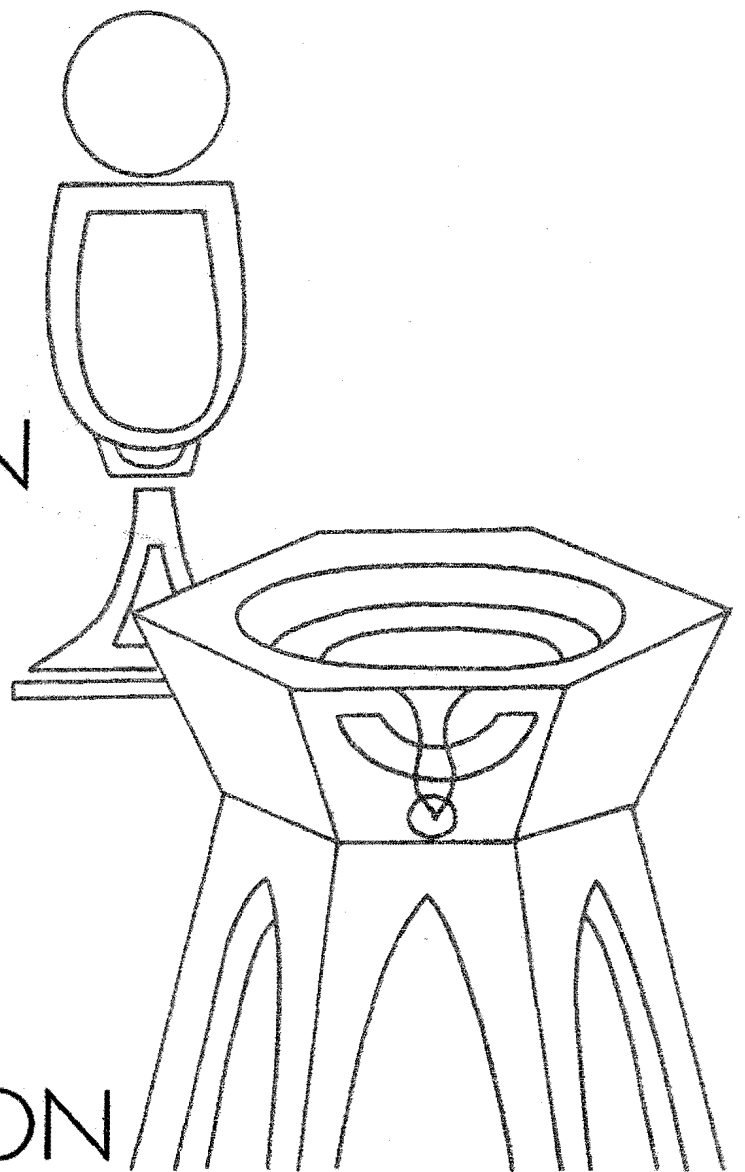


THE  
REPORT  
OF  
THE  
JOINT  
COMMISSION  
ON  
THE  
THEOLOGY  
AND  
PRACTICE  
OF  
CONFIRMATION



A REPORT FOR CONSIDERATION  
BY THE LUTHERAN CHURCH BODIES

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THE REPORT  
of the  
JOINT COMMISSION ON THE THEOLOGY AND PRACTICE OF CONFIRMATION  
to the  
HONORABLE PRESIDENTS  
of  
THE AMERICAN LUTHERAN CHURCH  
LUTHERAN CHURCH IN AMERICA  
and  
THE LUTHERAN CHURCH--MISSOURI SYNOD

March 7, 1970

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## I. THE LUTHERAN CHURCHES RECONSIDER THEIR THEOLOGY AND PRACTICE OF CONFIRMATION

The Lutheran churches in North America have, from the outset, regarded confirmation to be a focal point in their life style. The confirmation rite and the pastor's instructional program leading to it have been central in the life of the congregation; but at the same time they have been separated from it. Confirmation classes and confirmation day have been central because they have been regarded as rites of passage that every Lutheran (and Lutheran pastor) has had to go through to make possible a fully recognized belonging in the congregation. But confirmation classes and confirmation day have also been separated from the rest of life in the congregation--because the instructional program has most often been independent from other educational ministries and because confirmation day has been widely accepted as graduation from regular participation in educational programs of the church.

For many years discomfort with the practice of confirmation has resulted in a variety of concerns, voiced by individuals and by groups:

- Is it wise to withhold Communion from children?
- Is confirmation day properly linked to other celebrations in the congregation?
- Why is there such a severe dropout rate after confirmation?
- How could congregations achieve a greater uniformity of purpose and practice?
- Is the entire constellation of functions and events associated with confirmation the best way for conceiving of an educational ministry to children and youth in our time?

Study papers have been read in meetings of pastors, articles have appeared in church publications, resolutions have been voted in conventions, referrals have been made to boards. Because of the mobility of the population and the growing cooperation among the three main Lutheran bodies, it has been generally felt highly desirable for Lutherans to study and plan jointly with the hope that any changes in practice might be undertaken mutually.

The Joint Commission on the  
Theology and Practice of Confirmation

Responding to an invitation from the Lutheran Church in America, The American Lutheran Church and The Lutheran Church--Missouri Synod agreed to participate in a joint study on the theology and practice of confirmation. The three Presidents each appointed five men to establish in 1964 a Joint Commission including theologians, parish pastors, educators, liturgiologists, and administrators. The following members were named:

The American Lutheran Church

Reverend Herbert Brokering  
Dr. C. Richard Evenson  
Reverend A. L. Hock  
Dr. Theodore Liefeld  
Dr. Alton S. Rogness

Lutheran Church in America

Dr. Francis Gamelin  
Dr. W. Kent Gilbert  
Dr. Martin J. Heinecken  
Dr. Edward T. Horn, III  
Dr. Robert J. Marshall

The Lutheran Church--Missouri Synod

Mr. Herbert Garske  
Reverend Arnold Heumann  
Dr. Alvin W. Mueller  
Professor Daniel E. Poellot  
Dr. Arthur C. Repp

In 1965 Dr. Arthur Miller was named to replace Mr. Herbert Garske, who had asked to be relieved, and in 1969 Reverend Frank Klos was appointed as a regular member of the Commission in place of Dr. Robert Marshall when he was elected President of the Lutheran Church in America.

The Commission was called upon to examine the theological, historical, and practical aspects of confirmation practices and to make recommendations to the church bodies for a uniform practice suitable in North America at the present time.

The Commission was authorized to provide studies to the church, recommend actions establishing basic polity, and point out implications for various aspects of church life. If a church body should resolve to enact the recommendations of the Commission, it would then also properly refer to appropriate boards and commissions the tasks of providing implementing programs and supporting materials.

The Work of the Commission: 1964-1967

From the outset, the Commission recognized that its work must deal with practices which have, in a wide variety of ways, been deeply meaningful to many people and that the Commission must study with care before it could recommend any changes. The Commission also recognized that recommending definitions and practices for our present life together should not be regarded as judging other definitions or practices to be wrong for other times or people.

At its first meeting in September, 1964, the Commission agreed to undertake studies as follows:

- A. History
- B. The Current Situation
  - 1. In the Lutheran church
  - 2. In other churches
  - 3. The sociological situation
  - 4. The psychological development
- C. Theology
  - 1. Confirmation and the Word
  - 2. Confirmation and Baptism
  - 3. Confirmation and absolution
  - 4. Confirmation and Holy Communion
  - 5. Confirmation and the church
- D. Definition of Confirmation
- E. The Practice of Confirmation
  - 1. Christian education
    - a. The catechumenate
    - b. Catechetical instruction
  - 2. Liturgical acts
- F. Steps Toward a Better Understanding
  - 1. For the clergy
  - 2. For the laity

In 1966 the Joint Commission undertook a survey: Current Concepts and Practices of Confirmation in Lutheran Churches. The questionnaire used in the survey was sent to 538 parish pastors, 291 non-parish pastors and 2,152 lay leaders in the congregations. The percentage of questionnaires returned was 81 percent from the pastors and 52 percent from the lay leaders.

The survey showed that the concepts of confirmation most generally held by both pastors and lay leaders were:

- a renewing of one's baptismal covenant;
- a personal confession of the faith confessed by one's sponsors;
- a public affirmation of one's faith;
- the making of a lifelong commitment to Christ;
- a taking on of increased responsibilities as a member of the church;



--a necessary prerequisite for receiving Holy Communion.

The survey showed Grade 8.4 to be the average time for the confirmation rite, but a general feeling among both pastors and lay leaders that the age should be higher. Further, the majority of pastors and lay leaders favored the establishment of a uniform practice with regard to an age for the confirmation rite.

While most lay leaders and pastors were ready to consider admission to Holy Communion at an earlier age, they were not favorable toward admitting children to Holy Communion before the confirmation rite. The main reasons for this were: (a) concern for proper preparation for knowledgeable and salutary use of the Lord's Supper, and (b) confusion between confirmation as a rite occurring at a single point in time and confirmation as an instructional process during the years just prior to the rite.

