

**Ideas for Exploring**  
***Affirming Faith: A Congregation's Guide to Confirmation***  
***Affirming Faith: A Confirmand's Journal***

**A One Hour Introduction**

Read one of the following scriptures which are used in the UCC *Book of Worship* in the Order for the Rite of Confirmation (Affirmation of Baptism): John 15:5, 7, 10, 11; Romans 10:8-10; Ephesians 2:19-22. (These may be found on p. 148 of *Book of Worship*.)

Show video *Affirming Faith: A Confirmation Resource for Faith Formation* (17 minutes)

Discuss the following:

- What are the hopes or needs in our congregation that this resource, *Affirming Faith*, might address? List them.
- What questions about faith formation does the video raise for us?
- How can the rite of confirmation be a memorable and moving time in the worship of our congregation?

Pass out “Handout A” (page 5.4.3) with the table of contents and 10 characteristics of the resource. Review the 10 characteristics of the resource with the group.

Form pairs or groups — each pair or group works with a set of resources. Distribute “Handout D” (page 5.4.10). Ask each pair or group to make research one of the questions on the handout to be prepared to give a report to the whole group:

- List the units from the Table of Contents. Which ones are focused on the UCC Statement of Faith?
- List the parts of each session. How does this “flow” for each session seem to you?
- How many planning guides are in the *Congregation's Guide to Confirmation*? How might they help in your church's faith formation program?
- Examine the *Confirmand's Journal*. Leaf through it. List three things you notice about it.
- Look at the opening retreat. Be ready to describe three things you noticed about it.
- Look at the “Questions to Consider” in the *Confirmand's Journal*. How might these be used by mentors?
- List six ways the *Confirmand's Journal* might be used in a congregation.
- What sessions in the resource are built specifically on the UCC Statement of Faith? Why are some not focused on the Statement of Faith?
- Which sessions relate to witness and service (be sure to look at the Opening Retreat)?
- Which sessions deal with the Bible? How does the resource use the Bible?
- Examine the Closing Retreat. What do you notice about it?
- List several ideas of how *Affirming Faith* might be used by groups other than youth.
- What parts of *Affirming Faith* are helpful in planning and doing retreats?

Ask people to report their findings and questions.

Close with prayer. (Consider using one of the prayers on p. 155 of *Book of Worship*.)

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**Longer Events Focused on the Rite of Confirmation**

Begin with worship from the Opening Retreat of *Affirming Faith: A Congregation's Guide to Confirmation*. The worship itself is on p.6. The description of materials you will need (a basket of objects) is on pp. 5-6. Music is on p. 221 (also on p. 122 of the *Confirmand's Journal*). Depending on the size of your group, the sharing in this worship can take up to an hour for larger groups.

Create three newsprint (or chalkboard) lists, using this as a time both to get acquainted with the participants and to list the concerns which people have brought to the discussion.

- Confirmation: What is It?
- Confirmation Problems
- Confirmation Successes

Ask each person to introduce himself or herself and to add items to one or all of the lists.

Show the video *Affirming Faith: A Confirmation Resource for Faith Formation* (17 minutes)

Depending on the interest and knowledge of your group, you might want to share additional ideas and information from the following sources:

- *The Rite of Confirmation: Moments When Faith Is Strengthened* by Peter R. Monkres and R. Kenneth Ostermiller
- Notes from "Confirmation Presentation" by R. Kenneth Ostermiller (Handout B)

Use the discussion questions (Handout C) adapted from *The Rite of Confirmation: Moments When Faith Is Strengthened* to deepen and guide discussion.

If you have an extended time, it can be very moving to actually do the rite of confirmation (*Book of Worship*, pp. 145-156) for adults. Ask people to select the words they would like to have said for them in the Act of Confirmation (*Book of Worship*, p. 152). Consider using elements from the Affirmation of Baptism in the Great Vigil of Easter (*Book of Worship*, Service of Water, pp. 238-242), especially the Blessing of Water, p. 239, inviting people to place their hands in the waters of baptism in the baptismal font for the blessing.

Ask people to examine the resources in *Affirming Faith: A Congregation's Guide to Confirmation* and *Affirming Faith: A Confirmand's Journal* using the design from the one hour exploration above.

Close with prayer.

