

Thinking Theologically with Adolescents: A Confirmation Curriculum

Background

Learners:

This curriculum is designed for eight thru tenth grade students who have not been confirmed in the Presbyterian Church (USA). It is focused particularly for a group of students who have either not been involved in the church as children, or who do not have a strong background of Bible Content, theology or the Presbyterian Church (USA). The target ages for the students using this curriculum are 13-16 years old.

Setting:

The curriculum is designed to be taught in a classroom with access to multi-media equipment, or at the least a TV and a DVD player. It can also be adapted for teaching in a home-based environment if a church classroom is not available for use.

The curriculum is intended for use weekly for an entire school year, or approximately 24 weeks total. The curriculum can be started and stopped to allow for special church calendar breaks – Christmas, Easter, etc. – as necessary.

Time Frame:

Each lesson is designed to take anywhere from 45 – 75 minutes, given the time available to the students. The lessons may be made shorter by spending less time on reflection and activities. Should time allow for a longer lesson, students may benefit from additional time spent on reflections and activities.

Each lesson outline provided is based around a 60 minute lesson.

Curriculum Focus

Subject Matter and Main Idea:

Using the Bible, children's and adolescent literature, music and film, this curriculum will delve into a study of ten tenants of the Presbyterian Church (USA)'s reformed theology, as well as Christian practices. Students will explore theological terms and concepts using scripture, books, music, art, movies and television shows in order to relate "ancient ideas" to "modern life."

The theological concepts covered will include, but are not limited to: creation, salvation, sin, humanity, church, prayer, faith, Christian life, election and predestination, etc.

Through study of terms alongside traditional creeds and confessions, practical examples and practical applications, the students will begin to both understand and live according to the Presbyterian Church (USA)'s reformed theological tradition.

Overarching Goals:

At the end of this unit, students will be able to (or create via another method of expression) a personal statement of faith that encompasses an understanding of reformed theology. Students should be able to state their beliefs using Scripture, as discovered through the use of literature, art, film and music. Students will be prepared to share their faith statements with Session as part of their examination process for becoming confirmed members of the Presbyterian Church (USA).

Given that the curriculum includes such an array of media and teaching methods, the student will be allowed to use any method of expression which is most comfortable to him or her for the purpose of sharing their statement of faith.

For example, a student may choose to:

- draw a painting
- write a comic strip
- create a photography essay

- write poetry
- compose a hymn
- create a movie or
- write a traditional creed or faith statement

Ultimately, as a result of this unit of study, the students will be able to personally articulate their faith using Scripture, and show an understanding of reformed theology.

Curriculum Explanation & Rationale

Traditional Confirmation curriculums do a wonderful job of relaying the theological understandings of a denomination, but do not do a good job of encouraging youth to come to a place of personal spiritual awareness and ownership. The purpose and goal of this curriculum is to encourage teenagers to be personally aware of their faith and take ownership of the role as beloved Children of God.

Teenagers are at a critical point in their lives where they ask questions and want to discover answers. Especially in the religious realm, they question what they are taught and challenge authority when they are expected to learn and regurgitate. Keeping this in mind, this curriculum was developed to allow the students the space to question and explore in a safe and nurturing environment. They will be taught a concept and then encouraged to ask questions and delve further into learning about the concept so that they can come to a place of awareness and ownership of their beliefs.

The curriculum incorporates the use of everyday and “secular” media in order to help the students begin to recognize theology in everyday life. By using clips from popular movies and reading children’s literature, students will be able to learn that theology takes place outside of the walls of the church and home. They will be encouraged to begin living their theology through composing art, reading poetry, doing service projects and mission work, and actively participating in worship leadership and teaching children in the congregation.

The curriculum touches on a variety of lesson styles and multiple intelligences, including but not limited to: .

- Story Experience, Direct Instruction, Group Investigation, Creative Encounter
- Interpersonal and intrapersonal, Linguistic, Musical, Kinesthetic

Due to the nature of the curriculum, the teachers must be prepared and knowledgeable about the subject areas covered and be prepared to answer questions or be able to direct students to a location for them to research answers to questions. It is preferable for the teachers to have taught teenagers before, and also to have a strong grasp on reformed theology and the Presbyterian Church (USA).

The teachers must absolutely be comfortable leading discussions, working with and through uncomfortable topics and situations, keeping confidentiality, and being timekeepers as well. The teachers must be confident in teaching and leadership abilities. Teachers should also be comfortable with sharing personal beliefs, questions, and sharing faith stories with teenagers.

Adolescent Developmental Rationale

Erikson and Keegan both agree that teenagers need time to develop identities, develop “self” and the ability to think for themselves. Adolescents are at a crossroad in their lives where everything and everyone around are changing rapidly – expectations grow exponentially, hormones develop and mature, freedoms are encouraged and experienced – all of which makes life confusing and the attempt to develop oneself seemingly impossible. Teenagers need “holding spaces” and “moratoriums” that will allow for exploration and discernment of life, and especially of faith.

In Confirmation the church is asking these same teenagers to stand up and profess their faith to the congregation, and also undergo an examination by the leadership of the congregation. This can be incredibly overwhelming and confusing to someone who is trying to discover his or her identity. This

curriculum is designed to allow the students a comfortable holding environment where it is okay to think and question what they have always been taught, or even never understood about faith, church and “all of that stuff.” This curriculum is designed to be an opportunity for the students to be encouraged on the journey, to experience the practicality of theology in their lives outside of just the church walls, and to begin to discover their identity as children of God on their way to understanding their identity as humans and teenagers.

In keeping with Piaget’s developmental theories, the curriculum is designed to allow the students to think abstractly and struggle with the abstract nature of theology, but then not leave them dangling. Each concept is tied back into practical applications that allow for evaluation and connecting the concepts to the story of our lives in the story of God. Each practical application allows for discernment, a chance to learn the meanings and how they apply in real life, and how this shapes identity as children of God.

Returning to Erikson, the lessons are also designed to allow for creating intimacy with self and in relation to God (as a means of looking forward to young adulthood) as well as working through remaining struggles of inferiority and industry through looking at the value of personal gifts in the community of faith and in God’s kingdom (as a means of looking back to pre-adolescence).

The ultimate goal of this curriculum is to have the students take ownership of their identity and their beliefs, all done after a long period of study and discernment, but all as the starting block to the life of faith in the community of believers. Each student is encouraged to design their own method of delivering their “statement of beliefs and identity,” thus further encouraging the use of their individual God-given gifts and talents.

The following chart shows the outline for a 24 week confirmation class series. The curriculum may be shortened and adapted as necessary so that only one week is spent on each theological concept and topic. If this is done, make sure that time is left for an activity along with reflection and discussion. This curriculum is not designed to be solely a teacher-taught curriculum; the students are expected to participate as part of the learning and ownership process.

Curriculum Outline

WEEK	TOPIC
1	Introduction: What is Theology? What is Confirmation?
2 and 3	Creation
4 and 5	Christology
6 and 7	Trinity
8	Holy Spirit
9	Election and Predestination
10 and 11	Humanity
12 and 13	Christian Life
14 and 15	Church in the World
16 and 17	Providence
18 and 19	Sin
20 and 21	Salvation
22	Prayer
23	Worship
24	Wrap-Up

This curriculum was written by Katie Todd, MDiv/MACE student at Union-PSCE/Charlotte in 2009. Please give her credit if you use this curriculum in your church.