“Forming Faith: A comparative study of two methods of confirmation preparation and the ways they facilitate faith formation in candidates”

by

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This research project compares two different methods of confirmation preparation and the way they facilitated faith formation in candidates. The two methods investigated were the ‘traditional’ and the ‘catechumenal like’ approaches. Thirty eight young people were interviewed to identify the impact their confirmation experience had on them. The interviews followed a narrative enquiry methodology and their parents were also invited to complete a questionnaire. The two methods of confirmation preparation were then compared on the basis of the degree of faith formation achieved.

The context of this study is the ongoing debate in the Anglican Church of Aotearoa, New Zealand and Polynesia about the place of confirmation in the contemporary Church given the theological confusion that surrounds it and the decline in numbers of young people presenting themselves for confirmation. Other factors include the recent interest in reviving the ancient Catechumenate for the purposes of spiritual formation. The overriding issue however is the clear need for the Church to offer better processes for forming young people in Christ, first for the children of Christian parents but also for those with little church background who present themselves for membership.

It was found that the majority of candidates had a strongly positive experience of confirmation reporting life change and successful faith formation. A small number of candidates were also found to have experienced confirmation as a profound ‘rite of passage’ and reported that a deep personal change had taken place.

In the light of these findings a new model for successful faith formation through confirmation is proposed. This model conforms substantially to a ‘catechumenal like’ process but includes new features to enhance the possibility of deep faith formation in candidates.

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1 In this thesis ‘catechumens’ always refers to candidates who have never been baptised, the ‘Catechumenate’ to the rite of the ancient Church, the ‘catechumenate’ to a variety of modern rites and ‘catechumenal like’ processes to faith formation processes designed for those who may already be baptised.
CHAPTER 1

Background

In this chapter I will define the key terms and the scope of this project. I will demonstrate its relevance by setting it against the backdrop of continued numerical decline in the Anglican Church and the concern that religiously committed parents have for the faith of their children. I will also background the difficulties of faith transmission today. Special consideration will be given to the place of ‘catechumenal like’ processes in spiritual formation. I will close the chapter by examining the current state of confirmation in the Church taking note of recent developments.

Summary of Terms

**Confirmation**: This is the rite used in the Anglican Church and other Churches which provides those baptised as infants with the opportunity to confirm their baptismal promises, give public expression to their faith and receive the laying on of hands for spiritual strengthening by the bishop.

**Confirmation Preparation**: This is the period of time preceding the confirmation service during which candidates meet with leaders and receive instruction in the Christian faith.

‘Traditional’ Preparation: This method of confirmation preparation offered to candidates usually consists of up to 6 weekly lessons and is led by a clergy person using a didactic teaching style.

The Catechumenate: This is the process of faith formation, derived from the pre-baptismal rite of Christian initiation, which developed in the early Church late in the second century.

‘Catechumenal Like’ Preparation: In the modern era ‘catechumenal like’ processes are used by a number of denominations to prepare candidates for baptism, the reaffirmation of baptismal vows and confirmation. The structure of this preparation resembles in some ways the rite of the ancient Church but it is not usually limited to those who have not been baptised.

Faith/Spiritual Formation: This is the process by which individuals come to put their faith in God and begin to be shaped spiritually, mentally, emotionally and volitionally to the way of Christ. This takes place over a lifetime but is particularly important for those who are young and those who have recently come to faith in Christ.
Faith Transmission: Faith transmission is the process whereby individuals respond in faith to the word of God as it is presented by one person or persons to another. In this context the means by which faith is transmitted during confirmation preparation is especially relevant.

Scope of project: The scope of this project involves the exploration of the dynamics of faith formation in the context of confirmation. This includes both the preparation phase and the confirmation service itself. The study deliberately focuses on teens, both young men and women, in the 16-19 year age group. This is a critical stage of life and is particularly important in the process of faith formation. The project also focuses on Anglican young people or at least young people who are fully involved in either an Anglican church or Anglican school.

Background: The sociological background of this paper is the continued decline of the Anglican Church in Aotearoa/New Zealand and especially the overall aging of the Church.² Although some Anglican Churches continue to thrive today many others are struggling to remain viable in both membership and financial terms. The average New Zealander appears to be resistant to the Christian message and only a small number of new people find their way into the membership of the Church.

However this context is further complicated by the increasing difficulty Christian parents have in transmitting faith to their children. Anecdotal evidence suggests that many children who grow up in the Anglican Church drift away from it when they leave home. This is of particular concern given that the future viability of the Church is strongly related to the ability of Christian parents to pass on their faith to their children rather than rely on adults coming to faith.³ However Kay and Francis note that the process of growing up is often associated with a movement away from the beliefs of the family home.⁴

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² From 1991 to 2006 the number who named themselves as Anglicans declined by 24% from 732,048 to 554,925. Quoted by John Roberts, “Christian Churches on Slippery Slope,” Touchstone (February 2007). In addition in the Nelson Diocese infant baptisms averaged 173 per annum in 1994 compared to 72 in 2004.
The problem is clear. If the Anglican Church cannot maintain the loyalty of the young people who grow up under its influence what hope is there of winning those with little or no experience of the Church? Kay and Francis put the problem clearly when they stated that “…it is unlikely that the churches will influence the religious behaviour of unchurched young people unless they first influence the attitude toward Christianity of these [churched] young people.”

A further aspect of this problem is expressed in the ‘believing without belonging’ phenomenon. The children of Christian parents may continue believing but may not feel the need to express their belief through attendance at public worship or membership of a local church. Some are relaxed about this emphasising the importance of personal faith over membership of the Church. Others however recognise that being bound to the Church as the Body of Christ is an integral dimension of Christian identity. Confirmation, with its period of preparation together with the confirmation liturgy itself in the presence of the bishop, seems to offer an ideal opportunity to strengthen the ties between a young person and the Anglican Church. The intention of this study is to explore this relationship so that better ways may be found to deepen the sense of belonging and commitment that young people experience.

The drift of young Anglicans towards more charismatic churches represents an additional problem for Anglican leaders. There is much anecdotal evidence to support this phenomenon but little statistical evidence is available. However the 2001 Church Life Survey showed that Anglicans are older compared to the rest of the population and Pentecostals are considerably younger. This movement of younger Anglicans may contribute to the skewed age profiles of both denominations. An underlying concern with this research is to find better ways of bonding Anglican

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5 Kay and Francis, 143.
7 A survey of the Christian City Churches (CCC) in 2001 revealed that prior to attending a CCC 75.8% attended another church just prior to joining CCC. This indicates strong transfer growth. 5.5% came from an Anglican Church. In addition the CCC denomination is characterised by a very large cohort of those in their 20s (40%). Statistics taken from the 2001 Church Life Survey. Peter Lineham, personal email (June 2008).
8 In the 2001 Church Life Survey 3.2% of Anglicans were in the 15-19 age group compared to 9.2% for the total population. “…Christian City Churches have a younger profile than the census figures.” Norman Brooks, “Church Life Survey New Zealand,” in Thinking Outside the Square: Church in Middle Earth, eds. Ree Bodde and Hugh Kempster (Auckland: St Columba’s Press & Journeyings, 2003), 53.
children to the church of their upbringing so that Anglican identity can be maintained into the future.\textsuperscript{9}

However there are some Anglican clergy who are confused about confirmation or have rejected it altogether and rely for faith formation on courses like Alpha. In a previous generation confirmation was also referred to as a ‘passing out parade’ and even today there is a suspicion in some quarters that confirmation reinforces a nominal attitude toward the Church.\textsuperscript{10} This research will contribute to the discussion of faith formation and show why confirmation is significantly different from Alpha offering, as it does, a unique opportunity for spiritual formation in an Anglican context.

There is an additional need to help those coming to faith who have no church background. These new Christians need to develop a relationship with God, learn about the content of the Christian faith, learn how to live as a Christian in the world and develop a commitment to the Church and its mission. This task poses a significant challenge to clergy and lay people alike. It is my belief that confirmation could be a vital element to aid this process and may even be an undeveloped taonga in our possession.

The Catechumenate: In the 1990s there were moves among some Anglican Dioceses to adopt the catechumenate as a means of spiritual formation for those seeking baptism, reaffirmation of baptismal vows and confirmation.\textsuperscript{11} The modern catechumenate is derived from the ancient practice of the Church and is a rigorous and intentional approach to faith formation. In the early Church this process only ever applied to those being prepared for baptism, however today the modern catechumenate is also open to those already baptised and is sometimes used as a means of preparing candidates for confirmation.

The catechumenate may offer an approach to spiritual formation that addresses a number of the concerns that have been raised. For example its advocates maintain

\textsuperscript{9} Anecdotally some of these Anglican young people return to the church of their upbringing later in life. This phenomenon warrants further research.

\textsuperscript{10} Neimela’s study of confirmation in the Evangelical Lutheran Church of Finland found that despite high levels of participation in confirmation classes young people continued to be passive in their involved with the Church. Kati Niemela, “The Quality and Effectiveness of Confirmation Classes in Finland,” Journal of Beliefs and Values 27:2, (August 2006): 177.

\textsuperscript{11} The Dioceses of Christchurch and Wellington were particularly involved.
that it deals with the whole person and addresses not just the mind but the emotions and behaviour as well. It is a life changing process which Kavanagh called “conversion therapy.”\(^{12}\) It also seems to offer a means of bonding a person to the Church. Although the catechumenate has diminished in importance in some Anglican Dioceses, this study may uncover important reasons why it needs to be redeployed.\(^{13}\)

**Confirmation:** Since the mid 1960s confirmation, as a rite within the Anglican Church, has been in serious decline. For example in 1963 the average number of candidates presenting themselves to the Bishop of Nelson for confirmation stood at over 500 but by 2006 the number had plummeted to just 14.\(^{14}\) Confirmation has traditionally been an important experience for young Anglicans and yet in just four decades it has become an insignificant feature on the landscape of the majority of Anglican parishes.

It could be argued that the vacuum left by confirmation has been picked up by other evangelistic and discipleship courses and that all is well if a wider view is taken. However others are deeply concerned at the poor spiritual formation that is taking place in our churches. Robert Warren, Church of England Officer for Evangelism from 1993, sees defective initiation as the primary cause of the weakness of Western Christendom.\(^{15}\) This concern is echoed in a more recent article by Chanon Ross who believes that much of what passes for Christian youth ministry is in fact “Moralistic, Therapeutic Deism.” She argues forcefully for a countercultural faith that is “an alternative to the world..[and] a community of adults who embody this difference.”\(^{16}\) This paper seeks to evaluate the most effective ways of structuring the confirmation experience so that candidates are formed spiritually and bonded to the Anglican Church.

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\(^{13}\) At the time of writing the groups promoting and coordinating the catechumenate in both the Christchurch and Wellington Dioceses are in recess.


\(^{16}\) Chanon Ross, “Jesus Isn’t Cool,” *Christian Century* (September, 2005), 25.
Finally the rite of confirmation suffers from a lack of a clear Biblical mandate and so its place in the life of the Church can be contentious. Confirmation preparation offered to candidates also varies greatly from Diocese to Diocese and parish to parish. Therefore a further facet to the background of this study is the debate in the Anglican Church and beyond about the place of confirmation in the contemporary ‘mission shaped’ Church. I will bring to bear the recent work that has taken place internationally that has sought to clarify the role of confirmation in this regard.

Overall this research is timely and important because the ministry body of the Anglican Church (Tikanga Pakeha) is currently undertaking a review of ‘Confirmation, Inclusion and Rites of Passage.’ This research will contribute to this wider discussion.

17 Alec Clark, Ministry Educator in the Diocese of Dunedin, is coordinating this review.
CHAPTER 2

Theoretical Framework
This chapter seeks to provide a theoretical framework for the discussion of confirmation and faith formation among young people in their mid to late teens. I will first of all review some key aspects of the history of confirmation as a rite in the Church from the apostolic age until today. I will go on to discuss the development of the ancient Catechumenate, its place in Church history and its 20th century revival. Connections will then be drawn between confirmation and the Catechumenate. I will go on to discuss the idea of ‘stages of faith’ as it applies to the faith development of young people and also ‘rites of passage’ and how this relates to my thesis. I will close with a summary of the theory and provide a cogent justification for this study.

Confirmation: Our discussion begins with the pattern of Christian initiation found in the New Testament. It was usual for new believers to be baptised in water in the name of Jesus18 and throughout the New Testament baptism is regarded as the visible sign of God’s transforming work and signifies death to the old self and rebirth in Christ.19 However there is no clear cut practice of initiation that emerges. For example Acts 8:17 and Acts 19:6 describe two occasions where apostolic hands were also laid on new believers following baptism. This seems to ‘complete’ the initiation because those baptised are said to be filled with the Holy Spirit as a result. Roman Catholics use these verses to bolster the theology that confirmation indeed ‘completes’ baptism.20 Interestingly Pentecostals quote these same verses to claim that baptism in the Holy Spirit is a further distinct experience following water baptism.

In the past Anglicans have also argued that confirmation completes baptism21 however contemporary Anglican scholarship generally considers Acts 8 and 19 to be exceptional occasions and must not be taken as the norm.22 An overwhelming number of examples in the New Testament show that at baptism new converts are

18 Acts 10:48 reports that some were “baptised into the name of Jesus Christ.” Acts 8:16 and 19:5 report that some were “baptised into the name of the Lord Jesus.”
19 Col 2:12 for example.
20 The Roman Catholic position is expressed in article 1304 of the Catechism of the Catholic Church; “Like Baptism which it completes, Confirmation is given only once…” Catechism of the Catholic Church (Geoffrey Chapman, 1994).
21 A. J. Mason was influential and contended that the gift of the Holy Spirit was not received until confirmation. A.J.Mason, The Relation of Confirmation to Baptism (London: Longmans, Green and Co, 1891).
filled with the Holy Spirit without the need for the laying on of hands – apostolic or otherwise. For this reason the author contends that confirmation is not a rite of Christian initiation but rather a rite involving the confirmation of baptismal vows, public witness and spiritual strengthening.

The initiation practice of the early Church, although diverse to begin with, began to coalesce from the end of the second century and the beginning of the third. Initiation took place through the Catechumenate with candidates receiving the laying on of hands from the bishop directly following baptism. However as infant baptism became the norm from the fifth century the catechumenate began to decline. Despite this decline candidates in the West were still brought to the bishop for the laying on of hands in confirmation but the exact form of the practice was diverse. This was exacerbated by the decision that only bishops could confirm and so the age of candidates varied considerably depending on the availability of a bishop.

The English Reformers continued the practice of confirmation and the rite was included in the Book of Common Prayer. The 1662 rubric requires “So soon as children are come to a competent age and can say in their mother tongue the Creed, the Lord’s Prayer and the Ten Commandments and also can answer to the other questions of this short catechism; they shall be brought to the Bishop [for confirmation].” Thus since the sixteenth century confirmation became compulsory for Anglicans.

