



CONFIRM

NOT CONFORM

EPISCOPAL

SESSION 14

TEACH US TO PRAY: SACRAMENTS

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THEOLOGICAL STATEMENT

A life of faith is not merely intellectual assent to a set of propositions. To live in faith means to step out into something greater than ourselves, to enter into mystery, to not know. One way we do this, week after week, is through the Eucharist. We do not expect that those who receive the Eucharist knows exactly what it means or what happens in and through the bread and wine. Instead, we receive the sacrament as a gift of grace from God, unmerited and yet freely given to us.

This does not mean that we approach the sacraments thoughtlessly or carelessly. Believing them to be a gracious gift from God, we would be ungracious if we received them without some care and consideration. But the sacraments are ultimately a personal experience that cannot be fully explained through doctrine or description.

In our experience, youth are under a tremendous amount of pressure to Get Things Right. They are under constant pressure to achieve and perform. Failure must be avoided at all costs and they are forever looking for the right answer, whether they believe it or not. We present the sacraments as a stark contrast to this need to perform, this insatiable demand to find the right answer.

There is only so much we can teach about the sacraments. Ultimately, the sacraments are experienced by each person as an encounter with God. There is no one right way to receive the gift of grace. God's favor towards us does not depend upon getting it right. We receive God's favor with limited understanding but with humble confidence in God's presence with us.

Life Lessons

- **Your experience is valid**
- **You don't need to know everything before you choose**

Life Skills:

- **Paying attention to your instincts**
- **Letting go of control**

PRE-SESSION CHECKLIST

Before the day of the session

- Review all the scripted and spoken parts of the session, paying particular attention to the things you should read aloud to the session. Remember, the provided text is merely a suggestion—improvise, add to it, or change it as you see fit.
- Review the timeline for this session. The timeline is a suggestion only, and you should feel free to adapt it if more time is needed for an activity or a high-energy discussion.
- **Make sure you have the following on hand:**
 - Flip chart paper
 - Masking tape
 - Marker
 - A blindfold or two
 - Oranges, enough for everyone have at least one slice with one whole orange left over
 - Some kind of wet wipes
 - Copies of *The Book of Common Prayer*, one for each youth
 - Music playing device
 - Two songs that can be played on aforementioned device: one raucous and one soothing
 - Service Project check-in flip chart sheet from *Session 12*
 - Copies of the *Memorizing your Bible Passage* handout (found in the Session Materials)
 - Copies of the *Confirm not Conform* handout for each youth (found in the Session Materials)
 - *The Rules of the Road*
 - The file box with youth file folders
 - [optional] If you are doing the full ninety-minute version of this session, set up something that will allow you to show a YouTube video, *Guerilla Handbell Strikeforce*, to the group. The link is <https://youtu.be/40qHb9uFpRI>

On the day of the session

- **Set up the space [approximately 45 minutes]**
 - Check the space you'll be using for the Gathering and other activities. Is there enough room for everyone? Enough chairs and floor space?
 - Have copies of the handouts ready to distribute.
 - Post the service project flip chart sheet.
 - Keep the oranges out of sight so that whoever is blindfolded during the *It's a Mystery* presentation won't know about them.
 - Title one piece of flip chart paper "What is a sacrament?"
 - Have at least three additional pieces of flip chart paper ready for the discussion on *What are the Sacraments?*
 - Have copies of *The Book of Common Prayer* ready to distribute.

- If you will show the YouTube video, set up any projector/screen you need. Check to make sure everything is connected, online, and working. If you do not have wifi in your space, or if it is slow, you can use a variety of programs (that can be found online) to download it to your computer.
- Set up the music playing device. Make sure the two songs you want to play are cued up and ready to go
- Have the file box with youth folders available
- Post the *Rules of the Road* where youth can refer to them

Timeline for a Ninety-Minute Session

-0:05 – 0:05	Gathering
0:05 – 0:10	Service Project Check-in
0:10 – 0:15	Bible Passage Check-In
0:15 – 0:25	Presentation: It's a Mystery
0:25 – 0:45	Discussion: What are the Sacraments?
0:45 – 0:55	Discussion: Outward and Visible Signs
0:55 – 1:05	Activity: Confirm not Conform
1:05 – 1:20	Discussion: Confirm not Conform
1:20 – 1:30	Closing Prayer: Hand Meditation

