

THE “MUMBOJUMBO” OF THE RITE OF CONFIRMATION

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## ABSTRACT

This thesis aims to define the rite of confirmation used in the Wisconsin Synod. Confirmation is a mixed bag. Throughout history, no one knows what to do with the rite. Many congregational traditions make it almost impossible to change or cut it. Confirmation is an artificial bridge between the sacraments: baptism and the Lord's Supper. The history of the rite of confirmation in the Lutheran Church is complicated. There has been no uniformity on the purpose of the rite. The rite of confirmation is not going anywhere in the Lutheran Church, but a pastor will have to determine the purpose of confirmation and will use care to see if practices in his church match that purpose.

## INTRODUCTION

If you are like me, someone born and raised in a WELS church, then you may remember your Confirmation Day. I remember that day vividly. The church I grew up in, David's Star Lutheran Church, had confirmation<sup>1</sup> on Palm Sunday. The examination took place the Thursday before Palm Sunday. I remember the examination vividly, too. The pastor went around to each of my classmates, asking them questions about the material we had covered in catechism class.

Confirmation Sunday has much pomp, fanfare, and splendor. I remember getting all dressed up. We put on white gowns. The girls had corsages, and the boys had boutonnieres. We sat in the front of the church. After the sermon, we each got up to recite our confirmation verse. Then, we received a blessing from the pastor as he laid his hands on our heads.

Another commonality for many groups of confirmands is that many members do not still attend church. I stood up there with each of my classmates and promised to remain faithful. Something truly impossible to expect an eighth grader to make, let alone any sinful human being. It is unsurprising that many do not remain faithful; we constantly battle our sinful nature. The impression of confirmation has an impact on young people, too. Many members of WELS congregations see confirmation as a graduation. Confirmation means the end of instruction. For many parents, confirmation was the end of their instruction. They send their kids to confirmation classes because that is what their parents did.

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1. Unless otherwise noted, "confirmation" refers to the rite of confirmation and not the class/instruction.

Confirmation lacks a clear, widely agreed-upon purpose. The uncertainty surrounding the rite of confirmation can lead a pastor to wonder what to do with it. That question came to mind during my vicar year at St. Peter Lutheran Church in Schofield, Wisconsin. I was asked to write for the May newsletter that went out to all the members. I chose to write about confirmation. I could not shake the question, what is the purpose of confirmation? This thesis is a product of asking that question. This thesis briefly examines the rite of confirmation from its beginning but focuses on why it is in the Lutheran Church. It gets into the varied opinions held by different reformers. After establishing some of the history, there is an analysis of the three rites of confirmation used in the Wisconsin Synod since 1949. The purpose of confirmation is to show that a person has been instructed enough to receive the Lord's Supper. Based on that purpose, applications can be drawn about the timing of confirmation and parent involvement.

## LITERATURE REVIEW

Over the centuries, the topic of confirmation has been revisited in the Lutheran Church. Starting from the Reformation, Martin Luther covered the topic briefly in his writings. Then, Martin Chemnitz picked up the topic again in his *Examination of the Council of Trent*. More recently, Arthur Repp wrote a comprehensive guide to the rite of confirmation through history in his work *Confirmation in the Lutheran Church*. Even with confirmation being covered multiple times, there is still no consensus on the rite. The title of Pastor Richard I. Krahn's paper, "Confirmation: Form in Search of Function," highlights the state of uncertainty surrounding the rite of confirmation. Confirmation is a rite of the church, but not many know why we do it.

Martin Luther wrestled with many doctrines from the Catholic Church during his life. He was concerned about the sacramental theology of the Catholic Church. That is the argument made by Brian Brewer, "Salvation by faith alone would prove to transform sacramental theology to the point that one might even posit that the Reformation was born out of sacramental disagreements."<sup>2</sup> Martin Luther might agree with that statement. He wrote extensively against the seven sacraments of the Catholic Church. One of his more famous writings goes over each sacrament one by one. In the *Babylonian Captivity of the Church*, he says, "To begin with, I must deny that there are seven sacraments, and for the present maintain that there are but three:

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2. Brian C. Brewer, *Martin Luther and the Seven Sacraments: A Contemporary Protestant Reappraisal* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Baker Academic, 2017), 3.

baptism, penance, and the bread. All three have been subjected to a miserable captivity by the Roman curia, and the church has been robbed of all her liberty.”<sup>3</sup>

Since confirmation was one of the seven sacraments, Luther briefly discusses it. Emphasis on the word “briefly,” as the section on confirmation is considerably shorter than any other section. He concludes, “For this reason it is sufficient to regard confirmation as a certain churchly rite or sacramental ceremony, similar to other ceremonies, such as the blessing of water and the like.”<sup>4</sup>

Arguably, the most influential reformer for confirmation was Martin Bucer. The rite was okay for pastors to do, but Bucer wrote a rite and gave purpose to the rite. Amy Nelson Burnett, a professor at the University of Nebraska-Lincoln, writes extensively about Martin Bucer and his context. She highlights the Anabaptist context in Strasbourg in her article, “Martin Bucer and the Anabaptist Context of Evangelical Confirmation.” She dives into some of the theological teachings of the Anabaptists that influenced Martin Bucer and his rite of confirmation. The Anabaptists were against infant baptism. Bucer advocated for infant baptism and would not change his view. However, to appease the Anabaptists, Bucer introduced the rite of confirmation as a way for a person to surrender to Christ.<sup>5</sup>

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3. Martin Luther, *Luther's Works, Vol. 36: Word and Sacrament II* (ed. Jaroslav Jan Pelikan, Hilton C. Oswald, and Helmut T. Lehmann; vol. 36; Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1999), 18. It should be noted that Martin Luther did not consider penance to be a sacrament for too much longer. As he says later, “Nevertheless, it has seemed proper to restrict the name of sacrament to those promises which have signs attached to them. The remainder, not being bound to signs, are bare promises. Hence there are, strictly speaking, but two sacraments in the church of God—baptism and the bread.” (124)

4. Luther, *LW* 36:92.

5. Amy Nelson Burnett, “Martin Bucer and the Anabaptist Context of Evangelical Confirmation,” *The Mennonite Quarterly Review* 68, no. 1, (January 1994), 109.  
<https://search.ebscohost.com/login.aspx?direct=true&AuthType=sso&db=lsdar&AN=ATLA0000876472&site=ehost-live&scope=site>.



In another article by Amy Nelson Burnett, “Confirmation and Christian Fellowship: Martin Bucer on Commitment to the Church,” she discusses the other purpose of Bucer’s rite of confirmation: church discipline. As people were leaving his church for the Anabaptist church, he tried to emphasize that the children were not only surrendering themselves to Christ but also to the church. They would be subject to discipline if they wavered in faith or went over to the Anabaptists.<sup>6</sup>

It becomes clear that the rite of confirmation had no standard practice after the sixteenth century. Martin Luther permitted the rite. Martin Bucer elevated it in Reformed churches. Martin Chemnitz also permitted it and gave some guidelines.<sup>7</sup> Arthur Repp categorizes all the different viewpoints on confirmation, saying, “Out of the tangled mass of influences and counterinfluences one may discern no less than six different major types of confirmation within the Lutheran Church. These may be characterized, for want of better terms, as catechetical, hierarchical, sacramental, traditional, pietistic, and rationalistic. The first four made their appearances in the 16<sup>th</sup> century, while the last two appeared in the 17<sup>th</sup> and 18<sup>th</sup> century.”<sup>8</sup> Hans Wiersma, in his article “‘Monkey Business’? On the History of Confirmation” lists nine different modes. The nine modes he identifies are preparation for the Lord’s Supper, instruction, vow of

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6. Amy Nelson Burnett, “Confirmation and Christian Fellowship: Martin Bucer on Commitment to the Church,” *Church History* 64, no. 2, (June 1995), 205.  
<https://search.ebscohost.com/login.aspx?direct=true&AuthType=sso&db=lsdar&AN=ATLA0000898633&site=ehost-live&scope=site>.

7. Martin Chemnitz, *Examination of the Council of Trent*, trans. Fred Kramer, vol. 2 (St. Louis: Concordia, 1978), 211–12. Also see p. 25–26 in this paper for more detail on his guidelines.

8. Arthur Repp, *Confirmation in the Lutheran Church* (St. Louis: Concordia, 1964), 21.

obedience, a sacrament, personal conversion, completion of baptism, ratification of baptism, period of discovery, and a culturally embedded rite of passage.<sup>9</sup>

All the uncertainty surrounding the rite of confirmation in history has led to uncertainty in practice. There is no standard purpose for confirmation throughout the WELS. The former Commission on Youth Discipleship sent a survey in 2001 to many WELS congregations. The final question of the survey says,

36. Check one statement which comes closest to your understanding of the central purpose of confirmation.
- a. Preparation for the reception of the Lord's Supper.
  - b. Identify/participate more fully in the life and mission of the adult Christian community.
  - c. Renewal of one's baptismal covenant.
  - d. To commit oneself to Christ.
  - e. To become an adult member of the congregation.
  - f. Public profession of faith in which confirmands were baptized.
  - g. Other<sup>10</sup>

The results for that question show there is no consensus on the purpose of the rite of confirmation; none of the responses exceeded thirty percent. Since 2001 it seems like a consensus has been found in WELS. In the new agenda for the newest WELS hymnal, "The rite is used when children who have been instructed desire to confess their faith publicly and affirm that they are prepared to receive the Sacrament of the Altar."<sup>11</sup> Notice the focus on the reception of the Lord's Supper and confession of faith.

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9. Hans H Wiersma, "“Monkey Business”?: On the History of Confirmation," *Word & World* 38.1 (2018), 17–8.

10. "2001 Confirmation Survey," sent by the former Commission on Youth Discipleship, available on wels.net, <https://yfm.welsrc.net/download-yfm/confirmation-general-documents/>.

11. *Christian Worship: Agenda* (Milwaukee: Northwestern, 2021), 21. Also see Appendix C for the full rite of Confirmation.

Much of the literature on confirmation helps to fill in the gaps of the primary sources. Thankfully, much of what Luther wrote about confirmation has been translated. The work of Martin Chemnitz on confirmation was also translated and published. Amy Nelson Burnett translated some of Bucer's writings to give his views on confirmation. Arthur Repp did some similar work in translating old church orders. The more recent articles helped to shed light on possible applications for the Lutheran Church today.

## CONFIRMATION BEFORE THE REFORMATION

Confirmation was not always a rite practiced in the Christian Church. It developed into one over time. Initially, it was a much different rite than we have now. It initially flowed from baptism—something the bishop would do to confirm that the baptism was done. Historically, confirmation included oil and the laying on of hands. As the Early Church grew, the confirmation rite was not done right away after baptism but delayed until later. A significant factor in delaying the rite was that the bishop was the only one who could confirm. The bishops could not meet demand, so confirmation was delayed until later. Confirmation was not always a sacrament either. Eventually, it was numbered among the seven sacraments. What follows is a brief survey of history up to the Reformation as the rite of confirmation developed.

### **Outgrowth from Baptism**

There is no evidence of confirmation in the first century AD. The earliest mention of some of the elements of confirmation is by Tertullian (c. 155–220 AD). Tertullian records in his treatise *On Baptism*,

After this, when we have issued from the font, we are thoroughly anointed with a blessed unction,—(a practice derived) from the old discipline, wherein on entering the priesthood, *men* were wont to be anointed with oil from a horn, ever since Aaron was anointed by Moses. Whence Aaron is called “Christ,” from the “chrism,” which is “the unction;” which, when made spiritual, furnished an appropriate name to the Lord, because He was “anointed” with the Spirit by God the Father; as *written* in the Acts: “For truly they were gathered together in this city against Thy Holy Son whom Thou hast anointed.” [Acts 4:27] Thus, too, in *our* case, the unction runs carnally, (*i.e.* on the body,)

but profits spiritually; in the same way as the *act* of baptism itself too is carnal, in that we are plunged in water, *but* the *effect* spiritual, in that we are freed from sins. [Emphasis in original]<sup>12</sup>

Tertullian explains why oil is used after baptism: the person is anointed. He points to places in Scripture to give credence to the act. Tertullian notes that the practice of unction predates him. Anointing after baptism has historical significance.

