



A
GREAT
MIRACLE

A Great Miracle Confirmation Preparation Plan 2017

// *Life in the Face of God*



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*"Life in the
Face of God"*

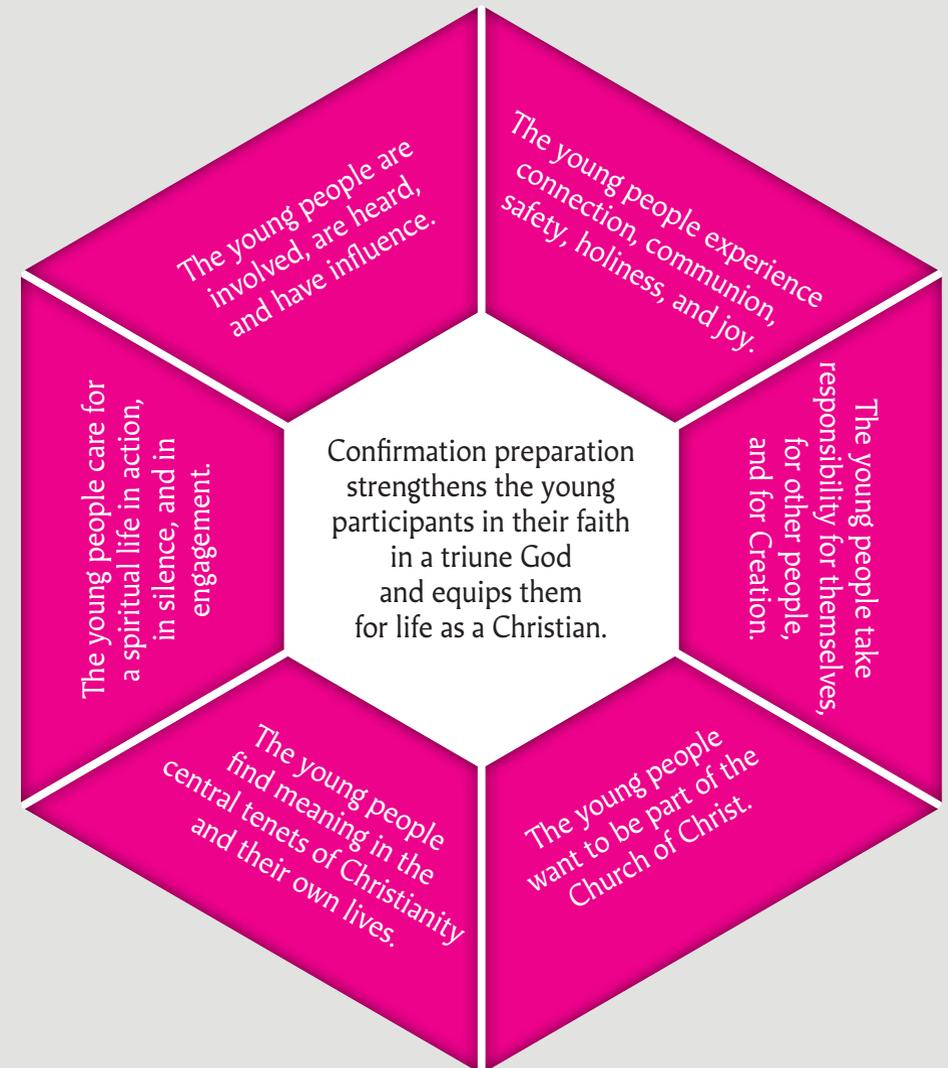
Publications of the Evangelical Lutheran Church of Finland 73
The Church and Action

National Church Council

Helsinki 2018



The Goals of Confirmation Preparation



Great Miracle
 Confirmation Preparation Plan 2017
 "Life in the Face of God"

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Publications of the Evangelical Lutheran Church of Finland 73
 The Church and Action
 Recommendations, instructions and guidelines

Tasknumber: D/240/04.04.02/2016
 Book design Unigrafia
 Layout Jani Käsmä kasma.fi
 Photo: Jussi Vierimaa jussivierimaa.com and p. 68 Ville Heiskanen villeheiskanen.fi

ISBN 978-951-789-615-3 (Paperback)
 ISBN 978-951-789-614-6 (PDF)

ISSN 2341-9393 (Print)
 ISSN 2341-9407 (Online)

Grano Oy
 Kuopio 2018





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Introduction: Facing Miracles



In many ways, confirmation preparation classes are about facing miracles. Christianity is all about a great miracle, God's love for humanity. Confirmation preparation is really another miracle, something that happens again and again through the interaction of God and individual human beings. In that miracle, there are innumerable stories of how faith in a living Creator, in Jesus and in the Holy Spirit is strengthened, renewed, born and visible in the lives of young people and adults alike. In confirmation preparation, we wonder at the works of God and our own existence as created by God: *'I praise you, for I am fearfully and wonderfully made.'* (Ps 139: 14)

Confirmation preparation still reaches a great majority of young people in Finland. In fact, its popularity is a world record. Part of the explanation for the status of our confirmation preparation is the effort we put into it: the Evangelical Lutheran Church of Finland (ELCF) has provided plans for confirmation preparation throughout the past hundred years. The first directives proper for confirmation preparation classes were given by the Bishops' Conference in 1919. Since then, confirmation preparation has been developed and new plans are regularly adopted. *A Great Miracle, Confirmation preparation Plan 2017* follows in the footsteps of the 2001 preparation plan *Life – Faith – Prayer* and further develops it to meet contemporary needs.

The confirmation preparation plan, *A Great Miracle*, puts young participants more directly at the heart of ELCF confirmation preparation. Every young person is a miracle. Young people are the active subjects of confirmation preparation, the people whose engagement is what the preparation strives to support and listen to. At the same time, this new plan endeavours to focus better on community and the involvement of families.



This means the Confirmation Preparation Plan is not a curriculum per se, but a tool to support the comprehensive growth of the participating youth.

This confirmation preparation plan shows Christian understanding of the whole human individual and takes a comprehensive view of how we learn. Views on human life, faith and prayer are seen as a connected whole in the Christian life. The plan gives greater emphasis to spirituality in confirmation preparation. In particular, it focuses more on the Eucharist, which helps to get young people involved in their spiritual well-being by encouraging them to attend Communion regularly. The participation of confirmands in the life of the parish is developed on the basis of experience, with more effort being made to show young people the parish as a spiritual community and the various meanings of membership of the church. Confirmation is increasingly made into a joint and common celebration of the young people, their families and the parish. In addition, the confirmation preparation is more clearly oriented towards the future, from the points of view of young participants and the church itself. This means the *Confirmation Preparation Plan* is not a curriculum *per se*, but a tool to support the comprehensive growth of the participating youth.

This 2017 plan, *A Great Miracle*, is in line with the guide Isoja ihmeitä – Isostoiminnan linjaukset (*Big Miracles – Guidelines for Work with Young Confirmed Volunteers*) of 2016. Confirmation preparation and ELCF activities for young confirmed volunteers (YCVs; *isonen* in Finnish) are closely connected.

The *Confirmation Preparation Plan 2017* has been drawn up in cooperation with confirmands and church employees in various parts of Finland. Chair of the Confirmation Preparation working group was the vicar Hans Tuominen (Vantaa). Members of the working group were: Secretary of Youth Affairs Tarja Liljendahl (Nuori kirkko ry); leading expert Stefan Myrskog (Church Center for Work in Swedish); church youth work leader Delila Myyry (Joensuu); expert Mika Nurmi (Espoo); parish lector Jouko Porkka (Diak); Secretary of Parish Education Jari Pulkkinen (Tampere); student Saara Kinnunen (Kotka); church musician Ruusu Tervaskanto (Rovaniemi); and expert Jarmo Kokkonen (Education and Family Affairs). Secretary for the working group was Heli Pruuki (Education and Family Affairs).

This confirmation preparation plan contains references to church laws and recommendations by the bishops. Current recommendations regarding, for example, baptism, communion and confirmation are available in Finnish and Swedish under *Konfirmaatio/Konfirmation* (i.e. *Confirmation*) in the Sakasti web service of the church's central administration.

Psalm 139

For it was you who formed my inward parts;
you knit me together in my mother's womb.
I praise you,
for I am fearfully and wonderfully made.
Wonderful are your works;
that I know very well.
My frame was not hidden from you,
when I was being made in secret,
intricately woven in the depths of the earth.
Your eyes beheld my unformed substance.
In your book were written
all the days that were formed for me,
when none of them as yet existed.
How weighty to me are your thoughts, O God!
How vast is the sum of them!
I try to count them — they are more than the sand;
I come to the end — I am still with you.
(Ps 139: 13–18)

Jesus Blesses Little Children

People were bringing little children to him in order that he might touch them; and the disciples spoke sternly to them. But when Jesus saw this, he was indignant and said to them, 'Let the little children come to me; do not stop them; for it is to such as these that the kingdom of God belongs. Truly I tell you, whoever does not receive the kingdom of God as a little child will never enter it.' And he took them up in his arms, laid his hands on them, and blessed them.
(Mk 10: 13–16)

Go and make disciples

Jesus came and said to them, 'All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptising them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything that I have commanded you. And remember, I am with you always, to the end of the age.'
(Mt 28: 18–20)

1.

Basis and Mission of Confirmation Preparation



1.1 Living in the face of God

Confirmation preparation is about the relationship between God and humanity. Psalm 139 expresses our amazement at the wonderful works of God and at our own existence as created by Him. In confirmation preparation we also plumb this amazement at life, say thanks and pray to God, and ask Him for guidance.

The central message of Christianity is found in the relationship between God and humanity. Because He loves us, God gave his only Son to save humanity. Each human being is created to live in the face of God and in active relation to God, who is ever-present and who ceaselessly calls people to come to Him. Each person is created and redeemed by God, a great miracle. In the Gospel according to Mark, Jesus points in particular to the child as a paragon of faith. By the time children begin confirmation classes, they are already teenagers.

In confirmation preparation we also focus on the relationship individuals have with themselves, with other people and with all of Creation. How do we live a good life? What is the right way? How should a Christian live their life? No one is an island, we cannot live without one another in isolation. In all their relationships, human beings live in the face of God.

Amazement, wonder and questioning are also part of being young. In human life, the period of youth is a period of development, change and growth. Often, that can be both a wonderful exploration and a demanding, perhaps even daunting, challenge. There are great variations in the stages of development among the young people who take part in confirmation classes and this poses a challenge, both for the instructors and the young people themselves.

There is joy and a thirst for life in being young, but there is also vulnerability and insecurity. Young people need to know their worth and in many ways question whether they are good enough. Emphasizing the individual is a trait of our time which gives people the opportunity to express themselves more freely, but it can also create demands and generate pressure through comparisons. Will I do? Am I beautiful/smart enough? Wonderful enough? Does anybody love me?

At the heart of church teaching is something countercultural: You are enough. You don't need to seek anyone's approval. You don't need to change or to look a certain way in order to feel good enough. To people who ask us if they will do, our message is clear: God, who created you, has made you precisely who you are – and He is ceaselessly calling out to you. From God's point of view, his relation to us is the loving relationship of a giver of life, resembling the love of one's mother or father. It is unconditional.



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From a human point of view, our relationship with God is in our belief, faith and in holding on to the promises of God. Part of it is being humble enough to understand that we are needy and wanting. Again and again, the Spirit of God opens the hearts of humanity to receive the grace and love of God.

During their preparation for confirmation it is important that each young person experiences their life as valuable, as a miracle. They may also learn gratitude towards the giver of life and wish to live with God's guidance. The period of confirmation preparation is a good time to consider one's choices and values in life, the relationship between humanity and God, questions of sin and grace, of redemption and salvation, of life, death and the mystery of the resurrection, of respecting and loving another person, of the future, and of the hope of heaven.

Preparing for confirmation is a school of life that opens up a window to that which is eternal. Jesus has promised that none who believe in him will perish, but will have eternal life. Now we live our lives in the face of God, but one day we will see God face to face.

1.2 Baptism, a sacred rite, sacrament and mystery

Confirmation preparation is intended for people who have received Christian baptism and those who are preparing for it. Jesus gave the Great Commission, *'All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptising them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything that I have commanded you.'* (Mt 28: 18–20)

Baptism is a sacred rite, a sacrament and a mystery, in which God acts. Many baptisms include the words, 'Your eyes beheld my unformed substance.' (Ps 139: 16) Confirmation classes, too, can become part of remembering your baptism: returning to the promise and the gift you have received or can receive through baptism. The same psalm is sometimes quoted at a burial: 'All the days that were formed for me, when none of them as yet existed.'

In baptism we become party to God's grace, we become disciples of Christ and members of a parish. The Catechism teaches us that in baptism, God calls each of us by name, which means we become members of the worldwide Church of Christ. In baptism all people are equal. Baptism does not require a specific knowledge or skill, nor does the value of baptism depend upon our attitudes. Baptism is an act of God which carries you throughout your life. *'Do not fear, for I have redeemed you; I have called you by name, you are mine.'* (Isa. 43: 1)

In baptism the Holy Spirit gives the person who is being baptised the faith with which they can hold on to the promises of God. Faith is a miracle and a mystery. It is the gift of a triune God. The Catechism says 'The covenant of baptism is steadfast even when our faith waivers.' The parish is also a miracle. From generation to generation, the parish lives, changes, evolves – and is an expression of the mercy of Christ and the love of God in this world, forever touching new people. People of all kinds and all ages can be part of the parish of Christ, to be

near one another and near God, to be and to grow. 'Baptism obligates us to put our trust in Christ alone and to live our lives following his example.'

The group of confirmands is a congregation (as opposed to a parish, which is defined through territory rather than its common worship) which reads the Bible, celebrates the worship service, goes to Communion, prays and learns together. In this way, the confirmands are always face to face with God and God's reality. They can grow stronger in the faith they have received in baptism or a faith in God can be born in them through the influence of the Holy Spirit.

Increasingly, confirmation preparation is also a preparation for baptism. A young person can be baptised at an early stage of their confirmation preparation. When the baptism will take place is discussed with the young person, the parents or guardian, and a decision is made on a case-by-case basis. A young person can feel close to God without having been baptised. A decision to join confirmation preparation is in itself a sign of the work of God's Spirit in their life.