With regard to the meaning of confirmation for adults in the congregation, most lay leaders and pastors focused on reminders of their own personal commitment to Christ and their own responsibilities in the church rather than on their view of the youth and assisting them in their needs.

In studying the results of the survey the Commission found such a wide divergence between the understandings and practices reported and the emphases appearing in its theological studies that it decided to call for an extensive program of study throughout all congregations of the church bodies involved. It was felt that the issues to be considered should include:

- whether there is some biblical or "correct" understanding of confirmation that must be regarded as normative for any decision to be made by the church;
- what the appropriate relationships among Baptism, the fellowship of believers, the church's teaching ministry, Holy Communion, and participation in the mission of the church ought rightly to be;
- what the consideration of the issues related to confirmation might imply for the overall shape of the church's ministry to children and youth;
- what the central purpose of confirmation in the life of the congregation should be.

In December, 1967, after eleven meetings, the Joint Commission completed a Report for Study and recommended to the Presidents of the church bodies that they provide for authorization of a church-wide program of study to be carried out under the direction of the Boards of Parish Education in 1969.

The Church-Wide Study Program: 1969

The Commission's editorial committee, consisting of the three Executive Secretaries of Parish Education, requested Reverend Frank Klos, who had functioned as recorder of the Joint Commission, to prepare a study book and discussion plan subsequently titled Confirmation and First Communion.

In January, 1969, the three church bodies separately initiated extensive efforts to provide every pastor with a copy of Confirmation and First Communion, with firsthand information from a member of the Commission, with opportunity to discuss the Report for Study with his colleagues, with some preparation for conducting studies by groups of leaders in his congregation, and with instructions for reporting the results of the studies to the Joint Commission.

More than 192,000 copies of Confirmation and First Communion were distributed. Reports from groups representing more than 86,000 participants in study groups were received and analyzed. The reporting groups represented 24.2 percent of all congregations in The American Lutheran Church, the Lutheran Church in America, The Lutheran Church--Missouri Synod, and the Evangelical Lutheran Church of Canada.

In addition, more than 250 letters from individuals and various types of groups were received by the Commission. The letters were read and their contents categorized by the researchers, and were further read by members of the Commission to provide them with opportunity for direct consideration of the statements submitted.

A Report on the Study of Confirmation and First Communion by Lutheran Congregations, prepared for the Commission following the 1969 church-wide study, showed much more agreement with the recommendations of the Commission than disagreement.

In 1966 very few pastors or lay leaders selected "identify with the mature congregation" as the primary role of the youth in confirmation. But in 1969 the most selected "central purpose of confirmation" was "identify with the adult Christian community." Additional data indicated much disapproval of including the term "adult" in the statement.

When asked to indicate the elements they considered essential to the process of accomplishing the central purpose of confirmation, the 171,147 responses (each person could check more than one element) overwhelmingly agreed with the elements as proposed by the Commission: a program of instruction, an ongoing pastoral ministry to young people, testimony of faith in Christ, a public ceremony or rite.

The most generally stated time for a confirmation rite was Grade 10, and for admission to Holy Communion, Grade 5. Further, the study showed 83.3 percent agreeing that it is desirable to have uniformity on matters of age in regard to confirmation and first Communion.

A key item in the study was a yes or no answer to the statement: "Admission to the Lord's Supper should come at an earlier age than the rite of confirmation." In the 1966 survey only 12.8 percent of the lay leaders and 38.1 percent of the parish pastors answered "yes" to this question. In 1969 the reports from participants in the church-wide study showed 50.8 percent of the laymen and pastors answering "yes" to the question. If the "uncertain" responses were distributed proportionately, the number agreeing would be an impressive 73 percent. Positive responses were related principally to pastoral concern for the child and to doctrinal beliefs. Negative responses were linked primarily with adherence to a strong sense of tradition in the congregation.

Of particular interest was a special study of 175 congregations whose leaders had participated in the 1966 survey and had also participated in the 1969 study on confirmation and first Communion. Replies were received from 1,493 individuals who took part in both efforts. Their selection of the central purpose of confirmation changed significantly, with 35 percent more agreeing with the Commission after the study process than before. Two large shifts showed up in their opinions on elements essential to the accomplishment of the central purpose-- a sharp drop in the number who selected "admission to the Lord's Supper following the ceremony or rite of confirmation," and an even sharper increase in the number who selected an "on-going pastoral ministry to young people."

It is clear that the opinions of many people were changed by the church-wide study of confirmation and first Communion. The Commission also found that some of its own viewpoints were changed and its thinking clarified as a result of the reports from study groups. In reexamining its statements and in preparing its Report to the church bodies the Commission has been guided by the results of the study program in correcting many ambiguities and in clarifying the proposed definitions, emphases, and practices in all the sections of its Report.

The Report of the Commission: 1970

The Report of the Commission is submitted for consideration and action by the Lutheran church bodies. If it is adopted by the several church bodies, it is the hope of the Commission that appropriate attention to uniform rites among Lutherans will be made by the Intersynodical Lutheran Commission on Worship, with which the Joint Commission on the Theology and Practice of Confirmation has been in some contact; and that the appropriate officers of the church bodies may confer to develop proposals for a uniform usage of terminology and designation of church membership.

The Report of the Commission has implications for the congregation to reevaluate its present concepts and practices in its entire ministry to children and youth, and to call that entire ministry "confirmation."

## II. THE HISTORY OF CONFIRMATION IN THE LUTHERAN CHURCH

It is generally agreed that the current problems facing the Lutheran church in reference to confirmation are deeply rooted in its history. Since confirmation, unlike Baptism and the Lord's Supper, lacks scriptural authority and is a practice that has arisen in connection with the observance of the sacraments, its tradition has developed as needs and conditions have changed. This was particularly true of the Lutheran church, which had rejected the practice current in the sixteenth century and yet had difficulty in agreeing whether a substitute for confirmation was needed and what its function and form should be.

Confirmation has been correctly described as one of the unsolved problems of the Lutheran church, lacking both a consistent approach and a universally accepted definition. The judgment expressed in the report to the Helsinki Assembly of the Lutheran World Federation (p. 18), "that the whole problem of confirmation must be discussed thoroughly in the light of its historical development," requires thoughtful attention. If the Lutheran church is seriously concerned with a reconstruction of the confirmation practice, it must study its history in order to understand the rationale behind present-day practices and be prepared to examine them in the light of its theology and current needs.

### Confirmation Prior to the Reformation

Lutheran confirmation has usually, though not necessarily, been associated with both sacraments. As far as its relation to Baptism is concerned, Lutheran confirmation traces its heritage directly to the early church where confirmation was part of the initiation rite. Insofar as

the practice is associated with the Lord's Supper, it has only little in common with confirmation as it was practiced in the early church and as it was found later in the Greek Orthodox and the Roman Catholic churches.

The rite for the sacrament of initiation in the early church developed in separate ways in the East and the West. In the East initiation rites were developed after instruction and prior to Baptism, which included a renunciation, a vow of obedience to Christ, a confession of faith, and the anointing on the forehead. In the West the anointing usually followed Baptism as a sign of "sealing" and of "confirmation" connected with the confession of faith. A remnant of this early practice of confirmation has survived in liturgical form in the present postbaptismal prayer still in use among some Lutherans. In both the East and the West, participation in Holy Communion was the concluding event in the initiation rite. When infant Baptism became more general, the church continued for some time to include infants in the celebration of the Eucharist.

With the growth of the Christian church, especially with the universal practice of infant Baptism, emphasis began to be placed on postbaptismal instruction in the West. The right to baptize was delegated by the bishop to the priest. This in time permitted confirmation and, with it, the baptismal Eucharist to be separated from the initiation rite. Where the Roman liturgy came into use, Baptism and confirmation gradually became distinct and separate rites. Confirmation came to be regarded as a complement to Baptism, at first as an added gift of the Spirit and later as necessary for salvation.

As early as the first half of the twelfth century confirmation was

referred to as a sacrament, and at the Council of Florence in 1439 it was declared to be a sacrament. The Council of Trent in 1547 fixed this as a doctrine, affirming confirmation to be a sacrament, effective through the act performed not necessarily associated with a period of instruction. The council fixed the age for the confirmation observance at some time between the seventh and the twelfth years.

Concurrently, a second view, which regarded confirmation as catechetical, became prevalent in the West. Accordingly, the confirmation rite marked the close of the catechumenate and the acceptance of the individual into the worshiping congregation. This was the view of Erasmus and was adopted by the Bohemian Brethren. The catechetical emphasis receded in Roman Catholic circles after the Council of Trent had fixed the doctrine and condemned as heretical the Lutheran and Reformed substitutions with their emphasis on instruction.