Tertullian then explains that laying on of hands after anointing with oil. “But this, as well as the former, is derived from the old sacramental rite in which Jacob blessed his grandsons, born of Joseph, Ephrem [Ephraim] and Manasses [Manasseh]; with his hands laid on them and interchanged, and indeed so transversely slanted one over the other, that, by delineating Christ, they even portended the future benediction into Christ.”<sup>13</sup> Interestingly, Tertullian calls the laying on of hands a sacramental rite that goes back to Jacob blessing the sons of Joseph. It is a vital component in confirmation. At the turn of the third century, confirmation had two primary markers: anointing with oil and the laying on of hands.

Around the same time as Tertullian, Hippolytus (c. 170–235 AD) added that the bishop was the one who anointed and laid on hands after baptism.<sup>14</sup> The sealing by the bishop started to become a problem. The church was contained in urban areas during the first three centuries AD. After Christianity became legal under Emperor Constantine (ruled 306–337 AD), Christianity spread from urban to rural areas. Now, there had to be country bishops and local priests. The priests were not allowed to anoint all baptized Christians. Consequently, the time between

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12. Tertullian, “On Baptism,” in *The Ante-Nicene Fathers: Translations of the Writings of the Fathers down to A.D. 325*, ed. Alexander Roberts and James Donaldson, trans. Sydney Thelwall, Vol. 3 (Buffalo: The Christian Literature Company, 1885). 672.

13. Tertullian, “On Baptism,” *ANF* 3:672.

14. Brewer, *Seven Sacraments*, 67–8.

baptism and the bishop anointing grew.<sup>15</sup> Because confirmation started to separate from Baptism, confirmation was seen as its own rite. Professor Em. John Brenner says in his article, “The actual term *confirmation* seems to have been used first by two French Councils, Riez in 439 and Orange in 441. These councils used the term for the ceremony of laying on of hands after the baptism. They stated that the local priests had the right to baptize and to anoint with oil following baptism, but the bishops were directed to visit the parishes and *confirm* the baptisms. [Emphasis in original]”<sup>16</sup> Edward Yarnold adds the original meaning for the term, “Indeed, the original meaning of the term ‘confirmation’ seems to have been ‘completion’; the gift of the Holy Spirit at confirmation completed or sealed the effect of baptism.”<sup>17</sup>

In the Middle Ages, confirmation was one of the core church rites. It had elements, the oil, and the laying on of hands. Scripture was quoted to give it more credit. Even though it was separated from baptism, it is still connected to baptism. The bishop anointed only those baptized. It sealed the person with the Holy Spirit and completed baptism. The next step for confirmation was becoming a sacrament.

### **Confirmation as a Sacrament**

The term “sacrament” is an ecclesiastical term. It is not found in the pages of Scripture. Just as confirmation developed over the years, so too did the sacraments. Without the term sacrament,

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15. Brewer, *Seven Sacraments*, 69–70.

16. John M. Brenner, “A Brief Study of Confirmation: Historical Development, Theological Considerations, and Practical Implications,” delivered to the joint Metro Conference in Port Washington, WI, November 18, 1996, (Seminary Essay File), 4.

17. Edwin Yarnold, *The Awe-Inspiring Rites of Initiation: The Origins of the RCIA, Second Edition*, 2nd edition. (Collegeville, MN: The Liturgical Press, 1994), 36.

the early Christians had unique things they would do when they came together. They baptized new members (Acts 2:38; 8:35–38; 16:33). They gathered to break bread in fellowship (Acts 2:42,46). They worshipped (Acts 2:42). They preached (Acts 5:42). They anointed the sick (James 5:14–15). “Gradually, the Western fathers of the early and medieval church developed the notion of sacrament from the Greek work *mystērion* (mystery), which they rendered in Latin as *sacramentum*, a term originally derived from the associated Latin words *sacro* (consecrate, hallow) and *sacer* (sacred, holy).”<sup>18</sup>

Maybe the most famous definition of a sacrament is from Augustine (354–430 AD). He defines a sacrament as a “visible form [or sign] of invisible grace.”<sup>19</sup> The church knew that there were signs that were more special than others. There were many attempts to number them. Peter Abelard (1079–1142) counted five sacraments: baptism, confirmation, communion, anointing, and marriage. Hugh of Saint Victor (1096–1141) numbered six: baptism, confirmation, communion, marriage, penance, and extreme unction. Peter Lombard (c. 1096–1160), influenced by Hugh, numbers what is now the seven sacraments of the Catholic Church: baptism, confirmation, the eucharist, penance, extreme unction, orders, and marriage.<sup>20</sup>

Thomas Aquinas (1225–1274) developed the doctrine of confirmation in his *Summa Theologiae*. He says,

As was said above, character is a spiritual power ordered to certain sacred actions. We also said that as baptism is a spiritual generation into Christian life, so confirmation is spiritual growth bringing man to spiritual maturity. But it is clear that, from a comparison with bodily life, the activity of a man newly born is different from that which is proper to him when he reaches maturity. So through the sacrament of confirmation a man is given spiritual power for activity that is different from that for which the power is given in

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18. Brewer, *Seven Sacraments*, 6.

19. Brewer, *Seven Sacraments*, 10.

20. Brewer, *Seven Sacraments*, 10–13.

baptism. For in baptism power is received for performing those things which pertain to one's own salvation in so far as one lives for himself. In confirmation a person receives power for engaging in the spiritual battle against the enemies of the faith. This is clear from the example of the apostles who, before they received the fullness of the Holy Spirit, were in the upper room persevering in prayer; afterwards they went out boldly to confess the faith openly, even in the midst of enemies of the Christian faith. Thus it is manifest that a character is imprinted in the sacrament of confirmation.<sup>21</sup>

Aquinas says that a different spiritual power is given in confirmation than from baptism.

Specifically, it is spiritual growth that leads to maturity. His scriptural proof is surprising as he points to the upper room before Pentecost. The disciples were afraid, but afterward, they were not afraid and confessed Christ boldly. He sees Pentecost as the apostles' confirmation.

### **Explanation of the Rite at the Time of the Reformation**

Confirmation progressed, being connected to baptism, becoming its own rite, then becoming a sacrament. Confirmation, being a sacrament, is the focus of Martin Luther's attacks on the rite. Before examining Luther's thoughts about confirmation, it is beneficial to understand the rite during the time of Luther. An excellent description of the rite is given to us by Martin Chemnitz in his *Examination of the Council of Trent*.

Staying consistent with Augustine's definition of a sacrament there must be an element to be a visible form of invisible grace. Baptism has the water, and the Lord's Supper has the bread and wine. Confirmation must have a visible element, "so they also ascribe to their confirmation a certain material thing, namely, oil, and that not simple or common oil, ... but chrism, that is,

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21. Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae: Baptism and Confirmation*, trans. James J. Cunningham, vol. 57 (New York: McGraw-Hill Book Company, 1975), 205.



olive oil mixed with balsam according to a certain proportion or formula.”<sup>22</sup> Later in the examination, Chemnitz notes that it does not make sense in their logic that oil is the element. The Roman Catholics point to three passages for confirmation. They are descriptive passages about the Holy Spirit coming to people. They refer to Acts 1:5,<sup>23</sup> Acts 8:17,<sup>24</sup> and Acts 19:6<sup>25</sup> as the proof passages for confirmation. Chemnitz says oil is nowhere to be found in those passages. There is a fire in Acts 1. There is the laying on of hands in Acts 8 and 19. “I know you will be astonished when you hear it. The oil in papalist confirmation corresponds to the fire on Pentecost. By what reasoning? Because oil nourishes fire. But a well-dried stick of oak does the same. The balsam corresponds to the appearance of tongues, because it is fragrant.”<sup>26</sup> Then, about the laying on of hands, “For in the papalist church following is the same thing as preceding; therefore when the bishop, after confirmation, taps the confirmed person on the cheek, this takes the place of the laying on of hands in Acts, which at that time preceded the giving of the Spirit.”<sup>27</sup>

Chemnitz also gives the words the bishops use when confirming. The bishop says, “I sign you with the sign of the cross, and confirm you with the chrism of salvation in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit.”<sup>28</sup> Typically, the oil was put on a person’s

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22. Chemnitz, *Examination*, 181.

23. Acts 1:5 “For John baptized with water, but in a few days you will be baptized with the Holy Spirit.” (All passages are NIV 2011).

24. Acts 8:17 “Then Peter and John placed their hands on them, and they received the Holy Spirit.”

25. Acts 19:6 “When Paul placed his hands on them, the Holy Spirit came on them, and they spoke in tongues and prophesied.”

26. Chemnitz, *Examination*, 192.

27. Chemnitz, *Examination*, 193.

28. Chemnitz, *Examination*, 182.

forehead to confirm them in the name of the Triune God. Confirmation is an anointing and smearing of the consecrated oil on the head of a baptized person. With that simple act, the Roman Catholic Church takes away from the sacrament of baptism. They are making the sacrament of confirmation an essential act for a Christian.

## VIEWS OF THE REFORMERS

It should not be surprising that the Lutheran Reformers did not support confirmation being called a sacrament. It did not take Martin Luther long to reduce the number of sacraments from seven to three, then to two. Baptism and the Lord's Supper are distinguished in Scripture. There is nothing else like them in the whole Bible. God institutes both. Both use an earthly element connected with God's Word. Both offer the forgiveness of sins. Confirmation, however, is different in several ways. Christ did not institute it. It does not offer the forgiveness of sins. There is no earthly, visible element. The insights of the Reformers on confirmation give greater clarity on how the rite may be used in the Lutheran Church.

### **Luther's View of Confirmation**

Based on what Luther wrote about confirmation, it may be surprising that the Lutheran Church has it. Indeed, Martin Luther did not write much on confirmation. Contrasting the amount he wrote about confirmation with what he wrote about the other six sacraments in *The Babylonian Captivity of the Church* makes that clear. Early in the Reformation, Luther had not yet decided about confirmation. He references the sacrament briefly in his lectures on Hebrews. He says, "Therefore all theologians say that the Sacrament of Baptism and Confirmation cannot be

repeated.”<sup>29</sup> He calls confirmation a sacrament. He lectured on Hebrews when he wrote the “95 Theses,” so his theology is not fully developed.<sup>30</sup> It seems it did not take Luther long to exclude it as a sacrament. Luther wrote a private letter to George Spalatin, the Elector of Saxony’s secretary, explaining that he would not preach about confirmation when he preached about the sacraments. Luther did not see confirmation as a sacrament “since there is no sacrament except where a divine promise is expressly given and evokes faith.”<sup>31</sup>

Luther’s thoughts about confirmation became clear in *The Babylonian Captivity of the Church*. Luther only writes a few paragraphs about the rite. There Luther says that confirmation should not be considered a sacrament because Jesus did not make a promise concerning confirmation. By the end of the section, Luther does concede that confirmation can be done as a churchly rite or ceremony.<sup>32</sup> With those short remarks, he covered what he needed to cover about the rite. Confirmation comes up almost randomly in some of his other writings, but still, it is not much. From what Luther says about confirmation, he has problems with the Catholic Church’s sacrament system. The main reason Luther is not a supporter of confirmation as a sacrament is because it cannot be proved by Scripture. He says, “But instead of this we seek sacraments that have been divinely instituted, and among these we see no reason for numbering confirmation. For to constitute a sacrament there must be above all things else a word of divine promise, by which faith may be exercised. But we read nowhere that Christ ever gave a promise concerning

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29. Luther, *LW* 29:180.

30. Jaroslav Jan Pelikan, *LW* 29: xii. Pelikan notes in the introduction to Volume 29, that Luther lectured on Hebrews from April 1517 to March 1518.

31. *Weimarer Ausgabe*: D. Martin Luthers Werke, Kritische Gesamtausgabe, Briefwechsel 1:19–24; quoted in Brewer, *Seven Sacraments*, 74.