1.3 Preparing for Holy Communion

In the Bible, having a meal together is a key sign of communion, of friendship and trust. In the first congregations, Christians *'spent much time together in the temple, they broke bread at home and ate their food with glad and generous hearts.'* (Acts 2:46)

The sacrament of Holy Communion is the holy supper instituted by Christ and is meant for all Christians to strengthen their faith. Holy Communion is a mystery within which God acts. We can come to the communion table even if we do not fully understand its significance – its essence is grounded in Christ's work, not the person administering Holy Communion or its recipient.

A person brings their entire life to the communion table – including their sins, their lack of love and their unbelief. In the communion, they receive the grace and love of God in the body and blood of Christ. According to the Catechism, *'The body of Christ, the bread of life, nourishes and strengthens the spiritual life begun in baptism. The blood of Christ, the remedy of immortality, heals us and offers us eternal life.'*

The roots of confirmation preparation are found in the readying of a young person to attend communion independently. Children can receive communion with their parents or with other adults who take part in their Christian education. This means that the confirmands can also take Holy Communion in the worship service of their preparatory congregation alongside their confirmation instructor. It is recommended that the group of young people attending preparation classes together will receive communion several times during the period of their confirmation work. This requires classes to prepare for communion at the beginning of the period of work. When there is, for whatever reason, something that makes receiving communion physically more difficult, it is particularly important to go to communion prior to the confirmation. Holy Communion is based on free will and you can also come to the altar of communion to receive a blessing. Jesus says, *'Come to me, all you that are weary and are carrying heavy burdens, and I will give you rest.'* (Mt 11: 28)

1.4 Preparing for a life of prayer

Human life with its many questions and challenges, faith in God and the life of prayer are all connected. In the life of a Christian, they are simultaneously real and true, and impact upon one another. God is part of all aspects of our daily life and through prayer you can speak to Him about everything. Like breathing, our spiritual life, faith and prayer are part of everything we do as Christians, weekdays and feast days. They cannot be separated from the rest of our life. The spiritual life grows continuously through our connection with God. Sometimes this life goes in waves.

During confirmation preparation, young participants learn to tend their spiritual life in various ways. Ideally, a life of prayer permeates the entire process of confirmation preparation as a natural and prominent part of it. Regular moments of quiet and prayer, communal prayers and the divine office give a rhythm to the preparation for confirmation, which helps confirmands to converse with God about events in their life and anything that may be causing worry.

The Bible is used extensively in confirmation preparation. The Catechism says, *'When we read or hear God's word, the Holy Spirit kindles in us a renewed trust and courage.'* We read and listen to the Bible in worship service, in communal prayer and when we work on our assignments. In Bible study groups, biblical texts are read and discussed. It is important for young people to reflect on what the Bible can mean in their life and for them to be given help in understanding the Bible.

During the period of confirmation preparation, participants gather as a congregation in the liturgical life of the worship service. The worship service is a safe place to meet, where God speaks to and listens to people, and where people can speak to and listen to God. The interaction of the worship service comes through words, music and silence.

In the worship service and through prayer, Christ himself serves his congregation and sends it to serve others. Little by little, the confirmands learn to find their inner peace in the face of God, both on their own and with one another. At the same time they learn more about what God is like and what faith means in practice. In this way, the life of prayer as experienced during the preparation for confirmation leads young people to love their neighbour, both in their classes and in their everyday life.

As the confirmands work together to set up the worship service and common prayer and take part in them, they become familiar with the worship service, which in turn leads them to an understanding of it. Repetition brings safety and peace. The daily reading of the affirmation of faith, the Our Father and the Lord's



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Blessing become part of each individual's own resources, something they can naturally reach for in the future, when taking part in the liturgical life of their parish and tending their own spiritual life.

It is important that the life of prayer expressed in confirmation preparation is multiform and regular, and expresses a freedom and space to breathe. Ideally, each meeting should include elements of prayer.

1.5 Confirmation preparation strengthens and equips

The mission statement for confirmation preparation is: **Confirmation preparation strengthens the young participants in their faith in a triune God and equips them for life as a Christian.**

The verb to *strengthen* that is used in the statement connects to Lutheran baptismal theology. Preparing for confirmation strengthens young people and their relationship to God. The period of confirmation preparation is intended to help its young participants to live and understand the reality of the faith that they have received or can receive in the sacrament of Baptism.

Confirmation preparation gives young people the tools they will need to live as Christians today and in the future. Confirmation classes *equip* young people to tend their spiritual life, understand the sacraments, consider the questions of faith and science, and to know and read the Bible. Confirmation preparation calls young people to become part of their parish and to grow as Christians throughout a journey that will last their entire life. It equips them for ethical considerations in everyday situations: to live their life loving their neighbours, expressing a natural everyday form of Christianity and global responsibility. Confirmation preparation also strengthens and equips young people for the difficult periods in life by providing a message of hope, of God's presence, of divine guidance, redemption and eternal life. *'Even to your old age I am he, even when you turn grey I will carry you. I have made, and I will bear; I will carry and will save.'* (Isa. 46: 4). Faith in the triune God means trust, knowledge and obedience. Faith is to freely trust in and rely on God. Because it is hard for us to rely on someone we do not know, part of faith also requires some sort of knowledge about who God is and all his benefits. Faith leads to obedience, to striving to find the goodwill of God in one's own life and in our shared lives.

The world has changed rapidly in the past twenty odd years, both locally in our own society and globally. These changes play their part in religions and philosophies. As part of preparing for confirmation, participants also learn about other faiths and about ecumenism and are thereby equipped to meet the challenges of atheism and irreligion. Knowledge of one's own background and the faith of one's church helps in encounters with people whose thoughts and beliefs vary from your own. Preparing for confirmation equips young people to live in this world as Christians and as Lutherans.

In effect it is God himself who strengthens and equips the young people as they prepare for confirmation. It is He who carries the whole of the preparation process.

1.6 Confirmation is a celebration of unity

For the confirmands, for their families, loved ones and the entire parish, the confirmation is a celebration. The confirmands confess their faith within the parish, thereby joining the chain of generations before them who have confessed the same faith, praying together and being prayed for. In the unique right of confirmation, God blesses and strengthens them, both as individuals and as a member of the parish. Every young person is holy and a miracle. Confirmation celebrates the miracle of the particular young people present on the day and their being children of God. It is a celebration of participation and unity.

Confirmation is not an event separate from the period of its preparation, but is a natural extension of it. In fact, it is better to see the whole period of classes and preparation as building blocks for the confirmation itself. Which is why plans for the confirmation day are best made during the preparation period together with the young people who are to be confirmed. Having the participants involved in the planning and implementation of the confirmation service gives it more dimensions than if church employees took care of it all. Accepting the emotions, experiences, engagement and physicality of the confirmands contributes to a worship service that truly puts them at its centre. The young participants are also the ones who produce the contents of the prayers. It is they who do the praying and for whom prayers are said. It is ideal if each confirmand's name can be said in prayer.

In any one group that is preparing for confirmation there may be young people who for some reason do not want or cannot be confirmed. Even so, they must still be offered an opportunity to take part in the worship service and be encouraged to get involved in the activities of the parish.

It is important that the young people know what rights are accorded to them for taking part in confirmation preparation classes and by the confirmation itself. A person who has attended the preparation classes can be married in a church. Being confirmed gives a person the right to independently partake of Holy Communion and to become sponsor at a baptism. Confirmation also accords a person the right to become a candidate in a parish election after they have turned 18.

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1.7 Preparing to live a Christian life

During their preparation for confirmation, young people may experience a sense of being close to God and of God speaking to them. Hopefully, this too will lead them to find their place in a parish in the future. Growing in faith, hope and charity and learning more and more about the meaning of faith is a life-long process.

Preparing for confirmation is part of the Christian life. One does not attend preparation classes simply to have done them, but for life – life in the here and now and for eternity. The preparation for confirmation reminds young participants of the future and of the hope they have in God and as God's children. God calls and sends these young people to live their life as Christians, as members of their parish and of the Church of Christ, in all that they do in life. For many young people, the first time they have a chance to take on a responsibility in the parish is as young confirmed volunteers or YCVs.

Confirmation preparation and the confirmation itself not only give young people certain rights, they also give them a mission. Being a Christian in this world is both mission and diakonia, that is both faith and charity. Living a Christian life is living a life of mission, a life of having been sent.

Each Christian and the entire parish have been sent to realise God's call in their own everyday life. At its best, confirmation preparation can help a young person to find their own calling, to experience life as meaningful and to find hope. It is a question of strengthening one's Christian identity. Your calling in life can be varied – you can be called on to be a good neighbour, a friend, a parent or to pray for others. *'And whatever you do, in word or deed, do everything in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through him.'* (Col 3: 17)

2.

The Goals of Confirmation Preparation



The mission statement for confirmation preparation is: **Confirmation preparation strengthens the young participants in their faith in a triune God and equips them for life as a Christian.**

The goals of confirmation preparation express what we want to achieve. The mission statement for confirmation preparation is realised through six goals, expressed from the point of view of the confirmands. Usually, confirmation preparation is undertaken communally. The goals take into account participation and rights, feeling and experience, spirituality and aesthetics, knowledge and church membership. The goals express what the church wants to achieve, and set the direction for the entire preparation process and for its individual parts.

In preparing for their confirmation:

The young people are involved, are heard, and have influence.

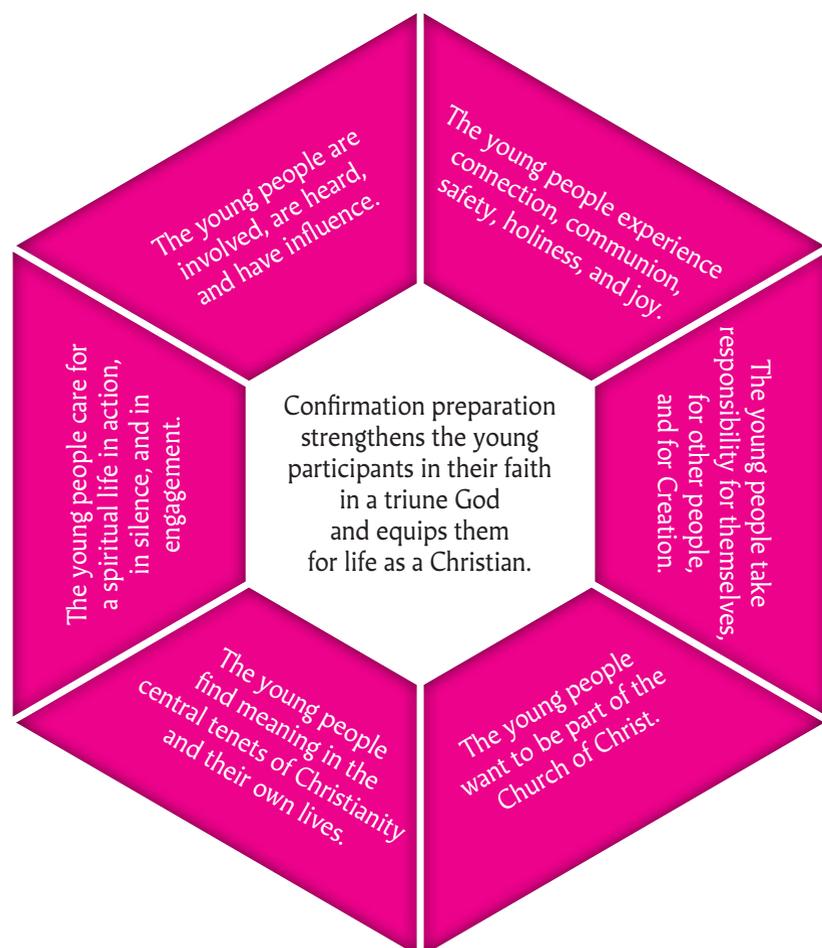
The young people experience connection, communion, safety, holiness and joy.

The young people learn to care for their spiritual life in action, in silence, and in engagement.

The young people take responsibility for themselves, for other people and for Creation.

The young people see in their own lives the meaning of the central tenets of Christianity.

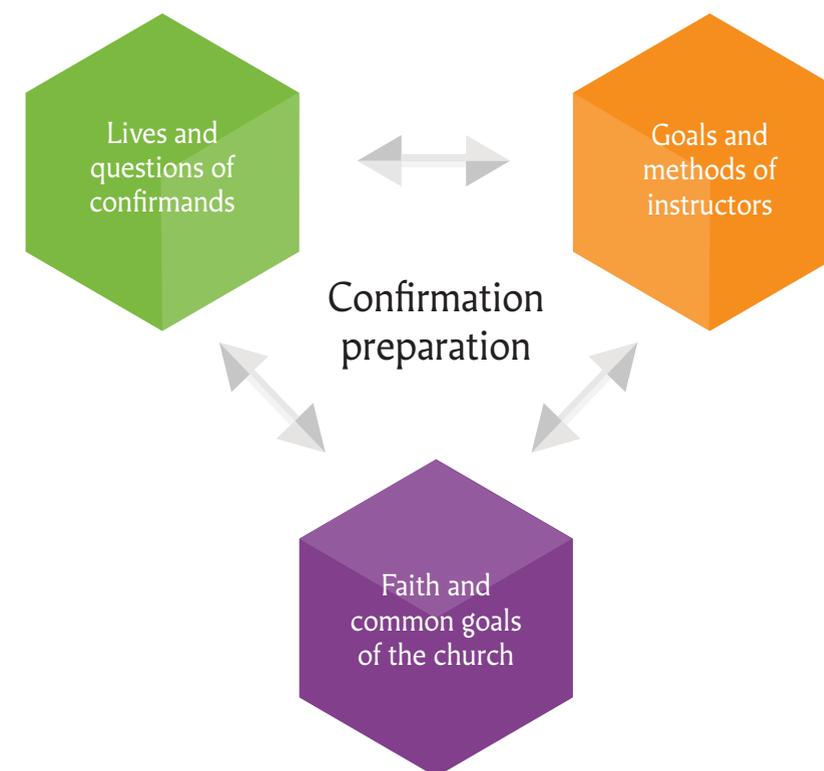
The young people want to be part of the Church of Christ.



These six goals are present throughout the period of preparing for confirmation. Humanity and aspects of life, faith and prayer are all present in each of the goals. In combination, the six goals encompass a key part of the preparation for confirmation, that is, being part of a community. If the six goals are realised, they strengthen the community of the confirmands.

