

Re-Imagining Youth Confirmation - REA 2015 Colloquium

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What is the meaning and purpose of confirmation as church affiliation in North America declines? What does confirmation offer to meet the spiritual hunger of contemporary teenagers? What can be learned from vibrant programs to help young people grow in their faith? The Confirmation Project, funded by the Lilly Endowment, studied confirmation and equivalent practices in five denominations that practice infant baptism. With findings from this national study, we will reimagine confirmation as a vital, transformative process, noting the role of mentoring, youth agency, and congregational climate.

PRESENTATION

Guiding question: What is the meaning and purpose of confirmation as church affiliation in North America declines?

Confirmation Project Methodology:

- Research Question: What is the state of confirmation and equivalent practices within five Protestant denominations that practice infant baptism?
- Concurrent mixed methods design
- Survey (quantitative) designed to mirror nine country, two-phase European study to facilitate international dialogue
- Portraiture (qualitative): gathering data through site visits (minimum of 20 congregations, four in each denomination, and five camps); sharing the findings through developing rich, narrative portraits.
- See www.theconfirmationproject.com for more detail

Using illustrations from our site visits, we will present three significant, interrelated shifts in the understanding and practice of youth confirmation across five U.S. denominations.

Three Shifts:

1. ***Purpose:*** Shift from established doctrine and rite to adaptive practice(s) to meet the spiritual hunger of teenagers. Shift from focus on equipping young people for church membership and denominational loyalty toward lifelong journeys as followers of Jesus.
2. ***Pedagogy:*** Shift from traditional, didactic instruction (clergy/pastor/educator-centered) toward a resource-rich learning community. Shift from focus on cognitive learning about Christianity toward engaged, holistic and transformative learning about the Christian life.
3. ***Context:*** Changes in the American religious landscape have radically altered congregational cultures, and confirmation is shifting from a siloed program/event toward a process owned by

congregations, and connected to the wider church/community. Confirmation as a dynamic ecology.

DISCUSSION (sample questions related to each area of shift)

1. **Purpose** – What is the primary purpose of confirmation in your location? How well does it meet the spiritual hungers of youth today?

2. **Pedagogy** – Creating a learning community includes ministry leaders, other adults, and young people. In what ways is confirmation ministry crafting a vibrant learning community? What is being learned? By whom?

3. **Context** - Confirmation was once understood as a “marker” and today is seen more as a “bridge.” How is confirmation ministry embodying both in your setting?

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