

# Tips on Bringing Confirmation Online

As we think about faith formation offerings for the fall, one of the first that comes to mind is the Lutheran foundational program of confirmation. Over the past years, a minority of churches have moved to online platforms, but many (like ours at Calvary) still featured in person classes. Obviously, there are benefits and drawbacks to each approach, but going forward, we may not have much choice as to what we do, when we factor in the safety of our students and their families.



So, you may be wondering, how do I even begin to move confirmation online?

## What Calvary Lutheran Church Did:

In the fall of 2019, our confirmation program introduced blended learning for confirmation. We did this for several reasons. First, we wanted to involve parents more in the faith development of their students. As we know, parents are the primary influencers in faith formation, and we wanted to encourage cross-generational discussions at home. Second, we have students who are increasingly busy with school, sports, and other programs and wanted to provide a more flexible schedule to suit their needs. After taking some classes through *Vibrant Faith Ministry*, we felt like we could take the jump (and obviously, it turned out to be fortuitous.)

We initially designed the new program so that students met every other week. At the beginning of each unit, parents were invited to come in for an overview lesson, so they had a refresher course (or an introduction, depending on their background!), to whatever part of the catechism we were studying. With students, we used the *Here We Stand* curriculum to introduce a topic the first week. We also provided time for group building activities. Then some time during Week Two, students were responsible for working through a lesson at home with their parents, which explored and reinforced what they had learned about in class. In the third week, students shared some of what they did at home and teachers then went onto the next topic. The fourth week was at home and so on. At the end of the unit, students worked together on a service project.

To support the at-home piece, a website was designed to provide the schedule, lessons, and parent resources as well as host pictures from middle school activities. (To check out the website, go to <https://www.calvaryconfirmationsb.org/>.) We instituted passcodes for the page with lessons because of copyright issues. When in-person gatherings were restricted, we moved the teacher-facilitated classes onto Zoom. We solicited feedback from parents throughout the year to help us make the experience better.

## What We Learned:

- Parents like having the overview lesson. We usually had 90-100% participation from the households. It gave them a chance to connect, ask questions, and share what was happening at home.
- Parents needed tech support! While using the website seemed to us to be straightforward, we still had parents who needed to be guided through the process of logging in and getting lessons.
- Lessons at home should be designed with a 20-30 minute timeframe in mind. We found short videos with follow-up discussion questions worked well. We used “*What Would You Do?*” episodes to drive some discussions along with episodes on ***Luther’s Small***

**Catechism** from *Concordia Publishing House* found on YouTube. Listening to Christian music is a good option too!

- Try assigning creative projects that can be shared with classmates the following week and/or put faith into action. For example, we did a photo project for the Apostle's Creed.
- It is important to build in accountability, so the work is done at home. Until families realized that the most amazing discussions can happen, they will tend to put off doing it. At the end of the first unit, feedback from families was very positive about having these discussions
- Moving our teacher-facilitated lessons onto Zoom was a challenge, but doable. Lessons needed to be redesigned to go to an hour timeframe. (Our in-person class was an hour and a half.) We also needed to build in some movement and fellowship time. So we added scavenger hunts, show-and-tell, and some other Zoom games to help keep our middle schoolers' attention in the evening. Some parents told us that it was the only time their students were getting to interact live with other students, and they were grateful for the fellowship time.
- Build in some surprises! To end the year, we delivered mini Bundt cakes to each of the families without the students knowing. So, at the end of the class session, we all had cake together!
- Build relationships with congregation members. As part of our original programming, we invite members our congregation throughout the year to interact with the students. Sometimes it is teaching a skill; sometimes it is having dialogue around faith topics. Because we missed some of that with the pandemic, we decided to institute a pen pal project for six weeks. Some decided to do it through email, some participated in it the old-fashioned way through hand-written letters. The feedback was so positive that we have decided to keep it as a part of the program this coming year. (Note: For safety, be sure that parents are copied on all correspondence and that adult pen pals have training in protection of minors and background checks.)
- While our 8<sup>th</sup> grade students have decided to postpone their confirmation until we can have it live, we did provide the opportunity for them to present their Faith Journey projects, using Zoom. Students designed their projects and videotaped them. We then invited the congregation to come to a Zoom presentation to see what they had done and gave members the opportunity to ask questions.

We find ourselves in a time calling for experimentation. Don't be afraid to fail. By failing, we learn what works and what doesn't. Instead, think of the opportunities available for the Holy Spirit to work in the lives of our families and our own lives as we learn new ways of sharing the love of Jesus!

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