



Confirmation Orientation 2019-2020

Welcome to another great year of Confirmation at St. John's. I am looking forward to working with the students once again, and I pray that our time together will be a blessing to them. I invite you to speak with me at any time with questions or concerns you may have about the program, or any other spiritual matter that may arise over the course of the year. I will do my best to keep you informed and updated on everything as we go through the time of instruction.

Confirmation is a blessing and a gift, given by God to his church for the purposes of educating his people in the primary and foundational doctrines. It is a blessing in the sense that it is something that is received, which is to say, it is an opportunity to confess one's faith in the one true God, his only Son and our Savior Jesus Christ, and the Holy Spirit. It is a gift in the sense that it is not earned by work or merit, but is purely grace on God's part. In the Lutheran church, Confirmation is not a sacrament, but a reminder of one's baptism into Christ and a public profession of one's faith, that the student "intends to continue steadfast in this confession and Church and suffer all, even death, rather than fall away from it (*from the Rite of Confirmation, LSB Agenda pg. 30*)." As such, Confirmation is not a right that one has to lay claim to the church, it is not a requirement, and it is not a work that one does to be accepted by God or others. It is one of the opportunities that we have been given to grow in our faith, to grow in the relationship that we have with the church, and to grow in the fellowship of the believers.

With this in mind, there are certain expectations of the Confirmation program. The expectations for confirmands are the same as the expectations of those already confirmed, and of all Christians. When we are called to faith, and as we live in that faith, it is important to feed that faith first by being in the gifts of God (*see Acts 2:42*), then by seeking ways in which we might serve our Lord through the church and in the community with the special gifts and blessings he has given to us (*see James 2:14-19*). Simply put, the expectations of this class are:

Regular attendance at Divine Services: This is really what this class is about, finding the joy that comes in being in God's presence, receiving his forgiveness, and departing in his peace. It is expected that students and their families will be in church on a regular basis, not because it is a requirement, but because they desire to be there. If you are away and cannot attend St. John's, you may attend another church and receive "credit" for going. Simply bring in a copy of the bulletin from that church as a sign of your presence there. ***Please keep attendance at other churches to no more than 2 as it pertains to the requirements for the class.*** It is hoped that students and families would make an effort to be at church every weekend, and requiring a certain number of services would be to make a law of that which is intended to be pure Gospel. However, if the student is not engaged in Divine Service attendance at least 50% of the time, it will be seen as an indication that the student is not ready to be confirmed at this time. Attendance will be tracked as they sign in on the clipboard at the services they attend. In addition to merely attending, a discussion of the service with the family is a helpful thing to reinforce the Word and teach how to listen and receive in the church. A monthly tracking of attendance will be made available to the students at the end of each month. Please remind them to check the list and keep you informed about their progress. If by Christmas it appears that the student is falling behind in this area, contact will be made with the family to discuss the future of the student in the program. By the middle of April, the student should have attended at least 16 Divine Services.

Serving the church: Students are expected to serve in one of the roles offered on the registration form. An online signup has been set up for the scheduling of acolytes. Please sign up for at least one service per month. If you choose another area to serve, it is expected that you will fulfill the requirements for participation in that area (i.e., if you are in one of the choirs, you must attend rehearsals and

performances, Sunday School assistants must help at least once per month, etc.) A list of students and their phone numbers will be given to you, so if you need to switch, you may do so with other students on the list. Please do not call the church office to tell us you can't do it until you have tried to call and find a replacement. If an emergency arises at the last minute, that is understandable, and if possible, please call the office, or the person responsible for your service area, and let us know so that we can be prepared to try and find someone.

Attendance in Class: It is expected that the student will be in class each week, and may not miss more than 5 classes (this requires attendance at 75% of the classes) otherwise it will be assumed the student is not ready to be confirmed at this time. Attendance is taken each week. Due to the short time period for the class, if the student is late by more than 15 minutes or must leave more than 15 minutes before class is completed, they will be considered absent that day. If you know you are going to be absent, please let the office know so that materials may be set aside for you. If no one answers, please leave a message for Pastor Noack at extension 104, or you may email or text me.

