

OVERVIEW OF THE CONFIRMATION PROJECT

August 14, 2014

The Confirmation Project seeks to learn the extent to which *confirmation and equivalent practices (CEP)* in five Protestant denominations in the United States are effective for strengthening discipleship in youth. Strengthening discipleship includes nurturing faith in Jesus Christ and facilitating youth encounters with Christian traditions (Scripture, creeds, confessions, and practices) to support lifelong Christian vocation. The five denominations in this project include: the African Methodist Episcopal Church, the Episcopal Church, the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America, the Presbyterian Church (USA) and the United Methodist Church. This project is funded by the Lilly Foundation, Inc. and seeks to provide ministry leaders within the Christian church examples of strategies and practices that are effective in helping young Christians grow as disciples of Jesus Christ.

Leadership for the grant includes two co-directors and a steering committee of five practical theologians (one from each of the five denominations represented in the study), five graduate research assistants (one in each denomination represented in the study) and several specialty persons.

Co-Directors:

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The **aim of this project** is to examine confirmation and equivalent practices within five denominations that practice infant baptism with the goal of strengthening discipleship formation for youth.

Primary research question is:

What is the state of confirmation and equivalent practices within five Protestant denominations that practice infant baptism?

The **primary objectives** are:

- A. To carry out **empirical research** on confirmation and equivalent practices across five denominations. A concurrent, mixed method approach will be used, including quantitative surveys and qualitative portraits.
- B. To **interpret and analyze findings** that will strengthen youth discipleship within the church.
- C. To **disseminate the findings** of this study through articles, monographs, webinars, conferences, and an interactive website.

The **secondary objectives** are:

- A. To offer **new theological thinking** about confirmation and equivalent practices, inviting congregations to think in fresh ways about the nature of Christian discipleship and young people.
- B. To serve as a **catalyst** for discussion among **practitioners and ministry leaders** involved in confirmation and equivalent practices.
- C. To provide resources for the development of **effective pedagogical approaches** for confirmation and equivalent practices that take into account contemporary and contextual challenges.

The **primary audience** is **practitioners and ministry leaders in congregations**. And the **secondary audiences** for this research are **leaders of denominations**, so they may provide guidance to the educational ministry of their church, and **professors in seminaries and divinity schools** teaching in the area of confirmation, as well as Christian education more generally.

Research Methods:

A concurrent, mixed method approach will be used to study the primary research question.

- A. **Qualitative** - Qualitative research will include gathering data through site visits (visiting 20 congregations, four in each denomination, and five camps, one in each denomination) and sharing the findings through developing portraits.
- B. **Quantitative** - Quantitative research will include analyzing data from surveys of confirmands, parents and congregational leaders. (Confirmands, parents and ministry leaders will be surveyed in fall 2014 and again in spring 2015; surveying confirmands at camps will take place in the summer of 2015). (For more detail on research methodology, go to theconfirmationproject.com.)

Background:

This project emerged out of a similar study on confirmation in Europe, which began in 2007. A preliminary survey of pastors in the United States was conducted in 2012, and as a result the current study was proposed to the Lilly Foundation Inc. and approved for funding in 2013. Currently the European confirmation study includes nine countries and is in the second phase of research. This project has been designed so the findings of the United States study can be put into conversation with the findings from both phases of the European study.

Key definitions:

Why the term *confirmation and equivalent practices*? The practices surrounding confirmation have been important for youth discipleship in many Protestant denominations that practice infant baptism. The rituals and practices surrounding confirmation, however, have changed over the years, as has the contemporary context. This project's aim is to study the current state of confirmation in the United States in Protestant denominations who practice infant baptism and, given the changes that have taken place in many of these denominations, the steering committee believed it important to focus on confirmation practices more widely rather than more narrowly. Therefore the term *confirmation and equivalent practices* is being used to allow each denomination to work within their tradition and understanding of confirmation.

For more information on this project, see TheConfirmationProject.com.