

Concordia Theological Monthly



AUGUST

• 1951

BRIEF STUDIES

MANUAL FOR THE CONFIRMATION INSTRUCTION OF CHILDREN

In the last few years a number of surveys were made to determine the *status quo* of confirmation instruction for children in the Missouri Synod.¹ The studies clearly indicated that there was a wide divergence in practice, a great degree of aimlessness, that a number of areas of Christian life were frequently overlooked, and that, in some instances at least, unwholesome practices were beginning to manifest themselves. It became quite clear from the surveys that many pastors welcomed suggestions which might assist them in making this important phase of Christian education more effective. At the suggestion of the Superintendents' Conference the Board for Parish Education gave some consideration to this area of Christian education. Efforts were made to get an author to prepare a service manual, but thus far the Board has not met with success. In order that the matter might not be further delayed, the undersigned was asked to prepare an outline for such a proposed manual for confirmation instruction, with the hope that some of the thinking might be crystallized. The outline with additional comments was submitted to the Board in its plenary session on May 19, 1951. That the church at large might share in the initial plans of the study, it was suggested that the report be submitted to the *CONCORDIA THEOLOGICAL MONTHLY*. It is earnestly hoped that the publication of this outline will prompt frank criticism and suggestions so that any manual which will finally be produced will meet the actual needs of today's ministry.

Manual for Confirmation Instruction

- I. The Historic Background for Confirmation Instruction
- II. The Place of Confirmation Instruction in the Church Today
- III. The Pupil
- IV. The Objectives for Confirmation Instruction
- V. The Curricular Material

¹ Studies more generally known were made by Dr. H. H. Harms (Synod-wide sampling), Secretary H. H. Koppelman (Central Illinois District), Professor Arthur C. Repp (St. Louis area), and Rev. Robert Koehler (St. Paul, Minn.).

- VI. Planning the Course
- VII. Teaching Methods (1)
- VIII. Teaching Methods (2) — Activities
- IX. The Examinations
- X. The Administration of the Class
- XI. Home and Church Work Together
- XII. The Instruction in Relation to the Total Program
- XIII. Physical Equipment
- XIV. Special Problems
- XV. Keeping Up the Contacts (Post-Confirmation)
- XVI. Standards (Check List)

I. The Historic Background for Confirmation Instruction

Since much of what we are doing today has been borrowed from the past, it will be necessary to consider briefly the various trends which have been apparent in the history of confirmation instruction within the Lutheran Church. Such a review will indicate that through the years different emphases have been made. At times the emphasis was placed on Baptism so that the rite of confirmation became for the candidate a confirming of the promise made for him by his sponsors. The instruction preceding the rite enabled the child to make the promise with an appreciation of its meaning. At other times the emphasis was placed on the instruction itself rather than upon the rite. Thus the year or two spent with the pastor was chiefly a period of concentrated instruction. Others have placed the chief emphasis of the instruction on preparing the catechumens for partaking of the Lord's Supper, and everything else became incidental to this one purpose. Strangely enough, there have even been some who have regarded this instruction as a preparation for church membership and have thereby given the rite of confirmation an importance all out of proportion to its true meaning. Regardless of the emphasis given, the rite of confirmation was frequently overemphasized at the expense of the instruction. Where the instruction received the emphasis, perhaps because of it, the impression was often left that Christian education could safely end with confirmation.

A review of these emphases or their combinations should help clarify what the church should attempt to do through its confirmation instruction and what importance should actually be given to the rite itself.

II. The Place of Confirmation Instruction in the Church Today

Confirmation instruction enjoys an important place in the Lutheran Church today. It is the common experience of every Lutheran communicant and has undoubtedly helped to give the church an indoctrinated laity. This practice has been attended by divine blessings which dare not be minimized.

On the other hand the kind of instruction which the children have received has not been without its very serious faults. The aimlessness of much instruction has contributed to its weaknesses. Wrong emphases have left the impression that confirmation was terminal. This fact has seriously handicapped our Bible classes and personal Bible study. The stress on the intellectual, especially the mistake of identifying doctrinal knowledge with Christianity, has at times been almost tragic. The failure to reach the inner life of the child through functional teaching has had a negative effect. Too often the children have also received the impression that confirmation instruction was simply preparing them for adult life instead of meeting their immediate needs as Christians. As a result they frequently failed to see the relevancy of much of what was being taught. Not the least of the weaknesses of our confirmation instruction has been the overemphasis of the Catechism in place of the divine Book itself.

This chapter should conclude with a statement concerning the place of confirmation instruction in the educational program of the Church and especially in the life of those who are being instructed.