32. Luther, *LW* 36:91–2.

confirmation.”<sup>33</sup> Furthermore, “That confirmation is a sacrament is asserted without the authority of the Word.”<sup>34</sup>

Luther’s thoughts on the sacraments build on the tenets of the Lutheran Reformation: *sola Scriptura* and *sola fide*. Brain Brewer suggests that *sola fide* was one of the reasons for Luther’s problems with the sacraments of the Catholic Church. “Salvation by faith alone would prove to transform sacramental theology to the point that one might even posit that the Reformation was born out of sacramental disagreements.”<sup>35</sup> Luther saw no scriptural evidence for the sacrament of confirmation. Luther knew his opponents would respond by saying that Jesus laid on hands and his disciples laid on hands after his ascension. Luther saw these passages as descriptive and not prescriptive.<sup>36</sup>

Luther writes powerfully against the sacrament of confirmation by using phrases like: “monkey business ... fanciful deception”<sup>37</sup> and “mumbo-jumbo ... the character of the beast.”<sup>38</sup> He writes so powerfully because the church has been leading people astray by promising that confirmation somehow confers a special grace or mark of the Holy Spirit.<sup>39</sup> Luther also saw a problem with the Catholic teaching that bishops were the only ones who could confirm a person.

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33. Luther, *LW* 36:92.

34. Luther, *LW* 34:356.

35. Brewer, *Seven Sacraments*, 3.

36. Luther, *LW* 36:92.

37. Luther, *LW* 45:24.

38. Luther, *LW* 45:8–9.

39. Luther, *LW* 45:8.

Luther describes his disagreement by citing the priesthood of all believers. “By denouncing the hierarch’s sole jurisdiction to interpret the Scriptures and appropriate the church’s tradition, Luther ushered in a new regime, which practiced a more egalitarian ‘priesthood of all believers.’”<sup>40</sup>

Luther may have preferred that the whole rite be thrown away to not confuse people over what was happening or being taught in the rite. Although, he did approve of a simple rite of confirmation as something beneficial. He says at the end of the section on confirmation in *The Babylonian Captivity of the Church*,

For this reason it is sufficient to regard confirmation as a certain churchly rite or sacramental ceremony, similar to other ceremonies, such as the blessing of water and the like. For if every other creature is sanctified by the Word and by prayer [1 Tim. 4:4–5], why should not man much rather be sanctified by the same means? Still, these things cannot be called sacraments of faith, because they have no divine promise connected with them, neither do they save; but the sacraments do save those who believe the divine promise.<sup>41</sup>

In *The Estate of Marriage*, he shows that if someone uses confirmation, then it should not be like in the Catholic Church. “I would permit confirmation as long as it is understood that God knows nothing of it, and has said nothing about it, and that what the bishops claim for it is untrue. They mock our God when they say that it is one of God’s sacraments, for it is a purely human contrivance.”<sup>42</sup> Indeed, Luther never wrote a rite for confirmation, but he approved the 1540 Brandenburg Church Order, which included confirmation.<sup>43</sup>

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40. Brewer, *Seven Sacraments*, 2.

41. Luther, *LW* 36:92.

42. Luther, *LW* 45:24–5.

43. Brewer, *Seven Sacraments*, 77.

That exhausts Luther's thoughts on the topic of the sacrament of confirmation. We would like him to write more about it, but he did not see a reason. He disapproved that confirmation was a sacrament because there was no promise from Christ or even the laying on of hands. He especially hated that bishops were the only ones who could confirm and the teaching that confirmation conferred some special grace or mark, thus completing baptism. Despite all those negatives, Luther still valued the simple rite of confirmation. It may be there to bless a person who has finished the catechetical process.

### **Other Voices from the Reformation**

Luther was not the only one to have strong opinions about confirmation. Other voices from the Reformation helped shape the rite over the years. Philip Melanchthon talked even less about it than Luther did. Martin Bucer is the main contributor to Protestant confirmation as we know it in the Lutheran Church now. His conversations with the Anabaptists shaped his views. Martin Chemnitz continued the dialogue, emphasizing that it should not be a sacrament. The Council of Trent (1545–1563) had strong words against the Lutherans for their view on confirmation. That gave Chemnitz a unique opportunity to address the topic. Following are summaries of the views of Melanchthon, Bucer, and Chemnitz on confirmation.

#### **Philip Melanchthon**

Martin Luther made considerable changes to worship after the Reformation started. He had two proposals for change in worship: the *Formula Missae* in 1523 and the *Deutsche Messe* in 1526. Luther was aware of the wide latitude of practices in Lutheran churches. He was concerned about

how much the pastors knew of Reformation doctrine to teach the laity, so he organized the Saxon Visitations. Philip Melanchthon wrote a short guide for the visits entitled *Articles of Visitation* (1528). While Melanchthon wrote the articles and the short preface, it was Luther's ideas that were being written down. What Melanchthon wrote is included in the works of Martin Luther.

Only one line from the *Articles of Visitation* is important for the Lutheran view on confirmation. Melanchthon includes it in the section on baptism, "One need not quarrel over the use of chrism. The true chrism with which all Christians are anointed by God himself is the Holy Spirit."<sup>44</sup> Confirmation is still linked with baptism for Melanchthon. He does not have much on confirmation, but in 1528, Melanchthon told pastors they did not have to worry about confirming a baptism. Simultaneously, he took a jab at the Catholics and said that all Christians have already been anointed with the Holy Spirit. He gave references to two Scripture passages, Isaiah 61:1<sup>45</sup> and Ephesians 1:17.<sup>46</sup>

Another reference to Melanchthon's view of confirmation is in the Apology of the Augsburg Confession. Article XIII is titled: "The Number and Use of the Sacraments." It says about confirmation, "Confirmation and extreme unction are rites inherited from the Fathers, which even the church does not require as necessary to salvation, since they lack the command of God. Hence it is useful to distinguish these rites from the previous ones, which have the

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44. Philip Melanchthon, *LW* 40:288.

45. Isaiah 61:1 "The Spirit of the Sovereign Lord is on me, because the Lord has anointed me to proclaim good news to the poor. He has sent me to bind up the brokenhearted, to proclaim freedom for the captives and release from darkness for the prisoners."

46. Ephesians 1:17 "I keep asking that the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the glorious Father, may give you the Spirit of wisdom and revelation, so that you may know him better."



expressed command of God and a clear promise of grace” (Ap XIII 6).<sup>47</sup> Melanchthon agrees with Luther that there is no command from God concerning confirmation. He may even have in mind that the laying on of hands does not have a command from God either. It is good to distinguish the rite of confirmation from true sacraments. Melanchthon says they are to be distinguished from “the previous ones.” He considers the three rites he named sacraments earlier: baptism, the Lord’s Supper, and absolution. (Ap XIII 3). Based on that, Melanchthon may have had a similar view on confirmation as Luther; it could be a useful rite, but it should be used carefully to avoid confusing people.

#### Martin Bucer

Martin Bucer is not as well known among reformers as Martin Luther, Philip Melanchthon, or Martin Chemnitz. In the realm of confirmation, it would be a mistake not to talk about Martin Bucer’s contributions to the rite in the Lutheran Church. He is known as “the father of evangelical confirmation.”<sup>48</sup> He brought a unique viewpoint to confirmation. Bucer was a pastor of a congregation, so he was not as concerned about theological matters and distinctions like Luther, Melanchthon, and Chemnitz. He was more concerned with practical matters. That unique outlook helped shape his view on confirmation.

Bucer’s role in confirmation started in Strasbourg during the 1520s and 1530s. While Bucer was in Strasbourg, he tended to side more with Ulrich Zwingli and his teachings. Bucer,

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47. Robert Kolb, Timothy J. Wengert, and Charles P. Arand, *The Book of Concord: The Confessions of the Evangelical Lutheran Church* (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 2000), 220.

48. Burnett, “Anabaptist Context,” 95.

initially, was concerned about mediating between Zwingli and Wittenberg Reformers over the Lord's Supper. While Bucer was in Strasbourg, he faced attacks from the rapidly growing Anabaptist movement. The Anabaptists were drawing people from Bucer's church. Bucer found himself in frequent discussions with the Anabaptists.

One way to summarize Bucer's confirmation rite would be "surrender to Christ."<sup>49</sup> The Anabaptists had a problem with infant baptism. Part of their belief about baptism is that the person must publicly profess faith. An infant cannot do that. Bucer had difficulty convincing the Anabaptists that an infant could be baptized. Bucer started to use some of the terms of the Anabaptists to try to find some middle ground. Bucer was not willing and would not compromise on the teaching of infant baptism. "In order to prevent further defections from the city's church, Bucer was willing to make concessions to Anabaptist sensibilities. For instance, while he continued to uphold the validity of infant baptism, he also began to stress that when adults were baptized they had to profess their faith in Christ."<sup>50</sup>

In December 1531, at the Strasbourg Council, Bucer brought a proposal to Ambrosius Blarer, a pastor in Constance, and other southern German pastors. Bucer suggested that they add a profession of faith after instruction because the Anabaptists had negative feelings about infant baptism because there was no profession of faith.<sup>51</sup> There is no evidence that churches in southern Germany included a rite of confirmation in their church order.

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49. Amy Nelson Burnett gives thorough detail about Bucer's use of Anabaptist terms in her article "Martin Bucer and the Anabaptist Context of Evangelical Confirmation." She says that Bucer used the term "*ergeben Christo*" meaning infants were "consecrated to Christ." But he also used the phrase "*sich ergeben Christo*" which has more of the meaning of "surrender to Christ." Bucer used these terms to appease the Anabaptists. Yes, he would baptize infants, but they would receive instruction and then later "surrender to Christ" in Confirmation.

50. Burnett, "Anabaptist Context," 108.

51. Burnett, "Anabaptist Context," 108–109.

Bucer continued to develop his thoughts about confirmation or, more specifically, a profession of faith. He began to connect church discipline to confirmation. This development became clear when Philip of Hesse asked Bucer to come to Hesse in 1538. Hesse was also experiencing an infiltration of Anabaptists. Philip saw some of the success Bucer had in Strasbourg with the Anabaptists. In the church order Bucer drafted in Hesse, children confessed the basic tenets of the Christian faith. They were also to swear obedience to the church.<sup>52</sup> Bucer thought that if people publicly confess their faith and “surrender to Christ,” they would be less likely to leave the church.

A couple of interesting developments came from Bucer’s emphasis on church discipline. Bucer was looking for scriptural proof for the rite of confirmation. He went too far in his search. He continued to talk about children being brought into the covenant family through baptism. He saw confirmation as re-establishing the covenant relationship with God. He connected this thinking with the Israelites having to re-establish the covenant after the exile.<sup>53</sup> Another interesting development was about whether confirmation was necessary. Bucer saw the Christian life like a slave, serving his lord. To be a Christian meant to be committed to the church. Just as a slave did not have a choice on whether to serve their master, so it seemed like a Christian did not have a choice in confirmation.<sup>54</sup>

Martin Bucer made some significant advances in confirmation. He transformed the rite from being merely permissible (as Luther and Melanchthon held) and tried to give confirmation

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52. Burnett, “Confirmation and Christian Fellowship,” 205.

53. Burnett, “Anabaptist Context,” 116–117.

54. Burnett, “Confirmation and Church Fellowship,” 209.

more significance. Arthur Repp, in his book *Confirmation in the Lutheran Church*, includes an excerpt from Bucer's church order. From reading that excerpt, there are many similarities with confirmation rites in the Lutheran Church today. An examination of the chief articles of the Christian faith preceded confirmation. After answering the questions, the children publicly surrender themselves to Christ. The pastor then encourages the congregation to pray to the Lord to preserve the children. The pastor also lays hands on them. The children are then admitted to the Lord's Table.<sup>55</sup>

Effectively, Martin Bucer put a rite between baptism and the Lord's Supper. Along with the previous reformers, he did not view the rite as a sacrament. His basis for including a rite of confirmation is clouded by the context in which he was operating. The threat of the Anabaptists led him to make some concessions that led to the importance of the profession of faith. However, connecting church discipline with confirmation and turning the vow of confirmation into law would have negative consequences. It emphasized obedience to the church and its elders instead of focusing on the grace of God. Nevertheless, after Martin Bucer, the rite of confirmation started to take shape.

#### Martin Chemnitz

One of the capstones of the Counter-Reformation was the calling of an ecumenical council by the Catholic Church. After some delays, a council was convened in Trent in 1545. The Council of Trent was held during twenty-five sessions from 13 December 1545 to 4 December 1563. The

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55. Aemilius Ludwig Richter, *Die evangelischen Kirchenordnungen des sechszehnten Jahrhunderts*, Vol. 1, (Weimar: Landes-Industriecomptoirs, 1846), 291. Quoted in Repp, *Confirmation*, 32.