All the goals are of equal importance and in many ways are all interconnected. In this plan, for instance, we address many aspects of learning through involvement, but learning is a key part of all the goals. Learning accumulates throughout the period of confirmation preparation, as learning occurs all the time and in all situations.

In addition to the aims of the church, the participants themselves express and find words for their goals and hopes, both as a group and as individuals; as do their families, the YCVs and confirmation instructors, interacting as a team and as individuals, along with the parish.



These three groups are in dialogue with one another, which is as it should be. It is important that confirmation instructors discuss the goals with the confirmands, who should also be given opportunities to express their hopes and expectations of the confirmation preparation. Respecting the young people's right to self-governance is a key starting point in setting the goals and working to achieve them. Talking about these things increases openness, trust and a sense of participation.

If the goals of the different parties are not expressed verbally, the instructors may unintentionally use a lot of power by subjecting the goals of the participants and those of the church to their own, possibly subconscious, aims. Openly discussing what the various parties want, hope and strive for strengthens the professionalism of the instructors and makes confirmation preparation a safer place.

In assessing how the goals have been achieved, it is necessary to think through how they can best be promoted within your local situation. How do you, for instance, take into account the expectations of each family; how do you factor in cooperation with the local school(s) and the work culture in the parish? In addition to the six common goals of confirmation preparation, the parish can locally specify a focus of their own or add a topical goal.

2.1 *The young people are involved, are heard, and have influence*

2.1.1 Each young person is unique

At the heart of confirmation preparation are the young participants. It is for them that the whole thing is organised. The goals, the planning, the structure and the activities of the preparation period must serve their learning and growth as Christians. At the same time the confirmation classes are part of the church's baptismal teaching and as such an important part of how the church understands itself.

The title of this plan, *A Great Miracle*, is a reference to the words of Psalm 139, pointing to the inalienable value of each and every human being. All young people have the right to be seen, acknowledged and respected as individuals throughout their confirmation preparation. Each young person is individually important and interesting. They are personally called.

Confirmation classes and the congregation are also communities. Each confirmand is part of these communities, of their own group and of their parish. They have been called to communion together with other people and with God, both during their preparation for confirmation and thereafter, throughout their life. Jesus met, called and accepted many different kinds of people.

Learning and growth do not happen in a vacuum. For young people, their friends, their peer group and the community that grows during their confirmation preparation are especially important. It is therefore important to support the creation of the community bonds. In a community of young people, the role of adults is to guide and enable, rather than constantly being the active party themselves. Adults make it possible for each young person to express their own personality and to be seen and heard as part of the group within a safe environment.

2.1.2 Becoming involved participants

True participation involves taking part and influencing what happens in the group of which you have become a member. Participation is about how each young person can be involved and contribute to the planning, realisation and evaluation of their confirmation preparation. Each of them will have something to contribute to the whole. The opportunity to get involved and take part in working through things within a personally significant community is a key aspect of developing human identity. It is a basic requirement of growth and development. Through participation we learn to be and to live together.

A particularly important part of participating in confirmation classes is the experience of belonging and togetherness, which allows each confirmand to feel 'There is a place here for me. I can be a part of this group.' A personal experience of being heard and seen as your true self is possibly the central element in feeling that you really are a participant. Also, by taking part one forges connections: confirmands *are* and *do* things together.

Confirmation preparation can support the young participants by, for example, getting them to take part in and influence its planning, by supporting



their individuality, their knowledge and their skills, by helping them learn more, and by giving them a relevant amount of responsibility.

It is good to encourage young people to think about their own wishes and needs and to learn to express them. Youth participation can be actively strengthened by asking about and listening to their experiences and thoughts, and taking them seriously. Participation is feeling that you are taking charge of your role, your hopes and your needs. Also it enables you plan and evaluate: *‘What should I choose and what do I want to choose, what is important to me? Where am I coming from and in which direction do I want to go?’*

Young people can be challenged to actively think and look at themselves in relation to the confirmation preparation. The preparation is a learning experience provided by the parish, which means that its contents and goals are not entirely up to the confirmands, who during the period of confirmation preparation will study the key tenets of Christianity. At the same time it is important that they can be heard. They can be asked to set the goals for their own confirmation preparation, and ask themselves, for example, *‘What can I get out of this? What do I want to consciously learn about God, the church, myself, other people? What will happen if my confirmation preparation is a great success?’*

Of course young people also have the right to take part in the preparation without setting specific goals of their own. Participation is not only doing, but being and receiving. It is the freedom to choose for yourself. When it is good for the young people themselves, it is enough for them to just be.

Participation also triggers questions of accessibility and equality. All young people are welcome to attend confirmation classes, which means that the preparation must be entirely accessible for them. About one fifth of young people have some kind of learning disability and everybody can benefit from being mindful of the needs of others. Confirmation preparation is inclusive on principle. That is, depending on the situation, in part or as a whole, we make it possible for all young people to take part in the same teaching groups. We do not segregate people, everybody is equally valuable and accepted within any group. This does not mean that it is not an option to arrange tailor-made confirmation preparation groups for people with disabilities or those who use sign language; sometimes they are justified and necessary for the young people.

2.1.3 Dialogue is a way of being and speaking

Words shape our reality. How we talk about and view others during confirmation preparation can make a big difference. Our choice of words can strengthen either a sense of involvement or feelings of detachment.

Confirmation preparation should be developed in the direction of dialogue and dialogic learning (through speaking). Through dialogue we mean to encourage a way of interacting that is characterised by openness, compassion and appreciation. In this way of communicating and interacting with others each party is considerate of the other, they respond to one another and make adjustments to accommodate the other. Actually, the dialogic approach is a more comprehensive way of being, of awareness of one’s own and the other’s thinking and experience. Dialogue strengthens a person’s sense of security and the experience of being seen, of being known. It builds a sense of community.

Part of dialogic teaching is the idea that nobody owns the truth, but that we are all journeying towards it together. Dialogue is about striving together to understand. Dialogue does not require that we think alike or that we set out from the same point of view, but that we respect individuality and difference. When somebody supplies the right answer without leaving an opening for other people’s thoughts it is the death of dialogue. The discourse of confirmation preparation ought to provide space for the thoughts and questions of all participants. Dialogue requires enough time and a calm atmosphere in which to foster respect for others.

Dialogic conversations strongly support community learning. However, learning is often also a personal dialogue on many levels. Matters central to Christianity are studied during confirmation preparation, but if they are to become of significance to the young confirmands the content must come into dialogue with their own questions in life. It is important that the participants process the contents personally in order for the information to move from a superficial learning of the head to a deeper learning of the heart. Through personal and group dialogues the meaning of the central tenets of Christianity can open up and the confirmands can experience an intimate understanding of them.

The spiritual life is also a matter of the dialogic and of entering into dialogue, a dialogue between human and God, between the individual and their community, between the faith of the church and the faith of the individual. Knowing their own faith equips young people for dialogue with other people and different world views.



Dialogue does not require that we think alike or that we set out from the same point of view, but that we respect individuality and difference.

2.1.4 Multiform and active learning

Learning is an inseparable part of our comprehensive and life-long growth as human beings and of building a good life for our community. Learning is active and should be viewed through the lens of the qualifications of the individual participants, such as their previous experience and level of skills and knowledge. Learning is also interactive, the individual learns in cooperation with others.

In confirmation preparation, learning is an interchange between the group and its instructors. It continues throughout the period of preparation in all situations and environments that are part of the process. Identifying individual needs, such as a need for support or a lack of motivation, and taking them into account does not exclude communality or interaction, but are a different take on the same whole.

Communal learning takes place when the group consciously strives together to study and understand the contents of the confirmation preparation through, for example, dialogic learning. In the communal process the confirmands build new knowledge jointly, knowledge that cannot be wholly attributed to any one individual. In thinking about and discussing things together, everybody takes part in the process, more or less actively. In this way, young people can draw on one another's knowledge, experience and skills and make use of them while at the same time each individual learns more. In confirmation preparation the process nature of communal learning is very important. The joint responsibility, the fact that everyone participates, and that this is a way of making visible the thoughts of the community make these key parts of the process. The parish is a community and together we learn to be members of it.

The role of the already confirmed volunteer leaders, or YCVs, is enormously important in this process of learning together. Participants follow the opinions, attitudes, behaviours, expressions of faith and activities of the YCVs very carefully. It is also good to remember that the 'Y' in YCV stands for young and that they, too, are part of the overall setup in order to learn and grow more.

Learning during confirmation preparation should be meaningful and motivational for all participants. What the younger ones appreciate and how they feel always guides the learning process, which means it is always essential to listen to and take them into account. At its best, learning provides positive emotional experiences, and the joy of learning encourages people to learn more.

It is important that what is being learned and discussed finds a touch point in the life and phenomena familiar to the confirmands. They should feel that they are discovering more and discussing things that are meaningful and real to them. The work should be challenging enough for them, but not feel impossible. Understanding the goals of the various activities and areas of work helps confirmands to see them as meaningful.

Young people's motivation to learn is awakened and strengthened when they feel they are making decisions and speaking for themselves, while feeling that they belong with the rest of the group. Motivation is further strengthened in their experience when they develop or gain from what they are learning. It is good to consciously promote motivation among the confirmands by encouraging them to think, to take part and be active.



Ideally, the learning will link to their existing knowledge, attitudes and skills. It may help them to see connections if they are encouraged to reflect on their experiences and consciously see them in conjunction with their new skills and knowledge. Young people can delve more deeply into things that are being taught when they are supported in seeing the connection between a subject and their own understanding of past experiences. It is the job of the instructors to help them see details as part of a greater whole.

Encouragement and a supportive response during study helps people to learn but also contributes to a person's positive self-image.

2.1.5 Involving the family

Along with the young participants, their families also want to be involved in the process, some more, or less, so than others. The parents remember their own confirmation preparation camps and think afresh about parenting and relating to their child who has become old enough for confirmation. They may also give thought to their own relationship to the church and their faith. The confirmation celebrations are important to many families. For parents, godparents, grandparents and other loved ones, the confirmation day is an important time for expressing love and appreciation of their growing child.

For many young people, home is a refuge and their family the community they miss awfully while away attending confirmation classes. Conversely, during their teens, home and family seems to be the very community they are working towards liberating themselves from. Confirmation preparation can provide young people with a safe place to process what they are feeling about their family, their background, and the place from which they will go forth in life. Preparing for confirmation brings many teenagers a greater understanding and appreciation of their parents and family, and thereby provides the basis for a better relationship. It is natural for them to miss home concurrently to the need to be more independent.

However, there are many kinds of homes. The reality of how home and family life is may be very sensitive for some young people, in which case the confirmation preparation can provide an important counterpoint. The role of the instructor as a safe and dependable adult may be of key significance in the life of some young people.

The instructor needs to be able to take seriously a variety of family situations, without shrinking away from differences or rough circumstances. Instructors in confirmation preparation need to get to know the whole family to some extent, which makes parent evenings or family days a key part of the process. There have also been good experiences of instructors visiting families in their home or of inviting parents or guardians to a brief individual meeting. Meeting a young confirmand's family can help with understanding the young person, but any parts of the preparation that are directed towards parents and families must be done considerately. They should not cause embarrassment or feelings of loneliness for those young people whose parents for some reason do not or cannot get involved, or for any young person who may feel ashamed of their parents.

Meeting the families is important, but we must be willing to prioritise the individual needs of each young person entrusted to us, and when necessary accept their need to remain independent of their family. For the participants, confirma-

tion preparation is in many ways 'their thing'. Information about the preparation process is given to parents, but always with respect for a teenager's need to keep some things private.

2.2 The young people experiencing connection, communion, safety, holiness, and joy

2.2.1 Communion and being together

Safety and trust go hand in hand as essential elements of a preparation process that can lead confirmands to feel a sense of joy and connection. A confirmation preparation group comes together as a congregation. At its best, it is a community of safety, trust, joy and unity. The young people experience a communion with God and with one another, enjoy being together and feel empowered by it.

The sense of community, connection and common spirit that develops among the group members is meaningful and important in many ways. Instructors can foster a safe and open atmosphere by showing the members of the group acceptance, openness and trust. During the process of becoming a community it is key that each participant experiences being seen and heard, being accepted and feeling important as a member of the group. Encouraging significant values, such as openness and respect for other people's opinions, help to create a strong group bond. A safe and liberated atmosphere encourages any shy or sensitive members of the group to also speak up and take part.

Joy, too, plays its part in learning. Most of the young people discover something important during their preparation for confirmation, when they recognise they are taking part in a significant school-of-life situation and are enjoying their own existence in a new way. Chatting, making jokes, playing games, exercising and the rest of the 'free time' they share in the preparation period is all important. It all contributes valuably to the community and the connection between the participants. The laughter they share is not only beneficial but is a good measure of the atmosphere generated. Laughter and joy unite people, helps them to relax and feel liberated. When everyone is laughing, something important happens. It opens up the possibility of other kinds of openness and expressions of feeling. Trust and connection deepens.

Joy also has a spiritual dimension and is part of the Gospel, of being a child of God. '*The fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, generosity, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control.*' (Gal 5: 22–23)



The sense of community, connection and common spirit that develops among the group members is meaningful and important in many ways.

2.2.2 Confirmation preparation is safe

People remember if they felt safe or unsafe during their own confirmation preparation: ‘Were things good for me during conformation work? How did I experience it and what was it like?’ That preparation experience can go hand in hand with the impression of whether or not the parish is *‘your thing’* or whether or not you feel connected to other Christians.

Feeling safe leads people to strive towards understanding others and building peace. Whereas, fear and feeling unsafe often lead a person to seek safety, and a need to stay within a known situation, to defend oneself and to hold on to what is here and now. A Christian finds safety in God and the Gospels, which have the power to change the world. This power can be expressed in alleviating loneliness, stopping bullying, and acceptance of the fact that all people are different.

The period of confirmation preparation should be safe for all participants. It requires respect for each individual and their attributes or limitations on all human levels: physical, mental, spiritual, emotional, sexual and social. A safe confirmation preparation group is a community where young people can trust that they are respected, loved and protected just as they are. This sense of security is built up in many small ways by, for example, friendly looks and a kind way of speaking to one another. In a safe atmosphere everybody can express their thoughts and feelings without fear or embarrassment.

When confirmation preparation takes place within a safe community, it can be a truly spiritual experience. How confirmands experience the period of preparation, and including the intensive study period, ties in with their view of Christianity and of how God operates in this world. A safe atmosphere makes it possible to see God as what is safe in life.

