayer?

What are some of the goals of prayer?

Different ways you've heard of people praying?

In addition to *Celebration of Discipline*, another wonderful resource for this section is Richard Foster's book, *Prayer*.

Turning Loose with God

10:45 a.m. • 45 minutes

Opening

Do: Everybody gets a paper plate and writes his/her name on it.

Find something large and circular (e.g., a trash can) and put it in the middle of the meeting space.

Have everyone form a circle around it 5-10 feet away, holding their paper plates. Then have them turn around and throw the paper plates toward the target without looking.

Turn around and see how close you got.

Now get your plate and get back in the circle.

Try to hit the target again, but this time face the target.

Discuss: Which was easier? Why? Did you have a strategy?

Say: Worship is a little like this game. In worship, we turn our focus toward God. When more than one of us worships, we also focus on the same target.

Large group brainstorming

Ask: What are some of the things we can do to turn our focus toward God?

Small groups

Do: In small groups, prioritize the list. Why do you think your top three are more important than the others?

Large group reporting

Say: This idea of worship helping us turn ourselves toward God is really important. Tonight you will have a chance to work on some of these things that help us turn toward God. We may not be in church tomorrow, but I think you will find that the worship we do together will be extraordinary.

Movie: "Brother Sun, Sister Moon"

Do you have to be crazy to follow God?

1:00 p.m. • 3 hours

Watch movie. It portrays the life of St. Francis of Assisi. Many of its historical details are very accurate, including the portrayal of life and perspectives of the 1100s. [Note: Make sure you watch this one first! Watch very carefully for details. The director of this film pays very careful attention to detail, using symbolism to say visually what more modern films would say in words. The scene where St. Francis completely disrobes in the city square really happened! Why is it such a pivotal point in St. Francis' life?] Point out the details that will make it easier for the teens to understand. The final scene with the pope really brings things together, contrasting the opulence of the pope with the simple reverence of the Franciscans.

Ask: What did you think about this movie? Why? (Don't let anyone just pan or praise it out of hand. Make them explain why they think it was a bad movie.) Most of us have a lot of "stuff." Does your "stuff" make you happy? Or do you find that having "stuff" means you just have to get more "stuff" and work harder to keep it up? Does our "stuff" start to control us? What would St. Francis say about our society and all its "stuff?" Do you have to be crazy to follow God? How much craziness is a good idea?

Conclude: Now I'm not saying that we should all go and throw all our possessions out the window when we get home, but I do think we should listen to what St. Francis has to teach us. One of the things I like about this movie is how it shows that following God can change not only our lives but the lives of the people around us. I saw great joy in the faces of St. Francis and Clare and the peasants who were being true to God. That's a joy I really want in my life.

Close in prayer

Planning the Church of the Future

7:00 p.m. • 90 minutes

Small groups

Handout paper (preferably newsprint or butcher paper) and markers.

Ask: If you could design a church and a worship service that would be meaningful to people your age, what would it look like and how would it work? (Encourage the groups to draw and write their ideas on paper.)

Large group reporting

Then say: Wow! These are all really creative ideas. In fact, I want to commend you for your hard work on them. You know, each generation has to talk about the Good News of Jesus in its own way. In a sense, each of you has a part in figuring out how to tell your generation about God in a way that they can hear. I am going to save these and pass them on to the people in our church who work on worship for our church. [Make sure you do this!] I can't make any promises, but hearing what would help you, may help them make decisions that will make church work for all of us.

Putting It Together

8:45 p.m. • 60 minutes

In the small groups from the "Turning Loose with God" discussion, have each group pick one thing they listed and work on it for the worship service the next day.

- Music
- Bible
- Understanding the passage
- Making it real for your life
- Prayer
- Offering

Help each of the groups to think creatively about their part. Also encourage them not to think of it as a performance, but as something to help other people understand and focus on God better. The real beginning part is for the group

working on the Bible to pick a passage they want to work on. Many study Bibles have a subject index that can help here. (Example: you can ask the teens what topic they think God most wants them to know about. Look that up in the subject index. Then choose from the passages listed) Teens will struggle with the parts about understanding the passage and making it real for your life. Encourage them that everyone can understand the Bible (God helps us!). A good tool for “making it real” is to act out the principles of the passage as skits.

When all the groups have a decent idea of what they are doing for the worship service, take their ideas and put them in the order they will be in for worship the next day. Feel free to use or not use a similar order to what your church normally does on Sunday mornings. Print the final version on newsprint or butcher paper so that you can post it before worship the next morning.

Communion

10:00 p.m. • 30–45 minutes

Preparation

Gather what you will need for communion. Use a single, unsliced loaf, but cut it part way through to make it easier to break when you are doing the communion. Put the grape juice in wide-mouthed cup or bowl that won't slosh too easily. If you have a fireplace, why not get a fire going. If you do not have a fireplace, bring out the candles, candle holders and a metal bowl. Make sure you have matches handy. Make sure you have song sheets and instruments for singing. If you need someone to hold a flashlight for you, have them sit next to you. When you are ready, light the candles, extinguish the electrical lights and invite everyone to come in and sit in a circle. Make sure everyone feels included and is equal. Encourage them to be in a quiet mood.

Singing

Lord, I Lift Your Name on High
Have You Seen Jesus, My Lord?

Prayer of Invocation

God, come join us tonight. Help us to listen to your voice. [Add anything else.]
Amen.

Message

Ask: How do we know we can come to God? Why? Is there anything we can do that is so bad that God can't forgive it?

Do: Hand out index cards. On one side, put down something you need forgiveness for. On the other side, put down something you would like to ask God to help you change about yourself. Encourage them to be completely honest. No one else will see those cards except God.

Say: At one time or another, all of us feel we aren't good enough for God. That's a natural feeling. But we have to be careful that it doesn't keep us from going to God when we most need God. There is nothing you or I can do that is so bad that God can't forgive us! God didn't want us to be left out just because we don't feel good enough, and that's why God sent Jesus. Jesus died on the cross for each of us, not because we were good, but because we needed God. So no matter how bad or ugly our lives have been, in Jesus God said, "I'm here for you, no matter what. I know things can be different. Will you let me make things different for you?" In your hands you have a card with things written on both sides. What I'd like you to do in a moment, whenever you're ready, is to get up and throw them in the fire. [If you don't have a fireplace for this, you can use a metal bowl. If you use the metal bowl, gather all of the cards first, then light them.]

Do: Start to sing a quiet song. ("I Love You, Lord" or "Lord, You Are" or "Create in Me a Clean Heart" are good choices.) As the group sings, people can come up and put cards into the fireplace or into the bowl. Watch them burn until they are gone.

Ask: What happened to your cards?

Say: That's what God does with our sins. They go up in smoke. God forgives and forgets. We can start completely fresh...if we want to. All of the ways that bad things have tried to hold onto us, they are swept away, wiped out. And we are finally free to be the wonderful, incredible, joyful people God made us to be. That's why Jesus is such Good News."

Communion

Say: On the night that Jesus was betrayed, he sat with his friends like we do tonight. After dinner, he took a loaf of bread (pick up the loaf of bread) and gave thanks (hold it up to heaven) and broke it (tear the loaf in half). And as he gave it to his friends he said, "This is my body which was broken for you." In the same way, Jesus took a cup filled with wine. (Hold up the cup so everyone can see it.) Tonight we're going to use juice, but they are both the fruit of the vine. Jesus took a cup and as he gave it to his friends, he said, "This is my blood, the blood of the new covenant, shed for you, for the forgiveness of sins. As often as you eat this bread and drink this cup, remember me."

Say: Tonight, we are going to take communion a little differently. We are going to pass the bread around. As you offer it to the person next to you, say, "This is the Body of Christ, broken for you." Let them take a piece. Then give the person next to you the bread. After you get a piece of bread hold onto it. Then we are going to pass the cup. As you offer it to the person next to you, say, "This is the blood of Christ, shed for you." The person will dip the bread in the cup, and then eat the bread and juice together. Then give the person next to you the cup. If you dip the bread only part way in and then turn the dipped part up, you will probably not drip.

Sing

Seek Ye First
They Will Know We Are Christians by Our Love

Closing Prayer

Make sure you allow time for others to pray if they choose to do so. If no one chooses to pray out loud, that's fine. The silence is good too. Your or someone else should close the prayer.

Sunday Worship

10:00 a.m. • 45 minutes

Preparation

Post the paper with the order of worship on it in a place where everyone can see it.

Worship

Do: Gather everyone in the main meeting area, preferably in a circle. Work your way through the order of worship. Be prepared for a teachable moment. You offer the closing prayer. Be enthusiastic in your praise for their honest efforts, and express your gratitude to God for each person.

Cleaning Up

Various times • 60+ minutes altogether

Before beginning general clean-up, have everyone clean up his/her own sleeping area and pack. When this is done, begin by asking for volunteers. Assign particular areas to small groups of people. Put each group under the supervision of an adult. Help the teens understand the importance of leaving the place better than they found it. (Note: This is especially true if one is in a church or someone's home. Nothing can squash the good feelings of a retreat faster than getting reamed out for wrecking the place. Take time to put things back together the way you found it. If anything has been broken or damaged beyond repair, make sure the owners know about it before they discover it for themselves. Work out an equitable way to pay for any damage. Perhaps the teen(s) who did the damage need to be the ones who pay for the damage.)

Closing Circle

12:00 p.m. • 15–30 minutes

See "Closing Circles" in *Activities...* (p. 166).

Shopping List

Buy in bulk (Costco or Sam's Club)

OJ (384 oz)	Saturday Breakfast and Sunday Breakfast
Milk (900 oz)	Sat Breakfast, Saturday Lunch, Sunday Breakfast, also possible for Snack
6 dozen doughnuts	30 each breakfast
3 dozen bagels	18 each breakfast
Butter (tub)	tub for both breakfasts
Cream cheese (tub)	tub for both breakfasts
Peanut Butter (2 big jars)	Saturday lunch
Jelly (2 big jars)	Saturday lunch
El cheapo pizzas 12	Saturday supper
Salad (2 small bags)	Saturday supper
Bread	Communion
Grape Juice	Communion
Hoagie buns 13 - 12 inch	Sunday lunch
Sandwich cheese (1 slice/person)	Sunday lunch
Sandwich meats (3 slices/person)	Sunday lunch
30 cups (sturdy)	
Markers	
Prizes (candy packs)	
M&Ms (large bag)	
25 apples	Snack
bread	All the meals, Sunday lunch, communion

Bring from Home

- Salad Dressing
- Bread knife
- Pitcher?
- Board games
- Cards

Another idea for supplying snacks

Buying all the snacks teens can go through in a weekend can be expensive. Why not make bringing a snack and 2 liter bottle of soda part of the registration fee?

Things to Do/Bring

Rent videos

1. Last Temptation
2. Saturday Night stuff
3. Monty Python and the Holy Grail
4. Almost an Angel

Check on newsprint

Put TV and VCR in car

Guitar

Song books / sheets

Paper Plates (250-300)

Plastic utensils

Ream of paper

Newspaper

"Boom Box" and CDs

Trash Bags 10-12 big ones

Make up sign-up sheets for meals

Go see retreat facility

Practice guitar

Prepare signs for Dr. Brain, Dr. Heart and Dr. Hands

Index cards (10 per person = 250)

5 Candles and holders

matches

Meal Sign-ups

Saturday Morning Breakfast

1. _____

2. _____

3. _____

4. _____

5. _____

Advisor: _____

Sunday Breakfast

1. _____

2. _____

3. _____

4. _____

5. _____

Advisor: _____

Saturday Lunch

1. _____

2. _____

3. _____

4. _____

Advisor: _____

Sunday Lunch

1. _____

2. _____

3. _____

4. _____

5. _____

Advisor: _____

Saturday Supper

1. _____

2. _____

3. _____

4. _____

5. _____

Advisor: _____

Youth Activity Consent Form
NORTH SHORE CONGREGATIONAL CHURCH

Description or title of activity: Confirmation Retreat 2001
 Date(s) and time(s) of activity: 6:30 p.m. January 5, 2001 thru 2 p.m. January 7, 2001
 Site(s) of activity: Camp Whitcomb-Mason
 For emergencies only: (262) 538-1190

Please print the first and last name(s) of the young person(s), participating in the above named activity, for whom you will accept responsibility:

I hereby certify that I am aware of, approve of, and take full responsibility for the participation of the above named person(s) in the above described activity. Furthermore, I release North Shore Congregational Church, and its employees, volunteers, and other agents, from any and all responsibility and legal liability for loss, damage, or injury to the person or property of the above named person(s) which may be sustained during or as a result of participation in the above described activity.

In the event of an emergency, I hereby authorize Rev. Doug Gray, an advisor, or any other volunteer leader to act as agent for me in consenting to any X-ray examination, medical, dental, surgical, or psychological diagnosis, treatment, and care, advised and supervised by a physician, dentist, surgeon, psychologist, or social worker licensed to practice under the laws of the state in which the services are rendered. I understand that I, or the applicable insurance carrier(s), will be financially responsible for any such emergency services. I expect that attempts will be made to contact me in the event of any such emergency.

Signature of parent or legal guardian: _____

Date: _____ Emergency telephone number(s): _____

I'm attending this youth activity to make friends and to be a friend, to learn more about God, and to have fun! I understand that if I fail to follow the rules and directions given by the director, advisors, counselors, chaperones, or any other adult leaders-or if I fail to show basic respect and Christian concern toward my fellow group members, the adult leaders, or the church's property-my family may be called and I may be sent home at any time. I also realize that my attitude will largely determine the kind of experience I have at this activity, and therefore I'll do all that I can to make it a safe and fun time of recreation and learning for myself and for others.

Youth's signature: _____ Date: _____

MEDICAL INFORMATION PERTAINING TO THE PARTICIPANT(S):

Allergies: _____

Medication(s) being taken: _____

Physical handicap(s) or limitation(s): _____

Medical insurance company: _____

Group or policy number: _____

Any other information that you deem important for the activity leaders to know (continue on reverse side if needed):

Sample Retreat 2: Overnight Service Retreat

Contributor: DLG

Service is a terrific tool for increasing teens' awareness of others, investment in helping, finding Christ in one's neighbors, and increasing self-esteem. The below overnight retreat happened during the summer and involved driving an hour to an urban church partnered with Habitat for Humanity in that city. In the United States, most cities with over a million residents have a chapter of Habitat.

Habitat combines faith, housing and shared hard work to battle poverty and apathy in a creative, community-building program. For more information on Habitat for Humanity International, see their website at www.habitat.org. If you don't have one in your area, perhaps your fellowship would like to consider starting one or filling the same niche.

One of the goals of this retreat (and really any mission project) is to glean some understanding of poverty, justice and the Bible's view on these matters. Another goal is to help teens identify with those who will be living in the houses. Habitat requires that anyone who will own a house has to put in "sweat equity" in their house and those of others in the neighborhood. Most teens are impressed with the amount of work that is involved and find themselves respecting the people who will move into the homes with which they help. Finally, my prayer is that we would be challenged by the biblical and hands-on experiences to rethink our own understanding of trusteeship and blessing.

Preparation

Months ahead:

Coordinate retreat schedules with local chapter of Habitat for Humanity and its partnered church(es).

Consider fund-raising to cover the cost of the trip and contribute the rest to Habitat either in cash or building supplies.

Weeks ahead:

Find adult sponsors who will be project leaders and chaperones on the trip. A great opportunity to pull in gifted people with construction skills who would not normally work with teens.

Find parents to drive and provide additional chaperoning.

Start sign up sheet.

The week before:

Call to find out what the likely projects will be for your retreat.

Confirm arrangements with adult sponsors, drivers and chaperones.

Gather tools for projects. If necessary, purchase additional building supplies to donate to the project.

Purchase food and other supplies.

The day before:

Talk with project leader to confirm everything one more time and get an even clearer picture of the work projects.

Retreat Schedule and Notes

Friday

- 1:00 pm Meet at church
 Pray
 Caravan to Habitat worksite
- 2:00 pm Arrive at worksite
 Orient with project leader
 Divide into work teams (each team needs a project leader or adult from your church)
- 5:30 pm Clean up projects for night
 Head for church
- 6:00 pm Free Time
 Dinner preparation team gets supper together.
- 6:30 pm Dinner
- 7:00 pm Free Time
 Clean up crew hard at work.
- 7:30 pm Discuss day's work and events
 Help group process the meaning of the events
 Break up into small groups to work on one or more of these passages:
 Matthew 25:31-46 ("As you did it to the least of these...")
 Luke 21:1-4 (Widow's Mite)
 Jeremiah 22:13-16 (Knowing God and practicing justice go together)
 Deuteronomy 10:18-19 (God's love for the weak)
 1 Corinthians 1:18-29 (God's preference for working with the weak)
 2 Corinthians 9:6-15 (Sowing generously)
 Have each group prepare a skit to express the meaning of their passage
 Discuss each skit
 Close with prayer
- 9:00 pm Break and Snack
- 9:15 pm Movie
- 11:00 pm Sleep

Saturday

- 7:00 am Rise and Shine!
- 7:30 am Breakfast
- 8:00 am Depart for worksite
- 8:15 am Arrive and orient

- 8:30 am Devotions
Work projects
If necessary, re-divide the group into different project teams. If possible, keep the same groups to promote group cohesion and development.
- 11:30 am Break for lunch
- 12:15 am Back to work
- 4:00 pm Break for day
Prayer and Closing Circle
Head for home!

Sample Retreat 3: Undernighter on the Reformation

Contributor: DLG

Preparation

Buy prizes
Markers/whiteboard
Newspapers
Copy Study Sheet
VCR and TV

Schedule and Notes

(bold print indicates things students should remember)

- 6 pm Gather and a game or activity
6:15 Dinner
6:30 Singing
Lord, I Lift Your Name on High
Where Do I Go?
Love the Lord Your God
6:45 Reformation Overview
- Middle Ages**
- A. Problems (See below)
 - B. Monastic solutions to these problems
Poverty + Hard work
Remember St. Francis (rags and no shoes + building the church?)
 - C. Problems that came after the monastic efforts
Hard work + no spending = Wealth
The Church became increasingly corrupt
 - Ecclesiastical court system**
 - Indulgences — selling of forgiveness/easier to get to heaven**
 - Vestments — really expensive robes, stoles, hats, etc.**
 - Buying/selling of church office**
 - Priests and bishops often not in residence (usually in Italy)**
 - Actual pastors (the person left in charge in the parish by those away) earned almost nothing and often lived in poverty
 - Worship and Bible in Latin (not a language people generally used or understood)**
 - Only Priest could have wine during Lord's Supper (performed with back to congregation, as if people weren't good enough to view it)**

Focus on the sacrifice of Christ (the Lamb of God slain on the altar)

Church bureaucracy was sucking the church dry

Always looking for new ways to make money (led to corruption)

Renaissance

"Discover" Greek and Roman culture/language

Architecture

Philosophy

Learning, etc.

John Wycliffe translates Bible into English (1300s)**People start thinking and reading for themselves****Invention of the Printing Press (Gutenberg, 1st Bible 1456)****Erasmus** Vanguard of Reformation

Incredible writer

Great satirist

First Greek NT published 1516

7:00 Luther. Watch video.

7:25 Analysis: **Luther**

Monk

Really stressing about his inability to be truly good no matter how hard he tried

Told to read Romans and St. Augustine

Nailed 95 Theses on the door of Wittenberg Castle (October 31, 1517)

Aimed for reform, not revolution.

"Here I am, I can do no other." — What Luther said when asked to recant.

Goals:

Pushed for services in German

Less sacrificial language in service

Accountable clergy who lived in community with those they served

More focus on preaching and less on pomp and circumstance

Communion (both elements) for everyone

Three sacraments: baptism, Lord's Supper, confession

7:35 Calvin & Zwingli. Watch video

8:05 Analysis & Radicals

Zwingli

Lived in Zurich, Switzerland

Began lecturing on NT with reformed feel (1519)

Got rid of the altars (and sacrificial language)

Moved a table into the middle for communion**Used bread (not wafers) on wooden platters****No formal vestments (robes and such)****Focus on preaching and praying**

No singing (read psalms)

Calvin

Second generation of Reformation

Passed through Geneva (1536) and pretty much stayed

Concerned with the question: How do we make politics/civic life in God's image?

Helped city leadership enact Ecclesiastical Ordinances based on Biblical laws

Secret of success: Authority of rightly called, educated and purified ministry.

Famous work: Institutes of Christian Religion (Latin, published at 25)

Extremely tight and cohesive

Drew on an amazing knowledge of scripture

Focuses on Sovereignty of God ("Double Pre-destination")

Radical Reformation

The Question: How far do we reform?

The Anabaptists (baptizing of adults, nonviolence), conscientious objector status, separation of church and state (not that one cannot use religion in making decisions and guiding the state but that the state cannot impose its views on someone else's religion)

The Case of Münster (Using the OT as your guide).

8:20 Break

8:30 Games: Everyone's It (with variations/ amputee and healing; see p. 168)

8:40 Housekeeping

Return papers

Talk about requirements & turning things in

Focus on memorization, attending meetings, service/ fellowship

Ways to add up service/ fellowship hours quickly

8:45 Sacraments and Rites — An outward sign of an inward grace (in the sanctuary)

Seven and Two

Roman Catholics have seven:

Baptism

First Communion

Confirmation

Marriage

Extreme Unction

Confession

Communion

Most Protestants have two

Baptism

Communion

Communion

What is it?

What does it do?

How does it work?

How we do it is important!

Transubstantiation vs. consubstantiation

The Real Presence

Memorial

Baptism

What is it?
What does it do?
How does it work?
How we do it is important!
Infant vs. adult baptism
What is confirmation then?

Footwashing?

According to the Bible, Jesus never baptized anyone.
He did wash people's feet.
Should that be a sacrament?

9:30 Worship

Bible Work: What will rule our lives?

Matthew 6:24

Matthew 6:33

Mark 12:30

Philippians 3:7-11

Skits that illustrate one of the things that compete for control of our lives

Sing

Create in Me a Clean Heart

One Name Under Heaven

10:00 Bye bye

**Building Confirmation
the Congregational Way**

**Activities, Games
and Simulation**

Alphabetical Listing

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Bible Scavenger Hunt

Contributor: DLG

Activity level: Medium-High

Duration: 15–30 minutes

Ages: 7+

Preparation: 30–60 minutes

For each small group of four playing, prepare one set of clues on strips of paper..

1. Divide into small groups of four or so.
2. Explain the game. The goal of this scavenger hunt is to find all the items on the list. The challenge is that you have to figure out what each item is from a clue in the Bible. In order to do that, you will need to use your Bibles (specify whatever translation from which you compiled the clues). Some of the clues have multiple passages or additional hints. The successful team will think creatively about how all the clues fit together.
3. One rule will be very important in playing this game:
 - Your entire group must stay in the same room. If you are discovered apart, your team will be disqualified.
4. Any questions? Go!
5. First team to bring all items to the starting place wins.

Sample clues based on the New International Version are listed below. You can easily prepare your own list by using a Bible and a concordance. Come up with the items to look for first. Use the concordance to find verses that include that word, then count the words from the beginning of the verse. For items without words—like video or refrigerator—consider having more than one biblical clue or adding an additional hint. Remember that if you are not specific enough, you may not get what you intended! **Note:** Having your students use the same translation you used in putting the scavenger hunt together is *critical!*

Passage

Jeremiah 17:8, word 27
 Matthew 10:42, words 7–10
 Isaiah 40:18, word 9 (lots of them,
 moving across a screen)
 Psalm 18:2, word 5
 John 1:27, words 10–13 (we would
 substitute the “L” word; bring 2)
 Job 41:13, word 7
 Matthew 26:30, word 6
 Job 6:5, word 9
 Isaiah 9:5, word 3
 Ezekiel 21:21, word 10
 Exodus 3:15 & Proverbs 3:3 (belonging to
 any Schimpf, a popular name in our
 church)

Item looked for

leaves
 cup of water
 video tape

 rock
 shoe laces (2)

 coat
 hymnbook
 blade of grass
 boot
 fork
 name tag

Closing Circles

Contributor: DLG

How you end and how you begin say a lot to people about what is important. So how do you end a meeting? At least with prayer...but here are some ideas to enliven your closing times.

Activity level: Quiet

Duration: 5–40 minutes (depends on activity and size of group)

Ages: Any

Preparation: None

Web of Appreciation — ball of yarn

- **Close in a standing circle.** This gets the group started toward leaving and forms a good buffer between what has gone before and what will come after. The circle is a great way to reinforce interconnectedness and equal value of all persons.
- **Hold hands.** Helps with group bonding.
- **Crossed hands.** Try having everyone cross their arms in front of them, right over left. This makes the circle tighter. It is also an object lesson: In ancient times, people did not have toilet paper, so instead they would use their hand or any available leaf to do the wiping...but only with their left hand. To offer someone your left hand in greeting was a terrible insult. When you cross your arms in front of you, you are therefore symbolically accepting what is worst in the other person (symbolized by his/her left hand) with what is best in you (symbolized by your right hand). The person to your right does the same for you, and so on around the circle. Right over left symbolizes the triumph of what is best over what is worst. Pass on that symbolism to your students; even your immature boys will catch a measure of the solemnity of this kind of circle. For a “twist,” when you say, “Amen,” pull your arms over your head and untwist. If everyone in the group does it, then every person is facing out of the circle and ready to go!
- **Circle of thanks.** As the leader, you start the prayer. Tell God something for which you are thankful, then squeeze the hand of the person next to you. The next person thanks God for something and squeezes the hand on the other side. If someone doesn't feel like praying aloud, s/he can just squeeze the hand on the other side. When it comes back to you, conclude the prayer.
- **Mix and match.** Combine one or more of the above or come up with your own rendition. Go around multiple times if you like.
- **Circle of well-wishing.** As above, only ask people to think of someone or some situation that needs God's help. When the prayer is passed to him/her, s/he simply says what or who it is. Of course, people can say more if they like!
- **Web of Appreciation.** For a longer version of a closing circle, have the students sit in a circle. Bring a ball of yarn. Start describing what you like about someone in general terms while others try to guess to whom you are referring. When you are done with your affirmation of the other person, hang onto the end of the yarn and toss/roll the ball to the person you just complimented. This person will then affirm another person, hold tight to the yarn and pass the ball to this next person,

- and so on until everyone is holding onto the yarn. (Note: This works best if you send the yarn *across* the circle, not pass it to a person close to you. Also, remind people that they can only say things that they *like* about the other person or that affirms the other person in some way. Don't let people get away with backhanded compliments either!) Ask someone to drop his/her end of the string. Watch what happens to the web as a whole (it loses tension, maybe begins to fall apart). A great opportunity to talk about the oneness of the Body of Christ and how when one person hurts or drops out, the whole group suffers.
- **Popcorn prayer.** Open the prayer time. Invite people to send up a one-word or short-phrase prayer, popping it up like popcorn. Encourage people to be like a bag of popcorn in full pop, with the prayers coming fast and furious!
 - **Spotlight prayer.** If you have a little more time, encourage people to share things with which they would like God's help. As each prayer concern is shared, a person in the circle volunteers to pray for it. When the person has finished with all his/her prayer concerns, s/he comes to the center of the circle. Everyone puts a hand on the person and prays for the prayer concern for which they volunteered, or for other things. More than one person can pray for a single prayer concern. Can be a very profound experience.
 - **Open prayer.** Before beginning the leader tells the group who is going to start and who is going to conclude the prayer. (This works well if you have two leaders, one of whom will begin and one of whom will end.) The person who begins sets the tone of the prayer time. The person who concludes must be aware of people's need to pray and should hold off closing if people's need to pray is strong. Simple but very effective, especially if time for prayer concerns beforehand is available.
 - **Jelly-roll prayer.** Have people join hands in a circle. Pick the person who is least liked by the group and draw this student into the center of the circle while the student holds on to one other person's hand. Then have the rest of the group wrap around this one person, like a jelly roll. When everyone is wrapped, grab hold of the group of them as widely as you can and close with a quick, heartfelt prayer of thanks for each of them and their gifts.

Cure for Cancer Simulation

Contributor: DLG

Activity level: Quiet-Medium

Duration: 20–30 minutes

Ages: 10+

Preparation: 5–10 minutes

Newsprint

Markers

Write goals (see below) onto sheet of newsprint (or chalkboard) beforehand

- A. Divide up into small groups (4 or so each)
- B. Choose a representative to record and present to the class.

Say: Your group has discovered the cure for cancer (*any* cancer), but it requires a combination of a simple change in diet and a vaccine in order to work. (The vaccine is something any pharmaceutical lab can create inexpensively.) Your group has two goals:

1. to make sure that the information on diet and formulating the vaccine is spread as quickly and as far as possible; and
2. to make sure that those who hear about it will want to make the diet change.

Come up with a strategy for accomplishing these goals.

Try to plan to solve possible problems before they arise.

Time limit: 10 minutes

C. Simulation Wrap-up

What are the key factors in your plan to get the word out? (TV, internet, classes at school, etc.)

What made those factors possible? (invention of solid state transistors, invention of computers and later PCs, laying of network lines, development of internet, invention of printing press, etc.)

Bonus: If you have more time or if a group gets done early, have the group design and perform a 30-second, TV or radio commercial the members could use to implement their group's strategy.

Everybody's It

Contributor: DLG

Activity level: High

Duration: 5–20 minutes (as long as people are having fun)

Ages: 6+

Preparation: None

Just like freeze tag, only everybody's it! If people tag each other at the same time, both are frozen. Play a couple rounds of this.

Variation: Give everybody not only the power to freeze, but the power to heal. If someone wants to unfreeze someone else, that person wanting to unfreeze another has to say, "Healing touch," as s/he tags the other person.

Variation: As above, only the freezing only works on the body part tagged (e.g., a person tagged on the left arm loses the use of it, a person tagged on the right leg can only hop on the left leg, a person tagged in the back flops to the ground, etc.) The healing touch still works, one healing touch per affected body part.

Truly chaotic! (That means it's fun!)

The Game (a.k.a. Kick the Can)

Contributor: DLG

Activity level: High
Duration: 10–45 minutes
Ages: 6+
Preparation: Chair and cup or ball

Set up a chair and place the cup or ball on it. Pick two or more people to be "it." Set aside some space for a jail in the same room as the chair. Set boundaries (areas that are going to be off-limits (e.g., boiler room, sanctuary and office spaces) or where you don't want running. The goal of the people who are "it" is to tag all the people who are not "it." People who are tagged go to jail. Those who are not "it" have two goals: not to get tagged and to free people from jail. Someone frees all the prisoners by knocking the cup or ball off the chair without being tagged. Once the cup or ball is off the chair, no one can be tagged until the cup or ball is replaced.

Variations: To make the game go more quickly, make more people it. An "it"-to-runner ratio of 1:8 is challenging to the "its." A ratio of 1:4 is challenging to the runners. For an interesting twist, make one or two people "secret its" part way through the game.

Warning! This game is extremely addictive! Teens will enjoy it so much that they won't want to play or do anything else. Use this game sparingly and don't let yourself be wheedled into playing it all the time. My thanks to Rev. Gary Filson for teaching me "The Game."

Getting to Know You Games

Contributor: DLG

Activity level: Quiet

Duration: 15–45 minutes (depends on group size)

Ages: 6+ (interviews works better with older participants)

Preparation: None

Take as Much as You Need (something with parts, e.g., toilet paper, M&Ms, etc.)

If you have a really large group, you can break into groups of 10–20 and continue with the game.

- Alliteration. Say your name and an adjective that describes you. I would say, “Dizzy Doug.” The next person, Lynn, says, “Lovable Lynn” and “Dizzy Doug.” The next person, Joanne, says, “Jocular Joanne” and “Lovable Lynn” and “Dizzy Doug.” This continues around the circle, the next person saying their own adjective and name and the adjective / name combinations of each person before them.
- Personal Interview. Ask people in the group to pair up with someone they don’t know. (If everyone knows everyone, then ask them to pair up with the person they know the least about.) Give each person one minute to find out everything s/he can about the other person. When you are done, form a circle again, this time with pairs sitting next to each other. Begin with one pair introducing each other, giving as much detail as s/he can remember. Work your way around the circle giving everyone a chance.
- Common Ground. Pair up people as in 2. above. This time give the pairs 30 seconds to find out what they have in common. Encourage pairs to generate as many things as possible. When the pairs finish, take one of two tracks:
 - a. Pair up with a different person and repeat. Repeat three or four times.
 - b. Find another pair and (now as a group of four) repeat. When the group of four finishes, have them get together with another foursome and repeat (now a group of eight).
- Take as Much as You Need. Gather people in a circle. Pass around something with parts (e.g., a bag of M&Ms, a roll of toilet paper). Tell people to take as much as they need when the item gets to them. When everyone has taken as much as s/he needs, tell them that they have to tell us one thing for every piece they took! So if the group were passing a bowl of M&Ms and you took three, you would have to tell the group three things about yourself. The hitch with the edible things is that they can’t eat them until they have told all the things about themselves!

Knots

Contributor: DLG

Activity level: Medium
Duration: 5–15 minutes
Ages: 6+
Preparation: None

Gather everyone in a circle and ask people to raise their right hands and reach across the circle and take someone else's hand. Ask people to raise their left hands and (without letting go of the other hand) to reach across the circle and take someone's hand (not the same person). The goal is to untangle yourselves until you are standing in a circle *without anyone letting go of anyone else's hand!* Things to look for:

1. You need an even number to make it work.
2. You need at least eight to make it work.
3. Doing it with more than 16 is hard.
4. If someone is being overly bossy, do the exercise again only that person can't speak or is blindfolded.
5. Occasionally, groups will end up in a figure eight formation. This is as far as you can go! Break hands and try it again.

Ask:

- Was this easy or hard?
- Why?
- Who had the ideas that made this work? Was it just one person or more than one? (Almost always, a point comes where the person who was directing the untangling is on the outside and away from the main part of the knot. Watch for who takes over then. This reminds us that the group is more than just one person...everyone's gifts are important!)
- If you blindfolded someone, ask them about the experience. How did this person know what to do? To whom did they listen?

Lining Up Games

Contributor: DLG

Activity level: Medium
Duration: 5–10 minutes
Ages: 6+
Preparation: None

Show people an imaginary or real line. Tell them they have to line up according to:

1. Height
2. Shoe size
3. Birthday
4. Eye color (don't let people talk for this one)

To make it harder, don't tell them which end of the line is tallest or biggest, etc. To make it even harder, blindfold or mute the students.

Ask:

1. Was this easy or hard?
2. Why?
3. If you did the eye color one, ask how they figured it out? (Eye color is a good example of a quality which is not naturally hierarchical (height, shoe size and birthday all have a natural order.)
4. Does it matter which end is which? Is being in order important?

Mingle

Contributor: DLG

Activity level: Medium High
Duration: 5 minutes tops
Ages: 6+
Preparation: none

Have everyone stand in the open space. Stand on a chair so you can see out over people's heads. Participants "mingle," greeting each other or exchanging random bits of information (e.g., where they grew up, shoe size, etc.). When the leader shouts a number, participants attempt to form a group of that number by linking elbows or hands. Those without a group have a seat. (Example: The leader shouts, "Four!" Participants try to form groups of four. If you had nine people, you will have one person who will have a seat on that turn. When you have a few people left, declare them the winners and start again. Don't play this game too long!

Name Tag Fun

Contributor: DLG

Activity level: Quiet
Duration: 10–15 minutes
Ages: 8+
Preparation: construction paper (lots of colors), markers (also lots of colors), yarn (cut the yarn into 2'–3' lengths), single hole puncher(s)

Hand out paper, pens/pencils and yarn/string. Invite people to write their name on it in large letters, and then to write or draw at least two things that describe who s/he is and what s/he likes or likes to do and one thing that describes something s/he knows about God. Ask people in their small groups to introduce themselves, using the newly created name tags as a tool. When all the groups have shared (or 10 minutes has passed), gather all the small groups together and ask for one or more volunteers to share their name tags. Compliment people on their creativity!

People-to-People

Contributor: DLG

Activity level: Medium-High
Duration: 5–30 minutes (as long as people are having fun)
Ages: 6+
Preparation: 2 minutes

Circle of chairs with one chair less than the group

Have everyone sit in the chairs arranged in a circle. The person who is left stands in the middle. This person's goal is to find a seat and sit down. In order to do that, s/he must get other people to stand up. To do *that*, the person in the middle says, "I like people who..." and fills in the blank with something or some act which describes people sitting in the circle of chairs. Examples:

...brushed their teeth this morning.
...are wearing blue jeans.
...have black hair.
...have seen a movie in the last 3 days.
...like Ricky Martin.

If the person in the middle's description applies to anyone, they have to stand up and move to another chair while the person in the middle tries to sit down in one of the open chairs before somebody else does. Here are three rules to guide this process:

1. You cannot single out a single person. If the person in the middle's description applies to only one person, then the person in the middle has to try a new description.
2. Once you stand up, you cannot sit down in the chair from which you came. (You have to find a new chair.) That chair can be next to you.
3. If you cannot think of a description—or just want to generate maximum chaos—say, "People-to-People." When the person in the middle says, "People-to-People," *everyone* sitting in chairs stands up and has to move to another chair. With "People-to-People," you may not move to a seat next to you.

Romans and Christians

Contributor: DLG

Activity level: High
Duration: 30–45 minutes (as long as people are having fun)
Ages: 13+ (because of subject matter)
Preparation: Brief other adults on their duties as “Romans.” Best to be played at night and with few lights (keep on stairway lights for safety). Decide on a room or area for the jail.

This game is designed to help teens think about the life of early Christians. (For a brief, historical background, see “Real-Life Hard Decisions,” p. 100.) All the students should be Christians. Their goal is to meet together in the dark, preferably to sing and talk about God (offer extra prizes for those who are found that way). The goal for the Roman guards is to capture the Christians and take them to jail. If the Romans capture all the Christians, they win. If the Christians are able to keep at least one free, they win. If a Christian is captured, s/he can earn release by giving a Roman guard three good reasons for becoming a Christian. (This parallels some of the stories in Acts in which Peter, Paul and others converted their guards.)