Council of Trent covered many topics, such as justification, original sin, salvation, the biblical canon, and veneration of the saints. The topic covered in the seventh session held on March 3, 1547, was the seven sacraments of the Catholic Church. Three canons were issued about confirmation. Martin Chemnitz took it upon himself to respond to the Council of Trent. Chemnitz's *Examen* became the primary Lutheran response. He responds directly to the papists' statements about confirmation.

Before Chemnitz examines the canons of the Catholic Church, he provides the canons as the council issued them. It is beneficial to have them here, too:

#### Canon I

If anyone says that the confirmation of the baptized is a useless ceremony and not rather a true and proper sacrament, or that it was at one time nothing else than a certain instruction by which those approaching adolescence confessed the ground of their faith before the Church, let him be anathema.

#### Canon II

If anyone says that those who ascribe any power to the sacred anointing of confirmation are insulting the Holy Spirit, let him be anathema.

#### Canon III

If anyone says that the ordinary minister of holy confirmation is not solely the bishop, but any simple priest, let him be anathema.<sup>56</sup>

Chemnitz begins his examination of those canons by explaining confirmation practices and how the Catholic Church teaches the sacrament. Some of his explanations were used above to describe confirmation during the Reformation.

One of the main problems Chemnitz sees with the Catholic teaching of confirmation is that they seem to strip some of the blessings from baptism. By doing that, they lower baptism to be less than confirmation. Chemnitz then quotes church fathers to prove that confirmation has been placed higher than baptism. First, from Urban, "All the faithful must receive the Holy Spirit

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56. Chemnitz, *Examination*, 181.

by the laying on of hands of the bishops after Baptism, in order that they may be found full Christians.”<sup>57</sup> He also quotes from the Council of Orleans, *De consecratione*, “No one will ever be a Christian if he has not been anointed in confirmation by the bishop.... An infant that has been baptized but not anointed will have a lesser glory than one that has also been confirmed.”<sup>58</sup> Chemnitz quotes many more church fathers, but from these two quotes, it is evident that Rome taught that a person who is not confirmed is not a true Christian. He says later to sum up his thoughts, “For whatever is attributed to the chrism is, by contrast, taken away from Baptism. For if Baptism were believed to bestow it, to what end would there be need for the smearing of chrism? Therefore the papalist teaching concerning the chrism cannot be received and approved without harm and reproach to Baptism.”<sup>59</sup>

Despite some of the negative things Chemnitz says about the Catholic teaching of confirmation, he lands in a similar spot as the other reformers. “Such a rite of confirmation would surely be very useful for the edification of the young and of the whole church.”<sup>60</sup> Chemnitz goes further than some of the other reformers and gives guidelines for confirming correctly. He has six main points:

[First], our theologians have often shown that if traditions that are useless, superstitious, and in conflict with Scripture are removed, the rite of confirmation can be used in godly fashion and for the edification of the church namely in this way, that those who were baptized in infancy (for that is now the condition of the church) would, when they have arrived at the years of discretion, be diligently instructed in the sure and simple teaching of the church’s doctrine and, when it is evident that the elements of the doctrine have been sufficiently grasped, be brought afterward to the bishop and the church....

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57. Chemnitz, *Examination*, 182.

58. Chemnitz, *Examination*, 184.

59. Chemnitz, *Examination*, 196.

60. Chemnitz, *Examination*, 212.

Second, the child himself would give his own public profession of this doctrine and faith.

Third, he would be questioned concerning the chief parts of the Christians religion and would respond with respect to each of them or, if he should show lack of understanding in some part, he would be better instructed.

Fourth, he would be reminded and would show by his confession that he disagrees with all heathenish, heretical, fanatical, and ungodly opinions.

Fifth, there would be added an earnest and serious exhortation from the Word of God that he should persevere in his baptismal covenant and in this doctrine and faith and, by making progress in the same, might thereafter be firmly established.

Sixth, public prayer would be made for these children that God would deign, by His Holy Spirit, to govern, preserve, and strengthen them in this profession. To this prayer there could be added without superstition the laying on of hands. This prayer would not be in vain, for it relies upon the promise concerning the gift of preservation and on God's strengthening grace.<sup>61</sup>

These are wise points by Martin Chemnitz, and one can see some similarities with modern confirmation rites. Chemnitz reminds us that confirmation should not take anything away from baptism. It should not have the impression that it completes baptism in some way. It can be a useful rite if understood correctly and does not overshadow the two sacraments of the Lutheran Church.

### **Summarizing Thoughts**

As the examples have shown above, many opinions about the rite of confirmation exist. During the Reformation during the sixteenth century, there was no clear consensus on the rite. Arthur Repp notes this in his book *Confirmation in the Lutheran Church*. He sees four different understandings about the rite during the sixteenth century. His four categories are valuable and beneficial for summarizing the different views. He has six total types in his book, but the last two

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61. Chemnitz, *Examination*, 212.

were developed after the Reformation era. The focus will be on the four types during the Reformation. They are catechetical, hierarchical, sacramental, and traditional.

The catechetical type is the category Luther would fall into. The purpose was to get children ready for the reception of the Lord's Supper.<sup>62</sup> This follows Luther's emphasis on making sure the laity were educated in the things of the Bible. Luther and many others saw the catechetical process as ongoing. Receiving the Lord's Supper did not mark the end of instruction. Pastors were expected to preach catechetical sermons several times a year.<sup>63</sup> However, there was a reluctance among pastors to introduce a ceremony of confirmation. The thought was not wanting to associate it with the Catholic confirmation rite. "The catechetical type of confirming without a closing ceremony was the normal practice in all Scandinavian countries for a long time. The church order of Denmark formulated under Bugenhagen's direction became law in 1539, two years after he had been called to that country to establish the Reformation."<sup>64</sup> The catechetical type was less formal as there was no ceremony. However, there were still three main elements: "the instruction, the examination to determine the understanding of the catechumen (also regarded as a profession of faith), and the prayers of the congregation."<sup>65</sup> While there was no public ceremony like the rite of confirmation today, there was still an examination. For the most part, the examination was done in private. The catechetical type was necessary in developing confirmation in the Lutheran Church.

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62. Repp, *Confirmation*, 22.

63. Repp, *Confirmation*, 23.

64. Repp, *Confirmation*, 26.

65. Repp, *Confirmation*, 27.



The following two types, the hierarchical and sacramental, are best characterized by Martin Bucer. First, the hierarchical type is called that because of the church discipline element Bucer added to confirmation. Martin Bucer pushed for a rite or ceremony, unlike the catechetical approach. “It should again be emphasized that with his ceremony Bucer added two elements which had not been present in the catechetical approach: a surrender to Christ in the form of a confession of faith and a submission to the discipline of the church, both elements firmed up with a vow.”<sup>66</sup> Regarding the sacramental type, Martin Bucer can be put in this camp based on his comments. Those who took the sacramental approach to confirmation are few because Martin Chemnitz put many of those thoughts to bed in his *Examination*. Nevertheless, Martin Bucer, in his catechism in 1534, made it sound like the laying on of hands was a sacrament because it was commended by Jesus when he blessed the little children.<sup>67</sup> Then, in his catechism in 1543, he explained the purpose of the laying on of hands. “He admitted that the Lord did not command it, but since Jesus and His disciples did find blessing in its use, it was proper that the church continue to use it in His name.”<sup>68</sup> While Martin Bucer may not have seen confirmation as a sacrament, some of his wording muddied the waters. His contributions furthered the development of the rite.

The traditional type is the final type that characterizes the rite of confirmation during the sixteenth century. The traditional viewpoint did not want to associate confirmation with the Lord’s Supper but with baptism. This was going back to the Catholic view, as the Catholic

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66. Repp, *Confirmation*, 36.

67. Repp, *Confirmation*, 38.

68. Repp, *Confirmation*, 39.

confirmation had nothing to do with the Lord's Supper.<sup>69</sup> After the death of Martin Luther, two Catholic documents influenced confirmation. Both the Augsburg and Leipzig Interims demanded acceptance of confirmation as a sacrament. The Philippists agreed with making this concession. The Gnesio-Lutherans in Northern Germany were wary of the laying on of hands. For the most part, confirmation was not done in Northern Germany.<sup>70</sup>

Confirmation went through some developments as the Lutherans and other reformers were trying to figure out what to do with the sacrament of confirmation. In general, confirmation is connected to the Lord's Supper. Confirmation had essentially lost its original connection with baptism. That was a good change because the sentiment was that confirmation completed baptism. That would be going further and even in opposition to Scripture. Connecting confirmation with the Lord's Supper was natural. Whether there was a public ceremony or not, there had to be some way to ensure a person was ready to receive the Sacrament. That can be done through an examination by the pastor or elders of a congregation. It can be done through a public confession of faith. A common feature among the various approaches to confirmation was the emphasis on the congregation. The congregation would pray for the young people to remain faithful. Confirmation can be beneficial for the congregation to see young people grow in faith and take ownership of their faith. Whatever form confirmation takes in the individual congregation, careful study of the practices must happen to ensure that the ceremonies are not going beyond Scripture or confusing someone about what confirmation is. The next part will look at some applications drawn from this study of the history of confirmation during the Reformation period.

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69. Repp, *Confirmation*, 44.

70. Repp, *Confirmation*, 47–50.

## APPLICATIONS TO MODERN CONFIRMATION

A brief scenario will help frame the applications that can be made surrounding confirmation. Confirmation is a beloved rite of the Christian Church that has many ceremonies and pomp that go with it. Imagine a visitor comes to your congregation for the first time. The visitor takes in all that is going on in the service. That morning, there is a baptism. The visitor sees a family bring a young child to the front of the church. He sees the pastor put water on the child's head and says that the child is now a child of God. That visitor returns the next week, and the Lord's Supper is celebrated. He hears the pastor say that the Lord's Supper is only for members and those who agree on doctrine. The visitor watches as the people in the pews get up and walk solemnly to the front of the sanctuary. The pastor distributes bread and wine. He dismisses the people, and they walk back to their seats, still solemn. The visitor comes back for a third week; it's Confirmation Sunday. At the beginning of the service, young people dressed in white gowns process into the sanctuary. They sit near the front of the church. The service continues as usual. Then, after the sermon, the young people dressed in white confess their faith. They are asked questions. Each one goes up to the altar. They say a Bible passage. The pastor blesses them by laying his hand on their head.<sup>71</sup> In the mind of that visitor, Confirmation Sunday may be seen as the more important event. It may be an exaggerated example, but it makes one think about what impression we give with our confirmation practice.

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71. The scenario was adapted from Wiersma, "Monkey Business," 17.

While we do have the rite of confirmation in the Lutheran Church today, it no longer has its original meaning. The confirming was done by the bishop to confirm that the person was baptized and received the Holy Spirit. Now, it is something completely different. It is held between the two sacraments. It connects baptism to the Lord's Supper. It is seen as a necessary step before taking the Lord's Supper. Others see it as becoming a member of the congregation. There is no one way to understand confirmation because it has undergone many changes over the centuries. That means care is in order, not to go beyond Scripture or to give an impression about confirmation that is not intended.

### **Confirmation is an Adiaphoron**

Confirmation is not prescribed for us in the Bible. No Bible passage is a clear example of confirmation. Rome tries to point to some passages that support confirmation. One passage is Acts 8:15–17, “When they arrived, they prayed for the new believers there that they might receive the Holy Spirit, because the Holy Spirit had not yet come on any of them; they had simply been baptized in the name of the Lord Jesus. Then Peter and John placed their hands on them, and they received the Holy Spirit.” Another passage is Hebrews 6:1–2, “Therefore let us move beyond the elementary teachings about Christ and be taken forward to maturity, not laying again the foundation of repentance from acts that lead to death, and of faith in God, instruction about cleansing rites, the laying on of hands, the resurrection of the dead, and eternal judgment.” The Acts passage describes the Holy Spirit coming to people with the laying on of hands. It is just a description. It does not command anything. Hebrews 6:2 references the laying on of hands as a core teaching in the church, but nothing commands it anywhere in Scripture.