Be on time, and prepared: *Both classes meet together on Wednesdays, downstairs by the kitchen from 6-7pm.* Please make every effort to be on time for the classes, and to make arrangements to stay for the whole time in which the class meets. All students should bring a writing instrument, a Bible, a copy of Luther's Small Catechism, and a folder to hold the handouts and use as a writing surface. If you need either a Bible or a Catechism, please visit www.cph.org or call 1-800-325-3040 for Concordia Publishing House and you may purchase them there. We will be using the English Standard Version of the Bible for class, but a New International Version is also acceptable.

Homework: This year, there is really only one thing required outside of class time. This will be introduced in the first class, but each student will be asked to open our class with prayer. A sign up sheet for this will be available at the first class, and the student will lead the prayer on the day they sign up for. They should come prepared that day to pray aloud to open our class.

Advent & Lenten Services: Midweek Advent and Lenten services will be held on Wednesday evenings at 7:30pm. You are encouraged to make every attempt possible to be in attendance for the services. These are separate services from our weekend services, and can be used as part of your service attendance requirement.

Class List: A complete list of students with phone numbers will be distributed to you which will also indicate what area of service the student has chosen. Please use this list to switch with other students when conflicts arise for you. Please make an effort on your end to make the changes, and let the church office know if you think of it (631-589-3202; stjohs11782@aol.com).

Work together: There is only so much that can be taught in the hour we are together each week over the year. This is why being in church is so vital...it reinforces what is taught in class. In addition, at the beginning of each subject in the Small Catechism, Martin Luther reminds the reader that these subjects are for instruction in the home, "as the head of the family should teach it in a simple way to his family." It has always been the intention, then, that the pastor of the church support and reinforce what is already being taught within the family unit. I can only do so much. It will be helpful if you, as a family, help to teach these things and encourage one another in growing in the faith. If you need help in how to go about this, please ask – I would be happy to offer suggestions. In the very least, discuss things that are discussed in class, and offer your own insights. If, as a family, you have questions, I would be happy to entertain them along the way.

Youth Group: Twice a month, or so, the students are invited to stay after class for an hour and unwind in the gym and youth room. It is really just a chance to get to know one another in a relaxed atmosphere through friendly competition, or just hanging out with one another in the youth room. Date will be announced each month, and an attempt will be made to hold it every other week.

Some final thoughts: We will follow the Sayville Schools' calendar in regard to breaks and scheduled times to meet. There are students from many districts so we had to pick one to base things upon. If Sayville schools are closed for weather on a Wednesday, or have early dismissal or cancellation of after-school programs, then class is cancelled for the day. If it is known in advance of the weekend that class will be cancelled, it will be announced at all services. However, please give us an email address that you check regularly so that if a last minute emergency arises we can let you know more quickly that class has been cancelled. I will not inundate you with emails, but will remind or announce important things from time to time.

It is expected that students will behave in a manner that is appropriate and respectful to both the Pastor and fellow students, and as is befitting Christians. If this becomes an issue at any point, a parent may be asked to accompany their child to class to help them with this. I will, of course, treat all students with courtesy and respect. I value their insights and opinions and views of the world and desire to hear their input. Over the course of the year, I often find that I learn as much as they do.

Finally, please keep the lines of communication open between us. If there is something going on in your family or home life that is affecting things at school or church, please speak to me. If your child has any special needs or issues I need to be aware of, please speak to me as soon as possible. If I don't know about it, I can't help to find a solution to it and I will assume that everything is fine. If I know, I can try to help as I am able and time permits.

Thank you for participating in the Confirmation Program here at St. John's. Once again, I look forward to growing with you and your families, and I pray that the students will grow together in Christian friendship and in a lively and active faith.

Lord God, heavenly Father, in Holy Baptism You began Your good work in our catechumens, and You have blessed their instruction and training in Your Word. We implore You to pour out Your Holy Spirit on their hearts and minds so that they will truly love and revere You, confess the faith with joy and boldness, endeavor to live according to Your commandments, and praise and glorify You as their faithful God and Lord, for the sake of Your Son, Jesus Christ, our Lord. Amen. (from Lutheran Service Book, pg. 310)

Contact Information

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Service Times

Saturday – 6:30pm
Sunday – 7:45am, 9:30am
Wednesdays – noon, 7:30pm (Advent & Lent seasons only)

Inevitable Catechesis

By [Joel A Hess](#) –

Dear parents, your kids will be catechized whether you like it or not.