Note on Jail Breaks: Christians cannot escape from prison. Because Christians wanted to be good witnesses of their faith and take the opportunity to try to convert their guards, even when Christians had the opportunity to escape, they refused to leave.)

Note on Making People Romans: Roman persecution of Christians still has a notorious reputation. Romans authorities of some eras could be rightly compared to the Nazis of World War II. Because you are putting the Romans in this game in a position of power over the Christians, all Romans should be adults or much older teens with good judgment who will not misuse this position.

Sardines

Contributor: DLG

Activity level: Medium-High
Duration: 15–45 minutes (as long as people are having fun)
Ages: 6+
Preparation: None

Gather people to hear the rules. This game is like hide-and-seek in reverse. One person finds a place to hide. Everybody else tries to find that person. When someone finds the hiding person, s/he hides with the hiding person. Game continues until everyone finds the person who was hiding. Can make for some pretty cramped quarters. Works better at night in a dark or semi-dark building. Set boundaries that

exclude unsafe or special places (e.g., boiler room, china closet, offices, etc.). Some church fellowships are very sensitive about using the sanctuary for games. Know where your fellowship stands before you set boundaries for this game. Keep an eye out if you have couples who might use the opportunity to forget the game and find their own close quarters!

Scripture Races

Contributor: DLG

Activity level: Quiet-Medium
Duration: 5–15 minutes (as long as people are having fun)
Ages: 8+ (some knowledge of the Bible is required)
Preparation: 2 minutes
Pick out two scripture verses to start the game rolling
Optional: have bag of treats for winners

This game encourages participants to learn their way around their Bibles better. The leader gives a scripture verse (e.g., Matthew 5:1) and everyone has to find it. If you are playing with the optional bag of treats, the first one to find the passage gets a “trip to the bag” for one treat. While participants are looking up the first passage, the leader can look up the third. Thus the leader stays a verse or two ahead of the participants.

Stacking Game

Contributor: DLG

Activity level: Medium
Duration: 5–15 minutes (as long as people are having fun)
Ages: 6+
Preparation: 2 minutes
Circle of chairs with one chair less than the group

Person stands in the middle and gives descriptions (see “People-to-People” above), a number and a direction. Example: “Anyone who is wearing white move two spaces to your left.” All the people to whom that description applies get up and move the appropriate number of chairs in the appropriate direction. If someone else is already sitting in that chair, then the person moving sits on the lap of the person in the chair. If a person who is not the top person in a stack has to move, then everyone in the stack above that person must move with the person who has to move. Keep the pace up.

Target Practice

Contributor: DLG

Activity level: Medium

Duration: 5–15 minutes

Ages: 6+

Preparation: 2 or 15 minutes

Have a paper/Styrofoam plate for each person. (Alternative: have paper for teens to make paper airplanes)

If you use a trash can, 2 minutes.

If you create a target on the floor: 15 minutes

Place the trash can in a place with space around it. Give each teen a plate and ask them to write his/her name on the back. Have teens gather in a circle around the trash can far enough away that throwing the plate into the trash can will be possible but challenging. Students will attempt to throw their plates into the trash can. If someone makes it in easily, ask them to step back and try it again. When everyone has had one or more chances while facing the trash can, have students turn their backs on the trash can and try to make it in. If this seems too easy, add difficulty by having students throw it through their legs or some other challenging variation.

For examples of discussions that might follow, see Topical Lesson Plans, “Biblical Ideas of Sin/Atonement/Forgiveness/Love,” p. 78, or “Focus on God,” p. 113.

Target on the Floor Variation: If you have a bit more time and the right setting, consider using tape or string to make a target on the floor. Tape concentric rings on the floor with 2–3 feet separating each ring. The goal of this variation is to put the plates into the “bullseye.” To generate more fun, turn this into a team game with different point values awarded for each ring. Total up the points and award prizes to the team with the most points.

Airplane Variation: Instead of throwing paper plates, students are asked to make paper airplanes and write their names on them. The game proceeds as above (depending on whether you have a trash can or target on the floor). This variation is particularly useful for the “Biblical Ideas of Sin/Atonement/Forgiveness/Love” session, p. 78.

Wink

Contributor: DLG

Activity level: High

Duration: 10–15 minutes

Ages: 8+

Preparation: 2 minutes

Circle of chairs with a small space between them. The number of chairs is equal to half of the group size plus one chair that will remain empty.

Count off the group by twos. Have “ones” sit down in the chairs. Have “twos” stand behind each chair. The student who stands behind the empty chair is “it.” (Note: if you have an even number of students, one of the adults can stand behind the empty chair.) The goal of the person behind the empty chair is to have one of the students sitting down move into that chair. The person behind the empty chair will do this by winking at one of the students sitting in a chair. When a student in a chair is winked at, s/he will attempt to move to the empty chair, while the person sitting behind him/her will try to keep the person from moving. To avoid physical injury, let the sitting people know that if they feel hands on their shoulders, they can't go; also let the standing people know to be gentle. To avoid giving the people standing an unfair advantage, have them either keep their hands at their sides or on the back of the chair. Note: the wider the circle, the harder it is for the person winking to get someone to stand up.

**Building Confirmation
the Congregational Way**

Special Program Elements

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Introduction

The confirmation process provides a rare and golden opportunity to impact the life of a young person in a way to which they may or may not be open in the future. In addition to the regular elements of confirmation (which we hope will have a beneficial effect on the confirmand), a few program ideas have even greater potential for significant impact. None of them can truly happen in the course of an ordinary confirmation session. Some of them require that extraordinary arrangements be made. All of them can open up windows to living faithfully through which the confirmands might catch a glimpse of what walking with God could be like, or help them look at what they know about faith in a completely different light.

Because of their power and the preparation and/or work involved in each of these, one could quite easily put together entire books on some of them (See the *Annotated Bibliography*, p. 245, for examples). The goals of this section will be somewhat limited in scope:

- To provide enough information to decide whether this program element belongs in the confirmation program at your church
- To offer one or more examples of how such a program element might be used in an overall confirmation curriculum

For some sample literature and handouts, see the appropriate section in *Appendix C: Handouts*, beginning on p. 321.

Church Meeting Attendance

See “Special Program Elements” in *Handouts* for any handouts for this special program element.

Objectives

- Help prepare confirmands for church leadership
- Encourage confirmands to reflect spiritually on “ordinary” events

Advantages

- Easy to organize (every church has multiple meetings in a given month)
- Easy to implement
- Easy to tailor to individual interests of confirmand
- Gets teens thinking about the possibility s/he might be able to serve on a board or committee
- Helps confirmands begin to gather the skills that will be necessary not only to serve in church leadership positions, but also
- May offer confirmand an example of good leadership outside the corporate model
- Encourages members on the board or council to “behave,” perhaps even reflect on what is really happening in the meeting
- Reminds adults in leadership positions that youth are capable of understanding and contributing to the leadership of the church

Disadvantages

- To see the spiritual issues at hand, a confirmation instructor or pastor may need to help with the process of spiritual reflection
- Can backfire (a really boring meeting or a shouting match), leaving confirmands soured on being involved in leading the church
- If a meeting is led in a clearly corporate style without any reference to spiritual ideas or issues, may reinforce thinking of the church from a business model

One of the most under-utilized resources in the church are its youth members. In many (perhaps most) churches, teens are never nominated to serve on boards or committees. If the truth were to be told, the nominating committee probably never thinks of them as candidates! Perhaps including meeting attendance as a requirement can begin and encourage the process of including gifted teens in positions of leadership.

Church Visitation

See “Special Program Elements” in *Handouts* for any handouts for this special program element.

Objectives

- Learn what other people believe
- Gain better understanding of one’s own beliefs
- Understand the nature, purpose and “language” of worship better (see *Sermon and Worship Analysis*, p. 188)

Advantages

- Engages all the senses (good learning!)
- Increases cross-cultural awareness and understanding
- Relatively easy to set up
- Most worship leaders of other churches and faiths are happy to explain their beliefs and worship practices

Disadvantages

- Few confirmation leaders have enough knowledge of other religions or the origins of different religious practices to interpret them for their confirmands
- Attending some worship services means taking confirmands away from their home church’s worship
- Introducing impressionable young people to other faiths may appear to be a risky proposition to some people

What better way to appreciate one’s own faith tradition than to experience a different one. Confirmands visit other churches even other “houses of faith” (e.g., synagogues, mosques, etc.) and participate in worship as observers. Explaining the worship is a critical part of any visit.

Interviews

See “Special Program Elements” in *Handouts* for any handouts for this special program element.

Objectives

- Help teens see inside the spiritual journey of people of faith
- Build relationships across generations and other perceived “barriers”

Advantages

- Engages multiple faculties in determining and asking questions and listening to the response
- Increases awareness of other generations and variety of experiences and perspectives
- Easy to organize
- Variety of approaches (one-on-one speaking, tape recording, video recording, etc.), subjects (historical views, experience of faith, understanding of the church, etc.) and opportunities (over tea, during all-church events, etc.) give interviews nearly endless variety
- Most people are thrilled to share their faith with a young person who is interested in their experiences and perspective

Disadvantages

- Asking people for an interview is sometimes daunting to teens
- Teens may be told something inappropriate or simply untrue. Teens generally are unable to think critically enough to sort out such statements.
- Having multiple confirmants interview the same person or persons may create a serious time commitment for that person(s).

Mentoring

See “Special Program Elements” in *Handouts* for any handouts for this special program element.

Objective

- Give confirmands a chance to see and experience Christian faith in the life of someone else
- Provide an additional adult role model for journeying with God

Advantages

- Provides an adult relationship in the church besides family and pastor (studies show this additional adult often plays a vital role in faith development)
- Gives confirmands a chance to ask questions of someone else
- Provide someone to encourage the confirmand in the confirmation process
- When it works mentoring can be the best part of confirmation

Disadvantages

- Can be difficult to set up a mentoring program
- Busy schedules make mentoring challenging
- When it doesn't work it becomes a major hindrance for the spiritual lives of mentor and confirmand alike

An ancient, honored practice in Christian faith, mentoring pairs a person of some Christian experience with a person with little Christian experience. Although typically a one-on-one experience, in some models, mentors oversee a small group of “mentees.”

Mission/Service Project

See “Special Program Elements” in *Handouts* for any handouts for this special program element.

Objective

- Give students a chance to practice serving (arguably the essence of following the example Jesus Christ)

Advantages

- If nothing else, confirmands have done something good for others!
- May make service by confirmands more likely after confirmation
- Could be good for group relationships and relationships with other adults
- Works very well with those who have trouble concentrating in a typical “classroom” setting

Disadvantages

- Can be difficult to set up and/or implement
- Might make teens think a Christian’s value is determined by what s/he does
- May offer little or no opportunity to cover other confirmation material
- A single program may not appeal to or meet needs of each person

Service has always been part of the Christian life and work, starting with Jesus in coming to serve rather than be served. Project intensity (how hard are you going to work on it at a stretch) difficulty and length can vary and can be done as an individual or as a group. One could even combine this with the retreat (see above) on a mission trip of a couple of days or more.

Retreat

For samples, see *Retreats and Trip Plans*, p.131.

Objectives

- Gain perspective on “ordinary” life
- Learn about God

Advantages

- Offers opportunity to cover one or more segments of the confirmation program (depending on the length of the retreat)
- Offers opportunity to cover longer material (e.g., watch movies)
- Builds group trust and relationships
- Can be extremely memorable for confirmands
- Other advantages are possible depending on how one sets it up

Disadvantages

- Time-intensive to prepare and implement
- Definitely need additional adult help
- Can be expensive
- Can be intense to lead

Another classic Christian practice, retreats have enabled Christians to remove themselves from “ordinary” life in order to gain perspective and (hopefully) a deeper awareness of God’s presence.

Sermon and Worship Analysis

See “Special Program Elements” in *Handouts* for any handouts for this special program element.

Objective

- Become more aware of and more open to the meaning of worship

Advantages

- Encourages independent thought in confirmands
- Builds sense of *koinonia* with church body
- May open eyes of confirmand to meanings/he never perceived before
- Opportunities abound in one’s own church or in others
- When combined with “Church Visitation” above, p. 183, can encourage thinking about many aspects of faith, theology and church history
- Simple to adapt to accent different program emphases
- Might promote family conversation about worship

Disadvantages

- Not a “group” activity in the usual sense of the word
- Confirmands may write what s/he thinks the instructor wants to hear
- Requires ability to think and articulate somewhat clearly about what one is perceiving
- May backfire if family does not reflect enjoyment of worship to confirmand

One of the difficult transitions confirmands need to make is from a generally unaware, youth participant into a generally aware, young adult, worshipping member. Many confirmands take worship for granted and pay little attention to the meaning and purpose swirling around them. Taking notes on sermons and thinking about the other elements that go into worship (the architecture, sense of space, type of music, where people stand, what people do, how people do it, who is worshipping, etc.) encourages confirmands to begin gathering meaning more intentionally from the world and worship around them.

Service/Fellowship Hours

Objectives

- Give students a chance to practice serving
- Encourage teens to participate in the life of the church

Advantages

- A great way to get a “foot in the door” with confirmands whose families are marginally involved
- Confirmands can serve/participate in what interests them
- Easy set up

Disadvantages

- Have to track their hours
- Offers no opportunity to discuss/debrief experiences

A variation on the Service/Mission Project is the requirement that students participate in a specific number of hours either serving others or participating in the life of the church. (Regular worship should not be counted since that is just part of being in the fellowship.)

Worship Design and Leadership

Objective

- Help confirmands understand worship from the inside out, not as performance, but as a reflection of a living relationship with God

Advantages

- Gets teens involved
- Helps teens begin to draw on and develop their gifts for the greater good of the fellowship
- Builds confidence
- Helps teach the congregation to value the contributions of young people (not just on Youth Sunday)
- Great way to involve the pastor of your church in the confirmation process

Disadvantages

- Can be challenging to organize
- May require plenty of advance planning if you are participating in your fellowship's main worship
- May require worship practice outside of regular meeting times
- Some teens are so nervous about being in front of others that it can sour the whole experience
- The responses of adults in the congregation may be mixed
- If pastor is involved, s/he may overwhelm the teens' creative thought, leading to a less open understanding of worship

Someone has said that worship is the heart of the church. Confirmation students who design and lead worship (whether for the class or youth group or the whole congregation) have a stronger sense of what worship means and why it is important, not just in abstract terms, but for themselves. Can be as simple as lighting the candles in the advent wreath or reading the scripture on Sunday morning, or as complex as having a whole worship service organized and led by the confirmands.

Writing a Statement of Belief ("Credo")

See "Special Program Elements" in *Handouts* for any handouts for this special program element.

Objective

- Help students think about what *they* think and believe, not just what someone else says

Advantages

- Independent project
- Requires some thought on the part of each student
- Can encourage dialogue with parents about spiritual matters
- Can act as a "comprehensive final exam" for a confirmation program
- Provides good material to impress the rest of the congregation with the spiritual thoughtfulness of the confirmands

Disadvantages

- Some teens parrot what other adults tell them is a good belief
- Difficult project for teens younger than 8th grade
- Potentially devastating if the teen feels his/her beliefs are judged or "graded" by the instructor(s)
- May be a seriously negative experience for students with a learning disability

Many confirmation programs require that confirmands write a statement of what they believe. (Note: the word, "credo," is Latin for "I believe.") An outline of topics to be discussed in such a statement often helps confirmands structure their thoughts.

**Building Confirmation
the Congregational Way**

Sample Curricula

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Introduction

What does confirmation look like? That depends on a number of things—how long the course is, the size of the class, the things your church and you consider to be important—but you may find it helpful to see how others have put confirmation together.

Six-Week Course

Some things to factor into your decision-making as you plan a six-week course:

- Think of having multiple hours at a time. The idea of preparing a young person for confirmation and covering (even in the broadest strokes possible!) the Bible, theology, church history, worship, Congregationalism and church membership in six meetings is a challenge. If you can, give yourself extra time so the confirmands can ask questions and focus a bit longer on the topic. (Note: The exception is if confirmands are part of an adult membership program. See *Appendix B: Alternative Models of Confirmation*, p. 276).
- Consider some of the more intense of the special program elements, especially the retreat. A long-standing tradition in the early church was for the confirmation class (the early church called them “catechumens”) to spend the night or even the week before confirmation in seclusion, preparing themselves for this great event. The way of the early church might really speak with power in the life of the confirmation students.
- Consider having assignments due at each session. This will encourage the confirmands to think about confirmation and work on it at home between the “formal” sessions.

Preparation for Lenten Confirmation: A Time Table

If you are conducting this course during Lent, that means that in September you will want to begin putting things together. You will want a firm idea of what’s going to happen by the end of November. By the end of December, you will need to have done all the publicity and inviting you are going to do. Your sessions will begin in February (or early March) a few days after Ash Wednesday!

Almost by nature, this will be a very intense course for the students and their families. Think about how you can balance the intensity of the course with the knowledge that the confirmands and their families have a life outside of confirmation.

Working with the Six-Week Course

Ready-to-Go Meetings

The first lesson plan in each topic in *Topical Lesson Plans* is specifically tailored for a six-week course of confirmation. The lesson plans work through each of the major topics in most confirmations and are designed to last roughly two hours. With some creative tinkering, these meetings can be adjusted to fit your church's needs. See below for details on how that tinkering might happen.

Adjusting for Meetings of Different Lengths

Though I present a single meeting plan for a two-hour session, please feel free to supplement this with other ideas from *Activities, Games and Simulations*. Please note that doing everything in an outline takes roughly 105 minutes on paper, but may take longer when you do it. Make sure you allow time for questions as you go along. You may, in fact, want to only do one of the games/activities to give you more time for questions. (If you must do this in one hour, please consider abandoning one of the objectives and cutting out elements of the outline.)

What to Do If You Believe Differently Than I Do

Thank you for disagreeing! One of the wonderful aspects of the Congregational Way is that we can believe different things and still follow God together. I hope you will *not* present something to your students that you don't believe or that your congregation wouldn't support. To do so may put you in a difficult position ethically and be unwise or unreal in terms of the teens in your care. Please *do* adjust anything you find here so that it will fit with your group's needs. My general inclination is to present both sides of an issue, but because of time constraints, I make some choices for each session, trying to stay in the "mainstream" if I can. If you don't like what you see in these lessons, try one of these things:

- Look in the other *Sample Curricula* and *Topical Lesson Plans* for further lessons and activities that you can substitute for this one.
- Try a panel discussion or debate. If you can't find someone to represent all the viewpoints you want, consider making up "people" to play the parts of a panel discussion or debate. Be careful not to lay it on too thick! (Example: Maybe you are not sure about the Trinity discussed in "Basic 'God Stuff' 1: God Who?" p. 82. Why not get Captain Trinity (a superhero highly in favor of the Trinity) to argue for it, and Ms. Unity (a superhero who thinks there is only one God) to argue against. This might require some preparation on the part of your two superheroes, but it could be helpful and great fun, especially if the superheroes make up their own costumes and play wacky parts!)

- Make your own. If you feel strongly enough about an idea, I hope you will put some real thought into how you would do it if you could. If it works, would you think about e-mailing it to the NACCC Office so that others could benefit from your wisdom?

Evaluation

Take a few moments after the confirmand(s) have left to evaluate the meeting. If you have an adult assistant or two, you could ask them to be part of this process. What worked? What didn't? Did you run out of time? Did you have too much time left over? Were you happy with what the teens seemed to get out of it? What else would you change? Take notes on your meeting outline and file it for the next time you do this (or the next person if you don't).

Goals

1. Meet God.
2. Develop a familiarity with both Old and New Testaments. By the end of the class, confirmands should be able to find a passage anywhere in the Bible.
3. Know more about Christians in other centuries and Christian practice across the centuries.
4. Learn more about what you believe.
5. Learn more about the other class-members.
6. Make a decision whether to join the church or not.

Requirements

1. Class attendance at all scheduled meetings is required.
2. Attendance in worship during Lent.
3. Personal Interview with a Minister
4. A Statement of Belief (outline provided)
5. Memorization of any two of the following:
 - Ten Commandments Beatitudes
 - Psalm 23 Passage of Choice (5+ verses)
6. 2 "Listening to a Sermon" Worksheets
7. Church Meeting Attendance:
 - One Board Meeting
 - One Church Council Meeting
8. Make choice of whether to join the church or not.

Six-Week Course Schedule

All the dates listed below are on Sunday except where otherwise noted.

February 25	following worship	Kick-Off Meeting
March 4	6–8 p.m.	Bible at a Glance
March 11	6–8 p.m.	God Who?
March 18	6–8 p.m.	Time Travel
March 25	6–8 p.m.	Why We Do What We Do
April 1	6–8 p.m.	Who Are We?
April 8	6–8 p.m.	Is There Life After Confirmation?
April 14	10–11 a.m.	Confirmation Practice
April 15	9 a.m.	Reception for Confirmands
	10 a.m.	Confirmation in Sunday worship with communion
	11 a.m.	Reception in Fellowship Hall with pictures and gifts

One-Year Course

Because you are spreading the course over a school year instead of six weeks, you will have the opportunity to delve more deeply into the different topics and projects.

In addition to the suggestions mentioned for the six-week course (p. 196), the one-year course allows for:

- a. **Longer projects and approaches** to the confirmation process. Consider including three or more of the special program elements. This will give the confirmand some assignments to do outside of class, give parents/mentors opportunities to encourage the teen, and add some variety to regular class schedule.
- b. **Quizzes, tests and assorted assignments.** If you are not going to have assignments due at each class, you will need to find a way to encourage students to pay attention in class. As a rule, try to have the emphasis on mastering the material, not making the grade.
- c. **Consolidate class time where possible.** Because you have a year, the importance of each individual session seems to fade. If you have weekly classes, attendance at any given class may fluctuate as students have other things to do. To avoid attendance problems and to minimize burnout, try putting two or more sessions together in a mini-retreat or even a weekend retreat. The downside to an irregular schedule is that communication of times and dates for events becomes even more important.

Working with the One-Year Course

Basic and Bonus Meetings

The first lesson plans in each topic are designed to be good introductory sessions on the topic. The lesson plans work through each of the major topics in most confirmations and are designed to last roughly two hours. With some creative tinkering, these meetings can be adjusted to fit your church's needs. See below for details on how that tinkering might happen.

In addition to the Basic Meetings, Bonus Meetings are also included. These could be additional sessions that follow a Basic Meeting. (See the "Schedule" below.)

Adjusting for Meetings of Different Lengths

Though I present a single meeting plan for a two-hour session, please feel free to supplement this with other ideas from *Activities, Games and Simulations*. Please note that doing everything in an outline takes roughly 105 minutes on paper, but may take longer when you do it. Make sure you allow time for questions as you go along. You may, in fact, want to only do one of the games/activities to give you more time for questions. (If you must do this in one hour, please consider abandoning one of the objectives and cutting out elements of the outline.)

Evaluation

Take a few moments after the confirmand(s) have left to evaluate the meeting. If you have an adult assistant or two, you could ask them to be part of this process. What worked? What didn't? Did you run out of time? Did you have too much time left over? Were you happy with what the teens seemed to get out of it? What else would you change? Take notes on the meeting outline and file it for the next time you do this (or the next person if you don't).

Goals

1. Meet God.
2. Develop basic working knowledge of both Old and New Testaments. By the end of the class, confirmands should be able to find a passage anywhere in the Bible.
3. Have initial knowledge of the basics in Christian living, thought, and history.
4. Learn more about what you believe.
5. Learn more about the other class-members.
6. Make a decision whether to join the church or not.

Requirements

1. Attendance will be taken in class. If for some reason you are unable to attend, please call the church office ahead of time to inform the leaders of your absence and make arrangements to "make up" the material. (Please note: the make-ups are harder and nowhere near as exciting!)
2. Regular attendance in worship. This means more than "occasional" attendance!
3. Participation in mentoring program. (Details to be handed out October 1)
4. Completion of 30 "service/fellowship" hours. Proposal due October 22.
5. Personal Interview with a Minister
6. A Statement of Belief (outline provided)
7. Memorization:

Books of the OT	Ten Commandments	Beatitudes
Books of the NT	Psalm 23	Passage of Choice (5+ verses)

Memorization will be tested on at least 4 "pop-quizzes" during the year, but can also be tested at any point by appointment
8. 5 "Listening to a Sermon" Worksheets
9. Church Meeting Attendance:
 - One Board Meeting
 - One Church Council Meeting
 - One Congregational Meeting
10. Make choice of whether to join with our fellowship or not.
11. Completion of Final Exam (Saturday, May 13)

Schedule

The following schedule is based on regular meetings of 90 minutes, mini-retreats (called “undernighters” because they are not overnights!) of 4 hours, and one weekend retreat. Regular meetings were held in a corner of a fellowship hall on Sunday evenings following the middle school youth group meeting. Since several confirmands also attended youth group meetings, dinner was prepared by a rotation of parents. The parent(s) who prepared the meal were asked to remain as adult advisors for the meeting.

Orientation

September	24	Introductory Meeting.
October	1	Mentoring Kick-Off

Unit 1 — The Bible and Knowing God

October	20	“Undernighter “— Getting Wise Covers the following sessions: Bible at a Glance Sin/ Forgiveness/ Atonement/ Love What’s a Prophet?
November	5	Gospels & Bible at a Glance
	19	Did the Resurrection Happen?/ Holy Spirit
December	3	God and Paradox: Trinity & Incarnation

Unit 2 — Confirmation Retreat (January 5, 7 pm thru January 7, 3 pm)

Session I	Fri Eve	What Makes a Christian a Christian?
Session II		Jesus Is the Rock! (What Would Jesus Think About Today’s Music?)
Session III	Sat Morn	Tapping the Power: Prayer & Meditation
Session IV		Turning Loose with God
	Afternoon	Movie: Brother Sun, Sister Moon
Session V	Sat Eve	Planning the Church of the Future
Session VI		Turning Loose with God The Feast of Champions: Celebrate communion
Session VII	Sun Morn	Turning Loose with God II Head for home

Unit 3 — Where Do We Come From?

January	21	Persecutions & Heresies
February	9	“Undernighter” — Wild Times Spiritual Earthquakes of the 16th century
February	18	20th Century Question: Who’s a Christian?
February	25	Other Religions

Unit 4 — Congregationalism and North Cong’l Church

March	4	How did Congregationalism start?
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March 11	What is Cong'lism? a Cong'list?
March 18	North Shore Cong'l History
March 25	What's a Member?
April 1	Future of Cong'lism

Exam and Confirmation

Sunday, May 6	11:30a–12:30p	Review (All assignments due!!!)
Saturday, May 12	9a–11a	Exam and Practice (parents & mentors invited)
Sunday, May 20	10 am	Confirmation

Quizzes and Tests

Below are the pop quizzes used with the above schedule. Brief answers are included, but for more information on individual topics, see the appropriate sections in *Topical Lesson Plans* (p. 49), *Handouts* (p. 321), and *Annotated Bibliography* (p. 231). Any good study Bible should have notes and/or articles to answer the biblical questions.

Pop Quiz One: Bible

1. List the books of the Old Testament in order. Circle the books of the Law. (20 pts; 1/2 pt for each book)
 2. Choose one of the following passages and write it from memory: Ten Commandments, Psalm 23, the Beatitudes. (10 pts)
- You may use your Bible for the next two questions.
3. Two major events stand out in the Old Testament: the Exodus and the Exile. Choose one of these major events, explain what it is and what it tells us about who God is and who God's people are. (Please include important names and dates.) (5 pts)
 4. What or who is Immanuel? What does Immanuel mean? Does it come from somewhere in the Bible? If it does, find at least one scripture reference using your concordance. (5 pts)

Extra credit: On the back of this sheet, list the books of the New Testament in order. (up to 5 pts)

Answers to Questions 3 and 4:

3. Exodus — God works through Moses to lead the Hebrews out of slavery in Egypt (answers that include God parting the Red Sea are good); it tells us of God's love for his people, of God's power and the possibilities for a fresh start that God's power makes possible. Occurred ca. 1446 BC.
Exile — After sending many people (prophets like Isaiah, Amos and Hosea) to remind the Children of Israel that they needed to return to God's ways or there would be trouble, at last, God worked through the nations to take the Israelites into exile. The Northern Kingdom (a.k.a. Israel, Ephraim, Samaria) fell in 722 BC and the Southern Kingdom (a.k.a. Judah) fell in 586 (Jerusalem was conquered and its walls destroyed). When the Jews returned seventy years later, the reconstruction of their

land was paid for by the Persians! In this we see God's forgiveness and grace, no matter how badly we have strayed, if only we will turn to God.

4. Immanuel is one of the names for Jesus. It means, "God with us." You can find reference to it in Matthew 1:23 and Isaiah 7:14.

Pop Quiz Two: Theology

1. Please list the books of the New Testament in order. Please group the gospels. Please circle and label the book(s) of history and apocalypse. (10 points)
2. Choose one of the following passages and write it from memory: Ten Commandments, Psalm 23, the Beatitudes. (10 pts)
3. One of your friends is Jewish. One day she asks you what the Trinity is? How would you explain it so that she would understand it. Include some description of each Person of the Trinity.

Extra credit: What is predestination? What is free will? Do you agree more with one or than the other?

Answers to Question 3 and Extra Credit:

3. Examples of reasonably good explanations can be found in *Handouts*, "Who is God?" Allow the teens to make up reasonably good explanations on their own.

Extra credit. Predestination is the idea that before we are born, God knows everything that will happen to us. All aspects of human life (including who makes it to heaven) are "predestined" or determined by God beforehand. This idea emphasizes that God is in charge. Free will is the idea that God has given humans the ability to make choices for themselves, to determine their own destinies. Humans can influence or even decide whether or not they make it to heaven (by choosing to follow God or, in humanist eyes, the ability to save the world on their own).

Pop Quiz Three: Worship and Church History

1. One of your requirements is to memorize Psalm 23, the 10 Commandments, the Beatitudes and a passage of your choice (at least five verses). Please write one of these below. If you do not have one of these memorized, spend a few moments deciding what the passage of your choice will be and write down where to find it in the Bible. (10 points)
2. What date is widely regarded as the beginning of the Reformation? Who started it and where did s/he start it? (5 points)
3. We discussed the views of three major figures in the Reformation. Can you name any of them? (3 points) For extra, extra credit, tell me something about one of them. (2 points)

Answers to Questions 2 and 3:

2. October 31, 1517. According to one story, Martin Luther "nailed" 95 theses to the castle door in Wittenberg, Germany.
3. The three major figures (of concern to Congregationalists) are Martin Luther, John Calvin, and Ulrich Zwingli. For more information about each of them, see the "Undernighter on the Reformation," p. 159.

Pop Quiz Four: Congregationalism and Church

1. In what town in England did Congregationalism begin? (3 pts; extra for the year and/or building)
2. Two groups came to exist in the Church of England in the 1500s and 1600s (in addition to those who considered themselves stolid members). Name those two groups. Identify which one came to the New World first, on what ship, and indicate the year and place where they landed. (6 pts; extra for the date.)
3. Who is considered the “Last Puritan”? Why is this person famous? (4 pts)
4. What year was North Shore Congregational Church founded (extra points if you know the date)? What was unique about how the original document was signed? Why might that be significant for a church’s life? (5 pts)
5. Our church is Congregational. Name at least one way you can tell that it is Congregational. (3 pts)

Extra credit: What are some of the advantages our church enjoys because it is Congregational? (+1 for each separate advantage)

Answers to Questions:

1. Scrooby. The first worship service was in 1606 in the house of the royal postmaster because it was the largest house in the group.
2. Puritans and Separatists. The Separatists came to the New World first on the Mayflower, landing at Plymouth, Massachusetts on December 25, 1620.
3. Jonathan Edwards is widely considered to be the “Last Puritan.” He is famous for his preaching, for being at “ground zero” for the Great Awakening (1730s) and for writing one of the authoritative accounts of the progress of that era.
4. North Shore Congregational Church was founded April 27, 1949. The original covenant was signed on a coffee table in the home of the Fritz and Leanore vonGrossman. Because it was so low, everyone had to kneel to sign. It suggests that people had to be humble before God, and that the original people were also people of prayer.
5. Four principles identify Congregational churches:
 1. Christ is the Head of the Church.
 2. The church is a group of Jesus’ followers gathered around a church covenant.
 3. The congregation is the final authority on the way in which it will follow God.
 4. The congregation is in relationship with other churches for ministry and fellowship.

Good answers might be: “We make decisions as a congregation.” “We have a covenant.” “We do things with other Congregational churches.”

Extra credit: Some advantages that might be listed include: flexibility and responsiveness to God’s will in the local area; don’t *have* to pay for non-local organizations that are not sensitive to the local situation; tolerant of many different Christian beliefs

Final Exam

One or two weeks before the final, a review session is offered. The final exam itself is an oral exam. Members of church boards and councils are invited to attend as well as family and friends of the confirmands. The goal of the exam is to make the students shine, to show those observing how much they know. All questions are taken from worksheets, quizzes, and handouts. Though the teens worry about the exam, the reality is that unless a student clearly made no effort to know any of the material, success is guaranteed. The exam lasts 45–60 minutes and is followed by practice for the rite of confirmation.

I. Introductions

II. Bible

A. Overall

- How many books in the Bible?
- How many books in the OT?
- How many books in the NT?
- Do the OT Books in order.
- Do the NT Books in order.
- What is a covenant?
- What is the covenant cycle? (Have newsprint available for drawing)

B. Old Testament

- Language it was written in?
- Name the four kinds of books in the OT; give an example of each
- Exodus
- Exile
- What is a prophet? Give a modern day example.
- Talk to me about atonement OT style
- Reciting some of the memorized scripture

C. Five Factors That Helped Spread the Gospel

D. New Testament

- Language it was written in?
- Name the four kinds of books in the NT; give an example of each
- What does the word, “gospel,” mean?
- Three of the gospels are “synoptic gospels” because they have a similar view. Which one is different? What is different about it?
- What does “Emmanuel” mean? Why is it used about Jesus?
- Who is Paul? Why is he important?
- Reciting some of the memorized scripture.

III. Theology

- Tell me what “incarnation” means?
- Explain the Trinity in your own words
- Explain free-will and pre-destination
- What or who is the Holy Spirit? Name one thing in which we recognize the work of the Holy Spirit.

IV. Worship and Christian Life

- Meditation: What is the difference between Eastern and Christian meditation?

- Prayer: Why do we pray?
- Worship: What is worship? Why do we worship?
- V. Church History
 - A. Early Years through Constantine
 - When was the first gospel written? Why did people wait so long to write something down?
 - When was the first major persecution?
 - What major event happened in late-first century Palestine that affected Judaism as well as Christianity?
 - Who was Constantine? Why is he important?
 - B. Monastic Reformation
 - Can you tell me something about St. Francis?
 - What issues were important to him?
 - C. Reformation
 - Name a factor that led to the Reformation
 - What is the date most people accept as the beginning of the Reformation? Why?
 - D. We studied two other major figures in the Reformation. Name them and tell me a little about them and how we see their ideas now.
 - E. Congregational History
 - What is Congregationalism? How would we recognize that a church is Congregational?
 - Where did Congregationalism, as we know it, get its start?
 - Tell me about one factor that contributed to Congregationalism.
 - How are the Congregationalists different from the Puritans?
 - Can someone tell me when and how Congregationalism came to this country?
 - In 1957, many Congregationalists decided to merge with the Evangelical Reformed Churches. What was the problem some people had with this merger?
 - To what national body do we currently belong?
 - F. North Shore Congregational Church
 - When was this church founded?
 - Was there anything unique about the way our church began?
 - Name one thing you really like about this fellowship.
- VI. Questions from the Floor
- VII. Conclusions

Two-Year Course

This confirmation program is a two-year program in which students (normally seventh and eighth grade students [or higher grade level]) participate in a series of classes and activities to assist them in exploring their Christian faith in their spiritual journey toward becoming members of the Church as believers in Jesus Christ.

Class Goals

To help all students explore the Christian faith seeking to assist them in arriving at answers to the questions:

1. Who is God?
2. Who is Jesus Christ?
3. Who is the Holy Spirit?
4. What is the Church?
5. How do I understand and live the Christian way of life (including an understanding of one's responsibility as a church member)?

(Note: Each student will write a statement of faith that addresses these five areas.)

Class Code of Conduct

The code of conduct for the entire class requires class members treat each other and those called to teach, direct and assist them with *Christian love and respect* at all times. Each student is asked to agree to the following covenant statement:

As a child of God and a student of the 2001-2002 Confirmation Class of the Gurnee Community Church, I covenant with God and the students, volunteers, sponsors, and pastors to abide by the basic ground rule of this class which is to treat each other with Christian love and respect at all times.

Class Procedures

In both years of the program, each student is asked to:

1. be on time to all sessions and activities;
2. have a Bible, class text (*A Guide to the Bible* [first-year] and *A Guide to God* [second year]), and a three-ring notebook with notebook paper for teaching sessions;
3. respect others by not interrupting;
4. assist in clean-up after classes and activities are over;
5. ask for, and make up, assignments when a class has been missed*;
6. turn in assignments on time; and
7. make confirmation classes and events a priority in life.

*Please note that the pastor will be available to meet with any student to discuss any material that has been missed, or material requiring further explanation.

Class Expectations

During both years:

1. attend the Kick-off Sunday introduction of the Confirmation program;
2. attend at least two worship services per month (October through April) and evaluate four sermons during that period (Note: evaluation forms are located in the Community Room and should be turned into the Pastor's office mailbox when completed);
3. participate in five hours of Christian mission work (e.g., assist with communion preparation, Sunday greeter, work in a local soup kitchen, visit church shut-ins, etc.); and
4. participate regularly in the weekly class sessions (missing no more than one "Growth Session" per every two months) and the overnight retreat.

During the first year:

1. select an adult sponsor who is an *active* member of Gurnee Community Church (e.g., former Sunday School Teacher, Elder, etc.) and not a relative (Note: this person will continue to mentor the Confirmand during both years of the program); and
2. attend a Board Night and a Church Council meeting.