#### In the Sixteenth Century

The Roman concept of the sacrament of confirmation as a supplement to Baptism, conferring grace and the added gift of the Spirit, was vehemently rejected by Luther, Melanchthon, and the Lutheran Confessions, as well as by Calvin. The Reformers regarded the Roman confirmation as a blasphemous abridgment of Baptism.

#### Luther

In spite of Luther's strong criticism of the Roman confirmation, he was not opposed to a restructured confirmation along scripturally sound lines as were some leaders in the Reformation movement. Luther was not, however, personally interested in reforming medieval confirmation and



therefore he did not directly contribute to the development of a substitute. Because of his high regard for Holy Baptism and the Lord's Supper, Luther did stress the element of instruction in connection with both sacraments. The importance he attributed to confession and absolution underscored his concern for a proper preparation for the Lord's Supper. This emphasis became the first step toward a restructured confirmation that later was associated not merely with Baptism but also with the Lord's Supper. The need for religious instruction rising out of both sacraments was appreciated by all evangelicals and created a natural situation that in time led to a Lutheran type of confirmation practice. In most instances, however, Lutherans were not consciously developing a new kind of confirmation. In fact, the very name confirmation was long regarded as a Romanizing offense. The gradual development of a restructured confirmation that began in the sixteenth century followed no uniform pattern, and it is for this reason that we find no consistent approach today.

#### The Development of a Lutheran Practice

Out of the tangled mass of influences and counter-influences that affected the practice of confirmation, six major emphases may be discerned in its gradual development: catechetical, hierarchical, sacramental, traditional, pietistic, and rationalistic. The first four made their appearance during the sixteenth century, the latter two in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. When speaking of six emphases, there is the risk of oversimplification. One must understand that these types were rarely found in their pure form. Several strands may often be detected in a single rite. In the latter part of the nineteenth century and par-

ticularly in the twentieth, it is not unusual to find the impact that four or even five may have had on a particular area. This is true especially in the United States.

The so-called catechetical type of confirmation in its initial stage was actually only a prototype of confirmation, for there was no conscious thought of developing the practice. The catechetical type grew out of the need for instruction and preparation for the Lord's Supper, though not necessarily limited to those preparing for first Communion. No formal rite was necessarily associated with the practice at first, though a simple ceremony might be performed when it marked the occasion for first Communion. The ceremony was usually limited to an intercession on the part of the congregation, led by the pastor. This type of "confirmation" was the most common form in the Lutheran church during its first 150 years, particularly among the Scandinavians and most of the extremely orthodox Lutheran group of Germany.

The hierarchical<sup>1</sup> type of confirmation had its origin with Martin Bucer, who introduced it in the Hessian churches in 1538--39 through the Ziegenhain Order of Church Discipline. He combined the pedagogical and subjective concerns of Erasmus with the disciplinary pastoral emphasis of Luther in a type of confirmation that became most familiar in the Lutheran church. In many respects Bucer may actually be regarded as the father of Lutheran confirmation. Bucer's form has been referred to as hierarchical because he introduced a vow wherein the child pledged to surrender himself to Christ and submit himself to the discipline of the church. With this emphasis a subjective element was introduced through the rite.

<sup>1</sup>The term hierarchical is used in its elementary sense to denote the rule of the parish clergy in a local congregation.

The sacramental tendency appeared usually with some other type of confirmation rite. It placed the emphasis on the laying on of hands, often with a sacramental interpretation. Bucer's ambiguous wording in the Hessian rite offered the occasion to interpret the laying on of hands as an actual imparting of the Holy Spirit. Though this interpretation was not widely accepted, the sacramental element continued to be felt in different parts of the Lutheran church.

Because of the disciplinary emphasis Bucer placed on confirmation, it became necessary to emphasize in the confirmation rite that the confirmand placed himself under the church's discipline and that confirmation marked the beginning of his membership in the church. While originally this was intended to mean the church as an organization, confirmation was often associated in the minds of both the clergy and the laity as marking the beginning of membership in the Christian church. This gave the rite a sacramental overtone that has not been lost.

Occasionally, efforts were made to retain the traditional form of confirmation without the Roman Catholic abuses. Accordingly, the confirmation observance was practiced independently of the Lord's Supper, with first Communion occurring some time later--anywhere from a few weeks to several months. In the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, where the traditional type was practiced, first Communion might be postponed for as much as one or two years. The traditional form of the confirmation rite emphasized the laying on of hands and the instruction that preceded it. The Brandenburg Church Order of 1540 is an early example. This type of observance was commonly practiced in Pomerania as early as 1545 and, in some instances, as late as the middle of the nineteenth century. It was

vehemently opposed as Romanizing, especially after the Leipzig Interim in 1548 during which an attempt was made to force Lutherans to conform to the Roman Catholic sacrament of confirmation.

In recent years modifications of the traditional type have been incorporated in some of the changes proposed among Lutherans.

#### Areas of Agreement

A study of the varying practices of confirmation in the sixteenth century among Lutherans permits very few generalizations except when stated in very broad terms. Regardless of the type of confirmation practice in vogue, there was general agreement in a number of areas:

- (a) There was universal rejection of the Roman Catholic doctrine of confirmation as a sacrament supplementing Holy Baptism.
- (b) All Lutheran confirmation forms either assumed or specified Christian instruction before a catechumen was presented for confirmation or first Communion.
- (c) Except in the case of the traditional type of confirmation, Lutheran practice was associated directly with both sacraments.
- (d) The usual age of the catechumen at the time of his first Communion was quite early when compared with present-day practice. In fact, age was not regarded as important, since the major criterion was the catechumen's readiness to partake of the Lord's Supper. In practice, the age was rarely higher than twelve.

#### In the Next Three Centuries

The four types of confirmation practices originating in the sixteenth century continued during the period of Orthodoxy, though the development of a practice with a distinct rite attached to it was slowed down consider-

ably in most Lutheran churches. Parish life in Germany generally declined during this time due to the ravages of the Thirty Years War, the French invasion, and the losses effected by the Counter-Reformation. The breakdown of parish life in many communities was paralleled by a deterioration of catechetical instruction. As a reaction to this decline, a pietistic influence was brought to bear on confirmation, particularly through the influence of Philip Spener.

Using Bucer's confirmation rite as a model, Spener restructured confirmation to serve his conversion theology. The vow became the occasion for a renewal of the baptismal covenant. The confession of faith became subjective in nature. Similarly, subjective elements permeated the examination, preparation for the Lord's Supper, and the confirmation blessing. Since it was important that the catechumen "feel" his new life, the age for confirmation was advanced, allowing for greater maturity. It was this type of confirmation that became official in Norway and Denmark in 1736.

The sixth type of confirmation, the rationalistic type, was a reaction to Pietism. Under the influence of Rationalism with its deemphasis of the sacraments and its stress on understanding God's witness to mankind in Holy Scripture, the confirmation observance became a cultural hallmark that served the conventional Christian who summed up his Christianity as a series of virtues to be respected and that he might emulate. The rationalistic type of confirmation was regarded as the event that gave meaning to Holy Baptism. With this emphasis confirmation became the great festival of youth in which the candidate made his dramatic decision, marked by a vow and now elevated to an oath, to become a member

of the church. Great stress was placed on the examination, which was to show that the catechumen understood the meaning of the confession he was about to make to the world.

This drama of confirmation became the occasion for long addresses by pastors. Sentimentalism was allowed free reign on the part of parents and friends. Because of the importance attributed to confirmation, totally unrelated acts were usually attached to the event by law (e.g., enforcement of school laws, eligibility to guild membership, voting and majority rights, and such church privileges as baptismal sponsorship and the privilege of marriage in the church). In short, confirmation became necessary if people wished to have the rights of first-class citizenship. In this manner confirmation became part of the social and national fabric.

By the middle of the nineteenth century many religious leaders recognized the harmful tendencies inherent in confirmation as practiced at that time. In spite of their anxious attempts to bring about changes, nothing of importance happened. The drift of discontent away from the church due to economic, political, and social causes prevented any real reforms in confirmation from being effected. Even after Neopietism arose, the effects of Rationalism continued to influence confirmation practices and rites.

#### Confirmation in the New World

It was only natural that this "Lutheran heritage" was transferred by immigration to the New World. Though Rationalism as far as doctrine is concerned had little influence among Lutherans in North America, the marks of Rationalism on the prevailing Pietism were clearly evident

in confirmation. Even when the "Old Lutherans," who were protesting laxity in doctrine in the German states, arrived in the 1830s and '40s they did little to correct the unwholesome accretions that by now had attached themselves to the practice everywhere. There was even less positive influence by later Lutherans. In fact, the exaggerated esteem that confirmation enjoyed in Europe because of Rationalism became a major obstacle for any real reform among Lutherans in North America. What little difference did exist among the various groups of Lutheran immigrants was largely assimilated in practice though some variations continued regionally and ethnically.

