

*"The good news about confirmation ministry is that there is no one right way to do it. The major challenge to confirmation ministry is... there is no one right way to do it."...Kathy Christenson*

## **Purpose of Confirmation:**

*"The purpose of confirmation is to enable people to come to a purposeful existence within their faith communities, be motivated toward making life decisions informed by the tenets of their faith, and be encouraged to make a public commitment to discipleship"*

## **FAITH PRACTICES:**

*"The central challenge for ...ministry today concerns the most important mark of good ministry; the ability effectively to mediate faith as an integral way of life to persons, communities, and cultures."...Miroslav Volf*

Shortly (2010) The United Church of Christ will offer a new on-line resource entitled "Faith Practices." An overview of the series can be found at [www.ucc.org/education/practices](http://www.ucc.org/education/practices).

**Confirmation Connection** is intended to provide practical information and resources appropriate for enhancing the confirmation experience with adolescents.

## WHAT WORKS AND WHAT DOESN'T

What works and what doesn't work for confirmation education is a subjective call. It all depends upon one's personal perspective. Despite some common denominators that bind confirmation programs together, each local church savors its uniqueness which the congregations feels is crucial to keep the program vital. For some it's tradition – "We've always done it this way" – that holds priority. These congregations sustain confirmation customs through many generations. Other congregations seem

always in the throws of innovation. If it has been done before, that's reason enough for a change. The focus here is upon the experimental and experiential.

To learn what works and why, it is best to listen to those who teach the program. Success comes packaged differently, but all packages revolve around achieving a single, expected purpose. Gleaned from the many responses we get, the purpose of confirmation education might be summarized in the sidebar: (see Sidebar to left)

In future newsletters in this column we will report on the findings forwarded to us by those in the field actually "doing" confirmation education about what works and what doesn't work. Each article will summarize actual responses from those teaching programs in local congregations. Among the topics to be covered are

[Methods of Instruction](#)

[Use of Mentors](#)

[Teaching Creedal Thinking](#)

[Continuing Confirmation](#)

## IT'S NOT ABOUT JESUS, IT'S WHAT JESUS IS ABOUT

**FAITH PRACTICES.** So what are faith practices? Simply put, they are the ways by which the person of faith puts that faith into practice the same way that a physician puts her medical knowledge into practice. It's more than knowing about Jesus, it's doing what Jesus is about.

Dorothy Bass describes "practices" as "those shared activities that address fundamental human needs and that, woven together, form a way of life." The way of life

embodied by Christian faith practices – prayer, bible study, worship, hospitality, service, generosity, teaching, and mentoring – is a life lived in community.

Learning to practice faith is a fundamental objective of confirmation education. Faith practices are an essential teaching tool for the confirmation educator. "In my view, an essential task of education in faith is to teach all the basic practices of the Christian faith" (Craig Dykstra). Not designed exclusively for confirmation education,

Faith Practices do fit snugly with the purpose of confirmation. Each age appropriate activity engages the student in practicing faith rather than just talking about faith. The activities enable the students to move toward a purposeful existence within their faith communities. They challenge students to examine scripture and make life decisions informed by the tenets of faith. We encourage the use of Faith Practices as a supplementary resource for confirmation education.

*"Mentoring is a brain to pick, an ear to listen, and a push in the right direction."  
... John Crosby*

*"I've learned that people will forget what you said, people will forget what you did, but people will never forget how you made them feel."  
...Maya Angelou*

**A Mentor is Not...**

**... A social worker. But can refer confirmand to those who are.**

**...A fixer. Don't try to change or "make better" the confirmand.**

**...An ATM machine. Give time, support, and friendship, but avoid material things.**

**Key Attitudes**

**Show respect**

**Be Patient**

**Establish Clear Boundaries**

**Be consistent**

**Listen-Pay Attention**

**Recognize growth**

**Don't embarrass**

**Validate feeling**

**Avoid Blame**

# MENTORING – The Confirmation Companion

Mentoring is an experience particularly significant and gratifying to both confirmand and adult mentor. Mentoring is an ancient custom. The original Mentor is a character in Homer's epic poem *The Odyssey*. When Odysseus, King of Ithaca went to fight in the Trojan War, he entrusted the care of his kingdom to Mentor. Mentor served as the teacher and overseer of Odysseus' son, Telemachus.

A mentor is an individual, usually older, always more experienced, who helps and guides another individuals development. Not done for personal gain, the mentor assists the confirmand because of a commitment to the student and the congregation.

