



Wondering about Confirmation A Five-Minute Devotion

This devotion has been adapted from the 2016 Practice Discipleship Curriculum on *Wonder*. The full session can be downloaded at www.nemnsynod.org/Discipleship or www.practicediscipleship.org

SESSION DESCRIPTION

Confirmation is a ministry with a long history, yet what is the place of confirmation today? This “Wondering about Confirmation” devotion challenges us to think about ways confirmation can continue to be an adaptive and vital congregation ministry in the 21st century.

BIBLICAL FOCUS

Matthew 28:16-22

MATERIALS NEEDED

none

DEVOTION PLAN

A reading from the Gospel of Matthew:

Now the eleven disciples went to Galilee, to the mountain to which Jesus had directed them. When they saw him, they worshipped him; but some doubted. And Jesus came and said to them, ‘All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. Go therefore 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 that I have commanded you. And remember, I am with you always, to the end of the age.’ -Matthew 28:16-22

So often adults’ conversation about confirmation feels like the exchanging of “war stories” about the memorization and recitation of Luther’s Small Catechism, trips or retreats gone awry, and the survival of terrifying interviews with pastors or church councils. Too often confirmation is understood by confirmation students, their families, and congregations as a kind-of graduation in (and from) church. Amid dropping church attendance, declining religious affiliation, and ever-increasing pressure on youth today, we have to wonder, what is the role of confirmation today?

In *Wondering about Confirmation*, Terri Martinson Elton writes,

“Too many confirmation ministries are focused on creating Lutherans. What if we expanded our imagination about confirmation? What if the vision of confirmation was to help people discover a Christian way of life rooted in our baptismal identity?... What is the role of the congregation in affirming youth in Christian faithfulness with an emphasis on lifelong learning and discipleship?”

The ELCA’s definition of confirmation states that “Confirmation ministry is a pastoral and educational ministry of the church that helps the baptized through Word and Sacrament to identify more deeply with the Christian community and participate more fully in its mission.”

From a theological perspective confirmation is not itself a sacrament, but it grows out of our understanding of baptism where God names and claims us as children of God, out of our understanding of a church where God is revealed to us through the means of grace, and out of our understanding of God’s mission in the world.

Historically confirmation is a rich and varied tradition. It has never been *one* thing, but instead has adapted to the needs of the church and context over time. Though this can make confirmation ministry confusing, it is also a gift that grants congregations great freedom.

This freedom is granted to congregations today, too... freedom to rethink the way we understand and lead confirmation. Today the Christian church finds itself in a different place. No longer a central voice within the culture, the Christian church is having to find new ways of being a community and forming faith.

But rather than let these changes and challenges halt our faith formation practices, may they serve as a catalyst for wondering about and rethinking our confirmation ministries. After all, “The Christian life is not about knowledge, rituals, or church membership; it is about loving God and loving our neighbor. Hence, the point of confirmation ministry is living a life of faith based on loving God and loving our neighbor.” As we gather in community around the Word and sacrament and as we are scattered in the world, let us pray:

God of grace, we thank you for the rich theology and varied history of our confirmation traditions. Grant us wisdom and guidance as we wonder about confirmation, rethink and refocus our faith formation practices on loving and following you, and seek ways the church may help people discover a Christian way of life in the 21st century; through Jesus Christ, our Savior and Lord. Amen.



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