Timeline for a Sixty-Minute Session

-0:05 – 0:05	Gathering
0:05 – 0:10	Service Project Check-in
0:10 – 0:15	Bible Passage Check-In
0:15 – 0:25	Presentation: It's a Mystery
0:25 – 0:40	Discussion: What are the Sacraments?
0:40 – 0:50	Activity: Confirm not Conform
0:50 – 0:55	Discussion: Confirm not Conform
0:55 – 1:00	Closing Prayer: Hand Meditation

SESSION 14

GATHERING

~5 MINUTES

- Welcome youth as they arrive.
- When everyone has arrived, start the continuum activity.
- Let them know that, as in past weeks, they will respond to a few statements by moving to a spot in the room, indicating whether they strongly agree, strongly disagree, or stand somewhere in between.
- Indicate which end of the room means they strongly agree and which end means they strongly disagree.
- Then make the following statements.
 - I'm having a good day.
 - At this point in time, I am planning to be confirmed.
 - My parents want me to be confirmed.
 - I have memorized the first verse of my Bible passage.
 - I am feeling a lot of stress.
 - I have eaten my recommended daily allowance of fruits and vegetables today.

SERVICE PROJECT CHECK-IN

~5 MINUTES

- Spend a couple of minutes checking in on the service project. Write down their answers on the flip chart paper from the previous sessions.
 - Ask if anyone has gotten more information on the charity or project.
 - Ask if there have been any developments or decisions about what they will be doing or when.
 - Ask what they need to find out or do next.
 - Ask who will be doing it.

BIBLE PASSAGE CHECK-IN

~5 MINUTES

- If there is any youth who has not yet settled on a passage to memorize, set up a time to meet individually.
- Check to make sure everyone has received the *Memorizing Your Bible Passage* handout; distribute extra copies if needed.
- Ask if anyone has come up with other memorization techniques that can be shared with the group.
- Remind everyone of the date of the *iConfirm* service, when they will need to have this passage memorized.

- If youth reported that they were feeling stressed (and probably even if they didn't), be sure to provide words of encouragement. Let them know that you are available for help if they need it. Be sure they know how they can reach you.
 - You may also want to be in touch with the mentor of any youth who seem particularly stressed.

PRESENTATION: IT'S A MYSTERY

~10 MINUTES

- Ask the students if words can describe everything.
- Let them debate the question for a minute or two.
- Ask for a volunteer who would be willing to be blindfolded. Assure the volunteer nothing's going to happen to him or her. .
- After blindfolding your volunteer, bring out the whole orange and the orange slices.
- Say to the group:
 - Describe this thing and what you experience for [the blindfolded youth]—without using the name of the object.
- Distribute the orange slices to everyone except the blindfolded youth.
- Ask them to describe the orange slices for the blindfolded youth.
- The blindfolded youth may be able to guess the object by the smell as well as the descriptions the other youth offer. If s/he does, s/he can remove the blindfold. If not, let her/him guess for a minute or so, then remove the blindfold.
- Ask the youth (blindfolded or un-) if there was anything missing from the description.
 - Although they may say other valid things, what you're looking for is that the *experience* itself cannot be fully shared. It has to be experienced by each person on his or her own.
- Give an orange slice to the formerly-blindfolded youth.
- Say, using your own words or the following:
 - One thing you cannot fully share with others is your personal experience of something—even something as ordinary as the taste of an orange.
 - There are things in our lives which are beyond words or even our ability to understand them in a logical way. They are experiences that can't be described well in words.
 - In our faith, we believe that sometimes God speaks to us, not in words, but in that sense of mystery. Somehow we know God is involved, even if we can't talk about a specific reason. Something happens that makes us feel closer to God, or to things that are holy or sacred that we may not be able to explain.
 - As long as there have been human beings, there have been these experiences of sacred mystery. People draw on the walls of caves, or write poems, or sing songs, or sit in silence, to try and capture what it's like when we are near holy things.