III. The Pupil

Before the instructor can formulate his objectives, it will be necessary to consider the capacities and needs of the pupil in whom he hopes to bring about a change. Where such needs and capacities have been given consideration, it seems to be a common assumption that the confirmands are adolescents. However, since the average pupil is only about fourteen when he is confirmed, very few in the class, if any, are adolescents during the time of the instruction. For some this is the period of puberty, and for others it is still the time of childhood. Hence several basic teaching problems become apparent even to the most casual observer. This chapter should devote some space, therefore, to the capacities, needs, and general interests of the average pupil in this age.

While some may welcome a discussion on the advisability of postponing confirmation instruction for a few years, perhaps toward the end of the high school age, under present circumstances such a

presentation would be purely academic and should perhaps not be included in the proposed manual.

This chapter might well include a section on the educational, social, economic, and religious influences which play an important role in the lives of the pupils and which are reflected in a teaching situation.

IV. The Objectives for Confirmation Instruction

As every congregation should have a clearly defined set of objectives for its program of parish education, so the instructor for the junior confirmation class must set up aims for his instruction.² These aims must be under the framework of the parish objectives and certainly distinct from that of any other educational agency in the congregation. They should be drawn up with particular reference to the pupil in order to help him to meet the Scriptural truths at his level. In many instances the implied or formulated objectives try to prepare a child for adult Christianity. This concept has strengthened the idea that confirmation is terminal and has often been predicated upon the assumption that this is our last chance to instruct the individual. It seems that in the majority of cases the catechumen has taken us up on this assumption and therefore sees no need to continue his study of the Scriptural truths. Unfortunately much of the instruction was irrelevant and therefore meaningless to him at the time that he was a catechumen. Because he could not relate it in his youth, he has lost it for adulthood. Thus we have failed him in two ways: leaving him with the impression that confirmation was the end of instruction and, in trying to prepare him for adulthood, neglected to make Christianity relevant for his youth.

V. The Curricular Material

This chapter might begin with a brief reminder that the curriculum of any class or school is not limited to the books or the course outlines, but includes all the experiences which the class has under the direction of the teacher. This includes not only what the instructor says, but also what he is and what attitude he shows. The atmosphere created by the physical surroundings also play an important part in the curriculum. In fact, the curriculum includes even the attitude which the congregation shows toward this instruction and the attention it gives to it.

Consideration should be given to the primary importance of the

² Cf. Arthur C. Repp, "Objectives of Parish Education," *CONCORDIA THEOLOGICAL MONTHLY*, July, 1948.

Bible, the Catechism, and the *Lutheran Hymnal* as curricular material. Such supplementary material as a good concordance, the stewardship and mission booklets prepared from time to time, the *Lutheran Witness, This Day*, the *Walther League Messenger*, etc., should be discussed. The use of workbook material and other catechetical helps will be considered in this chapter.

VI. *Planning the Course*

The material as it is set forth in the Catechism has usually determined the outline of the course. This procedure, however, may be questioned, since the order does not appear to be the best one psychologically. The explanation to the Catechism begins with the study of the Bible, and logically much can be said in favor of this order. However, it may be better to begin with the Law, as Luther did, or with the doctrine of God, or with the doctrine of Christ. If the course begins with the Law, its purpose would be to sharpen the concept of sin and God's wrath. This would cause the class to feel the need for the Gospel. Very likely the Ten Commandments would be studied in detail in connection with the Third Article. The outline may also begin with the doctrine of God: God as revealed in nature (natural knowledge) and as He is revealed in the Holy Scriptures. Where children have had a fair knowledge of the Christian truths either through the parochial school or the pre-confirmation class, it may be advisable to begin with the Gospel. The Law in such a case would be taught chiefly as a rule according to which the new man lives. The chapter should suggest various outlines.

It is understood that such material usually found in the explanation of the Catechism as is not appropriate to the capacities of the pupil or which does not meet the objectives set forth would be omitted.

VII. *Teaching Methods (1)*

At least two chapters should be devoted to teaching methods. This section might be opened with a brief statement on the real meaning of teaching with special references to religion. It will be pointed out that while the basic doctrinal facts are essential in confirmation instruction, it is equally important that such facts be made meaningful and functional during the teaching process.

The basic principles of at least two methods should be discussed and illustrated. One of these might be the inductive catechetical method. According to this method, the class does not begin with the Catechism theses but with the Bible, from which the pupils are taught to draw the correct doctrinal truths and to apply them to their world

of now. This procedure should help to make Bible-searching Christians rather than Catechism assenters.