During the second year:

1. make a banner square to be used in the Confirmation Class banner;
2. assist with the Easter Sunrise service and Easter Breakfast;
3. prepare a personal statement of Christian Faith in the spring;
4. appear before the Elders in the spring prepared to answer questions based on the class activities, final paper and the confirmand's personal faith testimony as a Christian;
5. attend the Confirmation banquet along with his/her parent(s) and sponsor;
6. prayerfully consider the decision of whether or not to be confirmed at the completion of the program.

Parents

Parents of confirmands are asked to give full support of their child, as he/she is involved in the confirmation process by:

- insuring the confirmand's attendance in class, assigned activities, and Sunday worship;
- encouraging the confirmand in his/her assigned work in the class;
- supporting other parents, sponsors and the Pastor in the confirmation process and offering assistance where needed;
- attending those meetings and activities designated for parents; and
- keeping abreast of the schedule of events for the confirmation program (see attached schedule).

Parent volunteers will be needed to assist the program in the following manner:

- assist the Pastor with the coordination of the special events and activities (e.g., lock-in, caroling, etc.),
- create a confirmand attendance chart,
- assist in sending letters and notices to confirmands, confirmation families and sponsors as needed,
- participate in the transportation of confirmands as needed,
- organize parents to assist with Easter Sunday Breakfast (2nd year),
- organize the Confirmation Banquet (pot-luck) (2nd year),
- serve as a telephone coordinator to notify confirmands with information,
- assist in the organization and creation of the class banner (2nd year), and
- arrange parents to bring snacks for Thursday night sessions.

Fees

Each year there will be a fee of \$25 required of each confirmand to cover the textbook, class materials, overnight retreat, etc.

Sponsors

The confirmation sponsor is a member of the church chosen by the confirmand in the first year of confirmation as a “partner” to assist, support, and guide the confirmand during the confirmation process. The sponsor must be an *active* member of Gurnee Community Church who is committed to study, worship, prayer and servanthood to the Lord. He/She cannot be a parent or immediate relative of the confirmand.

The sponsor is asked to:

- attend sponsor training sessions,
- encourage his/her confirmand in spiritual growth and development during the two year confirmation program,
- assist his/her confirmand in preparing assigned materials for the class (e.g., banner square, final paper, etc.),
- assist the confirmand in the preparation of the banner square,
- attend the designated events,
- offer counsel and support to his/her confirmand through individual opportunities initiated by the sponsor with the confirmand and
- assist other sponsors, parents and the Pastor in the development and administration of the confirmation program.

Sponsors are requested to participate and/or attend with their confirmands the following activities. (*Drivers/Chaperones will be needed.)

Caroling Party*

Overnight Lock-in and trip to Chicago*(a portion of this event)

Maundy Thurs. Communion Service
Easter Sunrise Service & Easter Breakfast (2nd year)
Confirmation Banquet (2nd year)
Confirmation Service (2nd year)

The sponsor is encouraged to initiate other activities with his/her confirmand (e.g., Zion Passion Play, dinner at the sponsor's home, etc.)

Lay Volunteers/Mentors

In addition to the pastors, a number of adult lay volunteers are called to serve as mentors for the confirmands as well as their sponsors. Working closely with the pastors these volunteer mentors will lead small groups, oversee recreation, and assist parents and sponsors in the confirmation program while building important personal relationships with the confirmands.

Mission/Service Projects

The students will be expected to participate in at least five hours of Christian service to the church (or the community) each year. Students may assist in working at a local soup kitchen, the Sunday School, the nursery, etc.

Retreat

The confirmation over-night retreat is scheduled to take place in the winter months and is designed for the confirmands to: develop closer relationships, a stronger bond with Christ, a unity of purpose and spirit and have a time of fellowship in a Christian setting.

Passion Play

An option for the students and sponsors is to attend the Zion Passion Play in the spring, which depicts the final days of Christ's life on earth. This is an excellent way for students to understand the teachings and ministry of Christ's life.

Banquet

Annually in the late spring, the 2nd year confirmation class members join parents, sponsors, GCC Board members, and the pastors for a special dinner to acknowledge the accomplishments of the confirmands. The second year parents organize this event.

Confirmation Sunday

Following completion of the confirmation process in April, the confirmands are received into Christ's church during a Sunday afternoon confirmation service.

2000-2001 Confirmation Schedule

<u>Date</u>	<u>Time</u>	<u>Event</u>	<u>Assignment/Comments</u>
Sept. 17	12:00 Noon	Confirmation Kick-off	Introduce Confirmation (for students & parents [with pizza])
Sept. 28	7:00 pm	Mentor Training	Adult Mentors Only
Oct. 5	6:30 pm-7 th 7:45 pm-8 th	Game Night	An evening of fun & games (sponsors should be picked by this night)
Oct. 12	6:30 pm	Growth Night	Time for recreation, study & small groups – Chapter 1**
Oct. 19	6:30 pm	Growth Night	Chapter 2 (Note: sponsors to attend: 1 st year at 6:30; 2 nd year at 7:45)
Oct. 26	6:30 pm	Growth Night	Chapter 3
Nov. 2	6:30 pm	Game Night	
Nov. 9	6:30 pm	Growth Night	Chapter 4
Nov. 16	6:30 pm	Growth Night	Chapter 5
Nov. 23	Thanksgiving	No session	
Nov. 30	6:30 pm	Growth Night	Chapter 6
Dec. 7	6:30 pm	Game Night	
Dec. 14	6:30 pm	Growth Night	Chapter 7
Dec. 21	6:30 pm	Christmas Caroling	Both groups meet at the church
Dec. 28	Christmas	Vacation / No session	
Jan. 4	6:30 pm	Game Night	
Jan. 11	6:30 pm	Growth Night	Chapter 8
Jan. 18	6:30 pm	Growth Night	Chapter 9
Jan. 25	6:30 pm	Growth Night	Chapter 10
Feb. 1	6:30 pm	Game Night	
Feb. 2/ Feb. 3	8:00 pm	Overnight Retreat	Friday night activity and lock-in at church with a trip to Chicago on Saturday
Feb. 8	6:30 pm	Growth Night	Chapter 11
Feb. 15	6:30 pm	Growth Night	Chapter 12

*From this point forward the Thursday evening confirmation program starting time will be listed as 6:30 pm with 7:00 pm understood as the starting time for the 2nd year students.

**The 1st year class will use the text *Bruce & Stan's Guide to the Bible* and the 2nd year class will use the text *Bruce & Stan's Guide to God*.

2000-2001 Confirmation Schedule (*continued*)

<u>Date</u>	<u>Time</u>	<u>Event</u>	<u>Assignment/Comments</u>
Feb. 22	6:30 pm	Growth Night	"Cushion Night" (no assignment- this time designated for further study of previous chapters and/or to introduce new materials)
Mar. 1	6:30 pm	Game Night	
Mar. 8	6:30 pm	Growth Night	"Cushion Night"
Mar. 15	6:30 pm	Growth Night	1 st year: History of Christian Church and Congregational Church 2 nd year: Develop Easter "Sunrise" service
Mar. 22	6:30 pm	Growth Night	1 st year: History of GCC and its organization 2 nd year: Work on "Sunrise" service and review for final paper
Mar. 29	Spring Break	No Session	
April 2	7:00 pm	Church Board Night	1 st year only
April 5	6:30 pm	Game Night	2 nd year: <i>Final</i> papers are due!
April 8	1:00 pm	Meet with Elders	2 nd year only
April 12	7:30 pm	Maundy Thursday Communion Service	Both years attend
April 14	10:00 am	Sunrise service practice and set up for Easter Breakfast	2 nd year only
April 15	6:30 am	Easter Sunrise Service & Breakfast	2 nd year only (1 st year should attend one of the Easter services)
April 16	7:30 pm	Church Council Mtg	1 st year only
April 19	6:30 pm	Growth Night	1 st year: review Faith, Mission, & Vision statements 2 nd year: Discover Spiritual Gifts
April 22	12:30 pm	Confirmation Banquet	2 nd year students, their parents, sponsors & church leaders
April 29	2:00 pm	Confirmation Service & Reception for 2 nd Year students	

Confirmation Schedule for Thursday Evenings

6:30–7:00 pm	Recreation time	1 st year
7:00–7:45 pm	Class time	1 st year
	Small groups	2 nd year
7:45–8:30 pm	Class time	2 nd year
	Small groups	1 st year
8:30–9:00 pm	Recreation time	2 nd year

(Note: The 1st Thursday of each month is “Game Night” when the following schedule will apply:

6:30 – 7:45 pm	1 st Year
7:45 – 9:00 pm	2 nd Year

**Building Confirmation
the Congregational Way**

Worship for Confirming

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Introduction

Worship in Confirmation

Confirmation is more than a class. Confirmation needs to be a way that teens can experience the faith in such a way that they can put their stamp of approval on it: "This is what *I* believe!" If this is so, then we need to find ways for teens to experience all the elements of faith experience we can in whatever period we have.

Worship is one of the cornerstones (some would argue, the only real foundation) for what the Church is universally and locally. How can we help confirmands experience authentic worship with their peers as well as grown ups?

The final two sections of this chapter are aimed specifically at encouraging singing to be part of each confirmation session. For further information and examples on worship in regular confirmation sessions, see the *Topical Lessons Plans* (p. 57) and examples of worship in the first retreat in *Retreats and Trip Plans*, p. 140)

Winding Up Confirmation

How a church winds up the confirmation process says a great deal about its meaning and significance for the church and its members. If your fellowship has a confirmation program, then chances are it will benefit from a dramatic and ringing conclusion.

Why? First, Confirmation is a big deal! Confirmation is the culmination of a long journey for confirmands, parents and the local church. If parents brought their infant to the fellowship for baptism, then the church and the parents almost certainly made promises to bring up their children to know and love God, to be part of a Christian community until they reached an age when they might confirm the faith for themselves. A fourteen-year journey is concluding! A big celebration is definitely in order for those who complete it!

Second, Confirmation is a big deal! Confirmation is a rite of passage more important than getting one's driver's license, on a par with a bar-mitzvah (in which a Jewish boy marks his becoming a man). Confirmation marks the coming of age of a young Christian in the fellowship

Third, Confirmation is a big deal! In most churches, confirmation marks a teen's joining the fellowship's covenant as an adult. Confirmation is the training necessary to certify that a young person is mature enough to stand for God in all the ways appropriate for an adult. Sure, a teen does not have the life experience of a fifty-year-old, but each teen has gifts as important as those of any other adult. Indeed, confirmed teens have a perspective that is a gift in itself for any fellowship. If your

fellowship does not have any young people in positions of leadership, your fellowship may need to consider why that is. Are there any other sections of your membership who are not represented in leadership? What are areas in which teens could contribute a strong and important voice? Some churches include teens in leadership positions on Boards of Christian Education and Benevolence, even on Search Committees.

Fourth, Confirmation is a big deal! What does your fellowship do for new members? Do that for your confirmands too—they are after all joining the church—then do more! If your church includes pictures of adult new members in your newsletter, confirmands should have the same honor. If your church gives name tags to new adult members, the confirmands should get them too. Why not have a photographer to take pictures of families and their confirming teen to remember the day? What could you do to make confirmation a bigger deal than it is right now?

Fifth, Confirmation is a big deal! One of the goals of confirmation is to touch each teen's life in a positive way that will stick with them all their lives. If they are not "graduating from church," give them an experience so memorable that they will always look back at it as one of the most important moments in their lives!

For these reasons among others, winding up the confirmation process in grand style is a worthy effort.

Some ideas to consider for concluding Confirmation include:

- A final examination of some kind (perhaps before a board or committee overseeing the process; perhaps a public examination at a given time) either oral, written or both (Note: the goal of a confirmation examination is to help reinforce the positive experience, not try to weed out "bad" students). For examples of quizzes and tests, see the *Sample Curricula*, p. 203.
- Recognize all those groups who have had a part in the teens' coming to this point in their lives (parents, extended family members, mentors, Sunday School teachers, etc.)
- At least one party thrown by the church, even if that is just a reception after worship. The members of the fellowship need a chance to bless the confirmands, and the confirmands need a chance to be blessed!
- A gift from the church for their future journey with God, something special they will cherish for many years to come, perhaps all their lives. Jewelry would be appropriate, prayer books, Bibles, pins, etc. (Note: if your church usually gives confirmands a Bible, consider giving them the Bible at the *beginning* of Confirmation so they can get a year's good use and familiarity with it!)

In this section, you will find two sample rites of confirmation (hopefully more will be added in future updates, so please share your fellowship's approach).

Orders of Worship

First Rite of Confirmation

Contributor: DLG (First Union Congregational Church/Quincy, IL)

Assoc. Minister: Why do we baptize? And what is confirmation?

Sr. Minister: Baptism is the outward expression of the inward reality in which Jesus Christ washes away a person's sins and the person invites Jesus to become Lord of his or her life. In the Congregational tradition, parents often baptize their children as infants, taking the vows of baptism for their children. At some point, however, the children need to make these vows their own if they are to continue to grow and mature as followers of Jesus Christ. That is why we have Confirmation.

Assoc. Minister: The following persons have been instructed in the Christian Faith and fulfilled the requirements set forth by this congregation. As your name is read, please step forward to be confirmed in your faith. (*List confirmands here.*)

Sr. Minister: My friends, when you were baptized, our Lord Jesus Christ marked you as His own and introduced you into the family of God that is the church. You have expressed a desire to confirm your baptism and join with this congregation. Do you freely choose to confirm your baptism today?

If that is your decision, simply say, "I so choose."

To the parents:

Would the parents of these young people please stand. (*pause*)
Years ago, you took the Vows of Baptism for your children who now stand here today. You promised before God and His people to bring your children up within the church and to teach them to love God and to serve him with their lives. You hoped, as all Christian parents do, that some day they would remember their Baptism, and be confirmed in their faith and take for themselves the lifestyle and faith of a follower of Jesus Christ.

Today, by their own choice, they stand ready to assume their rightful place in the Church of Jesus Christ as baptized and confirmed followers of Our Lord.

On behalf of this congregation and the Church Universal, I say to you and to those who have supported you, "Well done!" You have fulfilled your vows and will now enter into a new relationship with these young people as fellow Christians. May your lives be richly blessed, for your efforts are bearing fruit.

To the teachers:

Church Official: Many other people have helped these families keep their promises through the years. If any of you here have taught Sunday School or led organizations that improved the lives of any of these young people, please stand.

On behalf of this congregation and the Church Universal, I say to you, "Well done!" Your teaching has made a difference in the lives of these young people. May your lives be richly blessed for your teaching is bearing fruit.

To the congregation:

Church Official: You have influenced these young men and women by example in word and deed. They have chosen to confirm their baptism in your presence. I ask you, therefore:

Do you accept them and their decision and do you promise your continuing and constant support through Jesus Christ?

If so, please answer: "We accept you and promise our support through Jesus Christ."

To the class:

Minister: Are you prepared to make a public personal profession of your faith?
Response: I am.

(Then to each individually)
Do you turn away from sin and evil?
Response: I do.

Do you turn towards God and take Jesus Christ as your Lord and Savior?
Response: I do.

Will you promise, depending on God for strength, to take responsibility for your growth in the Christian Faith? Will you strive to serve God and build up the Body of Christ that is His Church? Will you support the members of this local church in their walks with God?
Response: I will.

To the congregation:

Church Official: You, the members and friends of this congregation have heard their responses. Will you support them in their walk with God?
Congregation: We promise to walk with you in the Way of God, and to pray for you in all things.

Rite of Confirmation

Prayer

Father, these, your children have been received into the Family of God through baptism and now by personal declaration. Affirm their place as heirs to Your Kingdom. Lord, increase their awareness of Your Presence, their faith in the face of struggle, and their faithfulness in all of life. Touch them deeply now, Lord, and make them witnesses to the faith, hope and love they have through Jesus Christ, Your Son. Amen.

Laying on of Hands

_____, on _____ you were baptized, remember today your baptism and receive in a fuller and more fulfilling way the Spirit of God. And may God's Spirit within you guide your way, lifting you when you are low, humbling you when you are convinced of your own righteousness, and finally raising you up so that you may live a full and fulfilled life for eternity. In the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit. Amen.

Seal of the Covenant

_____, you have declared yourself accountable, and the Church has affirmed your confirmation. Now, receive this Seal of the Covenant, and choose to grow within it. (*Anointing with oil or giving a gift would be appropriate here.*)

Prayer

We give You thanks, Father, through Your Son and the presence of Your Spirit, for these young people who have chosen Your Way. Enable them to fulfill their covenant with You and us so that their lives will be a blessing through Jesus Christ. Amen.

Blessing

Paul said it well in his letter to the believers at Philippi:

[May] your love abound more and more in knowledge and depth of insight, so that you may be able to discern what is best and may be pure and blameless until the day of Christ, filled with the fruit of righteousness that comes through Jesus Christ—to the glory and praise of God. Amen.

Affirmation of the Church Covenant

Welcome and Presentation of Certificates

Second Rite of Confirmation

Contributor: DLG (North Shore Congregational Church/Fox Point, WI)

Recognition of Mentors [Team Leader for Mentoring Ministry Team]*Recognition of Parents* [Confirmation Leader]*Introduction of Confirmands* [Confirmation Leader]***Affirmation of Faith***

Minister: Will you now affirm your belief in God, infinite in wisdom, goodness and love, as you understand that God made known in the life and teachings of Jesus?

Confirmand(s): (*Loudly, with conviction*) I will, God being my strength and help.

Minister: Will you now promise, with all here, to strive to know and to do the will of God made known to you through the Scriptures, your conscience and thought, and the counsel of parents and fellow travelers of the Way of Christ?

Confirmand(s): (*Loudly, with conviction*) I will, God being my strength and help.

Minister: Will you affirm your continuing journey of faith, seeking always to grow not only in knowledge but in the experience of being children of God, disciples of the One who taught the way of peace, justice and love of all humankind?

Confirmand(s): (*Loudly, with conviction*) I will, God being my strength and help.***Rite of Confirmation***

[List full names of confirmand(s)]

Each confirmand will kneel and make the following profession:

Confirmand: O God, known to me in Jesus Christ, I give myself to you as your own, to love and serve you faithfully all the days of my life.

Prayer of Confirmation [Minister]

The Lord defend you with God's heavenly grace and by God's Spirit confirm you in the faith and fellowship of all true Christian souls. Amen.

Owning the Covenant and Reception into Membership

We confess our love for God, for Jesus Christ, and for our fellow men and women. We covenant with God, and with the church, to live in the fellowship of the gospel, to walk in the ways of the Lord—known and to be made known to us—to share in the worship and work of the church, to cooperate with it in all good enterprises and to promote its service, its maintenance, its purity and its peace.

The Welcome by the Congregation (unison)

We, the members of this church, gladly receive you into our communion and welcome you with joy to our fellowship. We pray that in Christian friendship we may work together to build the will of God into the lives of men and women, and into the life of the world. We extend to you the right hand of fellowship.

Prayer for Each Other (unison)

Loving and gracious God, we pray that out of the treasures of your glory, you might grant us strength and power through the Spirit in our inner being, that through faith Christ might dwell in our hearts in love. With deep roots and firm foundations, let us be strong to grasp—with all God's people—what is the breadth and length and height and depth of the love of Christ—to know what is beyond knowledge! Now to the One who is able to do immeasurably more than all we can ask or even conceive, by the power that is at work among us, to that One be glory in the church, and in Christ Jesus from generation to generation, evermore! Amen!

Right Hand of Christian Fellowship [Moderator]

In the name of our congregation, we cordially welcome you into our fellowship and invite you to participate in all the duties and privileges of Christ's church.

Receiving of Gifts and Certificates

Song Lists for Confirmation

Contributor: DLG

Music and worship are great activities that engage the whole person—body (mouth, hand-motions, etc.), mind (remembering the words, getting the pitches, etc.) and spirit (the words mean something and elicit some kind of heart response when we sing). Listed below are some of the songs I have used. The lists are by no means exhaustive. For more ideas, check out some of the resources listed below or talk with a youth leader in your area.

Many different songbooks are available from many publishers. Marantha! is one of the first (and still very good) publishers of contemporary music. Amy Grant has collaborated with a number of other artists to put together *Songs from the Loft*, a collection of good music that comes with a CD and many copyright advantages. Many Christian bookstores will also carry Marantha and *Songs from the Loft*, or be able to order them for you. My favorite songbook for many years (several editions) has come from Songs & Creations (1-800 227-2188; or in California, 1-415-457-6610). Their songbooks have a huge variety of material (includes Bob Dylan, Beatles, Bette Midler, Christmas carols, Amy Grant, etc.) and almost always comes with guitar chords as well as words. A tunebook is available, though not all melodies in the songbook are represented (due to copyright problems). Finally, if you hear something you like on the radio or somewhere else, find the music and add it to your list. I can't tell you how many times I have been bent over a tapedeck or CD player to catch the words for a great tune when I discovered that no sheet music was available. That's called an arrangement and as long as you don't try to sell it or make money from performing it, you are free to do so. (At least that's how I understand it as I go to press!)

Medium-High Activity

Song Title	Author/Arranger	Source
Abundantly	Yohann Anderson	Songs & Creations
Blindman	Arr. Yohann Anderson	Songs & Creations
*He's Alive	Jerry Black	Songs & Creations
Like a Child	Jars of Clay	Sheet music/Jars of Clay
*Lord, I Lift Your Name on High	Rick Founder	Various
Love the Lord Your God	Arr. Mona Bagasao Crane	Songs & Creations
*Peace Like a River	Traditional	See next section
*Pharoah, Pharoah	Tony Sbrana	Songs & Creations

Song Title	Author/Arranger	Source
*River of Life	Unknown	See next section
Seize the Day	Carolyn Arends	CD/"I Can Hear You"
Shout to the Lord	Darlene Zschech	Various
That's Why We Praise Him	Tommy Walker	Various
Where Do I Go	Amy Grant	Songs from the Loft

*Clapping patterns or hand-motions can be done.

Thoughtful

Song Title	Author/Arranger	Source
Child of God	Unknown	See next section
Come to the Water (For Those Tears I Died)	Marsha J. Stevens	Songs & Creations
Create in Me a Clean Heart	Unknown	See next section
El Shaddai	Michael Card & John Thompson	Various including Songs & Creations
Give Thanks	Henry Smith	Various
I Love You, Lord		Various including Songs & Creations
Jesus Loves Me	Traditional	Various
Jesus Loves Me	Rearrangement with Alleluias	Various including Songs & Creations
Jesus My Lord	John Fischer	Songs & Creations
Lord, You Are	John Wimber	Various
One Name Under Heaven	Unknown	See next section
Pass It On	Kurt Kaiser	Various
Psalms 19	Terry Butler	Various
Seek Ye First	Karen Lafferty	Various
They Will Know We Are Christians by Our Love	Rev. Peter Scholtes	Various
Trust in the Lord	Six Pence None the Richer (the band who performs it)	CD
We Believe in God	Amy Grant	Songs from the Loft
You Have Been My Hope, O Sovereign Lord	Unknown	See next section

Songs in the Public Domain

The following songs are—to the best of anyone’s knowledge that I have been able to find—in the public domain. If you have information to the contrary, please let the editor know as soon as possible so that future versions can be corrected.

Child of God

- ^A
1. I’m a child of God through faith in Jesus
^E ^D ^A
With the Spirit of Him living in my heart
^A ^E ^D
And by Him I can cry, “Abba! Father!”
2. We are children of God through faith in Jesus
With the Spirit of Him living in our hearts
And by Him we can cry, “Abba! Father!”

Create in Me a Clean Heart

(based on Psalm 51)

- ^C ^G ^D ^G
Create in me a clean heart, O God,
^G ^D ^G
and renew a right spirit within me.
- ^C ^G ^D ^G
Create in me a clean heart, O God,
^G ^D ^G
and renew a right spirit within me.
- ^C ^D ^G ^{Em}
Cast me not away from Thy presence, O Lord,
^C ^D ^G ^{Em}
and take not Thy Holy Spirit from me-e-e-e-e.
- ^C ^D ^G ^{Em}
Restore unto me the joy of Thy salvation,
^C ^D ^G
and renew a right spirit within me.

One Name Under Heaven

D *C* *G* *D*
 One name under heaven whereby we must be saved.
 One name under heaven whereby we must be saved.

D *C*
 Forgiven of our sins, Baptized in the water
G *D*
 Filled with the Holy Ghost, Washed in the blood of the Lamb.

(Repeat)

D *C* *G* *D*
 Free, really free my friend. Freed by the blood of the Lamb.
(Repeat)

D
 God's gonna move this pla-a-a-ace.
C
 God's gonna move this pla-a-a-ace.
G *D*
 God's gonna turn this whole world upside down.
(Repeat)

Repeat first verse.

Peace Like a River

1. *G*
 I've got peace like a river,
 C *G*
 I've got peace like a river,
 Em7 A7 *D A7 D*
 I've got peace like a river in my soul.
D7 *G*
 I've got peace like a river,
 C *G*
 I've got peace like a river,
 A7 D7 *G C G*
 I've got peace like a river in my soul.

2. I've got love like an ocean...
3. I've got joy like a fountain...
4. I've got peace like a river,
 I've got love like an ocean,
 I've got joy like a fountain in my soul. etc.

River of Life (Spring Up, O Well)

^G Oh, I've got a river of life flowing out of me.

^{Em} ^A ^D Makes the lame to walk and the blind to see.

^G ^C ^G Opens prison doors sets the captives free.

^D ^G I've got a river of life flowing out of me.

^G Spring up oh well (splish splash) within my soul.

^A ^D Spring up oh well (gush gush gush gush) and make me whole.

^G ^C ^G ^D ^G Spring up oh well (wooooosh!) and give to me, that life abundantly.

**Building Confirmation
the Congregational Way**

**Annotated
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Introduction

Contributors: DLG & RCF

Like the *Topical Lesson Plans*, the resources below come from different contributors. Entries are listed by the topical categories used in the *Topical Lesson Plans* with a few additional categories that coincide with other sections of this curriculum. Note that many of these resources fit in multiple categories, and an entry's assignment is purely arbitrary. You may want to glance through the other sections to see if something sparks your interest.

This annotated bibliography is compiled under some strong premises:

Premise #1: The times, they are a changin'. Trends in youth culture are changing faster and faster with each passing year, and so are youth ministry strategies. Increasingly, books on youth ministry have a "staleness" about them by the time they're actually published.

Premise #2: Some things never go out of style. Despite the message of Premise #1, there are some old-fashioned books that we find very valuable.

Premise #3: Scripture is always relevant. Bible study ought to be an integral part of any youth ministry program! Here are a few key recommendations:

1. Get a good study Bible. (See *Bibles and Paraphrases*, p. 236)
2. Get a good, one-volume commentary or two. (See *Bible Helps*, p. 237)
3. Get a good, one-volume Bible Dictionary. (See *Bible Helps*, p. 237)

Entries are followed by an attribution to the contributor who wrote it. The contributors are:

- RCF = Rob Fredrickson, North Shore Congregational Church, Fox Point (WI)
- DLG = Doug Gray, North Shore Congregational Church, Fox Point (WI)
- DR = Donna Ritke, North Shore Congregational Church, Fox Point (WI)
- LYM = Lynn Merkel, Gurnee Community Church, Gurnee (IL)

Always Wear Your Yarmulke!

I spent a semester in Israel and the West Bank as a college student. Before getting ready to enter an ultra-orthodox Jewish section of Jerusalem, the students in my program were advised to keep our heads covered (men and women), to wear long pants (men) or skirts below the knee (women), and not to drive through the neighborhood between Friday sundown and Saturday sundown (the Jewish Sabbath). We were told about people who had not taken one or more of these precautions and who had not only deeply offended the beliefs of the inhabitants, but had stones thrown at them by angry residents.

Each website also has a community of people who use it, some in passing, some on a regular basis. Before entering into chats, threaded discussions or asking a question, take a look around. See what the conventions are at that site. Read some of the discussions that have already happened. Look over the FAQs. Just as you wouldn't give out personal information to a stranger on the street (and certainly wouldn't post your address or phone number on a bulletin board in Times Square), be very circumspect about how much information you give out on the web. If you are not "up" on web security, please find any of the great resources on the internet or web and prepare yourself to surf safely. You may not get rocks thrown at you, but you may find yourself in other difficulties little more pleasant!

General Information/Teen Culture

Books

The Hurried Child: Growing Up Too Fast Too Soon, David Elkind. One of the best books examining how the pace of our society affects our children. Elkind ponders whether rushing our children into adulthood is such a good idea or if we should help our children enjoy wherever they are. A must read for people with high-paced lives or who minister to teens with fast-paced lives. (DLG)

Real Boys, William Pollack, Ph.D. Subtitled "Rescuing Our Sons from the Myths of Boyhood," *Real Boys* helps us to hear and understand the needs of growing boys. It addresses the issues of why so many boys are sad, lonely, and confused although they may appear tough, cheerful, and confident. By understanding what boys are really experiencing, parents, teachers, and youth leaders can help them develop more self-confidence to deal with the issues they face. (LYM)

Reviving Ophelia, Mary Pipher, Ph.D. This book is subtitled, "Saving the Selves of Adolescent Girls," and is written by a clinical psychologist who has treated girls for more than twenty years. Pipher addresses the fact that more American adolescent girls are prey to depression, eating disorders,

addictions, and suicide attempts than ever before and offers insightful looks into the reasons. *Reviving Ophelia* offers parents (and youth leaders) compassion, strength, and strategies with which to reach out to girls' lost sense of self. (LYM)

SoulTsunami, by Leonard Sweet. A mind-stretching approach to understanding the trends of today and their implications for the future. Many of the factors he discusses illuminate the culture we now live in and suggest how teens might be understood and spiritual issues approached. Also has a great website, www.soultsunami.com (DLG)

Magazines and Websites

Barna Research (www.barna.org) Not just for youth ministry—for *any* type of ministry—this site presents the results of cutting-edge studies about American religion and spirituality. (RCF)

Children's Ministry (include web site). This magazine is a must if you are working with children or doing children's sermons. Some of these ideas translate well into fun activities for teens. Also check out their website which includes opportunities to ask your tough leadership questions and get responses from other leaders from around the country. (DLG)

The Blind Leading the Seeing

Be warned! Unless you know the other person by reputation, remember that the person giving you advice over the internet may not know as much as you do or be as experienced as you are! Be careful how you receive this advice and make sure to check it with at least one other person whose judgment you trust!

Church Educator: Creative Resources for Church Educators, published by Educational Ministries Inc. (www.educationalministries.com) Terrific resource for discipline and creative worship for all ages (including teens). (DR)

Compassion International (www.compassion.com) This is the website for one of the finest Christian, child-sponsorship organizations in the world—the place to go for child-sponsorship opportunities, plus lots of up-to-date information on hunger, poverty, disease, and disaster. (RCF)

Gallup Organization (www.gallup.com) From this site, you can find polling data on nearly any subject—and from perhaps the most trusted name in the history of polls! (RCF)

Group (published by Group Publishing). This one is glitzier and glossier with more photos and a more full-color layout than *Youthworker Update* (see Youth Specialties, below). Each issue contains perhaps a broader array of content, but presented in less depth. Well-suited for full-time, part-time, or volunteer church youth workers. For more information, check out www.groupmag.com or www.youthministry.com. (RCF)

- Group Publishing (www.grouppublishing.com) One of the two leading publishers of youth ministry resources in the world, this site presents a wealth of articles and features, plus an online catalog of books, videos, and other resources. (RCF)
- Quotations Page (www.quotationspage.com) Need a quote on a certain topic...or by a certain historical figure...or containing a certain key word? This is the first place to look. (RCF)
- Search Institute (www.search-institute.org) One of the best places to look for current, relevant research on adolescent psychology, sociology, spiritual development, and asset-building. (RCF)
- Serendipity (www.serendipityhouse.com) Terrific small group material for youth and adults. In addition to great topical studies and Bible studies, Serendipity has the distinction of helping start the "small group movement" in churches in the 1970s. Their accumulated wisdom on what works for a small group and how to lead one is indispensable. (DLG)
- World Vision's 30-Hour Famine (www.30hourfamine.org) The web home for one of the best-known, large-scale service projects in all of youth ministry. Includes links to World Vision articles on poverty, hunger, etc. (RCF)
- Youthworker* (published by Youth Specialties). In my view, this is the best, most in-depth periodical available for the full-time or veteran part-time church youth worker. An added bonus: Each issue contains a "Youth Culture Update" section which used to be published as a separate newsletter entitled *Youthworker Update*. Find out more at www.Youthworker.com. (RCF)
- Youth Specialties (www.youthspecialties.com) The other leading publisher of youth ministry resources in the world (see also Group Publishing). (RCF)

Bible

Bibles and Paraphrases

A complete review of all Bibles and translations is impossible given the constraints of this bibliography. A few Bibles, though, are unusual or even unique. Please note the difference between a translation (word for word and phrase for phrase) and a paraphrase (gives you the gist of each sentence). A paraphrase may take liberties with particular words and expressions that from time to time make it less accurate than a translation. In general, a translation is better for your regular Bible study and devotions. For a "tasty treat," from time to time spice up your devotions with a paraphrase.

God's Word. Translation of the Bible. For decades, teams of people have translated the Bible into many languages. One group wondered what would happen if you used the same process for translating the Bible into everyday English. This Bible is the result. Very good, even inspired in sections. (DLG)

The Message, Eugene Peterson. Paraphrase of the New Testament. Puts the NT into everyday language. Some of the hardest sections of Paul's letters are especially well done. Check against a translation, but he makes some very dry material jump up and dance. (DLG)

- The New Oxford Annotated Bible*, published by Oxford University Press. I like the scholarship and the NRSV translation. Good for research, but not very youth-oriented. (RCF)
- The New Student Bible (New Revised Standard Version)*, published by Zondervan. (www.zondervan.com) Contains an overview of all the books plus introductions to each book, special Insight and Highlight inserts which explain difficult verses, point out facts, and encourage reflection. There is also a subject guide and lists of well-known events, and Miracles, Parables, and Teachings of Jesus. (LYM)
- NIV Study Bible*, published by Zondervan. Contains a greater quality and quantity of biblical scholarship than the Serendipity offerings, but is less “youth-friendly.” (RCF)
- Serendipity Bible (NIV)*, Serendipity House and Zondervan Press. Terrific bible-study aid. Includes “Open,” “Dig,” and “Reflect” questions for every passage of the Bible! Studies often need some adaptation to work for individual groups. Student version includes a 64-page section of interactive exercises for twosomes, foursomes, and small groups. (DLG & RCF) Designed for youth leaders, this Bible is filled with discussion questions and exercises, and contains ready-made lesson plans on 120 topics. It also contains a subject index and dictionary-concordance. Website listed in “General Information” above. (LYM)
- The Teen Study Bible (NIV)*, Zondervan Press (www.zondervan.com). Contains introductions to each book of the Bible, attractive page design, interesting sidelights, highlighted verses, Bible trivia questions, colorful pages, and a subject index.
- The Youth Bible (New Century Version)*, published by Zondervan Press. Promoted by *Group*, this Bible contains over 400 devotions with real life stories that help relate the Bible to daily life. It also has helpful introductions, thought-provoking questions, practical ideas for application, contemporary graphics, colorful maps and a dictionary. (LYM)

Bible Helps

- Bible Software. Can be a marvelous aid to studying the Bible. In addition to at least one translation of the Bible, most software packages include the ability to search for particular words/phrases, and notes on individual packages. Compare several before purchasing. (RCF)
- Dictionary of Bible and Religion* published by Abingdon. Has a broader scope beyond the biblical—with entries on theological terms, theologians, historical terms, etc. (RCF)
- Exhaustive Concordance. Remember only a few words of a passage? Look up the word in a concordance and you can find it in the Bible. The computerized versions of these (which any decent software package can do) are truly awesome. A great way to see what the Bible has to say on a particular subject (prayer or praying for example). Several different publishers. (DLG)
- Harper’s Bible Dictionary*, published by Harper & Row. Contains very solid scholarship from a variety of top-tier biblical experts. (RCF)
- Interpreter’s Dictionary of the Bible*, published by Abingdon Press. Still the authoritative Bible dictionary. Includes articles on topics (e.g., love, covenant,

prophets, etc.) as well as the standard ones on each book. Good place to start on any research. (DLG)

The Interpreter's One-Volume Commentary on the Bible, published by Abingdon.