Since confirmation is neither commanded nor forbidden, it is an adiaphoron. We follow the example of the writers of the Formula of Concord,

1. To settle this dispute, we unanimously believe, teach, and confess that ceremonies or ecclesiastical practices that are neither commanded nor forbidden in God's Word, but have been established only for good order and decorum, are in and of themselves neither worship ordained by God nor a part of such worship. "In vain do they worship me" with human precepts.
2. We believe, teach, and confess that the community of God in every place and at every time has the authority to alter such ceremonies according to its own situation, as may be most useful and edifying for the community of God. (FC Ep X 3–4)<sup>72</sup>

We have the freedom to have such a rite of confirmation. The rite can be altered to fit a particular context. Special care is in order when dealing with matters of adiaphora. Many practices surround the rite of confirmation. They differ from congregation to congregation. The pastor must use caution when wanting to change things like the rite of confirmation. It is not my place to suggest significant changes to the rite. Instead, I intend to add to the already ongoing conversation about the rite of confirmation.

Although confirmation is an adiaphoron, there are teachings about it that we should avoid as they are contrary to Scripture. Confirmation should not be seen as completing baptism. Baptism is complete (cf. Romans 6:3–14). God brings a person into his family through the waters of baptism. It is a "done deal." It does not need to be renewed either. The covenant relationship is kept by God and not human beings.

Another teaching to avoid about confirmation is placing too much on the vow made in confirmation. Some can misunderstand the vow as the child promising to remain faithful forever. That is not something a person can do. The Holy Spirit preserves faith through the Word of God. The Apostle Paul makes that clear in his letter to the Corinthians, "For in him you have been

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72. Kolb, Wengert, *Book of Concord*, 515.

enriched in every way—with all kinds of speech and with all knowledge.... He will also keep you firm to the end, so that you will be blameless on the day of our Lord Jesus Christ. God is faithful, who has called you into fellowship with his Son, Jesus Christ our Lord” (1 Cor 1:5,8–9).

We certainly do not want to give the impression that confirmation is the end of instruction. We may not say it, but often, parents reach that conclusion. The Bible speaks clearly about staying in the Word. Remember the picture of a tree planted by streams of water in Psalm 1. We constantly need God’s Word to give us spiritual life. The psalmist says, “But whose delight is in the law of the Lord, and who meditates on his law day and night. That person is like a tree planted by streams of water, which yields its fruit in season and whose leaf does not wither— whatever they do prospers” (Ps 1:2–3).

It is good to keep in mind that confirmation is an adiaphoron. Since it is an adiaphoron, care must be taken to ensure that practices contrary to Scripture are not done. Let confirmation be valuable and edifying for people rather than hindering consciences. Take an opportunity to analyze confirmation practices in your congregation so that some things are not done just because of tradition.

### **Purpose of Confirmation**

Serious consideration on the pastor’s part must occur regarding the rite of confirmation. The purpose of confirmation will directly affect its practices. Since this is an issue of adiaphoron, there is no uniform purpose for the rite. Over the years, there has been a shift in the purpose of the rite of confirmation used in the Wisconsin Synod. Analyzing the various confirmation rites from previous hymnals demonstrates this point.

Returning to the “2001 Confirmation Survey” done by the Wisconsin Synod shows no conformity on the purpose.

36. Check one statement which comes closest to your understanding of the central purpose of confirmation.
- a. 20.3% responded: Preparation for the reception of the Lord’s Supper.
  - b. 27.3% responded: Identify/participate more fully in the life and mission of the adult Christian community.
  - c. 4.5% responded: renewal of one’s baptismal covenant.
  - d. 8.9% responded: to commit oneself to Christ.
  - e. 3.9% responded: To become an adult member of the congregation.
  - f. 18.2% responded: Public Profession of faith in which confirmands were baptized.
  - g. 17% responded: Other.<sup>73</sup>

It may be a surprise that the majority did not have “preparation for the reception of the Lord’s Supper” as the primary purpose of confirmation. The percentages show that back in 2001, confirmation was a mixed bag. Since then, there seems to be more of a push to make the purpose of confirmation on the readiness for receiving the Lord’s Supper. That is highlighted in the rites and other recent writings on the topic.

It is helpful to track the progression of the purpose of confirmation in the rites themselves. In recent years, three rites of confirmation have been used in the Wisconsin Synod. *The Lutheran Agenda* from 1949 was used in many Synodical Conference congregations with *The Lutheran Hymnal*. The Wisconsin Synod published a new hymnal in 1993, *Christian Worship*. The rite of confirmation was not in print until *Christian Worship: Occasional Services* in 2004. With the most recent hymnal in WELS, there is a new rite of confirmation. It is in *Christian Worship: Agenda*.<sup>74</sup>

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73. “2001 Confirmation Survey” Question 36.

74. All three rites are found in the Appendices.

Looking first at the confirmation rite used in the Synodical Conference, both the examination and the confirmation are under the term “The Rite of Confirmation.” The introductory paragraph and the first question for confirmation says,

Dearly Beloved: When you were little children, you were received into God's covenant of grace in Holy Baptism. And now, having learned the meaning of this covenant from your instruction in the Word of God, you are gathered here before God and this Christian congregation publicly to make profession of your faith in the Triune God and to confirm your covenant with Him, to dedicate yourselves body and soul for time and for eternity to your God and Lord. (Others of you are to make this profession and promise and then, in obedience to Christ's command, to receive the Sacrament of Holy Baptism.) Lift up your hearts with me, therefore, to the God of all grace, and cheerfully give an answer to what, in the name of the Lord, as a minister of His holy Church, I now shall ask you.

Do you this day, in the presence of God and of this Christian congregation, confirm the solemn covenant which at your Baptism you made with the Triune God?<sup>75</sup>

One thing to note is the terminology, covenant of baptism. The children are there to confirm the covenant they were brought into when they were children or adults. That wording can lead to confusion. It gives the impression that we are doing something to confirm the covenant God brought us into. The covenant of baptism is not two-sided; it is unilateral. God is the one who does all the work. This wording is getting close to an understanding that confirmation completes baptism.

The rite found in *Christian Worship: Occasional Services* cut that wording out. The introductory paragraphs make no mention of confirming the covenant. The first question still connects confirmation with baptism but in a much better way. “Do you this day, in the presence of God and of this congregation, acknowledge that in Baptism, God gave you forgiveness of sins, life, and salvation?”<sup>76</sup> The change is from us doing something to confessing the truth of baptism

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75. *The Lutheran Agenda*, (St. Louis: Concordia, 1949), 23.

76. *Christian Worship: Occasional Services*, (Milwaukee: Northwestern, 2004), 17.



and emphasizing the confession of faith. In *Christian Worship: Agenda*, the mention of baptism is not in the first question but right away in the introductory paragraphs. “My dear young friends, when you were baptized, your gracious Lord forgave all your sins and covered you with the robe of Christ’s righteousness.”<sup>77</sup> The first question is, “Are you ready and willing to confess your faith before the triune God and those who are worshiping with you today?”<sup>78</sup> Good progression was made from confirming the covenant to a confession of faith.

Many of the questions are similar in all three variations of the rite. The pastor asks if the confirmands believe in the Triune God and if they believe the canonical books of the Bible are the inspired Word of God. There is a slight difference in the newest rite of confirmation. The wording of the vow is slightly different in *Christian Worship: Agenda. The Lutheran Agenda* says, “Do you also, as a member of the Evangelical Lutheran Church, intend to continue steadfast in the confession of this Church, and suffer all, even death, rather than fall away from it?”<sup>79</sup> *Christian Worship: Occasional Services* also has the word “intend” as part of the vow. The wording in both cases is not wrong. The vow itself can be debated: can a young person make that kind of vow or not? None of us can make a vow to continue steadfast always. That is why the wording in *Christian Worship: Agenda* may be better. “Is it your sincere prayer and desire to remain faithful to your Lord Jesus and his Word all the days of your life?”<sup>80</sup> Making it a prayer of the young people confessing their faith is a marked improvement. That kind of wording makes it more straightforward for the confirmands and the members in the pews.

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77. *Christian Worship: Agenda*, 21.

78. *Christian Worship: Agenda*, 21.

79. *The Lutheran Agenda*, 24

80. *Christian Worship: Agenda*, 22

The most significant change in the rites is the purpose of the rite of confirmation. The emphasis shifts from becoming a congregation member to coming to the Lord's Table. The wording chosen shows where WELS sees the purpose of confirmation. In the rite from 1949, the emphasis is on membership in the congregation along with coming to the Lord's Supper. In *The Lutheran Agenda* the confirmands are instructed to come forward and give the right hand to the pastor as he lays on hands for a blessing. After all confirmands come forward to receive a blessing and word of encouragement the pastor says, "Upon this (these) your voluntary profession(s) and promise(s), I, in the name of the Church of Christ, invite and welcome you, as a member (as members) of the Evangelical Lutheran Church and of this congregation, to participate with us in all the rights and privileges of the Evangelical Lutheran Church, in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Ghost."<sup>81</sup> This suggests that the young people were not members of the congregation or the Lutheran Church before they were confirmed. Instead, this seems like a rite for membership rather than confirmation. This statement was deleted in the other two rites to avoid giving the impression that one is not a member of the Lutheran Church until confirmed.

The purpose of confirmation in *Christian Worship: Occasional Services* comes out in the opening rubric. "Confirmation is a public profession of the Christian faith, following a period of instruction. It is a rite by which a person is recognized as one who is properly prepared to receive Holy Communion."<sup>82</sup> The purpose of the rite is to recognize a person as ready to receive the Sacrament. The purpose is restated after all the confirmands come to the altar to receive a blessing from the pastor. "Your church now invites you to receive the Sacrament of the Lord's

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81. *The Lutheran Agenda*, 26.

82. *Christian Worship: Occasional Services*, 17.

body and blood. Accept this invitation with deep reverence and holy joy. Regard your communing at the Lord's Table as a precious privilege given you by God through his Church; receive this Sacrament thankfully and often. The almighty and most merciful God—Father, Son, + and Holy Spirit—bless and keep you.”<sup>83</sup> *Christian Worship: Agenda* says something similar in the opening rubric, “The rite is used when children who have been instructed desire to confess their faith publicly and affirm that they are prepared to receive the Sacrament of the Altar.”<sup>84</sup>

The rite of confirmation seems to have found a common purpose in the Wisconsin Synod. The rite emphasizes being ready to receive the Lord's Supper. In other sources in WELS, the purpose is clear. *The Shepherd Under Christ* offers a definition, “Confirmation is a church rite in which a congregation gives its catechumens who have been instructed in Christian doctrine according to the Bible and the Lutheran confessions an opportunity to confess their faith before the church, prays for the children with the laying on of hands, and invites them as such who have sufficient spiritual maturity to participate in the Lord's Supper.”<sup>85</sup> This definition highlights a few things that make confirmation what it is. It highlights the education, the opportunity to confess faith publicly, the congregation offering prayers for the catechumens, and the catechumens being welcomed to the Lord's Supper. These are the essential elements in Lutheran confirmation. Repp offers similar essential elements, “the instruction in the Word, the confession of faith, and the intercession of the congregation, accompanied by the laying on of hands.”<sup>86</sup> Notably, the welcome to the Lord's table is absent in his essential elements.

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83. *Christian Worship: Occasional Services*, 21.

84. *Christian Worship: Agenda*, 21.

85. Armin W. Schuetze, *The Shepherd under Christ: A Textbook for Pastoral Theology*, 2nd ed. (Milwaukee: Northwestern Pub. House, 1981), 122.

86. Repp, *Confirmation*, 179.

More recent evidence that the purpose of confirmation is defined in WELS comes from the newest catechism. Nowhere in the 2017 catechism is the actual rite discussed. There is a glossary in the back of the book that gives definitions for specific terms. Confirmation is listed among them. It says, “A ceremony following instruction in which Christians confess their faith and are acknowledged as sufficiently instructed to receive Holy Communion.”<sup>87</sup> In that short definition, the same elements are emphasized: instruction, confession of faith, and recognition to receive Holy Communion.

Finally, *Christian Worship: Foundations* offers three purposes for confirmation. “Confirmation has three purposes in Lutheran practice: to announce to the congregation that these young people have been instructed so that they might examine themselves as they receive Holy Communion; to enable young people to publicly confess their faith to the congregation; to provide the congregation an opportunity to lift its prayers to the God of all grace that he might guard and guide these children to their eternal home.”<sup>88</sup> Once again, the emphasis is on instruction, confession of faith, the congregation’s prayers, and welcome to the Lord’s Supper.

