





I have long believed in the value of confirmation as a season and act of intentional faith development: an opportunity for robust faith formation/discipleship AND a particular moment in time when the gathered people of God ritualize a confirmand's choice to walk in the Way of Jesus. I have believed confirmation, at its best, is life-changing and world-shaping as young people emerge from the experience prepared to join God's mission with their baptismal vocations. The problem is that until now, I have only glimpsed the dimensions of such a transformative confirmation experience. Too often the rhetoric of confirmation failure has drowned out the stories of success. Yet, despite it all, there is something resilient about confirmation. Here are some of the qualities of a vital confirmation process that youth at #EYE14 identified:

... confirming not conforming, affirmation, commitment, connection, getting a chance to begin again, another step in the right direction, moving forward, special because it is my choice, God time, being challenged, becoming part of something bigger than yourself, being part of a larger community with a purpose, reformation and discovery, to claim my faith as a Christian for myself, renewal of baptismal vows, grown up decision to follow Christ, "It will be OK!" learning our faith story, understanding how scripture relates to my daily life, learning about our traditions and why we do what we do, a mature profession of faith ... acknowledging a commitment to follow Christ, understanding what that means, and publicly proclaiming it.

The opportunity to collaborate to study resilient confirmation practices in five Protestant denominations in the United States excites me! It is a privilege to work with a team of practical theologians who love Jesus and respect young people. I am tired of the church's esoteric theological debates on confirmation, cynically described within my (Episcopal) tradition as "a sacrament in search of a meaning," at the expense of young people's lived experience (see quotes above).

This research project matters to me because it will collect real data to inform and inspire improved adolescent discipleship practices. I trust it will deconstruct the question, "To confirm, or not to confirm?" I am confident the issue isn't whether the church should practice confirmation but whether what we are offering young people is worthwhile enough to merit their full attention. I want the study to equip our churches to offer confirmation processes that discern and affirm the trajectory of Christian vocation in each person's life. I will know the Project has been successful when young people across our churches participate in confirmation because they eagerly and freely chose to do so, not because they were pressured into it.

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*Lisa's research, teaching, and frequent public speaking focus on the significance of intentional faith formation in everyday life, and the relationship between Christian education and healthy faith communities in times of rapidly changing demographics and shifting patterns of religiosity. Currently Lisa is paying close attention to the effective use of digital technologies in ministry.*