## Affirming Faith: A Congregation's Guide to Confirmation

Ten characteristics of this resource:

1. Confirmation is a rite of the church.
2. Faith formation is a life long and congregation wide process.
3. The emphasis is on the Holy Spirit.
4. The focus is on community -- the congregation as teacher.
5. The resource is centered on the UCC Statement of Faith.
6. Scripture is used experientially.
7. The resource is designed to be flexible and adaptable.
8. The resource is three tiered -- may be used in sessions, mentoring, or retreats.
9. The resource provides two books -- a Leader's Guide and a Confirmand's Journal.
10. Writers are United Church of Christ lay and clergy leaders who work with youth.

### Tables of Contents

<p>Preface</p> <p>Introduction</p> <p>Confirmation in the Local Church</p> <p>Confirmation: Then and Now</p> <p>Sessions</p> <p style="padding-left: 20px;">Community Life</p> <p style="padding-left: 40px;">Opening Retreat: On a Faith Journey</p> <p style="padding-left: 60px;">1. Sharing Our Stories</p> <p style="padding-left: 60px;">2. Worship</p> <p style="padding-left: 60px;">3. God's Mission and the History of Our Local Church</p> <p style="padding-left: 20px;">Our History and Heritage</p> <p style="padding-left: 40px;">4. The Bible</p> <p style="padding-left: 40px;">5. The History of Christianity</p> <p style="padding-left: 40px;">6. The History of the United Church of Christ</p> <p style="padding-left: 40px;">7. The Statement of Faith</p> <p>God</p> <p style="padding-left: 20px;">8. God Creates</p> <p style="padding-left: 20px;">9. God Seeks and Saves</p> <p style="padding-left: 20px;">10. God Loves and Judges</p> <p>Jesus Christ</p> <p style="padding-left: 20px;">11. Jesus Christ, Human and Divine</p> <p style="padding-left: 20px;">12. Jesus Christ, Crucified and Resurrected</p> <p style="padding-left: 20px;">13. Jesus Christ, Risen Savior</p>	<p>The Holy Spirit</p> <p style="padding-left: 20px;">14. Guided by the Spirit</p> <p style="padding-left: 20px;">15. Bound by the Spirit</p> <p>The Church</p> <p style="padding-left: 20px;">16. The Body of Christ</p> <p style="padding-left: 20px;">17. Followers of Christ</p> <p style="padding-left: 20px;">18. Witness and Service</p> <p style="padding-left: 20px;">19. The Sacraments</p> <p>God's Gifts and Our Response</p> <p style="padding-left: 20px;">20. Forgiveness and Grace</p> <p style="padding-left: 20px;">21. Justice and Peace</p> <p style="padding-left: 20px;">22. Eternal Life</p> <p style="padding-left: 20px;">Closing Retreat: Affirming Faith</p> <p>Music and Liturgical Resources</p> <p>Glossary</p> <p>Planning Guides</p> <p style="padding-left: 20px;">A Guide for Youth Leaders</p> <p style="padding-left: 20px;">A Guide for Mentoring</p> <p style="padding-left: 20px;">A Guide for Witness and Service</p> <p style="padding-left: 20px;">A Guide for Retreats</p> <p style="padding-left: 20px;">A Guide for Field Trips</p> <p>Notes</p> <p>Related Reading</p> <p><i>Affirming Faith</i> Response Form</p>
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*Affirming Faith: A Congregation's Guide to Confirmation*      \$24.95

*Affirming Faith: A Confirmand's Journal*      \$10.95      Order from 1-800-537-3394

## Confirmation Presentation

This handout was developed by R. Kenneth Ostermiller for use at events exploring the history of the rite of confirmation and its place in the life of the church.

### 1. Faith Development Understandings

Experienced Faith – Baptism through adult (only faith to age 4 or 5)

Belonging Faith – Begins in elementary years through adult

Searching Faith – Begins in late adolescence through adult

Owned Faith – Earliest reached in late young adulthood

In our faith formation programs for youth we have thought we were dealing either with Belonging Faith (church membership, communion) or with Owned Faith (commitment, making one's own faith statement). The faith movement appropriate to adolescence is to bless and begin Searching Faith.

In order to adequately address this, I recommend that we unhook the issues of church membership and beginning to take Communion from the faith forming education we offer during adolescence.

The basis of our life with others is twofold, and it is one – the wish of every person to be confirmed as what he or she is, even as what she or he can become, by other persons; and the innate capacity in us to confirm other persons in this way. That this capacity lies so immeasurably fallow constitutes the real weakness and questionableness of the human race: actual humanity exists only where this capacity unfolds. . . .

We wish to be confirmed in our being by another person, and we wish to have a presence in the being of the other. The human person needs a confirmation, because we as human beings need it . . . secretly and bashfully we watch for a Yes which allows us to be and which can come to us only from one human person to another. It is from one person to another that the heavenly bread of self-being is passed.