A second method which might be demonstrated is the unit method which is based on major areas of Scriptural truths. While this method is quite difficult to plan, it is easily made functional.

It has been suggested that a companion volume be written in which an entire course for confirmation instruction is worked out according to one or both of these methods. Though such a book would undoubtedly prove useful, it might also have the tendency to stereotype confirmation instruction. After all, classes and parishes differ, and a complete set of lesson plans tends to become inflexible. Perhaps it will be sufficient simply to explain one or two methods and to illustrate them with a few sample lesson plans.

VIII. Teaching Methods (2) — Activities

The second chapter would probably be devoted to memory work, its advantages and limitations for the young Christian. Here, too, some specific aids to memory work should be reviewed, and definite suggestions should be given how memory work can be related to life problems.

Various types of activities which can be used during confirmation instruction might be enumerated, especially such as are related to prayer and worship, stewardship life, evangelism, and the church at work. The use of sensory material will be given important consideration. Such a section will not be limited to movies and other projected pictures, but will include the use of maps, field trips, flat pictures, and the like.

IX. The Examinations

Here thought might be given to the purposes which prompt us to examine the class and what we hope to accomplish thereby. The discussion of this chapter would center in the daily unit and the final examinations. The public examination for confirmation might also be given some study, together with pertinent suggestions, to make this more meaningful and interesting to the congregation.

X. The Administration of the Class

Generally little concern has been shown for the administration of confirmation instruction. Yet the relationship of this phase of Christian education to the congregation, to the elders, and to the Board of Education should receive some thought. The chapter would also include such topics as the class period, the frequency of the instruction, and the recruitment and enrollment procedures.

XI. Home and Church Work Together

It is a deplorable fact that even Christian homes are not showing the expected interest in their children during confirmation instruction. Perhaps the church should re-emphasize the fact that the home has the primary responsibility in the education of the children and that the church has no intention of replacing the home. But the home needs help from the church in seeing its responsibility. Hence this section should show how home and church might work together in a mutual understanding of the objectives, the work that the children are expected to do, the schedule, etc. Emphasis will be given to the importance of the personal visit to every home before confirmation instruction begins.

It must not be forgotten that the Lord has also given the church a responsibility regardless of the home's attitude. Confirmation has been established to help edify the church and extend the Kingdom of God. Hence the church must not only look for co-operation with the home, but must do everything in its power to win it; and failing to do so, it must plan accordingly.

XII. The Instruction in Relation to the Total Program

Confirmation instruction must not be isolated from the rest of the church's work. Hence a chapter will be needed to indicate how this phase of Christian education is a part of the total program. Suggestions for weaving in the divine services will be in place. Some space will be given to the co-ordination of the Sunday school and parochial school with the instruction and to showing how the Bible class is expected to continue the instruction throughout life.

The pastor's relation to the individual in the class will receive some emphasis.

The instruction preparing for confirmation should also instill a loyalty to the Lutheran Church. Hence the relationship of the individual to his congregation, Synod, and the body of all believers will be pointed out.

XIII. Physical Equipment

More and more congregations are providing special rooms for confirmation instruction. Where such provisions have been made, a sharing of experiences should prove helpful. Suggestions from readers how to create a more devotional atmosphere will be profitable. Various teaching equipment might be given some space.

XIV. Special Problems

As a sort of miscellaneous chapter this section will include such problems as arise when there are parochial school and Sunday school children within the same congregation. The specific problems of the rural and the urban churches will need some attention. The administration problems which appear when there are consolidated public schools, making scheduling difficult, must be met. The integration of the parochial school with, and its potentialities for, confirmation instruction present the pastor with opportunities which should be accepted.

XV. Keeping up the Contacts (Post Confirmation)

While a special effort must constantly be made to prevent the congregation, and particularly the children, from clinging to the idea that confirmation is terminal, specific thought should be given to the attainment of this objective. During the course of instruction the pupil should be prepared to look forward to the junior Bible class and the Walther League for continued instruction and service. The catechumen should be drawn into the work of the church through specific tasks as early as possible so that the transition to active church life is natural and effective. Too often the majority of the young people drift along without any definite part in the work of the church until they become old enough for voting membership.

XVI. Standards (Check List)

The manual might conclude with a check list enabling the pastor to compare his results with acceptable standards and so be alerted for continuous improvement.

Obviously this tentative outline for a manual for confirmation instruction will require further study. Pastors and teachers are urged to communicate with the writer in order that the widest amount of experience may be drawn in. Any course outlines, teaching or administrative helps, and general comments will be greatly appreciated. All correspondence and material will be shared with the eventual writer of the manual.

ARTHUR C. REPP