Not cutting-edge, but good, solid scholarship. (RCF)

The New Jerome Biblical Commentary published by Prentice Hall. The scholarship is mostly of Catholic origin, but the insights are excellent...and pretty cutting-edge. (RCF)

Synopsis of the Gospels. Ever wondered about the differences between the gospels? This book puts all the gospels side-by-side. (DLG)

Non-Fiction Books

30 Days to Understanding the Bible, Max Anders. A terrifically well-organized approach. I have heard someone say, "I never had the big picture of the Bible before. Now I understand how things fit together." (DLG)

Bruce & Stan's Guide to the Bible, Bruce Bickel and Stan Jantz. Excellent book for leader's use to gain a deeper understanding of the Bible. More importantly, this book is great for students to read. It's interesting and informative, and written in a way that gets youth excited about reading God's Word for themselves. *Guide to the Bible* gives an overview of the Bible, highlights the major themes, characters, stories, and lessons, shows the Bible's relevance to daily life, and makes the Bible personal. (LYM)

Creative Bible Studies: Matthew–Acts, Dennis Stone. Works through these books passage by passage, with activities and discussion suggestions. Includes good, brief introductory notes for each passage. Many sessions also have suggestions for how to get teens to take the lesson home with them. Terrific resource for active-learning Bible study. (DLG)

Creative Bible Studies: Romans–Revelation, Dennis Stone. Second volume companion to previous entry. (DLG)

The Prophets, Abraham Heschel. A wonderful detailed description of all the prophets, with a brief introduction to the surrounding scholarship. The introduction, where Heschel describes the nature and purpose of a prophet is one of the best parts. (DLG)

Teaching the Bible Creatively by Bill McNabb and Steven Mabry. One of the best approaches to teaching the Bible around. (DLG & RCF)

Fiction Books

Many Waters, Madeline L'Engle. Two teens are transported back to the time of Noah and learn about following God when you can't see where God is leading. Good for thinking about what life was like in OT times. Fabulous story! (DLG)

Movies

Acts. Video version of the actual text of the book from the Bible. Though the acting is somewhat contrived in places, the opportunity to see the text come alive (without the producers taking incredible license) is well worth it. (DLG)

The Chosen. Movie portraying the friendship between two Jewish boys, one orthodox and the other Hasidic (very orthodox). Set in 1940s, this movie shows what it is like to be Jewish, to love God as you follow the law, and to

- hope for a homeland. The differences between the two sets of beliefs helps teens see that being Jewish is no more monolithic than being Christian. (DLG)
- Matthew*. Video version of the actual text of the book from the Bible. Narrated by Matthew, this portrays a dynamic and even playful Jesus, whose words and touch changed people's lives. Though the acting is somewhat contrived in places, the opportunity to see the text come alive (without the producers taking incredible license) is well worth it. (DLG)
- Prince of Egypt*. Perhaps the best short telling of the Exodus story, this movie combines richly textured animation with incredible music for a very memorable (and remarkably faithful) experience of the OT. (DLG)
- Ten Commandments*. The great classic movie starring Charlton Heston (Moses) and Yul Brynner (Pharaoh). Though it is almost excruciatingly long (and politically incorrect at times), the acting and treatment is still magnificent. Even today, the special effects are good enough to impress young and old viewers alike. (DLG)

"God Stuff" (Theology)

Non-Fiction

- Bruce & Stan's Guide to God*, Bruce Bickel and Stan Jantz. The authors refer to this book as a "Cliff Notes" to God. It includes chapters on Scripture, the Trinity, supernatural beings like angels, Satan, and demons, the Creation, Humankind, Sin, Jesus Christ, Salvation, the Holy Spirit, the End of the World, and the Christian Life. Again, this is a great book for students to read and there are questions (at the back of the book) for each chapter that can be used for discussion. **Note:** One way this book can be used is for students and their parents to each read the chapters, followed by a combined discussion. This allows students to hear about what their parents and other adults believe. (LYM)
- People of the Lie: The Hope for Healing Human Evil*, M. Scott Peck. Thoughtful and humble examination of the problem of evil. A must read for those troubled by this topic. (DLG)
- A Short History of Christian Thought*, Lynn Urban. A really dry (but incredibly comprehensive) examination of many basic ideas in Christian thought. (DLG)
- The Will of God*, Leslie D. Weatherhead. To help the reader navigate these tough theological waters, Weatherhead suggests that we experience God's will in three different ways: ultimate, intended, and circumstantial. Perhaps the best short discussion of this topic I have found. (DLG)

Fiction

- The Chronicles of Narnia*, C.S. Lewis. Filled with Christian symbolism and topics. The first in the series (*The Lion, the Witch and the Wardrobe*) tells the story of Jesus coming into the world and his mission. Terrific adventures!
- A Ring of Endless Light*, Madeline L'Engle. A young woman deals with her grandfather's leukemia, faith and family with the help of friends and

dolphins. A great discussion starter for someone who may have trouble articulating the issues for themselves. (DLG)

The Space Trilogy, C.S. Lewis. Though slow in the beginning and intended for mature readers, these books communicate some wonderful truths about life in general and Christian life in particular. (DLG)

This Present Darkness, Frank Peretti. A spiritual adventure, this book pulls back the veil on the spiritual aspects of a small-town's far-reaching conflict.

Riveting, provocative writing that may need some reality checks. (DLG)

Wrinkle in Time, Madeline L'Engle. The first in a three-part series. L'Engle has thought deeply about issues of good and evil, of time and prayer and our role in the universe. The other books in the series are *A Wind in the Door* and *A Swiftly Tilting Planet*. (DLG)

Movies

The Last Temptation of Christ. Based only loosely on the scriptures, this movie has many flaws. Nevertheless, a few scenes render Jesus in some illuminating ways—portrayal of a prophet resisting the call (would Jesus have resisted God's call?), Jesus' sense of humor at the wedding in Cana, the scene with the woman caught in adultery are good examples. Don't be thrown by the dream sequence Jesus experiences on the cross! (DLG)

Stigmata. A priest who investigates miracles for the Catholic church examines the stigmata (wounds that resemble Christ's) of a young woman in NYC. In so doing he uncovers a plot to hide ancient manuscripts. A mostly Christian "X-File" that is compelling until the end. Though the ending seems to violate some of the other premises of the movie (and displays Hollywood's theological weakness), this would provide a great discussion starter appropriate only for juniors or seniors in high school and older. (DLG)

Church History

Books

The Early Church, Henry Chadwick. Covers all the highlights of early church history in some detail. Very helpful and good reference. (DLG)

How to Read Church History, Volume 1: From the beginnings to the fifteenth century, Jean Comby. Not only does this hit most of the high points of church history in this period, but it provides samples of things written by insightful people of each time period. (DLG)

Jesus Freaks—Stories of Those Who Stood for Jesus: The Ultimate Jesus Freaks, DC Talk and The Voice of the Martyrs. A modernized Fox's *Book of Martyrs*, *Jesus Freaks* records the stories of Christians who paid the ultimate price for their faith across the ages. Examples are pulled from most centuries, including the 20th century (even the 1990s!). Powerful reading. (DLG)

The Middle Ages, R.W. Southern. Broad stroke painting of the middle ages with some important detail. A good resource and reference. (DLG)

The Reformation, Owen Chadwick. A thorough presentation of the factors leading up to the Reformation with a solid discussion of the turmoil and issues during the Reformation. (DLG)

Movies

Brother Sun, Sister Moon. Depicts the changes in the life of Francis of Assisi that began the monastic reforms of the 1100s AD. Fabulous sets, costumes and portrayal of life in the Middle Ages. Richly textured symbolism abounds. May need some running commentary to pick out the meaning for students. Deals with issues of economics and justice. (DLG)

Joan of Arc. Exciting (and violent) depiction of the young woman who led the forces of France. How do we discern God's will in the present? Will we follow if someone calls? (DLG)

Reformation Overview. Published by the Christian History Institute. A set of two videos (4 half-hour sessions) on the Reformation that examine the contributions of several key figures, including Martin Luther, John Calvin, Ulrich Zwingli, and the radical reformation. This video set comes with discussion/study questions and a bibliography. Also comes as several separate video tapes. If you have time, picking out particular scenes from the videos makes them go more quickly and keeps them from becoming a "grind." (DLG)

Resurrection. Fictional drama of what happened in the life of one of the soldiers who was guarding the tomb when Jesus rose from the dead. (DLG)

She Said, "Yes!" Documentary on the life of Cassie Bernall, the young woman who was shot in the Columbine Massacre after she was asked the question, "Do you believe in God?" Powerful discussion starter (see "Bonus Church History 1: Back to the Future," p. 103) for adults and teens alike. (DLG)

Worship & Sacraments

Books

Celebration of Discipline, Richard Foster. A classic that every Christian should read for their own development. Terrific sections on prayer and meditation. Very accessible and very practical. (DLG)

Congregational Worship Book, Henry David Gray. Though its language is now dated, the outlines of worship and prayers are still worthy. Useful material about the Christian Year. (DLG)

Journey Inward, Journey Outward, Elizabeth O'Connor. Marvelous book of meditations and journaling ideas that leads one to think and pray deeply. One of its great contributions is the way it links the inward journey (meditation) with the outward journey (service). (DLG)

Library of Christian Worship, Seven Volumes, Robert Webber. One of the authoritative resources on worship. Many worship traditions are represented here (including Congregational, Orthodox, and even relatively obscure traditions). In addition to historical and liturgical volumes, other volumes

include two on music and the arts in worship. Comprehensive and easily understood. (DLG)

Prayer, Richard Foster. One of the best and most accessible volumes on the subject. Includes detailed suggestions and quotes from many of the “masters” of prayer throughout the centuries. (DLG)

Congregationalism & Church

Books

The Congregational Way of Life, Arthur Rouner Jr. One of the books every church probably has on its shelves. Captures the spirit and exuberance of Congregationalism in language that still speaks powerfully. Available through the NA office in Oak Creek (see title page for contact information). (DLG)

Congregationalism in America, Manfred Waldemar Kohl. One of the best short histories of American Congregationalism by one of Congregationalism’s broadest thinkers. Available through the NA office in Oak Creek (see title page for contact information). (DLG)

The Creeds and Platforms of Congregationalism, Williston Walker. One of the great indispensable works on Congregational covenants. When last I checked, it was out of print, so if you find a copy of this for sale, buy it! (DLG)

A History of Christianity, Volume II, Reformation to the Present, Kenneth Scott Latourette.

History of American Congregationalism, Atkins and Fagley. An authoritative, exhaustive history indispensable to any Congregational library. Out of print. If you find a copy for sale, buy it! (DLG)

The Lord’s Free People, Harry R. Butman. Available through the NA office in Oak Creek (see title page for contact information).

Of Plymouth Plantation, 1620-1647, William Bradford, ed. by Samuel Eliot Morison. The published journal of the first governor of Plymouth Plantation (William Bradford). A terrific account of what life and thought were like for the Pilgrims in their early years in America. Will give any reader a great admiration for the courage and faith that marked the beginnings of Congregationalism in America. (DLG)

The Oxford Dictionary of the Christian Church, ed. by F.L. Cross and E.A. Livingstone. First-rate, one-volume dictionary of the Church, its history and practices. (DLG)

Principles and Practices of the Congregational Way, Rev. Dr. Lloyd Hall and Rev. Karl D. Schimpf. Probably the best, short, contemporary piece on Congregationalism, written by two of the top Congregational thinkers of our day. Could be given to confirmands and new members. Available through the NACCC National Office. (DLG)

Streams of Living Water, Richard Foster. Explores some of the streams or traditions in Christian thought and practice. A provocative book for Congregationalists, since we value many different faith expressions. (DLG)

- Transforming Congregations for the Future*, Loren B. Meade. Lays out some useful models for thinking about church. (See “A Theology of Confirmation,” p. 264). Chapter on “The Role of the Judicatory” is a “must-read” for Congregationalists involved at the regional and national levels. (DLG)
- Where Two or Three Are Gathered...*, Lynn Merkel. Written for confirmation students, this is perhaps the most accessible, short history of Congregationalism. A great way to brush up on your Congregational history. Included as Appendix C in this updated volume. (DLG)

Websites

- www.congregational.net — Website for the Wisconsin Congregational Association. Besides getting a chance to see what other regional associations are doing, make sure you head to the Activities page, and from there to the page for the Wisconsin Congregational Theological Society. Lots of articles by many good congregational thinkers. (DLG)
- www.naccc.org — Website for the National Association of Congregational Christian Churches. News, events, forums and links to websites of many Congregational churches. Terrific resource. (DLG)
- www.rootsweb.com/~mosmd — Pilgrims & Plymouth Colony by Duane Cline. A study guide and aid for teachers. Has lots of detail about Pilgrims and how they were different from the Puritans. Discusses each step of the journey from Scrooby to Holland to Bristol to Plymouth. Very informative. (DLG)
- www.mayflower.org — Official website for the descendants of the passengers of the Mayflower in 1620. Great place to learn a bit more about the Pilgrims and see the passenger list. Also has pages that talk about how kids were involved. Includes photos. (DLG)
- pilgrims.net/plymouth/history — Website for Plymouth, Massachusetts. A great resource with many links to other resources. (DLG)

What Membership Means?

Books

- What Membership Means*, Henry David Gray. Though the language is dated, this pamphlet lays out all the basics. (DLG)

Games and Activities

Books

- Boredom Busters*, Cindy S. Hansen (DLG)
- Holiday Ideas for Youth Groups*, Wayne Rice and Mike Yaconelli. (RCF)
- New Games* (DLG)
- More New Games* (DLG)
- Play It! and Play It Again!*, Wayne Rice and Mike Yaconelli. (RCF)

Quick Crowdbreakers and Games for Youth Groups by the editors of Group Publishing. (RCF)

Movies

Almost an Angel. Paul Hogan (Crocodile Dundee) plays a bank robber who changes his ways when he is struck by a bus and given a second chance. Some of this character's sensitivities and obedience to God even when it seems nutty to us are very interesting. (DLG)

Monty Python and the Holy Grail. Just zany. With the exception of one minor scene in the Castle Anthrax, it's perfectly appropriate and good fun. Watch for the cats in multiple scenes. More appropriate for older teens who get more of the British humor. (DLG)

Princess Bride. A spoof on fairy tales. As funny and cleaner than the Holy Grail. (DLG)

Truman Show. Thought-provoking movie starring Jim Carey as a man whose whole life is literally on TV (though he doesn't realize this until the end). Try some discussion afterward about the nature of creation and how reality is different (or not!) from what the media shows us. (DLG)

Other Resources

Many of the resources (especially magazines and websites) listed in "General Information" or "Leading Small Groups" share games, activities and general ideas.

Leading Small Groups

Books

Harper's Encyclopedia of Religious Education published by Harper & Row. Here's an ultra-user-friendly resource with broad applications. (RCF)

How to Lead Small Groups, Dennis Rydberg. Though it also has great games and activities, the introduction and approach to leading small groups is not only a great short introduction, but draws on Jesus' own leadership style. (DLG)

Ideas Library, Youth Specialties. This 13-volume set has hundreds of ideas for games, discussion starters, drama, crowd breakers, camps, publicity, special events, and meetings...on a wide variety of subjects. Available in print edition or CD-Rom. A must-have for anyone working with youth! (LYM)

Purpose-Driven Youth Ministry, Doug Fields. This book, as well as its companion training kit, provides a framework for youth ministry which is effective and thoroughly biblical. It covers topics like evangelism, worship, fellowship, discipleship, and ministry. Great book for anyone who works with youth to share with everyone involved in your youth ministry team. (LYM)

Talk Sheets, Youth Specialties. Several volumes exist:

- *Junior High-Middle School Talksheets – Update*
- *More Junior High-Middle School Talksheets – Updated*
- *Junior High and Middle School Talksheets, Psalms & Proverbs - Updated*
- *High School Talksheets – Updated*
- *More High School Talksheets – Updated*
- *High School Talksheets from Psalms & Proverbs - Updated*

Each volume contains 50 creative discussions with topical questions and activities designed to get youth talking to each other about how real-life issues intersect with their Christian faith. *Talksheets* are great for both large and small groups.

Transforming Bible Study: A Leader's Guide by Walter Wink. Want to get beyond the old "devotional talk followed by discussion" model? This is a great place to start gathering ideas. (Published by Abingdon.) (RCF)

Special Program Elements

Books

Family-Based Youth Ministry by Mark DeVries. This is a MUST-read that'll change your preconceptions about goals and methods of modern youth ministry! (Published by InterVarsity Press.) (DLG)

Making Disciples, William H. Willimon. Completely mentor-based approach to confirmation put together by one of the best preachers/theologians of our day. Terrific resource. (DLG)

Retreats. Put out by Youth Specialties, this classic resource includes retreat outlines and suggestions for running retreats. A follow-up—*More Retreats*—is also good. (DLG)

**Building Confirmation
the Congregational Way**

Glossary of Terms

- apocalypse** (a•pah'koh•lips) — literally, “revealing,” “uncovering,” “unveiling;” representative of a type of literature that usually discusses the “end times.” The Book of Revelation (the last of the Bible) is the only New Testament book that is completely an apocalypse. Other important apocalyptic literature in the NT is in each of the gospels when Jesus talks about the “Day of the Lord.” In the OT, apocalyptic literature is found almost exclusively in the prophets, particularly Daniel and Zechariah. See eschatology below.
- catechism** (ca' ti•ki' zum) — the ancient word for the process of confirmation (still employed by the Roman Catholic church)
- catechumen** (ca' ti•kyoo' min) — one involved in catechism
- Christology** (cris•tahl' oh•jee) — area of study that discusses the question, “Who or what is Jesus Christ?”
- church** (churhch) — a gathered body of believers following Jesus; when capitalized, it means the Church Universal. Note: the church may meet in a building, but a church is far more than just the building!
- church leadership** (churhch lee' dur•ship) — (also “lay leadership”) people who serve on a board, committee or council of the church; these people are generally (but not always!) the most active members in the church
- confirmand** (con' fur•mand) — a student involved in the confirmation process
- confirmation** (con' fur•ma' shun) — the act of confirming, in this case, confirming one's faith for oneself; often used synonymously with “confirmation program,” the course of “study” a student might follow before being confirmed. When capitalized, Confirmation refers to the Rite of Confirmation, the act of worship in which the student is actually confirmed. See *Appendix A: Beyond Survival*, p. 257, for a more complete definition.
- Congregationalism** (kong•greh•gay' shun•uhl•iz' uhm) — primarily a way in which churches organize in which the local church decides how best to follow God in its local context and in relationship with other churches. See church and covenant; also see “Basic Congregational Church 1: Who Are We?” p. 115.
- conservative** (kahn•suhv' vah•tihv) — mostly unhelpful term denoting a wide range of beliefs; see “Bonus Congregational Church 2: The 20th Century Question,” p. 120.
- covenant** (cuv' uh•nehnt) — a solemn mutual promise or agreement between two parties; different from a contract in that where a person who violates a stipulation in a contract “breaks” the contract (making it null and void), if a covenant is violated, both parties are still obligated by it; examples of covenants in use today include the covenant of marriage and people's relationships with God; covenant is one of the key concepts of the Bible (Old and New Testaments). For more, please see lesson plan, “Bible at a Glance” (p. 58) or one of the basic Bible references listed in the *Annotated Bibliography* (p. 237).
- deism** (day' ih•zum) — belief that God is a supreme benevolent being who started the world running and then stepped back to watch without participating directly
- diakonia** (dy•ak' oh•nee' a) — Greek word meaning the act of serving, “washing the feet,” of those who need it, just as Jesus washed the feet of his disciples at the

Last Supper.² *Diakonia* is “The task of servant leadership...primarily outside the congregation—in the community that surrounds the congregation.”³ See *Appendix A: Beyond Survival*, p. 264, for its application to confirmation.

didache (dee’ dah•kee) — Greek word meaning the teaching of the scriptures and stories of faith that are the soil for spiritual growth. “...the work of *didache* is to help open up the scriptures, the stories, the lore of the faith so that they are alive and known.”⁴ See *Appendix A: Beyond Survival*, p. 264, for its application to confirmation.

ecclesiology (ee•klee’ zee•ahl’ oh•jee) — area of study that discusses the questions, “What is the church and how does it work?”

Episcopal (ee•pihs’ koh•puhl) — as used in this text, a pyramid-shaped way of organizing a church in which a leader is at the top and the people in the pews are at the bottom (see “What Is Congregationalism?” handout in *Handouts*, p. 321)

epistle (ee•pihs’ uhl)— letter, sometimes a long one; the New Testament includes many epistles, a number of them written by Paul; many scholars think that Paul’s epistles were meant to be read aloud in worship

eschatology (ehs•kuh•tahl’ oh•jee) — area of study that discusses the questions, “Is there an ‘end time?’ What is the end of time going to be like?”

euangelion (yoo•ayng•gehl•ee’ uhn) — Greek word most often translated as “Good News” or gospel; the root word from which we get words such as “evangelism” and “evangelize.” (See “gospel” below).

evolution (eh•voh•loo’ shuhn) — scientific theory first postulated by Charles Darwin in the 1800s that offers an alternate explanation for the origin of species; sparked amazing controversy in the United States.

faith (fayth) — “Faith, then, is the conviction of things hoped for, the certainty of things not seen.” (Hebrews 11:1) The author continues: “without faith it is impossible to please God, because anyone who comes to him must believe that He exists and that He rewards those who earnestly seek Him.” If someone talks about “the faith,” often that person refers to the Christianity.

free will (free wihl) — Free will is the idea that God has given humans the ability to make choices for themselves, to determine their own destinies. The farther one goes toward free will on the free-will/predestination continuum, the more one will believe that humans can influence or even decide whether or not they make it to heaven (by choosing to follow God or, in humanist eyes, the ability to save the world on their own). See predestination.

fundamentalist (fuhn•dah•mehn’ tah•lihst) — a person who believes that a certain number of beliefs are essential in order for someone to be called Christian

gospel (gah’ spuhl) — from the Middle English, “god spell” (literally a “story about God and what God is doing); used to translate the Greek word, *euangelion*; can refer to a particular style of biography (examples: Matthew’s gospel, Mark’s

²John 13:1ff.

³Loren Mead, p. 63.

⁴*ibid.*, p. 61.

- gospel, etc.); when capitalized (“Gospel”), used to denote the “Good News” of Jesus Christ’s death, resurrection, and meaning in our lives.
- group** (groop) — a gathering of three or more people (two people is a couple and functions differently from a “group”); a group is a collective “organism” that can have the properties of health, maturity, strength and other ideas normally associated with an individual
- group dynamic** (groop dy•nam’ ik) — a social and psychological “intangible” of a group and its “life” together; can be “good” (helpful group dynamics include caring, sharing, honesty, etc. that remove barriers and encourage growth in its individuals) or “bad” (harmful group dynamics include jealousy, hostility, apathy, selfishness, etc. that put up barriers and make individual growth less likely or even impossible).
- incarnation** (ihn•cahr•nay’ shun) — the “enfleshing” of God in Jesus. See John 1:14.
- kerygma** (kur•ig’ mah)— Greek word meaning the proclaiming of the Word, both spoken (preaching) and lived (illustrating the Good News with our lives and deeds). “*Kerygma* is both a source of transforming power to those in the congregation and an impelling force in their encounters with the outside world.”⁵ See *Appendix A: Beyond Survival*, p. 264, for its application to confirmation.
- koinonia** (koy’ no•nee’ ah)— Greek word meaning sense of community, fellowship or *esprit de corps* that strengthens the body and leads people to actively appreciate and care for each other; also how and why people participate in the community. *Koinonia* is both “a power to support the development of disciples and a sign to society of God’s intent that we live in community...”⁶ See *Appendix A: Beyond Survival*, p. 264, for its application to confirmation.
- lay leadership** (lay lee’ dur•ship) — see church leadership
- liberal** (lih’ buhr•uhl) — mostly unhelpful term denoting a wide range of beliefs; see “Bonus Congregational Church 2: The 20th Century Question,” p. 120.
- moderator** (mah’ dur•ay’ tur) — traditionally, the lay head of a local congregation; traditionally, the moderator (leader of the laity) and the pastor (clergy or leader of the clergy) are co-leaders of a congregation
- non-synoptic** (nahn•sihn•ahp’ tik) — not “synoptic” (see below); refers to John’s gospel because it is different in material, outline and chronology.
- NT** (ehn•tee)— short for New Testament
- omniscience** (ahm•nih’ shuhnts) — literally, “all knowing;” God is often portrayed as “omniscient”
- omnipotence** (ahm•nih’ poh•tehnts) — literally, “all powerful;” God is often portrayed as “omnipotent”
- omnipresence** (ahm•nih•preh’ zuhnts) — literally, “all present;” God is often portrayed as being everywhere (sometimes also “every when”) at the same time
- OT** (oh•tee) — short for Old Testament

⁵Ibid.

⁶Ibid, p. 58.

- panentheism** (pan•nehn' thee•ih'zhum) — belief that God is in everything and everything is God
- Pentateuch** (pehn' tah•took) — a name for the first five books of the OT
- polity** (pah' li•tee) — way of organizing or relating between people; often used in the phrase “church polity” to indicate how a church is structured (that is, who makes the decisions and who is responsible). Most churches have one of three polities: episcopal, presbyterian, or congregational. See “Basic Congregational Church 1: Who Are We?” p. 115.
- predestination** (pree•dehs' tihn•ay' shun) — Predestination is the idea that before we are born, God knows everything that will happen to us. All aspects of human life (including who makes it to heaven) are “predestined” or determined by God beforehand. This idea emphasizes that God is in charge.
- Presbyterian** (prehs' bih•teer' eeahn) — as used in this text, a way of organizing church which locates the primary authority in the presbytery (generally, a county-sized district).
- program segment** (proh' gram sehg' mehnt) —
- program slot** (proh' gram slaht) — separate program which has a single focus; made up of program segments.
- prophet** (prah' feht) — a messenger from God who reminds people to return to God; a prophet is very sensitive to what does and does not fit with how God works; a prophet foretells what will happen if people and society do not change their ways; during the reigns of King David and his descendents, a prophet was the spiritual check on the king's absolute authority
- reductionistic** (ree•duhk' shuhn•ihs' tik) — likes to reduce things to their smallest component parts in an attempt to understand things better
- rite** (ryt) — an important sacred act of the church; not one of the great mysteries or sacraments; rites practiced in Congregational churches usually include confirmation, marriage, burial, etc.
- sacrament** (sa' krah•mehnt) — from the Latin word meaning, “mystery” which translates the Greek word, “mysterion;” an outward and visible sign of an inward and invisible grace
- scientism** (si'ehn•tih•zuhm) — belief that science cannot only find the answers to the universe's big questions but that science is the *only* valid way to do so. Scientism is as much a religion as Christianity, though it is not often recognized as such.
- small group** (smahl groop) — a group of 2–5 people; the perfect small group size is four; anything larger than five develops different group dynamics than in a small group
- soteriology** (soh•teer•ree•ahl' oh•jee) — area of study that discusses the questions, “How are we saved and for what purpose?”
- synoptic** (sihn•ahp' tik) — literally, “with one eye”; used to refer to Matthew, Mark and Luke's gospels because they approach the life and teachings of Jesus with the same basic outline, chronology and material.

Testament (tehs' tah•mehnt) — the Greek word for testament can also mean “witness” or “covenant;” see “What is a ‘testament’ anyway?” p. 59.

theism (thee' ih•zuhm) — belief that God knows and cares for us

theology (thee•o' lo•jee) — area of study that discusses the question, “Who/what is God and what is God like?”

Trinity (trih' nih•tee) — belief held by many Christians that God is paradoxically Three-in-One; model developed by Christians after Jesus' resurrection and the Holy Spirit's coming upon the Church at Pentecost that reflected early Christians' experience of the Living God.

Unitarianism (yoo•ih•tair' ee•uhn•ih•zuhm) — belief held by some Christians that God is One not three.

wisdom literature (wihz' duhm lih' tuhr•ah•chuh) a type of writing in the OT distinguished by its willingness to ask questions of God and seek wisdom as a great good

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**Appendix A:
Beyond Survival**

Overview

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What Is Confirmation

In most Christian traditions, confirmation currently refers to some or all of three different functions:

1. The basic Christian instruction undertaken in preparation for the rite of confirmation (known before this generation by the very cool word, “catechesis”).
2. The rite of passage for a young Christian during which the parents’ vows (taken at baptism) are fulfilled as the young person owns the faith for himself or herself.
3. Formal welcome of the newly adult member into the active life of the church.

In most Congregational churches, all three are generally meant by the word, “confirmation,” much to the confusion of congregation, confirmand and pastor. This confusion can cause problems. Knowing the multiple reasons we do confirmation may help you choose which are most important to your church

Why Do We Do Confirmation?

Confirmation, seems to have risen out of several concerns for people. Pastors and churches have wrestled with how best to meet these needs.

For parents

- to have a measure of assurance for the salvation of their children in an uncertain world (hence infant baptism)
- to provide a means by which parents could fulfill their baptismal vows on behalf of their infant children

For parents and children

- to know the child was part of the covenant community (hence infant baptism)

For children baptized as infants

- to know their faith more deeply
- to claim and profess their faith as their own

For the local church

- to ensure that those who join the church understand what it means to join
- to ensure that those joining with the church are not paying mere lip-service to vows they have no intention of fulfilling

Consistently, the meaning of confirmation lies on the thin line between wanting to meet people's needs and maintaining an essential respect for baptism as sufficient for the cleansing of sins and the giving of the Spirit. To argue that confirmation is essential for baptized infants leads ultimately to a two-class church (the baptized-confirmed, and the baptized-unconfirmed). This flies in the face of biblical and early church understandings of baptism. On the other hand, to deny the felt needs of people with regard to baptism and confirmation is to withhold the grace of God from those who need it, not something churches should do. The combination of these concerns (and perhaps others) powerfully pulls the church toward having confirmation class or something like it.

A “New” Way to Look at Confirmation

On the first day of the week we came together to break bread. Paul spoke to the people and, because he intended to leave the next day, kept on talking until midnight. There were many lamps in the upstairs room where we were meeting. Seated in a window was a young man⁷ named Eutychus, who was sinking into a deep sleep as Paul talked on and on. When he was sound asleep, he fell to the ground from the third story and was picked up dead. Paul went down, threw himself on the young man and put his arms around him. “Don’t be alarmed,” he said. “He’s alive!” Then he went upstairs again and broke bread and ate. After talking until daylight, he left. The people took the young man home alive and were greatly comforted.⁸

Luke’s story about young Eutychus is a modern-day parable of confirmation.⁹ Too many young people in the church sit in a precarious, spiritual position when they come to confirmation class—Biblically malnourished, doctrinally vague, generally skeptical, and rarely acquainted with Jesus Christ, the reason for our faith. At best, the adult leaders talk on and on, knowing their need for even the most basic knowledge. At worst, the adult leaders drown potential growth in a sea of words that have no relevance for young people’s daily lives. Whatever the intent, the result is the same: our young people are numbed in body and mind and fall out of the church after confirmation, often never to return or worse, to die a spiritual death.

I believe churches and pastors must, as Paul does, interrupt their “business as usual” approach to confirmation. As a community of faith, we must go to where the confirmands are, (gently) throw ourselves upon them (so they can experience the power of God’s love through us) and put our arms around them as a body of believers. Then and only then will confirmands be able to find more secure seats in the fellowship and break bread with the rest of the body, even learning more effectively, just as Eutychus seems to have done, by spending the rest of the night listening to Paul!

Going to Where They Are

If we wish confirmands to know we care, we cannot stay where we are comfortable, but must go to where they are. This means two things: First, we need to address their spiritual formation in ways they can access. If we regularly talk over their

⁷The Greek here, *neanias*, taken with verse 12 means that Eutychus was a youth, no more than 14 years of age. This is one of six times the word is used in the NT (Acts 7:58, 23:17ff.)

⁸Acts 20:7-12.

⁹For a number of reasons, Luke is widely believed to be the author of Acts as well as the gospel that bears his name. For a discussion, see the introduction to Acts in most study Bibles.

heads, they will correctly perceive we are teaching to meet our needs, not theirs. Second, we need to focus on spiritual formation in ways they can experience God on a daily basis. If we deal even primarily in ethereal theology, they will not believe God can meet them in their very real lives.

Throwing Ourselves Upon Them

As I read this phrase and try to apply it to confirmation, I find myself uncomfortable, not because I don't think it's true, but because it seems so extreme and could be misconstrued by the confirmand. But perhaps confirmands do need to experience being overwhelmed by the strength of love and affection the believers have for them. Few people join a church because of its theology or its history or its memorization of the Bible. Many join because they experience the love of God through the people in fellowship, often in ways that are intensely personal and overwhelmingly simple. "Personal" because one never knows what will reach into and touch the heart of someone. "Simple" because often it is "nothing out of the ordinary" or "just because that's what you do" to the person who does it. I am increasingly convinced that without an experience of the love and power of God either directly (God has always touched people directly throughout history) or indirectly (through those God's love is already moving), our young people will lie in the street, broken and without aid except by God's own hand.

Bringing Them Upstairs and Breaking Bread with Them

Through confirmation, young people own for themselves the baptismal vows which their parents undertook for them. Through confirmation, young people enter into their spiritual adulthood and become members of the church. Thus, young people are not the future of the church. They are the church now and should be pursued at least as eagerly as other new members. After the church confirms a young person, s/he needs to be included in fellowship, leadership and stewardship as an adult. If we wish confirmands to respond as adults, then we need to accord them the same respect and expectations. The end result will be spiritually sturdy young people who not only can "make it" as Christians, but who revitalize the church from within.

Where Does Confirmation Come From?

The Early Church

The roots of confirmation run deeply into the sacrament of baptism. The apostles frequently baptized by the “laying on of hands.”¹⁰ According to the biblical witness, the Spirit comes immediately with baptism, but in rare cases (e.g., the baptism of the Samaritans in Acts 8), the Spirit is given only on the laying on of the hands.¹¹ In virtually all cases, these were adult baptisms. The exceptions are when the apostles baptized entire families, which may have included infants.¹²

In the early church, the common practice was to do both baptism and confirmation, with communion to immediately follow. This is still the practice in the Eastern Church where the local minister administers baptism, confirmation and eucharist to infants in the same ceremony.

In the Western tradition, however, the local priest would baptize an infant followed by the bishop anointing the infant with oil, the laying on of hands and first communion. Nevertheless, baptism, confirmation and communion are still linked through Tertullian and Irenaeus (c. 180-225), with the first separations evident in the writings of St. Cyprian (c. 250) and Pope Cornelius (c. 251). The practice of separating baptism and confirmation (and communion) seems to have originated in Rome. With small dioceses, the bishop could conceivably keep up with the baptisms, but when the practice moved to Gaul (ca. the late 400s¹³), the bishop was often unable to be present for each baptism. Children were baptized by the local priest and confirmed the next time the bishop traveled to the area, sometimes a period of several years.¹⁴ Thus, confirmation and first communion remained linked, but gradually separated from the sacrament of baptism.¹⁵

¹⁰See Acts 8:14-17, 19:1-7. Much of this history derives from *The Oxford Dictionary of the Christian Church*, ed. by F.L. Cross and E.A. Livingstone (London: Oxford University Press, 1997), p. 395-7; and *The Complete Library of Christian Worship, Volume 6: The Sacred Actions of Christian Worship*, ed. by Robert E. Webber (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson Publishers, 1993), p. 185-193.

¹¹One should note that Acts 8 and its two-step baptism of the Samaritans is considered an aberration, a mistake that Peter and the other apostles quickly remedy, not a biblical warrant for confirmation.

¹²See Acts 10 and 16 for two similar cases of family baptisms.

¹³Linwood Urban's *A Short History of Christian Thought* (NY: Oxford University Press, 1995), p. 273.

¹⁴William J. Bausch, *A New Look at the Sacraments* (Notre Dame, IN: Fides/Claretian, 1977), pp. 93-5, argues that a major influence on the West's decision to separate confirmation from baptism was to consolidate and maintain the authority necessary for post-empire Europe. “The point is that in the West the bishops, under the circumstances, became even more a kind of center of civil, social, and religious gravity. It was needful and desirable to keep their image and position intact,” p. 94.

¹⁵An interesting note: in many minds baptism, confirmation and communion were still linked though the practice of doing all three in the same ceremony rarely occurred. Henry VIII brought Elizabeth I to receive all three sacraments when she was three days old. *ODCC*, p. 396.

Middle Ages

In the Middle Ages, Peter Lombard, St. Thomas Aquinas and other Dominican theologians argued forcefully that Confirmation should become one of the Seven Sacraments. Some thought (Bonaventure among them) that confirmation bestowed the gift of the Spirit “to strengthen the candidate in his conflict with evil.”¹⁶ The biblical and early Christian fathers were reinterpreted to not only allow but mandate confirmation.¹⁷ Not until the Lateran Council of 1215 was confirmation listed as a sacrament in any documents, but by the end of the fifteenth century, it received uniform recognition as a sacrament.

Reformation

During the Reformation, reformers accepted the baptism-confirmation split, using it for their own ends. The incremental initiation was continued, with its educational feature (which had been little developed in medieval Catholicism) heightened. Catechisms, for children and for their teachers, were written; clergy added teaching to their expected duties; confirmation became (as it remains in many traditions) an important event for the children, their families, and the congregation.¹⁸

Calvin in particular seems to have viewed this incremental initiation through pastoral as much as theological lenses. While accepting infant baptism on its relationship with the biblical injunction of circumcision,¹⁹ Calvin seems to echo twentieth century frustrations with confirmation when he cries out,

How I wish that we might have kept the custom which, as I have said, existed among the ancient Christians before this misborn wraith of a sacrament came to birth! Not that it would be a confirmation such as they fancy, which cannot be named without doing injustice to baptism, but a catechizing, in which children or those near adolescence would give an account of their faith before the church.²⁰

¹⁶ODCC, p. 396. Urban, *op. cit.*, quotes from an early Gallican homily on confirmation: “The Holy Spirit who comes down upon the waters of Baptism with health-giving descent, in the font gives His fullness to produce innocence, in Confirmation affords an increase to produce grace. In Baptism we are regenerated so as to attain to life; after Baptism we are strengthened for battle. In Baptism we are washed; after Baptism we are made strong.”

¹⁷Bausch, p. 98, argues that most of the scholars of the Middle Ages took this step without recognizing its foundations in the *False Decretals* and a fabricated document from a phony pope named Melchides.

¹⁸CLCW, p. 186.

¹⁹Urban, *op. cit.*, p. 293. “For Calvin, baptism, like circumcision, was a sign of the covenant.”

²⁰John Calvin, translated by Ford Lewis Battles, *Institutes of the Christian Religion* (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1960), Book 4, Chapter 19, Section 13, p. 1460. First edition of the *Institutes* was published 1536.

Calvin's influence over the reformed tradition—and especially with a small group of separatists in Scrooby—formed the basis for the current form of the confirmation process in the Congregational tradition.

Early Congregationalism

In the New World, the Pilgrims regularly wrangled over issues surrounding baptism and confirmation.²¹ The issues mirror ones existing in Congregational churches today:

1. Should infants be baptized (and how)? Or should baptism be only on profession of faith?
2. In what way are baptism and the doctrine of original sin related?
3. What is the relationship between baptism and confirmation?

John Robinson firmly argued against infant baptism: “We must not conceive of baptism as of a charm, or think it effectual to all it is put upon, but must judge it available and of use, according to the covenant of promise which God hath made to the faithful and their seed, and none otherwise...”²² Yet later in the same work, Robinson is quite adamant that baptism “is effectual upon the very infants of the faithful, though for the present wanting faith...”²³ From a theological standpoint, Robinson seems to have felt compelled to reject infant baptism, yet from a pastoral perspective, to accept it. He is known to have baptized infants and to have offered advice to the colonists on baptism.²⁴

As you can see, confirmation has developed mostly in answer to people's needs, not because of any clear and coherent statements or examples from the Bible or definitive church tradition. Confirmation has grown or evolved over the centuries to be what it is now.

