



Confirmation

What is Confirmation?

The word *confirm*, from the Latin *confirmare*, means “to strengthen.” At Confirmation, the Holy Spirit and the church’s prayers strengthen those who are being confirmed. This strengthening includes preparing individuals who were baptized in infancy to 1) profess their personal faith and the faith of the church and 2) declare their intent to take part actively and responsibly in the church’s worship and mission. For those not baptized as children, Confirmation includes both Baptism and a profession of faith.

What is a profession of faith?

A profession of faith is a vow that young people make as a renewal of the baptismal covenant. A profession of faith affirms what the church believes and answers questions of intentions. The word *creed*, translated “I believe,” has the connotation “to set one’s heart,” “to give one’s heart,” and “to love.” *Big God Big Questions* helps young people answer the heart questions of Confirmation. Loving God and loving your neighbor as yourself is central to the learnings of the curriculum. Thus, the confirmands are asked to commit themselves to love in the way of Jesus Christ.

What does a profession of faith consist of?

A profession of faith is made by saying the Apostles’ Creed, the baptismal affirmation of the early church, and making vows by answering the four BIG Questions from the *Book of Common Worship*:

- Trusting in the gracious mercy of God, do you turn from the ways of sin and renounce evil and its power in the world?
- Who is your Lord and Savior?
- Will you be Christ’s faithful disciple, obeying his Word and showing his love?
- Will you devote yourself to the church’s teaching and fellowship, to the breaking of bread and the prayers?

These vows serve as a first formal, public profession of faith. Confirmation is not meant to be a Christian’s only profession of faith. Confirmation is a transition—a commencement, not a graduation.

How does *Big God Big Questions* help prepare the confirmands to make a profession of faith?

Big God Big Questions’ scope and sequence (see pp. x–xi) is based on the four BIG Questions. The curriculum includes 1) scriptural and traditional content learned within your local church context, 2) the role of the heart in making vows of commitment, and 3) practices of faith, including prayer, fellowship, service, and ritual.

Confirmation is not meant to be a crash course in Christianity, but an opportunity to welcome youth into an intentional time of discernment and conversations about faith, exploring the BIG Questions so that the confirmands can make a faithful response.



Why should my church use *Big God Big Questions*?

Big God Big Questions addresses the concerns of youth and faith today. Researchers have found that most Christian youth espouse a faint version of the faith—Moralistic Therapeutic Deism—which stresses “the importance of being nice, feeling good about yourself, and saving God for emergencies” (Kenda Creasy Dean, *Almost Christian* [New York: Oxford University Press, 2010], 10). Youth need faith formation in which they model themselves after devoted parents, mentors, and the congregation; learn and practice using the language of the faith; and see that Jesus calls them to a mission to others that is bigger than their own personal desires.

The Confirmand

At what age should a young person be confirmed?

Congregations are free to choose what they consider to be the best moment for a young person to be confirmed. We change and grow in relation to faith throughout our lives. What a young person thinks or believes at age thirteen or age fourteen will certainly be different than at ages seventeen, twenty-five, or seventy-five. *Big God Big Questions* is geared for confirmands who are thirteen, fourteen, or fifteen.

What is required of the confirmand?

A confirmand will be able to say the Apostles’ Creed and answer the four BIG Questions. Beyond that, the curriculum does not give a series of boxes to be checked for a young person to be deemed worthy to become an active member of your congregation. Homework assignments, attendance habits, and class engagement certainly reflect a young person’s engagement with the church and with the material.

Congregations are free to set up requirements for the young people who want to be confirmed. Among these may be:

- Attendance at Confirmation classes
- Completed BIG Journal assignments
- Weekly meetings with mentors and parents/caregivers
- Active participation in the congregation’s worship and ministry/mission life
- A prepared faith statement

Worship

Participation in worship is an important part of Confirmation. Session 11 explores prayer and worship. In several other sessions, confirmands review parts of the worship service to connect what they are learning in the Confirmation class with the congregation’s expressions of faith.

Service Project

Sessions 3 and 7 suggest activities to help confirmands know and be involved with local and international mission partners. A service project would connect confirmands, especially those who may be reentering the life of the church. A mission project could be a culminating activity for the group, to help them think about how they will choose to show Christ’s love as active members of the congregation.



What about the young person who decides not to be confirmed?

Faith Statement

Session 12 leads confirmands through the writing of a statement of faith. Keep in mind that writing a statement of faith may not be the most helpful way for all confirmands to consider their readiness to confirm their faith. Session 12 has options for this activity.