Based on the evidence and the published works of the synod, the purpose of confirmation can be defined. Confirmation is a rite after a period of instruction where the confirmands get the opportunity to confess their faith, the people of the congregation get to offer prayers on behalf of the young Christians, and the confirmands are welcomed to partake of Christ’s body and blood in the Sacrament. Confirmation should not give the impression that it completes baptism or renews

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87. *Luther’s Catechism: The Small Catechism of Dr. Martin Luther*, Anniversary Edition, New International Version. (Milwaukee: Northwestern, 2017), 376.

88. *Christian Worship: Foundations*, (Milwaukee: Northwestern, 2023), 182.

the baptismal covenant. It should also avoid language that says the young people are not church members until confirmation.

### **What this Means for Confirmation**

The beginning of the third section of this paper had the scenario about a visitor seeing confirmation. What would be that visitor's impression of confirmation? Once the purpose of confirmation is established for a congregation, does practice match the purpose? Is the impression of confirmation helpful or edifying for the people? These are some of the questions a pastor wrestles with when examining the rite of confirmation. The pastor sees young people coming to catechism class; during that time of instruction, the child is faithful in coming to church. Then Confirmation Sunday comes and goes and many of the class members no longer attend church like they did. This can be incredibly frustrating for a pastor to watch.

There is this sense for many members of congregations that confirmation is the end of instruction in the Word. It is seen as a kind of "Graduation Syndrome."<sup>89</sup> While statistics do not show the entire picture, a comparison between average weekly attendance in worship and average attendance in Bible study shows that not many members see a reason to continue education in the Bible. Comparing those two columns is based on the premise that those attending Bible Class are most likely also attending worship. The stats from the past five years,

	Average Weekly In-person Worship Attendance	Average Weekly Communicant Bible Study Attendance
2022 Synod Totals:	117,246	35,241
2021 Synod Totals:	107,441	32,707
2020 Synod Totals:	100,954	31,508

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89. Charles L. Learman, "How Shall We Combat the Confirmation/Graduation Syndrome," (Seminary Essay File, 1993), 1–12.

2019 Synod Totals:	143,681	42,463
2018 Synod Totals:	145,953	43,077 <sup>90</sup>

Over the past five years, the average percentage of worship members in Bible Class is 30.15%. This, of course, does not give a complete picture because average weekly attendance includes non-communicant members. Including pre-confirmation bible study numbers adds another 12.56% to equal, on average, a mere 42.71% of WELS members furthering instruction in the Bible. The statistics reinforce the idea that not many WELS members are interested in furthering their education after confirmation.

The timing of confirmation could give the wrong impression. The common practice in WELS is for confirmation to happen around eighth grade. In many cases, Confirmation Sunday is a Sunday in May, a couple of weeks before graduation from grade school. The proximity to graduation could lead some to think confirmation is a graduation from studying the Bible. It could be done earlier in the year or before eighth grade. The reality is that confirmation does not have to be in eighth grade. In 1967, three major Lutheran bodies<sup>91</sup> recommended a study on confirmation. The study suggested that the age of first Communion could be done in fifth grade but then tenth grade for confirmation.<sup>92</sup> Arthur Repp, who was part of the delegation from the LCMS that was part of the Joint Commission of the Theology and Practice of Confirmation,

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90. WELS Statistical Report 2022. Accessed at <https://welscongregationalervices.net/download/wels-statistical-report-2022/>

91. The three bodies were Lutheran Church in America, American Lutheran Church, and Lutheran Church–Missouri Synod. Two of the three accepted the proposal on the age of Confirmation. The Lutheran Church–Missouri Synod left it up to the individual congregation.

92. “The Report of the Joint Commission of the Theology and Practice of Confirmation” Joint effort by the Lutheran Church in America (LCA), The America Lutheran Church (ALC), and The Lutheran Church–Missouri Synod (LCMS), 1970, 46–9. Accessed at <https://theconfirmationproject.com/wp-content/uploads/2014/03/Joint-Commission-on-Theology-and-Practice-Confirmation-report-1970.pdf>

gives the age of twelve a good time for confirmation and First Communion.<sup>93</sup> Since one of the primary purposes of confirmation in WELS is the reception of the Lord's Supper, confirmation could be pushed earlier. A fifth-grade child can easily recognize that the body and blood are present in the Sacrament. They can recognize their sins and a need for a Savior and forgiveness. Thus, as the Apostle Paul says in his first letter to the Corinthians, they can examine themselves. "Everyone ought to examine themselves before they eat of the bread and drink from the cup" (1 Cor 11:28). As the Lutheran Church–Missouri Synod did, the matter of the timing of confirmation ought to be left to each congregation after careful study. Maybe moving the timing of confirmation can help with the impression that it is graduation from studying the Bible.<sup>94</sup>

Another possible way to help combat the "graduation syndrome" in confirmation is to get the parents involved in the instruction. Learman notes that there is a lack of commitment by parents. He clarifies that by saying many parents are "one hour a week Christians," they come to church infrequently. They do not come to Bible class. They do not participate in the events and life of the congregation. There are no home devotions.<sup>95</sup> Of course, the kids see that from their parents and think it is okay to do the same. The kids grow up and follow the same pattern of attending church infrequently. "I fear that too many of our parents are expecting the church to do the job of raising their children and instructing them in the Word of the Lord. Yes, the church is there to assist parents in this important work."<sup>96</sup> Parents do have a role in bringing their children

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93. Repp, *Confirmation*, 191–3.

94. This can create logistical problems between two congregations that are close to one another. If a confirmed 7<sup>th</sup> grader is confirmed but her LES classmates from another WELS church have not. While this does not need to be a source of conflict, the pastors would have to be transparent with each other. And then the pastors would want to do a lot of instructing of their members that each church has a different age for confirmation.

95. Learman, "Graduation Syndrome," 5.

96. Learman, "Graduation Syndrome," 8.

to the Lord. “Fathers, do not exasperate your children; instead, bring them up in the training and instruction of the Lord” (Eph 6:4). A pastor is there to assist parents in bringing their children up in the Lord. He can help them establish devotion time or suggest books for devotion. When the pastor and parents work together, the children may see that studying God’s Word does not end at confirmation.

Making significant changes to the rite of confirmation will not solve the problem of children leaving the church after confirmation. A pastor can give thanks because he gets the opportunity to share God’s Word with young people. We believe that God’s Word is effective, so we put our trust in God working through his Word. Paul says, “For it is God who works in you to will and to act in order to fulfill his good purpose” (Phil 2:13). Or the prophet Jeremiah, “‘Is not my word like fire,’ declares the Lord, ‘and like a hammer that breaks a rock in pieces?’” (Jer 23:29). A pastor can keep in mind the heart of confirmation, it is not the rite of confirmation. “The heart of confirmation lies in the instruction of the Word that precedes the rite. The real confirmation takes place in the confirmation of faith by the Word, for through the Word, God continues to confirm the faith begun in Baptism and nurtured by the home and the church.”<sup>97</sup>

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97. Repp, *Confirmation*, 177.



## CONCLUSION

“Especially to be rejected is confirmation, that deceitful mumbojumbo of the episcopal idols. It has no foundation in Scripture.”<sup>98</sup> Martin Luther wrote those words in a letter to Nicholas Hansmann and urged him to confront the bishop about the rite of confirmation. It is the reason why I titled this thesis the way I did. Martin Luther called confirmation “mumbojumbo.” After reading much of what Luther said about confirmation, it surprised me that the rite is in the Lutheran Church. Martin Luther was getting me ready to tear confirmation to shreds and to get rid of it. Reading more from other reformers, I started to see the checkered past of the rite of confirmation. Martin Luther calling it “mumbojumbo” fit perfectly. There are many different views on confirmation, just in the Lutheran Church. It has gone through many changes over the centuries, too. It no longer has its original meaning anymore. Rightly so, it is not connected to baptism as it was in the ancient church.

I wonder if Martin Luther would look at the rite of confirmation in WELS churches and still call it “mumbojumbo.” I do not think he would. He used that word because confirmation was a sacrament in the Catholic Church. There have been many twists and turns in the history of confirmation in Lutheranism. Based on the evidence I provided, there is a common purpose for confirmation in WELS. I would not call it “mumbojumbo” anymore.

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98. Luther, *LW* 45:8.

I wanted to track down a purpose for confirmation. It started with writing an article for the newsletter to my vicar congregation. I did not know the purpose of confirmation after all the years of Lutheran education, starting in a Lutheran grade school, then attending a Lutheran high school, attending a Lutheran college, and studying at the Seminary. I wanted a purpose, a definition. I did that for myself, as a future pastor. I need to know what confirmation is and what to do with it. I gave my definition for confirmation as I understand it. I will state the definition here again. Confirmation is a rite after a period of instruction where the confirmands get the opportunity to confess their faith, the people of the congregation get to offer prayers on behalf of the young Christians, and the confirmands are welcomed to partake of Christ's body and blood in the Sacrament. That definition is not binding since it is not defined, described, or instituted in Scripture. My definition may not even be the right or best definition, but it is how I see confirmation.

This thesis did not try to solve the problem of many confirmands not staying in the church. As alluded to above, there is not one silver bullet that will change recent trends. Maybe it would be good to take a new look at ways to educate. Maybe there can be a new study into the age of confirmation. Would moving it up to about age 12 change anything? There is one thing we can depend on in the many practices of confirmation. God is in control. He works through his Word to work faith in many young lives because of confirmation instruction. The instruction in the Word is the heart of confirmation. The Holy Spirit works in the heart to strengthen faith to assure us that we are a redeemed child of God. That cannot be taken away from any of us. It is God who confirms us through his Word. A pastor is not the one who confirms. It is God. What Luther said about baptism can be helpful when thinking about confirmation. He said, "Therefore

let us open our eyes and learn to pay heed more to the word than to the sign, more to faith than to the work or use of the sign.”<sup>99</sup>

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99. Luther, *LW* 36:67.

## APPENDIX A: 1949 CONFIRMATION RITE<sup>100</sup>

### THE RITE OF CONFIRMATION

*In the regular Morning Service the Examination may be placed after the singing of a Hymn following the Apostles' Creed; in the Vespers, after the singing of a Hymn following the Lection.*

### THE EXAMINATION

*The following introductory paragraph may be read.*

When children have attained such knowledge of the truths of the Christian religion as are contained in the Catechism that, pursuant to the injunction of St. Paul, 1 Cor. 11:28, they are able to examine themselves, they should no longer be kept from the Holy Supper. Before they receive the Holy Sacrament, however, they should be examined and confirmed in the presence of the assembled congregation.

*The Minister may introduce the Examination by the following or another suitable Address:*

Dearly Beloved: Holy Baptism is the washing of regeneration and renewing of the Holy Ghost, which God shed on us abundantly through Jesus Christ, our Savior, that, being justified by His grace, we should be made heirs according to the hope of eternal life. Through this Sacrament, God receives little children into His covenant and Kingdom of Grace, working faith in them and making them members of Christ's Church and temples of His Holy Spirit.

And as God will not suffer His faithfulness to fail, but keep His covenant and mercy; even so He says to each of His own: Be thou faithful unto death, and I will give thee a crown of life. To the end, however, that His purpose of God may be accomplished and children may grow in grace and Christian knowledge as they advance in years, the Lord gave commandment, saying to parents through the Apostle Paul: Bring up your children in the nurture and admonition of the Lord, and to the Church, even as unto Simon Peter: Feed My lambs.

In accordance, then, with Christ's command, children are instructed in the Christian faith. When they reach an age of discretion and understand the covenant entered into by them by the grace of God in Holy Baptism, they should daily give their hearts to God and let their eyes observe His ways. In particular, being able to examine themselves and to discern the Lord's body, they should for their furtherance in grace receive the Sacrament of Holy Communion with the Church of God.