Reports from the field indicate that hardly a confirmation program exists

that does not include some sort of mentoring experience. Guidelines for confirmation mentors are often included with the denominational confirmation resources. For those who wish a more in-depth understanding of mentoring for confirmation programs, the following two resources provide excellent assistance:

- **Talk Point's** (Available from Cokesbury) is a program to encourage conversations about faith issues between youth and adult mentors. It utilizes a unique set of "conversations" that highlight faith issues in simple language.
- **Making Disciples : New Approach to Confirmation .**

Designed by William Willimon who uses an "apprenticeship" approach in pairing adult mentors from the congregation with confirmands. He produces a series of learning experiences where both mentors and students are teachers and learners. Elements of the program include a 13 session series consisting of four interrelated resources.- Mentors Guide, Coordinators Guide, Confirmand's Journal, and Mentors Support Journal.

[www.logosproductions.com](http://www.logosproductions.com) 800-328-0200

## Building Healthy Relationships with Adolescents

Remember, you were once an adolescent. Probably had pimples, a fear of the opposite sex, and spent an exorbitant amount of time in front of the mirror. You know how painful it can be. You don't want to go back there and they don't want you to become one of them.

Don't be afraid to be an adult. Adults know how adolescents feel, act, and think. Their need to belong, to fit in, to be accepted is overwhelming. Here are some tips for building healthy, realistic relationships with adolescents.

**Show Respect:** Learn their names. Recognize each person as an individual and don't play favorites.

**Be Patient:** Building trust and rapport takes time. Take clues from their timelines.

**Establish Boundaries:** No need for you to be a best friend. Stay in your role as adult.

**Be Consistent:** Adolescents do best with regular structure. Be consistent with behavior and tolerance.

**Listen:** Pay attention and hear what they are saying

even if you disagree.

**Recognize:** They are growing up in a different era than you

**Don't Embarrass:** Embarrassment is their worst enemy. It debases them. Pull them aside for personal conversations.

**Validate Feelings:** Don't tell them how they should feel. They won't share with you anymore.

**Avoid Blame:** Even when they share some responsibility for problem, avoid hasty blame.

## Loose the Attitude and Enjoy Confirmation<sup>3</sup>

**Confirmation doesn't have to be a chore. It's really an opportunity. If you are a student, take advantage of the experience.**

**Liking confirmation may take some effort. The suggestions to the right are there to help make it a pleasant experience**

**Loose the Attitude:** You don't have to be in confirmation class. It's a choice. It's not a punishment. It's a new experience, so loosen up. Being rude or disrespectful will make a good experience only feel bad.

**Show Appreciation to the Teacher:** Nobody is getting paid to be in confirmation. Leaders volunteer because they enjoy

Young people. So what's wrong with that? You can get to like the leader with a little effort.

**Make New Friends:** You will probably know some of the others in your class, but there will be new people. This is a good time to make some new friends. Maybe you will even learn to appreciate people you didn't think you liked.

**Be Part of the Church:** Your whole congregation thinks you're something special. Maybe you're not, but like a big family, the whole church cares about you. Where else are you accepted that easy?

**You're almost grown:** The congregation accepts you as an adult when you join. That's even before you get your drivers license.

### **"Benign Whateverism" – The demise of adolescent's faith and practice**

At least once every decade, sociologists and others descend upon the adolescent population of America in the hope of ferreting out their views on sex, peers, parental relationships, school, music, politics, and any other cultural phenomenon they deem relevant. Not to be outdone, religious faith and practice is also fair game for the researcher.

A team from the National Study of Youth and Religion (NSYR) recently completed such a survey. The results are published in a book entitled *Soul Searching: The Spiritual Lives of American Teenagers* (Smith and Denton, Oxford University Press, 2005). The results of the study are not pretty. What teens proclaim about their understanding of faith is far from resembling the tenets of the traditional Christian beliefs. Their perceptions of God appear to be simplistic and self-centered. They perceive a God who exists to meet their needs with little emphasis upon serving God. Prayers are presented as petitions seeking God's intervention in assisting teens toward achieving their materialistic goals in life. The phrase "incredibly inarticulate" resonates throughout Smith and Denton's book as that which characterizes the "benign whateverism" of adolescent faith and practice.

For the confirmation educator, reading this book is a must for girding one's self in preparation for working with adolescents. It becomes imperative to understand the real world of teen faith and practice if one holds out hope that this emerging generation will not be a lost Christian witness. If reading the entire study is not feasible, the internet contains many reviews and commentaries worth the time and effort to digest.