For many churches, autumn marks the beginning of confirmation classes for young people. The season also witnesses many a pastor's struggles to convince families to make instructing their children in the faith a top priority. Understandably, after spending long hours in school and extracurricular activities, even families that make Christian education a priority find little time to do it seriously.

Recently, the *Pew Research Center* released yet another study highlighting the increasing number of twenty-somethings who do not declare any religious affiliation. What's more shocking is that whether a person went to the church or not doesn't seem to matter. The number one reason this growing demographic leaves Christianity is because they don't believe in it; they believe in something else! According to researchers, the most common culprits for rejecting the Faith are science and common sense.

Why do they leave the Church? That's what they were instructed to do! Whether intentionally or not, most students are being catechized by social media and their schools not to believe in the teachings of Holy Scripture, even those catechized thoroughly!

Parents, you really have no choice as to whether or not to have your children instructed in the Lord. Your children will be catechized whether you like it or not. If not by you and the Church, then by the world. Someone will teach them right and wrong. Someone will teach them whom or what they should worship. Someone will tell them what to believe, what to trust, and what to avoid. Your kid will be instructed one way or another! And when a parent allows Christian instruction to take a back seat to everything else in life, she is effectively teaching her children to believe exactly that. Your child is being actively catechized about Jesus whether you want it or not!

Increasingly, Christians seem to downplay the importance of kids learning the details of the faith, memorizing scripture, and getting to know why they believe what they believe. Time and time again, simpletons have thrown out shallow sayings like "It's not a religion; it's a relationship," "Being in church doesn't make you a Christian any more than being in a garage makes you a car," and "I'm spiritual not religious." Many a church and pastor have promoted these very ideas because they either believe it or have given up on teaching the faith and are just happy to have people sitting in the pew. Yet, kids brought up on this hogwash are guaranteed to leave the church when they are confronted by anything that challenges their undeveloped understanding of God.

Parents and pastors are afraid to bore students even for a moment. Yet, how quickly do we force our kid to spend hours studying Chemistry whether he likes it or not because we want him to be an engineer, own a home in the suburbs, and give us grandkids to watch on the soccer field? All the while, God's Word is the only thing that gives life abundantly in Jesus Christ!

Meanwhile, schools have dramatically increased their demands of kids in everything from science projects to third grade soccer tournaments. Catechism gets the leftovers of a student's attention. That would be fine if parents were teaching their kids at home. Unfortunately, that does not happen. Therefore, young people learn from their parents that Christianity and learning about God takes second place to

learning about amoebas. They have divorced learning from faith and are just happy that Johnny comes to church with them, doesn't do drugs and hasn't gotten his girlfriend pregnant yet.

Then they are surprised when Johnny marks "none" on the census form when asked what religion he belongs to. Yet, there is no such thing as "none!" We all have been catechized in one religion or another.

People dance all around the issues of why Johnny doesn't go to church anymore. It's not because of society, a new philosophy, or a new discovery in science; it's because his church and parents were afraid to catechized him, so someone else did!

Learning to Hate Confirmation

By [Paul Koch](#) –

I have learned to hate Confirmation.

For those outside of the Lutheran tradition, Confirmation is a day when the youth, being instructed in the teachings of the church, are called upon to give a public confession of the faith. They often dress up in white robes and stand before the congregation, where they are asked to answer questions such as:

"Do you confess the doctrine of the Evangelical Lutheran Church, drawn from the Scriptures, as you have learned to know it from the Small Catechism, to be faithful and true?"

And,

"Do you intend to continue steadfast in this confession and Church and to suffer all, even death, rather than fall away from it?"