Because of the imposition of the bishop’s hands, the invocation of the Holy Spirit and the claim of apostolic succession, it was believed by most Anglicans that confirmation somehow completed the rite of initiation that baptism began. The collect following the laying on of hands emphasises this connection when the bishop prays; “…We make our humble supplications unto thee for these thy servants, upon whom (after the example of thy holy Apostles) we have now laid our hands, to certify them (by this sign) of thy favour and gracious goodness towards them…let thy Holy Spirit ever be

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23 Acts 2:38ff for example.
24 The Catechumenate will be explained more fully in the next section.
25 In the Eastern Church baptism and confirmation through chrismation (anointing) have never been separated as was the case in the West.
26 The Book of Common Prayer.
with them.” The final rubric of the service reads “And there shall none be admitted to the Holy Communion until such time as he be confirmed…”27

This practice, reinforced over a period of four hundred years, had serious theological and practical implications. For example baptised children were excluded from full participation in the Church especially communion. In response to this the age of confirmation was forced down so that progressively younger children were making what was originally intended to be a mature and adult commitment.28 As a result confirmation became diminished in value.

However in the 20th century many of the pastoral, liturgical and theological problems relating to Christian initiation and confirmation began to be addressed. In 1971 the Church of England published the *Ely Report on Initiation* which stated that “Baptism cannot be added to or supplemented or ‘completed.’ It is the one and complete sacrament of Christian initiation.”29 This was reinforced in 1991 in *The Fourth International Anglican Liturgical Consultation* that met in Toronto. It stated that “Baptism is complete sacramental initiation and leads to participation in the Eucharist. Confirmation and other rites of affirmation have a continuing pastoral role in the renewing of faith among the baptised but are in no way to be seen as a completion of baptism or as necessary for admission to communion.”30 Clear emphasis was placed on confirmation as a rite for the expression of “a mature ratification of baptismal faith…Confirmation therefore stands as a pastoral office in its own right, and not as a part of the initiatory process.”31 However this has led to an inevitable crisis for confirmation. If baptism initiates candidates into full membership of the Body of Christ including a welcome at the Lord’s Table and commissioning for ministry and mission what then can confirmation possibly add?

For those baptised as infants, confirmation will always be a necessary rite for candidates to confirm their baptismal vows and publicly profess their faith. This is

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27 ibid.
28 Michael Green, *Baptism: Its Purpose, Practice and Power* (London: Hodder, 1987), 108. Speaking of a previous generation Green states that “…it has become customary for children to offer themselves for confirmation at any time between 7 and 16.”
29 Cited in Green, 103.
30 *On the Way*, 121.
mandated in scripture.\textsuperscript{32} Through baptism they are grafted into Christ’s Body and sealed with the Holy Spirit, however the personal and public confession of their faith must by definition be delayed until they are of a mature age. Current practice suggests that this is around the age of sixteen although it may vary somewhat depending on individual maturity. The laying on of hands is therefore not a sealing of the Spirit but rather a strengthening and further empowering of the Holy Spirit. At a social and emotional level candidates are also given an experience that in some way binds them to the wider Anglican Church through the ministry of the bishop.

It is also appropriate for confirmation to be used in other situations. For example unbaptised adults who come to a living faith should be baptised and then confirmed in the same ceremony. Although these adults are clearly able to give a mature declaration of faith at their baptism, the imposition of the bishop’s hands reminds candidates of their membership in Christ’s Body in time and space, binds them to the Church and strengthens them through the Holy Spirit. Again this has great significance in connection with faith formation.\textsuperscript{33}

\textbf{The Catechumenate:} One of the most distinguishing features of the Christian movement is its drive to pass on its message to the uninitiated, enfold them into the Christian community and have them join in the missionary endeavour. This basic missional pattern proved particularly successful in the first few centuries of the Church with new people seeking membership despite the real possibility of persecution and death. Membership of the Church became “both valuable and dangerous.”\textsuperscript{34} ‘Valuable’ because only those who had completed the lengthy preparation were initiated and ‘dangerous’ because of the strong likelihood of opposition and physical harm that accompanied baptised membership.

It was important that converts were well prepared before their baptism so that they would endure and remain loyal to Christ if they were arrested.\textsuperscript{35} As a result, a long

\begin{footnotesize}
\begin{enumerate}
\item[32] Romans 10:9
\item[33] This is also appropriate for those being welcomed into the Anglican Church who have come from other denominations.
\item[35] David Wright suggests that there may have been other reasons for rigorous and lengthy baptism preparation. He writes “Careful preparation for baptism was seen as essential, because baptism was commonly thought of as dealing with a person’s past corruption but not his future faults. This explains the practice of delaying loading of hands”.
\end{enumerate}
\end{footnotesize}
and complex process developed from about 180 AD for those who were preparing for baptism.36 Those being thus prepared were known as catechumens and the process was known as the Catechumenate. Both words were derived from the Greek word ‘echo.’ Instruction was to be so internalised that it was to be ‘echoed’ in the heart, mind and behaviour of the convert.

Although details of the Catechumenate differed between the eastern and western parts of the Church the basic structure was similar; Enrolment, Catechumenate, Election and Mystagogy.37 The ‘Enrolment’ stage involved an introduction to the faith and consisted of a process of free enquiry by the seeker. The ‘Catechumenate’ stage could last for a period of three years or longer and involved formation in faith, becoming familiar with scripture, the Creeds and prayer, exorcisms, transformation of behaviour and identification with the Church as the catechumen’s new family.38 The ‘Election’ covered the short period just prior to baptism and eventually took the form of the Lenten season. It involved a time of reflection, a scrutiny of behaviour and beliefs and purification. The rite of baptism then followed on the dawn of Easter day. It involved the naked catechumens being anointed and immersed in flowing baptismal waters using the Trinitarian formula. They were then dressed in white robes and anointed again by the bishop who marked them with the sign of the cross. Sometimes they were given milk and honey. The period that followed baptism was known as ‘mystagogy’ and involved the newly baptised reflecting on their new status as baptised persons and the meaning of the Lord’s Supper and taking their place as full members of the Church.

The Catechumenate, with considerable local variation, became well established throughout the Roman world by the third century. It became variously described in terms of a ‘march’ from Egypt, through the Jordon to the Promised land; the ‘gestation’ of a young child in the womb of the Church; the novitiate’ – the training of

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a young military recruit; and a ‘plant’ growing from a seed, into a tree yielding fruit.  

All these images reveal that new believers were expected to turn from their old lives, and learn a completely new way of life in the fellowship and nurture of the Church. The waters of baptism recapitulated in one, vivid image the catechumenal process as a whole.

From the fourth century however the Catechumenate began to decline. Following the Edict of Milan the Church began to enjoy tolerance, then freedom and finally privilege. This had a two-fold effect. First a trickle then a stream of people sought baptism and as a consequence the rigor of the Catechumenate was relaxed. This was compounded by the numbers of people seeking baptism who were not truly converted. By the fifth century the bishops instituted a new Catechumenate based on the Lenten season but this was sometimes shortened to only a few weeks. As a result the level of faith formation was dramatically compromised. Finally infant baptism became the norm and the Catechumenate disappeared altogether.

Apart from some isolated reforms this situation continued from the sixth to the 15th century. In the Middle Ages the catechumenate became simply a rite of preparation for baptism that took place at the church door or near the font. Despite the contraction of the rite a clear link with baptism was still maintained and the first three parts of the catechumenate could still be recognised namely Enrolment, catechumenate and Election to baptism.

From the 16th century the rites of initiation were re-evaluated as a result of the missionary activity of the Roman Catholic Church and the growing number of adult converts who were joining the Church especially in Asia and Africa. New forms of the catechumenate were developed as pre-baptismal rites for these new converts. In the 18th century “the African Church successfully established the catechumenate that not only advanced in stages but also lasted long enough to ensure the likelihood of perseverance in the faith.”

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39 Dujarier, 26.
40 Some argue that the rise of infant baptism also lead to the downfall of the Catechumenate but Dujarier argues against this. Dujarier, 31.
41 Johnson, 216.
42 ibid, 231.
43 ibid, 301.
In the 20th century the impetus for the catechumenate came in Europe from a general concern that the Church was being marginalised, believed to be partly due to an inadequate theology of baptism. A revival of adult initiation preceded by a short catechumenate was one response made by a group in Paris in 1957. However the most significant development in the 20th century took place in the deliberations of the second Vatican Council in 1963. In particular the Constitution of the Sacred Liturgy declared that...

The catechumenate for adults, comprising several distinct steps, is to be restored and to be put into use at the discretion of the local ordinary. By this means the period of the catechumenate, which is intended as a time of suitable instruction, may be sanctified by sacred rites to be celebrated at successive intervals.

This directive eventually led to the development of the *Rites of Christian Initiation of Adults (RCIA)* first published in Latin in 1972. Other denominations followed and began developing their own processes and materials. Anglicans in Canada and the US explored the catechumenate. In 1994 ECUSA produced in its *Book of Occasional Services* a suggested process and a liturgical framework for the catechumenate under the heading ‘Preparation of Adults for Holy Baptism: the Catechumenate.’ The Church of England was also involved in the development of the catechumenate. Peter Ballad of ‘The Catechumenal Network’ was especially influential. In the English context the catechumenate would often lead to confirmation or re-affirmation of baptismal vows because many candidates had been baptised as infants. The Anglican understanding of the catechumenal process was clearly expressed through the International Anglican Liturgical Consultation held in Toronto in 1991;

The catechumenal process begins with the welcome of individuals, the valuing of their story, the recognition of the work of God in their lives, the provision of sponsors to accompany their journey, and the engagement of the whole Christian community in both supporting them and learning from them. It seeks to promote personal formation of the new believer in four areas: formation in the Christian tradition as made available in the scriptures, development in

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The catechumenate was slower to develop in New Zealand. The Christchurch Diocese took steps to establish it from 1993. A ‘Catechumenate Core Group’ was established in 1994 with the goal of establishing the catechumenate in every parish of the Diocese. The Wellington Diocese began developments at a similar time and produced its own resource in 1996 which it called ‘The Catechumenal Kit.’ Two national gatherings took place in 1994 and 1996 under the heading ‘National Catechumenate Conference’ to promote the catechumenate nationally. Other Dioceses like Nelson did not show any interest in these developments partly because of their commitment to courses like Alpha. Today there seems to be fewer churches and Dioceses actively promoting the catechumenal process than there were five to ten years ago. However there are a handful of parishes and some Anglican schools who use a modified ‘catechumenate like’ process for faith formation leading to confirmation and sometimes baptism.

In summary the historic Catechumenate offered a process by which new converts were reoriented towards the way of Christ, counted the cost of following and were bonded to “mother Church.” In the 20th century this ancient practice was revived in a number of forms but all emphasised deep spiritual formation, bonding to the Church and a commitment to ministry.

In what way then is the ancient Catechumenate related to confirmation today? In the 20th century a number of Churches have adapted the Catechumenate to provide a process for those coming to faith in Christ and who want to join the Church. These catechumenal processes are primarily for those who have not been baptised but they can also be offered to those seeking confirmation or the renewal of baptismal vows. The Roman Catholic Church for example, provides in the RCIA, for persons undertaking ‘catechumenal preparation’ who are baptised and so not called

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48 Quoted in On the Way, 30.
49 For an evaluation of the history of the Catechumenate in the Diocese of Christchurch see Don Fergus, “The Modern Catechumenate in the Diocese of Christchurch” (MMin diss., University of Otago, 2007). He outlines its beginning, growth and decline.
50 Dujarier, 23.
catechumens but who are confirmed at the end of this process. In New Zealand ‘catechumenal like’ processes are also used for the formation of those seeking confirmation. The ‘Catechumenal Kit’ for example makes this clear. Bishop David Coles, who promoted the catechumenate in the Christchurch Diocese, stated that "the Catechumenate [is]…a process which is designed to equip and nurture adults on the faith journey towards baptism and or confirmation.” The Book of Occasional Services of the Episcopal Church allowed that, “due to limited resources,” the baptised and unbaptised could join together in a catechumenal process. At the conclusion the baptised person undertakes a rite known as the “Reaffirmation of the Baptismal Covenant.” There is however no direct mention that the catechumenal process may be an appropriate preparation for confirmation.

Having briefly explained the relationship between confirmation and the catechumenate I now turn our attention to the sociological and psychological factors that impinge upon teenagers being prepared for confirmation. This background will offer valuable insights into the dynamics of faith formation in the context of confirmation.

Stages of Faith: In the 1970s and 80s James Fowler postulated that faith develops in certain definable stages over a person’s lifetime. His theory was influenced by the psychological development work of Jean Piaget, Erik Erikson, and Lawrence Kohlberg. Fowler "proposed a conceptual framework for examining the cognitive and affective processes underlying our meaning-making activities throughout the life cycle." I intend placing the experiences of those confirmed within this framework of faith development.

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53 Quoted in Don Fergus, 65.
54 The Book of Occasional Services, 136.
Fowler proposed the following six stages that he suggested unfolded consecutively.\textsuperscript{58}

1. Intuitive-Projective Faith: The child is egocentric and meaning emerges through the imagination.

2. Mythic-Literal Faith: There is a strong sense of causality, justice and mutuality. Deities are thought of in literal, anthropomorphic terms.

3. Synthetic-Conventional: This stage is characterised by conformity. It is still pre-critical and subjects are incapable of detached examination. Conflicts are resolved by “appealing to mutually shared feelings and conventional interpersonal virtues.”\textsuperscript{59} This stage does not usually emerge before the twelfth year.

4. Individuative-Reflective Faith: This stage is characterised by internal angst and struggle and the personal evaluation of truth claims in the light of a range of new data. “…disembedding of the self from traditionally derived relationships may also be marked by a sense of commitment to self-chosen rules for governing relationships.”\textsuperscript{60} This is not usually attained before the age of 18.

5. Paradoxical-Conjunctive Faith: In this stage there is a growing acceptance of paradox and the multivalenced character of belief systems. The particularities of a person's faith tradition are recognised in the light of universal claims. This is not usually reached until mid-life.

6. Universalizing Faith: This final stage represents our ultimate calling as human beings and involves surrendering the self to the ultimate being. Praxis is in complete accord with faith and belief.

Despite the critique of some scholars in the field,\textsuperscript{61} Fowler’s theory has become well established in the areas of Practical Theology, Christian Education and Counseling. Drawing from his theory it is possible to locate the majority of Christian teenagers at Stage 3. Generally teens at this stage are ‘conformists’ in the sense that they seek the affirmation of adults or the peer group. Those at this stage are not yet ready to hold opinions and values that run counter to the prevailing norms. They don’t yet have the ability to ‘objectify’ religious faith and make personal assessments about it.

\textsuperscript{59} Moseley, 147.
\textsuperscript{60} Moseley, 147.
\textsuperscript{61} For example David Haywood, Romney Moseley and May Ford-Grabowsky all critique Fowler’s theory to some extent. See Moseley.
A sense of self is largely dependant on the relationships teenagers have with significant others. In Stage 4 there is a growing realization of the ambiguities of life. Young adults in their late teens and early twenties commonly begin reevaluating their faith position in the light of new information in the context of influential individuals and peers. This individuation process involves a movement away from the familial and traditional matrix of relationships towards a self chosen network. Some openly reject the conventional sources of wisdom like parents, teachers and ministers. ‘Self’ is increasingly defined by personally selected values.