What was the prevailing pattern for confirmation among the Lutherans in the New World? Generally speaking, the central feature of the practice was its emphasis on the renewal of the baptismal covenant and preparation for first Communion. Great stress was placed on the solemnity of the vows and their lifelong effect. The confession of faith was regarded as subjective in nature. It was said that in the rite the catechumen was assuming the promises that his parents or sponsors had made for him in infancy. Confirmation marked the event in which the child joined the Lutheran church or a local congregation. The examination was intended to give evidence that the catechumen understood the meaning of the solemn moment. The handclasp was interpreted in one of two ways: either it formalized the vow or it transmitted the rights and privileges that were said to come with the rite. One of these privileges was usually assumed to be the right to partake of the Lord's Supper. The laying on of hands gave dignity to the occasion but was not given a sacramental meaning. It symbolized the gift of the Holy Spirit working through the

Word and, in the minds of many of the people, through the importance of the rite itself.

Many of the secondary associations with Rationalism continued. As long as graduation from the elementary school marked the end of formal education, confirmation was closely linked to that event. For this reason the customary age for the confirmation rite was about thirteen or fourteen. Concomitantly, confirmation also marked the end of formal religious education.

Palm Sunday, which in Europe had normally fallen about one week before spring graduation from school, continued to be observed as the popular day for the confirmation observance, even after school closing and graduation were no longer connected with the rite and were held late in spring. No doubt one reason for the retention of Palm Sunday was that the catechumen could partake of his first Communion during Holy Week, since the Lord's Supper was celebrated only occasionally in most of the Lutheran churches in America.

#### Twentieth-Century Developments

Though efforts at reform continued to be made in Europe, little actually happened until the close of World War II. The waning influence of the church in the life of the people called for drastic action. The serious inroads of communism in previously strong areas of Lutheranism served to show that the Jugendweihe of the communists had, in fact, become a real threat where the confirmation observance had become merely a civic event with religious overtones. Several commissions were appointed in Germany and the Scandinavian countries to study the confirmation practices.



As a result, a number of plans were proposed at different times, and several were adopted. Some recommendations suggested a division of the catechumenate into several stages. The confirmation rite and first Communion were at times separated and variously placed. New curricular materials were developed by Lutheran educators in all parts of Europe to meet the changing needs of the churches. A major contribution was the examination of confirmation rites to eliminate un-Lutheran emphases. The United Lutheran Church of Germany (VELKD) adopted a new rite restoring the Lutheran theological accent.

At the urging of its member churches the Lutheran World Federation called for a thorough study of the practice of confirmation. Two important seminars were held in connection with the study. The Hofgeismar (Germany) seminar in 1955 was national in scope and the Loccum (Germany) seminar in 1961 was international. Papers and study documents of these two seminars were the main sources of the report made to the Lutheran World Federation in 1963 at Helsinki (Document No. 16).

Reform plans in North America were, until the last two decades, primarily concerned with the improvement of curriculum and teaching methods rather than with the theological issues and historical problems involved. In 1954 an important intersynodical seminar was held at Racine, Wisconsin, at which most Lutheran churches were represented. The study seminar gave lengthy consideration to a broad scope of the problems facing the Lutheran churches in America. Subsequent confirmation workshops, reflecting historical, theological, and practical concerns, were held in 1957--60 by the antecedent bodies of The American Lutheran Church. In 1961 the Lutheran World Federation seminar on confirmation raised the question of

confirmation on an international level and in large measure stimulated the present intersynodical study herein reported. At its initial meeting in 1962 the Lutheran Church in America reviewed a report on the practice of confirmation that stressed also the theological issues, especially the association of confirmation with the Lord's Supper. In recent years all the major Lutheran church bodies in North America have given serious study, under the auspices of their Boards of Parish Education, to the production of educational resources suitable for confirmation instruction.

### III. THE THEOLOGICAL ASPECTS OF CONFIRMATION

The central teaching of the Lutheran church states that God accepts sinners by grace alone, for Christ's sake, through faith. God expresses this acceptance through what the church calls the "means of grace." These means or channels through which God's grace comes to us include the Word manifested in such activities as preaching and teaching, and the sacraments, Holy Baptism and the Lord's Supper. Through these means of grace, God reveals and declares to men that he is fully reconciled to all the world. Through them God creates, supports, and strengthens a new relationship with people. This relationship is based on the forgiveness secured for men by God's Son, Jesus Christ.

"All this is from God, who through Christ reconciled us to himself and gave us the ministry of reconciliation" (2 Corinthians 5:18). "The ministry of reconciliation" is the church's reason for being: to bring to men God's love and grace in Christ. It is in the light of that gospel ministry that the church must constantly examine what it is doing. The church must always test whether its activities and ritual heritage supply what is demanded by the "ministry of reconciliation." This applies also to a consideration of the theology and practice of confirmation.

#### Confirmation and the Means of Grace The Word

In the Bible God's approach to men is called the Word. This name is given especially to God's Son Jesus, who became man to make God known to men. "In the beginning was the Word . . . the Word was God . . . All things were made through him and without him was not

anything made that was made" (John 1:1,3).

The Son of God has in turn entrusted to men the work of making God known in the world. This proclamation, too, is called the Word. By that Word God confronts men with the same resultant effect as when he spoke through Christ. He calls men into relationship with himself. He puts into their hands the benefits of Jesus' death and resurrection.

Those who are called into relationship with God through this Word become "God's people." They are the church. Luther said, "God's Word cannot be present without God's people, and God's people cannot be without God's Word." It is the purpose of the church, God's people, to produce and maintain sons of God by means of the Word (Augsburg Confession, VII).

The Word of God comes to each child in Baptism. This act brings each child into a new relationship with Christ and with the people of God.

Like all living experiences, this new relationship is always in motion. It is genuine and complete. Yet the child's part in it grows and changes under the continued influence of God through the Word (1 Peter 2:2).

The church takes great care to make this growth possible. It presents the Word to its children by teaching and preaching and, at the proper time, in visible form in the Holy Communion. The influence and authority of the Word shapes the way these young persons think and speak and act (Colossians 3:16-17; 2 Timothy 3:16-17). It strengthens their relationship to God. They live more and more in awareness that in him they have a loving Father, Savior, and Guide.

This work of strengthening the Christian through the Word is a lifelong process. The style of this strengthening must always accord with his maturing. It takes place daily throughout the Christian's life.

Confirmation could be described as an initial stage of this strengthening, not as a terminal experience but as a stage in a lifelong process of nourishing through the Word.

### Holy Baptism

The sacrament of Baptism as a means of grace is a miracle of God performed through the church. By this act God lays claim on the sinner.

God's relationship with the sinner is so radically changed by Baptism that the Bible calls the experience a new birth (John 3:5). Man is said to become a new person (Titus 3:5; 2 Corinthians 5:17). The old person who is under the judgment of God dies and a new person who is under forgiveness and grace is born (Romans 6:4; Acts 2:38, 22:16).

Baptism also gives the sinner a new relationship with the church. It makes him fully a member of the church (1 Corinthians 12:13). It gives him the gift of the Holy Spirit (Titus 3:5).

The saving benefit of Baptism is entirely God's doing. It is prompted solely by his love and mercy. It is not conditioned in any way by any decision or promise or act of man, whether by his parents or sponsors, or by himself as in a confirmation rite. To assert or even to imply that the saving power of Baptism is in any way contingent on any subsequent event is to deny its status. It is therefore theologically indefensible to give a confirmation rite a meaning whereby it is elevated to a position in which it either complements or supplements the sacrament of Holy Baptism.

By his own free grace God brings man into a child-father relationship. Man can accept this new relationship or he can ignore it. In either event, as Luther said, "Baptism remains forever. Even though we fall from it and sin, nevertheless we always have access to it" (The Large Catechism, IV, 77). What man does is in response to an act that is complete in itself. The responsibility of the Christian, therefore, with respect to the relationship given him in Baptism, is to learn to know it, live in response to it, enjoy it, and celebrate it. For this reason, Baptism itself implies the need for a lifelong process of education through which the believer grows within his baptismal relationship.

#### Holy Communion

The spiritual and eternal gifts of God are received and appropriated exclusively by faith. God does not demand of those whom he would bless a measure of achievement in the performance of his will or a period of probation in his service or a level of status in the membership of his church. His gifts are ours by faith alone.

Nor does God impart his grace in a piecemeal manner, as though the fullness of his salvation were to be approached only through successive stages as in a process of gradual progress from poverty to wealth. All is received by faith, and faith receives all.

That the total gift of grace is given to all Christians by faith whether they are infants or mature becomes significant for an understanding of Holy Communion in its distinction from Holy Baptism as a means of grace. There is, of course, a similarity between the two sacraments. Both give forgiveness of sins, life, and salvation.

Similarly, faith appropriates the blessings and benefits offered in both sacraments.