²¹George Williston, *Saints and Strangers* (NY: Time-Warner, 1964), pp. 76-9, 384-5, records these and other instances. A strange side-note is the bizarre “self-baptism” performed by John Smyth of Amsterdam, who claimed that “Infant baptism, so Smyth informed Clyfton [the first preacher for the group that formed in Scrooby] was ‘the mark of the beast’ ...,” p. 77.

²²*The Works of John Robinson* (London: John Snow, 1851), p. 115.

²³*ibid.*, p. 458.

²⁴See Williston, *op. cit.*

A Theology of Confirmation

Why have the writers of this curriculum made the choices they have about what to include? What are the essential elements of confirmation and why?

'...Jesus went into Galilee, proclaiming the good news of God. "The time has come," he said. "The kingdom of God is near. Repent and believe the good news!"'²⁵

Jesus preached the Good News wherever he went and people were drawn by the thousands to him. Older adults, younger adults, teens and children—all were hungry for the Good News, and Jesus is clear throughout his ministry that God's love is for each person regardless of age, status or experience. Thus, our reasons for reaching young people through confirmation are the same as the ones God had for reaching us with the Good News through Jesus Christ. "Good News" is a phrase that should be applied to every part of the confirmation process. Young people should have a sense of excitement as they delve into what it means to know and follow God's will. We also want young people to have a sense of calling to be good news to a world where bad news is everywhere.

Understanding that they are embraced and undergirded by this attitude of Good News, the confirmands will be led into the church in four principle areas described by four Greek words: *koinonia* (fellowship, community and participation), *kerygma* (proclamation and showing forth), *didache* (stories and teachings), and *diakonia* (service).²⁶

Koinonia (koy' no•nee'•ah)— A sense of community, fellowship or *esprit de corps* that strengthens the body and leads people to actively appreciate and care for each other; also how and why people participate in the community. *Koinonia* is both "a power to support the development of disciples and a sign to society of God's intent that we live in community..."²⁷

Kerygma (ku•rig' mah)— The proclaiming of the Word, both spoken (preaching) and lived (illustrating the Good News with our lives and deeds). "*Kerygma* is both a source of transforming power to those in the congregation and an impelling force in their encounters with the outside world."²⁸

Didache (dee' dah•kee)— The teaching of the scriptures and stories of faith that are the soil for spiritual growth. "...the work of *didache* is to help open up the scriptures, the stories, the lore of the faith so that they are alive and known."²⁹

²⁵Mark 1:14b-15.

²⁶For this whole section, I summarize and condense a much longer and invigorating discussion by Loren B. Mead in his *Transforming Congregations for the Future* (NY: Alban Institute, 1994), beginning on page 43.

²⁷Ibid., p. 58.

²⁸Ibid.

²⁹Ibid., p. 61.

Diakonia (dy•ak' oh•nee'•a)— The act of serving, “washing the feet,” of those who need it, just as Jesus washed the feet of his disciples at the Last Supper.³⁰ *Diakonia* is “The task of servant leadership...primarily outside the congregation—in the community that surrounds the congregation.”³¹

These four aspects of the church are intertwined and sometimes overlap, but they are also the foundation of the Church Universal described in Acts 2. Surrounded and pervaded with the spirit of Good News, these four aspects of the church's life form the foundation and describe the goals for the confirmation process.

Tying Up Some Theological Loose Ends

In proposing the above new theology, I have intentionally avoided the thornier questions. These issues are, however, ones that every person who has considered the matters of baptism and confirmation has pondered at least briefly. What follows are not the definitive answers to these thorny questions, rather what may provide a starting point for more discussion.

Infant Baptism: A Theological or Pastoral Concern?

As the history above suggests and as reformers like Luther, Calvin and Zwingli agree, infant baptism has little if any direct biblical warrant. Indirectly, we can turn to Jesus' evident love and appreciation of children and the apostles' baptisms of whole families, but these are indirect.

Not until Augustine put some teeth into the doctrine of original sin did the practice of infant baptism become an urgent, felt need of virtually every parent. Only in the face of damnation or limbo did long-standing ideas of baptism change. In light of its reliance on the doctrine of original sin and the modern disdain for the doctrine, the practice of infant baptism seems outdated. Only if one follows Calvin's lead and looks to the Old Testament practice of circumcision does the idea of doing anything with infants develop any theological merit, and then only as a dedication, a welcoming of the infant as a member of the covenant community. Thus, I would suggest that a rite of infant dedication has more theological integrity than infant baptism. When the child is old enough to profess his/her faith, then baptism is appropriate.

From a pastoral standpoint, however, the sacrament of infant baptism will be practiced as long as parents want additional assurance of their child's salvation or are so tied to the tradition of infant baptism that they cannot imagine doing otherwise.

³⁰John 13:1ff.

³¹Mead, p. 63.

When to Confirm

Regardless of whether or not children are baptized or dedicated as an infant, eventually a time comes when young people need to make the faith their own. A number of churches approach the process like many schools—when one graduates from 7th grade Sunday School, one spends the next year in Confirmation Class. The amount of peer pressure that develops for every member of that class to move into Confirmation Class (whether or not s/he is ready or interested) is enormous.

I believe this system does the potential confirmands an enormous disservice. Developmentally, most 8th graders simply can't think in the abstract terms that most Confirmation Classes count on. Indeed, the ability to think abstractly is not generally part of young people's make ups until 9th or even 10th grade. Because this developmental step is so marked, I wonder if confirming in 8th grade (or earlier) is wise. I see three ways to remedy this approach:

1. Lower the developmental level of confirmation class to something more age-appropriate for 8th graders or younger.
2. Make confirmation a long-term process (three or four years) that encourages teens to think about their faith at lots of different levels. Start it in 8th grade if necessary, but allow the commitment stage to occur later.
3. Free confirmation from its peer pressure by linking it instead with the adult membership process. Confirmation can then take place as teens feel led (or not). This might even encourage "never confirmed" adults to formally own their baptismal vows.

Family Is the Primary Engine for Christian Education

Somehow churches have gotten in the bad habit of thinking of themselves as the source for Christian education. Gradually this thinking has come under scrutiny. The Search Institute (see *Annotated Bibliography*, p. 234) has published research suggesting that the single most important factor in determining whether or not a child grows to have an active faith is the degree to which family members discuss faith issues outside of church walls. If parents and other family members talk about their faith away from church, it doubles the likelihood that a child will develop an active faith life!³² Somehow confirmation leaders need to involve parents more in the process of confirmation, whether as mentors or discussion leaders or trip participants or just sharing their own faith with their teens.

In looking back on his first youth ministry call, Mark DeVries tracked down the young people with whom he ministered.

Almost with out exception those young people who are growing in their faith as adults were teenagers who fit into one of two categories: either (1) they

³²Search Institute (Minneapolis, MN) and Ben Freudenburg's and Rick Lawrence's *The Family-Friendly Church* (Loveland, CO: Group Publishing, 1998).

came from families where Christian growth was modeled in at least one of their parents, or (2) they had developed such significant connections with adults within the church that it had become an extended family for them.³³

I would argue that a confirmation process must work from both of these two angles—church and family—if it plans to be successful, especially where parental involvement in the church is spotty prior to a child entering such a process.

Concluding Remarks

Given the confusing history and unevenly developed theology of confirmation, one should not be surprised that confirmation is generally misunderstood and misapplied. Nevertheless, confirmation occupies an important place in the ritual life of local congregations. As local congregations seek to develop confirmation as a process and a rite, some basic principles may be used as a guide:

1. Wherever possible, the elements of initiation in the early church—water, oil, bread and wine—should be reunited. They are potent symbols that will convey the gravity of confirmation.
2. Where changes are warranted in a confirmation process, leaders would be well-advised to seek advice of parents and future confirmands. Perhaps a slightly different model may prove a useful stepping stone to a more radical one without causing great distress in parent and student expectations. (See *Appendix B: Alternative Models for Confirmation*, p. 269.)
3. Confirmation leaders need to network with other confirmation leaders to share ideas and encourage adapting confirmation to our society while simultaneously deepening the theology of confirmation.

We should not wonder that confirmation—growing out of mostly pastoral concerns—should be a rite in search of a theology. Theology has often followed the needs pastors sense in their flocks. While for theological reasons confirmation should probably never become more than a rite of the church, local churches could, indeed, should use it to deepen and enliven not only young people, but the entire congregation

³³*Family-Based Youth Ministry: Reaching the Been-There, Done-That Generation* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1994), p. 63. DeVries notes that, “The only notable exception to this pattern were those young people who, although they did not connect with adults in the church, created their own adult extended Christian family by becoming ministers (including joining the staff of parachurch organizations like Young Life, Youth for Christ, Campus Crusade, InterVarsity or the Fellowship of Christian Athletes) or marrying ministers.

**Building Confirmation
the Congregational Way**

**Appendix B:
Alternative Models
for Confirmation**

Overview

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Introduction

Given how differently Congregational fellowships are organized and how different the communities and people they serve, the possibility of finding “the One” confirmation model that will work is impossible. Nevertheless, we need something.

Any model for a more functional confirmation process must take into account the following factors:

1. Baptism and covenant membership have to make sense theologically.
2. The concerns presented at the end of the section, “What Is Confirmation?” and “Why Do We Do It Anyway?” p. 257
3. Current socio-cultural factors that affect the young people and their families.
 - a. Increasing biblical and “faith-wise” illiteracy in both confirmand and families.
 - b. Increasingly busy schedules.
 - c. The importance of family involvement in the confirmation process, so that children of inactive members remain active after confirmation ends.
 - d. How do we avoid confirming a young person who does not want to be a Christian? (And how do we measure *that*? The whole concept of “measuring” one’s faith ought to deeply scare all of us.)
 - e. 80% of active Christians make their personal commitment during their teen years.
4. The four “pillars” of fellowship, teaching, service and life-changing application addressed in “A Theology of Confirmation,” p. 264.

Take a look at the following models. Maybe your church might take what is good from each of them and combine these ideas with your own local traditions to make your congregations’ current confirmation process more effective and satisfying for all concerned.

Some Common Confirmation Elements

Below are listed some special elements one can add to confirmation. For a full listing, please see (p. 179).

Church Visitation. Confirmands visit other churches and even synagogues and temples to explore the meaning of their own faith and ways of worship as they are juxtaposed with the faith and worship of others. Can be done as a series of confirmation class trips or as a family or mentoring experience.

Mentoring groups. Anywhere from one to three confirmands are matched up with a spiritually mature adult who shares from his/her faith experiences what faith is like on the inside. Time in bible-study and worship would be part of mentor training.

Confirmation Retreat. All current confirmands would go on a weekend retreat each year. Each retreat would do group-building activities in addition to covering important faith development topics. Mentors would be invited to come and participate as small group leaders.

Statement of Belief. Each confirmand must articulate what s/he believes about the major aspects of the Christian faith.

Sermon Note-Taking and Worship Analysis. Each confirmand spends time learning to attend to worship, focusing on what is happening, how the setting and music contribute to the worship experience, and thinking about what the preacher is saying and why.

Worship Design and Leadership. Each confirmand is involved in designing and leading worship in at least two contexts—small and large groups.

Service/Fellowship. Students should complete certain number of hours in service of or fellowship with others (preferably through or with the congregation) over the course of their entire confirmation process.

Of course, you could choose other special program elements, but these are ones that form a regular part of many of the programs below.

Note: Though only retreat- and mentoring-based confirmation are described below, almost any of the items listed in *Special Program Elements* could become the basis for an effective confirmation model of confirmation. To do so, the instructor must have a very clear picture of how all the major topics of confirmation can be shown through the special program element.

Model One: Developmentally Appropriate Confirmation

Current confirmation classes for a largely 8th and 9th grade population are generally developmentally inappropriate. Instead of feeling obligated to communicate a body of biblical, theological and liturgical knowledge, a formational approach may work better.

Features

- Emphasis on interacting with the stories of the Bible.
- Each class would have a variety of “earthly activities with a heavenly meaning” to paraphrase C.H. Dodd. These “living parables” could make the bible and its principles come alive without traditional lecturing.
- Each class should conclude with some devotion time, especially if singing is possible. Eventually devotions could be delegated to the students.
- Mentoring groups. Mentors could even include older, spiritually growing high school students.
- Confirmation Retreat. This is especially important for this model.
- Statement of Belief. Confirmation leaders should not expect too much theologically, aiming instead to encourage wrestling with the issues.
- Worship design and leadership. Students should not be expected to write sermons or even “sermonettes” (that’s more appropriate for high schoolers) but rather should be encouraged to communicate more in music and drama and interactive activities with the congregation.
- Service/Fellowship. Students should complete 20–50 hours over the course of the whole year.

Advantages

- Does not interrupt the sweep of Sunday School through confirmation.
- Increases a teen’s enjoyment of thinking about their life (and life in general) in spiritual terms.
- Confirmands may experience a greater sense of *koinonia*.
- Adapts well to small congregational contexts, especially if done with two or three years of middle school students in one confirmation class.
- Could be a great way to start a youth group at a church that currently does not have one.

Disadvantages

- Most of the current disadvantages for confirmation continue to hold true.
- Since abstract faith issues are not addressed, these will need to be addressed some other way, perhaps through high school Sunday School or youth group.

Model Two: Longer-Term Confirmation

Many churches offer a fairly comprehensive confirmation process that ignores one or more of the “four pillars” I discussed above. Rather than racing to learn and accomplish a high volume of subjects and tasks in a single year, a better balanced and yet less-intensive approach may work better for confirmands, ministers and families. This model could be completed in one or more years as determined by each confirmand for him or herself.

Features

- Classes would be no more than once a quarter. Written, oral or other activities could be assigned for each lesson without being onerous.
- Mentoring groups. Mentors should be spiritually growing adults, probably more than high school age.
- Confirmation Retreat. Could be done a particular year (e.g., 8th grade, 9th grade, etc.)
- Statement of Belief.
- Worship design and leadership. More should be asked of older students.
- Service/Fellowship. Students should complete 150 hours or more.

Advantages

- Allows confirmands to complete their process as their schedules permit.
- Increases overall maturity of confirmands.
- Confirmation can be completed whenever the student is developmentally ready and motivated to do so. You might, for example, confirm one young person in 6th grade, another in 12th grade.
- Removes stigma of not being confirmed at a particular age and so makes the decision to be confirmed (or not) a more authentically owned decision.
- Since this approach may generate a longer time-frame for completing the confirmation, the involvement of the confirmand and the family may well increase.
- Confirmands may experience a greater sense of *koinonia*.
- Confirmands and their families are more likely to develop the habit of active involvement in the congregation.
- Adapts well to small congregational contexts.

Disadvantages

- Confirmation process is much more dependent on mentors. Recruiting mentors would be challenging. Training for the mentors would be necessary.
- Not as satisfying for parents—no definite year for completion of their baptismal vows.

Longer-Term Confirmation

Underlying this model is the understanding that confirmation is first and foremost spiritual formation. Slowing the pace of confirmation addresses some of the concerns, but raises others. Among these is the recruitment of mentors who are an important part of developing both *koinonia* and *kerygma*. Also not addressed is the continuing incongruity between adult and confirmand requirements for joining the local church.

Model Three: Confirmation Linked with Adult Membership

In this approach, the confirmation process would proceed along two different tracks, one unique to confirmation and one in common with all adults seeking membership in the local congregation. A student could go through the rite of confirmation whenever the requirements were met.

Confirmation Track

- Mentoring.
- Statement of Belief.
- Worship design and leadership.
- Service/Fellowship. Students complete 30 hours or more in service of or fellowship with others (preferably through or with the congregation).
- 1-2 sessions with a minister and/or other lay leaders in the congregation. These sessions would cover the significance and meaning of confirmation and other aspects of faith not covered in the second track.

All Adults (including Confirmands) Seeking Membership

- At least two, introductory, adult education classes on each of the following
Bible
Church History
Theology
Christian Living
- At least two weeks of membership orientation, including completion of a spiritual gifts and involvement survey.

Advantages

- Allows confirmands to complete their process as their schedules permit.
- Confirmation can be completed whenever the student is developmentally ready and motivated to do so.
- Parents can be involved in the classes with their confirmand(s). Decisions about what classes to take can be made as a family. Perhaps at least one of the parents could be required to participate in one or more classes.
- Removes stigma of not being confirmed at a particular age and so makes the decision to be confirmed (or not) a more authentically owned decision.
- Makes adult confirmation (confirmation of adults who were baptized but never confirmed) much more comfortable.
- Maintains, even enhances, integrity of baptism and congruity between the confirmation and membership processes.
- Increases general level of biblical and theological literacy of the congregation.

- Since this approach may generate a longer time-frame for completing the confirmation, the involvement of the confirmand and the family may well increase.

Disadvantages

- Except as the confirmands experience it through the congregation as a whole or through individual service projects, confirmands may not have as deep an experience of *koinonia* as one would want.
- This model emphasizes confirmation as something “for the head” as opposed to something “for the heart.” It does not attempt much in the way of spiritual formation, leaving the spiritual formation primarily to the mentor or parent.
- This model presumes that an active adult education program is available. It may not work as well or easily in a small congregation.
- Raising the standards for joining the congregation may be a difficult prospect.

This process clearly understands confirmation as a process of gaining knowledge and learning how to participate in the active life of the church. Because it presupposes a relationship with Christ, this model for confirmation may reduce confirmation class sizes, but a local church may find the advantages outweigh the drawbacks.

Model Four: Family-Based Confirmation

Since New Testament times, Christians have recognized the important role a person's family plays in faith development.³⁴ Indeed, as noted in the previous appendix, families who discuss faith outside of church double the likelihood that their children will have an active faith.³⁵ It stands to reason, then, that confirmation could quite easily be done almost entirely within the family.

Features

- Some kind of framework for family discussions is helpful. One could use one or more books, perhaps with a set of discussion questions, or a Bible study booklet. (For ideas, see the *Annotated Bibliography*.)
- Based on the discussions, students complete either a series of simple worksheets (see *Handouts*) or short papers on given topics.
- Worksheets and other projects can be turned in to a pastor or other person.
- Statement of Belief.
- Confirmation Retreat is helpful (but not necessary) to reinforce sense of *koinonia*. Families could be involved either by assisting with the retreat or by writing a letter of appreciation to the confirmand.
- Service/Fellowship.
- Worship design and leadership. Students could participate in the planning of their own confirmation, given as much freedom as possible in choosing music and wording. Parents could have a chance to communicate their thoughts on their child's confirmation.

Advantages

- Allows for great flexibility of scheduling.
- Encourages parents to play a very active role in the confirmation process.
- Confirmation not restricted to any particular time table. (Confirmands could be confirmed after a few months or a few years.)
- Mentoring is built into this approach.
- Confirmation is tailored to the individual needs of the student.
- Adapts well to small congregational contexts.

Disadvantages

- Confirmands may experience less sense of *koinonia*. Ways will need to be found to have students interact with church members.
- Confirmands and their families are less likely to develop the habit of active involvement in the congregation.

³⁴ In the first few verses of his letter to Timothy, Paul sends greetings to Timothy's mother and grandmother. Timothy was one of the youngest and strongest in the faith. As a result, he became Paul's "troubleshooter," sent into difficult church situations when Paul himself was unable to attend.

³⁵ See *Appendix A: Beyond Survival*, p. 266.

Family-Based Confirmation

- Confirmation process is utterly dependent on parents. Where parents are conscientious and knowledgeable, this will work well. Where parents are less than stellar in these qualities, the results may be inconclusive.
- Parents may not feel qualified to lead most of the discussion.
- May be burdensome to busy families.
- May add stress to family situations.

In many ways, this model is the ideal approach to confirmation. Involvement of pastor and church are the keys to balancing its weaknesses. For more on this approach, see the *Annotated Bibliography*, p. 245.

Model Five: Retreat-Based Confirmation

The early church viewed preparation for baptism (and confirmation since the two were joined at that point in history; see “Where Does Confirmation Come From?” p. 261) as a time when the candidates for catechism went apart—for a vigil from Good Friday to Easter morning or sometimes for the entire period of Lent! From the beginning of Christianity, then, churches recognized the value of intensive times of preparation for formally becoming part of God’s people. Indeed, the period of Lent memorializes the time when Jesus went apart for forty days to prepare for his own ministry.* Retreats, then, are an ancient tradition for confirmation that might be just right for our time.

Features

- One or more retreats of varying length.
- Topics could vary within a single retreat or better, focus on a single category of confirmation (e.g., Bible, worship, church history, what it means to be a member, etc.)
- Mentoring could be a strong part of the retreats, offering mentors and “mentees” time for significant one-on-one time.
- Statement of Belief.
- Service Project or Service/Fellowship Hours. If more than one retreat is involved, consider making one of the retreats a Service Project. (Habitat for Humanity or a similar project would be ideal for this.)

Advantages

- Very little in the way of week-to-week scheduling.
- “Life-changing”—allows students (and all who are involved) to get out of the mainstream of their lives and focus on God.
- Confirmands develop strong sense of *koinonia*.
- Allows for a potentially deeper approach to any and all topics.
- If a weekend or overnight retreat is done, the retreat will utilize all the periods of a given day. This reinforces the fact that God is part of all of our days and all of our lives.
- Parents can be involved as chaperones and assistants without much organizational difficulty. Getting time away may be another matter for them!
- In a smaller congregational context where confirmation does not happen every year, consider blending all the students (regardless of age) into a single program. This will reinforce the sense of *koinonia* and highlight the different gifts and abilities in the “Body of Christ.”

*Granted, Jesus’ period of fasting in the wilderness *followed* his baptism (see Matthew 4:1–11), but the idea of having a season of preparation and a time apart seems to be what is important here.

Retreat-Based Confirmation

- Makes designing and leading worship services and devotions a very natural part of the format.
- Works well with all ages, though meeting the needs of several ages in a single retreat may be a programming challenge.

Disadvantages

- Requires intensive planning and, potentially, some arrangements being made far in advance of the retreat.
- If one goes on retreat away from the church, arranging a site may require reservations 6 months to a year (or more!) in advance.
- Can be expensive. If one goes to a formal retreat site with all meals provided, the bill could easily reach \$100 per person! (Remember, you have lodging and meals in addition to everything else.)
- Very little flexibility once the retreat dates are set. If something goes wrong in the arrangements, leaders may have to cancel rather than modify their plans.
- Makes a number of different special programming elements difficult (e.g., church visitation, sermon note-taking and worship analysis).
- Family involvement is potentially more difficult. Where younger siblings are present, both parents can't go on the retreat without bringing the younger sister or brother.
- Confirmands and their families are less likely to develop the habit of active involvement in the congregation.

With some careful consideration many if not all of the disadvantages can be relieved. One group of Methodist churches in Wisconsin actually holds a week-long Confirmation Camp! For more information designing and running a retreat, see *Special Programming Elements*, p. 187, and *Retreat and Trip Plans*, p. 131.

Model Six: Mentor-Based Confirmation

Mentoring is an important model and tool for spiritual formation. (See *Special Programming Elements*, p. 185)

Features

- Mentoring groups of one or more meet on a regular basis.
- Mentoring groups discuss and work on projects from every category of topics for confirmation.
- Handouts could be worked on jointly and kept in a notebook or turned in to a pastor or other supervisor.
- Church Visitation.
- Statement of Belief.
- Sermon Note-Taking and Worship Analysis.
- Service Project. Mentors and mentees can determine the nature and scope of the project.

Advantages

- Confirmation is tailored to each student by the mentor.
- Can provide a solid, adult relationship for teens that is *not* one of their parents.
- All handouts and activities can be discussed and processed on an individual basis.
- Mentors can make sure confirmands are completing the assignments.
- Confirmands can develop a deep enough relationship to ask questions of a mentor they would never think of asking their parents.
- Having multiple teens with a single mentor makes some things easier. For example, mentors and confirmands do not experience as much social pressure when they are together (others are present to help bear the social burdens of conversation).
- A great choice in a smaller congregational setting.

Disadvantages

- Completely dependent on the quality and consistency of the mentor. A good mentor means a good experience. A poor or inconsistent mentor means a bad experience.
- Organizers of confirmation will need to keep tabs on mentors to make sure the mentors are fulfilling their duties and to make sure they are equipped for all they are doing.
- Many mentors feel ill-equipped for doing Bible study or being seen as an “expert” in theology or other matters of Christian history or living.
- Having multiple mentees can make scheduling time together a nightmare.

Mentor-Based Confirmation

- Requires a high level of commitment on the part of the mentor both of time and energy.
- Time and energy requirements make finding qualified *and* willing mentors difficult.
- In larger congregational contexts, finding a dozen or more mentors can be an arduous task.

At least one major curriculum publisher (Logos Productions; Lutheran background) has an entire curriculum already mapped out called, *Making Disciples*. This will be an invaluable resource to those thinking about a mentor-centered approach to confirmation.

Model Seven: Confirmation as Independent Study

Confirmation, like following Christ in general, is both an inner journey and an outer one.* Certainly the inner journey lends itself to an independent study. A slightly different mentor is necessary: the spiritual guide or director. In some ways, this person is a mentor as discussed above. In other ways, the spiritual guide is much less directive in his/her involvement with the confirmand. A spiritual guide will focus on the reflective process of confirmation and help the confirmand to do her/his own reflection. Where the mentor may be doing things with the confirmand, the spiritual guide receives and discusses whatever the confirmand brings but may not be otherwise involved.

Features

- Confirmands work through a series of projects and/or readings that cover the entire range of topics for confirmation. Perhaps short papers on each topic.
- Confirmands bring completed projects to the spiritual guide (possibly the pastor) for further reflection through discussion.
- Church Visitation.
- Sermon Note-Taking and Worship Analysis.
- Service Project or Service/Fellowship Hours.
- Statement of Belief.
- Worship Design and Leadership.

Advantages

- After some careful initial design, confirmation runs itself. Little regular commitment from the organizer.
- The ultimate in flexibility. Confirmands tailor the course to their own interests, determine their own schedules, and meet only occasionally with their spiritual guide(s).
- Requires true independent thought and faith ownership on the part of the confirmand. Regurgitating memorized material is not enough!
- Allows for very different (and deeper) readings and assignments. An independent study could explore the Christ story through C.S. Lewis' *The Lion, the Witch and the Wardrobe* for example, something few other confirmation programs could contemplate.
- Wonderful in the smallest church settings where only one student seeks confirmation at a time.
- Also ideal for adults considering confirmation.

*Elizabeth O'Connor's *Journey Inward, Journey Outward*, is the inspiration for this division and an excellent devotional resource, as well as a potential pattern for an independent study.

Disadvantages

- Not appropriate for ages younger than high school. The level of independent and reflective thought involved is probably most appropriate for juniors or seniors in high school.
- Extremely difficult to find *koinonia* with only one in the program. Confirmation organizers will need to consider other ways of getting the independent study confirmand involved in the life of the fellowship.
- Will only work well with self-motivated, self-starting students. The spiritual guide generally serves as a counselor rather than a motivator.

While the independent study is neither a preferred nor a practical model in most confirmation situations, in a select few, doing an independent study may be the perfect solution to problems of schedule and class size.

**Building Confirmation
the Congregational Way**

**Appendix C:
“Where Two or Three
Are Gathered ...”**

A History of Congregationalism for Students

Written by Lynn Y. Merkel

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Foreword

The driving force behind the writing of this piece has been stirred by my teaching of Confirmation classes at Congregational Churches. I feel that students who are preparing to affirm the Covenant and become members of a Congregational church should have some knowledge of the history of Congregationalism and so I strongly encourage inclusion of this study of history as part of the Confirmation curriculum.

My greatest frustration has been in finding a written history of Congregationalism that is designed for students. Most written histories are college-level or beyond and assume too much background knowledge on the part of the reader. For this reason I have felt compelled to write a history of Congregationalism specifically for middle or high school students and especially for those preparing for Confirmation in a Congregational church.

Written 1990, revised 2001.

Introduction

This is a brief history of Congregationalism. It is about Congregational churches and people who followed the Congregational way. Where did Congregationalism come from? How did it begin? What are some things that Congregationalists did? What is the Congregational Way? What does it mean to follow that Way? These questions will be answered in the following pages.

The reader of this paper should know that this is not intended to be a documented, scholarly-researched history. Enough such works have been written already. Instead, this paper is intended to provide a basic account of the history of Congregationalism for students. Hopefully, after reading this history one will be able to do several things: 1) make an informed decision about becoming a member of a Congregational church; 2) explain to friends something about Congregationalism; and 3) read more detailed histories of Congregationalism.

This history is outlined in chronological order beginning with the roots of Congregationalism in England. It continues with how Congregationalism came across the Atlantic Ocean to the New World, how churches formed and what they did, and other important historical facts about Congregational churches in America. It also details different ways Congregational churches affected secular, or non-church related, areas of life including politics, education and social issues. Finally, this history encompasses how Congregationalism has developed over the past four centuries; how it has changed as well as how it has remained the same.

Chapter 1: Beginnings

Reformation in Europe

Before one can begin to understand how Congregationalism began, it is important to understand some of the things that were happening in the religious world four and five centuries ago. Previous to that time, from about A.D. 350-1500, the "Christian Church" in Europe meant the "Roman Catholic Church." This meant that everyone who was a Christian was under the authority of the Pope of the Roman Catholic Church. In the 1500s certain religious leaders began to disagree with and **protest** against many things the Roman Catholic Church believed and did and they wanted to **reform** some of those things. This was the beginning of the **Protestant Reformation**.

The Reformation began almost simultaneously in different parts of Europe. In Germany, Martin Luther, a Roman Catholic monk, disagreed with the Roman Catholic Church over several issues. One of the most famous disagreements was over the issue of Indulgences. Indulgences was a practice by which a person could pay the Church money to shorten their time spent in Purgatory after they died, before going to heaven. Luther believed that someone could not be saved by doing good works and giving great sums of money. Rather, he said one is saved, or justified, by the grace of God through faith in Christ. (Romans 5:1) Luther also believed something different about the Lord's Supper (also called the Eucharist) than what the Roman Catholic Church taught.

At about the same time that Luther was in Germany, two men in Switzerland, first Huldreich Zwingli and later John Calvin, were calling for similar reforms in the Church. Some of their reforms included simplifying the liturgy of the worship service, eliminating vestments (or fancy robes) worn by the priests, and changing how the Church was governed. They also understood the Lord's Supper purely as a memorial, a way to remember what Christ has done for us,

Both in Germany and Switzerland these reforms spread quickly for several reasons. First, the Reformers had the support and protection of the civil government authorities. Second, this was the age of Enlightenment following the dark Middle Ages and many more ordinary people were learning to read. Also the printing press had been invented. Many of the Reformers' ideas were printed and published and many people were reading them and agreeing with them. Therefore, many people, both common people and church leaders, were beginning to want change.

Reformation in England

Having seen how the Reformation began on the European continent it is time to see what happened in England. The English Reformation began with King Henry VIII. Henry wanted to divorce his wife, Catherine of Aragon, because she had failed to bear him a male heir and because he wanted to marry his mistress, Anne Boleyn.

The Pope would not grant the divorce so, in 1534, Henry declared that he, the King, was now the supreme authority over the Church, rather than the Pope, and he got divorced. Even though the king of England now ruled the Church in England, nothing really changed either theologically or governmentally in the churches. There were still priests and bishops telling the people what to do.

After Henry died, the Church in England went through turbulent changes with each new ruler. Henry's son, Edward VI, became the next king in 1547 at the age of nine. Jane Seymour, Edward's mother and Henry's third wife, was Protestant and since Edward was so young, his mother influenced him. Under Edward the Church of England's *Book of Common Prayer* for use in worship services was published. The *Book of Common Prayer* was intended to bring uniformity of worship to the churches. In 1553 Edward died and was followed by his half-sister, Mary, who was a Roman Catholic. She returned the Church in England to Roman Catholicism and persecuted many Protestant church leaders. In 1558, Mary was succeeded by Queen Elizabeth I. Elizabeth had been raised a Protestant and when she became queen, many English Protestants who had fled to the European continent to escape Queen Mary returned to England with the *Geneva Bible* and dedicated it to Elizabeth. The *Geneva Bible* was published in Geneva, Switzerland, and was one of the first English Translations of the Bible. These Protestants were not totally satisfied with Elizabeth. She was less interested in the Church than she was in ruling England and further, in England ruling the world.

In 1603, James Stuart, King of Scotland, became James I, King of England. Under James the Church of England came increasingly under the king's authority. By that time it was unlawful, and punishable by death, to worship in any way except in accord with the Church of England. During the reign of both Elizabeth and James some people in the Church began wanting certain changes. These people were known as Puritans because they wanted to "purify" the Church of things they felt were wrong. Let us now see what the Puritans believed and did.

English Puritans

Puritanism in England began as far back as a century or more before Luther and Zwingli with a man named John Wycliffe. He proclaimed that the Bible is the only guide needed for matters of religious faith and duty as well as for matters of ecclesiastical order, or how a church is structured. He rejected the authority of the Pope and bishops, and taught that Christ is the only Head of the Church. Since Wycliffe believed that each person was to read and interpret the Holy Scriptures for him or herself, he began translating the Bible into English.³⁶

As has already been seen, the Church under Henry VIII was essentially the same as it was under Rome except the king replaced the pope as the Supreme Head of the Church. The Church of England remained organized like the Roman Church. At the

³⁶ Kohl, Manfred Waldemar. *Congregationalism in America*. Milwaukee, Wisconsin: The Congregational Press (CCC/NA), 1977, p.1.

top, respectively, was either the king or pope followed by bishops, then priests or ministers. Many people desired to rid the Church of this imposed order. At the time everyone in England, regardless of personal belief, was required to belong to the local parish church and pay taxes to support it, but the individual had no voice in the beliefs or government of this church. Therefore, there was much unrest among the Puritans who wanted change.

These puritans held the view that the Bible was their only authority as Christians. They wanted to strip away the human authority found in the Church of England. They wanted to transform the Church from within and establish as much Puritan discipline and practice in the Church as they could.³⁷

So, what did the Puritans believe? Besides their emphasis on the Bible as their only authority, they also emphasized law and discipline. They were very moral, hard-working people. The Old Testament was important for the laws it contained. They also sought more able ministers and better preachers. Their theology was one of experience; that a person could experience the presence of God in their own life. Puritans also emphasized the idea of the covenant, or an agreement between God and man, especially God's unconditional covenant with Abraham.

English Puritans adhered to one of two types of church polity, or organization. Either they were Presbyterian, following John Calvin, in which several individual churches belong to a Presbytery which has some authority over the churches *or* they were Congregational in which individual churches are autonomous, self-governing bodies with no higher organization. Their only higher authority was Jesus Christ himself.

³⁷ Rouner, Arthur A., Jr. *The Congregational Way of Life*. New York: Prentice-Hall, 1960, p. 3.

Chapter 2: Separatists

For anyone who has attended Sunday School in a Congregational church, this chapter and the next will contain familiar names of people, places and events. The Puritans in England who wanted to purify the Church have already been discussed, but there were others who shared the Puritan view of the authority of the Bible but were not content to wait for reforms to happen. They wanted the kind of church they believed God demanded, and they wanted it immediately. They were willing to go so far as to actually separate themselves from the State Church (the Church of England) and establish congregations of their own. They wanted to worship freely, as Christ led them and not as the State told them.³⁸ These people were called Separatists.

These Separatists had read the Bible and had drawn some conclusions about what a church should be. First, they believed that the Church is composed only of Christian people – those who are trying to follow the Lord Jesus. In sixteenth century England every citizen was a member of the Church, but the Separatists claimed that only those who were consecrated to Christ were *real* “members.” Second, they believed that every church, as a gathering of Christians with Christ himself as their guide and authority, had the right to self-government and the freedom to follow Him. They felt that the king or queen had no right to rule the Church. Third, they recognized no spiritual hierarchy from people to priests to bishops. They believed that every member of a church had an equal privilege and duty to share in the church’s government.³⁹ The Separatists’ concept of a church was based on their understanding of Jesus’ words, “For where two or three are gathered in my name, there am I in the midst of them.” (Matthew 18:20) For them the Church was made up of “individual Christians in a given geographical place gathered together by Christ through their common love for Him.”⁴⁰ No bishops or higher authority other than Christ himself was necessary.

The Scrooby Congregation

One small group of these Separatists formed a church in 1606 in the town of Scrooby, England. They met in the house of William Brewster, the post-master. After consenting to a covenant, the members chose Richard Clyfton as minister, John Robinson as teacher, and William Brewster as elder. Robinson was to become their leader urging them to sail to America although he would never be able to join them there, and Brewster was to become their spiritual leader while they were without a minister in their new land. They had to meet secretly in Scrooby and feared for their lives. When these secret church meetings became known, persecution intensified. Separatists were watched and searched. Some lost their jobs. Some were imprisoned.

³⁸ Ibid.

³⁹ Ibid., p. 4.

⁴⁰ Ibid., p. 30.

Finally, they decided to flee to Holland to escape the persecution, for Holland had become a place of religious freedom for all.

The Scrooby congregation escaped to Amsterdam in 1607 and 1608. Amsterdam was a big city, but most of the Scrooby Separatists were farmers. So, in 1609, John Robinson took over the leadership of the church and moved them to Leyden where they lived for twelve years. Despite their warm reception in Holland, these early Congregationalists were Englishmen and they feared that their language and their customs would be lost if they stayed too long among the Dutch. And so in 1620 part of the Leyden congregation decided to migrate to America to form a settlement where they could both keep their English ways and worship God in the way they felt God demanded.

One of their members who had been with them since Scrooby, William Bradford, who would later become the governor of their colony, wrote of their departure from Holland:

"So they left that goodly and pleasant city, which had been their resting place near twelve years, but they knew that they were pilgrims and looked not much on these things, but lifted up their eyes to the heavens, their dearest country, and quieted their spirits."⁴¹

And so they left Holland to sail to the New World.

⁴¹ Atkins and Fagley. *History of American Congregationalism*. Boston: The Pilgrim Press, 1942, p. 60, quoted from William Bradford.