– Adapted from *To Hallow This Life* by Martin Buber

I don't know Who – or what – put the question. I don't know when it was put. I don't remember answering. But at some moment I did answer Yes . . . and from that hour I was certain that existence is meaningful and that, therefore, my life, in self-surrender, had a goal.

From that moment I have known what it means "not to look back," and "to take no thought for the morrow."

– from *Markings* by Dag Hammarskjöld

## 2. Historical Understandings\*

"The kindest thing which can be said about Confirmation is that since the Third Century it has been a rite in search of a rationale."

Common modern understanding – Confirmation = **Completion**.

First proposed in the Middle Ages.

Argued against by the Reformers.

I suggest we return to an understanding first proposed in the Third Century:

Confirmation = **Strengthening** of Faith.

### Historical Development

**Early Church** == Unified rite of  
Baptism-Confirmation-Communion.  
Confirmation was Bishop's part of the Baptismal liturgy.

Constantine declared Christianity a religion of the state.  
Parish priests began to baptize when the Bishop was not present.  
Augustine encouraged the baptism of infants

**Middle Ages**  
Rite of Confirmation fell into disuse

**Pre-Reformation**  
Recovered as part of sacramental theology of Roman Catholic church  
7 Sacraments  
Confirmation = "Second dose of grace"

**Reformation**  
Only two sacraments. Confirmation not well thought out.  
Turned into an "education" event – new educational tool  
= Catechisms

In the earliest church traditions Confirmation was a part of the unified ritual of Baptism-Confirmation-Communion. "I confirm . . ." was the Bishop's part in the Baptismal liturgy and symbolized the presence of the Holy Spirit in the baptism. Newly baptized Christians were "confirmed" by the Bishop (the laying on of hands and anointing with oil) and immediately (adults or children) took their first communion.

After Christianity became the state religion (Third Century) and the church grew, Confirmation became separated from Baptism because the Bishop could not physically be present at every Baptism. Since that time Confirmation has been a "rite in search of a rationale."

Up until the Reformation the church retained it as a sacrament but gave, over the centuries, many explanations. Some saw it as giving a "second dose" of grace. Some explained it a "completing" baptism, but other theologians argued against this from the very beginning. During the middle ages most people were not confirmed. There are stories of the Bishop "confirming" a whole town on horseback when he visited.

\*Please refer to *The Rite of Confirmation: Moments When Faith Is Strengthened*, by Peter R. Monkres, and R. Kenneth Ostermiller (United Church Press: 1995), Chapter 2, "A Brief History of Confirmation,"



### 3. Possibilities for Today

Confirmation is a rite of the church done in worship. Liturgically it is an "affirmation of Baptism." The laying on of hands or anointing with oil are appropriate symbols. While it is an occasion for deepening and expanding education about our faith, it is not an education program.

"Faith forming" education may lead one to want to participate in affirmation of Baptism. Let's call the education "faith formation" and save the term "Confirmation" for what happens in worship.

Confirmation = "**Yes**" to strengthened faith or faith growth

The Church says "Yes"

The individual says "Yes"

A. Baptism – Children or adults become members of the church when baptized. Whenever there is a baptism all members should have the opportunity to affirm their Baptism.

B. Communion – Baptized children may take Communion when parents feel they are ready. Annually (for example, in the fall before World Wide Communion Sunday) the church may offer a "faith formation" event for families whose children are ready to participate in the sacrament of Holy Communion. Affirmation of baptism could be a part of this service.

#### C. Faith Formation Program for Youth

*Affirming Faith: A Congregation's Guide to Confirmation*

A possibility: two years beginning in the middle of 9th Grade (or middle of 8th Grade). Program would include participating in three or more faith growth experiences per year.

! Use retreats from *Affirming Faith*: Opening Retreat, six Unit Retreats, Closing Retreat. (The Unit Retreats do not need to be done "in order," allowing flexibility for congregation which have youth beginning the program each year.)

! Take the Faith Formation group to a Conference Youth Rally or to a National Youth Event.

! An urban field trip to visit church mission sites.

! Work camp to Habitat for Humanity or other site.

! Multi-cultural experience (visit Puerto Rico or spend a weekend with a congregation of a racial or ethnic background different from your own).

The Faith Formation Program could also include mentoring relationships between adults and youth, participation in mission and service activities through the church (acolyte, usher, choir, Meals on Wheels, food bank, etc.), and field trips. Youth would participate in the regular education program of the congregation and attend worship. At the end of the second year youth could prepare a statement (paper, art work, poem, or video tape) on "Where I see my search for faith headed until I'm 20." An entrance ritual would mark the beginning of the program. The rite of Confirmation and commissioning would mark the end. Adult mentors and leaders would participate in the rite of Confirmation with the youth.