### **THE SYMBOLS OF SACRAMENTS - Guiding confirmations students toward understanding Christian symbols**

**"The invention or discovery of symbols is doubtless by far the greatest single event in history of man" John Dewey**

It appears that any controversy surrounding the invitation of the non-confirmed to Holy Communion has been resolved. A few reluctant congregations still suffer heartburn, but most all denominations encourage communion for all who have been baptized regardless of their age or status as members. Baptism is the primary requirement.

Do adolescents understand the full meaning and significance of Communion? Probably not. But neither do most of the adult population. But age is not a requirement for discerning the difference between included and excluded. Neither the Sacrament of Baptism nor Holy Communion should be viewed as a barrier to faith. Rather they should be experienced as pathways to understanding and acceptance.

The Sacrament of Holy Communion relies heavily upon the use of symbols – the bread and the wine. Christian symbolism is the use of actions or objects to point to truths proclaimed by the Christian faith. They act to remind us of those truths or as a way of spiritually connecting with the underlying truth or act.

In the confirmation resources *AFFIRMING FAITH*, the sacraments of baptism and Holy Communion are presented to the confirmand as symbolic acts. The water, the bread, and the wine are acknowledged as significant symbols, but little explanation is provided about the concept of symbols. It is imperative that students have some understanding of the nature and role of symbols if they are to better understand both the symbols of bread and wine as well as the symbolic act of communion.

The following pages present a worksheet for confirmation students to grapple with as an introduction and exploration of the use of symbols as means to express truths. We recommend the use of this worksheet in preparation for the introduction to the sacraments of Baptism and Communion as well as other experiences confirmation students might have with Christian symbols.



### The Barbie Doll Syndrome

Cindy Jackson had a dream for herself, a dream that perhaps many females share. Ever since she was a little girl she admired her Barbie Doll. She thought Barbie was the epitome of how every beautiful girl should look. She wanted to look beautiful too, long-limbed, big busted, small-waisted, with a pert nose, cute face, and long blonde hair.

Cindy's dream of beauty was symbolized by her Barbie Doll. Barbie represented the famine ideal. Cindy Jackson, however, was just an average looking, plain girl from Ohio. But that didn't keep her from dreaming about Barbie's glamorous lifestyle.

As she grew toward adulthood, she inherited a small sum from a relative. This money allowed Cindy to think about her dream. Almost immediately she began to use her new found wealth for numerous plastic surgeries that would eventually transform her into a Barbie look-alike. So far, as much as we can tell, Cindy is happy with her new looks.

Barbie was a powerful symbol for Cindy Jackson, a symbol of her image of what she wanted to look like, and to a certain extent, to be like. It motivated her to action, to effectively change her life almost completely. She aspired to become the person the symbol of Barbie

### Students Book

## SYMBOLS AND SELF-ESTEEM

How symbols help us understand Christian Faith

cultivated in her. Responding to symbols has the power to change a person forever. Cindy is not alone in her attempt to live out her dream.

Cindy's dream may be a bit extreme; but teenagers and adults are like walking advertisements. We purchase tee shirts, hats, pack backs embossed with Nike swoosh symbols, certain types of sneakers endorsed by Shak O'Neil, and sport images of our favorite heavy-metal bands or sports teams all in an effort to symbolize the kind of person or image we think we would like to be like.

### PERSONAL SYMBOL QUIZ

Underline the following "circumstances" that pertain to you:

- I wear my hat backwards
- I only wear one brand of sneakers
- I choose friends by how popular they are
- I let my pants sag and my underwear show
- My cell phone is color-coordinated
- Cheer leaders are the most popular girls in school
- Being a nerd is... just nerdy
- When my parents drive me to school, I ask them to let me off one block before the school
- Being thin is very important

- Only sports jocks get the girls
- I always hug my friends
- Boys read *Seventeen Magazine*
- I never say "Whatever"
- I'm not a member of a clique.
- Prefer internet to TV.

**Now** ...from the list that you underlined, decide what each symbolizes about you and your image of yourself.

### WHAT ARE SYMBOLS AND WHAT DO THEY MEAN?

Symbols can be words or designs or articles that represent ideas, emotions, or experiences. The word *dog* is not a dog, but it reminds us of a dog. We associate the word *dog* with a particular dog or an experience we had with a dog. A four leaf clover is a symbol of good luck. The heart is a symbol of love.