Chapter 3: The Mayflower Voyage

The story of the Pilgrims and the *Mayflower* is familiar to almost all American school children. When the Separatists who had fled from Scrooby to Leyden decided to leave Holland and sail for America, they boarded the *Speedwell*, a sixty-ton Dutch vessel, and left Delftshaven carrying part of the Pilgrim congregation. A larger vessel, the *Mayflower*, had sailed from London to meet the *Speedwell* in Southampton. The two ships were to sail together, but the *Speedwell* proved to be unseaworthy. Many of the pilgrims crowded onto the *Mayflower* to make the voyage. "It was a sad farewell, for John Robinson and the majority of the congregation stayed behind, hoping to follow in a short time."⁴² Many of them would follow in the next few years, but the beloved pastor Robinson would never join his people in their "promised land."

One hundred and two persons finally left on the *Mayflower* on September 16, 1620. Only forty of these were members of the Separatists' church in Leyden, and of those, only William Brewster and his wife and William Bradford came from the original Scrooby congregation. The forty referred to themselves as "saints" and to the others as "strangers."⁴³ On the way across the Atlantic, one man died and Oceanus Hopkins was born. In December Peregrine White, the first born in New England, made the group one hundred and three.⁴⁴

These Pilgrims had intended to land somewhere in Virginia, but they first landed at the tip of Cape Cod, hundreds of miles north of their intended destination. Since it was already almost winter, the travelers had to spend the next several months living on board the *Mayflower*. They made several exploratory trips along Cape Cod until they arrived safely in Plymouth Harbor on December 26, 1620.

The Mayflower Compact

When the *Mayflower* first landed on Cape Cod, there was some friction among the travelers. So, they drew up the famous **Mayflower Compact** even before they disembarked. The Compact was a document of mutual agreement bearing the signatures of both the saints and the strangers. It was really a covenant between those who signed it as well as between them and God. This covenant was both religious and secular.

"In the name of God, Amen. We whose names are underwritten, the loyal subjects of our dread Sovereign Lord King James; by the grace of God, of Great Britain, France and Ireland King; Defender of the Faith; etc.

"Having undertaken for the glory of God, and advancement of the Christian faith, and honour of our King and Country, a voyage to plant the first colony

⁴² Kohl, p. 7.

⁴³ Ibid., p. 9.

⁴⁴ Atkins and Fagley, p. 61.

in the northern parts of Virginia; [we] do by these presents, solemnly and mutually, in the presence of God and one of another, covenant and combine ourselves together into a Civil Body Politic, for our better ordering and preservation; and furtherance of the ends aforesaid; and by virtue hereof, to enact, constitute and frame such just and equal laws, ordinances, acts, constitutions, offices, from time to time, as shall be thought most meet and convenient for the general good of the Colony; unto which we promise all due submission and obedience. In witness whereof, we have hereunder subscribed our names. Cape Cod, 11th of November, in year of the reign of our Sovereign Lord King James of England, France and Ireland 18, and of Scotland 54, Anno Domini 1620."⁴⁵

Forty-one male passengers signed this compact. It was the first political document written in the New World and was the first written instrument establishing a democracy.

Plymouth

When the Pilgrims arrived at Plymouth Harbor they knew that this was where they would establish their colony. Bradford records their reaction:

"Being thus arrived in a good harbor, and brought safe to land, they fell upon their knees and blessed the God of Heaven who had brought them over the vast and furious ocean, and delivered them from all the perils and miseries thereof, again to set their feet on the firm and stable earth, their proper element."⁴⁶

The first winter was extremely difficult. The settlers had to build shelters and fend off attacks by Indians. Many of them got sick and died. The dead were buried in hidden, unmarked graves so that the Indians would not know how many they had lost. Before the end of the first year, half of the group had been buried. Despite these difficulties, when the *Mayflower* sailed back to England in the spring, not one of the colonists was on board.

Since John Carver, the first elected governor of Plymouth Colony, died during that first hard winter, they elected William Bradford to succeed him. With him leading them, the Pilgrims sowed seeds they had brought from England and learned about corn and beans from their Indian friends. In the fall they gathered in their first harvest and held a Thanksgiving celebration with their Indian friends, feasting on deer and turkey, cranberries and fish, and corn.

The London merchants who had sponsored this colony had required that all the colonists live communally, working the fields together and sharing everything, but

⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 62.

⁴⁶ Bradford, William, ed. By Samuel Eliot Morison. *Of Plymouth Plantation, 1620-1647*. New York. Alfred A. Knopf, 1952, p. 61.

no one owned any property of their own. Everything belonged to the merchant company. Bradford could see that the colony would fail unless men profited from their own hard work. In 1623, he assigned a certain amount of land to each family and required them to grow their own corn. The colony prospered as a result of this and in 1624 was able to make a settlement with the merchants' stock company. Now the land belonged to the settlers to divide among themselves. In the meantime, more new settlers had come to Plymouth so that by 1630, Plymouth had 300 inhabitants.⁴⁷

From the time the Pilgrims reached Plymouth, they held regular worship services. William Brewster, their ruling elder, preached and taught since they did not have a minister. He did not, however, administer the sacraments of baptism and the Lord's Supper, since they believed that only a duly called and ordained minister could administer the sacraments. The Plymouth congregation was without an ordained minister for several years.

⁴⁷ Kohl, pp. 11-12.

Chapter 4: More Congregationalists Arrive

With the death of England's King James in 1625 and the accession of his son, Charles I, the Puritans in England again became greatly persecuted. The new Archbishop of Canterbury, William Laud, opposed Calvinism and wanted all churches to conform to the Established Church of England. Many of the Puritans protested against this by immigrating to America. These were not Separatists, who wanted to separate themselves from the Church of England, like the Plymouth colonists, but ministers and laymen of the Established Church who were looking for freedom. Since these Puritans held the belief that the Bible was their only guide in matters of church organization, the churches they founded in Massachusetts were, like those in Plymouth, Congregational in form.

The Massachusetts Bay Colony

In 1629, some of these Puritans founded a church in Salem, Massachusetts. Since the church in Plymouth had initially been founded in England, the Salem church was the first Congregational Church actually established on New England soil. The members of the Salem Church agreed to this simple covenant:

"We Covenant with the Lord and one with an other; and doe bynd our selves in the presence of God, to walke together in all his waies, according as he is pleased to reveale himself unto us in his Blessed word of truth."⁴⁸

In 1629, King Charles I granted a Charter to the Massachusetts Bay Company to found a colony. John Winthrop, a Puritan who was later elected governor of the Massachusetts Bay Colony, planned a mass migration to New England. In March 1630, Winthrop and several ships landed at Charlestown (near what is now Boston), and he had the colony's written Charter with him, rather than leaving it in London. This allowed for self-government of the colony since the company sponsoring the colony would be headquartered in the colony, not in England.

The first church was founded in Boston in July 1630. Its members were non-separating puritans who organized their church Congregationally. They did not want to separate from the Church of England, but rather, they wanted to purify the Church. Most of them were well-educated and middle- to upper class Englishmen.

The Winthrop colonists scattered over the Boston Bay region forming settlements and organizing churches. More ships continued to arrive and settlers moved westward so that by the mid-1630s, thirty churches had been gathered in the four

⁴⁸ Walker, Williston. *The Creeds and Platforms of Congregationalism*. Boston: The Pilgrim Press, 1925, p. 116.

colonies of Massachusetts Bay, Plymouth, New Haven, and Hartford. By 1640, probably 20,000 Puritans had crossed the Atlantic to find the freedom they desired to worship God in the way they believed God had ordained.

The story of the Mayflower Pilgrims is an epic tale of incredible struggles and hardships that eventually turn to triumph, and this story continues to evoke deep emotions as Congregationalists look to the Plymouth settlers as their legacy. However, it is the Puritan Congregationalists in the Massachusetts Bay Colony who really influenced the development of Congregationalism in New England. Their numbers were greater and eventually Plymouth was absorbed into Massachusetts.

Emphasis on Education

The New England colonists needed a college. These Congregationalists held high the need for an educated clergy. The first ministers in New England had been educated at Cambridge or Oxford in England, but as the colonies grew, so did the need for more ministers. In 1636, a college was founded in Newtowne (now Cambridge) primarily to educate men for the ministry. It was named *Harvard College* after John Harvard, who gave the school his library of books. Harvard was the only college in New England until 1701, when *Yale College* was founded to provide Connecticut churches with educated ministers.

The majority of the Pilgrims and Puritans who arrived in New England could read and write. Many were university scholars. These people wanted their children educated also, so they provided opportunity for education. In Massachusetts every town of fifty dwellings had to have a primary school; and every town of 100 dwellings had to have a grammar school to prepare young people for the University. The main educational aim was for all children to be educated sufficiently to read and understand the Bible. So, education was important not only for ministers, but for everyone.

Chapter 5: New England Congregationalism

So, what exactly was New England Congregationalism? What did these people believe? Some Puritans in England called upon the New England Congregationalists to answer these questions. Correspondence between ministers in England and New England between 1636 and 1648 helped to settle and define the principles of Congregationalism.⁴⁹ One New England minister, Thomas Hooker, was asked to write a statement of Congregational beliefs in response to criticism of the New England church structure by English Presbyterians.

Eventually, it became clear that the New England churches needed to gather together to discuss and define the “Congregational Way.” In 1646, the General Court of the Massachusetts colony called the churches to sit in a synod, or conference meeting, to clear up questions of church government and discipline and to agree on a uniform practice in all the churches. Delegates from Plymouth, Connecticut, and New Haven were also invited. The meeting was to take place in Cambridge, and so, the *Cambridge Synod* of 1646-48 occurred.

The Cambridge Platform

The end result of the Cambridge Synod was the drawing up of the Cambridge Platform. This document provided the first definition of a “Congregational” church:

“A Congregational-church, is by the institution of Christ a part of the Militant-visible-church, consisting of a company of Saints by calling, united into one body, by a holy covenant, for the mutual edification one of another, in the Fellowship of the Lord Jesus.”⁵⁰

In fact, the first four chapters of the Platform repeatedly declare that there is only one form of church polity prescribed in the Word of God: that is, the Congregational one.

The Cambridge Platform defines a church as consisting of “visible saints” only. That is, those people who are visibly evident to be chosen by God. To become a “member” of a church, “one had to be born again, to give an account of his/her conversion, and to show evidence of sanctification.”⁵¹ In other words, a prospective member had to be certain of his/her salvation and, further, had to stand before the congregation and give testimony as to how they knew for sure that God had chosen them. Moreover, the term, “church,” applied only to a small, local body of believers.

⁴⁹ Kohl, p. 15.

⁵⁰ *Cambridge Platform*, Chapter II, paragraph 6.

⁵¹ Kohl, p. 20.

For these early Congregationalists there was no larger Church, such as the Roman Catholic Church or the Church of England, only small local churches. The church consisted of clergy and laity, men and women, and all classes of people.

The Cambridge Platform also addressed other issues of church polity. For example, a minister was to be called and elected by the church he was to serve and then be ordained by that church. Ideally, the Platform calls for each church to have two ministers: a pastor and a teacher. Also, a group of saints or believers were not a church unless they had a *Church Covenant* that bound them together. The Covenant was an agreement "whereby they give up themselves unto the Lord, to the observing of the ordinances of Christ together in the same society."⁵² Only "members" of a church could have their children baptized. Other issues this document discusses are those concerning church officers, admission of members into the church, removal of members, and how churches should associate with one another. Most importantly, the Platform proclaims that the Supreme authority over the church is Jesus Christ.

Fellowship

One important element of the Cambridge Synod and Platform dealt with the issue of fellowship among the churches. The Synod was the first time a group of churches gathered together. The idea of fellowship is critical to Congregational polity. The Platform calls for several reasons that churches should be in communion with each other: to care for one another's welfare; to consult with one another; to admonish one another, although no one church had authority over another; to participate together in the sacraments; to recommend membership for individuals who move to a new location; and to aid and assist churches in need. Further, the Platform allowed for future synods and councils to be held "to debate and determine controversies of faith..."⁵³

Such synods were occasionally called, such as the Synod of 1662 that was called to discuss the Half-Way Covenant. The Saybrook Council of 1708, held in Saybrook, Connecticut, formed the first permanent regional association of churches. So, fellowship between the churches began.

The Savoy Declaration

Although it did not happen in New England, it is worth mentioning that the Savoy Declaration of 1658 was to English Congregationalists what the Cambridge Platform was to New England. Both councils adopted a Confession of Faith, or statement of belief, which was based primarily on the Westminster Confession of the English Presbyterians. The Congregationalists differed from the Presbyterians, however, on church polity. For example, the Congregationalists said there must be a strict separation of Church and State, and church officers only have jurisdiction over the local church they were ordained in.

⁵²Cambridge Platform, Chapter IV, paragraph 3.

⁵³ Ibid, Chapter XVI, paragraph 4.

Specifically, the Savoy Declaration stressed that: Christ is the power in the church; the church is a group of Christians gathered together by Christ; the Bible is the only authority needed; the Covenant relationship is the heart of the Congregational Way; the Lord's Supper should be open to all Christians; and other issues similar to those in the Cambridge Platform.

Problems in Massachusetts

Anne Hutchinson

In the following decades problems began to arise in the Massachusetts Bay Colony. One of these was the Antinomian Controversy. *Antinomian* means anti-law or above the law. In extremes, antinomianism means that a person's moral behavior does not affect their salvation. In other words, it does not matter what a person does for it has already been determined who will be saved and who will not. If one is predestined to be saved, then they will be, regardless of how they act. This is the opposite of *Arminianism*, which teaches that doing good works can assist in one's salvation. In seventeenth century New England, both extremes were considered heresy. The Puritans tried to maintain a middle ground.

The New England Puritans were *predestinarians*, that is, they believed everyone was predestined (or pre-determined) either to be saved or be damned for eternity. But, they also advocated a doctrine called "Preparation." That is, only God could save man, but man could *prepare* himself to receive God's grace in an orderly manner. Many ministers preached this Preparation idea, but one Boston minister, John Cotton, did not. Instead, Cotton preached about God's unconditional grace.

One member of Cotton's church, Anne Hutchinson, began holding meetings in her home to discuss theology and sermons. She began to attack all the ministers in Boston, except for Cotton and Hutchinson's brother-in-law, for their preparation theology. She attracted many influential followers. Of course this disturbed the other Boston churches and Anne Hutchinson was brought to trial and eventually condemned by the Church and the General Court of Massachusetts for saying that she knew what she was saying was true because she had had a "direct revelation from God." To the Puritans this was blasphemy since they believed that direct revelation ended with the Apostles. Anne Hutchinson was banished to Rhode Island where Indians later killed her.

Roger Williams

A second problem arose concerning the separation of Church and State. New England Puritan Congregationalists wanted to maintain a non-separating policy to keep in the good graces of England. One minister, however, named Roger Williams, thought that complete separation of Church and State was essential for a pure Church. Williams was particularly opposed to the practice of civil authorities making laws dealing with the first four of the Ten Commandments. The first four commandments are known as the "First Table" of the law, and the last six commandments are the "Second Table." The first table concerns man's relationship

with God, and the second table concerns man's relationship with each other. Williams argued that it was wrong for the civil government to pass laws to enforce the first table. Such laws included those dealing with swearing or with what was allowable on the Sabbath. Roger Williams fled to Rhode Island before he was arrested.

Both Anne Hutchinson and Roger Williams were really banished from Massachusetts because what they taught was upsetting the balance in the colony. They also both "refused to allow others the same freedom of speech and belief which they claimed for themselves."⁵⁴ The story of Hutchinson turns out tragically, but that of Roger Williams becomes heroic. Williams first ministered to the Indians and eventually established the colony of Rhode Island as a place of religious freedom. Many of those who were persecuted in Massachusetts, like the Quakers and Jews, found a home in Rhode Island.

Indians

A third problem faced by the Massachusetts colonists was the Native Americans. The colonists had had some trouble with the Indians when they first settled, but had then befriended some of them and were able to live in relative peace for many years. But, in 1675-76, King Phillip, an Indian chief, led an Indian rebellion. King Phillip's War had been instigated by the French in Canada in order to gain land for France. In the course of this rebellion the English population of New England was reduced by 10 percent.

Half-Way Covenant

The matter of church membership became increasingly difficult. The Puritans began expecting of themselves some awesome revelation or spiritual experience to assure them that they were chosen by God. Fewer and fewer people felt convinced enough of their salvation to stand publicly before the church and tell of their conversion in order to become a member.

Among the second and third generations of believers there were many who, although they were baptized and raised in the church and believed in the Bible and attempted to live according to Christ's teachings, could not be confident that they were chosen by God because they had not had some sort of conversion "experience." This was a problem because only church members could vote on either church *or* civil matters.

In response to this problem, many churches in the 1660s adopted *Half-Way Covenants* for people who had grown up in the church but were not "full" members. In a sense, people could become *half-way* members of churches. Such memberships allowed for certain privileges such as the right to have their own children baptized.

⁵⁴ Kohl, p. 14.

The Puritans began to see these problems as judgment from God. They felt their religious life was declining and their problems were seen as punishment for lowering their standards. In an effort to combat this decline, a synod was held in 1679, the Reforming Synod, which called churches to re-own their Covenants. Even so, the problems grew worse. The Massachusetts Bay Charter was revoked in 1684 and a royal governor was appointed; the Witchcraft trials took place; and the merchant class was prospering and reacting against the Church. All these events created the need for something to happen.

Chapter 6: Faith Renewed

The Great Awakening

Just as religious life in New England was facing serious problems, the most significant event in colonial American religious history took place: the Great Awakening of the 1730s-1740s. The Great Awakening was a period of revival within the churches. This revival spirit spread up and down the Atlantic coast from the Carolinas to New England. It began in the middle colonies with Jacob Freylinghuysen in New Jersey, and it spread from his church to others. The Great Awakening affected all the denominations in all the colonies and, in a way, brought the colonies closer together.

The two most famous persons associated with the Great Awakening in New England are Jonathan Edwards and George Whitefield. Jonathan Edwards graduated from Yale in 1720, spent some time in a New York Presbyterian Church, became a tutor at Yale in 1724, and in 1727 was ordained as a colleague of his grandfather, Solomon Stoddard, at Northampton, Massachusetts where he became the pastor in 1729. During his early years in Northampton, Edwards "preached a series of sermons on justification by faith, with the result that the entire city became concerned with the issues of faith and eternity."⁵⁵ People began to study the Bible and pray, and to experience the feeling of divine forgiveness that follows conviction of sin and repentance. In 1734 there was a flurry of conversions in Northampton, and this revival spirit spread to surrounding towns.

While the revival associated with Jonathan Edwards was localized in his own town and the surrounding area, another, more fanatical, revivalist was causing a stir throughout New England. George Whitefield, an English clergyman, made seven visits to America after 1740. Whitefield was such a popular preacher that even the largest churches could not hold the crowds, as many as 20,000 people at a time. During his tours through New England, Whitefield preached several times every day. Whole communities were transformed through his influence, but he alienated some people by his radical enthusiasm and tactless comments about New England ministers. Other preachers toured New England at the same time as Whitefield. Some of these were very radical and eventually laws were passed against these itinerant preachers.

This period of revival reached its climax in New England in the early 1740s with many positive effects. New life was infused into the churches, the number of church members grew, and new churches were founded. In addition, there was a renewed concern for theology.

⁵⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 27.

The Revolutionary War

It had always been maintained in Congregational churches that each local church was self-governing and that no one outside the local church could discipline its members. Through the early eighteenth century the writings of ministers like John Wise, which were reissued as political tracts at the beginning of the American Revolution, it became inevitable that "the same reasoning which would convince a man of the need of the democratic church could also convince him of the need of a democratic state."⁵⁶

Alice Baldwin, a historian who has written of the relationship between New England clergy and the American Revolution, maintains that the Puritan Congregational clergy of New England were among the chief agitators for the Revolution. The large majority of ministers and churches in New England at the time of the Revolution were Congregational, perhaps eighty percent. Some estimates say there were 530 Congregational churches and 550 ordained ministers in New England before the war.⁵⁷

Congregational ministers used every available opportunity for political preaching: Sunday mornings, Muster-days, Election days, Thanksgiving and Fast Days. They preached about the fundamentals of government, teaching that God is sovereign and his laws should be supreme, that God and man are bound together in a covenant relationship, and that all human government should be patterned after divine government as a compact between the governing and the governed.⁵⁸ Sermons were preached on texts like Isaiah 10:1,2.

"Woe to those who make unjust laws, to those who issue oppressive decrees, to deprive the poor of their rights and withhold justice from the oppressed of my people, making widows their prey and robbing the fatherless."

They passed on to their congregation the belief that every man has the divine right to be free and to be governed by a democratic system, both in church and state matters. This kind of preaching was intensified by events such as the Stamp Act and the Boston Massacre.

New England was ready for independence and growing tensions between the colonies and the British government slowly solidified the colonies. When the war finally broke out, "many ministers served as chaplains, side by side with their parishioners. They helped to recruit, to inspire, and to lead" the soldiers, and many were themselves killed or wounded.⁵⁹ Many church buildings were burned or ruined by the enemy.

⁵⁶ Ibid., p. 25.

⁵⁷ Atkins and Fagley, pp. 115-116.

⁵⁸ Ibid.

⁵⁹ Kohl, p. 29.

Congregationalists helped lay the foundation for the Declaration of Independence and, after the war, were involved in setting up new constitutions for the country.

"There were thirteen clergymen in the Massachusetts Constitutional Convention (1779-1780). We owe to them and to their contemporaries more than to any other single source those 'Bills of Rights' which in the federal and state constitutions are still the safeguards of the essentials liberty of the individual. In such ways as these the colonial ministry made their invaluable contribution to the temper, tradition and political corps of the American life."⁶⁰

Of course, not all the credit can go to the New England Congregationalists for the Revolution. All the colonies were working together in that endeavor.

The American Revolution, while it freed the colonies from the control of Britain, was, in some ways, detrimental to religion. Churches had to adjust to a new political situation. The war had drained the ministry. And the Revolution took the emphasis off the revivalism of the Great Awakening.

⁶⁰ Atkins and Fagley, pp. 115-116.

Chapter 7: Difference of Beliefs

Rationalist Christian Theology

While there were those Congregational ministers in the eighteenth century like Jonathan Edwards, who adhered to the reformed theology of Calvin, with its emphasis on predestination, the revealed Word of God, and unconditional grace; there were others who began looking at faith differently. These were called "rational Christians" because they tried to base their theology on reason. Part of this change in thinking was due to the effects of the Enlightenment: people were beginning to understand the world better through advancements in science. Extreme rational Christians were "naturalists," who believed that one could come to know God through the natural world.

Rational Christian Theology tried to emphasize the simplicity of the Christian faith. It stressed God's creation of the natural world and de-emphasized a personal relationship between God and man. Furthermore, it believed that Jesus was a good, moral teacher, but not God in the form of man. This theology was the opposite of Calvinism in that it taught that man could save himself through good works. This more liberal view of theology would soon cause problems for Congregationalism.

The Unitarian Departure

Around the turn of the eighteenth century, the first signs that Rationalist Christian Theology would cause problems for Congregationalism occurred. Unitarianism had become established in Europe in the sixteenth and seventeenth century and had spread to New England. Unitarian theology rejects the doctrine of the Trinity, that is, God as three persons: Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. It denies the divinity of Christ and believes in the "unipersonality" of God. On the other hand were the Calvinist Congregationalists, who were Trinitarians and believed in the three persons of God. Charles Chauncy, the minister of the First Church in Boston, was a leader in the Unitarian movement.

Interestingly, the first church to declare itself Unitarian was not a Congregational church but the Episcopalian *King's Chapel* in Boston. Eventually, though, all but one of the seventeen Congregational churches in Boston, that being Old South Church, became Unitarian. The Unitarian cause was furthered when a Unitarian, Henry Ware, was appointed to the Hollis Professorship of Divinity at Harvard College. The Hollis Chair was important for students preparing for the ministry because Harvard did not yet have a Divinity school. So, Henry Ware guided the studies of the ministry students and the Unitarian thinking influenced them. In opposition to this liberalism, the conservative Trinitarians founded their own school in 1808, Andover Theological Seminary, to train ministers in the more orthodox (or traditional) theology. In 1809, Park Street Church was founded in Boston as a church that would maintain and defend the orthodox faith.

The founding of the American Unitarian Association in 1825 finally made a separate denomination out of what had been up to that time simply a liberal part of Congregationalism. By the 1830s more than one hundred churches in Massachusetts had become Unitarian, and many of those were the "First Church" in the town. This *Unitarian Controversy* caused problems when congregations were divided and it needed to be decided which fraction within a church owned the church's building and property. The courts answered this question in 1820 with the case of the church in Dedham, Massachusetts. This decision, which gave the church property to the Unitarians, affected many churches. "It has been estimated that more than 4,000 church members surrendered all claim to church property and records when they chose to separate rather than to support the smaller liberal (Unitarian) elements who took over the churches."⁶¹ Even now many of the First Churches in New England towns are in the Unitarian Fellowship.

The conservatives, although they were the majority, had to begin all over again, but they quickly recovered and experienced much greater growth than did the Unitarians. In fact, relatively few new Unitarian churches have been founded since that time. This Unitarian Departure was the first schism in Congregationalism, and later in this work is a discussion about another controversy that split the Congregational churches again.

⁶¹ Kohl, pp. 31-32.

Chapter 8: Spreading Out

Following the Great Awakening, and occurring at the same time as the Unitarian Controversy, was another development in theology: New Orthodox Theology. This post-Puritan theology tried to remain orthodox and maintain a balance between the Great Awakening Radicals and the Rationalists. It borrowed ideas from the Enlightenment and from Jonathan Edwards. This new theology, or New Divinity as it was called, paved the way for the Second Great Awakening in the early nineteenth century. This second Awakening was a period of *mild* evangelical revival led by men like Timothy Dwight, the President of Yale College. This period of revival was relatively quiet and orderly, but it revitalized religion in New England. Furthermore, it inspired other developments in Congregationalism such as westward expansion, voluntary associations, and missions.

The Plan of Union

Following the Revolutionary War and the formation of a new nation, many New Englanders sought to move westward. With the creation of the Northwest Territory in 1788, the “west” was free to be populated and many moved to claim land and begin new lives. It concerned Congregationalists in New England, however, that these frontiersmen were neglecting their church affiliations and that many of the new communities had no religious instruction. And so, associations of Congregational churches took it upon themselves to supply the western colonists with New England ministers; and Congregational churches, schools and, eventually, colleges followed.

Other denominations, particularly the Presbyterian Church, also established themselves on the American frontier. Friction resulted when both the Congregationalists and the Presbyterians wanted to start a church in the same town. They decided to work together and, in 1801, a **Plan of Union** was adopted by the General Assembly of the Presbyterian Churches of America and the General Association of Congregationalist Churches of Connecticut. This Plan of Union was an agreement as to how churches should be established and governed on the frontier.

Under the Plan of Union, a church could call either a Presbyterian or Congregational minister. If a Congregational church called a Presbyterian minister, the church could remain Congregational. If a Presbyterian church called a Congregational minister, it could remain Presbyterian. It was more complicated, though, when the congregation was a mix of both Presbyterians and Congregationalists. In the end, the Presbyterian Church was more organized on the frontier and the Plan of Union favored the Presbyterian Church. Often what happened was that a Congregational church called a Presbyterian minister and then, under his influence, the church joined a Presbytery (or group of Presbyterian churches). Once in the Presbytery, a church could not withdraw and so, many Congregational churches became Presbyterian. The Plan of Union was abolished by the Presbyterians in the mid-nineteenth century.

Voluntary Associations

Another result of the revitalization of the Second Great Awakening was the formation of voluntary associations. Such associations were composed of church people who gathered into societies to meet some need. These associations were involved in missions, publication and education, moral reform, and humanitarian causes.

In the area of publication and education, many societies were founded. In 1816, the American Bible Society was founded to publish and distribute Bibles. This was followed by the American Tract Society (a tract is a religious pamphlet), and the American Education Society. The Sunday School movement, which was designed to reach non-church members and poor people, provided an educational outreach. The American Sunday School Union was founded as well.

Moral reforms were enacted through groups like the American Temperance Union, founded in 1836. Alcoholism was especially prevalent in the poor working classes, and the temperance movement tried to encourage people to drink moderately. Other reforms were sought through the passing of "Sabbath Laws," which were laws that restricted certain activities on Sundays like dancing and card playing.

Other voluntary associations were those that formed in response to some humanitarian impulse. Such societies included those to help the poor, the deaf, the blind, the mentally ill, orphans, or any number of other causes. All of these associations were formed and governed independent of any denominational control.

Missions

The rebirth of the missionary spirit is perhaps the most significant result of the Second Great Awakening. Missionary societies were formed to encourage and aid both home and foreign missions. Home missions included those designed to evangelize the Indians and to minister to the frontiersmen. The Connecticut Association formed the first Congregational state missionary society in New England in 1798 to extend the gospel among the heathen tribes and to promote Christian knowledge in new settlements. The Indians had not, before that, been neglected however. The Pilgrims and the Puritans had both made efforts to minister to the Indians and teach them about Christ. In 1826 the American Home Missionary Society was founded and sent missionaries to every state in the union and to every territory.

A missionary zeal to foreign countries also grew in the early 1800s. Samuel John Mills, a student at Williams College, was influenced by his studies of the work of European foreign mission societies. In 1806, while he was at Williams, Mills and some of his fellow students were caught in a thunderstorm and sought shelter under a haystack. "While waiting for the storm to pass they discussed mission outreach to

Asia and resolved then and there to give their lives to foreign mission work."⁶² This famous *Haystack Meeting* paved the way for foreign missions involving American missionaries. Mills and his friends proposed the formation of a foreign missions board under the direction of the Congregational churches of the Massachusetts General Association. In 1810, the *American Board of Commissioners for Foreign Missions* was founded with nine members, five from the Massachusetts Association and four from the Connecticut Association. In 1812, five men were ordained as the first foreign missionaries and within a few decades missionaries were being sent to every part of the world to spread the gospel among those who had no knowledge of Christianity. These missionaries were first involved in preaching and translating the Bible, and later in education.

The American Board of Commissioners for Foreign Missions has an impressive record. From a simple prayer meeting under a haystack came a vision which has sent thousands to bring the gospel to all parts of the world to fulfill Christ's great commission of Matthew 28:19-20.

"Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you. And surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age."

Traces of Congregational mission outreach can be found from the tiny islands of the Pacific to the cities of ancient Greece; from the coasts of Africa to the Far and Near East; from Australia to South and Central America.⁶³

⁶² *Ibid.*, p. 36.

⁶³ *Ibid.*, p. 38.

Chapter 9: Changing Theology

Throughout the nineteenth century the general theological trend within Congregationalism was a move away from its Calvinist roots toward a more liberal theology. This chapter outlines the major developments in theology in the United States and how these changes in theology affected Congregationalism.

Transcendentalism

The Transcendental movement grew out of the Romanticism of the early 1800s. It was largely a reaction against the rationalism of the Enlightenment. Romanticism (think "romantic") stressed feelings, intuition and passions combined with an emphasis on the wildness and beauty of nature. This anti-rational view created an emphasis on the Holy Spirit and an internal experience of God. The author, Ralph Waldo Emerson, was the son of the minister of the First Church in Boston, which was a Unitarian church. Emerson himself was a minister for a short time, but he reacted against rationalism and embraced transcendentalism. The impact of transcendentalism on Congregationalism was felt mainly in the Congregational seminaries. It produced a more scientific exploration of religion, stressing the historical Jesus and biblical criticism. One Congregational minister, Horace Bushnell, wrote of the intuitive nature of religion and a more positive view of human nature. He claimed that a child who grows up in a Christian family probably would not have a dramatic conversion experience; their faith just grows with them.

Liberalism and the Social Gospel

Liberalism was a movement within Protestantism that endeavored to relate theology with new scientific discoveries. With the publication of Charles Darwin's *Origin of Species* in 1859, the Theory of Evolution became a direct threat to Scripture. The Liberals tried to reconcile Christianity to Darwin's theory. Another trend in theological understanding was to treat the Scriptures as any other historical work and to scientifically study the doctrines. New England Congregationalists generally accepted this liberal theology. Many seminaries (like Harvard, Yale, Andover and Bangor), where most Congregational ministers received their education, accepted it wholeheartedly.

The Social Gospel was another theological development that was directly related to the effects of urbanization and immigration. Within a generation after the Civil War, the United States changed from a rural, agrarian society to an urban, industrial nation. Furthermore, millions of people immigrated to the United States, with most of them moving into the cities. Large numbers of these urban immigrants had little or no contact with Protestant denominations, however.

The Social Gospel tried to relate to this new social situation, sought to address social problems, and tried to change things. This social impulse was not new (remember the Puritans, Great Awakenings, and Abolition), nor was it uniquely American or

exclusively Protestant. This movement taught that the "enemy" is poverty; the attack was not on wealth, but on the misuse of wealth. Two Congregational ministers of the Social Gospel movement were Washington Gladden and Josiah Strong. Gladden was critical of the "evils of the gilded age" and wanted radical change. Strong, who was an organizer of the Social Gospel movement, wanted more progressive gradual reforms.

Fundamentalism

In the early twentieth century an organized resistance to this liberalism existed. Theological issues were hotly debated in the 1920s: liberalism generally and evolution specifically with the "Scopes Monkey Trial." The conservatives fought to restrain schools from teaching scientific evolution and to stop seminaries from teaching liberal theology. They were more successful in their attempts at the seminaries. These conservatives were called Fundamentalists after a twelve volume theological work, *The Fundamentals*. The five main points the Fundamentalists claimed one had to believe in were: 1) Biblical Inerrancy, meaning there are no errors in Scripture; 2) the Virgin Birth; 3) the Satisfaction theory of Atonement, that Jesus was sacrificed for our sins; 4) Bodily Resurrection; and 5) the miracles of Jesus happened as they are recorded in the Bible. While this was a strong theological movement in the United States, most Congregationalists were unchanged by this Fundamentalist thinking.

Neo-Orthodoxy

Another theological development occurred in the 1930s-1940s. Unlike the Fundamentalist attack on liberalism that came from the outside, Neo-Orthodoxy was a critique of liberalism from within liberalism. Leaders of the Neo-Orthodox movement thought the liberals had gone too far and needed to re-evaluate their positions on theology. The devastation of Europe cause by two World Wars called into question the liberal assumption that man is basically *good*. Neo-Orthodoxy looked back to Reformation principles, classical theology, even Puritanism, while at the same time maintained a deep respect for advances in science and art. It was very scholarly.

Neo-Orthodoxy emphasized respect for the "Church" with a renewed interest in liturgy in worship and a greater emphasis on the sacraments. One positive impact of this theology was a revitalized interest in theological discussions; people were talking about theology.

Karl Barth was the leading theologian in the Neo-Orthodox movement. Many Americans read Barth's works. Douglas Horton, the Secretary of the General Council of Congregational Christian Churches, read and popularized Barth. Some Congregationalists rejected Neo-Orthodoxy, some accepted it totally, and some accepted part of it. The influence of this theology is still felt today.

Chapter 10: A Shift in Power

With the formation of voluntary associations and mission boards came an increasing desire for Congregational churches to unite. Many state and regional associations of churches already existed, but there was a growing trend toward a national fellowship of churches. In 1852, the first national meeting of Congregational churches since the Cambridge Synod was held in Albany, New York. The next national meeting of representatives of the Congregational churches was held in Boston in 1865.

This *Boston Convention* addressed itself to issues of polity and belief in Congregationalism. In the area of polity it was resolved that: 1) the local church derives its power and authority directly from Christ; 2) every local church should be in communion with neighboring churches and accountable to them; and 3) ministers of the gospel not elected to office in any church have no official power in or over churches. A declaration of faith was also presented at historic Burial Hill in Plymouth, where many of the Pilgrims from Scrooby and Leyden are buried. This Burial Hill Declaration was the first statement of faith approved by a nationally representative group of Congregationalists since the Cambridge Synod of 1648.⁶⁴

The National Council

This spirit of unity paved the way for the official founding of the *National Council of Congregational Churches* in 1871 in Oberlin, Ohio. Two hundred sixty-six delegates, representing more than 3,300 Congregational churches and 3,000 ministers, gathered to adopt a constitution that stated that the churches, while establishing this National Council to further the common interests of all the churches, do still maintain self-government and administration. The National Council was not to exercise legislative or judicial authority over the churches.

The Oberlin meeting also adopted a Declaration on the Unity of the Church, which opened the door for other denominations to seek union with the Congregationalists. Finally, in 1931, a merger was effected between the National Council of Congregational Churches and the General Convention of the Christian Church. The new body kept parts of both names and called itself the *General Council of Congregational Christian Churches*.

The Merger Controversy

The National Council continued to meet after its founding in 1871 every few years. The 1913 Council meeting in Kansas City is seen as a "real Watershed between old and new Congregationalism."⁶⁵ The full-time position of General Secretary was established, with the duties of official representative and executive of the

⁶⁴ Ibid., pp. 41ff.

⁶⁵ Ibid., p. 47.

denomination as his job description. Also, the more theologically liberal Kansas City Statement of Faith was adopted. It became clear that the power had shifted, and the National Council was taking a greater role in the supervision of the churches.

Following the Kansas City meeting, the powers of the denominational officials and the national committees increased. This threatened the liberty and autonomy of the local churches. One example of this shift in power was in the area of benevolence giving. The benevolence giving of most churches was no longer sent directly to individual boards and societies, but to the state conferences where it was then divided between the various national boards.

In the first half of the twentieth century there was a trend in America as a nation to move towards greater centralization. This same tendency could be found in western Christianity. Ecumenical meetings of churches showed that different denominations could work together and possibly unify. The Congregationalists and the Evangelical and Reformed Church were among those who felt a merger could be accomplished.

The *Evangelical and Reformed Church* was a national church body "without theological uniformity and having a Presbyterian type of church polity with a central governing body."⁶⁶ It differed greatly from Congregational churches. Even so, in 1942 the General Council of Congregational Christian Churches authorized its Commission on Inter-Church Relations to explore the possibility of a union. Finally, in 1957, the merger was finalized creating the *United Church of Christ*.

The United Church of Christ adopted its constitution in 1961, adhering to a Presbyterian style of church polity and compromising its Congregational heritage. The name "Congregational" was even deleted from the name of the new national body, but some local churches who joined the United Church of Christ have kept "Congregational" as part of their own church name.