Practice grace with confirmands who decide not to profess their faith or become an active member of the church. Find ways to keep them engaged with the community. *Big God Big Questions* provides a variety of moments through the BIG Journal, Home/Mentor Guide, and even some classroom conversations to check in with confirmands about questions or concerns they have about being confirmed.

Resources

What resource does the curriculum offer to the young person? How does the curriculum support the teacher?

The BIG Journal

... gives confirmands ways to engage with the content from the sessions, a secure space to keep track of work done in class, a private space for self-reflection, and opportunities to prepare what they are to bring to the next session.

The Teacher's Guide

... has twelve sessions that are ninety minutes, which can be split into twenty-four sessions that are forty-five minutes.

... includes lesson plans that guide the confirmands through the study of Scripture, the church, the Reformed tradition, and personal reflection.

... provides key words to help understand “church vocabulary.”

... offers brief explanations of biblical and theological context, as well as connections with contemporary youth issues.

... is written for small groups of five confirmands with suggestions for larger groups.

... makes essential connections to the BIG Journal.

... includes “101” Activities to be used at the teacher’s discretion to support confirmands who may need to review foundational information on the Bible, the sacraments, worship, and more. In college, introductory courses are often numbered 101 to signify that they are entry level. The “101” activities can be used as a pre-Confirmation review over several weeks, in a retreat setting, or as additional help included in a session. Since every group of confirmands differs from year to year, you may find yourself using different “101” activities each time you lead Confirmation.

The Infographics

... come in a set of sixteen 11" x 17" posters (or downloadable to size as you prefer) to provide visual connections with the content of the curriculum. Suggestions for using the infographics are offered in the Teacher’s Guide. Look for other ways to include the infographics.



What does the curriculum offer to the mentors and parents/caregivers?

The DVD/Videos

... includes twelve videos that introduce confirmands to a variety of real Presbyterians and communities around the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.), illustrating the breadth of experiences within the church.

The Home/Mentor Guide

... is a simple resource that serves a dual purpose for the mentor and the home.
 ... provides simple background information from each lesson and offers relevant prompts to work with confirmands on reinforcing the lesson, check-ins as they progress through the class, and opportunities to practice putting their faith in action.
 ... provides conversations or activities for each session for confirmands to share with their mentors and parents/caregivers.

Expectations

What should be considered in selecting mentors for the confirmands?

Mentors are expected to be engaged with confirmands throughout the Confirmation process. *Big God Big Questions* provides a simple resource that serves a dual purpose for the mentor and the home. The resource includes background information from each lesson, prompts for discussion, and opportunities to practice putting faith in action.

When pairing youth with mentors, keep in mind certain things:

- A mentor will need to be accessible to their young person on a regular basis.
- Except for unique circumstances, connect confirmands to mentors who are not members of their own family.
- Be sure to take a young person's pastoral needs into account when pairing them with a mentor.
- The most important qualifications for a mentor are not piety or orthodoxy, but love and grace.
- All adults who work with the children and youth in the church must be screened through a criminal background check. Contact your congregation's insurance representative.
- Check with your pastor or Christian educator about your church's policy for safe practices with youth. You may need to meet in a public place, such as a coffee shop, or at church when others are present. Plan with a parent/caregiver to provide transportation to and from meetings.

What is required of the Confirmation teachers?

To lead young people through Confirmation requires diverse leadership. Leaders should be emotionally perceptive, disciplined and informed enough to engage young minds and hearts, and able to foster a setting that embraces both trusting and questioning.



What is expected of parents/caregivers?

The home is the incubator of faith for young people, and parents are their first Christian role models. This significant role doesn't mean that parents/caregivers are experts in all things church or Christianity. But it does mean that they are present, are willing to engage in faith conversations, acknowledge where they struggle, and should be involved in the life of the congregation, such as attending worship services. Some parents may need to be nurtured in this role.

What is expected of the congregation?

The congregation assumes the responsibility of leading the confirmands to the time when they are ready and able to make a profession of faith. The curriculum includes many suggestions for how to invite the congregation into the Confirmation process. Each session gives activities and opportunities for confirmands to better understand the ministry of your congregation and the practices that shape your common life. Teachers are encouraged to invite members and leaders of your church (p. xv) to every session to get to know confirmands and to offer models of membership to confirmands. Look for other ways to involve members of your church.

More Help

Where can I learn more about Confirmation?

For an in-depth study of Confirmation, consider using the resource *Exploring Confirmation: Embraced by and Embracing the Covenant* by Ron Byars (available at pcusastore.com). This small-group study resource can be used with people in your church who want to know more about Confirmation and to support the Confirmation process in the congregation. This resource is ideal for parents, mentors, session members, Christian education teams, and others interested in understanding what Confirmation is. It makes a great six-week study in a season before a church's Confirmation class.