Stage 5 requires considerable growth and maturity to attain however given the right circumstances older teens may move beyond Stage 4 toward this next stage. Those at this stage increasingly learn to work with paradox, tensions and unresolved conflict and there is a growing awareness that listening and conversation are the skills required for personal growth. The use of symbols in this stage becomes significant because of their ability to transcend simple categories.

Fowler suggested that many people do not grow beyond stage 3 - Synthetic-Conventional. It is however essential for teens in a Christian education context to begin moving through this stage to stage 4 - Individuative-Reflective Faith. If they become ‘stuck’ they may, in the face of the ambiguities and the inevitable pain of life, develop a narrow faith or reject faith altogether. Confirmation ministry must therefore have the intention of equipping mid to late teens to move from stage 3 to stage 4. Ministers must offer support through this difficult transition and demonstrate winsomeness and trust in the personal decision making abilities of candidates. They need to be non-anxious in the face of a range of candidate questions.

The content and setting of ministry should take into account the move away from conventional religion and allow candidates to explore faith in a non-threatening environment. Candidates need to move from accepting received wisdom to questioning and [re]discovering faith for themselves. Opportunities should also be provided for teens to hear the way other candidates are exploring faith, hence the importance of providing ample time for discussion. The stories of faith told by trusted adults are also important and can be especially helpful to candidates transitioning
from stage 3 to 4. As these older Christians tell the stories of faith, and faith itself is explored in a supportive way, candidates are more likely to develop a personal relationship with God and make the transition to stage 4.

Rites of Passage: The following section on ‘rites of passage’ further contributes to the context within which confirmation may be understood. ‘Stages of faith’ provides a structure with which to understand the key themes, values and transitions people make in their faith journey. An understanding of rites of passage provides an additional sociological and psychological perspective furnishing an overarching social context.

During the early part of the 20th Century the Belgian anthropologist Arnold van Gennep undertook the seminal research that laid the foundations for a rigorous understanding of rites of passage. He observed that in all cultures, rituals had been devised to enable individuals to move through the various stages of life. These stages have traditionally been associated with birth, adolescence, marriage and death. The rituals enabled individuals to navigate the various changes in status and identity that took place through these stages and reinforced the dominant world view. Van Gennep developed the notion of a three phase process that described these rituals; separation, transition and incorporation.

‘Separation’ involved the withdrawal of the individual from the family, tribe or community. A journey was sometimes made to a different location which may have included elements of danger. The ‘Transition’ phase was named the ‘liminal’ stage by van Gennep. His word is from the Latin meaning ‘threshold’ and marked a period where the individual began learning new values and a new role, moving across one of life’s ‘thresholds.’ This phase was often marked by curtailed freedom and hardship without the usual support structures that had previously pertained. The group of individuals passing through this phase often found themselves deeply bound together. Over time individuals would be reorientated toward their new role. ‘Incorporation’ was the final phase and marked the individual’s entry back into community life. A ritual would usually mark this transition at which time a new status

would be conferred upon the individual. This outward status reflected an ontological change in the individual who, through the process, had taken up a new identity; the old person had died and a new person had emerged. The person would begin living out their new role with its new rights and responsibilities. The community itself was also reshaped as it began treating the individual in a new way. New clothes or possessions came to symbolise the new status and role.

Rites of passage were clearly powerful events especially in traditional or tribal societies where numbers of people were smaller and relational connectedness stronger. However there is much evidence to suggest that even in industrialised societies individuals benefit from rites of passage because they enable individuals to successfully grow through one life stage to the next. Without this ‘transitional help’ individuals sometimes get stuck in old roles or fail to develop a confident, workable identity that enables psychological flourishing.

Confirmation itself has traditionally been understood as a ‘rite of passage’ offering young people a way of marking the movement from adolescence to adulthood.64 Reference is commonly made to mid to late teens undertaking confirmation having reached the ‘age of reason’, or who have ‘come of age’ and so confirmation may be seen as a rite straddling the stages of adolescence and adulthood.65

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64 Confirmation is also undertaken by older adults and those seeking to transfer from one denomination to another.
65 In a previous generation the outcome for the Church was commonly a negative one because following confirmation, candidates often withdrew from active participation in the life of the Church. The purpose of this thesis is to explore better approaches to faith formation through confirmation so that this problem is not perpetuated.
CHAPTER 3

Literature Review

I will now provide a short review of some of the literature relevant to this investigation. The studies span a period of over forty years dealing with both mid teens and adults. All but one of the papers focus on confirmation in a number of mainline denominations. The final paper studies the attitudes that core Roman Catholic youth have towards the Church.

Brown: I begin with L.B. Brown’s work of 1969 entitled “Confirmation and Religious Belief.”66 He interviewed over 300 Teachers College students from Palmerston North, Christchurch and Adelaide to compare their religious beliefs before and after confirmation. Subjects were from the Anglican, Methodist and Lutheran Churches but also included some Roman Catholics. He found there was little difference in the beliefs and behaviour of Anglican candidates before and after confirmation and beliefs were only slightly stronger than those who had ‘no denomination.’ Confirmation seemed to make little impact on their faith development. He found that Anglicans in their late teens were passive in their religious commitment and the Church itself held little influence in their lives. “Confirmation has been offered and passively accepted, with little continued involvement.”67 He put this down to the quasi ‘established Church’ status of the Anglican Church in New Zealand. The year of Brown’s research corresponds roughly to the high point of confirmations in the Anglican Diocese of Nelson and sheds some light on the quality of the confirmation experience offered by the Church at that time.68 This study offers a convenient marker from which we might compare other approaches to confirmation preparation including the present study.

Dawson: In 1993 Brian Dawson undertook research into confirmation in a Methodist context.69 He proposed three key elements in confirmation preparation; Preparation,

67 Ibid, 38.
68 It would be untrue to attribute the low impact of confirmation solely on the quality of preparation. The quasi ‘established Church’ status of Anglicanism and the prior faith commitment of those being confirmed during the 1960s would have contributed significantly.
69 Brian Dawson, “In Search of Meaning: Christian Initiation and the Rite of Confirmation in the Methodist Church of New Zealand/Te Haahi Weteriana o Aotearoa” (Diploma Extended Research Essay, Melbourne College of Divinity, 1993).
Celebration and Participation. The process is essentially a free adaptation of the catechumenate model beginning in Lent and culminating on Pentecost Sunday with a confirmation service.\(^{70}\) His study revealed the importance of experiential learning in confirmation as opposed to “passing on ‘head knowledge’ of who [sic] and what God and the church are.”\(^{71}\) Experiential learning will be of particular interest in this study as the ‘traditional’ and ‘catechumenal like’ methods of confirmation are assessed. It is hoped that this present study will build on Dawson in identifying the best ‘shape’ and style of confirmation preparation. Dawson’s study in a Methodist context also took place at about the same time that interest in the catechumenate was being shown in the Anglican Church and forms an interesting parallel development.

Niemela: A further study that has relevance took place in the Evangelical Lutheran Church of Finland in 2001 although the paper was not finally published until 2006. “Every year some 90% of 15 year olds in Finland attend confirmation classes in the Evangelical Lutheran Church of Finland…”\(^{72}\) Niemela found that confirmation classes were a significant part of youth culture. Peer influence and the right to be married in a Lutheran Church were the two main reasons young people chose to be confirmed. He also noted that “Confirmation classes have changed from knowledge-based teaching to broad activity. Effort is invested in providing not only understanding but also experiences and activity. At the core is the young person’s own questions on life and the teaching emanating from them.”\(^{73}\)

The curriculum is responsive, candidate centred and experiential. The study established that those candidates who had an enjoyable confirmation experience were most likely to become more positively disposed toward Christianity with a strengthened belief in God. Niemela also learned that because confirmation classes usually took the form of a fun camp with enjoyable activities young people looked forward to them and enjoyed participating. Confirmation is “doing fun things, developing a good team spirit, making new friends, getting to know the opposite sex and enjoying pleasant leisure time.”\(^{74}\) Niemela went on to warn that “there is a tendency for the change in attitudes among confirmands to fade rapidly after

\(^{70}\) Dawson, 76.
\(^{71}\) Dawson, 66.
\(^{72}\) Niemela, 177.
\(^{73}\) ibid, 178.
\(^{74}\) ibid, 189.
confirmation...Despite their intentions of participating in the activities of the parish after confirmation, only a minority of young people do take an active part and their attitudinal changes tend to subside.\textsuperscript{75} He also noted that changes were being made to the confirmation curriculum so that classes would run for a minimum period of six months. Lutheran Church authorities hoped that instead of classes being a single episode where the experience fades quickly, it would become a more integral part of the young person’s life and so ensure more lasting change.

Niemela’s work shares many commonalities with the present study especially the cohort from the Anglican schools. His methodology however is quite different in that he used a quantitative approach that sought to measure the differences between expectations and experiences using questionnaires before and after confirmation classes. I will make comments on Niemela’s insights into peer influence, experiential learning and ‘fun’ in the discussion section of this report.

\textbf{Savage:} Three years later, in 2004, Ian Savage investigated the meaning which Australian Anglicans confirmed as adults gave to their confirmation and the place which confirmation had in their faith journey.\textsuperscript{76} His methodology involved the use of in-depth interviews and case studies. Candidates experienced a form of ‘catechumenal process’ for confirmation preparation. As a result of this commonality Savage’s study is particularly important. The metaphors he developed to describe the stories of subjects included the following: ‘Belonging to myself’, ‘Returning/Starting over’, ‘Growing up’, ‘Joining the family’ and ‘Making a commitment.’ Although Savage’s subjects were adults, mostly in their twenties, these categories proved a helpful starting point for the development of explanatory categories in this current study. Savage also highlighted the importance of identifying life transitions that paralleled the confirmation experience.

\textbf{Rymarz and Graham:} A final study by Rymarz and Graham produced an important study published in 2005 entitled “Going to church: attitudes to church attendance

\textsuperscript{75} ibid, 189.
\textsuperscript{76} Ian David Savage, “Confessing Their Faith: An Enquiry into the Meaning which Anglicans Confirmed as Adults give to their Confirmation and the place which Confirmation has in their Faith Journey” (Ph.D. diss., Swinburne University of Technology, VIC., Australia, June 2004).
amongst Australian core Catholic youth."77 This very recent research is even more relevant for the current research than Savage’s work. The methodology involved the use of semi structured interviews which was a similar approach to the one I employed. Rymarz and Graham predicted a likely decrease in the participation of subjects in the Church in the future. They closed their study by suggesting that the establishment of supportive networks could be a way to address this drift away from the Church. This concept of peer support may be important for the present study.

CHAPTER 4

Research Design and Methods

This chapter begins with a discussion and justification of the methodology that I employed in my investigation. I go on to explain the criteria used to define the ‘traditional’ and ‘catechumenal like’ groups and the relationship between them. I will explain the sampling methods and the development of the two questionnaires. I will also explain how the interviews were set up and the general approach to the interviewing process that was taken. Finally I will discuss the approach to data analysis that will be employed.

Usual permission was sought and granted from the Otago University Ethics committee to undertake interviews with young people aged 15 years and over. The style of enquiry indicated that a qualitative approach would be most useful because it deals with the meaning young people place on their confirmation experience. A quantitative approach is not usually suitable for collecting data of this kind. As a result it was decided to use a narrative enquiry methodology. Listening to the stories of how young people experienced their confirmation journey would provide richly descriptive data that could then be analysed for categories and themes. This process would enable theory to emerge from observation.

Savage’s study used a grounded theory approach based on the stories of eight adults presenting four of them as case studies. However there are special challenges interviewing a predominantly teenage group. It was believed that some candidates would find it difficult to articulate their experiences, thoughts, feelings and motivations clearly and to describe the exact nature of their faith formation. It was therefore decided to use a semi-structured approach where interviewees would be guided through their confirmation experience enabling a clearer and more coherent picture to emerge. It was hoped that prompting from the interviewer would lead to deeper responses and discussion around some of the key questions relating to faith formation.

78 Rymarz and Graham used a similar methodology in their work with 14 and 15 year old Roman Catholic youth. Ibid, 55-64.
The thesis required subjects to be from one of two groups; those prepared for confirmation using a ‘traditional’ method and those prepared using a ‘catechumenal style’ process. Traditional methods of confirmation preparation in the Anglican Church have usually taken the form of ‘classes’ with considerable emphasis on instruction in doctrine with some additional attention given to ecclesiastical practice. Because of the nature of the content the Vicar has traditionally been best suited to lead these classes. Therefore the criteria selected for defining this group included the following; classes led by a sole clergy person, didactic teaching style employed with a duration of between 3 and 6 weeks.

**Catechumenate:** Characteristics of the ‘catechumenal style’ are taken from Peter Ball’s work on the catechumenate. He identified five essential features including Welcome, Accompanied Journey, Celebrations, Faith Sharing and Community. ‘Welcome’ includes the idea of providing an open, questioning environment where the stories of candidates are listened to and valued. ‘Accompanied Journey’ emphasises the need for faith formation to take place over an extended period of time. Companions are essential for this journey. ‘Celebrations’ are the marking of stages of the journey through special, festive occasions. ‘Faith Sharing’ is a broad category covering various aspects of spiritual formation. This takes place through scripture, prayer, worship and ministry in a context of listening and dialogue. ‘Community’ expresses the involvement of the whole Church and includes congregations, sponsors, clergy and special guests. There are clear links between these five features and the historic, four stage Catechumenate; Enrolment, Catechumenate, Election and Mystagogy.

For the purposes of this study it is also important to recognise that the criteria for each method are mutually exclusive. Leadership for example is either provided by a ‘sole clergy person’ or is shared by a leadership community in the context of an

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79 Ball, 5. “Until comparatively recently confirmation preparation amongst both evangelicals and catholics followed a didactic approach forged initially for the intelligent teenager.” On the Way, 15.
80 Peter Ball, Adult Way to Faith: Preparing for Baptism and Confirmation (London: Mowbray, 1992). His framework is affirmed in On the Way, 36. An alternative and more complex framework is provided by Clifford King Harbin involving 14 principles; Storytelling, Questions, Community of faith, Celebration, Conversion, Tradition, Mission, Integrity, Activity led by the Spirit and led by the laity, Creativity and adaptability, Catechetical methods, Heart over head, Generous style and Time. Clifford King Harbin, “Principles of the Catechumenal Process,” Christian Century (March 1999): 348.
81 The Episcopal Church offers a similar template for spiritual formation in its Book of Occasional Services, 114. “During the period of the catechumenate, the context of catechesis is a continual reflection on Scripture, Christian prayer, worship and the catechumen’s gifts for ministry and work for justice and peace.”
'Accompanied Journey.' The content of the two methods is either conveyed through 'didactic teaching' or takes the form of 'Faith Sharing' in the context of an 'Accompanied Journey' and a wider 'Community.' The duration of the two methods is either between 3 and 6 weeks or is an 'Accompanied Journey' taking place over a period of ten weeks or more such that 'Faith Sharing' takes place and 'Community' is formed. These criteria address the need for groups in the study to be mutually exclusive and as a result for candidates to be in either one group or another but not in a group that fulfils mixed criteria. This is important for the purposes of comparison.