D. Faith Formation Program for Adults – We could do much more with faith formation for adults. The Roman Catholic Rite of Christian Initiation program for adults is a suggestive model for congregations to consider. Congregations could offer faith forming experiences related to education for new church officers, or those aspiring to become church officers. Some congregations might consider an annual Lenten faith formation program for any interested adult leading to Confirmation on Easter morning.

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Many in our church now see Confirmation as a **completion** of Baptism (and many youth see it as a completion of their participation in the church). This common popular understanding (that Baptism needs some "completion") was decried by the 16th Century Reformers, and yet it has been the denominations of the Reformed tradition which have been most forceful in creating education programs which reinforce this mistake.

We need to return to an earlier understanding of Confirmation as the rite which recognizes a **strengthened** faith. Faith grows at many points in life and, therefore, Confirmation should be a repeatable rite. In the UCC Book of Worship there are several liturgies for the "Affirmation of Baptism." Confirmation is an affirmation of Baptism and may take place several times in one's life.

## Discussion Questions

These discussion questions are adapted from *The Rite of Confirmation: Moments When Faith is Strengthened* by Peter R. Monkres and R. Kenneth Ostermiller (United Church Press, 1995) and are used with permission of the publisher.

1. Invite those present to remember their own confirmation and to offer a brief description of its impact or lack of impact on their faith. After each person has had an opportunity to share, evaluate the group's experience using the following scale:

Confirmation had no significant effect on my faith journey.

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|

Confirmation had a modest effect on my faith journey.

|  
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Confirmation had a great effect on my faith journey.

Discuss the following questions:

- What experience of confirmation is most frequent in your group?
  - What factors make confirmation most meaningful to participants?
  - What factors keep confirmation from being meaningful?
2. How well is confirmation working in your church at the present time?
- What are its greatest strengths?
  - What things most need to be changed?
  - What strategies would help your church to change?
3. What are the most important things we as modern Christians need to learn from the history of confirmation in the Christian church?
4. If you could change three things about the way confirmation has evolved over the past two thousand years, what three changes would you make, and what effect would you hope those changes might have in the life of the church?
5. If you could reclaim three things about confirmation from earlier centuries in the church, what would they be?
6. How do you respond to the idea that the rite of confirmation is repeatable and that faith formation opportunities should be offered adults?
7. Share moments in the church when you have enjoyed the opportunity to say "yes" to a strengthening of faith in your life.
8. How has the church most meaningfully affirmed a time of faith-strengthening in your life?

9. How would you most like your congregation to say "yes" to faith-strengthening moments in members' lives?

10. How might you encourage some of these new possibilities to happen in your church?

11. Invite participants to consider how their faith was strengthened at different stages of their spiritual journey:

As a child:

- How were your God images formed?
- Did you prepare for Holy Communion?

As a youth:

- How did you test the Christian faith in the midst of relationships and community?
- Did you affirm your membership in the church at that time?

As a younger adult:

- How did you discover your vocation?
- Did your church help?

As an older adult:

- How might confirmation help you to clarify your life?
- Did the church help you to deepen your spiritual life?

As an elder:

- Has the church helped you to confirm your faith in relation to retirement and death?

<p>What parts of <i>Affirming Faith</i> are helpful in planning and doing retreats?</p>	<p>List the parts of each session. How does this “flow” for each session seem to you?</p>
<p>How many planning guides are in the <i>Congregation's Guide to Confirmation</i>? How might they help in your church’s faith formation program?</p>	<p>Examine the <i>Confirmand's Journal</i>. Leaf through it. List three things you notice about it.</p>
<p>Look at the opening retreat. Be ready to describe three things you noticed about it.</p>	<p>Look at the “Questions to Consider” in the <i>Confirmand's Journal</i>. How might these be used by mentors?</p>
<p>List six ways the <i>Confirmand's Journal</i> might be used in a congregation.</p>	<p>What sessions in the resource are built specifically on the UCC Statement of Faith? Why are some not focused on the Statement of Faith?</p>
<p>Which sessions relate to witness and service (be sure to look at the Opening Retreat)?</p>	<p>Which sessions deal with the Bible? How does the resource use the Bible?</p>
<p>Examine the Closing Retreat. What do you notice about it?</p>	<p>List several ideas of how <i>Affirming Faith</i> might be used by groups other than youth.</p>