Now, the preparation for this moment varies widely from congregation to congregation. The vast majority still use Luther's Small Catechism as the basis from which to organize their instruction, but in practice, it can look like anything from a weekend retreat to several years of formal instruction. It can be as simple as discussion about the Ten Commandments, the Creed, and Lord's Prayer or as in depth as understanding the rhythm of the church lectionary and the basis of good hymnody.

Yet, these discrepancies are not the source of my disgust with Confirmation. As a pastor, I have developed and reworked what I think is a useful way to instruct the youth of my congregation in the confession of the church. I assume other pastors have done the same in their context. And I don't hate the actual instruction—the Confirmation classes. I love the opportunity to hand over the faith that I have received to children of the congregation. Sure, it can be frustrating at times, especially when memory work is obviously being done on the car ride over and no real time is being dedicated to learning what it all means in the home or elsewhere. But I am not angry or upset about the chance to spend some quality time with these young children of our Lord.

What I've learned to hate is the day set aside for the rite of Confirmation, whether that day is Palm Sunday (as it was when I went through Confirmation), Pentecost (which is when we'll be celebrating it at my church), or some other day. My hatred has nothing to do with the kids dressed up in their robes or the

questions I'll ask them in front of the congregation. It has nothing to do with the parents taking pictures afterward or the slicing of cake. Rather, my hatred comes from a lie that overshadows the whole day—a lie that I willingly receive because it masks my own fear.

My fear is what runs through my head every time I go through the motions of a Confirmation day. As I look into the eyes of these young faces, I fear that this moment will not be the beginning of a long and rich life of receiving the gifts of Christ in His church but the beginning of a steep and drastic move away from the gifts. I know, for some strange reason, that Confirmation is still valued in many homes. Families who rarely make it to church on a regular basis will actually try a little harder to make it to Confirmation classes. And so I know that for some families that day of Confirmation is the pinnacle of all the hard work and the highpoint of their participation in the life of the church. After that day, after the confession is made and the rite is completed, some will slowly and surely begin to fade from the regular reception of our Lord's gifts. And this is what I hate.

The lie is to believe that this rite, however we dress it up at our given church, is somehow going to overcome the apathy thriving in the homes of God's people. The lie is to think that a pastor's work with children for one hour a day on one day out of the week can overcome parenting that places little value on Word and Sacrament. The lie is when we place anything, even the white robes of Confirmation day, above the living voice of the Gospel as if the works of our hands can overcome.

But I am afraid, and so I buy into the lie.

Yet, the comfort for my fear is no stranger to me, for the light that reveals this lie is Christ himself. Our rites and ceremonies will never fill a void where the Gospel has been silent. The proclamation of our Lord from the pulpit to the people and from the parents to their children turns fear into confidence and hate into joy.

So let us pray, teach, and preach Christ crucified in our homes and in our churches. Let us find cause again to love Confirmation day because it produces nothing at all but rather demonstrates the fruit of the living Word.

[The uncertain future of our children. . .](#)

By Larry Peters –

Glen Stanton at Gospel Coalition has done us all a favor with some fact checking of oft repeated truths that end up being taken as Gospel when, in truth, they are distortions of the truth at best and downright lies at worst.

Here he tackles those who put the fear of God in parents, suggesting that their children will face an uncertain future as to their faith -- no matter what the parents do. It has sold a lot of book and been the chatter at many conferences on the future shape of Christianity.

[Stanton:](#)

A handful of Christian authors have created a bit of a cottage industry peddling the scary news that the odds are not good that our young people stay strong in their faith into adulthood. Untrue.

There are important, effective, and relatively simple things parents and Christian workers can do to substantially increase the likelihood our young people will retain a thriving faith into and through their adult years. This is revealed in very strong, sophisticated research from some of the leading sociologists of youth and religion in the world.

Influencers of Faith

In the National Study of Youth and Religion (NSYR), noted Notre Dame professor Christian Smith and his team found:

- There are relatively simple factors that "powerfully shape" faith that remains strong through life.
- The biggest influencing factor is the faith of parents themselves and the practices they employ with their teenagers.
- These practices are simpler than many parents might imagine.