To ensure the participants’ safety, instructors must be aware of their power and responsibility. This requires them to acknowledge the risk of manipulation and abuse, and to make a conscious effort to minimise such risks. Instructors must be ready to change practices and behaviour and to intervene whenever necessary.

Providing confirmation instruction in safety requires understanding of any gender sensitivities. Young confirmands are at a very sensitive stage of their development. During the intensive study period, there are games, sports and other activities that bring people into close proximity with one another. Instructors must be observant of how people touch others in the course of these activities, be sensitive to what they say to one another and to what they laugh about or at. Some word choices can serve to shut people out, sometimes even without the speaker realising it or being intentionally bullying. It is important to be aware of the fact that the young confirmands, their families, and their individual realities come in many forms. In the church we do not want to make anybody feel they are an outsider.

Occasionally, an employee or volunteer might begin to worry about a teenager’s situation at home or some other aspect of the personal life of one of the participants. Essential to the professional skill-set of an instructor is a knowledge of the Child Welfare Act and if necessary to have the courage to intervene. All parish employees are obliged to follow the Child Welfare Act in any situation that requires the authorities to be notified. The only and rather rare exception to this rule is the confessional seal which binds a priest. All confirmands have the right to receive help, which ultimately will be in the best interests of the entire family.



A safe confirmation preparation group is a community where young people can trust that they are respected, loved and protected just as they are.

2.2.3 Learning to love your neighbour

In confirmation preparation, a conscious effort is made to think about and learn how to be human, how to be a good person, how to love our neighbour. We are created to be in relationship to others. We are constantly in relationship to the triune God, to other people, to nature and to Creation – and also to ourselves. Each person is created to connect and to be responsible, but we are also broken and in need of redemption. The reality of sin is part of all our lives. Thanks to the Atonement of Christ we can constantly be renewed in all these relationships.

A human being is the sum of many parts: we are physical, mental, spiritual, emotional, social and sexual beings. To see the whole of a person requires seeing the entire arc of a human life at all its stages. A human being is valuable and important when all is going well, but also in the parts of life when things are difficult. Nobody can go through life sufficient unto themselves without encountering some problems along the way.

Each of us must face evil and suffering both near and far. Young people need to find their own way of coping with their feelings of helplessness, pain and anxiety caused by the suffering in this world.

It can also be tough to deal with oneself and one's own human relationships. Most young people suffer from intermittent anxiety and feeling wretched. Some young people become depressed or live with other mental-health issues such as, for example, an eating disorder. Instructors involved in confirmation preparation need to be ready to provide pastoral care, and confession too can be helpful for participants.

Preparing for confirmation is about learning the theory and practice of being Christian, of being a neighbour and learning the meaning of diakonia. Each one of us needs to connect with others. Confirmation preparation can help young people create and care for connecting with others. In the best-case scenario, they get to experience that they are important and loved members of their community. This strengthens their well-being, mental health and ability to care for themselves and others. They also learn from one another.

Sometimes confirmation preparation can be a key factor in preventing a sense of exclusion and in fighting loneliness. In most settings there will be confirmands who feel lonely. Any lonely child or young person will need a friend who sees them as individually important, and will suffer the lack of having someone like that. Being lonely can cause a feeling of failure and shame that nobody seems to want to be with you. Loneliness and being left on the outside of things can have a significant impact on a child or young person's self-image. If the loneliness is prolonged, they can start thinking it's their fault that they are lonely, that they are not good enough, that they are bad and therefore that the situation cannot be resolved and must be permanent. During confirmation preparation, young participants can form new bonds and also ways of being with one another.

For a child who has grown up without a sense of security, friends may provide the emotional support they need to help them handle the challenges they face in their family life. The confirmation preparation time can provide a rare opportunity for some of them to be themselves in peace. YCVs and instructors should play a key role in making this a safe space. As a community of friendship, confirmation preparation can provide special support for those young people who are most in need of safety and care.

2.3 *The young people care for a spiritual life in action, in silence, and in engagement*

2.3.1 Liturgical life permeates confirmation preparation

Throughout the period of preparing for confirmation, the liturgical life is present in our prayers and worship services, but parish services are also part of this life. During their preparation, confirmands learn that prayer and a spiritual life are a natural part of being human. Every day we have a chance to meet God. It is not a rarity.

Humans are spiritual beings. Every one of us is spiritual. This is an intimate and sensitive area, where we touch upon a deeply personal way of being and living. Through confirmation preparation, young people can identify their spiritual self.

In worship service we stop to meet God and to examine ourselves in the company of others. In the worship service, we come face to face with that which is Holy and take part in the mercy, grace and love of God. The worship service is the heartbeat of Christian life. Each service is a celebration of God's redeeming presence. Its power is not based on the size of the parish or the quality of those officiating, but on the promise of Jesus: *'For where two or three are gathered in my name, I am there among them.'* (Mt 18:20)

When young people are involved in planning and realising the worship service, its riches are opened up to them. They learn how the liturgy, the homily, the music, the art, the church room and the parish come together. *Service, prayer and spiritual life* are not just words – they involve movement, doing, taking part, being, singing, creative expression, planning, thinking and discussion. One grows into the worship service by taking part in and contributing to it. Even today, making the sign of the cross, bowing or kneeling can still be significant ways of prayer for young people.

The spiritual experience of each young confirmand is unique. For many young people, the spiritual life opens up as a new area of life as they prepare for confirmation. It can be difficult for a grown-up to understand and remember what it is like when one first enters into the spiritual life. It is important to tell the young participants that the experience of spiritual life can be different for each individual and that it can change over the course of a lifetime. Along with communion, joy and exaltation, the spiritual dimension of life can include challenging 'times in the desert', emptiness and loneliness.



*In the worship service,
we come face to face with that which is Holy
and take part in the mercy,
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//
*The worship service
 is the heartbeat
 of Christian life.*

It is important to make different forms of spiritual life part of confirmation preparation, so that each participant can find something that feels natural to them. At the same time, you need to pay attention to sufficient repetition. The spiritual life is fed and nurtured by many kinds of music, which in turn can provide words for our conversations with God. Use the hymnal throughout the period of preparing for confirmation. Prayer beads can provide tangible support for the life of prayer. Virtual aids are also used in online prayer life. Symbols, gestures and movement are wordless ways of expressing a living faith.

Be mindful of the language used in prayer. By all means introduce prayers that are meaningful but not necessarily open to immediate interpretation, but remember that prayers in simple language are meditative and speak to many people.

The experience of being part of something is also important in the spiritual dimension. Each Christian is part of a long chain and traditions that stretch back over thousands of years. It is important to be familiar with the common prayers of Christianity, in particular the *Lord's Prayer* and the *Benediction* (i.e. the *Aaronitic Blessing*). Regularly saying morning and evening prayers and grace or singing before meals are natural routines during confirmation preparation. There is a wealth of material in the Christian tradition of meditation. Silence and retreats are also attractive to young people. It is good to use some regular form of prayer, such as laudes, completorium or a Taizé-inspired prayer of silence, or to pray daily using prayer beads. A repetitive mode of prayer that becomes familiar to the confirmands can provide a source of safety and closeness. In the parish, after the confirmation, it is good to keep up the same form of prayer.

Spiritual songs and hymns, silent prayer and Bible reading can be combined with the study of any theme of the confirmation preparation. The life of prayer learned while preparing for confirmation, the regular prayers, and praying as part of the work and routines of life at a confirmation preparation camp all help the participants to understand how they can have a spiritual dimension in their everyday life. The structure of prayer that is often used, with set morning and evening prayers as well as a communion service or service of the word, breaks up the day with important moments of recollection, examination and peace. Often this structure of the daily schedule comes quite close to the programme of prayers used in monastic life.

In confirmation preparation, it is up to the instructors to see that the spiritual life is not experienced as something that is forced upon the participants nor as being manipulative. The prayers used in confirmation preparation should be safe and nurturing throughout. God may speak to the young people, but others cannot force this to happen.

2.3.2 Learning how to go to communion by taking part

Going to communion is an intrinsic part of liturgical life and is a key Christian way of tending to one's own spiritual needs and accepting God's care of you. The Lord's Supper strengthens the communion of Christians. Confirmation preparation is a preparation for communion and provides a place where young people can discover communion as a part of their regular tending of their spiritual life. Young communicants also learn to understand that Holy Communion is a sacrament initiated by Jesus.

Communion preparation has its basis in the free will. Confirmands are invited to the communion table during their period of preparing for confirmation. If they do not want to receive communion or are not yet baptised, they can come to the communion table and place their right hand on their left shoulder as a sign that they would like to receive a blessing rather than the Lord's Supper. A young person who chooses to be baptised during their confirmation preparation can, depending on the circumstances, be baptised at an early stage in the process. In which case, the importance of the sacraments must be discussed in detail.

Young baptised members of the church should not be denied access to Holy Communion with their parents or their confirmation instructors. The group preparing for confirmation can go to communion together several times during the preparation period. At the outset of confirmation preparation, the group learns about the celebration of the service of communion and its meaning. Throughout the period of preparing for confirmation, the group will return to this subject and deepen their understanding through conversation and study. The sacrament of Holy Communion is a mystery, many dimensions of which are beyond comprehension by the human mind. It seems it is a miracle of God that cannot be explained in words. The spiritual importance of Holy Communion can only be fully understood through the repeated experience of partaking in it.

It is wise to discuss with the parents or guardians the content and practices of celebrating the service of communion at an early stage of their child's confirmation preparation, and the subject should be touched upon in the letter to the family before the preparation begins. It may be new to some of them that young people can receive communion during their confirmation preparation. Some families have a long tradition, going back generations, of the first communion being taken at the confirmation service. Through parish education for children, other families are used to the communion table being open to anyone who has been baptised. We respect the wishes of each family and are considerate of them. The family of any young person preparing for confirmation is invited to services and to communion. A Communion Service can be celebrated, for instance, during the visitors' day of a confirmation preparation camp.

During confirmation preparation it is also good to talk about ecumenism and communion. Young people need to know that there is currently no intercommunion between all denominations of the Christian church. In other countries and in Finland people can attend the services of different denominations and in some cases even approach the communion table to receive a blessing to signal the unity that exists as well as show their respect for the different traditions.

2.3.3 The Bible, a guidebook for Christian life

The Bible is a holy book, the basis of the life of the church, and a guidebook for Christians. It should be used regularly and in many ways during confirmation preparation, to make it more familiar to the participants.

Each young person who is preparing for confirmation has the right to a Bible in their own language.

The Bible serves as God talking to humankind. According to the Catechism, the Bible *'turns our eyes to the Saviour, who did for us what we ourselves are incapable of doing'*. Christ and his love for us provide the key to understanding the Bible. The Bible tells us about God's relationship to the world and about the relationship between human beings and God, and human beings with one another. The books of the Bible face the question of how we live in God's world and in relation to God, to others, and to Creation. There are many stories about what has touched people in different times and what has helped them to find their own path in God's world. Confirmation preparation should look at the Bible also from this point of view, through its human dimension.



*If a story or verse
from the Bible speaks
to a confirmand,
it is God speaking.*

In the Bible, that which is human and that which is divine come together. It is a book written by human beings, through which God speaks. The Bible has been interpreted in different ways in different times, both literally and less literally. The texts of the Bible show the influence of different world views, some alien to one another and to the times we live in. Many of the texts in the Bible today were originally written in congregations and intended to be read when the congregation comes together. In the early centuries of the Common Era the Bible became a Holy Book and a collection of 'books' that unites Christians regardless of culture.

Today, the Bible and its content have become increasingly unfamiliar to younger generations. There is scarcely any basic knowledge that you can expect all the young people to share in common at the start of their preparation for confirmation, whether it be about how the Bible came into being or regarding its key contents. Attitudes towards the Bible also vary greatly.

It is a challenge to find the right level of discourse in confirmation preparation. There is a need to set off at a simple enough level to study what sort of a book the Bible is. At the same time, it is important to go deep enough in the use of the Bible, to enter into processes that support young people's musings about their own existence and identity. The Bible expresses God's redeeming love towards humanity.

In confirmation preparation the reading of the Bible should be so regular that it becomes familiar to the participants, regular readings that require no special attitude. It is good for young people to recognise that much of what they see in their lives and culture is based on the Bible and its stories. This provides them with their own relationship to the Bible and Bible stories: they begin to grasp that what is in the Bible plays a part in their own faith and life. Confirmation preparation strives to awaken an interest in the Bible and help the confirmands find building blocks for their own life searches and spiritual life. If a story or verse from the Bible speaks to a confirmand, it is God speaking.

The texts of the Bible can be consciously mirrored in the personal life and identity of the young participants, in questions raised by the preparation group, or in current affairs that are influencing society at large. The New Testament primarily points to the significance of Jesus. The Gospels and the epistles challenge each reader: 'Am I a disciple of Christ? Who am I if I become one of the followers of Jesus?'

2.3.4 Music is one of God's gifts to humanity

The ability of humans to create, produce and experience music is a miracle. Music influences us mentally, emotionally, socially, spiritually and physiologically in ways and for reasons we find difficult to understand. Luther says music is a great gift of God to man. It is a good deed of creation by God. Music is part of human life in which God is present.

In the parish, music is meant to be for everybody, not just for professionals or music specialists. Music has an intrinsic value in the parish, but it is also a tool: it is an integral part of the worship service and the spiritual life. It is part of weekdays as well as feast days. In hymns and other spiritual songs we combine the gift of God with deeds.

Many kinds of music – songs with spiritual content, hymns, playing and singing music together – are important during confirmation preparation. Music opens us up and gives our emotional life a specific direction, it gives pleasure and strengthens the sense of participation. Music enhances connections between people and is nearly always community-oriented. The key things about the use of music during confirmation preparation are communication and interaction. There should be no sense of needing to excel with the music. Appropriate music for confirmation preparation is characterised by words such as understandable, liberating, joyful, touching and creative.

In confirmation preparation, the use of music is intended to foster and strengthen participation, communion and spirituality. A sense of participation and connection can be strengthened by merely listening to music, and especially by creating music together. During confirmation preparation, many types of music should be played or used so that everybody can find something familiar or something they can respond to. Church music brings another dimension to the expression of faith. All genres of music are good, provided they are used well, for building connection and participation.