Nevertheless, there is a distinction between the two sacraments that is both scriptural and confessional. We may distinguish between them from the point of view of the specific effect of each. Holy Baptism grants sonship; Holy Communion maintains and strengthens it. The former is the initiating sacrament; the latter, the sustaining. The distinction is one of emphasis. The relationship is not exclusive or supplementary but collateral.

Further, the apostolic teaching of 1 Corinthians 11:28 makes it incumbent upon the church to exercise its pastoral concern for its growing members to help them prepare for a meaningful participation in the Lord's Supper, each at his own level of development. This means an understanding of the simple meaning of the gospel and participation in the sacrament in the context of this gospel. It also involves a basic understanding of the nature of Holy Communion and a desire to participate in its benefits.

Specifically the nature of Holy Communion suggests certain implications for this preparation:

1. Holy Communion is a celebration of the redemptive work of Christ, in particular a memorial of his death as the price of our redemption and including a joyful sharing of the power of his risen life. This implies that at his own level the child understands and celebrates the sacrificial life of Christ, his death, resurrection, and ascension.

2. Holy Communion is a receiving of the body and blood of Christ (1 Corinthians 10:16; Matthew 26:26-28). This implies a simple acceptance of the words and promises of Jesus at the institution of the sacrament.
3. Holy Communion offers and gives the forgiveness of sins for which Christ died (Matthew 26:28). This implies that the child understands, at his level, what God's will is for him and his own failure in keeping it. It further implies that he learns to look with joyful anticipation to God's word of forgiveness in the sacrament, so that he receives it with thanksgiving.
4. Holy Communion expresses and strengthens participation in the body of believers (1 Corinthians 10:17). This implies an awareness and appreciation of the life we share in Christ.
5. Holy Communion is a nourishment for the Christian life. This implies that the child recognizes that God's word of forgiveness for him in the sacrament gives him strength for his daily life (John 15:5).
6. Holy Communion is a foretaste of the heavenly banquet (Matthew 26:29; 1 Corinthians 11:26). This implies that the child receives the sacrament with the expectation of one day seeing his Savior, anticipating this event with joy in the eating and drinking.

In the light of these implications the church should provide learning experiences for children at their level of growth so that their



participation in Holy Communion can be meaningful. The child's learning is by no means merely an intellectual exercise. Though the learning involves the comprehension of certain basic facts of salvation history and simple formulations of faith, it includes also attitudes and conduct responses.

In Holy Communion, as in Baptism, the Christian partakes in a sacrament of forgiveness, a free gift from the gracious hand of God. But the Lord's Supper has an added element of value. Partly because it presupposes a measure of understanding of God's plan of salvation and partly because of its repeated occurrence, Holy Communion assists the baptized believer to remain within the baptismal grace and to grow in it.

Moreover, Holy Communion is the sacrament of fellowship, not only with Christ but also with all the saints. As such, it encourages spiritual growth and maturity and becomes a significant event in the edification of the Christian believer.

But these experiences of Christian growth do not happen as by magical infusion. The groundwork should be laid. To receive Holy Communion without understanding would be to perform a meaningless act that would contribute nothing to the process of growth. For this reason the church should help the child prepare for his first experience at the Lord's Table. This preparation does not, however, imply a lifetime competence for receiving Communion, for each individual Communion is an event in itself, and to each Communion there applies the apostle Paul's insistence on self-examination. The educational process preceding first Communion will normally be continued in order to provide a resource for further growth.

### Confirmation and the Church

The practice of confirmation in the Lutheran church in the past has been closely associated with the doctrine of the church, often in such a manner that the practice was inconsistent with that doctrine as set forth in the New Testament and the Lutheran Confessions. The various ways in which church membership and the special privileges, rights, and responsibilities have been associated with confirmation, and the various shades of meaning attributed to these elements have had a tendency to skew the Lutheran teaching of the doctrine of the church. A similar impairing influence arising out of past practices of confirmation may at times be detected when the objectives and the curriculum of confirmation instruction are reviewed. For this reason it is necessary in defining the meaning of confirmation to reexamine its relationship with the doctrine of the church.

### Biblical Meaning of "Church"

In spite of the many popular usages of the term church, the New Testament restricts this term to but one meaning. On the basis of Scripture (e.g., Ephesians 5:23-30) we speak of the church as being sanctified, cleansed, holy, and without blemish. According to the Augsburg Confession, Lutherans say that "the Christian Church, properly speaking, is nothing else than the assembly (Versammlung--congregatio) of all believers and saints" (A.C., VIII).

Though the New Testament limits itself to but one meaning of church, it uses the word in two different ways. In the Ephesians passage already referred to, church means the sum total of all believers throughout the world--past, present, and those yet to be called by the Holy

Spirit. A study of Acts 9:31, 1 Corinthians 1:2 and 1 Corinthians 16:19 makes it clear that church in these passages refers to believers at a given place, the Christians who are there. Paul refers to the Corinthians as "those sanctified in Christ Jesus, called to be saints."

Clearly the letter is addressed to every last Christian at Corinth, both the weak and the strong, but only to the Christians. Thus the word church in the New Testament always means the total number of believers, either at given localities or throughout the world in every age.

A further New Testament characterization of the church is that it is the body of Christ. This characterization must not be regarded in some idealistic, Platonic way but as a powerful and true figure denoting a living reality. Every member of the church is in truth a member, deriving his function, purpose, and life within the body from its head, which is Christ. Thus Christians are not an assembly of individuals, like so many beads in a box, but with Christ constitute a living body with him as Head and Lord (Ephesians 4:1-16; 5:21-32; Colossians 1:21-23).

#### Membership in the Church

Membership in the Christian church is bestowed on an infant or a child through Holy Baptism. When the church, in obedience to its Lord, baptizes a child, it makes him by that very act a member of the church (1 Corinthians 12:13). The membership begun in Baptism is thereupon experienced in the Christian life (worship, teaching, the Lord's Supper, and service). Membership in the church is not conferred by a later experience nor by a special rite, such as confirmation,

but in the way commanded by Christ, through Holy Baptism.

When a child is baptized by the church, he is baptized into the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit according to the faith expressed in the Apostles' Creed, the ancient baptismal confession. Baptism is normally administered by a minister of Christ who has been called by a particular group of Christians assembled about the means of grace, that is, by the church at a given place. Also, when a layman performs an emergency Baptism, he does so by virtue of the command that Christ gave to this church. In such cases the child's newly-created membership in the church is normally inscribed in the records of a community of Christians, who recognize him as a fellow member.

The baptized child's membership in the holy Christian church may be expressed and made more evident through the confession of the congregation that authorized or accepted his Baptism. By virtue of his Baptism a child becomes a member of the local congregation. The congregation accepts the baptized person into its fellowship, prays for him, and otherwise expresses its love and concern in a pastoral and educational ministry whereby the child is "strengthened," i.e., confirmed, in the grace of the almighty God unto life everlasting.

In the case of children no longer infants, pastoral judgment will determine the type and extent of instruction, if any is necessary, prior to Baptism.

In the case of youth and adults who request to be baptized, the church accedes to their request when it has been assured that they have already been made one with Christ through the power of the gospel. By their faith the candidates for Baptism already share in the death and

resurrection of their Lord. The subsequent Baptism clearly signifies the new relationship that is theirs by faith, confirming their personal share in the redemptive work of Jesus Christ. In such cases a rite of confirmation is not appropriate. Adults who have already been baptized and instructed should be received by profession of faith.

Through the sanctifying, nurturing, sustaining, and refining power of Word and Sacrament, the church is what its members confess it to be in the Nicene Creed: "one holy, catholic, and apostolic church." Each of these attributes has far-reaching implications for confirmation.

#### Confirmation and Church Organization

God has not prescribed to the church how it should organize itself. Therefore its choice of structure is part of the church's liberty. Whatever action it takes will be for the sake of mutual edification through Word and Sacrament and in order to carry out the church's ministry in an effective manner.

The different designations of membership that an organization may devise for the sake of order and efficiency merely indicate various levels of rights or responsibilities that the members may have accepted within the organization. But the Scriptures do not speak of various kinds of membership. Baptism makes us members of the body of Christ, the only church of which the New Testament speaks. Thorough study of such significant passages as Romans 12:4-5, 1 Corinthians 12:13, Galatians 3:26-27, Ephesians 5:25-27 leads inevitably to this conclusion.

The purpose for which God called the church into being will determine the polity a church body elects as its pattern. Christians will

organize themselves in a manner in which they can serve God most effectively and in a way pleasing to him, making certain that in the chosen structure they are not in danger of denying the essence of the church. A confirmation process could, therefore, serve to prepare youth to minister effectively in the organizational structure of their church and beyond it.