The reason the formation of the United Church of Christ is referred to as the *Merger Controversy* is because it split the Congregational churches. Many Congregationalists felt that the fifteen years of negotiation between the two merging bodies were filled with misunderstandings and even forthright dishonesty. During that time the General Council functioned as a most authoritative body, and acted beyond its limits of power.

One example of this is that when the merger proceedings began, it was clearly stated that the merger would not go into effect until it was approved by 75% of the persons, churches, associations, and conferences voting. That goal was not reached. When the first vote was taken in 1948, only 65.3% of the churches approved. It was decided to extend the voting period until January 1, 1949 to allow more churches to vote. Even then, the final vote was only 72.3%, but a special General Council

⁶⁶ Ibid., p. 51.

meeting "declared, in defiance of mathematics, that 72.3% was 75%, and proceeded to go ahead with the merger."⁶⁷

The National Association of Congregational Christian Churches

Opposing the merger and the formation of the United Church of Christ was a faithful minority who firmly believed in the historic Congregational principle of the autonomy of the local church. There had been some lawsuits by local churches against the General Council to prohibit the merger, but these had failed. Congregationalists looked back to the Scriptures and discovered again that the churches in the New Testament were local in nature and Congregational in polity.

So, how do we define a Congregational Church today? One prominent Congregationalist who opposed the merger, Harry Butman, offers this definition:

"A Congregational Church is a voluntary company of Christians, complete under God in spiritual authority and ecclesiastical power, regularly meeting and worshipping in one place, and covenanting to walk together after Christ's commandments in love toward God and neighbors."⁶⁸

A "voluntary company of Christians" means it is a group of believers. By saying that a Congregational Church is "complete under God in spiritual authority and ecclesiastical power," he means that the local church is a complete church and does not need a higher ecclesiastical authority. God has given the local church all the power and authority it needs for its work. Jesus says, "For where two or three are gathered together in my name, there am I in the midst of them." (Matthew 18:20) He is saying that the presence of Christ is the source of power in a local Congregational church, and that is the only power needed. A Congregational church is, furthermore, a body of Christians "covenanting to walk together." The idea of covenant has high importance in Scripture, beginning with God's covenants with Abraham and David and in the words of Christ, "This cup is the new covenant in my blood ..." (Luke 22:20). The covenant is what makes each Congregational church a distinct body.

With this renewed idea of Congregationalism, a small group of these continuing Congregationalists (continuing the historic principles of Congregationalism) met on November 9 and 10, 1955, in Detroit, Michigan, to organize the National Association of Congregational Christian Churches. The National Association was established to guarantee the great freedoms of the Congregational Way. The National Association is a fellowship of independent and autonomous local churches. It has already been noted how the Cambridge Platform allowed for and even insisted upon fellowship between churches. We also find that the churches in the New Testament "associated with one another as equals, with neither one church claiming authority over the

⁶⁷ Butman, Harry R. *The Lord's Free People*. Milwaukee, Wisconsin: The Congregational Press (CCC\NA), pp. 126-127.

⁶⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 84.

others, nor the several churches lording it over the one. The early churches lived together in an atmosphere of mutual love, not in a relationship of dominance and submission."⁶⁹ The National Association brings local churches together for counsel, inspiration, and fellowship. It has no ecclesiastical authority over its member churches. And so, it is like any traditional Congregational association. The National Association of Congregational Christian Churches has over 400 member churches.

Other Congregationalists

In 1945, several theologically conservative Christian churches joined together as a fellowship. This fellowship became the *Conservative Congregational Christian Conference*. This "Four C's" fellowship has about 150 member churches. There are also some Congregational churches that have chosen not to connect with any association and remain completely separate.

Furthermore, is an international council of Congregationalists called the *International Congregational Fellowship* of which the National Association is a member. This is a fellowship of continuing Congregationalists from around the world. The International Congregational Fellowship was organized in 1975, and holds international meetings every four years.

⁶⁹ Ibid., p. 100.

Bibliography

For brief notes on each of these and other resources, see the *Annotated Bibliography* on "Congregationalism & the Church," p.

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**Building Confirmation
the Congregational Way**

**Appendix D:
Handouts**

Overview

Bible

"God Stuff" (Theology)

Church History

Worship and Sacraments

Congregational Church

Membership

CONFIRMATION COVENANT

We, the Leaders, promise...

- ...to prepare meetings aimed at the Confirmation Goals.
- ...to really read, listen and think about what you say.
- ...to give you straight answers to your questions.
- ...to do all we legitimately can to help you fulfill your requirements.
- ...to give only assignments aimed at reaching a Confirmation Goal (no "busy work").
- ...not to force you to believe what we do.

I, the Confirmand, promise...

- ...to fulfill the requirements of Confirmation Class. I understand that these requirements will help achieve the Goals of Confirmation, and that I will not be confirmed until I do fulfill them. I also understand that I may freely withdraw from the class at any time by talking with my parent(s) and one of the leaders.
- ...in particular, to fulfill the attendance requirements for this class, for worship and for CF/PF.
- ...to participate in class discussions and activities.
- ...to make a final decision on whether to be confirmed by May 6.

I/We, the Parent(s), promise...

- ...to support the Confirmand's participation
 - by ensuring transportation is available for each class.
 - by helping the Confirmand keep the class time in our schedule.
 - by sharing my/our personal beliefs with the Confirmand as appropriate.
 - by being open to learning.
- ...to pray regularly for the Confirmand

This program is only a beginning. Our hope and prayer is that you will continue to grow and seek opportunities to deepen your faith in relation to God and in service with others. Welcome to Confirmation 1999–2000, the next step on your spiritual journey!

Confirmand

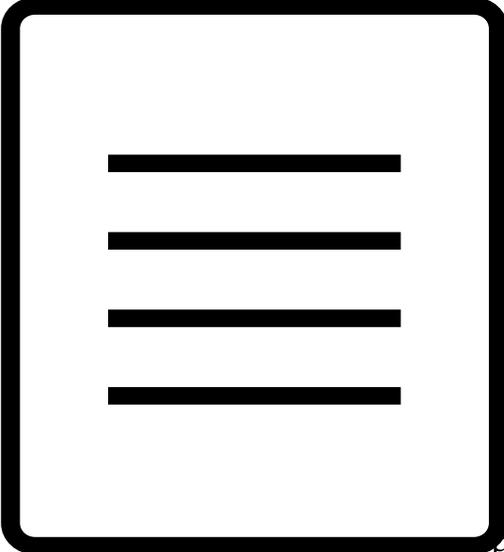
Parent(s)

Rev. Douglas L. Gray

Rev. Karl D. Schimpf

Confirmation 2000-2001

Summary of Progress Sheet



Second Term

(by March 4)

Third Term

(by May 6)

Attend Confirmation Retreat
 3 "Listening to a Sermon" Sheets
 Service/Fellowship Hours Completed: 15
 Attend a Board or Council Meeting
 Attend a Congregational Meeting
 Memorize:
 Books of OT
 Books of NT
 10 Commandments
 Psalm 23
 Pop-quizzes: At least 2.

Attend Confirmation Retreat
 3 "Listening to a Sermon" Sheets
 Service/Fellowship Hours Completed: 20
 Memorize:
 Beatitudes
 Passage of Choice (at least 5 verses)
 Attend outside worship service
 Pop-quizzes: At least 1.

Statement on Beliefs
 Service/Fellowship Hours Completed: 30
 2 "Listening to a Sermon" Sheets
 Attend a Board or Council Meeting
 Assist in Worship Service (optional)
 Pop-quizzes: At least 1.
 Final Exam

Bible Handouts

Basic Teachings in Scripture

1. God created _____. (Genesis 1:26-27)
2. Humanity _____. (Genesis 2:15-17; 3:1-19; Romans 3:23)
3. We are in _____ with God as witnessed in the _____. (Genesis 9:11-17; 15:17-21)
4. The _____ warned people against their sin and _____ the Lord's coming. (Jeremiah 7:1-7; Isaiah 53)
5. God sent _____ to personally deliver His love to us in a fulfillment of His new covenant with us. (John 1:1-18)
6. The _____ of God is not earned, but it is a _____ freely given to those of faith. (Ephesians 2:8-9)
7. Although humanity sinned, God offers forgiveness to those who _____ of their sins and confess their belief in the risen _____. (Acts 3:18-19; Romans 10:9)
8. Indeed, _____ died for our sins. (Romans 5:8)
9. God calls us to be spiritually _____. (John 3:1-10)
10. No one comes to _____ except through Jesus Christ. (John 14:6)
11. Those who believe in God through Christ are not _____, but may have _____. (John 3:16-21)
12. As believers we are commanded, first, to love the _____ and, secondly, to love our _____. (Matthew 22:37-40)
13. Likewise we are to take up our _____ and follow _____. (Luke 9:23)

The Bible in Brief Summary

(As referenced in Bruce and Stan's Guide to the Bible, Chapter 3)

The Bible begins with God's _____ of the world in which he made _____ and Eve, who gave into Satan and established _____ in the world. As centuries passed people ignored God such that by the time of _____ only one decent family remained on earth. God sent a _____ to destroy the world after which he selected a group of people called his " _____ " to reveal himself to the entire world.

From this God chose a man by the name of _____ to whom God made a promise that:

1. This man's descendants would become a great nation,
2. The land of _____ would be their homeland and
3. All of humanity would be blessed by one of his descendants.

Although _____ and his wife, Sarah, were old and had no children, God gave them a son, _____, and from him the new nation of _____ was born.

This nation was enslaved in Egypt for over _____ years when the people, or Jews, escaped Egypt and fled to Mount _____ where _____ received the ten _____ from _____. In these words the people learned how God wanted them to _____ him and treat each other.

The Jews wandered in the desert for _____ years during which God provided _____ and _____ every day. _____ died and Joshua took the Israelite people into the " _____ " where he appointed " _____ " to lead the nation and give _____ guidance to the people.

For another 400 years the Israelites complained and wanted a _____ to rule over them. God knew they did not need this, but granted their desire with the calling of three _____, whose names were _____ (not named in Chapter 3 of the book), _____, and _____. During the reign of the last leader, Israel was divided into two nations with _____(number) tribes in the north and _____(number) tribes in the _____. The two Jewish nations did not always follow God and in spite of his warning, through messengers called _____, (e.g. _____ and _____), the two nations fell to outside forces. The northern nation of Israel fell in _____ BC, and the _____ nation of Judah fell in _____ BC and both nations were exiled.

The people returned from exile to their homeland to rebuild _____ and the temple. For the next _____ years God didn't send Israel a leader (like Moses). He also stopped _____ to the people. By 50 BC Israel was under the control of the _____ Empire.

God remembered his promise to _____ (who was married to Sarah) that a Savior would come for the entire world and so as we now move into the _____ Testament portion of the Bible we discover the birth of _____ who, at about the age of _____, began a ministry in which he taught a new understanding about the Kingdom of _____. Together with his band of _____ men (number) he ministered to all the people and mentored his own _____, who would go on to share his message after he was gone from the earth. This man was despised by the Jewish _____ who, after three years of ministry wrongly accused, _____, convicted, and _____ this man on a cross. He was _____ in a tomb where on the _____ day he rose from the _____. After that he appeared to about 500 people before instructing his _____ (and all of us) to spread the message of God's _____ for humanity around the world. He then _____ into heaven.

After that point in time the _____ descended into the world and the church was born. With that the message of God's plan of _____ was delivered to the entire world, not just to Jews. One Pharisee who converted to the Christian movement was _____ who became known as _____. This man wrote many _____, along with other Christians, teaching people about Jesus, giving reassurance of spiritual care, describing Jesus' principles of personal relationships and instruction for organizing the _____.

The Bible closes with the vision that the disciple, _____, received from God concerning the _____ of the world. This vision focuses on:

1. The unknown time when people will least expect the return of Jesus (this time is called the " _____ "),
2. Which will be a time of judgment for _____.

The end of the world will be marked by the greatest and last battle between _____ and _____ in which _____ will prevail and _____ will be no more.

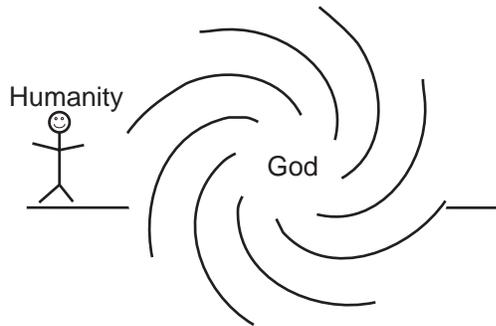
(Compiled by Pastor Bill Genda, Gurnee Community Church)

The Bible in Brief Summary

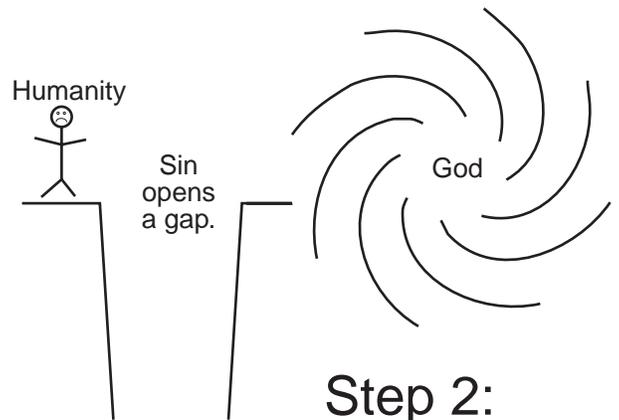
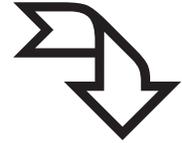
Answer Key

Creation	kings	religious leaders (Pharisees, Sadducees)
Adam	Saul	tried
sin	David	crucified
Noah	Solomon	buried
flood	10	third
Chosen People	2	dead
Abraham	south	disciples
Canaan	prophets	salvation
Abraham	Amos	ascended
Isaac	Isaiah (or any other two prophets)	Holy Spirit
Israel	722 BC	salvation
400	southern	Saul
Sinai	586 BC	Paul
Moses	Jerusalem	letters
Commandments	400	church
God	talking	John
worship	Roman	end
40	Abraham	Second Coming
food (manna)	New	sins
water	Jesus	God
Moses	30	Satan
Promised Land	God	God
judges	12	sin, rebellion and death
spiritual	disciples	
king		

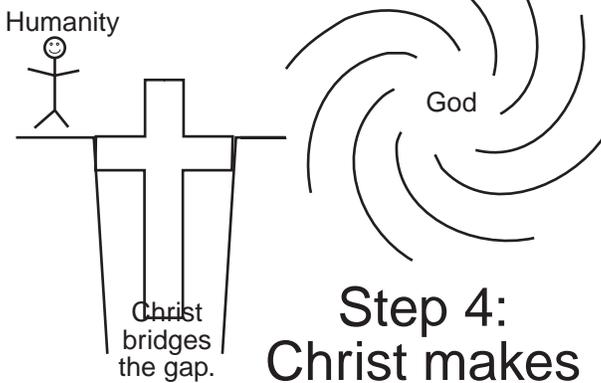
The Cycle of Covenant



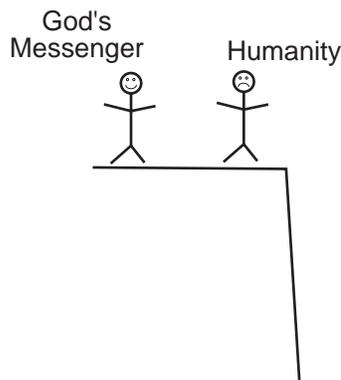
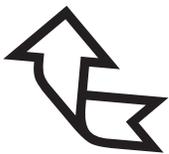
Step 1
"I love you!"



Step 2:
People fall away
or forget about God



Step 4:
Christ makes
"at-one-ment."



Step 3:
God reminds us
of God's love.

Old Testament Books

Brief Descriptions

39 Books broken into 4 types

- LAW – Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers, Deuteronomy (5 books)
- HISTORY – Joshua, Judges, Ruth, 1 and 2 Samuel, 1 and 2 Kings, 1 and 2 Chronicles, Ezra, Nehemiah, and Esther (12 books)
- POETRY – Job, Psalms, Proverbs, Ecclesiastes, Song of Solomon (5 books)
- PROPHECY – Major Prophets: Isaiah, Jeremiah, laments, Ezekiel, Daniel (5 books)
Minor Prophets: Hosea, Joel, Amos, Obadiah, Jonah, Micah, Nahum, Habakkuk, Zephaniah, Haggai, Zechariah, Malachi (12 books)

GENESIS	Contains very old stories of the creation of the world and the beginning of the Hebrew people down through the life of Joseph. (“Genesis” means “Beginning”)
EXODUS	The story continued through the flight of the Hebrews from Egypt and their wanderings in the desert. (“Exodus” means “Way Out”)
LEVITICUS	Chiefly a collection of laws about the right way to conduct the worship of the day.
NUMBERS	Continues the story of the Hebrew people, tells about their 40 years of wandering in the desert and contains details of taking a census of the people.
DEUTERONOMY	Principally laws about the right way to worship and the right way to live. (“Deuteronomy” means “second law”)
JOSHUA	The story of the Hebrew people entering the land of Canaan under the leadership of Joshua.
JUDGES	Stories about the tribal “rulers” or “leaders” of the Hebrew people. Some of them are Samson, Deborah, Barak, Gideon, and Abimelech.

RUTH	A beautiful love story about David's great-grandmother, who was really a "foreigner." Ruth left her homeland of Moab to go to Bethlehem with her mother-in-law, Naomi.
1 and 2 SAMUEL, 1 and 2 KINGS	These four books recount a continuous history over a period of some 500 years, from the first King of Israel to after the last one. Samuel, Saul, David, Solomon, Elijah, and Elisha are among the great characters of this history.
1 and 2 CHRONICLES, EZRA, NEHEMIAH	Four more books of history which cover the same period and more, but were written several centuries later by a priest or someone who thought like a priest. In addition to telling of the defeat of the Israelites by the Babylonians, Ezra and Nehemiah tell about the Israelites' return to Jerusalem.
ESTHER	A thrilling story of a Jewish girl who was a beautiful queen and a brave patriot.
JOB	A great drama dealing with the question, "Why do good people suffer?"
PSALMS	A hymnal containing 150 hymns, gathered together over many centuries.
PROVERBS	A collection of wise sayings.
ECCLESIASTES	The name means "Preacher." This Preacher is discouraged with life and is trying to find out if it is worthwhile.
SONG OF SOLOMON (or Song of Songs)	An ancient love song.
ISAIAH	Chapters 1-39 contain the words of a young prophet in a time of danger. Chapters 40-55, written 200 years later during the exile in Babylon, are a message of faith and hope.
JEREMIAH	Another great prophetic book, whose main point is that religion is a personal matter between God and each one of us.
LAMENTATIONS	Five poems lamenting the capture of Jerusalem by her enemies.
EZEKIEL	A priest in exile looks forward to a new and better day for his people.

DANIEL	Stories about Daniel and four strange yet hopeful visions which he had.
HOSEA	A prophetic book whose message is God's love for us.
JOEL	A prophetic message in a spell of locusts and dry weather.
AMOS	A strong prophetic message that God wants right living above everything else.
OBADIAH	A prophetic message at a time of trouble for the nearby Edomites.
JONAH	A prophetic message that God loves all people of all nations. This is really a foreign missions sermon.
MICAH	A prophetic message much like that of Amos.
NAHUM	A message of joy that the great enemy, Assyria, seems about to fall.
HABAKKUK	A prophetic message dealing with the question, "Why do evil people seem to get along so well?"
ZEPHANIAH	A prophetic message about the terrible Scythian invaders: they are carrying out God's judgment.
HAGGAI and ZECHARIAH	Two short books with the same purpose: to encourage the Israelites to rebuild the Temple, which had been destroyed.
MALACHI	A message of warning to the Israelites to get ready for God's judgment. ("Malachi" means "My Messenger")

Great Stories in the Old Testament

	<u>Chapters</u>
Genesis	
The Beginnings/ Adam and Eve in the Garden of Eden	1-3
Cain and Abel	4
Noah	6-7:17
Abraham and Sarah	12-23
Jacob, Esau, Leah, Rachel and Jacob's 12 sons and daughter	25:19-35
Joseph	37-46:7
Exodus	
Moses, Pharaoh and the Plagues God sets on Egypt	1-12
Children of Israel leave/ Parting of the Red Sea	13-15
Children of Israel in the Wilderness	16-18
Moses climbs Mt. Sinai and brings back 10 Commandments	19-20
Numbers	
Children of Israel in the Wilderness	10-13
	20-25
	31-33
Joshua and Hebrews go into the land/ Walls of Jericho come down	1-6
Judges	
Deborah defeats a general	4-5
Gideon and his remarkable strategy	6-8
Samson and Delilah	13-16
Ruth and Boaz: A Love Story	
1 Samuel	
God calls Samuel at night	3
Ark of Covenant (as in <i>Raiders of the Lost Ark</i>)	4-6
How Saul became Israel's first king	8-11
David and Goliath	16-17
Jonathan and David: Best Friends Forever	18-20
Saul and David: Who's Going to be King?	21-31
2 Samuel	
David and Bathsheba: A Love Story Gone Wrong	11-12
1 Kings	
Solomon becomes King	1-3
Solomon and Bathsheba: Seduction Away from God	10-11
Elijah does miracles (like raising the dead, calling down fire, etc.)	17-19
2 Kings	
Elijah taken up to heaven	2
Elisha (Elijah's student) does miracles	4-7

Esther: A Queen saves her people from a Holocaust

Job: Why is there suffering? Why does God allow it?

Psalms: Songs/Poems written by faithful people with praise and problems

Proverbs: Lots of little tidbits of wisdom

Ecclesiastes: What's the meaning of life?

Song of Solomon: Greatest (and steamiest!) Love Song in the OT

Isaiah

God calls Isaiah	6
Prophecies of the Messiah and what comes after	40-66

Jeremiah

God calls Jeremiah	1
Some of Jeremiah's life	26-29
	34-45

Ezekiel

Vision of the Fiery Wheel	1
---------------------------	---

Daniel

Daniel and his friends	1
Daniel interprets dreams	2
Daniel's friends in the fiery furnace	3
Daniel in the lion's den	6

Hosea and Gomer: A Strange Kind of Love Story	1-3+
-----------------------------------------------	------

Jonah and the Whale/Jonah gets ticked off at God	1-4
--------------------------------------------------	-----



*"As the rain and the snow
come down from heaven, and do not return to it
without watering the earth
and making it bud and flourish,
so that it yields seed for the sower and bread for the eater,
so is my word that goes out from my mouth:
It will not return to me empty,
but will accomplish what I desire
and achieve the purpose for which I sent it."
(Isaiah 55: 9–11)*

The Making of the Old Testament

In the Beginning...

...people just told the stories as they were handed down for generations.

Scholars call this **oral tradition**.

...writing was only for formal documents, like treaties, royal decrees and royal monuments.

Why?

- Not many people knew how to read
- Even fewer knew how to write
- Writing surfaces (papyrus, good hides, stone) and ink were very expensive to make

Question: In a society and culture which reliably passed down the holy stories and laws by word of mouth, **why write anything down at all?**

Words of Law and Family

- Israelites orally transmit the stories of Genesis. Family traditions develop.
- Some things are already written down (e.g., 10 Commandments and some other laws on tablets of stone) by Moses and others
- Perhaps others were written down after Moses death.

The Golden Age

During reigns of King David (ca. 1000–961 BC) and King Solomon (ca. 961–922 BC)

- Strong national spirit grows
- A united Israel becomes a regional power
- Nation wants to explain why it is great
- Temple is built during Solomon's reign
- Need for "rule book" for temple worship
- Need to remember

The Preaching of the Prophets in the Divided Kingdom

After Solomon's death, the kingdom is divided into Israel (north) and Judah (south).

Israel's kingdom sets up separate worship centers, and is known for its corrupt governments, violence, lack of true worship of God, extreme wealth and poverty. Beginning in ca. 850 (roughly 100 years after Solomon's death), a string of prophets (Elijah, Elisha, Amos, Hosea and others), points out the faults in the system. Israel's headed for a fall! In 722 BC, Samaria falls to the Assyrians and is exiled.

Judah has some similar problems and, beginning in ca. 742 BC, a similar series of prophets (Isaiah, Micah, Zephaniah, Jeremiah, and others) points out the faults in Judah's systems. A king finally listens

Prophets gather schools around them.

King Josiah's Deuteronomic Reform

During reign of King Josiah (ca. 640–609 BC), a renaissance takes place

- prophets (esp. Jeremiah are listened to)
- strong national spirit grows
- Judah exerts some independence from a waning Assyrian Empire
- Nation wants to recover its greatness
- Need to remember
- Law is read and followed (and copied)
- Histories are written and/or copied
- Emphasis on Moses' books, esp. Deuteronomy

Assyria falls to Babylonia in 605 BC.

The Exile and the Return

Between 597 and 587 BC, Judah's best and brightest are deported to Babylon. There they:

- realize that their faith and their religion are in deep trouble
- encounter other "gods" who have images and who seem in control
- learn (many of them) to read and write
- live in a place where lots of things were written down
- picked up some sophisticated ideas (like the idea of resurrection, which gets into parts of Ezekiel and Isaiah)
- were first called Jews because they were from Judah

In 539 BC, Babylon fell to the Persians and King Cyrus II (550–530 BC). Cyrus sends them home and pays to rebuild everything!

- come back with all these ideas
- have an even stronger renaissance
- rebuild temple (Ezra) and read the Law
- rebuild city walls (Nehemiah)
- Hebrew writing and reading is taught more consistently
- more history is written down (Chronicles, Ezra and Nehemiah)
- Cyrus is called "the Anointed One," the Messiah, altering how Jews imagined the Messiah forever

The Empires and the Revolt

Alexander the Great forges his empire (336–326 BC), which later broke up with Palestine under control of Egypt.

Highlights:

- Antiochus IV (also called Epiphanes) defiled and brutalized the Jews
- Some think the "anti-Christ" of revelation is patterned after Antiochus IV
- Maccabean Revolt throws off the yoke
- Roots of Chanukah stem from the cleansing of the temple in 165 BC

Rome captures Jerusalem in 63 BC (Pompey led and would later become emperor)

Two Revolts Second Exile

In 66 AD, the Jews revolted. The revolt ended in 70 AD when Titus stormed and sacked the Temple, setting fire to Jerusalem.

During the siege, Rabbi Johannon begged to be allowed to establish an academy away from Jerusalem. It was founded at Jamnia.

Rabbi Gamaliel (following Johannon)

- instituted many rituals for Passover Eve
- gathered the best Jewish scholars
- had two new translations of the Hebrew books made (Greek and Aramaic)
- worked and argued with the other scholars to fix the Hebrew canon

Rabbi Akiva was a conservative scholar who is famous for

- his passionate defense of the Song of Songs right to be in the Bible
- raising the rebellion in 130 AD
- naming and anointing the resistance leader (Bar Kokhba) as the Messiah

In 85 AD, the Council of Jamnia decreed that Christians were to be thrown out of all synagogues as the heretics they were.

In 135 AD, the rebellion was crushed and the Jews were exiled from Jerusalem by the Romans.

Name: _____

Old Testament Worksheet

1. What was the original language of the Old Testament?
2. What does the word, “testament,” mean? What makes the idea behind it so important?
3. On the back, list the books of the Old Testament and group them into categories. (hint: you should have at least four)
4. The two most important events of the Old Testament are
 - The Exodus
 - The ExileWhen did they happen (i.e., dates)? Who were two of the main characters in each? Why are they important? What do they tell us about God?
5. Write down the 10 Commandments. Circle one and on the back, explain what it means to your life.
6. When the United Kingdom divided, it split into two smaller kingdoms. Give their names and when they were destroyed.

Northern Kingdom

Southern Kingdom
7. What is a prophet?
8. Name three prophets (from the Old Testament or in history; some wonderful prophets have lived in the 20th century!) and the main thrust of their message in your words.

New Testament Books

Brief Descriptions

27 Books divided into 4 types

- GOSPELS – Matthew, Mark, Luke, John (4 books)
- HISTORY – Acts (1 book)
- EPISTLES – (Letters) Romans, 1 and 2 Corinthians, Galatians, Ephesians, Philippians, Colossians, 1 and 2 Thessalonians, 1 and 2 Timothy, Titus, Philemon, Hebrews, James, 1 and 2 Peter, 1, 2, and 3 John, Jude (21 books)
- APOCALYPTIC – Revelation (1 book)

Why are there four Gospels?

These books tell the story of Jesus - his life, ministry, and death. (Gospel means "good news.") They are intended to do more than just inform; they are meant to bring you to believe in Jesus and to put your faith in Him.

Couldn't someone have just written one story to include everything? Well, the four gospels give us four different perspectives on Jesus. Think of it like this: If four people visited a museum and saw all the same things, and then wrote a report, each person would report it from a different perspective with a focus on one exhibit over the other. Each account would be accurate, of course, but each would have its own unique emphasis.

So it is with the gospels. There is only one gospel story with the one goal of bringing people to believe in Jesus as Savior and God. Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John each had a particular audience in mind.

MATTHEW

A life of Jesus picturing him as the Messiah and stressing his teachings. Matthew wrote to a Jewish audience with the goal of presenting Jesus as the true King of Israel, the Redeemer God had promised to send.

MARK

Mark emphasized, primarily to a Roman audience, Jesus as the Servant of the Father, a man of action. Therefore, he focused on what Jesus did rather than what he taught.

LUKE

With a Greek (Gentile or non-Jewish) audience, Luke focused on the humanity and compassion of Jesus. The tender side of Jesus moved him as he healed the sick or gathered children in his arms. This Gospel shows Jesus' great love for all people.

JOHN

This account presents Jesus as God. John wanted his message to be so clear that anyone of any age could read it and be drawn to Jesus.

ACTS	The history of the early church and the life of Paul. Written by Luke, Acts continues the history of the Gospels and also gives the historical context for the epistles.
ROMANS	A letter written by Paul explaining his ideas about the Christian message. It is the Christian faith "in a nutshell."
1 CORINTHIANS	This letter by Paul answers various questions that the Christians of Corinth had sent him. It also explains how the Holy Spirit equips each Christian with gifts to minister to others.
2 CORINTHIANS	A letter by Paul (or several letters put together) defending himself and his work against criticism and attack.
GALATIANS	Paul's letter opposes the idea that everyone who wanted to become a Christian must first go through the Jewish circumcision ceremony. Christians are free in Christ.
EPHESIANS	A letter to the church at Ephesus (perhaps written by Paul), which reminds Christians of God's limitless love for them and depicts the Church as the "body of Christ" made up of many members.
PHILIPPIANS	A letter by Paul thanking the Christians at Philippi for their work and encouraging them to continue, giving advice on how a Christian can rejoice despite difficult circumstances.
COLOSSIANS	A letter by Paul reminding the Christians at Colossae that all that is need for salvation is found in Christ.
1 THESSALONIANS	Paul's first letter and the oldest book in the New Testament. Paul is glad the church at Thessalonica is doing so well and offers some advice and encouragement.
2 THESSALONIANS	A second letter to the same church to clear up a mistaken idea and misunderstanding and urging them not to be lazy. Some Christians in Thessalonica quit their jobs because they thought Jesus was going to return almost immediately.
1 and 2 TIMOTHY and TITUS	Three letters on how a church leader should pursue godly living, give sound teaching about the truth of God, and worship in the church.
PHILEMON	A brief letter by Paul to the master of a runaway slave, encouraging the master to forgive the slave just as Christ has forgiven him.

HEBREWS	Hebrews is like the “Readers Digest” Bible because it contains everything we need to know about how God has chosen to operate in the world, most of the Old Testament themes, and major people in the Bible. It shows how much better the Christian faith is than the Jewish faith because through Christ the penalty for our sins is paid forever.
JAMES	A practical letter on how to live the Christian life day by day. This letter emphasizes that real faith produces “good works.” These good deeds are proof of one’s faith.
1 PETER	A letter to Christians who have to face hardship and persecution.
2 PETER	A letter urging Christians to beware of false teachers and not to give up hope that Jesus will return.
1 JOHN	A wonderful letter about love: loving God and showing love to others.
2 JOHN	A short letter to a “lady and her children,” encouraging a life of love.
3 JOHN	A brief letter to a church member named Gaius, encouraging him to accept other believers in love.
JUDE	A brief warning against false teachers who used God’s grace and forgiveness as an excuse to live any way they pleased, even in disobedience to God’s standards.
REVELATION	The Apostle John wrote this dramatic vision, full of symbolism, for the encouragement of Christians facing persecution and suffering.

How Is the New Testament Organized?

Four Kinds of Books

Gospels

Matthew
Mark
Luke
John

History

Acts

Letters

Romans
1&2 Corinthians
Galatians
Ephesians
Colossians
Philippians
1&2 Thessalonians
1&2 Timothy
Titus
Philemon
Hebrews
James
1&2 Peter
1-3 John
Jude

Apocalypse

Revelation



*"Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly
as you teach and admonish one another with all wisdom,
and as you sing psalms, hymns and spiritual songs
with gratitude in your hearts to God."
(Colossians 3:16)*

The Making of the New Testament

In the Beginning...

- ...people were too excited to write much down, only an **oral tradition**
- ...apostles and other witnesses went around telling people what Jesus had done and said
- ...some people started taking notes of things Jesus said and did
- ...besides Jesus was coming back soon, why waste time writing?

What changed?

- Christians kept waiting for Jesus to come again, and it never happened
- Christians were under all kinds of pressure. Written documents were a way to support fellow Christians at a distance
- Christians needed a stronger sense of who Christ was and how following Christ was different from Judaism and other religions.

Marcion: God wouldn't be a Jew

- ca. 150s
- made oldest-known list of Christian books
- couldn't believe that Yahweh (who was so justice-oriented) and Jesus (who was so loving) could be related
- Aha! Different "gods"!
- believed Jesus sprang full-grown from God
- excluded all the Old Testament
- excluded many letters of Paul
- hacked out pieces of Luke that he didn't like
- rejected allegorical interpretation of Bible

Valentinus: God couldn't be flesh

- believed flesh was bad; mind was okay; and spirit was good
- couldn't believe that God would be flesh
- by nature, humans could not be saved
- only a few were "spiritual" enough to be saved
- a combination of destiny and "secret knowledge" made the difference
- thought many writings were sacred
- believed the "secrets" were passed down from the disciples orally

Irenaeus: Makes the Choices

- Bishop of Lyons, France (ca 185-90)
- Studied with Polycarp (Bishop in Smyrna), who studied with the Apostle John
- Argued for four-fold gospels—four winds, four faces on a cherubim in Ezekiel, four creatures (lion, lamb, man, eagle) in Revelation
- Argued that the apostles (notably Peter and

Paul) both supported these four gospels and not others

- The acid questions were: is it orthodox? and were the authors related to an apostle?
- orthodoxy: means "right belief"; means it is in line with what Jesus, the apostles and the church have taught from the beginning
- there is a general consensus on the Bible

The Old Testament

Accepted

The OT as we know it,
divided into

The Law (5 books)

The Prophets (21 books)

The Writings
(Poetry and History; 13 books)

Disputed

Ecclesiastes
Esther
Ezekiel
Proverbs
Song of Songs

Rejected

1-2 Esdras
Tobit
Judith
Additions to Esther
Wisdom of Solomon
Ecclesiasticus
Baruch
The Letter of Jeremiah
Susanna
Bel and the Dragon
The Prayer of Manasseh
1-4 Maccabees
Psalm 151

The New Testament

Accepted

The NT as we know it,
divided into

The Gospels (4 books)

History (Acts of the Apostles)

Letters (21 in all)

Apocalypse (Revelation)

Disputed

Hebrews
James
2 Peter
2 & 3 John
Jude
Revelation (John)
1 Letter by Clement
(finally rejected)

Rejected

Gospel of Peter
Acts of Peter
Preaching of Peter
Revelation (Peter)
Acts of Paul
Shepherd of Hermas
2 Letter by Clement
Baranabas
Teachings of the Apostles
Gospel of Thomas
Gospel of Matthias
Gospel of the Hebrews
Acts of Andrew
Acts of John

Name: _____

New Testament Worksheet

1. In what language was the New Testament written?
2. What languages did Jesus speak?
3. What does the word, "gospel," mean?
4. List the five factors that made it easier to spread the Good News and how each made it easier.
5. Which of the gospels do most scholars believe was written first?
6. Which gospel is not considered to be one of the "synoptic" gospels and why?
7. Luke wrote one of the gospels. What other book in the New Testament did Luke write?
8. In one sentence, summarize the book of Acts.
9. Briefly describe three of the most important events in the book of Acts and explain why each is important.
10. Who was Paul, why was he important to the early Church, what was his name before he changed it to Paul, and why was it changed?
11. On the back or a separate sheet of paper, list the books of the New Testament by type. (Hint: You should have at least four categories.)
12. The writer of the Gospel of Matthew collected some of Jesus' sayings into what is known as "The Beatitudes." What is meant by the word, "blessed?" (Hint: Your Bible has notes at the bottom of the page.)
13. Pick one of the Beatitudes and explain it in your own words.
14. Using the Lord's prayer as a formula, write a prayer of your own.

Theology Handouts

God is ...

The Bible describes God in many ways. Look up these verses to understand what the Bible says about who God is. Write out in your own words the ideas about God contained in these passages.

Isaiah 42:5

Psalms 90:4

Psalms 130:1-4

1 Corinthians 3:9

Luke 12:6

Psalms 139:7-12

John 4:24

John 8:14-15

Psalms 25:8

John 1:12

Ephesians 3:9

1 John 4:8

1 Corinthians 8:5-6

Matthew 6:8-9

James 1:17

John 14:9

1 John 3:1

Romans 1:20

Isaiah 40:28

1 Peter 1:15-16

Malachi 3:6

Deuteronomy 32:4

CONFIRMATION

The Holy Spirit

What's the Spirit? (Large Group Discussion)

- A. Words and phrases for \$200
 - Essence
 - Soul
 - Way of living (with "spirit")
 - Life
- B. What's THE Spirit?
 - Essence of God
 - Way God works
 - Life-giver
 - Around from the beginning (see Genesis 1:2)
 - Also God (see the sheet, "Who Is God?" for who that could be)

Important words:

Ruach (the "ch" is hard like "loch") Hebrew for spirit; also means "breath" and "wind"
When God "breathed" life into Adam and Eve, He gave them their spirits. (Gen 2:7)

Pneuma (as in "pneumonia") Greek for spirit; also means "breath" and "wind"
Read John 3:5–10. Where you see the word "spirit" you could put the word, "wind," and vice versa.