Music is extremely important to many young people. Their sense of engagement in the activities is strengthened if there is music they can feel connected to. Music they like helps to give them a sense of acceptance.

Music also strengthens the connection between people and God. For many young people, the theological content of confirmation classes will open up through various songs. Which is why it is good for the participants to have a relationship with the music as, for example, with some specific spiritual songs or hymns. Lyrics and melody can also have a deep impact on a young person's view of God, the life of prayer and the ability to access their spiritual self. Part of preparing for confirmation is choosing the music for the confirmation service.

Musical skills and knowledge come in handy during confirmation preparation. They are immediately employed in the initial meeting of the group. Songs and hymns are best learned through participation. Early on in the preparation many confirmands will feel shy about singing or playing an instrument. The YCVs can often be a great help in getting them involved. Even if you are not inclined to sing or play, being around, listening, or studying the lyrics helps to foster a sense of shared participation and connection.

Music is part of the life of prayer and liturgy at confirmation preparation camp, including the matters studied, the programme in the evenings, and all group sessions. The knowledge and skills connected to the music help to carry the participants forward and prepare them for life in the parish. Getting to know the hymnal and spiritual songs for youth can provide food for thought in developing a spiritual life. It also makes it easier to take part in worship service and, for instance, to choose hymns and songs for the important celebrations in life, which means the musical element of confirmation preparation also equips people for the future.

2.4 *The young people take responsibility for themselves, for other people, and for Creation*

2.4.1 Living as a Christian

In the Christian life, prayers and ethically responsible living go hand in hand. There is no faith without love, without charity. One without the other withers. Striving to live an ethically sustainable life and lifestyle is boosted and given direction by the life of prayer.

A Christian desire to live an ethically sustainable life springs from the realisation of God's love and grace. We can do nothing to save ourselves – that is God's work. However, every one of us has the opportunity and obligation to do good for him- or herself, for others and for the rest of Creation. God is love, and He has given human beings the ability and power to love.

Christian ethics look beyond our immediate neighbours, to also embrace the stranger – a Christian's neighbour is both near and far. Each and every human being is included in the 'others' of the Golden Rule: *'In everything do to others as you would have them do to you.'* (Mt 7: 12) Each person's value is absolute and in no way dependent upon their abilities or actions.

Jesus made connections. He brought the Gospel to each and everyone: those who had been excluded were included, in his love. Confirmation preparation aims to concretise the core message of Christianity and make it a way of life in the here and now. The young people preparing for confirmation often ponder on who God is, what God wants and how God acts in this world, using people as his agents. 'How do I live as a Christian in the world, in relation to others, to myself and to Creation?', 'What are the choices I can make in my life?' These are the deep questions of creation, atonement and holiness.



Christian ethics look beyond our immediate neighbours, to also embrace the stranger – a Christian's neighbour is both near and far.

2.4.2 Being responsible for oneself

In preparing young people for confirmation we aim to give them the experience and deeper understanding that they are truly miracles – a creation of God, redeemed by God, unique and valuable in their own self. Each person is irreplaceable, worthy of protection and love. Realising one's own value can lead to an understanding of the value and uniqueness of other people, and to a wider respect for life.

It is important to support teenagers in valuing their own life and taking care of themselves on all levels. Preparing for confirmation can help young people to learn important mental health skills: to listen, to identify and express their own feelings and thoughts, to treat themselves with kindness and compassion, and to seek help when they need it. They are also given help to learn social skills and handle the requirements of a spiritual life.

For many young people, the teenage years can be tough. The conflict between the ideals expressed in the media and the reality they live in can cause anxiety. They can feel particularly pressured about their appearance and being good enough. Christianity's comprehensive view of the human being includes a positive approach to our physicality. The church teaches us that the human body is holy and must be protected and valued, regardless of what it looks like. Misusing our own or another person's body or invading their privacy causes injury and is wrong. God has commanded us to protect life, both our own and that of others.

A key area of growth for a young person is coming to understand their own sexuality, which tends to come to light in the everyday life of their confirmation work. Sexuality is a natural life force, created as an intrinsic part of people of all ages. A mature and healthy sexuality is to love and accept people as individuals, one's own gender and body, and those of others. Preparing for confirmation can help participants to grow into people who value their entire life, who take care of and protect their own body and that of others, while also respecting other people and their boundaries.

2.4.3 Loving your neighbour

Diakonia, or helping people in need, is based on Christian love. It is an everyday way of life and an attitude that ought to be present at all times. Ideally it is part of every home and extends into helping neighbours and taking responsibility for wherever you live. It also finds expression in the diakonia work of the parish, in the social-ethical guidelines of churches, and in acting responsibly in international matters. According to their own situation and ability, most individuals can help and comfort one another, shoulder another's burden, and take responsibility in their own way.

Diakonia is found in the interface between faith and charity. Confirmation preparation emphasises a diakonia way of life based on a life of prayer, on doing tangibly good deeds for and kindness to others. Instructors, YCVs and other employees at a camp centre, for instance, exemplify this in their care, interest and commitment to the confirmands and their questions.



*Diakonia is found
in the interface
between faith
and charity.*

Truly loving your neighbour requires compassion. The compassion skills of young people and the channelling of it into action should be actively supported and promoted. Compassion, the ability to feel sympathy for another's misfortune, is exactly the example Jesus has set for us through his life. All of Christianity is closely connected to the question of God's compassion for man. Compassion and the ability to imagine oneself in somebody else's situation are what inspire people to help others live a good life, whether near and far away.

Loving your neighbour also means acquiring other interaction skills. The whole of confirmation preparation is built on interaction, on meetings and on reciprocity. It is naturally a place where young people are supported in developing their interpersonal skills and in caring for relationships. Loving your neighbour and being able to interact depends in particular on how we speak and behave. Do we address others in a kind and supportive manner, or do we speak curtly in a way that shuts down conversation? What do we laugh at? Is it acceptable to call people names or categorise them? With young people it makes sense to talk to them about the limitations of language and humour. Common rules and respect for others are important topics.

There must be zero tolerance of any form of bullying, such as laughing at a person who seems in some way different.

In the various stages of confirmation preparation, interaction can also be supported through social media and digital communication. However, technology cannot fully replace the face to face understanding of another person, emotional intelligence or empathy, nor have a grasp of ethics, which means that digital interaction requires a different approach. Confirmation preparation provides a good opportunity to learn about loving your neighbour by interacting, both face to face and digitally.

As Jesus commanded, we all have a responsibility to love our neighbours and that includes all the people around us. And conversely each one of us can at times be vulnerable and need the support of others. No one can be a helper all through their life nor always be the person in need of help. Being human tends to require a balance of both. The Christian message of love is concretised and grows forth in various forms of diakonia, as the confirmands are encouraged to think about people in need of assistance in their immediate neighbourhood, in the country as a whole, and elsewhere in the wider world, and to find tangible ways of providing that help. In many areas, there have been good experiences of visiting old people in care homes, or of organising fundraising events to help people in disaster areas.

2.4.4 A sustainable life

Accepting one's ethical responsibility has global and ecological dimensions. It is all God's work. Christians share a responsibility for all Creation. Humanity is part of nature. This approach is supported by human history, the Bible, and modern science. Confirmation preparation fosters this sense of unity and connection by ensuring that the participants experience nature, which is usually easy enough at confirmation camp. To wonder at Creation while living amidst the wealth of a natural environment has a deep spiritual dimension.

The constraints of what nature can survive and questions regarding our common home are directly connected to the choices we make and our right to a decent life. The United Nations has defined sustainable development as meeting the needs of the present without compromising the needs of future generations. Sustainable development goals are aimed at helping people understand how to live in harmony with nature and with one another. Realising these goals requires us all to take into account what impact the choices we make will have, particularly their effect on ecological, social, cultural and economic aspects.

An ecologically sustainable lifestyle means maintaining ecological living practices to protect and preserve the natural world. The principle of social sustainability includes treating people fairly, equality between people and respecting differences. Key to this is to find ways of preventing exclusion, discrimination and violence, whether physical or mental. Cultural sustainability is maintained by passing on one's own cultural heritage as well as that of immigrant or minority cultures. Language, tradition and the arts are part of everyone's cultural heritage.

An economically sustainable lifestyle requires, for instance, moderation in consumption. Permanent economic growth inevitably increases the chasm between the rich and poor, and results in the massive depletion and non-sustainable use of natural resources. To live an ecologically responsible life, people should endeavour to consume only what they need and wherever possible ensure that things are reused and recycled.

The various aims of a sustainable lifestyle fit neatly with Christian ideals and belief in Creation. The principles of social and cultural sustainability are directly connected to the Christian mission to love your neighbour, both near and far. Environmental issues and the ideals of a sustainable lifestyle should be evident in the choices every Christian makes, and likewise in the practices that are in place during confirmation preparation. How can this period of preparation consciously favour the ideal of moderation and ecological choices? Perhaps by having a vegetarian day and ensuring that responsibility for recycling is undertaken with knowledgeable efficiency. It is also important to work with the camp staff who are responsible for the buildings and those in the kitchen.

Sounding out the teenagers on their thoughts on the matter is always a good idea. Some young people feel anxious and worry about the state of the world, global warming and, for instance, the treatment of animals. It is important to be able to talk with them about these feelings. On the other hand, a lot of young people don't care about or are fed up with hearing about the need for sustainable development and environmental responsibility. Make an effort to find some unexpected angle or approach to reawaken their interest, commitment, and perhaps even a sense of urgency regarding their own future.

Working for all of Creation is part of the Christian way, as is supporting and promoting fair treatment, global justice and respect for all people.

2.5 *The young people find meaning in the central tenets of Christianity and their own lives*

2.5.1 Content and study modules of confirmation preparation

The key doctrines of the Evangelical Lutheran Church are to be found in the Catechism. The aim of confirmation preparation is to create a meaningful dialogue between doctrine and the life of each participating confirmand. If the preparation is carried out perfunctorily, learning by rote or by ticking an extensive list of points of Christianity and doctrine, actual learning will most likely be superficial and soon forgotten. However, confirmation preparation successfully prepares teenagers for life as a Christian when the key tenets of Christianity are discussed and mulled over with other confirmands, the YCVs and instructors, and thereby brought into relation with pre-existing knowledge. When connections are made between what is being learned and everyday life it increases motivation and makes it easier for participants to recognise points of connection, which in turn are more likely that to stay with them beyond their actual confirmation. The aim is for confirmands to feel that the doctrines of Christianity are significant on a personal level in their own life.

The form of confirmation preparation must be sufficiently unified across Finland. The central learning content of the preparation is built both on the Catechism, and on the life questions raised by young participants. It has been developed through years of tradition and practical experience.

The learning content of confirmation preparation includes at least the following themes: diakonia and loving your neighbour; life values and choices; life of Jesus and his teaching; the death and resurrection of Jesus; God, creator and preserver; Worship Service and Holy Communion; Baptism and being a godparent; confirmation; being Christian in one's daily life; the Church of Christ and my parish; who am I, who are we?; suffering and death; the Commandments and conscience; mission and international diakonia; the Holy Spirit; the Bible; confession and pastoral care; sexuality and gender; dating, marriage and family; relationship to other religions; sin and grace; heaven and hell; the future and hope; faith and prayer; faith and science; responsibility for Creation; hymns and songs; friendship and human relationships.

In planning the learning content it is important to relate it to the aims of confirmation preparation. For instance, how young people experience togetherness, safety, holiness and joy in working with the Bible or discussing human relationships, or how they are active participants, are heard and have influence. The learning content should be connected to their life:



However, confirmation preparation successfully prepares teenagers for life as a Christian when the key tenets of Christianity are discussed and mulled over with other confirmands, the YCVs and instructors, and thereby brought into relation with pre-existing knowledge.

The learning content in the image are labelled in no specific order. The order they are studied in can vary from group to group. In addition to these, confirmation preparation can study other, locally determined learning content.

The learning content of confirmation preparation is built into study modules, which can be accrued according to specific themes. It is important for the young people to influence the content and the ways of working on the study modules. It is good to ask the confirmands which themes of faith and life are important to them at the moment, what are they questioning and what they would like to find out more about?

Coming up with a fitting name for each study module requires discussion with the participants. Be mindful that the name ought to be in the modern vernacular. We have foregone the term 'lessons' as that can suggest rote learning and disconnection.

Study modules can be structured in many different ways such as, for example:

I and my parish

Worship Service and Holy Communion;
Who am I, who are we?;
hymns and songs.

God

God, creator and preserver;
faith and science;
the Bible;
relation to other religions.

Caring, Caring for and Loving

Friendship and human relationships;
sexuality and gender;
dating, marriage and family;
diakonia and loving your neighbour.

Our world

Life values and choices;
responsibility for Creation;
being Christian in daily life.

A broken world

Suffering and death;
the Commandments and conscience;
sin and grace.