**Sampling:** A list was developed from the Anglican Diocese of Nelson’s records of those who had been confirmed in recent years using the ‘traditional’ approach. Because of my role as Bishop’s Chaplain in the Diocese I personally knew the majority of these candidates and their preparing Vicars. Further subjects who were thought to have been prepared using a ‘traditional’ approach were identified through contact with a Christchurch Anglican parish. The Vicar of this parish was a friend who I learned had recently prepared a large group of young people for confirmation. I planned to interview a combined total of about ten candidates from this ‘traditional’ group.

A further list was developed of those who had been prepared for confirmation using a ‘catechumenal like’ method in the Diocese of Wellington and in two Christchurch Anglican schools - Christ’s College and St Margaret’s College. I personally knew the chaplains from both Christ’s College and St Margaret’s College and they graciously agreed to seek permission from school authorities and candidates on my behalf and to set up interviews. I had made contact with one of the subjects from Wellington and asked her to recommend the names of others who had had a similar experience. Again I hoped to interview about ten candidates from this ‘catechumenal like’ group bringing to twenty the total number of subjects. This would provide a broad base of data to work with given the available time.

A special effort was made to interview candidates who had been confirmed in the previous year or two. This would enable candidates to remember their experiences more clearly. They were also required to be between the ages of 15 and 19 at the
time of their confirmation. I was seeking to research mid to late teens rather than young adults.

**Instrument:** A semi-structured questionnaire was prepared and can be found in Appendix 1. Enough space was left after each question to provide for notes, quotes, expansion of answers and comments made by the interviewer. Initial questions dealt with basic, background information and then moved to questions relating to faith formation. Because of the intangible quality of faith formation I intended to ask questions dealing with their experience of the preparation and the service, the meaning they placed on their confirmation, life change since confirmation and their understanding of what it means to be a Christian. From this data the level of faith formation could be assessed. The basic data, such as current age, age at confirmation and parental involvement in the Church, would be presented in table form. An extra question was added to the subjects’ questionnaire in response to feedback following the first four interviews.

A further questionnaire was prepared for the parent or parents of the subjects to provide triangulation of the data. Questions were designed so as to gain insight into the degree of subjects’ life change including attitudes and behaviour. This was through the observations and knowledge of parents. The level of faith formation could then be made by inference.

**Interviews:** Subjects were then contacted by the author or a contact person to arrange a time for the interview. An information sheet was then sent to the subjects via email and in some cases this was read before the interviews. Between the months of January and May 2008 the author interviewed 37 candidates and received an email response from one further candidate. 15 were prepared for confirmation using a ‘traditional’ method and 23 using a ‘catechumenal like’ method. This was a much higher number than originally planned mainly because those arranging interviews were more successful in securing willing subjects than was initially expected.

Candidates at the Anglican schools were interviewed in an office with windows and the candidate was seated between the interviewer and the door to provide a non-
threatening and safe environment. Interviews took approximately 30-40 minutes. Interviews at Christ’s College and St Margaret’s College took place on a single day. Students were scheduled to be interviewed during a free period. The Christchurch parish group were interviewed over a Friday afternoon and Saturday morning. The Wellington group met me at St Paul’s Cathedral where I had arranged to use an interview room. The Nelson group were completed over a two week period during the university holidays. I interviewed most candidates in their homes although some came to the Anglican Centre in central Nelson.

I began each interview with personal introductions and the interviewee was invited to read and sign the consent form. The audio tape was switched on and the interview commenced. Questions were asked following the outline of the questionnaire but from time to time the subject was invited to expand on an issue. A reflective listening style was used throughout and a conscious effort was made not to ask leading questions. Questions were asked using a neutral tone of voice to encourage honest answers. At the end of the interview the subject was thanked and given a parental form. They were asked to invite their parent or parents to fill it in and post it back to me. Tapes were then transcribed and filed along with the hand written notes, consent forms and any parental questionnaires that were returned. The tapes and documentation were kept in a secure office.

**Analysis:** Hand written interview notes were analysed first and when the transcriptions had been completed further reading and analysis took place. This happened in stages as the various groups were interviewed. Analysis generally involved reading separate questions across all candidates without reference to their particular confirmation preparation experiences. A number of categories with codes were developed to summarise the data and these codes were entered in the margins of each questionnaire. Summary tables were there produced with interviewee numbers occupying the first column and the codes placed horizontally across the page. See Appendix 2 for some examples of these tables. Various methods of categorising the data were used in an attempt to identify the underlying structure of the experiences of subjects. The basic interpretive criterion used throughout was the level of faith formation experienced by each candidate and this included the preparation phase, the confirmation service itself and the time following confirmation.
The final stage of analysis included rereading the entire interview transcript of each candidate to gain a feel for their overall experience. This was compared with the kind of preparation experience the candidate had – either ‘traditional’ or ‘catechumenate like’. Various hypotheses were then tested in order to describe and summarise these experiences. This phase of analysis took a considerable period of time due to the richly descriptive nature of the data.

Throughout this process I was aware of my own interest and commitment to confirmation and ways of improving and developing this rite for young people. I was also aware that even though the interview setting was neutral and my questions open-ended, there was also the possibility that some young people may have felt the need to give, what they perceived were, the ‘right’ answers. However because of the level of honesty and emotion shown by subjects together with the parental questionnaires, I believe this factor did not significantly skew the data. I was also aware that once I settled on a basic hypothesis then non-conforming data may have inadvertently been screened out. However I delayed making a final decision on the interpretation of the data in order to minimise this factor. I was also aware of this phenomena and its potential influence.
CHAPTER 5

Statement of Findings

Of the 38 subjects who were interviewed, 33 were baptised as infants. Of the remaining six subjects, two were baptised on the same occasion as their confirmation, two were baptised a few months before and two were baptised a few years before. The average age of subjects at the time they were interviewed was 18.0 years with a range between 15 and 27. Of further interest is the average age of subjects in the ‘traditional’ and ‘catechumenal like’ groups and this is illustrated in Table 1.

Table 1 Aages of Those Interviewed

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Group</th>
<th>Number of Candidates</th>
<th>Average Age in Years</th>
<th>Range in Years</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>‘Traditional’ group</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>18.3</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>‘Catechumenal like’ group</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>17.7</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 2 gives a further breakdown of the two groups showing that subjects from the Wellington ‘catechumenal like’ group were in their mid twenties at the time of their interview with a narrow range while the Nelson Diocesan group had a broad spread of ages. Subjects from the Anglican schools and the Christchurch parish were younger with a narrow range.

Table 2 Breakdown of Age According to Confirmation Group

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Group</th>
<th>Number of Candidates</th>
<th>Average Age in Years</th>
<th>Range in Years</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>‘Traditional’</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nelson Diocese</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>19.4</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Christchurch Parish</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>17.1</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>‘Catechumenal like’</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wellington Catechumenal Group</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Christchurch Anglican Schools</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>16.5</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 3 shows the number of years since confirmation of the four groups. Of particular interested is the time since confirmation of the Wellington group.
Table 3 Years Since Confirmation

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Group</th>
<th>Number of Candidates</th>
<th>Average Years Since Confirmation</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>'Traditional'</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nelson Diocese</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>2.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Christchurch Parish</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>1.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>'Catechumenal like'</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wellington Catechumenal Group</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>7.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Christchurch Anglican Schools</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>0.6</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Almost all the subjects were aged between 16 and 18 at the time of their confirmation and most were at High School in either year 12 or 13. Of the 38 subjects 33 were from a traditional two parent family and five were from single parent families. Table 4 shows the gender breakdown for each group. A greater number of females than males are represented in each group.

Table 4 Gender Breakdown for Each Group

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Group</th>
<th>Male</th>
<th>Female</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>'Traditional'</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nelson Diocese</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Christchurch Parish</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>'Catechumenal like'</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wellington Catechumenal Group</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Christchurch Anglican Schools</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>23</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Question 19 in the questionnaire sought to identify the key features of the confirmation preparation method experienced by individuals and groups. The features pertaining to each of the four groups are given below with further analysis in Chapter 6.

**Nelson Group:** Interviewees from this group, representing six different parishes, conformed generally to the ‘traditional’ criteria. Without exception the classes were taken by clergy where the number of candidates in each class was in the range of between one and seven with an average number of 4. The majority of interviewees referred to the use of a book or printed material from which instruction and information was derived. This generally conformed to the ‘didactic’ teaching method. Invariably however there was also reference to an encouraging atmosphere where
questions were welcomed and faith shared. Confirmation preparation lasted for an average of 4 weeks.

Christchurch Parish: This group also used a didactic style but at other times employed a more reflective and experiential method. For example some interviewees referred to hand-outs but one candidate also said “…people shared what they’d experienced…”82 Although there were no official sponsors assigned to candidates there were never-the-less a number of mature Christians and invited guests involved from time to time. The group also enjoyed an overnight retreat on the night before the confirmation. Although the preparation journey was shorter than the ‘catechumenal like’ groups (approximately 6 sessions) it was still long enough to encourage relationships and spiritual growth. According to interviewees there appeared to be only partial attention to faith formation through scripture, prayer, worship and ministry although ‘Bible Study’ was mentioned frequently.

Wellington Group: This group conformed most closely to Ball’s catechumenal scheme. Candidates enjoyed an open, supportive environment. A question box was used to collect questions raised by candidates and these were answered. Companions journeyed with candidates over a period of 10 weeks where spiritual growth was encouraged and expected. Spiritual practices like Lectio Divina, journaling and various methods of prayer were also taught. Weekends away were also part of the process as well as special meals. Faith sharing was a particularly strong feature of this group and was based on listening to scripture, prayer and journaling. A strong community developed which included sponsors.

Christchurch Anglican Schools: This group also conformed substantially to Ball’s catechumenal scheme. Candidates were encouraged to bring their questions. In fact one entire session was devoted to ‘Tricky Questions.’ Companions journeyed with candidates and attended some of the sessions with them and stood alongside them during the Confirmation service. Special guests were also invited to contribute to some of the sessions. Baptisms of a small number of candidates at Sumner Beach and a sleepover in the Cathedral the night before the confirmation service were also important features. Much of the content was discussion based but there

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82 Subject 37, interview by author, audio tape recording, Christchurch, 31 May 2008.
was less emphasis on ‘Faith Sharing.’ This was evidenced by less frequent mention of faith formation through scripture, prayer, worship and ministry by interviewees.

Find below in Table 5 a summary of the degree to which the groups conformed to their original criteria.

Table 5 Analysis of Styles of Confirmation

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Confirmation Preparation Criteria</th>
<th>General</th>
<th>‘Traditional’</th>
<th>‘Catechumenal like’</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Average duration in weeks</td>
<td>Approximate size of group</td>
<td>Led by single clergy/person</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nelson Diocese</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Christchurch Parish</td>
<td>6.5</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>No</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wellington Catechumenal Group</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Christchurch Anglican Schools</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The following pages contain a summary of the major themes identified in the data. Because faith formation is an intangible quality these themes offer an indirect route to its assessment. The information will be presented irrespective of the style of confirmation preparation employed. An analysis of the two methods of confirmation preparation will be made in the next chapter.

Public Statement of Faith: For the majority of candidates their confirmation was important because it enabled them to make a personal and public declaration of faith. The entire confirmation experience gave candidates who had previously been hesitant, coy or apologetic about their faith an opportunity to claim it for themselves publicly. Confirmation seems to have provided candidates with a vocabulary with which to articulate their faith in front of their peers and family. “[my confirmation]
gathered all the things that had happened in the years before into one."83 About half the candidates referred to the importance of this public declaration of faith.

Linked to this was a consistent mention of a greater sense of confidence in their faith that the confirmation experience seems to have engendered. One candidate said “It gave me more confidence to be public about my faith…during the confirmation period I spent more time thinking about it so it reassured me of what I thought really.”84 Another candidate said “I’m a bit more confident about my faith and things. God’s not such a, or faith isn’t such a scary thing for me anymore, or showing it’s not such a scary thing, like letting people see that I do believe in something.”85

Other candidates seemed to go a step further and saw confirmation as an opportunity to express how much their faith meant to them. They were not only confident but expressed pride in having faith in God. They seemed to rejoice in being different to other students. An Anglican schools candidate said “I guess the whole point of confirmation is saying I have a relationship with God and I’m proud of it and the whole of both of our schools were there.”86 Another one said;

‘You felt almost proud of yourself for being able to stand up in front, because that’s really hard. Like my best friend is not religious at all and she will often give me a bit of stick about being religious and it’s really hard to stand up there and say ‘Look I believe in my faith and I want to continue it and make these promises for myself.’ So to be able to do that, you know, made yourself quite proud… And you were proud of those that had done it as well – to do the same thing in front of their friends.”87

Joining the Church: About half the interviewees spoke about their experience in terms of joining the Church or being included in the Church family. This was particularly evident in the Anglican schools group. Typical phrases included;

“[confirmation] gives you something like a lifelong relationship with the Church,”88 “I kind of feel more part of the Church as well,”89 and “Now that I’ve done it I feel that I’m more a part of the Church now.”90 The data seems to indicate a movement from

84 Subject 38, interview by author, audio tape recording, Christchurch, 31 May 2008.
85 Subject 25, interview by author, audio tape recording, Christchurch, 30 May 2008.
86 Subject 28, interview by author, audio tape recording, Christchurch, 30 May 2008.
87 Subject 23, interview by author, audio tape recording, Christchurch, 30 May 2008.
89 Subject 32, interview by author, audio tape recording, Christchurch, 31 May 2008.
90 Subject 18, interview by author, audio tape recording, Christchurch, 7 March 2008.
implicit membership in the Church to a much more explicit sense of belonging and responsibility.

In a small number of cases this sense of belonging was particularly strong and interviewees reported an almost overwhelming sense of being welcomed. Typical responses included; “it’s the whole Anglican community accepting me … I belong to every Cathedral and Anglican Church around the world.”

Comments about joining the Church were less common in the Christchurch parish group with only one interviewee associating their confirmation with joining the Church. Two of the eight Nelson candidates who don’t currently attend an Anglican Church never-the-less considered their confirmation to be a commitment to the Anglican Church. Both gave the impression that there was some personal dissonance and perhaps a sense of disloyalty in attending a non-Anglican Church. One candidate said “Well it’s pretty hard now because we’re not actually in the Anglican Church any more…I guess if anyone asked, I guess I’m an Anglican…I still identify with Anglicans.” The theme of ‘joining the Church’ was absent from the Wellington group.

Many candidates referred to the strong sense of support they experienced from the wider Church community especially during the confirmation service itself. One interviewee said “I just felt this overwhelming sense of joy in the fact that there were other people there looking out for me.” Another reported that “having that feeling of like family and support as well, it was really good.” A Nelson interviewee said “Everyone knows you and is looking after you, taking your place in the community.”