To encourage such growth in Christian knowledge and faith, the rite of Confirmation is maintained in the Lutheran Church. The catechumens publicly make profession of the true faith, confirming the covenant made between them and God. The Christian congregation, or church,

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100. *The Lutheran Agenda* (St. Louis: Concordia, 1949), 21–29.

the dispenser of God's mysteries, having assured itself that the catechumens possess such knowledge of Christian doctrine as may give warrant of their worthy eating of the body and drinking of the blood of Christ, invites them to receive the Holy Supper and, with the laying on of hands, prays over them for the Holy Spirit of God, that they may grow in grace, be steadfast and unmovable in their profession, become fruitful in every good work, and in the end receive the crown of life.

These catechumens have here presented themselves for Confirmation. We shall now examine them in the chief parts of Christian doctrine, for the purpose of setting forth that they understand the faith they are about to profess.

*Then shall the Catechumens be briefly examined.*

*A Hymn may then be sung, followed by the Sermon.*

*If the Confirmation be held in a later service, this service shall be concluded in the usual manner.*

### THE CONFIRMATION

*The Order of Confirmation shall follow the General Prayer in the Morning Service: in the Vespers, the Hymn after the Sermon.*

*When adults not previously baptized are included in the group of Catechumens, they shall receive the Sacrament of Holy Baptism according to the Order for the Baptism of Adults. It is not necessary for them to receive Confirmation.*

*Then may the Minister address the Catechumens thus:*

Dearly Beloved: When you were little children, you were received into God's covenant of grace in Holy Baptism. And now, having learned the meaning of this covenant from your instruction in the Word of God, you are gathered here before God and this Christian congregation publicly to make profession of your faith in the Triune God and to confirm your covenant with Him, to dedicate yourselves body and soul for time and for eternity to your God and Lord. (Others of you are to make this profession and promise and then, in obedience to Christ's command, to receive the Sacrament of Holy Baptism.) Lift up your hearts with me, therefore, to the God of all grace, and cheerfully give an answer to what, in the name of the Lord, as a minister of His holy Church, I now shall ask you.

Do you this day, in the presence of God and of this Christian congregation, confirm the solemn covenant which at your Baptism you made with the Triune God?

**I do.**

Do you, then, renounce the devil and all his works and all his ways?

**I do.**

Do you believe in God the Father?

**Yes, I believe in God the Father...**

Do you believe in God the Son?

**Yes, I believe in Jesus Christ...**

Do you believe in God the Holy Ghost?

**Yes, I believe in the Holy Ghost...**

Do you desire to be a member of the Evangelical Lutheran Church and of this congregation?

**I do.**

Do you hold all the canonical books of the Bible to be the inspired Word of God, and the doctrine of the Evangelical Lutheran Church, drawn from the Bible, as you have learned to know it from Luther's Small Catechism, to be the true and correct one?

**I do.**

Do you also, as a member of the Evangelical Lutheran Church, intend to continue steadfast in the confession of this Church, and suffer all, even death, rather than fall away from it?

**I do so intend, with the help of God.**

Finally, do you intend faithfully to conform all your life to the rule of the divine Word, to be diligent in the use of the means of grace, to walk as it becometh the Gospel of Christ, and in faith, word, and deed to remain true to the Triune God, even unto death?

**I do so intend, by the grace of God.**

*Then shall the Minister say:*

Give now your hand at the Lord's altar, as a pledge of your promise, and, kneeling, receive His blessing.

*Then shall the Catechumens come forward—one by one, or in groups, as the Minister may have appointed—and, giving the Minister their right hand, kneel before the altar.*

*Then shall the Minister, laying his hands upon each one separately, pronounce the name of the Catechumen and the Benediction, adding a Scripture passage as a memorial of Confirmation, saying:*

N., God, the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, give thee His Holy Spirit, the Spirit of wisdom and knowledge, of grace and prayer, of power and strength, of sanctification and the fear of God.

*Or:*

N., The Father in heaven, for Jesus' sake, renew and increase in thee the gift of the Holy Ghost, to thy strengthening in faith, to thy growth in grace, to thy patience in suffering, and to the blessed hope of everlasting life.

*Or:*

N., The God of all grace, who hath called us unto His eternal glory by Christ Jesus, make thee perfect, stablish, strengthen, settle thee, and keep thee through faith unto eternal life.

*Or:*

N., The God of peace sanctify thee wholly; and may thy whole spirit and soul and body be preserved blameless unto the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ.

*Or:*

N., May God, who hath begun the good work in thee, perform it until the day of our Lord Jesus Christ.

*Then shall the Minister say:*

Upon this (these) your voluntary profession(s) and promise(s), I, in the name of the Church of Christ, invite and welcome you, as a member (as members) of the Evangelical Lutheran Church and of this congregation, to participate with us in all the rights and privileges of the Evangelical Lutheran Church, in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Ghost.

*Then shall the Minister pronounce the Benediction:*

The Lord bless thee and keep thee.

The Lord make His face shine upon thee and be gracious unto thee.

The Lord lift up His countenance upon thee and give thee peace +.

*The group shall say:*

**Amen.**

*Then shall the Minister invite the Congregation to make Intercession, as follows:*

Since it is God alone who worketh both to will and to do of His good pleasure, it behooveth us, dear friends in Christ, to call upon Him for these *young* members of this Christian congregation, that He would graciously perform the good work which He hath begun in them. Let us, therefore, (kneel and) pray.

Almighty and Everlasting God, who makest us both to will and to do those things which are good and acceptable unto Thy divine majesty, we make our humble supplications unto Thee for these Thy servants. Let Thy fatherly hand, we beseech Thee, ever be over them; let Thy Holy Spirit ever be with them; and so lead them in the knowledge and obedience of Thy Word that in the end they may obtain everlasting life, through our Lord Jesus Christ, who, with Thee and the Holy Ghost, liveth and reigneth, ever one God, world without end.

*The Congregation shall say:*

**Amen.**

*Or:*

Lord God, heavenly Father, we thank and praise Thee for Thy great goodness in bringing these Thy servants to the knowledge of Thy Son Jesus Christ and the truth of Gospel revealed through Him, and in enabling them both with the heart to believe and with the mouth to confess His name. We also entreat Thee to enlighten and strengthen them by Thy Holy Spirit, that they may daily increase in living faith, in godly fear, in patience under trials, in true knowledge of Thee, and in all other things profitable to their eternal salvation. Grant that, bring forth the fruits of faith and love, they may continue steadfast and victorious unto the day when all who have fought the good fight of faith shall receive the crown of righteousness, through Jesus Christ, Thy Son, our Lord, who liveth and reigneth with Thee and the Holy Ghost, ever one God, world without end.

*Or:*

Almighty and Everliving God, we thank Thee that Thou has brought these Thy servants to Thy Son Jesus Christ in Holy Baptism, cleansed them by His blood, and buried them with Him by Baptism into His death. And we beseech Thee, of Thy great goodness, to renew in them the gift of the Holy Ghost, that their hearts may be filled with the light of Thy Gospel. Increase in them

pure knowledge and true faith, that they may firmly believe in Thee, the only true God, and in Jesus Christ, whom Thou hast sent, and ever cleave to Thee with steadfast confidence. Defend them from the power of darkness, and establish them in the Kingdom of Thy Son, wherein we have redemption and forgiveness of sins. Fill their hearts and minds with the peace of Christ, the joy of the Holy Spirit, and love to Thee and all mankind. Endow them plenteously with the gifts of Thy heavenly grace, that they may be led into all truth, mortify the deeds of the flesh, overcome the assaults and temptations of the Wicked One, and serve Thee in Thy Church in holiness and righteousness all their days; and that, together with all true believers, they may, with joyful hearts and watchful prayer and in soberness and godly living, hope and wait for the coming of the Savior, to the honor of Thy holy name, who livest and reignest with the Son and the Holy Ghost, ever one God, world without end.

*Or:*

Almighty and Everlasting God, the Author and Finisher of our faith, who, of Thine infinite mercy, hast added to Thy Church these Thy servants by causing them to be born again of water and the Holy Ghost and hast given them knowledge of their redemption in Christ and power to own and confess Thee in the presence of Thy people, we thank Thee for the great mercy Thou has been pleased to show them, and beseech Thee, strengthen them by Thy Holy Spirit, and daily increase in them the manifold gifts of Thy grace, the spirit of wisdom and understanding, the spirit of counsel and might, the spirit of knowledge and of the fear of the Lord, that they may be kept in the Kingdom and covenant of Christ through faith unto everlasting life. Fortify them against the assaults of sin. Let not Satan prevail against them. Keep them from the evil that is in the world. Help them to walk in the Spirit that they may not fulfill the lusts of the flesh, but serve Thee in holiness and righteousness all their days. Defend them from all heresy and schism, from all apostasy and unbelief. Make them faithful unto death that no man may take from them their crown. And grant that, continuing steadfast in faith and hope, they may at the end by found meet to be partakers of the inheritance of the saints in light; through Jesus Christ, Thy Son, our Lord, who liveth and reigneth with Thee and the Holy Ghost, ever one God, world without end.

*Then shall the Minister and the Congregation say:*

**Our Father who art in heaven. Hallowed be Thy name. Thy kingdom come. Thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven. Give us this day our daily bread. And forgive us our trespasses, as we forgive those who trespass against us. And lead us not into temptation. But deliver us from evil. For Thine is the kingdom and the power and the glory forever and ever. Amen.**

*Then may be sung a Hymn.*

*Then shall the Minister pronounce the Benediction upon the Congregation:*

The Lord bless thee and keep thee.

The Lord make His face shine upon thee and be gracious unto thee.

The Lord lift up His countenance upon thee and give thee peace +.

*The Congregation shall say or chant:*

**Amen.**

*SILENT PRAYER*



## APPENDIX B: 2004 CONFIRMATION RITE<sup>101</sup>

### CONFIRMATION

*This rite is intended for both children and adults who have been baptized.*

*Confirmation is a public profession of the Christian faith, following a period of instruction. It is a rite by which a person is recognized as one who is properly prepared to receive Holy Communion.*

*The liturgical color for Confirmation is the color of the season.*

*This rite may be used in place of the Prayer of the Church in The Common Service or Service of Word and Sacrament.*

*A hymn of invocation of the Holy Spirit may be sung.*

*Those being confirmed stand.*

**M:** Brothers and sisters in Christ, our Lord Jesus said to his disciples: “All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. Therefore, go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you. And surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age.”

In obedience to the Lord’s command, you have been baptized in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit. You have been taught the precious truths of the Christian faith as confessed by the Evangelical Lutheran Church. You know what God has given you by his grace and what he expects of you as his dear child. You now have the privilege of receiving the Lord’s body and blood in the Sacrament of Holy Communion.

You are here to make a public profession of your Christian faith. The apostle Paul, writing to the Romans, said: “If you confess with your mouth, ‘Jesus is Lord’ and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved. For it is with your heart that you believe and are justified, and it is with your mouth that you confess and are saved. Everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved.”

Therefore, lift up your hearts to the God of all grace and joyfully answer these questions.

**M:** Do you this day, in the presence of God and of this congregation, acknowledge that in Baptism, God gave you forgiveness of sins, life, and salvation?

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101. *Christian Worship: Occasional Services* (Milwaukee: Northwestern, 2004), 17–21.

**R: I do.**

**M:** Do you reject the devil along with all his lies and empty promises?

**R: I do.**

**M:** Do you believe in God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Spirit?

**R: I believe in God, the Father almighty,  
 maker of heaven and earth.  
 I believe in Jesus Christ, his only Son, our Lord,  
 who was conceived by the Holy Spirit,  
 born of the virgin Mary,  
 suffered under Pontius Pilate,  
 was crucified, died, and was buried.  
 He descended into hell.  
 The third day he rose again from the dead.  
 He ascended into heaven  
 and is seated at the right hand of God the Father almighty.  
 From there he will come to judge the living and the dead.  
 I believe in the Holy Spirit,  
 the holy Christian Church,  
 the communion of saints,  
 the forgiveness of sins,  
 the resurrection of the body,  
 and the life everlasting. Amen.**

**M:** Do you believe all the books of the Bible to be the inspired Word of God?

**R: I do.**

**M:** Do you believe that the teaching of the Evangelical Lutheran Church, as you have learned to know it from Luther's Small Catechism, is faithful and true to the Word of God?

**R: I do.**

**M:** Do you intend to continue steadfast in this teaching and to endure all things, even death, rather than fall away from it?