Increasing the likelihood of enduring faith in our young people is not limited to super-spiritual parents. In fact, the more "regular" and human you are the better. The factors, listed by the power of their influence, are:

Parents: Parents with a vibrant and lived-out faith tend to have children who have and keep a vibrant, lived-out faith. Smith doesn't mince words: "Parents are huge, *absolutely huge*, nearly a necessary condition" for a child to remain strong in his or her faith into young adulthood. He concludes "without question, the most important pastor a child will ever have in their life is a parent."

Personal Devotion: Along with at least one believing parent, it is important for the child to develop some practice and habit of regular prayer, church attendance, and reading of Scripture, growing in the conviction and experience that these practices are important for a happy life with God and others. And this practice doesn't have to be perfect, only relatively consistent. If teens and pre-teens have this in their younger years, they are remarkably more likely to maintain these faith practices into adulthood. It is important that this practice be learned and developed as an organic, natural part of their lives, rather than something they are expected to do solely out of duty or parental expectation. A faith developed as one's own tends to remain one's own.

Support/Encouragement from "Satellite Adults": Young people with lasting faith have the support of other adults around them who have a strong and inviting faith practice. These "satellite adults" who hover around our children in close relationship serve in supporting, affirming, and often times adding to the faith our children experience at home. They are powerful because our children observe, "If Coach Johnson/Principal Simpson/Youth Pastor Nigel/Deacon Stevenson/Aunt Wilma are such great people and so passionate and honest in their faith, maybe there's really something to it beyond what my parents think."

Our kids need to have the faith they learn at home supported and encouraged by the larger ring of admired adults around them.

Beliefs: Not as vital as the first three, but it helps if your child has some specific strongly held beliefs and practices.

First, a commitment to sexual chastity is critical for interesting reasons. Sexuality being such a powerful part of developing in one's teen and young adult years, having strong convictions and practices here

indicate the presence of other deeply held and mature convictions regarding behavior. These usually cluster with faith convictions. It strengthens what these researchers call "cognitive resistance to modern secular culture."

Second, youth with lasting faith have the ability and support in honestly wrestling with and resolving their faith doubts. This teaches them to own their faith for themselves. And one is not likely to throw away what took hard work to develop.

Third, they should also experience and recognize God's hand in their lives through his faithfulness, answered prayer, and meaningful spiritual experiences.

Curiously, also having been teased for their faith is shown to be a faith strengthener, for this actually increases resolve and conviction. It requires they wrestle with the question of whether faith is really worth it.

Strong Faith Begets Strong Faith

Smith summarizes his team's findings in plain and direct language: "religious outcomes in emerging adulthood are not random happenstance about which all bets are off after age 18. Instead, they often flow *quite predictably* from formative religious influences that shape a person's life in earlier years. . . [The] religious commitments, practices, and investments made during childhood and the teenage years by parents and others in families and religious communities, matter---they make a difference." (emphasis added)

And these NSYR conclusions are corroborated by findings from a Pew Forum on Religion and Public Life analysis of religious convictions and practices of America's youth. Don't listen to the naysayers and pessimists. Their claims are as baseless as they say your child's faith-sustaining prospects are.

My Comments

Our problem is NOT the children raised by pious parents who practice their faith in worship will jettison their faith as quickly as they leave the house. Our problem in the Church is that there are fewer pious parents who practice their faith. By practice the faith I mean attend worship 3 out of 4 Sundays, go to Sunday school as adults and take their children to Sunday school, see that their children participate in worship instead of regularly ditching them in the Nursery for babysitting, pray with them each night before bed and each day at meals (minimum), read the Bible to them, regularly include faith in their discussions with their children, and bring their children to catechism class... among other things.

I am NOT trying to paint parents in a bad light and heap scorn and shame on them. I am only suggesting that a pious and active faith regularly practiced at church, home, etc... is the key. A once a month or less appearance at church and Sunday school and occasional prayers, etc... do NOT provide the solid foundation on which a child's faith grows and flourishes. I do understand the stresses placed upon the American family today but I also recognize that many of these are self-inflicted. Our children learn that faith is not important when sports and leisure activities are acceptable alternatives to the practice of the faith in church and Sunday school. The noble intentions of parents count little in the way of raising up children in the way of the Lord and passing on a living faith to our children.