### The Mission of the Church

God called the church into existence for his holy purpose, to serve him. His purpose set forth in Christ is "to unite all things in him, things in heaven and things on earth (Ephesians 1:10). To accomplish this purpose, the church as the body of Christ looks to him as its head to identify its mission.

As God sent Christ, so Christ sends his church. As Christ came to love, so he sends the church to love. As Christ came to serve, so he sends the church to serve. Therefore the church is always a church in mission.

The mission of the church may be described in terms of its principal functions: worshiping, teaching-learning, witnessing, and serving.

The church in mission is a worshiping community. The members gather for worship; they hear his Word, respond in adoration, praise, and thanksgiving, bring their petitions to God in the name of Jesus, and offer themselves as living sacrifices.

The church in mission is a teaching-learning community. The members provide opportunities for growth in spiritual understanding for children, youth and adults. They study the Holy Scriptures, probe the needs and problems of people, examine alternate courses of action, and

equip themselves for mission.

The church in mission is a witnessing community. The members bring the good news of the gospel to persons near and far, in order to further Christ's will to draw all men to himself.

The church in mission is a serving community. The members serve God by serving their fellowmen and bring love and help to men in all their needs. As ambassadors for Christ they live out their discipleship as "little Christs." This means to act with concern for the lonely, the deprived, the desperate, the hungry, the exploited, the victim of injustice.

The Lord is present with his church in mission. He comes in his living Word to empower his people for their tasks. He comes in his Supper to strengthen and maintain the faithful. He is in the dynamic fellowship of his people, inspiring them to greater works in his name.

#### Confirmation and the Church's Mission

Though membership in the church begins with Baptism, even young children must come to know the purpose of their fellowship by being told of it and by experiencing their belonging in the fellowship of believers. They must learn to know who and what they are: redeemed persons in community. The spiritual life begun in them must be nourished by the Word. As they mature, they must learn further what their responsibility is as children of God. They must learn to know their particular identity and that while they are in the world they are not of it. They are sojourners on the Way. Because the church is under the Cross and in tension, this nourishing of faith and life must continue throughout the life of the Christian.

The nurturing of the Christian should involve every aspect of his life. There dare be no compartmentalization between the spiritual and the secular as though the Christian's ministry were reserved for certain isolated pockets of his life.

The congregation's pastoral and educational ministry should involve the child, and later the youth, in significant relationships in worship, teaching-learning, witnessing, and serving. He is to be challenged and prepared to assume meaningful responsibilities in participating in the mission of the church, not at some indeterminate future date but during the very time in which he is being nourished in his faith and life. During each period of his life, he will learn that the process of becoming equipped must continue through the years in a lifelong catechumenate.



#### IV. A DEFINITION OF CONFIRMATION

##### Preamble

As the church seeks to carry out its commission from the Lord, a part of the process it undertakes is a strengthening or confirming of those in its fellowship. In so doing it looks to the Holy Spirit for direction and blessing.

Since the form of such confirming is not biblically prescribed, it may be changed from time to time and place to place. The church therefore must determine the form of confirmation with which it can best fulfill its mission in the pluralistic society of North America in these times.

Both historic practice and present need indicate that confirmation can best serve the church today as a ministry designed for baptized children.

##### Definition

Confirmation is a pastoral and educational ministry of the church which helps the baptized child through Word and Sacrament to identify more deeply with the Christian community and participate more fully in its mission.

##### Commentary

The ministry of the church serves persons throughout life. The confirmation ministry is a process of serving the individual through several phases from Baptism through early youth. During this process there is a time when the baptized child will be prepared and ready to participate in

Holy Communion. Later in this process he reaches a stage in his maturing when the whole congregation may celebrate in a rite both the fulfillment of its confirmation ministry to him and the joyful recognition of his more responsible role in the life and mission of the church.

The pastoral aspect of confirmation ministry is the loving care which the whole Christian community expresses for the well-being of the child.

The educational aspect is the help that the church gives the child through the learning process to know and confess as his own the Christian faith and to assume a more responsible role as a Christian in the world. This is one stage of a lifelong catechumenate.

In both aspects of the confirmation ministry, the church through Word and Sacrament enables the child to grow in his experience of God's forgiveness, life in Christ, and his relationship with God and his fellow-men. This ministry takes place through such experiences as fellowship, private and public worship, educational activities, daily renewal in his Baptism, participation in Holy Communion and other strengthening experiences. It influences him in all of his life involvements.

The Christian community is the family of those bound together by faith in Christ. It may find its local expression in a congregation or other fellowship of Christians.

To identify with the Christian community means to see oneself a member of it and to feel oneself committed to its purposes.

To identify more deeply implies development of a clearer understanding of the Christian community and a more profound attachment to it. This development depends on genuine and dynamic interaction between the

youth and the rest of the Christian community.

The mission of the Christian community is both the proclamation of God's love and the expression of that love in service to mankind and in the care of God's creation. It is as broad as the gospel and as specific as a cup of cold water given in Jesus' name.

The essence of the church's mission remains the same, but the church must address itself to a rapidly changing world. To participate more fully, therefore, means accepting responsibility for this mission and relating it meaningfully to one's own time and situation.

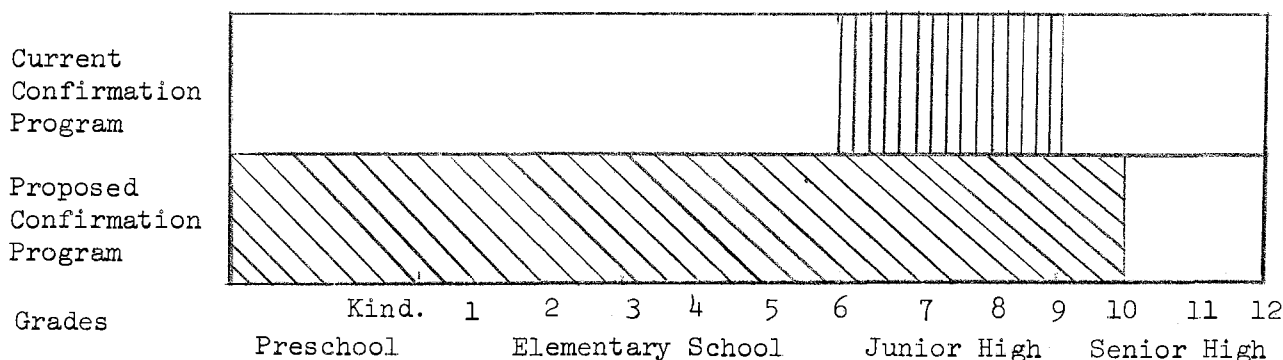
### V. PRACTICAL ASPECTS OF A CONFIRMATION MINISTRY

Confirmation as defined in this report differs from the generally held concept in several ways: its longer time span, its style of pastoral ministry, its earlier introduction of Holy Communion, and its fulfillment at a later age.

#### Time Span

Confirmation is regarded here as encompassing all of the educative experiences of the child from Baptism to mid-adolescence. Generally, confirmation has been thought of in much narrower terms as a two- or three-year program of instruction culminating in a rite. The ministry that the church has exercised toward the child prior to confirmation instruction generally has been thought of as preliminary to confirmation but not as an integral part of it.

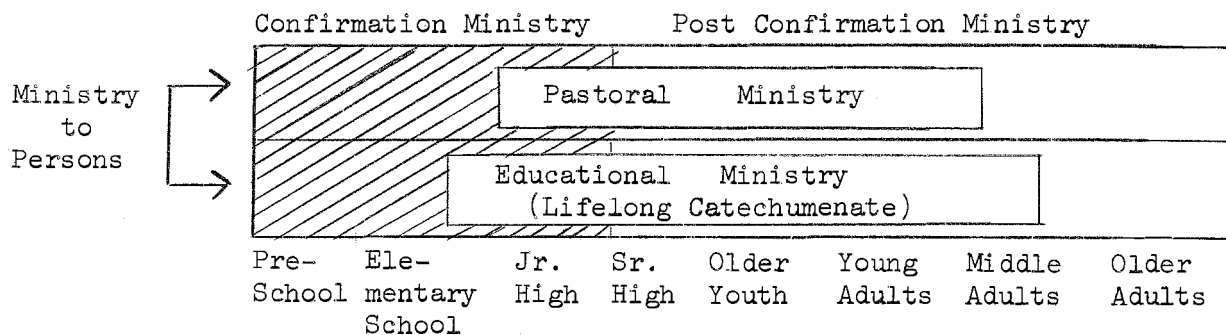
The difference in time-span between these old and new conceptions may be illustrated as follows:



The church should become more keenly aware of the fact that all of the pastoral as well as the educational experiences throughout childhood are confirmation ministry. As the child passes into adolescence the church must bring the experiences of Word and Sacrament to the young

person in such a way as to challenge him to develop a more mature faith and to assume a more responsible role in the Christian community. This too is confirmation ministry. During it the congregation may want to celebrate with him significant events that mark his growth.