Emotional Experience: The entire journey of confirmation was very emotional to some candidates especially as the experience culminated in the confirmation service. The verb to ‘feel’ was commonly used to describe the confirmation service. The following quotes were typical; “…it felt good to be formally recognised as being

91 Subject 31, interview by author, audio tape recording, Christchurch, 30 May 2008.
92 Subject 3, interview by author, audio tape recording, Renwick, 29th January, 2008.
93 Subject 38, interview by author, audio tape recording, Christchurch, 31 May 2008.
94 Subject 36, interview by author, audio tape recording, Christchurch, 31 May 2008.
95 Subject 2, interview by author, audio tape recording, Richmond, 28th January, 2008
confirmed” 96 and “I felt like it was becoming a part of me, sort of, more so than anything else.”97

For others there were more overt signs of emotion. “At some point I started crying…I think I was managing to keep it away for most of the first part…I couldn’t keep it in any more…it was going to find a way out whether I wanted it or not.”98 Another said “when you actually went up and knelt I thought I was going to cry. All these emotions.”99 Occasionally a candidate linked their experience more directly with the activity of God. One said…

I’m easily distracted, but never once was I distracted by anything that night, I just found it such an emotional time for me – not only being up there by myself getting confirmed, but watching those closest to me there doing it. It’s so hard to describe how I was feeling and what I thought of it – it’s definitely something I’ve never experienced before like that –I felt like I made that connection with God when the Bishop put his hands on my head.100

Two candidates began to cry as they spoke to me about their confirmation as they reconnected emotionally with it. In both cases this happened at the end of the interview after trust had developed and the questions themselves began to probe more deeply. In both cases they were especially moved when the Bishop laid hands on them. For one of the interviewees their confirmation had taken place just three weeks before and so the experience was still very fresh but for the other person it had taken place about 6 months before. Overall the group from St Margaret’s who had been confirmed just three weeks before the interview were able to describe their experience more clearly than the other groups and seemed especially able to articulate their emotions.

By contrast a small number of candidates used mainly cognitive words to describe their experience like ‘think’ or ‘understand.’ In describing his experience of the confirmation service one interviewee said

‘I can see that from other people’s perspective and certainly from boys at this school, that they didn’t really understand what it was and I think to come to that service made them realise, and see the process that we went through – laying

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96 Subject 15, interview by author, audio tape recording, Christchurch, 7 March 2008.
97 Subject 18, interview by author, audio tape recording, Christchurch, 7 March 2008.
98 Subject 37, interview by author, audio tape recording, Christchurch, 31 May 2008.
99 Subject 27, interview by author, audio tape recording, Christchurch, 30 May 2008.
100 Subject 31, interview by author, audio tape recording, Christchurch, 30 May 2008.
A final small group of candidates did not seem to experience any strong emotions at all. One interviewee said “I don’t know if other people felt something, but I didn’t feel any sort of…experience at all or anything like that.”

Peers: The Anglican schools students were typically from different friend groups before their confirmation however during the process of preparation they developed a very close bond. A young woman reported,

One of the things I’ll always remember…is that we were all so close by the end of it. We started off not really knowing each other - different friend groups, different schools. Some of us were friends already, some weren’t. When we started out nobody really wanted to say anything. [We were] all a bit nervous and by the end of it they couldn’t get us to shut-up! I’ve seen those guys heaps out of school.

A young man from Christ’s College, after being asked what was memorable for him, said “Being confirmed at last. But also with people within my own year, peer group.” These relationships seemed to flourish in an environment where all kinds of questions were welcomed and students constantly felt supported and affirmed at whatever stage of their spiritual journey they were at.

The Wellington group also enjoyed a rich relational confirmation experience. One reported that “…new relationships form. So the group was quite tight. I remember when it was coming near the end of it some of them were a bit ‘oh we should be doing something afterwards as a group – I don’t want to break up the group.’” Most of the interviewees from the Christchurch parish group had known each other for most of their lives and so the confirmation process enabled existing relationships to grow stronger.

The most notable feature of the Nelson interviewees was that many of them didn’t seem to remember the names of the people who they were confirmed with. After

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101 Subject 12, interview by author, audio tape recording, Christchurch, 7 March 2008.
102 Subject 15, interview by author, audio tape recording, Christchurch, 7 March 2008.
103 Subject 21, interview by author, audio tape recording, Christchurch, 30 May 2008.
104 Subject 19, interview by author, audio tape recording, Christchurch, 7 March, 2008.
105 Subject 6, interview by author, audio tape recording, Wellington, 30 January 2008.
reviewing the full list of people confirmed in the Nelson Diocesan groups it became clear that many confirmation groups were of mixed ages and life stages. This was quite unlike the other three groups who were made up of young people of very similar ages. This is confirmed by an inspection of Table 2 and provides a reason why the Nelson subjects did not often mention the role of the group in their experience.

Finally those who chose companions who were only slightly older than they were reported a less satisfactory experience than those who selected mature adults to journey with them. One candidate felt let down and even betrayed by his companion who was approximately the same age and of similar maturity. This soured the candidate’s confirmation experience somewhat.

**Journey:** Candidates from all groups commonly used the language of journey to describe their experience. Some candidates gave the clear impression that their confirmation was an important stage along the journey of faith but it did not represent a dramatic development. For example an Anglican schools student reported that “[confirmation] kind of marked a phase in my life.” 106 Another one said it was a “journey to explore faith.” 107 Others used stronger language and reported that confirmation was a very significant marker for them. A Wellington interviewee said “It was a milestone in my walk with God and gave me another shove in the right direction.” 108 Another said “Confirmation was sort of a more formal marker of taking responsibility for ministering – exploring ministry.” 109

For others it was like a new beginning. On the whole these candidates were brought up in the Church but their confirmation was like a new phase of the journey. One interviewee said “Hopefully [my confirmation will be] the start of the rest of my journey.” 110 Another said “I think it’s just another start to a journey – the continuing of the journey.” 111 Others described confirmation in terms of a tentative beginning to the journey. An Anglican school student said “It’s only part way on a journey I think for some people, probably me included – but I think it’s definitely just the step up from

106 Subject 28, interview by author, audio tape recording, Christchurch, 30 May 2008.
107 Subject 30, interview by author, audio tape recording, Christchurch, 30 May 2008.
108 Subject 9, questionnaire submitted to author, 31 January 2008.
110 Subject 2, interview by author, audio tape recording, Richmond, 28 January 2008.
111 Subject 20, interview by author, audio tape recording, Christchurch, 30 May 2008.
how we felt before.” Still others spoke in terms of rediscovering something about the spiritual journey that they had known once but had lost. One said “I think I’ve got more direction in my life…I guess it sort of bought me more back on track and down to earth because I was running out and doing what I like.”

A final group seemed to be uncertain as to whether confirmation was merely a part of their spiritual journey or represented an entirely different kind of experience. They made initial use of journey language but then sought to reframe their experience trying to find a different metaphor. For example one of the Christchurch parish candidates said “It wasn’t a major turning point in my life – but it is a turning point because the decision was mine and so what happens after it is my decision as well – so what I do now is up to me rather than I’m still being influenced by [my] parents.”

Opportunity to Learn: The third most mentioned meaning interviewees placed on their confirmation experience was that it represented an opportunity to learn. One candidate said

> It just opened my eyes really. All those questions, like why is there a Trinity and why is God like three in one and just all those kind of questions I didn’t really understand and we went over the Lord’s Prayer and just things like that like ever since you were about 5 you used to say it, you just know it, you don’t really understand it and just being able to really mean what you say. It was good.

Others said “It was just interesting to learn more things because I hadn't really known much about religion and that I’ve learned a bit more about it since doing it.” Learning involved getting to know other candidates and leaders together with their ideas, opinions and reasons for faith. One said “[confirmation] made me see other people’s perspectives…It was quite interesting to learn about what everyone else thinks about it.”

Maturity/Adulthood: A small number of interviewees recognised that their confirmation coincided with their transition to adulthood. This was a common

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112 Subject 21, interview by author, audio tape recording, Christchurch, 30 May 2008.
113 Subject 26, interview by author, audio tape recording, Christchurch, 30 May 2008.
116 Subject 19, interview by author, audio tape recording, Christchurch, 7 March 2008.
117 Subject 26, interview by author, audio tape recording, Christchurch, 30 May 2008.
response among Anglican schools candidates. One said “I’m a bit more mature and just a bit more understanding from the confirmation process.” Another said “No one pressured me into making the decision so it was sort of almost like a point where I matured, so it was something that I decided on my own.” A Wellington interviewee said…

…it matched up with the developments – I was first year university, this was sort of the first steps of me starting to take up a bit more independence, the following year I moved out of home for the first time and went flatting. So in terms of matching up with my life at that time, it was a nice ‘match’ in terms of me taking responsibility for myself and my faith and those sorts of things in a more formal manner.

Confidence: The Confirmation process led to a greater sense of confidence in the faith for the great majority of interviewees. A Wellington candidate said “I became more confident in the way I interacted with people regarding my faith and stopped shying away from the hard questions.” This was typical across all four groups. An Anglican schools student said “After being confirmed, I have more sort of confidence to stand up to those who don’t – who look at me and say ‘oh she’s religious, why would you want to do that’ type thing – I just ignore them – don’t retaliate, there’s no point.”

For the Anglican schools interviewees this confidence seemed to be linked to their growing knowledge. One young man said “The biggest thing for me now, is I know my faith well and it’s just spreading it and applying it to your daily life…Yes, like I’m not embarrassed – I’m strong in my faith and I want to stick by it so I’m definitely very confident.”

Life Change: Question 22 addressed the issue of life change. The most common response, reported by 12 subjects, was that their faith and belief in God had been strengthened through confirmation. A Nelson candidate said “I think I have a stronger belief in God and in what he’s doing for me, because before I was confused about that…I tell people I’m a Christian now – I didn’t use to do that. I used to be

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118 Subject 25, interview by author, audio tape recording, Christchurch, 30 May 2008.
119 Subject 30, interview by author, audio tape recording, Christchurch, 30 May, 2008.
120 Subject 6, interview by author, audio tape recording, Wellington, 30 January 2008.
121 Subject 9, questionnaire submitted to author, 31 January 2008.
122 Subject 23, interview by author, audio tape recording, Christchurch, 30 May 2008.
123 Subject 13, interview by author, audio tape recording, Christchurch, 7 March 2008.
kind of ashamed of it I suppose.” This inner psychological change also included new feelings of peace, satisfaction and harmony.

A small number reported that they were engaging with others differently and becoming more patient and forgiving. “It’s like you kind of have more patience towards other people – I just seem to notice that. Yes, being nice to people and treating them as you’d like to be treated sort of thing and understanding why” reported one interviewee. Still others reported that they had become more aware of other people and how they were relating to them. For example one said…

_I think I am more aware of other people around me in the faith and where they are at. Whereas before I was just one of them, but now that I’ve been confirmed I think a bit more where they’re at and what they are doing about their faith – it sort of means that you can help them a bit better and things like that._

A number of others reported an increase in private devotional activities like prayer and Bible study. One said “…I think certainly for me I’ve been able to pray a lot more and I’ve put a lot more emphasis on prayer myself.” Another said “It’s made me more active in my relationship with God – I pray more and read the Bible.” About 10 interviewees reported a similar life change.

A smaller number reported a more dramatic change. One young man said that “I have turned away from drinking and the party scene. I do Bible reading after prep. I’m praying more and in depth. I go to church more regularly and youth group.” In a similar vein another interviewee said “I pray every night which is something I hadn’t done. I’ve also taken to wearing my cross necklace all the time. Hopefully it will influence my life a little bit more when I get involved with the church.”

Parental Comments: Questionnaires were received from eight parents – four from the Nelson Group, one from the Wellington group, and three from the Anglican schools group. No parental questionnaires were returned from the Christchurch.

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124 Subject 8, interview by author, audio tape recording, Nelson, 1 February, 2008.
125 Subject 33, interview by author, audio tape recording, Christchurch, 31 May 2008.
127 Subject 12, interview by author, audio tape recording, Christchurch, 7 March 2008.
128 Subject 33, interview by author, audio tape recording, Christchurch, 31 May 2008.
129 Subject 4, interview by author, audio tape recording, Renwick, 29 January 2008.
130 Subject 31, interview by author, audio tape recording, Christchurch, 30 May 2008.
parish group. This represented a low return rate and was partly attributed to the fact that no stamped, self addressed envelop was provided and partly to the reliance on subjects passing on the questionnaire to their parents. The relatively high return rate from Nelson parents was because I knew many of them personally.

All eight parents spoke warmly and positively about the confirmation experience of their son or daughter. One father corroborated the comments of his daughter that significant life change had taken place and gave two examples that confirmed that this had happened. These examples were different from the ones his daughter gave. His answer to ‘Give evidence of changes’ included the following comments; “Two examples of having formed a position affecting others (one in sport, one socially) and stood up for what she believed in, at some cost to her in terms of what others think. We have supported her in these decisions.”131 The observations of two other parents were consistent with the experiences of their children.

However for the remaining five parents who returned questionnaires their observations of their son or daughter differed to some extent from the subject’s reported experience. In each of the five cases this difference was not substantial but significant enough to call for comment. For example one parent mentioned that his son had increased his Bible reading activity since confirmation. This was not mentioned by the subject. Another believed that confirmation had had the effect of increasing their daughter’s knowledge saying she has “more in depth knowledge and understanding of aspects of the Christian Church.”132 Again this was not reported by the subject. Overall however the parents confirmed the broad nature of the faith development of their child through the process of confirmation.

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131 Parent of subject 31, questionnaire submitted to author, Christchurch, 2 June 2008.
132 Parent of subject 8, questionnaire submitted to author, Nelson, 1 February 2008.
CHAPTER 6

Analysis and Discussion

I will begin this section by analysing the ‘fit’ of each confirmation preparation method with its original criteria. I will proceed to offer a way of interpreting the data that provides a more satisfactory explanation for the confirmation experience of subjects. In the light of this new model I will then review the data on the basis of the original thesis question which asked what kind of confirmation experience was most conducive to faith formation. I will finally offer a model that could be used to design a confirmation preparation process that provides the optimum opportunity for faith formation.

‘Fit’ with Criteria: I begin by turning our attention to the original criteria set down for the selection of groups of interviewees. I originally proposed two broad methods of confirmation preparation; the ‘catechumenal like’ and the ‘traditional’ methods. Interviewees were then selected from groups which were believed to conform to either of these two methods. The Wellington group and the Anglican schools group represented the ‘catechumenal like’ method and the Nelson group and the Christchurch parish group represented the ‘traditional’ method.

However as explained in Chapter 5 the four groups did not conform exactly to these initial criteria. The Wellington and Anglican schools groups conformed substantially to the ‘catechumenal like’ criteria. The main point of difference was the Anglican schools less rigorous approach to spiritual formation through scripture, prayer, worship and ministry.133 In the same way the Nelson cohort conformed substantially to the ‘traditional’ criteria. The teaching methods employed were largely didactic however the six separate classes which the 8 candidates were drawn from all used a responsive question and answer and ‘faith sharing’ style of learning to some extent. This was the only observed deviation from the original ‘traditional’ criteria.