Why these are important: Like the wind, we can't see the Spirit, but we can see how they affect the world around us (think of the wind in the trees or blowing a pinwheel)

How does the Holy Spirit come to us?

At the request of Jesus Christ (see John 14:15–27)

When we ask (see Luke 11:11–13)

With power (see Acts 2:1–12)

What does the Holy Spirit do?

Comforts	Teaches	Guides	Inspires
Intercedes for us	Binds us to Christ	Binds us to other Christians	
Counsels us	Shows us right/wrong	Opens us to God's working in our lives	

Unplugged Christians

Lots of Christians live by the Spirit

They often find that following God is too hard

But they're not "plugged into" the source of power to help them follow God

They're like lamps that wonder why it's so hard to get light when they aren't plugged into the wall.

Key Idea for the Day: Our strength as Christians is not measured by how strong we are, but on how much we depend on God's strength. (2 Corinthians 12:7–10)

Fruits of the Spirit: How do we tell "good" from "bad?"

By their fruits (Luke 6:43–45)

What are the "fruits" of the Spirit? (see Galatians 5:22)

Like the wind, we cannot tell if something is of the Spirit except by how it affects the world around us.

If we see the fruits of the Spirit listed in Galatians, then we know God is at work.

If we don't see these fruits or see ones that are counter to the Spirit, then something's wrong.

Gifts of the Spirit

We each have "spiritual gifts" which God has given us.

God gave them to us to use in building up the Church (local and universal).

Debate: Predestination vs. Free Will

Definitions

Predestination:	That God knows what's going to happen before it takes place.
"Regular" Predestination:	God chooses ("elects") those who are going to heaven before they are born.
"Double" Predestination:	God chooses some people to go to heaven and also chooses some people to go to hell. (Yikes!)
Free Will:	The ability to choose our own destinies, i.e., make our own choices.
Sovereignty:	God is in control of everything that happens in the universe. (God is "large and in charge.")
Omnipresent:	God is everywhere and "everywhen" (in every space and time). (How can this be? Because God is the Creator, He is not part of it the way planets, people, space and time are. He transcends these categories.)
Omniscient:	God knows everything. (No secrets from God!)
Ultimate Will of God:	God brings all Creation into a right relationship with Himself. Realized on the Day of the Lord (End Times)

Predestination

Focus:	God's sovereignty and providence.
Outlook on the End:	God wins. No sweat! Already decided.
Viewpoint:	Everything is part of God's plan. The hard core predestinarians would say that God even Satan "serves" God's overall plan. Since God sovereign, omnipresent and is completely good, how could He not have decided/know what's going to happen?
Problems:	Only aware of God's providence as we look back (retrospect) at our lives. Has trouble with question: So why should we bother trying to make decisions if God has already decided everything? Has trouble with question: Does God make us suffer? They would say, "Yes!"

Free Will

Focus:	God working with and through people to work His Will.
Outlook on the End:	God wins, eventually. Might take longer this way.
Viewpoint:	People can make choices for themselves. That means people can say no as well as yes. The hard core free will folks would say that people decide everything (so who needs God!) These are called Humanists. Even though God is sovereign, God lets us make decisions for ourselves (and we have to live with the consequences). Our decisions are valuable.
Problems:	Harder to believe that God is truly omnipotent and sovereign.

What do Predestination and Free-Will have in common? Both try to explain

- how does God relate to people?
- how does God work in the world?
- what will our individual futures?

WHO IS GOD?

Study Sheet

DEFINITIONS

Theology	the study of God (comes from <i>Theos</i> , which means God in Greek)
God	“I AM” (YHWH) or “Yahweh (the German pronunciation was “Jehovah”) Infinite, in every category that applies; beyond our understanding Gender, race, etc. — God is more than any one category (transcendant)
Theism	Belief in a caring, personally interested God
Deism	Belief that God set everything in motion and then let it run on its own without interfering
Trinity	the doctrine of One God in Three Persons (for more see below)
Doctrine	an understanding about God or our faith that humans came up with to answer particular questions
Christology	the study of Christ and His relation to humanity and God
Messiah	Hebrew for “annointed”
Christ	Greek for “annointed”
Incarnation	“in the flesh” refers to the way God became human in Jesus Christ Jesus was fully human, fully divine (for more, see below) applicable verses: John 1:1-5, 14

TRINITY

God is One. See Deuteronomy 6:4 (“Hear, O Israel...”) and Exodus 20:1–6.

We almost always experience God in three different ways:

Person of Godhead What We Usually Attribute to/Other Names for/

Father	Provides, creates, loves, wills, heals, all-powerful, all-knowing, holy, just, good, omnipresent, merciful
Son	Redeems, forgives, loves, heals, atones, prays for us, offers us grace, put aside immortality and died for us, raised from the dead to give us hope, humble, without sin, the Word, Prince of Peace, the Head of the Church, is our friend and oldest brother in the faith
Holy Spirit	Counsels, inspires, loves, comforts, guides, teaches, strengthens, heals, opens us to God, gives us power, helps us tell right from wrong and best from okay, joins us together with other Christians, joins us together in God

All are God! All existed from the beginning and all took part in Creation. Each knows everything and has the same Will.

“I don’t get it!” Examples

#1: You drink a glass of punch with OJ, cranberry juice, and ginger ale. How do you know what’s in it? You can see bits of orange pulp on top, detect an orangish color and orange taste; you see a reddish color, taste cranberries; you can see bubbles and taste the carbonation and ginger. Are you drinking OJ? Yes. Are you drinking cranberries? Yes. When someone asks, “What are you drinking?” we would usually respond, “Punch.”

God is like the punch, and the Father, Son and Spirit are like OJ, cranberry juice and ginger ale. They’re all one, but we experience them in different ways. Like you taste oranges, so you might experience the glory of the Father in a sunrise(as Creator), or thank the Holy Spirit for leading you to do something that surprisingly blesses someone. You could just as accurately say these came from God.

#2: Take a snowball. What's a snowball made of? Frozen water. Put it in a pan and heat it on the stove. What happens? It melts. What is it? Water. Keep heating the pan. When it starts to boil, what do you see rising from the pan? Steam, which is water vapor. All three are made of H₂O, but we see them in three different ways at different times.

The Father, Son and Holy Spirit are like ice, water and steam—each is experienced in a different way under different conditions. But at the same time, all are H₂O(that is, God), and all combine with other chemicals in the same way (have the same Will, power, love, knowledge, etc.).

#3: Look at one of your parents. You know this person as "Mom" or "Dad." They are also known as "daughter" or "son." They have lots of roles (wear lots of hats), but they are one person.

Same with God. Different roles or names for the same person. When your parent asks you if you want to get ice cream, is that your "Mom" (or "Dad") or is it that your "Grandma's daughter" who drives you to 31 Flavors? Both! When Jesus, the Son of God, was crucified, did the Father and Spirit die for us too? Yes!

Why is this important?

- God has only One Will.
- The different Persons of God all know everything about each other. (No secrets!)
- Having different Persons makes it a little easier to understand/remember how God acts in the world.
- The God the Jews knew(know) is the same one we know through Jesus Christ and when we encounter the Holy Spirit.

INCARNATION

"The Word became flesh and dwelt among us."(John 1:14)

God was born in Jesus, grew up and lived as a human.

Jesus was fully human and fully divine. (100% human and 100% divine).

Why is this important?

- By becoming human, God put his stamp of approval on being human. Human is good!
- If Christ was only "kindasorta" God then God didn't want to completely understand (from the inside) what it was like to be human; He was holding back.
- If Christ was only "kindasorta" human, then the example Christ gave us for overcoming temptation can't work for us.
- If Christ is only "kindasorta" human, we have no assurance that the resurrection which worked for Christ will work for us.

WHERE DID THESE IDEAS COME FROM?

(We'll talk more about this question in the next unit, but this will give you a taste.)

- Christians needed ways to describe their experiences of God.
- The "doctrines" (see above, Definitions above) of Trinity and Incarnation arise out of people's experiences in living with Scripture.
- Several crises hit the Church between Christ's death/resurrection (AD 31/32) and 400s.
- Extreme expressions of some misunderstandings of the Incarnation and Trinity didn't jive with scripture or the vast majority of Christian experiences.

Church History Handouts

CONFIRMATION

The Reformation

I. Prayer

II. Constantine (came to Christ 312 AD)

First Christian Emperor (beginning 312 AD)

Made Christianity the state religion

Overview: Thus, in less than 300 years, the faith of a few dozen disciples of Christ, became the religion of millions! Wow!

Called Ecumenical Church Councils to unify the church (Nicene Creed)

III. Augustine (354–430 AD)

Got involved with pleasure first, astrology next (why worship the stars when you can worship the One who made the stars?), then gnosticism

Gnosticism: Belief that there was a secret knowledge (greek for “knowledge” = *gnosis*) the disciples passed on only by word of mouth. Often very dualistic.

Dualism: Belief that things of the earth (tangible, matter, flesh, human, etc.) are evil and things of heaven (intangible, God, spirit, divine, etc.) are good.

Rebuttal to dualism — Christ was both human and divine

Came to Christ in his 30s (386)

Most famous book — “Confessions” (tells about all the wasteful stuff he did as a kid)

Most famous concept: Grace

Grace: The undeserved blessing of God.

Prevenient Grace: (“grace that comes before”) The idea that God works to prepare us for coming to a personal relationship with Christ.

IV. Middle Ages

A. Problems (See below)

B. Monastic solutions

Poverty + Hard work

Remember St. Francis (rags and no shoes + building the church?)

C. Problems

Hard work + no spending = Wealth

The Church became increasingly corrupt

Ecclesiastical court system

Indulgences — selling of forgiveness/easier to get to heaven

Vestments — really expensive robes, stoles, hats, etc.

Buying/selling of church office

Priests and bishops often not in residence (usually in Italy)

actual pastors (the person left in charge in the parish by those away) earned almost nothing and often lived in poverty

Worship and Bible in Latin

Only Priest could have wine during Lord’s Supper (performed with back to

Focus on the sacrifice of Christ (the Lamb of God slain on the altar)

Church bureaucracy was sucking the church dry

Always looking for new ways to make money (led to corruption)

V. Renaissance

“Discover” Greek and Roman culture/language

Architecture
Philosophy
Learning, etc.

People start thinking and reading for themselves

Invention of the Printing Press (Gutenberg, 1st Bible 1456)

Erasmus The point-man for the Reformation
Incredible writer
Great satirist
First Greek NT published 1516

VI. Luther

Monk

Really stressing about his inability to be truly good no matter how hard he tried

Told to read Romans and St. Augustine

Nailed 95 Theses on the door of Wittenberg Castle (October 31, 1517)

Aimed for reform, not revolution.

"Here I am, I can do no other." — What Luther said when asked to recant.

Goals:

Pushed for services in German

Less sacrificial language in service

Accountable clergy who lived in community with those they served

More focus on preaching and less on pomp and circumstance

Communion (both elements) for everyone

Three sacraments: baptism, Lord's Supper, confession

VII. Zwingli

Lived in Zurich, Switzerland

Began lecturing on NT with reformed feel (1519)

Got rid of the altars (and sacrificial language)

Moved a table into the middle for communion

Used bread (not wafers) on wooden platters

No formal vestments (robes and such)

Focus on preaching and praying

No singing (read psalms)

VIII. Calvin

Second generation of Reformation

Passed through Geneva (1536) and pretty much stayed

Concerned with the question: How do we make politics/civic life in God's image?

Helped city leadership enact *Ecclesiastical Ordinances*

Secret of success: Authority of rightly called, educated and purified ministry.

Famous work: *Institutes of Christian Religion* (Latin, published at 25)

Extremely tight and cohesive

Drew on an amazing knowledge of scripture

Focuses on Sovereignty of God ("Double Pre-destination")

IX. English Reformation (1531)

Cardinal Wolsey Officially the papal legate

United the backing of the King (appointed by the King) with the power
of the Pope

Controlled 20–33% of land in England

Did some reform, but was essentially corrupt

King Henry VIII
Took scads of bribes
Lived off salaries from no less than one additional diocese without ever visiting
Had a concubine (and had a daughter and son!)
Married to Catharine of Tarragon (he wasn't supposed to—she had been engaged to his elder brother—but he got the Pope to allow it)
No males and all but one (Mary) was stillborn
Wanted to marry Ann Boleyn
Pope refused to annul the first marriage (how could the Pope who gave permission be wrong? plus he had been captured by Catharine's nephew, Charles V)
Set himself up as the head of the church in England
Wanted smooth transition (and so made few religious changes)
Set the stage for role of Puritans

X. Radical Reformation

The Question: How far do we reform?

The Case of Münster

Confirmation

Reformation Notes

Middle Ages
Problems

Monastic solution

Problems begin and get worse

Five Major Factors that Encouraged the Reformation

1.

2.

3.

4.

5.

Key figures of the Reformation

Luther

What was Luther before he started the Reformation?

What passages of scripture revolutionized his thinking?

What did Luther do on October 31, 1517?

Famous line (end of one of his speeches)

What happened to Luther's movement after he began it — immediately and in the long-term?

Zwingli (Date of reformed ministry: _____)
Where did Zwingli do most of his ministry?

How did he change communion?

How did he change worship in general?

Calvin (Date of move to Geneva: _____)
What two professions did John Calvin pursue before moving to Geneva?

What famous book did he write and publish? How old was he when he wrote it?

What was the secret to his reformation?

Worship & Sacraments Handouts

Worship Analysis

There are many places and ways in which we can worship God, in daily prayer and wherever we may be. While there is reason for solace, meditation, and individual times of contemplation, ours is not like the eastern religions...in that we are a “Gathered People.” This means that worship is a shared experience.

Let’s look at our own form of worship and see what the central thought or purpose is for each part.

Part of Worship

Meaning

Isaiah 6:1-8

The experience of worship is somewhat like the experiences of the prophet Isaiah in the temple many centuries ago. Look at his experience and see how it provides us with a pattern. This may help in understanding our own worship.

The steps of Isaiah's experience are found in Isaiah 6:1-8. Next to each step is a list of common worship service elements that are similar to the prophet's.

Isaiah

(Turning our thoughts to God)
*I saw the Lord sitting upon a throne,
high and lifted up.*

*Holy, Holy, Holy is the Lord of hosts;
the whole earth is full of his glory.*

(We feel our unworthiness and God's
forgiveness)
*Woe is me! For I am lost; for I am a
man with unclean lips.*

(We praise God and learn what he wants
us to do)
*And I heard a voice of the Lord saying,
"Whom shall I send, and who will go for
us."*

We give ourselves to God's will and
care)
Then I said, "Here I am! Send me."

Order of Worship

Silent meditation
Prelude
Church Bells
Call to Worship

Processional Hymn
Invocation (opening prayer)

Confession of Sins
(This may be part of the Communion
sacrament.)

Pastoral Prayer
The Lord's Prayer
Responses (both choral and spoken)
Offertory
Anthem of Praise
Scripture Reading
Sermon

Hymn of Commitment
Benediction
Choral response
Postlude

The Christian Year

The Christian church year contains a heritage of rich spiritual and historical continuity and resources from the early church. Through recognizing its components Christians can gain a spiritual value from the sense of historical continuity from the time before Christ, through his life, and down through the centuries

The Christian year has seasons and special holidays (“Holy Days”), which are really celebrations of particular events in the life of God’s people, and may reflect specific events in the life of Christ. The beginning and end to these seasons varies in churches. The outline below illustrates many of the main celebrations.

September – October

This period begins with the return from vacation. Special days include World Wide Communion Sunday (first Sunday in October), which is an expression of unity in the church, and Reformation Sunday (Sunday closest to October 31), which is the anniversary of the posting of the 95 theses by Martin Luther.

November – December

Forefather’s Day is the anniversary of the Pilgrim’s landing. Thanksgiving Day is a national holiday but more importantly it is a day to thank God for his many blessings. Advent includes the four Sundays before Christmas. The word “Advent” means “Coming” and is a sign of the coming birth of Jesus Christ. Christmas is the celebration of Jesus’ birth.

January – February

Epiphany is recognized anywhere from one to six Sundays following Christmas and it signifies when the Magi came to see the baby Jesus and then went out to tell the good news. This season often gives rise to talk of missions in the church and asks how can the church spread the good news of Christmas. The word “Epiphany” means “show forth.”

March – April

Lent is the 40 days (less Sundays) preceding Easter. The word means “Spring” or “lengthen.” This represents Jesus’ forty days of fasting during his temptation in the wilderness. It is a time for Christians to examine the spiritual life they have and renew their dedication to God. Holy Week is the climax for this season. It begins on Palm Sunday (the entry of Jesus into Jerusalem) and includes Maundy Thursday and Good Friday, and culminates with Easter.

May – June

The 40 days following Easter are climaxed by Ascension Day, recognizing when Jesus ascended into heaven following his resurrection. Pentecost, which occurs 50 days after Easter, celebrates the coming of the Holy Spirit on the apostles, and the beginning of the Christian church, as we know it.

Churches that use liturgical vestments change the color of them for each season. Purple is used during Advent and Lent, White is from Christmas to Epiphany and from Easter to Pentecost, Red is used for Palm Sunday and Pentecost, Black is on Good Friday, and Green is used at most other times.

Symbols in Worship

A symbol is an object that represents something, or suggests something else. It recalls an abstract truth, but does not picture it. For example, candles on the communion table represent Christ and the presence of his gospel. Candles also represent Christ when candelabra are used during weddings. On Christmas Eve candles are used to symbolize the purity of Christ's light, light in the darkness, and of course, God with us. Symbols may be found in color, form, number and/or action.

Color Symbols

Red represents the blood of Christ.

White signifies purity.

Green means life.

Purple implies royalty.

Form Symbols

A **shell**, which can be dipped in water and hold water, symbolizes Baptism.

A **ship** is a symbol for the church.

The **cross** represents God's amazing love for us that he gave his Son for us.

The vine and cluster of **grapes** along with grain or loaf of **bread** suggest the elements of Holy Communion.

Number Symbols

Three symbolizes the Trinity.

Three, five, and seven are signs of perfection.

Twelve represents the twelve Apostles or the twelve tribes of Israel.

The Sacraments

A sacrament is an outward sign or indication of a solemn covenant or pledge.

Baptism indicates an entry into fellowship with God. It is the sign that a believer repents of their sins and desires to follow Christ. Infants and children may be baptized as a symbol of their parent's commitment to raise them in a Christian manner.

Holy Communion (or the Lord's Supper, or the Eucharist) symbolizes the Christian's fellowship with God and other believers. It is a service of remembrance of Christ's death and resurrection.

Other rituals such as weddings and funerals are ceremonies that emphasize the importance of the act performed, but are not recognized as sacraments in Congregational churches.

Confirmation Sermon Response

Confirmand's Name:

Date: _____

Preacher: _____

Main point of Children's Time: _____

HEARING GOD'S WORD

1. First Scripture Lesson:

2. Second Scripture Lesson:

SERMON TITLE: _____

- Notes from sermon (you may write on the back if you need more room):

- How does the sermon relate to either Bible text from above?

- How does the sermon relate to a teen's life today?

- What does the sermon have to do with your life?

- What is something that you would commit to do in your life, in response to today's sermon?

- In what way could you picture yourself involved in today's worship service?

Name: _____

How to Listen to a Sermon

Sermon Title: _____

Date: _____ Place: _____

Person Speaking: _____

First Scripture: _____ Notes:

Second Scripture: _____ Notes:

Theme: _____
(listen to the opening sentences for clues)

Illustrations or Parts You Remember:

Why do you think the person or leader decided to preach *this* sermon today?

What questions did this sermon raise for you?

What did this sermon invite you to do?

What did you learn from this sermon?

Further comments:

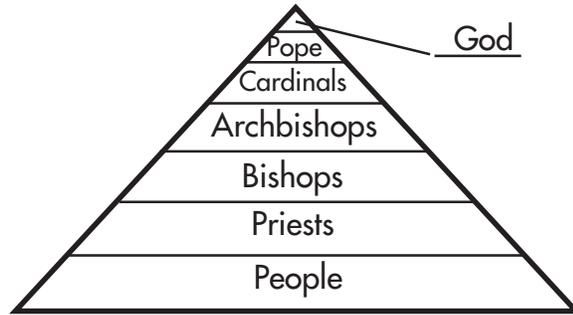
Congregational Church Handouts

What Is Congregationalism?

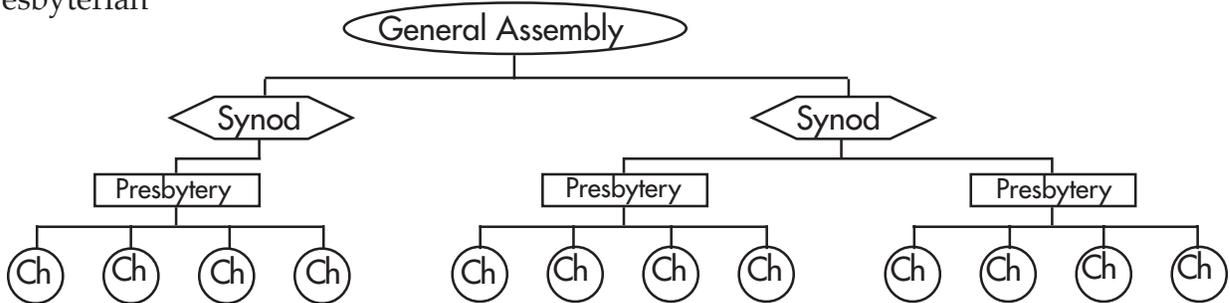
Three Church Organizations

Polity — The structure of a church or organization.

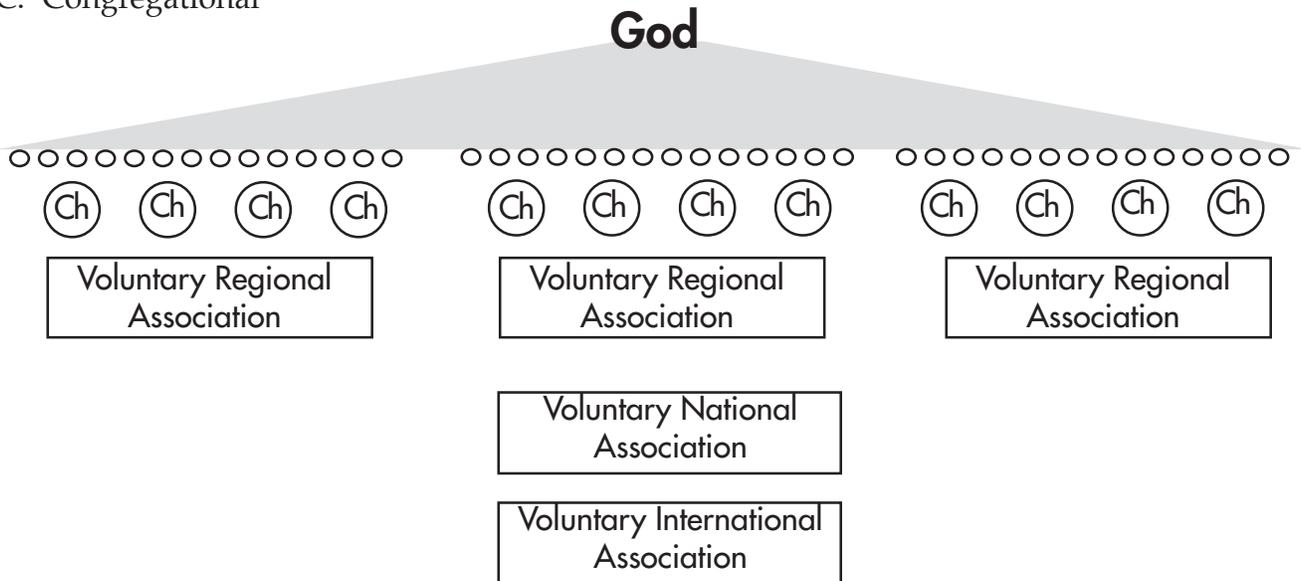
A. Episcopal



B. Presbyterian



C. Congregational



Some Basics of Congregationalism

1. Relationships are based on covenant.
2. Christ is Head of the Church.
3. A gathered fellowship of believers is the Church.
4. The (local) Church is in fellowship with other like-minded Churches.

Covenant — Definition

1. Promise
2. Describes relationship
3. Agreement
4. Statement of purpose

What Is Congregationalism?

Starting the Church

Imagine you and your small group are Jesus' first disciples. You want to start the first church and plan for growth, that is how all the churches after it should work so that the Church will last for the next 2000 years. You have gotten together to design your church and lay things out for the future. You will want to answer at least these questions:

1. Who can join the church? Do they have to do or believe certain things?
2. How do people join?
3. When you belong to the church, what does that mean you do?
4. Who makes decisions? Who pays? What if people disagree?
5. When you disagree about something, how do you resolve the disagreement? Do you have any special resources, people or group that you turn to for help if things get really "sticky?"
6. How will other churches start?
7. Does every church have to do or believe certain things?
8. What if someone gets a great idea for a project that is too big for just one church? Can it still it happen? Who makes decisions? Who pays?
9. Who decides if what someone/some church believes isn't Christian? What happens then?

Use the space below to write your answers.

Who's a Christian?

What Many Fundamentalists Claim Are Essential Beliefs

1. Inerrancy of the Bible in the original documents
That means "without error," no mistakes, even in matters of science, history, etc.
2. Jesus Christ is God.
3. Mary was a virgin when she gave birth to Jesus.
4. Jesus' died for our sins so that we could be right with God.
5. Jesus' was physically raised from the dead.
6. The miracles Christ performed really did happen.
7. Original sin
That's the idea that once Adam sinned, humans naturally tend to sin.
8. We are made right with God by our faith.
9. Jesus will physically and in person come again (Second Coming).
10. Heaven and hell are really places people can go.

Who's a Christian?

What Some Liberals Claim Are Essential Beliefs

1. The Bible is a flawed book with great truths in it; not historically or scientifically accurate.
2. God's Kingdom can be realized on earth...and soon!
The world's churches can unite under one banner.
We can solve the ills of society.
3. Prefer the Trinity: Creator, Redeemer, Sustainer.
4. God places an infinite value on each person.
5. Rational approach: Faith is grasped and grown with the mind.
One can understand the Bible by analyzing it. One grows by gaining information and critical thinking.
6. Skeptical of miracles.
What you see is what you get. Example: Communion is a memorial, nothing more.
7. Jesus Christ uniquely reveals God to humanity. Jesus is the mediator between God and humans.

Membership Handouts

Name: _____

Board/Council/Congregational Meeting Report

(needs to be a group in the church)

Name of the Group that Met: _____ Date: _____

What is the overall purpose of this group? (If you need a clue, ask a member of the group, or check out either the Constitution/By-laws or the Annual Report)

What are some of the projects this group is working on right now? What decisions were made?

What was one good thing about the meeting? What was one thing you think the group could have done better?

What were the spiritual issues underlying the group's process and decisions?

Your comments and feelings about the meeting?

Signature of the Chairperson: _____

Special Programs and Other Handouts

Name: _____

What I Believe

At some point in your life, you will begin to ask yourself that begin “What do I believe/think about...?” The answers may change somewhat depending on what’s going on in your life and what you’re learning about yourself and God. That’s OK. The purpose of this assignment is to get an idea of what you believe now, today. **This is not a test!!** Just a way to help you think about some things.

Some things to help you...

- Please put something down for each issue. If you don’t understand something, ask someone what it is or look it up. If you’re “blowing off” the assignment, I’ll give it back to you to finish.
- Remember there are no wrong answers, so be honest. If it’s what you believe, that’s great! If you’re not sure what you believe about something, that’s OK too.
- Work on a separate sheet of paper, or even better, find a computer and type it in there.
- If you’re comfortable with the idea, share your thoughts with someone who knows you (family is good, a mentor, a friend, etc.) and ask them what they think about these issues. The best place to do this is when you’ve finished your first time through these questions and have something already written down, or when you think you’re done.
- Give yourself some time to put your thoughts down. If you’re rushing, you may put things down that you don’t really mean just to have something down. That’s no good.

Please write a brief paragraph (2 or more sentences) about each of the following topics. Ask yourself, “What do I believe about _____” or “What does _____ mean to me?”

1. God
2. Jesus
3. The Bible
4. Prayer
5. The Church
6. Myself
7. The world in which we live
8. Worship
9. Congregationalism
10. Sacraments (Communion and Baptism)
11. The Kingdom of God
12. Following Jesus

Then also ask yourself these questions:

13. What do I expect from my church?
14. What can my church expect from me?

Church Visitation Worksheet

Name _____

Church name:

Denomination: (Baptist, Lutheran), etc.)

Name of the Minister or Rabbi:

Name of Discussion Leader:

QUESTIONS TO ASK:

What year was the church founded?

How many members does the church have?

During what religious movement was your denomination formed?

What are some of the unique aspects of the church's style of worship?

Are women allowed to lead worship, or be a minister, in your denomination?

At what age do children become members of your church?

ITEMS TO COLECT:

_____ Church Bulletin

_____ Order of Worship

_____ Visitor Information (Please sign the guest book)

REFLECTIONS: (Use reverse side of necessary.)

Describe any difference in the worship service from what traditionally occurs at your own church.

Describe any unique aspects of the church sanctuary.

Who were the leaders of worship? (Ministers, lay people, musicians) How many?

What was the minister's morning message about? (Name two or three things)

How was the music? What kinds of music did they have? Did you like the music? Why or why not?

If worship is a verb... How did you do? Did you participate? Why or why not?

Did you find this service more enjoyable or less enjoyable than your own church and why?

Personal Interview with a Minister

Purpose: To give confirmands and a minister a chance to get to know each other on a more personal, one-on-one basis.

Preparation: Ministers and confirmands should glance down the list of questions below and choose one or more that they think would be particularly interesting to hear answers to.

Time frame: 20–60 minutes

This interview is meant to be a “two-way street,” with both the confirmand and the minister asking the questions. Confirmands in particular should feel free to ask questions (perhaps even personal ones) of the minister. These are some of the areas that can be explored.

Tell me something about yourself (your “life story,” so to speak)

What were some of the most important times in your life?

What would you like to be doing ten years from now?

What interest or hobby do you enjoy most? Why?

What is the best thing about your school? The worst thing?

Who is the person you most admire?

What is the earliest memory(ies) you have about the church?

If you were formerly connected with another church, what were some of its strong points?

If a person moved into your neighborhood, and you were to invite them to this church, how would you describe it?

What do you wish for this church?

How could that wish come true?

Do you ever wonder if God really exists?

Does it ever seem to you that God is unfair?

Have you ever wondered about life after death?

Why do you think some people believe that Jesus Christ is so important?

If time permits, we also talk about some of the things the church does, some of the things that a minister does, and how the confirmand’s relationship with the church (and the minister) is evolving as the confirmand contemplates joining the church.

The most important thing you can do is to be yourself with your mentees and to let them have a window into what you and your life is like as a person of faith.

How do I do it?

Step One: Call to Volunteer!

See "For More Information" below.

Step Two: Come to the Mentoring Kick-Off Sunday, Sept. 28!

You'll have a chance to begin the "getting to know you" process and meet at least one of your mentees' parents.

Step Three: Arrange for your fun "get together" with your mentees.

This will be easy if you and your mentees come to the Kick-Off Meeting. Otherwise, call your mentees and set up a time. A natural time to meet would be the weeks they don't have Confirmation Class on Wednesday nights. Last year, several mentors found that breakfast meetings worked well. Others found that Saturday mornings and Sunday afternoons were easy.

Step Four: Plan ahead!

Either at the Kick-Off Meeting or at your social gathering, plan out your whole semester's dates, or even the whole year! It's not as impressive as it sounds—you're only talking about 10 dates in 8 months.

Sowing Seeds of Faith

As a mentor, you may experience some incredibly profound and fun times, developing close relationships that may continue throughout your life. As a mentor, you may experience some extremely frustrating and challenging times, breathing a sigh of relief at the end. For most mentors, they experience some of each.

But you are a seed-sower. Whether you see the fruits of what you do—even if you see no fruits at all!—*what you do and how you do it will change the young people's lives!*

For More Information

Does mentoring sound like it's for you? Do you have questions or suggestions?

Call Rev. Doug Gray at the church office (352-6123) or at home (371-1014).



Mentoring Program:

Sowing Seeds of Faith
in the New Generation





Confirmation Class of 2000-1
Mentoring Program
Sowing Seeds of Faith
in the New Generation

If you are reading this, you are a rare person, someone who wants to know more about being a mentor for one or two young people as they mature towards Confirmation. Young people need the structured learning about our faith and its practice that Confirmation Class provides, but they need even more the relationship and example of an adult who *lives* the faith and is willing to talk about it. Being a mentor will have a huge impact on a younger person's life!

Why mentoring?

Jesus was arguably the greatest mentor of all time! For 3 years his disciples listened, traveled, ate, slept and learned from all Jesus did. After seeing the way he lived (and not just hearing what he said), their lives were never the same!

Mentoring is a long-standing Christian tradition because it communicates more than words ever could!

What is a mentor?

A mentor is someone who sows seeds of faith in the life of a younger person, in this case, one who is in the confirmation program. A good mentor has:

- a sincere valuing/love of younger people for who they are right now (not for what you think they ought to become)
- a willingness to listen (younger people are, after all, wonderful, gifted children of God with some pretty nifty ideas and spiritual insights of their own)
- an active and growing faith in Jesus Christ (you don't just "do church" but are actively seeking to grow in your understanding and relationship with God and your service to God's children)
- a willingness to share some of what your personal walk with God has been like and what it is like right now
- a desire to help younger people come to know God better

What does a mentor do?

Besides what I've outlined above? Let's cut to the chase.

First Term: September 28 – December 21

- Get together with your "mentees" for fun at least once. Have dinner, go bowling, have a picnic, play cards... No reason except getting to know each other and having fun.
- Do together a 4-5 session Bible Study on the Gospel of Mark. (The resource

will be provided.) Can be done weekly or in large chunks.

- Attend at least one worship service at a synagogue or Catholic church.

Second Term: January 1 – February 25

- Attend at least one worship service at a synagogue or Catholic church (which ever you haven't done yet).
 - Talk about your faith journeys together.
- OPTIONAL:** Come on the Confirmation Retreat with the young people and Rev. Doug Gray. A great way to strengthen the young people and grow in your relationship with God.

Third Term: March 1 – May 10

- Attend at least one more outside service together.
- Get together with your "mentees" for at least one more time.
- Recommended: Come to the Confirmation Final Exam (Saturday, May 10, 1998) and watch your "mentees" shine.
- Strongly Recommended: Come to worship Confirmation Sunday (May 31, 1998) so we can officially recognize you and the important role you have had in the Confirmation process.



CONFIRMATION

Mentoring: Faith from the Inside Out

Why mentoring?

Jesus was arguably the greatest mentor of all time! For 3 years his disciples listened, traveled, ate, slept and learned from all Jesus did. After seeing the way he lived (and not just hearing what he said), their lives were never the same!

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- an active and growing faith in Jesus Christ (you don't just "do church" but are actively seeking to grow in your understanding and relationship with God and your service to God's children)
- a willingness to share some of what your personal walk with God has been like and what it is like right now
- a desire to help younger people come to know God better

How will mentoring work?

Besides what I've outlined above? Let's cut to the chase.

First Term: September 28 – December 21

- Get together with your mentor and fellow "mentees" at least once just for fun. Have dinner, go bowling, have a picnic, play cards... No reason except getting to know each other and having fun.
- Do together 4–5 hours of Bible Study on the Gospel of Mark. (The resource will be provided.) Can be done weekly or in large chunks.
- Attend at least one worship service at a synagogue or Catholic church.

Second Term: January 1 – February 25

- Attend at least one worship service at a synagogue or Catholic church (whichever you haven't done yet).
- Talk about your faith journeys together.

OPTIONAL: Come on the Confirmation Retreat with the young people and Rev. Doug Gray. A great way to strengthen the young people and grow in your relationship with God.

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What not to expect from your mentors

Don't expect your mentor to be infinitely flexible. If you set dates together, keep your appointment. If your group meets and you miss it, you are responsible for fulfilling the requirement!

Don't expect your mentor to have all the answers. Your mentor is not some nationally known guru on matters of faith. She or he is a normal person who knows God and is working to know God better. (For that matter, the nationally known guru doesn't know all the answers either; he or she just may make it sound better.)

Mentoring: Faith from the Inside Out

No matter how great Karl's and Doug's teaching may be, no matter how illuminating the reading and charts, the best audio-visual aid is your mentor. Through your mentor, you will catch some glimpses of what it is like to live a life with God as part of your life.

Your mentor may not know all the answers, but s/he does know the One who answers all questions, and knows what it's like to be asking the questions. Some of them have been through more with God than you might imagine!

My prayer is that, by spending time with your mentor, you will gain a clearer understanding of what faith is really about from the inside out. Perhaps you will even want to try on a relationship with God for yourself.

Confirmation Mission Hours Record Sheet

Date _____

Name _____

Mission task you performed:

How many hours did you work? _____

Did you serve by yourself or with others? _____

(If others, who?) _____

How did your service assist others?

Did you serve the church in general (a project for church) or did you serve an individual? _____

What did you learn from this experience?

Please have the person who supervised your mission work sign below after you complete this form.

Mission service supervised by _____

Date _____

Questions for Missionaries

Start with one or two of your own questions.

Did you always think you would be doing “mission work”? How did you come to the decision that this is what God wanted you to do?

What do you find are the best parts of being missionaries?

What are some of the hardest decisions that you make as leaders of your fellowship?

How important is money to your organization? When you are raising money, what do you do to make sure you are doing it in a way that fits with your vision for the mission?

Ask any other questions you like.