- The church calls these moments Sacraments – they are sacred. *The Book of Common Prayer* (and we know all about *The Book of Common Prayer* now, right?¹) tells us a little more about sacraments.

DISCUSSION: WHAT ARE THE SACRAMENTS?

~20 MINUTES

[If you are doing the sixty-minute version of this session, remember that you will have only fifteen minutes for this discussion.]

- Give each youth a *Book of Common Prayer*
- Say:
 - One section of *The Book of Common Prayer* that we did not look at last time was the Catechism.
- Ask the youth to find the catechism in the Prayer Book (it begins on page 843)
- Ask what else it is called.
 - Answer: An Outline of the Faith
- Ask for a volunteer to read the first paragraph on page 844, *Concerning the Catechism* (copied here):
 - “This catechism is primarily intended for use by parish priests, deacons, and lay catechists, to give an outline for instruction. It is a commentary on the creeds, but is not meant to be a complete statement of belief and practice; rather it is a point of departure for the teacher, and it is cast in the traditional question and answer form for ease of reference.”
- Ask if anyone can translate that into English.
 - You’re looking for something like “The catechism is a teaching tool, but it’s not meant to be the be-all and end-all of belief.”
- Say:
 - With that in mind, let’s look at what the Catechism says about the Sacraments.
- Have the youth turn to page 857 in *The Book of Common Prayer*.
- Ask for a volunteer to read aloud the first question and answer under the heading **The Sacraments**.
- Ask for a volunteer to read aloud the second question and answer, found on page 858.
- Ask for a volunteer to read aloud the third question and answer.
- Then begin the discussion:

¹ This assumes you used Session 13 on *The Book of Common Prayer*.

Discussion Question	Potential Follow-up Questions	Facilitator Notes
What are the sacraments, according to <i>The Book of Common Prayer</i> ?		They can simply read what it says in the prayer book: “The sacraments are outward and visible signs of inward and spiritual grace...” Write down that phrase on the piece of flip chart paper titled “What is a sacrament?”
What do you think that means?	What does it mean to you?	Youth may have very different ideas from you about what that means – and they may have very different ideas from one another. Jot notes on them all.
<p><i>Say: “Here is another way to define sacraments.” Write on the flip chart paper the following:</i></p> <p style="text-align: center;">Sacraments are things we can see, or feel, or touch, or taste, or hear, that makes us realize God is with us.</p> <p><i>Ask what they think of that definition, but don’t dwell too long there. Move on to the next question:</i></p>		
How does the catechism define grace?	What does grace do, according to the catechism?	Write the word “Grace” on the flip chart paper. The answer, according to the catechism is “God’s favor towards us.” Write that on the flip chart paper under the word “Grace.”
How would you put that in your own words?	How do you define grace?	Write their definitions on the flip chart paper.
What are the “two great sacraments” according to the catechism?		Start a new piece of flip chart paper. The answer is Holy Baptism and the Holy Eucharist. Once youth have answered, write <div style="display: flex; justify-content: space-around; width: 100%;"> Holy Baptism on the left side Holy Eucharist on the right side </div>
How are these sacraments “outward and visible signs”?	What is outward and visible about them?	Write down the appropriate answers under each of the sacraments. Don’t forget that “outward signs” include the words being said as well as the water, bread, candles, etc.
How do these sacraments provide an “inward and spiritual grace”? How do these sacraments show God’s favor towards us?	Why do you think this sacrament offers this grace?	Write down their answers under the appropriate sacrament. Youth may disagree, so ask them to offer their reasons why they think what they do.
Can you name any other sacraments in the church?	What are they called? And what are they, exactly?	If they can name them, write them down on the flip chart paper. They are: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Confirmation • Ordination • Holy Matrimony • Reconciliation of a Penitent • Unction If they cannot, hint that they may find them listed elsewhere in the catechism. (They are on pages 860-861)

Is it possible to have sacraments, or sacramental moments, other than the ones listed here?	Have you ever experienced a sacrament that wasn't in church?	Let them discuss this for a moment, then direct them (if they haven't already found it) to p. 861 where it says, "Is God's activity limited to these rites?" Have a youth read the answer out loud.
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- Say:
 - As a church and as individuals, we know that the sacraments of the church – baptism, Eucharist, confirmation, etc. – are not the only sacraments. There are other moments or experiences when we just feel God's presence, or we know something special is happening but we don't know what or why or how it works.