More significantly however was the way the Christchurch parish group deviated from the ‘traditional’ criteria. For example it was not led by a sole clergy person in the context of a ‘confirmation class.’ A mixed group of trusted leaders took responsibility

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133 Despite devoting one session to the Bible this did not constitute a thoroughgoing methodology of spiritual formation based on scripture.
for the curriculum. A didactic teaching method was mainly used and an apologetic tone was sometimes taken by the leader. One candidate reported “And…[the leader] would usually have some big question like – how much evidence is there for God.” However a more reflective and interactive teaching style was also used. In addition the meetings took place over a longer period of time than ‘traditional’ classes usually do. As a result relationships and spiritual formation took place in a more effective way than usually happens in traditional confirmation classes.

In fact the Christchurch parish cohort enjoyed an experience more akin to the ‘catechumenal like’ process of the Wellington and Anglican schools groups clearly conforming to the criteria of ‘Welcome,’ ‘Accompanied Journey,’ ‘Celebrations’ and ‘Community.’ It only partially conformed to ‘Faith Sharing’ because of its relatively low emphasis on worship and ministry. However candidates enjoyed a stronger link to a worshipping congregation than was the case for either of the ‘catechumenal like’ candidates. Overall the Christchurch parish group did not fulfil the ‘traditional’ criteria. In fact it more closely conformed to the ‘catechumenal like’ process.

Clearly it is not possible to rigidly define the kinds of confirmation experiences which candidates had. In fact the data shows that subjects from all four groups experienced significant faith formation during their confirmation experience. For example a Wellington candidate said “I think I’ve taken faith more seriously or more intentionally, as opposed to it being just part of my church and God and all that.”

One from the Anglican schools group said “It was of high significance. I’m a Christian now.” A Nelson candidate said “I value… [my confirmation] a lot. I like to say that I’m confirmed, because I’m stronger in my faith now.” And finally a Christchurch parish candidate reported “[my confirmation] had a lot of meaning. It helped me find my own way. I’ll take over now.”

New Grouping: As the interview data was analysed it became clear that candidates could be grouped in a way that was more sympathetic to their actual confirmation experiences rather than the nominal method of confirmation preparation originally

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134 Subject 34, interview by author, audio tape recording, Christchurch, 31 May 2008.
135 Subject 6, interview by author, audio tape recording, Wellington, 30 January 2008.
136 Subject 29, interview by author, audio tape recording, Christchurch, 30 May 2008.
137 Subject 8, interview by author, audio tape recording, Nelson, 1 February 2008.
defined. Three distinctive groups emerged which I will denote as ‘Journey’, ‘Transformational’ and ‘Low Impact.’ The ‘journey’ group consistently used the language of journey and referred to their confirmation as significant but only one stage among many others in their journey of faith. The ‘Transformational’ candidates stood out significantly from the ‘journey’ group. They experienced confirmation as a deep and transformative event in their lives akin to a sudden birthing of faith. It was an event that made a profound impression on them. The final group I have named the ‘Low Impact’ group because their confirmation experience seemed to make little impression on them. Overall there were 24 in the ‘journey’ group, 6 candidates in the ‘transformational’ group and 8 in the ‘low impact’ group. I will now discuss the way in which these three groups were identified and go on to show how the experience of the ‘transformational’ group conforms to the classic definition of ‘rite of passage.’ Interspersed will be some comments on ‘stages of faith.’

**Journey:** The subjects in this group were united in their use of the journey metaphor to describe their confirmation experience. They used a variety of words like ‘journey’, ‘track’, ‘marker’ and ‘direction.’ For them confirmation was important but it was just one experience among many others that contributed to their spiritual growth. Some hinted that the confirmation experience may have been more than just part of a journey with the use of phrases like ‘step up’ used but when the data was analysed more closely these subjects were still referring to a gradual process of development.

Many of these subjects had been raised in stable homes with at least one parent involved in the Church. These subjects seemed to have had many opportunities to express faith and to grow spiritually. When it came to the confirmation service there were an average number of emotional references. ‘Journey’ candidates saw confirmation as a public profession of faith more so than a formal joining of the Church. This is explained by noticing that the majority of subjects were already involved in a church and so would already understand themselves as having joined.

Faith formation took the form of growing spiritually and being strengthened in their faith through confirmation. Around one third also mentioned development of Christian character and behaviour as well as a deepening commitment to the spiritual disciplines like Bible reading and prayer. Interestingly this was the only group who
saw faith formation in terms of becoming more involved in ministry. They had been Christian believers for some time and were well aware of the ministry expectations involved. These candidates experienced a wide range of preparation and were represented in all four groups. The entire Nelson group were in this category.

Transformational: Interviews for this group usually proceeded without any initial indication that they were in any way different from the ‘journey’ group. In fact the data on these candidates reveals significant references to journey. However at question 20 which asks about the subject’s confirmation experience, the ‘transformational’ subjects invariably gave significantly different answers to the ‘journey’ group. For example they referred to their experience in very vivid, emotional terms which indicated a new beginning had taken place. One said “I don’t [sic] know there was [sic] all these emotions. I won’t forget it ever. And you just feel so much support… I felt so content and happy in my choice…It’s one of those moments like you’ll never forget, a defining moment.” 139 A further candidate said “Yeah, there were tears…they just sort of flowed. I felt the love of everyone there and it was just so overwhelming. It was silent tears just trickling down my face. I wasn’t ashamed of it or anything.” 140

These subjects understood confirmation as a way of joining the Church. This was much more common than the ‘journey’ group who already considered themselves part of the Church. One third of these candidates associated confirmation with a public profession of faith. They also saw confirmation as a means of learning more about the Christian faith and this led to an increase in confidence in their personal faith. Again this was a more frequent theme than the ‘journey’ group who had had a longer experience in the Church. Two out of the six subjects in this category also saw confirmation as a way of making a promise to God to remain faithful.

Although this group reported feeling strengthened in faith, growing spiritually, developing the spiritual disciplines and having a greater commitment to ethical requirements the most significant feature of their faith formation was confirmation preparation and the service taken together as an integrated experience. Faith

139 Subject 27, interview by author, audio tape recording, Christchurch, 30 May 2008.
140 Subject 38, interview by author, audio tape recording, Christchurch, 31 May 2008. This candidate had this experience during his baptism which took place during the same service as his confirmation.
formation also proceeded dramatically and quickly. An outstanding example of this is given below in one candidate’s answer to the question ‘Describe your experience of the confirmation service.’

Amazing – they had the most wonderful sermon. I’ve never been so enchanted by one because she related it to our age group and everything about it was amazing. I’m easily distracted, but never once was I distracted by anything that night. I just found it such an emotional time for me – not only being up there by myself getting confirmed, but watching those closest to me there doing it. It’s so hard to describe how I was feeling and what I thought of it – it’s definitely something I’ve never experienced before like that – I felt like I made that connection with God when the Bishop put his hands on my head – I didn’t feel like ‘oh yes, it’s just the Bishop’ – it’s the whole Anglican community accepting me. I was so grateful we could do it in the Cathedral, because now I don’t feel like I belong just to the school chapel, I belong to every Cathedral and Anglican Church around the world – I’ll walk in and say this is where I belong. So that was a great aspect to it.  

It is also important to note that the ‘transformational’ candidates were from either the St Margaret’s group (4) or the Christchurch parish group (2). All six subjects were either 16 or 17 and currently in years 12 or 13 at High School. There were five females and two males. Two were from families who were very involved in the Church, two with one parent who was very involved and two from families where neither parent was involved. It is clear that ‘transformational’ candidates were from a cross section of backgrounds but all shared some level of Christian knowledge growing up in their family home. In fact five of the six said they had ‘always known God’ when asked to describe their upbringing in relation to the Christian faith. The ‘transformational’ group are made up of young people who seem to have a natural ‘instinct’ or affinity for God.

Of the ‘transformational’ candidates only one had a parent who returned a questionnaire. He observed that his daughter had developed more confidence in life and emphasised this strongly. This can be explained in terms of the impact that the

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141 Subject 31, interview by author, audio tape recording, Christchurch, 30 May 2008.
142 Arniika Kuusisto noted the influence of parents in the transmission of faith. He claimed; “The most significant factors in transmitting values that stand out in the data are democratic relationships between parents and children, parental example, encouraging children to do their own thinking, and positive experiences of both religion and the social dimension of the religion’s community.” Arniika Kuusisto, “Transmitting Religious Values in Adventist Home Education,” Journal of Beliefs and Values 24:3 (December 2003): 283
confirmation experience had on the candidate’s sense of identity. They had been resourced in their transition from being a person who was uncertain about their faith identity to someone who was properly confident in the reality of God and their relationship with God.

It should be noted that all the ‘transformational’ candidates had been confirmed within the previous six to eight months and so their recollections of the event would still have been vivid. Niemela found that the experiences of his subjects tended to ‘fade’ quickly following the confirmation camp however there is no evidence to suggest that his subjects had ‘rites of passage’ experiences.\footnote{Niemela, 189. A longitudinal study is suggested to test this phenomenon.} I found that language was much less rich and memories less comprehensive for those who had been confirmed several years before.

Finally none of the ‘transformational’ candidates mentioned becoming more involved in ministry as a result of confirmation. They generally reported feeling ready to engage more deeply in church life but the ministry implications of their experience was still one step beyond this. This may indicate that they had not fully engaged with the full consequences of their experience. This group represents those most deeply formed in faith by the experience of confirmation and will shape the new model of faith formation developed later in this chapter.

Low Impact: The ‘low impact’ group included those who did not exhibit an explicitly Christian faith. They undertook confirmation partly through curiosity, partly through family involvement in the church and partly because of peer influence. As with the previous two groups they also employed journey language to describe their experience and like the ‘transformational’ group saw confirmation as a means of joining the Church and a way of making a mature public commitment to God. This seems anomalous for those not showing explicit signs of faith until note is taken that they were mainly from an Anglican schools environment where the Church forms a social backdrop to life.

What distinguished this group was the high number who said that confirmation had not affected them much at all. This was despite the fact that at other times in the
interview they said that their experience had been memorable and they had grown in their knowledge of the Christian Faith. However unlike the other two groups an increase in knowledge had not been commensurate with an increase in confidence in the Christian Faith – confidence levels had been low. Surprisingly this group reported a greater commitment to attending Church as a result of confirmation. This was higher than either of the other two groups and reflects an outward orientation of faith the locus of which is the Church as an institution rather than the person of Christ.

Rites of Passage Perspective: I want now to describe the confirmation preparation process from a ‘rites of passage’ perspective and comment in more detail on the experiences of the ‘transformational’ group. This will enable us to determine whether or not the ‘transformational’ candidates had a ‘rites of passage’ experience and the ways their experiences conform to van Gennep’s structure.\footnote{Don Fergus noted that Christ’s College and St Margaret’s College were developing confirmation as a ‘rite of passage’ for students. Fergus, 2.} We noted in Chapter 2 the three stages that constitute a rites of passage experience; Separation, Transition and Incorporation. In some cultures one stage may receive more attention than another and so these experiences are shaped in different ways according to cultural needs.

Separation: The first stage corresponds to the advertising of a forth-coming confirmation in either a parish or Anglican School and the opportunity to attend a series of preparation sessions. Those who are curious or uncertain are also invited to attend for a week or two so that an informed decision may be made in the first few weeks. This stage also involves discussions between potential candidates and chaplains, priests, parents and other family members as well as informal discussions between potential candidates. It is not known if candidates were publicly enrolled in confirmation preparation however it is unlikely that the wider school or parish community knew much about these developments. This is somewhat different to the classic ‘rites of passage’ framework where the community is fully aware of the social and individual changes that are about to take place.

The majority of the ‘transformational’ candidates were grateful for the opportunity to express their faith publicly and so joined the confirmation group quickly and
enthusiastically. A small number of them had discussed it with their parents or friends but on the whole this was a personal decision to ‘own’ their faith. Separation conforms broadly to the catechumenal stage of ‘enrolment’ which is open-ended and encourages free enquiry until the point of decision to follow Christ is reached.

**Transition:** The ‘Transition’ stage follows and corresponds to the beginning of confirmation preparation. Candidates become orientated towards a new routine of meeting weekly and gradually the confirmation journey takes shape. The challenge and cost of confirmation begins to be felt as candidates sacrifice time and energy to attend and a process of reprioritisation takes place in their lives. The character of the new group is established as candidates get to know each other. Members receive mutual strength and encouragement as the process unfolds due to the common challenges. This accelerates the establishment of group identity. This conforms to van Gennep’s structure describing this stage as particularly challenging and likely to enhance the bond between candidates.

The group is further enriched by the presence of trusted leaders and companions. This prevents the group from becoming just another peer group. Not only do leaders provide learning content and guidance they also act as role models and support people. Companions also take on the role of example, confidant and support person. It is essential that candidates choose their companions well. In this rich social environment faith formation is more likely to take place.¹⁴⁶

As candidates work through the content presented each week and participate in discussions, they gain new insights and perspectives. Learning takes place. Their world view is challenged and expanded. Ethical requirements are discussed and reflected on. Gradually candidates become more aware of the significance of confirmation and the new status and identity that this will confer. However because status is, to a significant extent, a social construction this change is largely unrealised during the preparation stage because the wider community is unaware of these developments. Because identity embraces both social and psychological dimensions this too only develops gradually.

Group members become increasingly important to each other as the journey of
discovery continues. The final aspect in the liminal stage takes place as candidates
withdraw on retreat just prior to the confirmation service. This is a time of final
bonding and the reaffirmation of their developing faith, values, status and identity and
their final preparation for the rite on the following day. In tribal societies this phase
usually included the learning of new roles, skills and behaviours in the transition from
adolescence to adulthood.

The ‘transformational’ group all reported that the preparation experience was
stimulating, very social and had the effect of strengthening faith and reinforcing the
Christian world view. There was a strong emphasis on learning and being open to
new things. The bonding of candidates into a supportive cohesive group was the
dominant theme. However candidates in the ‘transformational’ group did not stand
out significantly from other candidates during this stage.

Integration: The ‘Integration’ stage of van Gennep’s scheme corresponds to the
confirmation service itself and the period of time following. Candidates are presented
to the bishop with the support of either chaplain or priest and/or sponsor in the
presence of the wider community, family and friends. The occasion is very formal
with a set liturgy, movements and actions. The focus of the service centres on
candidates declaring their baptismal promises, the laying on of hands by the Bishop
for spiritual strengthening and the naming of their true identity. This identity is
publicly declared as candidates respond to the Bishop’s question ‘Will you commit
yourself to this life?’ by saying…

\[
I \text{ will, with God’s help. Through God’s grace I will forgive others as I am}
\text{forgiven; I will seek to love my neighbour as myself, and strive for peace and}
\text{justice; I will accept the cost of following Jesus Christ in my daily life and work;}
\text{with the whole Church I will proclaim by word and action the Good News of}
\text{God in Christ.}^{147}
\]

These ethical and evangelistic aspects of identity are combined with an ontological
dimension as the Bishop lays hands on the candidates and prays “Creator Spirit,

\[^{147}\text{The Anglican Church in Aotearoa, New Zealand and Polynesia, A New Zealand}
\text{Prayer Book He Karakia Mihinare o Aotearoa (Christchurch: Genesis}
\text{Publications, 2002), 391.}\]
strengthen N with your gifts of grace, to love and serve as a disciple of Christ.”