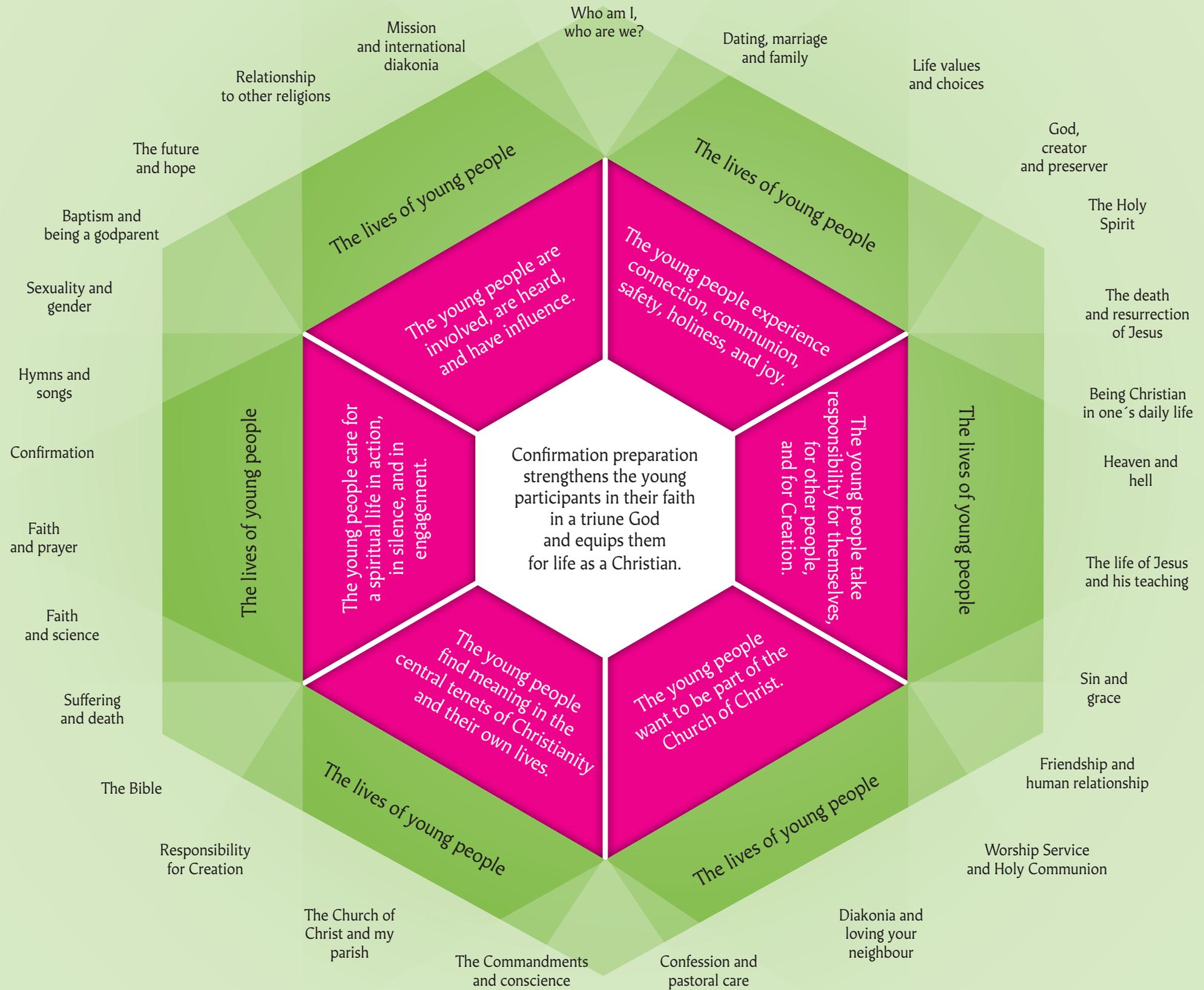
Jesus

Life of Jesus and his teaching;
the death and resurrection of Jesus;
heaven and hell;
future and hope.

Holy Spirit

The Holy Spirit;
faith and prayer;
confession and pastoral care;
Baptism and being a godparent;
the Church of Christ and my parish;
mission and international diakonia.

Confirmation



It helps if the study modules are compiled in the order in which they are to be studied, yet used flexibly during the confirmation preparation. When teenagers are interested, they learn. Optimally, one needs to be able to react immediately to any questions that arise within the group.

The amount of time spent on each study module can vary. Some modules may take an hour, while others might occupy a full day. The material will rarely be exhausted in a single session, nor can it be contained within a specific number of minutes. Some key parts of content, such as God or prayer, are touched on throughout the entire preparation process and are present every day, particularly in the prayers. Confirmation preparation can be structured well in many ways, but it is essential to allocate sufficient time for the most important study modules.

When choosing how the group is to work, it is important to consider that people learn in different ways and that the participants come to the process with different background experiences. Teenagers appreciate being able to influence how their studying is to be organised. If necessary, several methods can be used in parallel, according to the needs of the group.

From school, confirmands are accustomed to a phenomenon-based approach. Which means their studies focus on phenomena that are actually present in their life. A problem, a cause of joy, a sensory experience, or an abstraction could be deemed such a phenomenon. During confirmation preparation, phenomena could be any one of faith, trust, God or prayer. Phenomena connect the experiences and questions in a confirmand's life with the dogmas, principles and terminology of Christian life. The prayers of the confirmation preparation period are connected to the learning content.

A phenomena-based approach focuses on the subjects in which the young participants themselves are interested, and thereby boosts their motivation and sense of meaningfulness. A community-based way of working increases cooperation skills, joy, and a sense of belonging and togetherness within the group. Meanwhile, the participants are immersing themselves in skills that adult Christians can also use to find information about their faith. Through the phenomena studied, the confirmands link theoretical knowledge with practical observations, Christian life skills and the spiritual life. The result is deep-reaching and a profoundly understanding form of learning that examines Christian doctrines in relation to the life of the young participants at many levels.

It fits the church's partly countercultural message to support young people in their grasp and understanding of the structures and thought-patterns behind phenomena. These can tie in with world views, society and/or global justice. Such an approach entails an attempt to consider the values, evaluations and stereotypes of society: for example, good or evil done in the name of religion or atheism, positive and negative freedom of religion, the reasons for and reasoning behind racism, consumer culture, or various power structures. It is valuable to consider such things from more than one point of view.

This means varied and versatile ways of research and learning, with respect for the experiences and knowledge of all the participants. Methods to use

can include conversations, expressing thoughts, feelings, ideas with one's hands and body, through music, exercise, writing and imaging. Instructors and learners alike study and share these things together, which gives the young confirmands a larger role and increases their sense of safety within the group.

2.5.2 Learning by heart makes taking part easier

It is a good tradition to know the creed and some key prayers by heart. These are part of the confirmation preparation and give young people the confidence to live as Christians in the world and become involved in the liturgical life of a parish. Things learnt by heart can contribute to spirituality, participation and a sense of community. At their best they carry one throughout life and can provide solace in moments of grief and anxiety, and remain important long into old age.

For many young people learning by heart is genuinely difficult. Confirmation preparation learning must never become teary-eyed forced study or an anxiety-causing obligation. Knowing something by heart in the preparation process enables one to say, for instance, the Creed in unison with the rest of the group, but it is not entirely necessary to be word perfect. Repetition is important in learning. Projecting words on a wall helps to jog memory. Rhythm, body language, images or gestures can also help people to remember.

Learning content common to all confirmands are the Creed, the Lord's Prayer, the Benediction (Aaronic Blessing) and the Ten Commandments. The first three aid participation in the liturgical life of the church.

When it comes to the Commandments, one should be considerate of the varied ability and preparedness of different individuals to learn.

In addition, locally you can choose some of the following: Gospel in a nutshell, the Golden Rule, the Great Commandment, the Apostolic Blessing, The Commissioning of the Disciples, or some evening prayer.

In Finland, Christian parishes are multicultural. With a thought to the future, it could be a good idea to consider studying some prayers or perhaps the Apostolic Blessing in English.

2.6 *The young people want to be part of the Church of Christ*

2.6.1 A Christian identity

Confirmation preparation provides a setting to help confirmands to strengthen or review their identity as a Christian, as a member of a parish, and as a member of the church. This identity is one's personal and changing view of oneself as part of a community: Who am I, what am I like, which communities am I a part of and do I want to be part of? Questions of identity come from deep inside us, building on our values and views. But one's identity is not unchanging. Identities change when we come across new or different views and aspects, imagine oneself in another person's situation, or experience a new situation. A child and teenager's view of self changes in social interactions with people who are important to them.

In our time, building an identity is a challenge. The wider the range of variations around us, the harder it seems to build a viable self. Today, the building of the self is often permeated by the logistics of markets: How do I become a person who can sell myself in social life or, for instance, on the job market? Identity is strengthened through a multitude of dialogues, not just through strengthening the current or one-sided way of thinking. It is important that confirmation preparation provides young people with the tools to examine their own views while signalling the unique value of each one of them, a value which is not dependent on their particular set of abilities or characteristics.

Building an identity also means making choices. Confirmation preparation instructors support the participants to build a Christian identity, provide pastoral care through being Christian in their own way, and by accepting the confirmands as they are. Each person must find their own way of structuring their own Christian identity. The Christian faith and life can be discussed, studied and also criticised. When talking about the church and what it does, we must be honest and acknowledge that the church has many voices, many faces, many conventions, and even some conflict.

There is room for individuals of different kinds, of all kinds. It is important to be able to speak about our differences, but also to focus on what we have in common. There are many ways of experiencing and expressing ourselves, and a faith in God is one of them. That is why building unity is a well suited element of confirmation preparation.



Confirmation preparation instructors support the participants to build a Christian identity, provide pastoral care through being Christian in their own way, and by accepting the confirmands as they are.

2.6.2 The parish community provides strength

The young people will already have had some contact with the Christian faith and parish life before they began preparing for confirmation. The team spirit, connections between people, spirituality, joy and the safety they experience during confirmation preparation often leads them as older teenagers to look for the same type of experiences by working as Young Confirmed Volunteers (YCVs) and by joining in with parish youth activities. Confirmation preparation should be a continuation of the parish activities run for children and families, and serve as an invitation to take part in a living parish community. It is also important to be aware of the fact that many young people have little experience of parish life.

The aim is for the confirmands to find their own way of living in communion with their parish and to discover how they can express their Christ-given mission in their own life and in this world. The parish community is not just about active participation, but about a sense of togetherness and belonging. One's own parish and the connection one feels there provides an important spiritual home.

Confirmation preparation and the years immediately following it are a key period in growing as a Christian. However, being a member of a parish and having a parish is something that continues throughout one's life. It is important to strengthen the young people's sense of belonging to a community larger than that of the local parish: each parish is a spiritual community that is part of the Evangelical Lutheran Church of Finland. When somebody moves to another town, there will be a parish there offering the same potential for making connections, familiar activities and opportunities to get involved. Also social media can help people maintain and make connections, irrespective of where they are.

In addition to strengthening the Lutheran identity of the participants, confirmation preparation is also training in ecumenism. Throughout the preparation it is important to help the young people become aware of a deeper sense of being part of the church, of belonging to the worldwide family of Christ. Spiritual sustenance and parish communities are available for Christians nearly everywhere in the world. As parts of the process, the worship service, Holy Communion, the prayers common to all of Christianity, and the confirmation service itself are also important because they teach that the service is similar and recognisable all over the world. Throughout, worship service is united by these common features: people come together, the Word of God is proclaimed, there is prayer for the church and for the world, Holy Communion is celebrated and finally people are sent out into the world with a mission.

Learning to go to communion, a life of regular liturgical attendance, the connections between people and a sense of a spiritual home give young people a feeling and experience of the deep meaning of being a parishioner and of having that community to belong to.

Being part of a parish is an important resource for a Christian, something that makes it possible to grow in the faith throughout life. The parish is a spiritual home and a community of prayer which is open to everybody.



Confirmation preparation should be a continuation of the parish activities run for children and families, and serve as an invitation to take part in a living parish community.

2.6.3 Being a member of the church means something

It is beneficial to speak openly with confirmands about what it means to be a member of both church and parish. Living as a parishioner means that prayer, liturgy and a connection to the faith of the church are part of one's life. The members of a church are who make what happens in the parish possible.

As a parishioner one has some influence within the parish, so it helps to know how it works and what its structures are. It is important for confirmation preparation to give the participants a basic insight into how parish administration works and what the role of a parish is within the larger structure of the church. It also needs to be made clear that young people can exercise their rights within the parish – the voting age in church elections is 16 and one can become a candidate at 18. We want to actively support young people getting involved, voting for and holding elected positions.

Membership of the church is not something young people are indifferent to, but neither is it an obvious choice. During confirmation preparation it is good to discuss with the group what strengthens young people's commitment to the parish and the church. What reasons are there for not leaving the church? It is important to tell teenagers openly and boldly what the church's main job is, why they should remain members of the church, why there are parishes and what they do, and about all the good that can be generated by being part of this community.

3.

Planning and implementing confirmation preparation



Confirmation preparation should forego traditional limits to fields of occupation and make use of whatever talents, personalities and subjects of interest are available within a team – everybody knows things outside their own professional field.

3.1 Confirmation preparation teams are interdisciplinary

At their best, confirmation preparation instructors comprise an interdisciplinary and supportive team all of whom appreciate one another's professional skills. To deliver the instruction the church engages a combination of pastors, youth workers, church musicians, diakonia workers, early childhood educators, interns, seasonal and summer workers, adult parishioners and young confirmed volunteers (YCVs). There may also be vergers and camp-centre workers, sign-language interpreters and/or personal assistants. Every one of them has a valuable role within the team and the overall experience of confirmation preparation for the confirmands.

From the outset, it is worth making an effort to form bonds by getting to know the team. Discussing all subjects openly makes it easier to find a common take and way to work together throughout the confirmation process. Talk among team members about your own strengths and concerns, for instance, in relation to confirmation preparation. It also makes sense to speak openly about your own spiritual background, your key theological and pedagogical emphases, and how they can fit in with the confirmation preparation plan you are about to implement. Try consciously to create the kind of connection, safety and joy within your team that the confirmation preparation process itself aims to achieve, and also to make sure that the YCVs feel welcome and included within the team. A supportive and appreciative team spirit and the use of positive language between team members will promote a positive attitude throughout the whole process of confirmation preparation.

An instructor performs many roles throughout the preparation process, many of them very practical. At the heart of the instructor's role is that of spiritual guide. A confirmation instructor is a reliable adult with whom confirmands experience part of their life's journey. In this, all members of the team have something to give.

The Church Order specifies that confirmation preparation is led by a pastor or a lector. The internal division of responsibilities is agreed locally between employees. The person responsible for the programme and safety of confirmation preparation is assigned within the team and matters of procedure are determined in the local plan for confirmation preparation or in the statutes of confirmation preparation. Ultimately, the parish vicar is responsible for safety during confirmation preparation.

Every employee or other instructor adds value to confirmation preparation. It is desirable that all instructors be part of the team throughout the duration of the confirmation preparation process, which also includes seasonal workers, adult parishioners and YCVs. Confirmation preparation should forego traditional limits to fields of occupation and make use of whatever talents, personalities and subjects of interest are available within a team – everybody knows things outside their own professional field. A pastor is not responsible for teaching everything that touches on theology.

All members of the team can be involved in any study module during the period of preparation. Ideally, several team members take part in the instruction for each study module, or the whole team can be involved and engage everybody in dialogue.

There will not be enough staff for every confirmation preparation team to have representatives from every professional group involved. When there are no diaconia workers to be instructors during confirmation preparation, it is important to collaborate with them, particularly when considering how the confirmands can be engaged in various volunteer activities in the parish. When the confirmation preparation team contains no church musician, it is necessary to consider all the ways in which music is part of the preparation process and who is responsible for each area.