There are other symbols that are easily recognizable. The American flag is a tangible representation of our country. We know that the flag isn't the country, but that it symbolizes what our country stands for. The pledge of allegiance to the flag is not a statement of loyalty to a piece of fabric but of our loyalty to the experience of being an American.

Symbols help people understand the important words someone is saying or writing. Symbols are different than pictures. The meaning of a picture may be unclear while a symbol focuses on a single concept. This means that symbols offer precise information.

*"The invention or discovery of symbols is doubtless by far the greatest single event in the history of man."  
...John Dewey, from *The Quest for Certainty**

### CHRISTIAN SYMBOLS

Communicating our Christian faith depends heavily upon the use of symbols. Jesus often used simple things like coins and nets and sheep to communicate important concepts like integrity, salvation, and resurrection.

The sanctuaries of most churches are filled with Christian symbols.



The Greek letters "alpha" and "omega, the first and last letters in their alphabet remind us that the bible says God is the first and the last.



The butterfly is often used to symbolize the resurrection because the butterfly, like Christ, goes through a transformation (metamorphosis) from appearing to die to coming to life again in a different form.

The Christian symbols we use are not the Christian faith. We don't believe in or have faith in the symbols. Rather, the symbols "point" to a spiritual experience, a reality about God that we have experienced and do believe is the truth.



The empty cross on the altar symbolizes the reality that Jesus was crucified on a cross but is no longer dead. Instead, we believe Jesus rose from the dead and we experience Jesus' presence as living among us.

In the sacrament of Holy Communion, Bread and Wine are used as symbols. What do they symbolize? When we eat the bread and drink the wine, that action is also a symbol. What does the eating and drinking symbolize?

**What Christian symbols mean the most to you? What do they mean? Can you explain their meaning to another person? Do you think that other person understands?**

#### CHRISTIAN GANGS

*Oregon: "Gang-related behavior" is the reason being given for two Albany teenagers who were suspended for wearing crucifixes, which they say were given to them by their mothers. Marco Castro, 16, and Jaime Salazar, 14, ignored orders to remove them.*

*According to Salazar, Principal Chris Equinoa gave the order. Although not banned, he said he can still ask students to hide or remove items he feels have a connection to gangs. A local church said they've heard no reports of crucifixes used by gangs.*

*Nearby towns say they have dealt with this for years, and say it could indicate their spread. Familiar with gangs, Equinoa used to work in Southern*

*California schools, and said "We don't want to see it get to that point."*

Source: [www.komob.com](http://www.komob.com)

#### YOUR RESPONSE

- Do you think these students should not wear their crucifixes in school?
- Is being a Christian being part of a gang?
- How powerful is the symbol of a cross for you?
- What does the cross symbolize for you?

#### CHRISTIAN PEP RALLY

More than 22,000 evangelical teenagers prayed, sang and screamed at AT&T Park today during BattleCry - a mix of pep rally, rock concert and church service.

"We're all wrapped-up in Noah's Rainbow, as a symbol of God's promise to find new and exciting ways to kill us all next time. Drowning is so 2448 BC."

...source :

[www.democraticunderground.com](http://www.democraticunderground.com)

- Does dressing yourself in a Christian symbol make you more faithful?
- What Christian symbols do you wear? Why?



**Leaders Guide**  
**SYMBOLS FOR SENIOR HIGH'S**

Introducing Christian Symbols to help in Faith Formation

## INTRODUCTION

*A teacher told her students in her class to bring a symbol of their religion for show and tell. And so they did*

*The first student said, "I'm Catholic and this is a crucifix."*

*The second student said, "I'm Jewish and this is a Star of David."*

*The third student said, "I'm Lutheran and this is a casserole."  
...Anonymous.*

The voice on the other end of the phone was pleasant, almost sweet. Clearly her accent gave her away. I could tell immediately she was from Alabama.

"Hi there, Ya'll doing okay today?" She waited for my reply.

"Just fine," I replied. "And how are you?"

"My name is Dee Dee," she told me

## SESSION AT A GLANCE

### **Arriving**

Page of symbols

### **Gathering**

Personal symbols

### **Opening**

Matthew 16: 10-11 activity

### **Exploring**

Sanctuary scavenger hunt

### **Responding**

Symbols feedback

### **Closing**

Meditation

### **Alternative Teaching Activities**

Symbols Quiz Show

Wedding ring symbol

"and I'm calling from the Miraculous Gospel Tee Shirt Ministry. We're located in Alabama. Are you the pastor?"

I assured her that I was but suspected she would keep talking even if I wasn't the pastor.