The true identity of candidates is confirmed in their being named as belonging to Jesus Christ. The community also acknowledges the newly confirmed status of the candidates by saying, immediately following the imposition of the Bishop’s hands, “Amen! May we and they together be found in Christ and Christ in us.” In this way candidates are reintegrated into the community as confirmed people with strengthened roles and responsibilities.

For the ‘transformational’ group this final stage of integration was most significant of all. It was an intensely emotional time with some candidates crying. For them the change in status was accompanied by a deep sense of change in personal identity. The words of the service affirming their status as followers of Christ seemed to be efficacious in bringing about a new awareness and experience of Christ. The confirmation preparation came to a climax and clear focal point.

‘Transformational’ candidates also felt welcomed into the Church as their true family. They felt enfolded and supported. A number reported feeling proud that they had made this step for themselves in front of others. ‘Transformational’ candidates also reported feeling ready to take up new responsibilities and to find new ways to become more involved in the Church. They felt they had ‘come of age’ and attained a new level of maturity. A number of candidates also felt that their peers and family members saw them differently and had begun treating them differently. This ‘integration’ stage cements the candidate’s new identity in the presence of the community. The public nature of this rite is essential as candidates now have something to ‘live up to.’

As with the previous stages the integration stage clearly conforms to the final ‘rites of passage’ stage. A new status is conferred also signifying a new role and responsibilities. In tribal societies participants sometimes received a new name, title or clothing to symbolise these changes. None of the ‘transformation’ candidates mentioned receiving any kind of symbolic gift.

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148 Ibid, 393.
149 Ibid, 393.
Stages of Faith Perspective: Fowler’s work sheds further light on the experience of the ‘transformational’ group. All six candidates showed some evidence of moving from stage 3 to stage 4. They commonly reported that the confirmation process had helped them to ‘own’ their faith and they felt more confident in being different and being known as a Christian. This movement from conventional faith to an individuutive faith is evidence of a move from stage 3 to stage 4.

The confirmation preparation experienced by the ‘transformational’ candidates facilitated this movement by providing an environment where free enquiry and exploration was encouraged. In neither of the confirmation groups represented by the ‘transformational’ subjects was there a focus on the transmission of information only. Candidates were encouraged to explore faith and the implications of faith without fear of ‘getting it wrong.’

All ‘transformational’ candidates enjoyed a group context where a variety of more mature Christians were involved. This seems to be important in the transition from stage 3 to 4 as young people begin to form a sense of identity and meaning and begin to ‘try on’ a variety of identities to ‘see what fits.’ They begin to project themselves into the future and shape a vision of who they could become. The presence of wise, understanding and authentic sponsors and young adults provide models of what a life of faith might look like and has the effect of informing and inspiring them towards this. All members of the ‘transformational’ group spoke warmly of chaplains, priests, sponsors and other resource and support people.

Finally there were a number of features of the preparation offered, especially the Anglican schools group, that more accurately fitted the transition to stage 5 in Fowler’s scheme. For example leaders did not hesitate to address the difficult questions of faith and did not seem anxious about how candidates would cope with paradox and uncertainty. Members of other faiths were at times invited to contribute and talk about their perspectives. However I found little evidence that the differences between faiths were explored in detail or the ways in which the Christian faith was distinctive. As a result the paradoxes inherent in these kinds of discussions may not have been fully explored. All four ‘transformational’ candidates from the Anglican schools also spoke of the use of symbols in their confirmation preparation. This is
especially important in the movement from stage 4 to 5 because of the multivalenced way symbols mediate truth.

**A New Model of Faith Formation:** I present the following model for confirmation preparation in response to the interview data and interacting with the historic catechumenate and background information on ‘rites of passage’ and Fowler’s ‘stages of faith.’ This model is offered as a means of faith formation for young people in their mid to late teens being prepared for confirmation. It could also be used for those wanting to be baptised and those seeking to renew their baptismal vows.\(^\text{150}\) Young adults and older persons might also benefit from this process but these age groups are not the primary group of interest of this study.

This model takes its basic shape from the Catechumenal process proceeding in distinct stages with the transitions marked through ritual. The proposed model has three distinct stages and two rituals and represents a simplification of the RICA pattern which has four stages and three rites. I have named the stages ‘Exploration’, ‘Catechumenate’ and ‘Vocation’ with two rituals; Enrolment and Confirmation. Enrolment takes place on the first Sunday of Lent and the confirmation service on the Day of Pentecost. Exploration is an open ended period that culminates on the first Sunday of Lent with an Enrolment service. The Catechumenate is the 13 week period from the beginning of Lent until Pentecost. The period of Vocation is for seven weeks following Pentecost. The total period for confirmation preparation is therefore 20 weeks.\(^\text{151}\)

**Exploration Period:** Very early in the New Year young people in their mid to late teens are given the opportunity to be confirmed. This opportunity is made known to all the Anglican churches in a particular area or Regional Deanery and may include up to 8 churches. It is important that the number of candidates exceeds a minimum

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\(^{150}\) There is a tension between inviting folk with a variety of motivations, ages and stages to participate in a catechumenal process and limiting the group to young people who are likely to enjoy peer relationships and reinforce growth in faith more strongly. Given the low numbers of young people seeking confirmation at the present time it is acknowledged that forming a group consisting of 10 or more teens would be difficult.

\(^{151}\) An alternative structure may focus on Advent Sunday as the day of confirmation with the periods of Enrolment, Catechumenate and Vocation taking place during the preceding 20 weeks. Dawson also suggests a structure beginning at Lent and culminating with confirmation on Pentecost Sunday. Dawson, 76. A common timetable in the Church of England runs from “September to Pentecost including baptism at Easter.” *On the Way*, 130.
threshold of about 10.\textsuperscript{152} This is an open ended period and is so named because it represents a time of consideration and exploration of the possibility of being confirmed. Those who feel they are ready to confirm their baptismal promises are encouraged to take up this opportunity. Youth leaders in particular would be encouraged to make this opportunity known among the young people in their groups who are 16 years of age or over.

The expectations of those who move on to the catechumenate stage are clearly named and explained. The leaders responsible for the process are also named and at this stage a leadership team would be formed to manage and lead the process. It is necessary for each candidate to have at least one leader from their home church to be part of the leadership team. This is to foster trust, support and encouragement for candidates. Those who decide to continue to the next stage are asked to select companions from their home church. Companions are to be older Christians who are mature in the faith and who are able to support the candidate through to confirmation and beyond.\textsuperscript{153} It is not appropriate to choose a peer.

**Enrolment Ritual:** This is the ritual for those who have decided to be confirmed. It would take place on the first Sunday of Lent\textsuperscript{154} in the home church of each candidate and consists of the following parts; Presentation, Promises of candidates, Promises of companions, Promise of the congregation, Prayer by the Vicar and Enrolment of names. This takes place as a part of the usual worship service for the congregation. Each candidate, after the enrolment of names, receives a journey symbol\textsuperscript{155} from a parent, youth leader, minister or companion. The promise of the candidate covers aspects such as a pledge to grow into their baptismal promises, to attend worship, to serve and to discern their gifts. The companion promises to pray, support and be a godly example to the candidate. Finally the congregation promises to support and pray for the candidates.\textsuperscript{156}


\textsuperscript{153} This develops Rymarz and Graham’s idea of developing a network of support for young Catholics. Rymarz and Graham, 62.

\textsuperscript{154} It would be necessary to offer other discipleship opportunities to young people who miss the annual confirmation preparation period. This would simply form part of an extended enrolment process that never-the-less leads towards Lent the following year.

\textsuperscript{155} Such as a walking stick, compass or GPS.

\textsuperscript{156} Some of these ideas have come from The Book of Occasional Services, 114-125.
It is essential to include the congregation as much as possible in the entire confirmation process. This was neglected in most groups studied but from a developmental and theological perspective it is very important. For example Roehlkepartain and Patel have shown the influence of faith communities on the spiritual and social development of children and adolescents.\footnote{157 E Roehlkepartain and E. Patel, “Congregations: Unexamined Crucibles for Spiritual Development,” in Handbook of Spiritual Development in Childhood and Adolescence, ed. Eugene C. Roehlkepartain (Thousand Oaks, London, New Delhi: Sage Publications, 2006).}

Catechumenate: This period is divided in two. The first 6 week period runs from Lent through to Easter and the second period is for the seven weeks running from Easter until Pentecost. The overall purpose of both periods is to form the candidate spiritually in preparation for their confirmation. Evidence for faith formation is sought in terms of transformation of life and responses to set questions. Candidates meet for a two hour meeting each week at a time of mutual convenience. The location of meetings is important as this effects group dynamics. Fowler’s insights suggest that a location away from a traditional church building is best rather than associate meetings with conventional religion. Many candidates will be looking to assert their own independent thought and will be pushing away from more conventional expressions of faith.

As the 13 weeks unfolds the group gradually develops a sense of unity and cohesion and candidates themselves are spiritually formed. Initially the emphasis is on welcoming candidates warmly and providing hospitality for them. Leaders should provide an open and supportive environment where questions are strongly encouraged. Candidates are trusted to be themselves and to make their own decisions. Learning takes place as candidates are encouraged to reflect on their faith in the light of experience. Scripture is used to resource this journey but always with an eye to the application of scriptural truth to the life situations of candidates.

Leadership of the group is shared among trusted Christians whose life is consonant with their faith and who have a winsome, non-judgmental approach. Again this enables candidates to hear the experiences of faith of respected leaders who become role models and who facilitate the gradual faith formation of candidates. It is
important to emphasise at this point that faith transmission is more likely to be accomplished through the influence of other disciples rather than through didactic instruction alone.

The spiritual disciplines are talked about, developed and practiced. These become resources for faith formation over time. Candidates are encouraged to experiment with different spiritual practices like journaling, Lectio Divina and the Jesus Prayer. Symbols of faith are also introduced and used. These may include candles and holding crosses. This is part of the process of trying different identities to see what approach to faith and the spiritual life ‘fits’ them best. Content is covered in creative ways to take account of the learning styles of candidates.

The Creeds, the Lord’s Prayer and the Commandments provide part of the content for the 13 week period. These ancient catechumenal requirements are studied, discussed and memorised. The ethical requirements of being a follower of Christ are also drawn out and discussed along with the ‘shape’ of the life of a disciple. Each candidate is invited to reflect on his or her own life in the light of these requirements. Companions are encouraged to pray daily for their candidate and to attend some of the weekly meetings. There may be approximately three specific meetings to which they are invited during the 13 week period.

Throughout this process the candidate’s respective churches are encouraged to pray for them and prayer cards may be produced to facilitate this. As well as that candidates are encouraged to become involved in the ministry of their church in some way. This may be through playing music, the public reading of scripture, social service work, praying, visiting or serving morning tea. The Vicar or Priest in charge clearly needs to be involved in this aspect of the catechumenate although others may also be engaged in leading the weekly meeting.

Over Easter the group goes on retreat together to a secluded place. This is for the purposes of ongoing spiritual formation, prayer, Bible study, discussion, building relationships and reflection. Time is devoted to the celebration of Easter and to the

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158 A tension must be maintained between candidates learning the content of faith and reflecting on and being challenged by the content in the light of experience.
appropriate marking of the half way stage of their confirmation journey. It is recommended that candidates join a local church for worship on Easter Day.\textsuperscript{159}

A final retreat happens on the Friday and Saturday nights before the confirmation service. The Bishop joins the group for at least part of the time. Again this should happen at a remote location so that the group is drawn even more closely to God and to each other without external distractions. The Bishop explains to candidates what will happen in the service on the Sunday but also takes time to meet with candidates personally and to examine their faith. This is according to the ancient practice of scrutiny and serves as a means by which candidates name their faith. There is a general discussion about the faith journey that has unfolded for the candidates over the previous 13 weeks.

**Confirmation Ritual:** The Confirmation service would take place on Pentecost Sunday with all candidates together in the presence of family, friends, companions, leaders and other members of the wider church community. It would be necessary to select a church building large enough for the occasion. The Cathedral could be suitable if the respective parishes were near by. Members of the respective churches would all be invited to attend as this represents a very significant step for the candidates and is a source of great blessing and encouragement for the whole church. The link between local church and candidate as well as the wider Anglican Church and candidate needs to be clearly established.

The service would follow the standard confirmation service from page 387 in *A New Zealand Prayer Book* and its style would be dignified and formal. This seemed to be important for interviewees because it emphasised the solemnity and importance of the step being taken. Companions and the respective Vicars would present each candidate and stand near to them. The giving of symbolic gifts to candidates would be encouraged. Candidates may be given a copy of the Apostles or Nicene Creed and also invited to give a short testimony to their faith in Christ. A shared meal of celebration following the service would be very appropriate. Candidates would be received and welcomed in their home church on the following Sunday and invited to give a short testimony to the local congregation.

\textsuperscript{159} Note the importance of ‘fun’ that Niemela identified. Niemela, 189.
Vocation Period: This is the final stage of the process and involves the weeks following the confirmation service. It deals with the call of each confirmed person to ministry and mission in God’s world. It lasts for seven weeks to mirror the Easter season. It relates to the period of mystagogy of the ancient Church and enables the confirmed young people to reflect on the nature of God’s call on their life. Particular emphasis would be laid on the Eucharist, the meaning of baptism, the gifts of the Spirit and ministry. These themes come from the early Church but also tie in well with the season of Pentecost. The theme of ‘faith and work’ would also be considered.

The style and shape of the meetings would continue to be open, relational and reflective. Both leaders and confirmands would continue to share their experience of faith in the world however the confirmed would be given an ever increasing leadership role. The meetings would gradually become a community of disciples enjoying mutual support and learning.
CHAPTER 7

Summary and Conclusions

I will first of all summarise the recent background to this paper then go on to develop my conclusions. Since the 1970s there has been a growing recognition in the Anglican Church that baptism is the one and only rite of Christian initiation. Therefore baptised children receive a welcome at the Lord’s Table and are encouraged to take an active part in the life of the Church as full members. As a result there is no longer any pressure for children or young teenagers who are not yet ready to make an adult commitment to be confirmed in order to receive communion. However this has led to a crisis in the importance of confirmation in the life of the Church and many parish priests, in the face of a full calendar of events and programmes and few potential candidates, no longer offer it.

Moreover Anglican Churches throughout the country are increasingly made up of people from different denominational backgrounds, many of whom choose to delay the baptism of their children until the teenage years. There are also a small but significant number of adults who are coming to faith who have not been baptised as infants. From time to time people from these two groups present themselves to their parish priest for baptism. As a result there is an increase in the number of adult baptisms being performed in our parishes. These factors militate against the need to offer confirmation since adult baptism itself provides candidates with the opportunity to make a mature, public confession of faith.