This ministry comes to a close in middle adolescence, at about the time the young person turns toward adult interests, activities, and aspirations. At this time the congregation may celebrate with him the fulfillment of this confirmation ministry and his recognition of his more responsible role in the Christian community. This conception does not imply that the whole process of confirmation may be regarded as the final step in the church's concern for the spiritual growth of its members, but rather that the confirmation ministry will serve as the first stage of a ministry which continues to serve persons under its care throughout their lives. This conception may be visually portrayed as follows:



Style of Pastoral Ministry

In the new definition, the concept of confirmation is broadened to include the pastoral ministry to the baptized child. It is a style of ministry that calls for greater emphasis on the entire congregation's

pastoral care of the child. Even where there have been extensive programs of care, a stronger emphasis is needed upon every member's loving concern for the developing child, as well as his active participation in various ways of expressing this concern.

#### Holy Communion

Participation in Holy Communion is thought of here as a part of confirmation ministry, a means of strengthening, rather than as a goal toward which the entire confirmation process points. In this way Holy Communion is an aid in the development of the child, rather than a privilege granted upon completion of a required course of study prescribed by the church.

The child must be prepared for participation in the sacrament so that he receives it with benefit. This preparation involves a basic understanding of the gospel and the nature of the sacrament, at his level of expression. It should not be a course of study designed for a more mature mind.

#### Later Fulfillment

With participation in Holy Communion becoming a part of confirmation ministry rather than its goal, the age for a concluding confirmation rite is no longer determined by the young person's readiness to receive the Sacrament. The development of the child is the determining factor. Maturational factors have their part in this development, as do his experiences with Word and Sacrament in the life of the church.

The past concept of confirmation has created tension. The church has used confirmation as the occasion for meeting a major portion of

its obligation to instruct the young person following his Baptism; at the same time and with the same instruction the church has prepared the child for his first Communion. This has resulted in a conflict of purposes. Where parents, pastors, and congregations have recognized that a child may be ready to receive Holy Communion meaningfully prior to age fourteen or fifteen there has been a tendency to observe the confirmation rite at a much earlier age, as for example, ten or twelve. Such a shift, however, does not fully meet the educational and pastoral concerns of the church following Baptism, unless the congregation also maintains an unusually strong educational program during the critical early adolescent period. On the other hand, where the congregation has emphasized a longer range educational and pastoral responsibility rising out of its baptismal obligation, the tendency has been to postpone confirmation instruction until the mid-adolescent years, and to postpone also the admission to Holy Communion.

In order to serve both the educational concerns of the congregation and its desire to give children the benefit of the Lord's Supper at an earlier age, the church should regard Holy Communion as one of the strengthening factors in the total confirmation ministry. It is then free to continue its ministry as far into adolescence as necessary to help the young person identify deeply with the Christian community and participate fully in its mission.

The church can resolve this conflict between educational and sacramental nourishment of the child and adolescent by offering Holy Communion as one of the strengthening factors in its confirmation ministry.

Establishing a Time for First Communion

Admission to first Communion is an invitation of the Lord Jesus Christ to his Supper, presented through his church to the baptized child when he has been prepared and is ready to participate in the sacrament. This readiness involves the understanding, attitudes, and action patterns appropriate to his age level. The church will therefore invite to Holy Communion those baptized children who have been prepared and who then in the pastoral judgment of the congregation are ready to participate in the sacrament.

Most persons reach this stage of maturity at the fifth-grade level.

The child at this age normally accepts himself, tends to be friendly, agreeable, amenable, cooperative, sincere, easy-going, quick to admit his errors. He is concerned with the specific and concrete. He likes to assimilate facts and to memorize. He has acquired some of the concepts needed for the study of history and is capable of appreciating it. The fifth-grade child is conscious of right and wrong but needs help in making ethical decisions. He is particularly open to intimate family companionships and activities. He is not distrustful of his abilities or as concerned about his status as in later years. He is increasingly able to make responsible contributions to group activities and enjoys doing so. He feels closer identification with other groups beyond the family and enjoys participation in their activities.

This seems to be a most strategic time for Christian education to utilize the influence of the family and the active participation of the child in family life. He needs to see Christian faith and worship as a natural part of his family life. He is educationally amenable and



responsive; hence this is an important age for dealing with basic facts about the Bible and for completing a general factual framework in understanding Christian heritage. He can be helped to understand more fully the meaning of Christian stewardship and to assume more responsibility toward others. Since he is able to think more deeply, he needs to develop a concept of God as an invisible spirit and to gain a Christian understanding of the tragedies and potentials of life.

All this would indicate that he is ready to join in the fellowship of the Lord's Supper and to rejoice because of the presence of the Lord. He needs the guidance and strength of Holy Communion for making decisions. He will share with his family in the Communion, and at the same time share life with the larger family of the church, and with all people. This is a time when he will accept others who join him at the Lord's Table and will relate the individual to the community. He is capable of appreciating his heritage, the Christian faith, and to celebrate with believers. Participation in the Lord's Supper can become a natural part of his family's life of faith and worship. The fifth-grade person can relate facts of the sacrificial life of Christ, the cross, and the resurrection to the purpose and meaning of the Lord's Supper. Through participation with the Christian community in this meal he is helped to accept others and to serve his neighbor. He can trust in a hidden Lord who is present in visible gifts, in his body the church, and who brings joy and confidence in the midst of sin and sorrow. He can accept the joy and assurance of the Christian life through God's love in Christ.

Participation in the sacrament of Holy Communion is to be viewed as part of a Christian's total life in the Word as a means of grace. The first ten years of the educational and pastoral ministry of confirmation prepare the baptized for his first Communion. The educational program for the fifth-grader may be the regular educational program of the congregation and should include educational materials to introduce and welcome him to Holy Communion. Since the congregation and parents are both responsible for preparing the child, appropriate agencies and persons should provide special educational material and services for both the adults and the child.

In this ministry the Christian community is to help the baptized child at his level of maturity in achieving objectives such as:

1. To participate joyfully in the sacrament of Holy Communion, accepting it as God's gift of grace to him.
2. To understand and accept his role as a communicant in the fellowship of believers.
3. To accept himself as loved, forgiven of sin for Christ's sake, and confident that the Holy Spirit can lead him to love Christ and to love others.

Such objectives have far-reaching implications for responsible groups and persons in the Christian community. They imply the following:

1. All the experiences of the child in the confirmation ministry help prepare him for his participation in the Lord's Supper.
2. The whole parish education program of the congregation should be structured to help the child achieve these objectives.
3. Parents and other adults should be provided with help in their ministry to the child.

4. Learning experiences should include not only understandings, but also the development of Christian attitudes, values, and patterns of actions.
5. The attitude of the congregation from Baptism to first Communion should communicate to him a concern for his spiritual growth and a glad acceptance of him at the Lord's Table.
6. Experiences of self-evaluation, acceptance of forgiveness, and expression of faith should be provided for the child at his level of maturity within the fellowship of believers.
7. Flexibility of instruction should respect each child's unique social, religious, and educational background.
8. The child should be given the opportunity to indicate his readiness to receive first Communion in the latter part of the fifth-grade year.
9. Guidance should be provided to those involved in preparing the child and to the congregation for determining the child's readiness for first Communion.
10. Language and action meaningful to the fifth-grade child should be used in the service for Holy Communion, and in a first Communion rite if there be one.

Establishing a Time for the Fulfillment of the  
Confirmation Ministry

The definition of confirmation acknowledges that as the child matures the confirmation ministry achieves the purpose for which it was designed. In this process of maturation there comes a time when the person is no longer a child. This, therefore, is an appropriate time for terminating the confirmation ministry.

A review of the age-group characteristics and the kinds of learning of which a person is capable point to Grade 10 as the time most suitable for the fulfillment of the confirmation process. This designation is not, however, to be considered the termination of the pastoral

and educational ministry of the church. Rather, it is to mark a change in the style of this ministry appropriate to a certain stage of development in a lifelong process.

The following profile of normal tenth-grade persons points to this age as a time for fulfilling the confirmation ministry and initiating subsequent ministries in the Christian community.

The average tenth-grade youth continues to grow toward maturity at a slow, gentle pace with no dramatic change from that of the previous year. By this time a degree of wholesome self-confidence has been achieved. A growing sense of independence, a feeling of greater ease with the opposite sex and with adults is characteristic of this age. The youth now gives the impression of being more grownup and dependable. Having better emotional balance he no longer evidences the tensions within himself and with others that he did previously.

At this grade level most youths have found an emotional perspective. The many disquieting forces of the ninth grade seem to have disappeared. No longer is he so impulsive or such an extremist. Rather, he has become a more affable, easy-going individual, better adjusted to life's situations. He realizes that his own happiness involves that of others.