[If you are doing the sixty-minute version of this session, please omit playing the song and skip ahead now to the Activity: Confirm Not Conform.]

- If you are doing the full version of the session, say: "Maybe it's something like this."
 - [If you have the technological capability, show the YouTube video Guerilla Handbell Strike Force <http://youtu.be/40qHb9uFpRI>]
- [Ask if they recognize the song]

DISCUSSION: OUTWARD AND VISIBLE SIGNS ~10 MINUTES

[If you are doing the sixty-minute version of this session, please skip ahead to the Activity: Confirm Not Conform.]

- Suggest that it's time for a stretch.
- Invite the youth to stand and stretch with their hands up in the air, touch their toes, do a few jumping jacks, etc.
- Now that you've got them good and riled up, suggest that maybe they should take a nap.
- Have everyone lie down and curl up for about minute.
- Then say, "Nap time's over!" Start some raucous music and get everyone dancing for about a minute.
- Then quickly switch to a slow, soothing piece of music. Let that seep in for about a minute.
- Then begin the following brief discussion:

Discussion Question	Potential Follow-up Questions	Facilitator Notes
Which of those things we did best matched your mood as you started?		
How did each of those activities change how you felt?	How did your activity affect your mood or emotions?	We are making the assumption that these different activities will have some effect on everyone's mood.
Why do you think that is?		See if they have any ideas about this.

- Say, using your own words or these:
 - Sometimes people criticize what others do, saying that they are just “going through the motions.” And there’s truth in that. It’s important that what we do has some intention and meaning behind it, not simply following directions. When we ask you if you want to be confirmed, we don’t want you to just “go through the motions” and do it because you’re told to.
 - On the other hand, sometimes the motions affect us. The very act of going through the motions can work on us in mysterious ways. Your body is not separate from your mind or your spirit. They are all part of the same package, which is you.
 - One of the things that’s important about the sacraments is that you don’t have to understand them with your mind in order to do them with your body or be changed by them in your spirit.
 - You don’t need to know exactly what happens in the Eucharist to receive the bread and wine and have it mean something.
 - You don’t need to know exactly what happens in baptism before you are baptized.
 - The sacraments are an act of faith, taking a step without knowing exactly where it’s going to lead you.
 - As you think about whether or not you want to be confirmed, we’d like you to think about what it means for you. You may not know exactly. You may not even be able to put it into words. But as you think about going through these motions of being confirmed, take a little time to imagine what this might mean for you.

ACTIVITY: CONFIRM NOT CONFORM

~15 MINUTES

- Distribute the *Confirm not Conform* handout, found in the Session Materials.
- Say:
 - As we said from the beginning of this program, *you* get to decide whether or not you will be confirmed. We are not asking you to decide now. But we would like you to spend a little time finding out more about what you are deciding to do or not to do.
- Have the youth turn to the Confirmation Service on page 413 in *The Book of Common Prayer*.
- Say:
 - Take the next ten minutes to read through the service you’ll be going through if you are confirmed and write down what you think about it.²
 - We have some questions as suggestions, but you can write whatever comes to your mind.
- Let them get to work.

² Consider other options for this activity for those who have difficulty reading, such as working in pairs or reading

DISCUSSION: CONFIRM NOT CONFORM**~10 MINUTES**

[If you are doing the sixty-minute version of this session, note that you will only have five minutes for this discussion.]

- Bring the youth back together.
- Say:
 - Once again, we're not asking you to decide now whether or not you want to be confirmed. We just want you to start thinking about it—and especially to ask any questions you may have about confirmation.
- Invite them to ask any questions that may have come up during the activity.
- If you know the answers, answer them.
- If you don't know the answers, write them down to find out after class.
- One question may be exactly when and where their confirmation service will take place. Be sure to have that information.
- Conclude by using your own words or the following:
 - Confirmation, like all the sacraments, is something that can be used by God as an outward and visible sign of an inward and spiritual grace. But it's not the *only* way God can do this. The inward and spiritual grace doesn't depend on the sacraments. God's grace is free. It's yours if you want it, whether you decide to get confirmed or not. The choice is entirely yours. God will love you no matter what you do. And so will we.