In many parishes, an important contribution is made to confirmation preparation by adult parishioners who get involved as instructors, volunteers or working for a nominal fee. Often, they themselves have only recently reached adulthood and are assistant instructors, but this form of contributing is suitable for people of all ages – excellent experiences have been had together with ‘confirmation grannies and grandads’. This also gives the young people a chance to get to know people from the parish who are not taking part in confirmation preparation because they are paid to.

The Young Confirmed Volunteers or YCVs are a key part of the intensive study period of the confirmation preparation and of the team behind the process. This is why parish YCV activities and confirmation preparation as a whole are best planned together. YCVs are very important role models and ‘elder siblings’ for the confirmands. Often, participants learn more from the YCVs than from the instructors.

The theological roots of YCV activities are to be found in the sponsors of catechumens in the early church. As most baptisms in the early days of Christianity were of adults, the congregation allocated a support person for each catechumen. Their job was to lead the person being prepared for baptism into the congregation and the mysteries of the faith. Nobody was expected to take the road of Christianity alone, but each person had somebody they could rely on. The role of the YCVs is theologically very close to the sponsors of the early church.

It is important that the YCVs in each confirmation preparation group is as varied as possible. A YCV team of different kinds of people is created for the preparation and within that framework, each YCV is given a role that suits them individually. That the YCVs in the group are different works as a guarantee that there is room for many kinds of people in the parish, including the unfinished. When the integration of a group has worked well and the YCVs get the right amount of support, they can shine in their roles. Each of them also gets a chance to grow.

Young Confirmed Volunteers need to know what rights and responsibilities they have as YCVs. Particularly those who are volunteering for the first time, the most important training for being a YCV is the intensive study period of the

confirmation preparation itself and being a volunteer during that time. It is therefore crucial that the instructors provide support and guidance for the YCVs in all stages of the confirmation preparation.

It is good to talk to the YCVs about the value of them getting to know the confirmands and that they are contributing something important simply by being themselves during the confirmation time. YCVs appreciate being needed and being given responsibility, but often it is sufficient that the young volunteers can interact with other young people and find their own way of being a member of the community. For shy and uncertain YCVs the support from their fellow YCVs provides an incredibly important source of energy. Many parishes have had good experiences of letting the YCVs work in pairs. Confirmation preparation is a learning process for both the YCVs and the instructors themselves.

3.2 Planning and doing together

Working together creates a sense of community. The practical implementation of each confirmation preparation course is done with consideration for the needs and ideas within the preparation group. This makes each group a living congregation and community of prayer. The planning they do together is a focus area from the outset. The team of instructors needs to be put together in good time, so that seasonal or summer workers, interns, adult parishioners and YCVs can take part in the planning work as early as possible. The parish needs to think about how seasonal workers, for instance, can take part in planning meetings and whether remote access to meetings could be used. Gathering the team for joint planning can also influence the timing of the selection of YCVs.

When confirmation preparation is being planned, team members must explain their half-finished thoughts to one another and fit together different visions and ways of working. For the learning to become an integrated entity for the participants, all instructors must be clear about what happens in any workshops or modules in which they themselves are not teaching or otherwise involved. Setting up teamwork takes its own time, but by working through it together a team can achieve results that would be near impossible in a different setting.



Each confirmation group is encouraged to get involved in planning its preparation course as soon as possible prior to the intensive work.

By the time the period of intense work begins, its structure needs to have been well planned and include a built-in flexibility to allow for any necessary changes.

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The learning process of the group is in many ways dialogic. The entire group, including the instructors, are involved in a process of understanding. A confirmation preparation instructor is not supposed to be an all-knowing fount of wisdom but, despite having been on the road a while longer, is a fellow traveller equally involved in learning more about God and living as a Christian. It eases the way if instructors can step out of the instructing role, so walk in parallel with the confirmands as the questions at hand are discussed. This helps to build a spiritual community and a congregation.

Even though the general mode of the work is dialogic and the learning processes of the confirmation preparation emphasise the confirmands' own activity, the specialist knowledge of the instructors is still needed. The instructor needs to define the area of study, direct the work by, for instance, helping in the formation of groups, by giving feedback, and by organising situations in which study and learning can occur. In addition, situations arise in which the instructor as expert can provide information that enables participants to understand the content. Guiding the learning process presupposes situation-specific assessment of what type of support is needed by the group and by each individual.

Confirmands are generally the expert on their own learning skills and life, but they often need an adult to help them structure their thoughts on God, world views and the Christian faith. Viewing each young person as the active subject of and participant in confirmation preparation challenges parishes to evaluate how it is arranged. This also requires conscious thinking through the many practices and even the choice of words to use. Instructors need to actively consider what it means to the young people to participate in their own confirmation preparation. What does it mean for the quieter more self-contained youngsters and likewise for the more actively involved participants? How do you give each young person an appropriate amount of responsibility but also space enough to be peacefully part of the group? Which of the confirmation preparation practices could prevent young people from getting involved? In what different ways can confirmands become engaged in the planning and realisation of the preparation and the confirmation service itself?

3.3 Resource planning for confirmation preparation

Parishes need to be careful about allocating enough resources for confirmation preparation. It is important to estimate the amount of work one confirmation course will require in relation to other forms of work. Many professionals estimate that the preparations, meetings, exchange of messages and post-confirmation work involved around one confirmation preparation course is equal to three or four weeks of other kinds of work.

The demands and pressure involved in confirmation preparation should be factored into the overall workload of the parish. It is highly recommended that the minimum ratio of adult instructors to confirmands and YCVs should be 1:10.

That is, at least one adult to each group of up to ten teenagers.

A teaching group should not consist of more than 25 confirmands. This is to ensure the group process, that the participants can get to know one another, that they feel safe and everyone can be involved. It is also important that the needs of, for instance, learners with different abilities can be taken into account. In special circumstances, the church or parish council can decide to allow a larger group than is recommended. If in some years there is a particular need to have more confirmands than usual, then a division of the group into smaller study groups should be considered.

When providing additional training to deepen the skills of instructors, attention should be paid to the meaning of the liturgy, eliminating any barriers between areas of work, and to the fact that the role of employees changes from teacher to guide and enabler. Improving employees' skills in dialogue, pedagogical renewal and being up-to-date with information technology is also important.

3.4 The structure of confirmation preparation

Confirmation preparation takes place over a six-month period, depending on what is possible locally, with emphasis on an intensive period of activity around the intensive study period of the preparation. This intensive period consists of a camp that can be either residential or a day camp (attended daily), and a so-called near-study period prior to the camp, during which the participants get together during the day but sleep at home. The near-study period of the preparation is arranged close to the beginning of the camp, ideally just before. Intensifying the group sessions in the run-up to a camp promotes group cohesion and allows them to learn together. A near-study day can be structured the same way as a camp day.

There are four parts to the process of confirmation preparation: theme days; worship service and youth work; the intensive period; and the Confirmation. The entire group of confirmands take part in all of them. The timing of theme days, services and engagement in youth activities can vary according to local needs, and scheduled either before or after the intensive period or split around it. The various parts usually combine in a process that takes a total of 80 content hours spread over a period of six months. How the different parts are planned and in what order they are to occur is arranged locally and fixed in a local plan.

Getting to know the confirmation preparation group and group-building begins as soon as the participants find out who are in their group. However, the primary aim of engaging the teenagers in theme days, worship service and youth activities is not group-building, but to develop their attachment to the local parish, which is their spiritual community. Group-building and safety within the group is strengthened in particular during the near-study period.

In large parishes it can be challenging to find the right rhythm for the meetings of confirmation preparation groups so that they work meaningfully across the six-month period of the preparation. Smaller parishes in particular have had good experiences of starting the confirmation preparation in October, which allows it to follow the rhythm of the liturgical year and naturally build up to the more intensive period at the camp.



Confirmation preparation should work towards becoming a unified whole.

Confirmation preparation should work towards becoming a unified whole. Meeting for two hours once a month is not usually the most meaningful way of working. It is far better to have fewer meetings but accommodate several activities within one day. You can, for instance, invite the confirmands and their families to a communion service and Holy Communion, then have a family day at the church. Or after the service a Common Responsibility Campaign event [<https://www.yhteisvastuu.fi/en/the-common-responsibility-campaign/>] could be held, with the confirmands collecting funds for it.

When the Confirmation service is to be held is also decided locally. Finland has a long tradition of summer confirmations. However, many parishes have had good experiences of having the Confirmation service in the autumn. Taking part in the liturgy of the parish as well as planning it is usually more natural to the participants after the intensive period at the camp than before it. Common services and taking part in youth activities and other parish events creates a natural bridge from the intensive period of preparation for confirmation to becoming an active member of the parish. Which makes it possible for the confirmation preparation to more consciously steer confirmands into the community of their parish.

The structure of confirmation preparation

Theme Days

- Day 1: Getting to know one another.
- Parents' Day or Parents' Evening, getting to know the families.
- First session on the communion service and the Lord's Supper in the first meetings.
- 2–4 theme days (separate for each confirmation preparation group) or joint events for the whole parish, such as:
 - Common Responsibility Campaign event and collection
 - International Day of Mission and Diakonia
 - Musical event or concert

Theme Days can be arranged for one group or to include all the confirmation preparation groups of the parish/deanery. The aim is for each group to take part in all events as a group, together with the group instructors. That is why we have foregone cards to be stamped and other methods of control.

Services and youth activities

3–5 worship services, which are attended as a group. The confirmation preparation group plans, prepares and implements one service. The group partakes of Holy Communion at more than one service together with their instructors.

The group participates at least 1–3 times in parish youth activities either together or, if necessary, divided into smaller groups. If there is no youth activity in the parish, the group attends predetermined parish events as a group or joins in with youth activities in a neighbouring parish.

Intensive period (near-study + camp or day camp)

1–2 days of near study and a minimum of 7 camp days.

Confirmation

The Confirmation itself is preceded by a sufficiently long preparation period.

Meeting for two hours once a month is not usually the most meaningful way of working.

It is far better to have fewer meetings but accommodate several activities within one day.

3.5 One confirmation preparation – but many ways of doing it

The most common and popular form of the intensive period of confirmation preparation is the *camp*. Going to camp offers young participants an opportunity to form a community, experience silence and prayer, improve self-confidence, develop a sense of increasing independence and success, and spend a few days living close to nature. Participants build the camp together. There is time for leisure, rest and wonderment. Living for a few days in a community in which just being oneself is enough is something that is longed for by many young people of today. Studies show that the longer a camp is, the greater is the success of the confirmation preparation.

When a camp is long enough, it has a positive effect on the confirmands' interest in spiritual life, faith in God and their sense of the church being close to them. Which is why a camp must be at least seven days long.

Confirmation preparation is intended for every young person, but doing it in the form of a camp is not always possible or interesting for everyone. A good alternative to a residential camp is a *day camp* that can be attended by confirmands who go home each evening to sleep. Day camps are often preferred by those with different learning needs or are socially sensitive in some way.

The makeup of the group must be taken into account in the planning and the resources for a day camp must be at least equal to those for a regular camp. Consider setting up a day camp with five-hour days. In which case the day camp would need to be organised over ten days.

Another option is to run *Confirmation preparation evenings* in which the group meets, for instance, one evening a week over a six-month period. Evening classes can be a good alternative for a young person who for some reason cannot attend confirmation preparation in a camp nor handle the longer days of a day camp. If necessary, confirmation preparation can be arranged in the form of private tuition or in some other way by tailoring the process to be more individual.

In many places, various *themed confirmation preparations*, could be developed based on, for example, sports, music, hiking, media or the arts. A themed confirmation preparation is often a response to the wishes and needs expressed by parishioners. Doing things together ideally brings cohesion to the group. For a themed confirmation preparation remember to call on the skills available in the working community and the networks in the parish.

Confirmation preparation is always offered by the parish and church. In addition, confirmation preparation can be offered by other Christian organisations, provided they have permission from the Diocese. Regardless of who arranges the preparation, it always follows the Church Act and the current Confirmation preparation Plan. In *organisation-run* confirmation preparation the participants usually come from several different parishes and the intensive period takes place at a camp. Usually, such camps end with the Confirmation.

Even if the confirmation preparation is arranged by an organisation, it is important that connections are made to each confirmand's local parish. Organisation-led preparation also includes a section before the intensive period and during which the young participants take part in theme days, services and youth activities

in their own parish. It is important that they feel they are part of their local parish and that they can have the same confirmation preparation experience as their friends and others of the same age. There must always be regular communication between the Christian organisation and the local parish. Young people who prepare for confirmation elsewhere must become part of the parish preparation work either as a separate group or by being directed into existing confirmation preparation groups for the in-parish parts. The beginning of an organisation-led confirmation preparation can also contain the organisation's own assignments or meetings, such as web-based learning or the use of social media. This is to help the participants get to know one another, to become a cohesive group, and to provide orientation in the content of the confirmation work. Sections of preparation prior to the camp also enable confirmands to get involved in planning the content of their preparation.

During the intensive period of an organisation-led confirmation preparation course the participants are encouraged to get to know not only the organisation's youth activities but also what their local parish offers for young people. After confirmation, when youth activities in the parish pick up, the parish in turn invites those who have attended confirmation preparation elsewhere to get involved in its youth activities. In this way there is no competition between the organisation and the parish for the attention of young people, but they work together for the best of the confirmands.

Special-needs or small-group confirmation preparation is provided for young people who have learning difficulties, communication issues or special needs in social situations. It is usually undertaken in a small group which is recommended to include no more than twelve participants. The parish must provide confirmation preparation for everybody. In practice, it often makes sense for parishes to cooperate with one another, as a single parish may not have a suitable number of young people for a given group, nor the skill sets it would require. Cooperating with families and schools is also important.

A person's mother tongue is their most emotionally charged language and language of prayer. Young people who are deaf, severely hard of hearing, or who have deaf parents must be able to prepare for confirmation in sign language. A group preparing together in sign-language ought to include 6–8 participants, so that they can all see one another signing.

Confirmation preparation for young people with disabilities is tailor-made to suit the needs of each confirmand in cooperation with their school and family. If the confirmation preparation is realised in a small group of people with disabilities, the group must not include any more than eight confirmands (or four if the participants have severe disabilities). Regular confirmation preparation courses can include a number of young people with minor disabilities. However, such an integrated preparation group can have no more than 20 participants, of which a maximum of eight with minor disabilities can be included. Other options of confirmation preparation for people with disabilities are camp, day camp and private tuition.