**R: I do, and I ask God to help me.**

**M:** Do you intend faithfully to conform all your life to the teachings of God's Word, to be faithful in the use of the Word and sacrament, and in faith and action remain true to God—Father, Son, and Holy Spirit—as long as you live?

**R: I do, and I ask God to help me.**

*The minister addresses the congregation.*

**M:** Since it is God alone who enables us both to will and to do his good pleasure, it is right for us, dear friends in Christ, to call on him for *these confirmands*, that he would graciously complete the good work which he has begun in *them*. Let us, therefore, bow our heads and pray.

**PRAYER**

*One of the following prayers is said.*

**M:** Gracious Father, you have adopted *these brothers and sisters* in Baptism and anointed *them* with your Holy Spirit. Renew and strengthen *them* by that same Spirit so that *they* may continue to grow in faith and boldly confess you before others. Lord, in your mercy,

**C: Hear our prayer.**

**M:** Move *them* to faithfully hear your Holy Word and joyfully receive your Sacrament that *they* may again and again be assured of your gracious love and forgiveness. Lord, in your mercy,

**C: Hear our prayer.**

**M:** Give *them* the sincere desire to die each day to sin and put on the new self, created to be like God in true righteousness and holiness. Lord, in your mercy,

**C: Hear our prayer.**

**M:** Clothe *them* with the kindness, humility, and patience of Christ and so that *they* may live at peace with all the members of Christ's body. Lord, in your mercy,

**C: Hear our prayer.**

**M:** Protect *them* from the powers of evil, and give *them* the weapons to fight against the devil. Lord, in your mercy,

**C: Hear our prayer.**

**M:** Keep *them* faithful and holy so that *they* may inherit eternal life, through Jesus Christ our Lord.

**C: Amen.**

*OR*

**M:** Lord God, heavenly Father, we thank and praise you for your great goodness in bringing *these sons and daughters* of yours to the knowledge of your Son, Jesus Christ, and in giving *them* both hearts to believe and mouths to confess his saving name. Enable *them* to bring forth the fruits of faith and to continue steadfast and victorious until the day comes when all who have fought the good fight of faith shall receive the crown of righteousness, through Jesus Christ, your Son, our Lord, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever.

**C: Amen.**

*OR*

**M:** Almighty God, in Baptism you made *these brothers and sisters* members of the body of your dear Son, Jesus Christ. You washed *them* by his blood, buried *them* with him in his death, and gave *them* a new life in his resurrection. Renew *them* by the Holy Spirit, which you have poured out on *them* generously through Jesus Christ our Savior. Let *them* live out *their* lives as heirs of eternal life. Lead *them* to serve your Church in holiness and righteousness all *their* days. Keep *them* in fellowship with all who wait for the return of our

Savior Jesus Christ, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever.

**C: Amen.**

*OR*

**M:** Lord Jesus, author and perfecter of our faith, in mercy you joined *these brothers and sisters* to your Church when *they* were born again of water and the Spirit. In mercy you taught *them* your saving truth. Grant that *they* may offer themselves as living sacrifices to you as *their* spiritual act of worship. Transform *them* by the renewing of *their* minds so that they will not conform to the pattern of this world. Help all of us live in love and harmony with one another and to work together in serving you. Keep us united in your Spirit, and bring us at last to your eternal kingdom, where you live and reign with the Father and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever.

**C: Amen.**

### LORD'S PRAYER

**Our Father in heaven,  
hallowed be your name,  
your kingdom come,  
your will be done  
on earth as in heaven.  
Give us today our daily bread.  
Forgive us our sins,  
as we forgive those  
who sin against us.  
Lead us not into temptation,  
but deliver us from evil.  
For the kingdom, the power,  
and the glory are yours  
now and forever. Amen.**

*OR*

**Our Father, who art in heaven,  
hallowed by thy name,  
thy kingdom come,  
thy will be done  
on earth as it is in heaven.  
Give us this day our daily bread;  
and forgive us our trespasses,  
as we forgive those  
who trespass against us;  
and lead us not into temptation,  
but deliver us from evil.  
For thine is the kingdom  
and the power and the glory  
forever and ever. Amen.**

**M:** *Brothers and sisters in Christ*, what we as a Christian congregation have here asked our heavenly Father to confer on all of you, we now ask him to give each of you individually.

*The confirmands, in turn, come forward and may kneel. The minister may lay his hand on the head of each one.*

*He may speak one of the following blessings. A confirmation text may also be read for each.*

**M:** \_\_\_\_\_, may God, the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, give you his Holy Spirit, the Spirit of wisdom and knowledge, of grace and prayer, of power and strength, of sanctification and the fear of God.

*OR*

**M:** \_\_\_\_\_, may the Father in heaven, for Jesus' sake, renew and increase in you the gift of the Holy Spirit, to the strengthening of your faith, to your growth in grace, to your patience in suffering, and to the blessed hope of eternal life.

*OR*

**M:** \_\_\_\_\_, may God, who began a good work in you, bring it to completion at the coming of our Lord Christ Jesus.

*OR*

**M:** \_\_\_\_\_, may God the Father who created you, may God the Son who redeemed you, may God the Holy Spirit who sanctified you keep you faithful unto life everlasting.

*After all the confirmands have received the blessing, the minister dismisses them, saying:*

**M:** Your church now invites you to receive the Sacrament of the Lord's body and blood. Accept this invitation with deep reverence and holy joy. Regard your communing at the Lord's Table as a precious privilege given you by God through his Church; receive this Sacrament thankfully and often. The almighty and most merciful God—Father, Son, + and Holy Spirit—bless and keep you.

*The service continues with the Sacrament in The Common Service or Service of Word and Sacrament.*

## APPENDIX C: 2021 CONFIRMATION RITE<sup>102</sup>

### **Confirmation**

*The rite is used when children who have been instructed desire to confess their faith publicly and affirm that they are prepared to receive the Sacrament of the Altar.*

*If used in The Service, the rite follows the sermon and the creed. A hymn may be sung to begin the rite.*

*The pastor speaks to those being confirmed:*

My dear young friends, when you were baptized, your gracious Lord forgave all your sins and covered you with the robe of Christ's righteousness. Through water and Word he created faith in your hearts and adopted you into the family of believers. As you matured and heard and studied the Scriptures, the Holy Spirit enlightened your minds and preserved you as children of God.

You have expressed the desire to confess the truths you believe before your Savior, your family and friends, and this congregation. You are ready to say with St. Paul, "I believed; therefore I have spoken." You have learned to examine your thoughts, words, and actions in the light of God's law, and you have experienced the comfort of forgiveness in the Savior's gospel. With this preparation you are eager to receive the Savior's body and blood in the sacrament.

As we worship with you on this day, we are filled with joy as we see how the Lord has grown your faith and love. We are bringing our prayers to the Savior's throne of grace and imploring him to keep you faithful to him and his Word until you join us and all believers in the glories of heaven.

I now ask each of you:

Are you ready and willing to confess your faith before the triune God and those who are worshiping with you today?

**I am.**

Do you believe in God the Father?

**Yes, I believe in God, the Father Almighty  
maker of heaven and earth.**

Do you believe in Jesus Christ, the Son of God?

**Yes, I believe in Jesus Christ, his only Son, our Lord,  
who was conceived by the Holy Spirit,**

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102. *Christian Worship: Agenda* (Milwaukee: Northwestern, 2021), 21–25.

**born of the virgin Mary,  
 suffered under Pontius Pilate,  
 was crucified, died, and was buried.  
 He descended into hell.  
 The third day he rose again from the dead.  
 He ascended into heaven  
 and is seated at the right hand of God the Father almighty.  
 From there he will come to judge the living and the dead.**

Do you believe in God the Holy Spirit?

**Yes, I believe in the Holy Spirit,  
 the holy Christian Church,  
 the communion of saints,  
 the forgiveness of sins,  
 the resurrection of the body,  
 and the life everlasting. Amen.**

Do you reject the devil along with all his lies and empty promises?

**I do reject him.**

Do you believe that all the books of the Bible are the inspired and inerrant Word of God?

**I do.**

Do you believe that the teachings of the Evangelical Lutheran Church, as you have learned to know them from Luther's Small Catechism, are faithful and true to the Word of God?

**I do.**

Is it your sincere prayer and desire to remain faithful to your Lord Jesus and his Word all the days of your life?

**Yes, and I ask God to help me.**

Is it your sincere prayer and desire to live a life that pleases God, to value his Word and sacraments, and to witness to your Savior wherever you go?

**Yes, and I ask God to help me.**

*The pastor speaks to the congregation:*

Friends in Christ, the Word of God urges us to pray for one another and especially for the youth of the church. On this special day, it is fitting that we bring our prayers before God, firmly believing that he alone is able to strengthen us by the power of the Holy Spirit and keep us faithful to the Savior until we die. Let us pray.

Gracious Father, in Holy Baptism you created faith in the hearts of these young people and gave them a new birth as members of your family. Help them remember their baptisms every day and find comfort in your promise that you will never leave them or forsake them. Lord, in your mercy,

**hear our prayer.**

Give them strength to put down and drown the sinful nature that lives within them so that each day their faith may triumph in their living and loving and in their words and actions. Lord, in your mercy,

**hear our prayer.**

Lead them to see and believe that in the word of the gospel they find forgiveness for their sins and relief for their guilt. Use the remembrance of your commandments to drive them to the comfort of the gospel and then to guide them as they live for you and others. Lord, in your mercy,

**hear our prayer.**

Protect them from Satan when he tempts them to be careless with your Word and sacrament, to make plans for this life and not for the life to come, or to find popular theories more appealing than your truth. Lord, in your mercy,

**hear our prayer.**

Empower them by the gospel of your Son to live in their world with kindness, humility, and patience that others may see their good works and glorify their Father in heaven. Lord, in your mercy,

**hear our prayer.**

Help us provide fitting examples of faithfulness to your Word and sacraments. Lead us to encourage and admonish them in wisdom and love even after they have left our homes and made new homes for themselves. Lord, in your mercy,

**hear our prayer.**

When the end comes and we all stand before the judgment seat of Christ, have compassion on us despite our sins and accept us as eternal dwellers in your royal rooms, through the merits of Jesus our Savior, who became sin for us so that in him we might become the righteousness of God. Lord, in your mercy,

**hear our prayer.**

*If the service does not include the Sacrament, worshippers may join to pray the Lord's Prayer.*

**Lord's Prayer**

**Our Father in heaven,  
hallowed be your name,  
your kingdom come,  
your will be done**

**on earth as in heaven.**

**Give us today our daily bread.**

**Forgive us our sins,  
as we forgive those  
who sin against us.**

**Lead us not into temptation,  
but deliver us from evil.**

**For the kingdom, the power,**

*or*

**Our Father, who art in heaven,  
hallowed by thy name,  
thy kingdom come,  
thy will be done**

**on earth as it is in heaven.**

**Give us this day our daily bread;**

**and forgive us our trespasses,  
as we forgive those  
who trespass against us;**

**and lead us not into temptation,  
but deliver us from evil.**

**For thine is the kingdom**



**and the glory are yours  
now and forever. Amen.**

**and the power and the glory  
forever and ever. Amen.**

*The pastor speaks to those being confirmed:*

I now invite each of you to come forward to receive a blessing from the Lord and a word of encouragement from the Scriptures.

*Those being confirmed may approach the altar in turn and may kneel. The minister may lay his hand on the head of each and speak one of the following blessings. A passage from the Scriptures may also be read.*

God, the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, give you his Holy Spirit, the Spirit of wisdom and knowledge, of grace and prayer, of power and strength, of sanctification and the fear of God.

Our Lord Jesus Christ himself and God our Father, who loved us and by his grace gave us eternal encouragement and good hope, encourage your heart and strengthen you in every good deed and word.

The Father in heaven, for Jesus' sake, renew and increase in you the gift of the Holy Spirit for your strengthening in faith, your growth in grace, your patience in suffering, and for the blessed hope of eternal life.

The God of peace sanctify you through and through and keep you blameless at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ.

*The minister says:*

The grace of our Lord + Jesus Christ and the love of God and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with you all. Amen.

*Those who have been confirmed may be seated.*

*The offering follows. If the Sacrament is offered, it follows the offering.*

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