CLOSING PRAYER: HAND MEDITATION**~10 MINUTES**

[If you are doing the sixty-minute version of this session, note that you will only have five minutes for this hand meditation.]

Since we have been looking at how what we do with our bodies affects our spirit, the Hand Meditation seems particularly appropriate this week.

- Ask the youth to put the *Confirm not Conform* handouts in their file folders, then gather for the closing prayer.

Photos	General direction	Detailed direction	Comments
	<p>“Close your eyes. Clench your hands together into a fist.”</p>	<p>“What is it you are holding on to? Is there something that is knotting you up inside? Is there something you don’t want to let go of? Is there something you are struggling with? Is there something you don’t want anyone to see? Is there something you don’t want God to see? Whatever it is, notice that it is there. Notice what it feels like, without judgment or blame, simply observing and allowing the knowledge of what you are holding to come to the surface. And if you are not sure what it is, that is fine. Simply notice whatever is there.”</p>	<p>There’s no need to hurry through this script. Allow silence between each of the questions. Allow each of the gestures time to breathe.</p>
	<p>“Now, if you wish, open your hands.”</p>	<p>“It may be that you don’t feel ready to do that, and that’s O.K. You can go through this whole meditation with your fist clenched. But know that the invitation is there for you to open your hands, whenever you are ready. When you have unclenched your fist, notice what that feels like. Does it feel freeing? Does it feel scary? Does it feel like nothing is there? What is in your hand now?”</p>	<p>In this movement of the hand meditation we recognize that in God’s eyes, whatever is hidden in our clenched fist is already known and seen and loved. At the same time, we recognize that this is a gift to be received willingly, not something to be forced on participants. As long as participants are respectful of others, they may partake of as much or as little of the hand meditation as they wish.</p>

	<p>“Push whatever your hand is holding towards God.”</p>	<p>“Whatever was worrying you or scaring you or tying you up in knots, whatever you were carrying with you, whatever you were afraid to let other people see, push it towards God and let God catch it. Let God take whatever it was from you. Let your hands be empty.”</p>	<p>Allow time for this image to sink in.</p>
	<p>“Now, hold your open hand in front of you with the palm facing upwards.”</p>	<p>“Now that your hands are empty, allow God to put a gift into your hands. This may be a gift of encouragement. It may be a challenge or an instruction. It may be a new perspective. It may be a message of love. In may be an inward and spiritual grace. Maybe you don’t know what it is or you’re not sure anything is there, and that’s O.K. But whatever it is that God wants to give you, allow God to place it in your hand. What does it feel like? And how does it make you feel? Take a few moments and simply notice whatever is going on for you.”</p>	<p>This gesture can be frustrating for those youth who may not sense or feel anything. Although you will want to allow some time for youth to experience whatever gift God wants to give them, you do not need to stay at this step until everyone has had a revelation of some kind.</p>

	<p>“Press the gift that God is giving you into your heart.”</p>	<p>“See this gift entering into your body, traveling through your bloodstream. What does it feel like? Allow God’s gift to spread through you. If you don’t feel like you have received a gift, or are not sure if you want to receive the gift, you can keep standing with your hands open, or, if you wish, press your open hand to your heart. It may be that you discover something in that movement that you didn’t find in your open hand.”</p>	<p>This gesture allows the youth to be active recipients of God’s gift to them. Again, allow for differences of experience and keep the pace slow and meditative, but not lugubrious.</p>
	<p>“Finally, hold out your hands to offer your thanks to God.”</p>	<p>“Whether it is for a gift you have received today, or for anything else, use this gesture to offer your thanks to God for anything you wish. When you have offered whatever thanks you wish, please leave quietly. Go with God.”</p>	<p>The gesture of thanks is important, even if there are no revelations. There is no formal unpacking of the experience at this point.</p>

POST-SESSION REVIEW

At some point before your next session, meet as a team (if there is a team) or on your own and spend a few minutes reviewing what went well and what could be changed. Some things to consider:

- Overall, how did this session go?
- How much progress (if any) have the youth made in planning their service project? Are they clear on what they need to do next?
- Has everyone selected a Bible passage to memorize? Are they clear on what to do next?
- What questions did youth have about confirmation? What answers do you need to find before the next session?
- What's the general mood about confirmation, the *iConfirm* service? Are there anxieties that need to be addressed?
- Were the youth stressed? If so, how can that be relieved? Are *you* stressed? How can *that* be relieved?
- If you were doing this session again, what would you do differently?
- What did you learn from leading this session?
- What affected you personally? What questions did this session raise for you? How will you address them?

For the Scripture memorization passages:

- Check over any more passages that youth have handed in. Make a personal call or meet with each youth to ask why s/he chose this passage. If you feel the youth has a good grasp on the passage, what it means, and its significance to her/himself, encourage the youth to get started memorizing. If you feel the youth could dig a little deeper into the passage, engage him/her in a discussion about it.
- Make a copy of the chosen passages for your files and send the original back to the youth.
- Call any youth who have not turned in a passage to memorize and remind them to get that to you by the date you set. Offer help if needed.
- Once you receive their passages, follow up with them as described above.

As you plan ahead:

- What needs to be done in advance of the meeting with the vestry?
- What needs to be done in advance of the service project?
- What needs to be done in advance of the confirmation service?
- What needs to be done in advance of the *iConfirm* service?

Break these down into small, manageable pieces to help you get through them!

Be sure to take a look at the next session. Figure out:

- What needs to happen by then?
- What materials do you need to gather or purchase?
- Who will do these things?
- When will they be done?

SESSION MATERIALS

MEMORIZING YOUR BIBLE PASSAGE

Different people will find that different methods will help them memorize more effectively. Use as many of the following techniques as you wish to help you memorize your Bible passage. Or come up with your own. Do whatever works best for you.

FOR UNDERSTANDING

- Read the entire book in which your passage is found.
- Without looking at the passage, write out a summary of what the passage is saying.
- Outline your passage.
- Make flashcards using only key words from the passage.
- Without looking at the passage, tell it to someone in your own words.

VISUAL TECHNIQUES

- Create flash cards that contain key words or visual images/pictograms from your passage.
- Create a powerpoint slide show of your passage, using words, but also images and colors that the words evoke for you.
- Write down the passage using only the first letters of each word in the passage (e.g., I t b w t W a t W w w G a t W w G (*John 1:1*)). Use this sheet of initials to recite your passage. If you get lost, look ahead a few letters to see if you can figure out where the passage is going and try again.

AUDIBLE/SOUND TECHNIQUES

- Have someone else read the passage aloud to you (without looking at it yourself)
- Say only the vowel sounds of the passage.
- Sing your passage.
- Close your eyes and say as many words from the passage that you can recall, not worrying about order or sense (e.g. God, beginning, Word, has, glory, been)
- Record yourself reciting your passage and listen to it as you do other things.
- If your passage has been set to music, listen to recordings of it (but be aware that many compositions use the King James Version).

PHYSICAL/ACTIVE TECHNIQUES

- Write out the passage in longhand, organizing it into paragraphs that make sense to you, as opposed to what the passage looks like in the Bible.
- Make a passage puzzle. Write out your passage on index cards in 3, 4, or 5 word chunks; shuffle them and then try to put them in order without consulting your Bible.
- Clap or tap out the rhythm of your passage as you read it aloud; then clap or tap out the rhythm as you read it silently.
- Read your passage (or have it read to you) while you are moving. Pump your fist or make some other gesture when you reach a word that has emphasis.
- Bounce a tennis ball as you read or recite your passage.

OTHER METHODS THAT WORK FOR ME

CONFIRM NOT CONFORM

Instructions: Read through the Confirmation service in The Book of Common Prayer (starting on page 413). Then answer the questions below. You can use words, images, scribbles, or anything else that makes sense to you.

What did you like about the Confirmation service?

What made you uncomfortable?

What does being confirmed mean to you?

Use the back of this sheet to write down any questions you have about confirmation.