

Introduction and Core Principles

Before you do anything else, grab a copy of *The United Methodist Hymnal* and turn to page 33. Read the “Baptismal Covenant I,” a service that many United Methodist congregations use to confirm young people who have completed the church’s confirmation program. The service begins by describing confirmation as a “reaffirmation of our faith,” a renewal of “the covenant declared at our baptism,” an acknowledgment of “what God is doing for us,” and an affirmation of “our commitment to Christ’s holy church.”

This statement gives a good overview of the goals of any confirmation program. Confirmation is an opportunity for young people to affirm the faith into which they were baptized and, for those who were baptized as infants or small children, to renew the baptismal vows taken for them by their parents or guardians. Confirmation also makes young people aware of how God is and has been at work in their lives, even before they were old enough to realize it. And confirmation affirms a new commitment—a new covenant relationship—between a young person and Christ’s body, the church.

Core Principles

The CREDO (CREE-doh) confirmation program is grounded in these three core principles:

- ✦ Confirmation is the continuation of one’s faith journey (a journey begun at baptism) and the beginning of one’s covenant relationship with the church—not an end unto itself.
- ✦ Confirmation is more than just a series of classes. Confirmands must be fully engaged in the life of the church through worship, service, small groups, and involvement in other ministries.
- ✦ Confirmands should emerge from their confirmation experience prepared for a life of Christian discipleship.

CREDO reinforces the connection between baptism and confirmation both in the session plans (particularly the lesson on Sacraments) and in the retreats. Confirmands will remember their baptism (or, if they have not yet been baptized, anticipate their baptism) and learn about the baptismal vows that they took, that they will take, or that were taken on their behalf. Confirmands will understand confirmation as a way to claim and affirm the work done by the Holy Spirit in their baptism.

Emphases

Instruction is an important and essential part of any confirmation program. Through confirmation, young people claim the faith of the church. They must have a familiarity with what Christians (and specifically United Methodist Christians) believe, value, and do. Thus CREDO provides session plans for confirmation classes. But instruction is only one aspect of the confirmation program. The confirmation vows not only hold confirmands accountable to certain beliefs but are also a way of life and a commitment to Christ's body, the church. In addition to learning about their faith, confirmands must also experience their faith and have a sense of how to live as a disciple of Christ in a covenant relationship with the church. They do this by attending and participating in weekly Sunday worship, by working alongside other Christians in service of God and neighbor, by participating in Christian education, by having relationships with other Christians that are grounded in mutual support and accountability, and by being engaged in the ministries of the church. The CREDO CONFIRMATION DIRECTOR'S TOOLS provides information and resources to help you incorporate the following into your confirmation program:

CHRISTIAN EDUCATION

Your confirmation program is an important Christian education ministry, but it is not likely the only education opportunity for young people. And it is impossible (yes, impossible) for a confirmand to learn everything he or she needs to know about the Bible, Christian faith, and Christian living before confirmation Sunday. Christian education is a lifelong endeavor, and young people should make Christian education a habit by participating in educational opportunities such as Sunday school classes, mid-week Bible study groups, and/or youth fellowship gatherings. If it is possible, your confirmands should be involved in at least one other Christian education setting while they are going through the confirmation program.

MENTORING RELATIONSHIPS

Mentors should be adults with a mature faith who can set for young confirmands an example of how to grow in faith. Confirmands and their mentors should meet regularly for the duration of the confirmation program. Mentors are not teachers and need not be Bible experts or trained theologians. But they should be available to offer support and encouragement, to talk with confirmands about tough faith questions, and to discuss with confirmands the key teachings of the confirmation program. More comprehensive information on mentoring is available in the "Mentoring and Confirmation" section of this resource and in the book CREDO: CONFIRMATION GUIDE FOR PARENTS, MENTORS, AND ADULT LEADERS.

WORSHIP

Often when people talk about "going to church," they are talking about attending worship. While *worship* and *church* are not synonymous, worship is crucial to the life of the church and of each individual congregation. Worship is a way that we tell our story and pass down our beliefs and practices to subsequent generations; it is a way that Christians of all "ages, nations, and

“races” come together to express their common faith; and it is a way that we say yes to the God who said yes to us through our baptism. Being present each week in worship is an important way in which young people honor the commitment to the church, a commitment they make when they take their confirmation vows. It is important that young people get into the habit of attending worship while they are going through the confirmation program so that they will understand what is expected of them if they take the confirmation vows.

SERVICE

Although he was the Son of God and the Messiah, Jesus became a servant (see Philippians 2:7). He served others by healing, feeding, and teaching and by washing his disciples’ feet. Following Jesus’ example of service always has been an important part of Christian discipleship, and those who take the confirmation vows in The United Methodist Church vow to “faithfully participate in [the church’s] ministries” by (among other things) their service. While the word *service* may bring to mind images of raking leaves or restoring homes (and while these activities are important), service is about more than just work projects. Young people in the church may serve as acolytes, ushers, or greeters during worship; they may serve God and neighbor by raising money for missions and ministries that meet needs in the community and around the world; they may serve members of the congregation by praying and worshiping with persons who are physically unable to attend Sunday worship; they may serve by helping to lead a vacation Bible school program for younger children; and they may get their hands dirty by participating in the aforementioned work projects. Confirmands must understand that service is an important part of Christian living, that those who are confirmed in The United Methodist Church take a vow of service, and that the service must be performed in a spirit of love for God and neighbor. To get in the habit of serving, confirmands should be expected to complete a certain number of service hours as part of the confirmation program.

RETREATS

The word *retreat* means to get away or to withdraw. And while retreats give us opportunities to withdraw from our normal routine, they also give us an opportunity to draw closer to God and to our fellow Christians. On retreats, young Christians can experience God and Christian community without the distractions of television, mobile phones, the Internet, schoolwork, and household obligations. CREDO recommends that every confirmand participate in at least one retreat.

SESSIONS

Although CREDO emphasizes that confirmation is more than just a series of classes, confirmation class sessions are nonetheless a critical part of the confirmation experience. The 18 sessions in the CREDO program tell confirmands the story of our faith, teach them about core Christian beliefs and practices, explain to them distinct United Methodist emphases, and help them develop a faith vocabulary. These sessions fall into three units: “Know Your Story,” “Confirm Your Faith,” and “Live Your Commitment.”

CREDO Goals

The underlying goals of CREDO are to prepare confirmands (if they choose) to take the confirmation vows and to live lives of Christian discipleship. More specifically, CREDO aims to:

- ✦ Teach confirmands the story of their faith, as contained in the Old and New Testaments and in the history and traditions of Christianity and The United Methodist Church.
- ✦ Give confirmands a basic understanding of Christian theology, including the doctrine of the Trinity, creation, sin, and grace.
- ✦ Teach confirmands the traditions and doctrinal emphases that make United Methodism unique.
- ✦ Foster relationships between confirmands and Christian adults in the congregation who can set an example of how to live as a mature Christian.
- ✦ Give confirmands an understanding of the importance of Christian education as a lifelong endeavor, and help confirmands develop a habit of participating in Christian education.
- ✦ Give confirmands an understanding of Christian worship as practiced in The United Methodist Church and why worship is an essential part of Christian discipleship.
- ✦ Challenge confirmands to serve God and others through the life and ministry of the congregation.
- ✦ Give confirmands an opportunity to go on retreats, withdrawing from their normal routine and drawing closer to God and their fellow Christians.
- ✦ Teach confirmands about the vows they will have an opportunity to take and the commitments that one makes when one says yes to those vows.