

Confirmation in Church of Sweden

Fourteen years old and on the way out into life. Curiosity mingled with anxiety. Ahead is a time to test boundaries, spread your wings, explore the world and make commitments. There are so many roads, so many choices and possibilities.

MINISTRY TOWARDS TEENAGERS

Confirmation in Church of Sweden takes place during a transition period in young people's lives, characterised by a search for identity, building relationships and taking steps into adult life. During this process, the teenager will benefit from support from adults outside the family. In this sense, confirmation is regarded as a diaconal ministry for teenagers. One important criterion is that it must be meaningful to the confirmands and that their life issues need to be the starting point for learning and teaching in the preparation for confirmation. From a society point of view, Church of Sweden is one of the most experienced and competent organisations in the country with regard to supporting teenagers in dealing with their own life issues.

CHANGING TRADITIONS

Church of Sweden has a long tradition, where confirmation has been an accepted part of society as a transition rite leading to the adult world. During the 1970's, however, the numbers of confirmands started to decrease steadily. Today, 40 percent of all fifteen-year-olds are confirmed. The decision to join a confirmation group is no longer ruled only by tradition. It can also be seen as a manifestation of personal preference.

HIGH PRIORITY

Confirmation work is now given high priority in Church of Sweden. One of the aims of confirmation work is for the parish to build relationships with young people that will continue after the confirmation period. As a rule, people who have taken part in confirmation, continue to be members of the church. They get married in the church and later have their children baptized. Those who find their own confirmation period meaningful, will encourage their children to join a confirmation group.

CONFIRMATION FOR EVERYBODY

Confirmation in Church of Sweden is open to every teenager who wishes to take part, irrespective of background, handicap or other personal conditions. Also, it is required that the teenager is baptized. If the teenager was not christened as a child, baptism will take place during the confirmation period. Emphasis is put on offering a pedagogic environment and methods that will enable handicapped teenagers and teenagers who need specific support to take part in confirmation. 25 percent of the confirmands attend confirmation summer camps for a period of three to four weeks. Some of these camps are integrated in the sense that confirmands with and without functional disorders learn to live together.

CONFIRMATION TEAMS AND YOUNG LEADERS

Confirmation work is the responsibility and the obligation of the parishes. The vicar is in charge, but is not always involved in the actual teaching process. A team of leaders qualified in theology, pedagogics, music and diaconia will plan and conduct the confirmation groups. Very often voluntary workers are part of the confirmation team, especially young leaders from the age of 15 and upwards. Many dioceses have special leadership programmes for young confirmation leaders. This is regarded as part of the youth work in Church of Sweden and involves growing numbers of youth. The involvement of young leaders adds certain qualities to the confirmation team due to closeness in age to the confirmands, for example a young perspective on faith and comprehension of values and trends in young people's lives.

THE CONFIRMATION PERIOD

The confirmation group starts when the confirmands are fourteen, and the confirmation service takes place during

the year that they will become fifteen. The confirmation period lasts for at least six months, so that confirmands will have the opportunity to attend and acquaint themselves with services in the parish for a longer period of time. 60 hours of group meetings and at least four nights of confirmation camp are required. Some groups meet weekly during the school-year, and the confirmation service takes place in May or June. Others start at Advent time, meet a few times during the spring and conclude with a confirmation camp in the summer. Since so many activities compete with the teenager's time and attention, there is a growing trend to combine confirmation with other interests, for example sports like ice hockey, golf, sailing and hiking or cultural activities like music, drama or language training abroad.

PURPOSE

In Church of Sweden, with its Evangelical-Lutheran confession, the theology of confirmation is closely linked to baptism, which is the basis for membership in the church. Through baptism every Christian is offered a chance to interpret his or her life in the light of the life, death and resurrection of Jesus Christ. Therefore, the purpose of confirmation is to give the confirmands the tools to interpret and form their lives on the basis of their baptism. From a sacramental perspective, confirmation is seen as a ministry for young people to offer them insight into the Christian faith and the meaning of their baptism. In the confirmation service, each confirmand is individually prayed for, given the blessing of the Holy Spirit and sent out into the world as God's co-worker. As a whole, whereby a person can incorporate the Christian story into their own life and use it as a model of guidance.

AIMS, METHODS AND CONTENTS

In confirmation work, the main aim is to give the confirmands the opportunity and the insight to explore and try out Christian faith from the background of their own life issues. Another important aim is to support the teenagers in the process of identity formation, emotional and personal growth and building of good relationships. Confirmation work focuses on the encounter between the confirmands, the leaders and the faith and tradition of the church. Attention is given to meet the confirmands with full respect as individuals and people in their own

right. The stories of the Bible, especially the story of Jesus Christ, are an important tool to help the teenagers to form and interpret their life stories in the light of the Gospel. Creative methods like valuation exercises, drama, dance, play, music and painting are used to build a common experience in the group as a starting point for dialogue and reflection. The confirmation camp is an important feature for building good relationships and regular devotional practises in the group.

GUIDELINES

Confirmation work in Church of Sweden is regulated by Guidelines for Confirmation Work in Church of Sweden. This document has been issued to promote high quality in confirmation work. It is revised from time to time in order to keep up with changing conditions in society. Some of the criterias of high quality are that confirmation work should be given the necessary resources in terms of staff, training and preparation time. The existence of a team of competent co-workers holding theological, pedagogical, musical and diaconia skills, is regarded very important. In order to create the necessary resources for confirmation work, co-operation between parishes and dioceses is considered essential. The guidelines are also an important instrument for the dioceses to support and supervise confirmation work in the parishes. The dioceses are responsible for the training of confirmation leaders.

PROGRAMME FOR LEARNING AND TEACHING

In order to emphasize the importance of confirmation, a national level project was initiated in 2004, called "Confirmand in Church of Sweden." One conclusion drawn from this project was that confirmation work has to be viewed in its full context, which is the responsibility of the church to offer baptismal teaching. In order that confirmation might be a real option for the young, there is a need for regular encounters between the church and young people in the ages between baptism and confirmation. As a result of this project, every parish is responsible to work out a programme for learning and teaching, describing its educational work for all ages. It also contains a plan of action for its confirmation work. The parish council is responsible to work out the programme for learning and teaching as a part of its governing document, "the parish instruction".