However this study has revealed that candidates, baptised as infants, find confirmation to be a very important time of faith formation. This was evident no matter what method of confirmation preparation was employed. Candidates found that confirmation gave them an opportunity to confess their faith publicly and they found this very helpful. Confirmation also gave them a vocabulary of faith and they felt strengthened to live as Christians in the community. Some saw confirmation as an opportunity to declare their baptismal promises personally and saw this as a step toward maturity and taking responsibility for their lives. As a result they understood themselves to have joined the Church and were ready to take a more adult role in the life of the Church. Some expressed remarkable affinity to the Anglican Church and
appreciation for being part of a wider family in time and space. It was clear that confirmation indeed binds candidates to the Anglican Church through the preparation process and the ministry of the Bishop.

The prevailing stereotype of young people today includes features such as playful cynicism, an aversion to commitment and an unwillingness to stand out in a crowd. Data from this study indicates a somewhat contrary view. Candidates reported enjoying the demands of confirmation preparation and of standing up in front of their family and peers in order to make a definite statement about their faith. Many of course were apprehensive but in the end felt proud that they had overcome their fears. There were a surprising number of candidates for whom the confirmation service provoked many other emotions. Some even reported shedding tears because of the emotional intensity of the occasion.

The presence of peers was particularly important. Candidates appreciated journeying with others of approximately the same age and also learning from each other as fears and doubts were shared. The presence of trusted adults was also important. Learning new things and recognising the coherence of the Christian faith, in some cases for the first time, was also appreciated.

As a result of these benefits confirmation was a positive means of promoting faith formation for candidates. Generally candidates were at the age of questioning life and faith and considering the kind of lives to lead. Confirmation resourced them in this by enabling them to develop a workable faith capable of withstanding the pressures of life.

The original thesis of this study proposed that ‘catechumenal like’ confirmation preparation would offer superior faith formation than the ‘traditional’ confirmation class method. However it was difficult to differentiate precisely between these two methods. In practice there is a sliding scale of experiences between the two extremes. Ball provided a helpful template to describe the ideal ‘catechumenal like’ experience and this was used as a template to measure the experiences of the various groups.
This study however uncovered a significant trend. A small number of those who had been prepared for their confirmation with a ‘catechumenal like’ process had a much more intense experience compared with other candidates. To this extent therefore ‘catechumenal like’ confirmation preparation is indeed superior to the ‘traditional’ method. For these candidates confirmation was a ‘rite of passage’ and as a result they experienced deep spiritual formation. Formation involved spiritual, emotional, cognitive, volitional and social dimensions. They also reported a strong ethical aspect to their life change and reported making positive decisions about their lives as a result. These decisions included developing the spiritual disciplines, character development, ethical behaviour and attending church. There was little reference however to involvement in ministry or service.

This deep experience can be partly attributed to the style of teaching that was employed in the preparation sessions. There was an holistic approach to learning and formation and not just the provision of information. Leaders modelled the Christian life and used a range of creative teaching methods. Participants were encouraged to actively reflect on their lives in the light of scripture.

In the previous chapter I proposed a new model of confirmation preparation as one possible implication of this study. The model is tied to the Church year beginning in Lent with a confirmation service taking place on the day of Pentecost with a further period of 7 weeks exploring the topic of vocation. The ancient catechumenate, ‘rites of passage’ learnings and Fowlers ‘stages of faith’ all inform this model. It suggests that several parishes could work together to arrange a confirmation process for 10 or more young people. Planning for this may take as long a year or more. Leadership would be shared by trusted adults using educational methods designed for the formation of faith in Christ. The content of meetings would come from scripture and the creeds and candidates would be invited to develop a reflective dialogue between scripture and their own life experiences.

Candidates would also be encouraged to select a mature, adult Christian as a companion who would pray and walk alongside them during the 20 week process. Special retreat days would feature as well as times of special celebration. The spiritual disciplines would also be taught to enable candidates to develop a vital and
personal faith in God. Candidates would be linked to their local church to develop bonds of fellowship and to develop the candidate’s gifts and ministries.

This study suggests a number of areas for future research. For example a follow-up study could be arranged with candidates after two, five and ten years. A longitudinal study of this kind would provide valuable data on confirmation especially on the differences between those who had a rite of passage experience and those who did not and those who experienced a more ‘traditional’ confirmation preparation process and those who experienced a more ‘catechumenal like’ process. An improved response rate among parents could also be achieved by providing them with stamped addressed envelopes.

Niemela suggested that many candidates in his Finnish study undertook confirmation as a result of peer influence. The role of peers was also important in this study but was overlaid by the reported significance of the personal and public nature of candidates’ decisions. The interrelationship between personal choice and peer influence could be fruitfully explored especially among candidates from the Anglican schools group. Roehlkepartain also suggests that congregations themselves perform an essential function in faith formation and it would be fruitful to investigate the way in which their home churches influenced our subjects.

More information about candidates’ current ‘stage of faith’ would enable more accurate assessment of their spiritual progress through the confirmation experience. Developing a questionnaire with more focussed questions could educe this information. Of special interest would be the level of critical thinking, articulation of faith, source of identity and self esteem possessed by candidates. Following Niemela’s methodology candidates could complete questionnaires before and after the confirmation experience to determine the magnitude of their faith formation and movement through the stages.

The study also revealed some anomalies in the ministry practice of some parishes. For example two candidates were confirmed a few months after their baptism. This is not consistent with the best theology or practice of our Church and so a study of
current Diocesan policy and practice is suggested with the view of publishing national guidelines.

Comprehensive policies, liturgies and resources for confirmation have been developed by other denominations in various countries around the world however the resources provided by the Anglican Church in New Zealand are meagre. It is clear that, despite the current state of the catechumenate in this country, we should develop our own resources for confirmation and promote them throughout the province.

In this study I have demonstrated that the catechumenal process, linked as it is to the ancient rite and in harmony with what we know about ‘rites of passage’ and the ‘stages of faith’, is able to provide a context and a process for profound faith formation for young people being confirmed. It also offers a rigorous and proven approach to discipleship for people of any age and has considerable potential to strengthen Anglican identity and bind candidates to the Anglican Church. This Church has the resources and the people to develop the policies, liturgies and support required to re-present confirmation as a vitally important means of forming faith in Christ among our young people. We need to develop this taonga that has been gifted to us as an essential plank for the mission of our Church.
Bibliography


*The Book of Common Prayer*


*Catechism of the Catholic Church*.


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Savage, Ian David. “Confessing Their Faith: An Enquiry into the Meaning which Anglicans Confirmed as Adults give to their Confirmation and the Place which Confirmation has in their Faith Journey.” PhD diss., Swinburne University of Technology, 2004.


APPENDIX 1
Interview Plan for MINX591 – Research Project

PARTICIPANT

1 Date of Interview ..................................... 2 Venue .................................................................

3 Name of Interviewee .......................................................... 4 Gender M □ F □

5 Current age ........................................ 6 Educational level ..........................................

7 Age when confirmed ......................... 8 Month and year confirmed ..............................

9 School/Parish interviewee belongs to ........................................................................

10 Name of Vicar/Chaplain/Priest ................................................................................

11 List those living in your household of origin at the time of your confirmation. ........

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12 How involved are your parents in the church?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Level of involvement</th>
<th>Very involved</th>
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<th>Not very involved</th>
<th>Not involved at all</th>
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<tbody>
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<td>Father</td>
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</table>

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13 Describe your upbringing in relation to the Christian faith.

Always known God □ Had specific experience of God □ Unsure about God □ Other □
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14 What is your understanding of what it means to be a Christian?

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15 What is your current church involvement?
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16 Describe your personal faith commitment prior to confirmation (tick box after comments)

Committed to God  □  Uncertain about faith  □  Uncommitted  □  Other  □
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17 Why did you decide to be confirmed?
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18 Over what period of time did you undertake confirmation preparation?

Between 1 and 3 sessions  □  Between 4 and 6 sessions  □
Between 7 and 10 sessions  □  Over 10 sessions  □
(Time period) ..............................................................................................................................................................................
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19 Describe your experience of confirmation preparation.

1 Teaching from a book ☐
2 Worship ☐
3 Linked to Church ☐
4 Answered my questions ☐
5 Built relationships ☐
6 Served others ☐
7 Had a companion/sponsor ☐
8 Shared experiences/perspectives ☐

20 Describe your experience of the confirmation service.
21 What meaning do you place on your confirmation now?

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22 Has your life changed in any way since your confirmation? If so in what way or ways? (Prompt with beliefs, behaviour, attitudes, practices, habits, character).

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23 Give evidence of changes

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Interview Plan for MINX591 – Research Project

PARENT

1 Date of Interview ..................................... 2 Venue ..................................................

3 Name of Interviewee ..............................................................

4 Name of confirmed child interviewed ........................................

5 The name of the participants church/parish ........................................

6 Name of Vicar/Minister ..........................................................

7 List those living in your household at the time of your son/daughter’s confirmation.

8 How involved are you in your church?

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<tr>
<th>Very involved</th>
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9 Why did your son/daughter choose to be confirmed? ........................................

10 What was his/her attitude toward confirmation preparation? ........................

11 Did you observe any changes in your son/daughter during confirmation preparation? ...........................................
12 What impact did the entire confirmation experience have on your son/daughter?
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13 Describe any changes that took place; for example in their beliefs, behaviour, attitudes, practices, habits, character.
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14 Give evidence of changes
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### Summary Table of Question 20 ‘Describe Your Experience of the Confirmation Service’

**Yellow rows = ‘Transformational’, White rows = ‘Journey’, Green rows = ‘Low Impact’**

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<th>Very significant experience</th>
<th>Public act in front of church</th>
<th>Family were invited or involved</th>
<th>Emotional Reference</th>
<th>Laying on of hands</th>
<th>Felt supported</th>
<th>Preaching good</th>
<th>Participation of candidates</th>
<th>Testimony</th>
<th>Exchange of gifts</th>
<th>Decorated the church</th>
<th>Had supper</th>
<th>Phrase of interest</th>
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<td>Made you feel special in front of others. Whole service drew everything together</td>
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<td>I have faith and I’m proud of it.</td>
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<td>‘It was cool...a buzzing kind of atmosphere’</td>
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<td>‘Started crying – hoped no one would notice. I don’t know why – couldn’t keep it in.’</td>
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### Summary Table of Question 21 ‘What Meaning Do You Place On Your Confirmation Now?’

Yellow rows = ‘Transformational’, White rows = ‘Journey’, Green rows = ‘Low Impact’

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<th>Learning</th>
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<th>Public</th>
<th>Promise</th>
<th>Ministry</th>
<th>Low value</th>
<th>Commitment</th>
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## Summary Table of Question 22 ‘Has Your Life Changed In Any Way Since Your Confirmation?’

Yellow rows = ‘Transformational’, White rows = ‘Journey’, Green rows = ‘Low Impact’

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<th>Not much if at all</th>
<th>Character and Behaviour Developed</th>
<th>Spiritual Disciplines Strengthened</th>
<th>Confidence increased</th>
<th>Knowledge deepened</th>
<th>Church attendance/commitment increased</th>
<th>Involved in Ministry</th>
<th>Commitment strengthened</th>
<th>Increased feelings toward God</th>
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APPENDIX 3

INFORMATION SHEET FOR INTERVIEWEES

Relating to the following research project

‘Forming Faith: A comparative study of two methods of confirmation preparation and the ways they facilitate faith formation in candidates’

Thank you for showing an interest in this project. Please read this information sheet carefully before deciding whether or not to participate. If you decide to participate we thank you. If you decide not to take part there will be no disadvantage to you of any kind and we thank you for considering our request.

What is the aim of the project?
This research project forms part of the requirements for a Masters of Ministry Degree undertaken through the Theology and Religious Studies Department of the University of Otago. The purpose of this research is to learn how the different methods of confirmation preparation effect candidates and the ways they offer an opportunity for spiritual growth and renewal.

What type of participants are being sought?
I am seeking to interview people between the ages of 16 and 25 who have been either confirmed following a traditional course of preparation or after experiencing a ‘catechumenal like’ process. Additionally I seek a mixture of men and women who were actively involved in an Anglican Church at the time of their confirmation.

What will participants be asked to do?
Should you agree to take part in this project, you will be asked to give one or two interviews with the researcher at a time and place convenient to you. You will be asked to speak about your overall confirmation experience guided by the interviewer. Each interview will last for no longer than 60 minutes. Reflecting on your confirmation experience may be beneficial to you as you reflect on your faith development during that time and the impact it has had on your life since them.

Can participants change their mind and withdraw from the project?
You may withdraw from participation in the project at any time and without any disadvantage to yourself of any kind.

What data or information will be collected and what use will be made of it?
The interviewer will take notes during the interview and will also audio tape it. A transcription will then be made for the purpose of analysis. Although the transcription will be made by a third party they will not have access to the names of the interviewees. The only person who will be able to identify the participants will be the researcher.

This project involves an open-questioning technique where the precise nature of the questions which will be asked have not been determined in advance, but will depend on the way in which the interview develops. Consequently, although the Department of Theology and Religious Studies is aware of the general areas to be
explored in the interview, the Department has not been able to review the precise questions to be used.

In the event that the line of questioning does develop in such a way that you feel hesitant or uncomfortable you are reminded of your right to decline to answer any particular question(s) and also that you may withdraw from the project at any stage without any disadvantage to yourself of any kind.

The results of the project may be published and will be available in the library but every attempt will be made to preserve your anonymity.

You are most welcome to request a summary of the results of the project should you wish.

The data collected will be securely stored in such a way that only the researcher will be able to gain access to it. At the end of the project any personal information will be destroyed immediately except that, as required by the University’s research policy, any raw data on which the results of the project depend will be retained in secure storage for five years, after which it will be destroyed.

Reasonable precautions will be taken to protect and destroy data gathered by email however the security of electronically transmitted information cannot be guaranteed. Caution is advised in the electronic transmission of sensitive material.

**What if participants have any questions?**
If you have any questions about this project, either now or in the future, please feel free to contact me:-

Mark Chamberlain,
Department of Theology and Religious Studies
University of Otago
University Telephone Number - (03) 479 8901

This project has been reviewed and approved by the Department of Theology and Religious Studies, University of Otago.
CONSENT FORM FOR INTERVIEWEE

Relating to the following research project

‘Forming Faith: A comparative study of two methods of confirmation preparation and the ways they facilitate faith formation in candidates’

I understand that:
- Participation in this study is voluntary which means I do not have to take part if I don’t want to and nothing will happen to me.
- The Interviewer will be asking me questions about my experience of confirmation.
- There are no right or wrong answers and if I don’t want to answer some of the questions that is fine.
- Anytime I want to stop talking that’s okay and the interviewer will turn the tape off.
- The interviewer is writing a report for his University work.
- The interviewer will write about some of the things I’ve talked about but won’t use my name.
- The tape and the copy of my words from the tape will only be seen by the interviewer and the typist.
- The copy of my words from the tape will be kept private.
- If I have any worries about the interview then I can talk about these with the interviewer.

I consent to Mark Chamberlain talking with me today and to the talk being taped.

Signature of interviewee ..............................................................

Print name ...................................................................................

Date ............................................................................................