The job of the assistants is to ensure that all who take part in confirmation work experience their preparation period in a safe environment in a way that suits them personally. Ideally, any young person with a disability who is preparing for confirmation should have their own personal assistant. Occasionally, such a person

may need two assistants at the same time to make confirmation preparation possible for them. When the requirements for service as defined in the Disability Services Act are fulfilled, a person with a severe disability has a subjective right to a personal assistant at their confirmation preparation. It is therefore important to note future confirmation preparation attendance in the participant's personal Disability Services Plan as early as possible and apply for a personal assistant to be present.

Usually, people with disabilities absolutely require so-called professional assistants. In addition to which, there can be a few YCVs at the camp. In a new group, and particularly in a camp setting, the need for assistance and guidance is greater than is required in a familiar school setting. Many young people with disabilities need help for all mobility, moving from one place to another, and going to the bathroom. For a confirmand on the autistic spectrum, any situation with a new group of people can be challenging. For people with disabilities, different ways of communicating, an accessible and safe environment, and a clear structure are minimal requirements for their confirmation preparation.

Communication must be in plain language, using images and non-verbal forms to communicate. A participant's family is more present in the confirmation preparation of people with disabilities than they are in other forms of the preparation.

3.6 Confirmation preparation for adults

This Confirmation Preparation Plan 2017 also provides a common basis for preparing adults for confirmation and for doing so in small groups. Preparing adults for Confirmation takes at least 20 hours. The life situations and learning needs of adults vary, which is why the learning process in, for instance, the case of immigrants may require more than 20 hours. It helps to make sure there is enough time to talk about each confirmand's life situation, wishes and needs.

The confirmation preparation for adults includes meetings between the pastor and the adult participant as well as their taking part in parish life and activities. The confirmand and the pastor work together to create a personal plan for realising the confirmation preparation. The personal plan can take into account the background and life situation of the adult participant, the reasons they are attending the preparation course, and what their personal goals and wishes are for the confirmation preparation period and its schedule. Small-group confirmation preparation for adults is also planned in accordance with the needs and life situation of the participants.

Many adults are accustomed to using e-learning platforms and tools. Even when these tools are used, the confirmation preparation must involve participation in parish life and a minimum of two meetings, one of which can be baptism or confirmation. If an adult who comes to confirmation preparation takes part in a catechumenate (Christian initiation for adults), that is an adult faith group in the parish, it can become part of the preparation. However, this needs to be separately agreed between the parties and even in those cases a personal study plan must be made for the confirmation work.

3.7 Challenges and possibilities of the working environment

The world has been changing rapidly in recent decades, both locally and globally, in our society and in the wider world. The whole world is in flux in many ways. People's life expectancy and health are changing for the better and there is less extreme poverty. However, climate change and wars are causing increases in migration, suffering and crime. Changes happen continuously yet are not always easy to predict.

Changes in the reality that we experience in Finland are largely related to the dilution of a uniform culture, greater multiculturalism and the widening of what is viewed as a family. Our use of technology has also changed our daily lives in many ways. Climate change and related phenomena are also becoming ever more challenging both at home in Finland and worldwide.

A change in our operating environment also requires the church to be more flexible and able to assess and change our ways of working according to local needs. The church must find its own role in the face of a number of challenges and many kinds of polarisation.

As insecurity increases generally, people are looking for security. The church has a message about security, peace and love – a message that should be expressed in practice, in confirmation preparation instruction, and in life.

The work of the church and therefore confirmation preparation is negatively impacted upon by increasing numbers of secular people, atheism, multiple religions, and in particular by criticism of religion and an atmosphere of growing negativism towards religion. Membership numbers for the church are decreasing, which has brought on a turning point for the working culture of the church. The weakening of church finances and its position in society is a threat which parishes strive to respond to by changes in assignments, combining different fields of work, cooperation between parishes, parish unions, outsourcing and purchase of service agreements. The significance of volunteers in the church is increasingly important. How do we care for confirmation work despite the lessening of resources? What is the role of the church and of confirmation preparation in an environment with so many different worldviews and in part is even critical of religions? How can confirmation preparation actively invite young people to find their place in communion with God and the church?

Every year, Finland becomes more multicultural, whether you look at culture, gender, sexuality, ideology, worldviews or ethnicity. It is difficult to anticipate what the influence of immigration and in particular the number of refugees and asylum seekers will have for Finland and the rest of Europe. It has been estimated that there will be more than half a million immigrants in Finland by the year 2030. Multiculturalism and immigration often activate religious feelings. For many people, religion offers safety, something stable to hold on to. The young people who come to confirmation preparation are from an increasing diversity of backgrounds and young immigrants in larger numbers are joining confirmation work and YCV activities.



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Youth is diverse. Youth culture is fractured, ever changing and, even in geographically small areas, very varied. It is important to stay connected to current phenomena within youth culture. Through youth culture young people can seek out and build their own identity, develop, make friends, find communities and ways to express their creativity. However, there can also be side effects. At their worst, that could include a detrimental gang culture, use of drugs and other intoxicants, and racist, violent and criminal behaviour.

Youth culture should be analysed regularly at the local level so that confirmation preparation instructors can take it into account and anticipate possible risk factors. How do you make sure that the church's nature of being an inclusive, international and ecumenical community is visible in the content and practices of the confirmation preparation? How do you build a Christian identity when you are surrounded by all sorts of other belief systems? The confirmation preparation instructor must be able to conduct conversations around religious beliefs, those of its own church and in particular be informed about and able to discuss atheism and Islam.

In Finland, religious education is increasingly focused on religion as a phenomenon. That is why confirmation preparation should be better than ever before at providing the tools for building a Christian identity and living the spiritual life of a Christian. Confirmation work needs to promote knowledge of the Bible and offer answers to questions on why we should take the Bible seriously and how it can be understood, or what needs to be considered about the relationship between faith and a science-based view of the world. Active cooperation with schools, both locally and nationally, is important.

Technology is constantly developing and in turn changes the world and the way people communicate. Today, technological advancement impacts on the lives of people at almost every level. Both useful and entertainment technologies are part of our daily life. Social relationships have changed and become more active through social media. In its many forms social media creates more opportunities to make friends, build networks and to stay in touch. At the same time, it can also lend itself to cyber bullying and exclusion. Technology is also part of the modern learning environment and most confirmands are accustomed to using it at school. Digital technology has brought with it many new learning platforms and pedagogical tools that are worth using in the confirmation preparation setting. Searching for information and adding new information to the old is possible when there is access to modern equipment for both teaching and learning. Parishes and camp centres must see to it that their technical preparedness is up-to-date. Contact between camp and home, including godparents, can also be handled more efficiently through technology.

In recent decades, the definition of family has become a matter of personal choice. More and more often, a family is what somebody experiences as family and is made up of people they want to include. As well as nuclear families we see more single-parent families, blended families, LGBT (lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender) families, and foster families. A confirmation preparation group will gather young people from a great variety of family backgrounds and social realities. Although all families have some worries and problems, most Finnish

children and teenagers are doing quite well and may live a better childhood than any previous generation of children. However, there is a growing divide between the young people who are doing well and those who are doing extremely badly. Substance abuse problems, unemployment, mental health issues and violence in the family increase vulnerability and add to the risk of exclusion. Child poverty is increasing rapidly and is very likely to be inherited.

The risk of poverty is greatest in families with many children and single-parent families. This can affect a child or young person's life in many ways, weakening their health, preventing them from engaging in hobbies, and limiting their social life. Different levels of wealth between families must be sensitively considered, for instance by offering reduced camp fees and in the use of teenagers' own digital devices for those assignments that require them.

Realities in Finland vary greatly and sometimes also change quite rapidly. That is why the working environment must be analysed locally and often. Such an analysis is necessary at least every three years and should become the basis of the local plans for confirmation work. This gives parish employees and other preparation instructors a chance to plan the confirmation preparation so that it works well in their parish.

3.8 Local planning

Parish employees are expert assessors of local needs and whether or not church resources are sufficient. Parishes draw up a local confirmation preparation plan and the individual confirmation courses base their own plan on that parish-wide plan. The local plan is primarily intended for employees and ensures the quality of the confirmation preparation, that all participants are treated equally and that, for instance, new employees get the information they need.

A local plan can be four-fold:

- Description of the working environment (such as size of the year group, cultural starting points, traditions of the spiritual life, migration).
- Local principles for confirmation preparation (such as how the goals of confirmation preparation are reached; which pedagogical practices are favoured; how YCVs, families and different learners are taken into account; how is a bridge constructed from activities for boys and girls through confirmation preparation and onwards to youth activities and adulthood; evaluation and feedback; teamwork; confirmation).
- Communicating, marketing and communications regarding confirmation preparation.
- Attachments (such as statutes, YCV contract, security instructions, local contracts).

The local plan is drawn up for a three-year period and reviewed annually. The local plan for confirmation preparation must be approved by the parish or church council. The employee in charge of confirmation efforts draws up an annual plan

for the preparation work which shows the upcoming year's confirmation preparation groups, the employees on each team and the key dates for each of them, that is for: start, intensive period, confirmation.

Neighbouring parishes, particularly parishes in a parish union, should keep up to date with one another's local plan and consciously strive to develop their own confirmation preparation in the same direction. Cooperation across parish lines is important. Geographical circumstances create situations where it may make more sense for a young person to attend their entire confirmation preparation in the neighbouring parish.

3.9 Assessment as a tool for developing confirmation preparation

Evaluation is part of each confirmation preparation. Confirmation work can be developed to correspond to needs by evaluating how successful it has been both in terms of each confirmation preparation group and in relation to the confirmation preparation work of the entire parish. Confirmation preparation and its practices are also evaluated on a national level. Both an individual confirmation preparation course and the parish's confirmation preparation as a whole are assessed and developed with regard to the objectives that have been set for them. The objectives are expressed in the national confirmation preparation plan and in the parish-level local plan.

The aim of developing assessment is to identify the strengths and good practices of the work done and the areas that need developing, and also to help set practical goals for directing the process. As with an individual confirmation preparation course, the evaluation of parish-wide confirmation work requires participatory evaluation methods.

Evaluating the realisation of each confirmation preparation course should not be left till the end of the course. It is better to make some sort of daily review of progress in relation to the set goals. Rather than evaluate the confirmands and their actions, it is more helpful to evaluate the success of the confirmation preparation in reaching its goals and how the instructors are doing. How has the confirmation preparation realised the goals of confirmation work at various stages



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of the process? What prevents the goals being attained or makes it harder to do so? What can we be pleased about and what should we think about changing?

It is also important to talk to the YCVs about their experiences and thoughts. There needs to be evaluation early on, immediately after the first meetings, so that approaches can be changed if necessary.

The daily evaluation of the confirmation preparation needs to include a review of the group dynamics. It is fairly easy to sense the atmosphere. When the atmosphere is liberated, many people will have dared to speak and feel comfortable enough to talk about personal matters. If the atmosphere is reserved, the same few people tend to do all the talking. The group can be observed to see how the confirmands choose their place and what the distance is between them; which people sit close together; who is always further away; which of them keep their distance from others? The non-verbal communication, positions, facial expressions and choice of seats all tell their story. People who look relaxed usually feel good. Tension and anxiety also tend to be evident. Who speaks, for how long and about what? A safe and liberated atmosphere encourages any shy or sensitive members of the group to also speak up.

From time to time during the entire confirmation preparation process, we ask the confirmands how they are doing, how they are feeling. Having these personal conversations is significant. It is important to make sure that each young person has the opportunity to talk to an adult during the process.

More important than evaluating the participants' study progress is to give them support, to get and keep them engaged. When the learning is assessed, it is key to do it together with the participant. The teenagers can be involved in planning how the evaluation is done. Engagement, willingness to enter into debate and a level of interaction are the sorts of assessment that support learning and growth. Confirmands should feel that the adults who are working with them are there for them, supporting and encouraging them. Various self-evaluation, group-evaluation and evaluation-conversation tools are well suited for confirmation preparation. Web-based evaluation tools, personal conversations, interviews, placing one's self somewhere along a notional line between opposing statements according to how one relates to them, and using a study diary have all been useful methods in the past.

Instructors must reflect on how their choice of words support the confirmands and their learning: How do I give feedback in a way that will support their growth and help their motivation to grow as Christians? Periods of response and evaluation should be positive for everybody. If some sort of final review is to be part of the confirmation preparation, the participants need to know in good time what will be expected of them at that point.

If you have begun the confirmation preparation process by talking to the participants about their wishes and goals, it will be easier at the end of it to look at the preparation period with them and assess to what extent the goals have been reached. Instructors must talk to the young people and as a team think about what has helped the participants to learn and what has made learning difficult. What perhaps could be done differently next time?

Confirmation work is developed on the basis of feedback, employees' assessments and the needs of the local working environment. When confirmation preparation is coming to an end, feedback is gathered from confirmands, YCVs and, if possible, also from the parents of the confirmands. Employees need to study seriously all the feedback they receive – it contributes important information for doing a more thorough evaluation after the confirmation. The confirmation preparation team should also gather to thank one another and to evaluate what was a success and what might benefit from being done differently. The support and oversight of the Diocesan Chapter for its parishes are methodically developed.

For the national-level development and evaluation of confirmation preparation the confirmands are asked for statistical and research information as well as feedback through a country-wide evaluation system. The information provided through the system also serves local development needs. The local and national communications regarding confirmation preparation must be active.

Young people now and in the future deserve high-quality confirmation preparation and the opportunity to ponder life and the mysteries of faith in the face of God, together with other young people and their instructors. Which is why caring for the development of confirmation work is an assignment of great responsibility. However, as a church and as church employees, we do not rely entirely on our own strength.

*How weighty to me are your thoughts, O God!
How vast is the sum of them!
I try to count them – they are more than the sand;
I come to the end – I am still with you.
(Ps 139: 17–18)*



The Confirmation Preparation Plan A Great Miracle puts the young participants in focus of confirmation preparation.

The participants are the subjects of confirmation preparation and we work consciously to engage them and hear them.

Confirmation preparation strengthens the young participants in their faith in a triune God and equips them for life as a Christian.

NATIONAL CHURCH COUNCIL †

ISBN 978-951-789-615-3 (Paperback)

ISBN 978-951-789-614-6 (PDF)



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