Authorities on adolescent psychology agree that the tenth-grader is conscious of his own responsibility in handling emotions. He tries to control his anger and cover up his emotions by keeping his feelings to himself or by appearing to be insensitive to remarks of others. He may welcome criticism as a means toward self-improvement. His good sense of humor helps him accept criticism in a more positive manner.

He is more willing to see another's point of view and to take a broader outlook on things in general.

Because the tenth-grader has an alert mind, and his intellectual capacities for thinking and reasoning have reached new heights, this period of the young Christian's life offers splendid opportunity for stimulating discussions. The young adolescent is able to plan more logically and to carry out plans which extend over a longer period of time. His sense of historical time is no longer subject to foreshortening. Although he has nearly reached mental maturity, his judgment is not yet mature. Tenth-graders are willing to assume responsibility but want and need more guidance than they are willing to request.

At this age youth has a special interest in people. His newly-acquired sense of independence and his greater self-reliance give him a freedom and ease in his social relationships which he did not have previously. He seeks to cultivate friendships of both sexes. He may have one or two special friends with whom he is very close, but the boy still enjoys the gang, and the girl, her bunch of friends.

Whereas the tenth-grader may prefer the company of friends to that of his family, parent-child relationships are generally good if his parents treat him as a grownup.

It should not be surprising that at this age an apparent disinterest in church or church activities may be present. This should not be taken as a lack of interest in religion but rather as an indication that the church has not met the needs of the youth. They want help in thinking through their problems and straightening out their beliefs.

Both boys and girls are intensely interested in achieving a personal religion. They are very sensitive to an atmosphere of worship and usually respond deeply to a liturgical form of service. Many are interested in discovering what prayer can mean to them and knowing how to pray.

The tenth-grader is usually able to distinguish between right and wrong. Problems of decision and conscience which were of great concern earlier have lessened because of his sense of independence, a self-confidence, and self-assurance.

The youth can grow in awareness of who he is as a baptized person and in the fellowship in the body of Christ; he can appreciate the life-sustaining Word by which God builds faith and be ready to assume greater responsibilities for his faith.

The tenth-grade person has usually achieved the combination of stability, independence, and self-confidence which enables him to determine and select a role in an adult community and to be accepted in turn by that community.

The tenth-grade person is more ready to speak out of an independence with emotional balance, an informed interest in religious expression, and an appreciation for the people, the beliefs, and the devotional practices of the church. He demonstrates a readiness to be accepted as adult.

The church therefore needs to develop a style of ministry with confirmed youth which enables them to serve as full partners in the life and mission of the Christian community. This means accepting a young person for who he is and who he may become in sharing the responsibilities of the church in the world.

Implications for the Church in Fulfillment  
of the Confirmation Ministry

The entire confirmation ministry includes many stages from Baptism to middle adolescence. In this ministry the Christian community is to help the baptized child toward achieving objectives such as:

1. To know and confess as his own the Christian faith.
2. To live his role as a child and servant of God.
3. To grow in the life of the Christian community and its mission.

Such objectives have far-reaching implications for responsible groups and persons in the Christian community. They imply the following:

1. The regular educational program from Baptism through Grade 10 will provide opportunities for spiritual growth in knowledge, attitude, and response.
2. During the latter part of this process special attention should be given to Luther's Small Catechism as a way of interpreting life in the light of the Word of God.
3. In order that the young person may assume a more mature role in the congregation, genuine opportunities should be provided for him to see himself as a member of the congregation and to feel committed to its purposes.
4. Because of the importance of family relationships, parents should be involved throughout the educational process in meaningful ways.
5. If a rite is to be used to celebrate the completion of this confirmation ministry, opportunities should be provided to explore the meaning of the rite.
6. Ample time should be given for maximum personal development of tenth-graders, and a rite, where used, should come at a time significant to the person in the latter part of the school year.
7. Major attention should be given to help the young person to accept the fulfillment of the confirmation ministry as a significant point for proceeding into the next stage in his lifelong catechumenate.

Implications for Rites to Mark Stages of Growth  
in the Confirmation Process

A number of implications for rites should be taken into consideration by commissions on worship and by congregations of the Lutheran church bodies.

General Considerations

The language of any rite should be contemporary for the intended age level. This will serve to make the language both meaningful and teachable.

Rites to celebrate growth should be occasions for joy and should communicate both the note of celebration and of responsibility.

The observance of celebration and rites within the confirmation process should serve to increase the involvement of the sponsors in a sound and positive way and to serve as occasions when Christian growth is celebrated by the congregation.

The rubrics should be sufficiently flexible to allow a variety in practices throughout the years of the confirmation ministry.

Holy Baptism Rite

Because confirmation ministry begins with the baptized child, the church will best be able to invest the confirmation process with significant meaning if the language of the rite of infant Baptism expresses and describes the Baptism event precisely. There is a need for a baptismal rite specifically for infants without such elements as are proper only in an adult Baptism.

The language addressed to sponsors and the degree of their involvement in the orders of infant Baptism currently in use should be examined.



The renunciation ought not appear in both the rite of infant Baptism and in the later rites of confirmation, for it does not seem that the renunciation can mean the same thing in Baptism and later. If in Baptism it refers to reception into the church, it cannot mean this in later rites. If in confirmation it means to purpose leading a holy life, this is clearly an intent that the child cannot consciously have at Baptism.

The Baptism rite should be designed to make it clear that the confession and renunciation is that of the church. This could be done by asking the congregation to renounce the Devil and confess the faith into which the child is being baptized.

#### Admission to First Communion

If there is to be a special first Communion rite, it should be made clear to the child that when the church proclaims the gospel and administers the sacraments it is utilizing not two different means of grace but one. The Word alone is the bearer of God's grace. When preached and taught, it is the audible Word in which God offers his own righteousness by the hearing of the Word. In Baptism and the Lord's Supper it is again the Word, through visible actions and elements, by which God offers, bestows, and covenants his grace.

The new communicant should have been prepared for a meaningful participation in the sacrament and then invited to Holy Communion by those who have been charged with his spiritual care. It may be meaningful for the sponsors who have been admitted to the Lord's Table to be present. In the event that the baptismal sponsors or the parents cannot or will not assume this duty, another sponsor or sponsors may be appointed by the pastor in consultation with the candidate and the

family. Such a sponsor may assume continued pastoral care in the confirmation process.

The rite may be very brief and informal, according to the style of the pastor, the nature of the congregation, and the language and experience of the child.

#### A Rite for the Fulfillment of the Confirmation Process

A religious rite can have a strong psychological impact on the persons involved. This results from the weight Christian people give to it and from the meaning that the participant may see in it.

Much has been learned in recent years about the influence of the group on the individual. The climate of the congregation, the attitude of the parents, and the values held by the participant have a profound effect on the way each person looks at the ceremony.

Therefore it is important for each part of a confirmation rite to express what the church believes. The language, structure, and action of the rite should be examined carefully in the light of the purpose of the confirmation process, as described in the definition.

#### Other Rites in the Confirmation Process

Commissions on worship and congregations of the church bodies should consider describing and initiating a variety of rites at significant times during the growth of the child. These may relate to such events and persons as family experiences in early childhood, learning in the school, participating in community action, and developing basic skills, essential experiences in the congregation's life, and appropriate tasks in the church's mission.

Any rite must make it clear that it does not mark the end of study or of learning experiences. It must be part of the lifelong process in which the believer continually grows into Christ.

### Adult Rites

Adults will continue in the pastoral and educational ministry through the Word and Sacrament, and will worship with appropriate rites throughout. The rites by which adults may be received into church membership are by Baptism and affirmation of faith.

There may be other rites based on significant times and events in adulthood related to marriage, family, mobility, vocation, occupation, retirement, significant issues, social crises, community, and the church's mission. Each of these should have its own preparation and rite.

### A Concluding Word

Recognizing that there will be difficulties, foreseen and unforeseen, in a departure from a former practice, the church should also recognize that the difficulties are not insurmountable. This broader concept of confirmation ministry can better serve the needs of the church and its people in this particular time and place in mid-twentieth-century North America.

The history of confirmation shows that a variety of practices have prevailed in the past. The present situation shows considerable confusion and a growing dissatisfaction with it. Lutherans hold themselves bound in this matter only by such polity and practices as are required by the nature of the church and its mission. They should be free and

flexible for new creative ventures under the Word of God. They should strive for a uniform polity which is also flexible enough to allow for meeting different situational needs of the times. The form of the church's ministry must allow for change and flexibility, or it will become calcified and irrelevant.

In a changing society the church should adopt a challenging as well as a unified ministry.

VI. RECOMMENDATIONS

The Commission respectfully recommends:

1. That the (church body) adopt the report of the Joint Commission on the Theology and Practice of Confirmation as a guide for its confirmation ministry to children and youth;
2. That the (church body) and its appropriate units be prepared to implement the emphases and practices recommended in the report of the Joint Commission on the Theology and Practice of Confirmation by (date to be stated by the church body).

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