

3.1 Confirmation Work in Germany

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Katharina is 13 years old and lives in northern Bavaria. Her confirmation time started after Easter with a special Sunday service in which the new confirmands were introduced to the congregation. Although Katharina regards the church as something that is far away from her everyday life, she really looks forward to the confirmation time, especially because there have been some remarkable changes in the confirmation work of her parish recently. The period of preparation was cut down from two years to one year. Even better, there are now two weekend outings on the plan. For Katharina, these outings are the true highlights of the whole confirmation time, even more so since some older adolescents will participate as camp-helpers. The regular instruction on Wednesday afternoon lies solely in the hands of the local minister. Although the lessons are nothing that Katharina yearns for after a long school day, it is good to know that her fellow confirmands will be waiting there. For Katharina, the confirmation time has a lot to do with friendship – making new ones and refreshing old ones. And the final highlight, of course, will be the big celebration on confirmation day, with not only spiritual blessings. As her older brother put it: »On this day, being a Church member really pays off.«

3.1.1 General Overview

The Socioreligious Context of Confirmation Work

The situation of confirmation work in Germany is characterised in many respects by the fact that there is no single Protestant Church of Germany but a plurality of regional Churches that goes back to the post-Reformation territories. The former state Churches in these territories ended in 1918 with the separation between church and state but the individual Protestant Churches maintained their regional character. Given this plurality, we can only offer something like an outline of the average kind of confirmation work that one might find in many parishes. At the same time, readers will have to keep in mind that there are enormous differences in the German religious landscape, most of all between the western and the eastern parts of the country, that is, between what used to be the socialist German Democratic Republic (GDR) with its tradition of state induced atheism, and former West Germany with a system that has been much more open for religion, among others for Religious Education in state schools. In the light of recent statistics, the persistence of these differences becomes evident. Almost 20 years after the German reunifica-

tion in 1990, today 15% of the west Germans but 68% of the east Germans belong to no religious denomination.

Another important feature regarding the wider socioreligious context of confirmation work in Germany is the coexistence of two dominant denominations, with the Protestant Churches and Roman Catholicism both comprising a little more than 60% of the overall population. Finally, it has to be taken into account that Germany, with the largest Muslim population in Western Europe after France (estimated at 5%), is more and more turning into a multireligious society.

Confirmation Work in Transition

Confirmation classes or catechetical instruction in Germany go back to the time of the Reformation (Frör 1959). The celebration of a special confirmation service, however, was not necessarily part of the process and, at least as a general rite, was established in many places not before the 18th century, under the influence of pietism and the Enlightenment. The most popular catechisms in use were Luther's Small Catechism and the Heidelberg Catechism (in the Reformed tradition).

The traditional German term used for the educational preparation for confirmation is *Konfirmandenunterricht* – instruction for those who want to be confirmed. It is no coincidence that this term makes school instruction the model for the Church. The minister-teacher followed a traditional model of teaching and learning based on the catechism, on rote learning, and on questions posed to the class followed by brief predefined answers from the confirmands.

The traditional model has often been criticised for training parrots rather than helping young people to understand their own faith. Yet only during the last forty years has this model been replaced, at least to some degree, by a different setting that is closer to youth work than to traditional school teaching. The most current term *Konfirmandenarbeit* – working with and for confirmands – is expressive of this new understanding, especially with its allusion to *Jugendarbeit* (youth work) that now serves as its model. Many methods from youth work have been taken over for working with confirmands. Moreover, the general attitude of this work has changed from instruction to more creative and youth-oriented ways of working and being with young people.

The most common way for organising confirmation work today addresses young people at the age of 13 or 14. It comprises regular meetings once a week for one or two years. Most often, these meetings take place in the afternoon of a set day of the week. They typically last 90 minutes and are taught by the local minister. In the last twenty years, a new programme for children of the age of eight or nine has been introduced in some of the regional Churches (cf. Cramer/Ilg/Schweitzer 2009). In this case, preparation for confirmation includes

two phases – a first one in childhood comprising approximately ten meetings in small groups led by parents or other volunteers and special church services, with an emphasis on the introduction to the sacraments, and a second phase in adolescence with a more general introduction to the Christian faith and to the life of the Church.

During their confirmation time, the confirmands have to attend worship services for a set number of times, for example, twice a month. Following the new understanding of confirmation work, a number of additional elements have been introduced. Overnight outings of two or more days are very popular. Confirmation camps bring together young people from different locations in large numbers. Internships within the congregation are another new idea, with the confirmands as temporary volunteers in youth work, Sunday school or diaconical work. Sometimes, the confirmands can also participate actively in the preparation of worship services and are allowed to play an active role in them as well. Additional elements of the current model include:

- different time structures, for example, meeting for half a day or even for a whole day on weekends;
- different contents beyond the traditional catechism, for example, topics related to the personal life of teenagers, to ethical issues (peace and justice), or to youth culture;
- creative and active methods like games, working with art, movies, computer animation;
- additional personnel, for example, youth workers, deacons, or volunteers from the congregation;
- process-oriented introduction to the Eucharist, for example, by celebrating the Eucharist during a special outing and in special settings;
- special youth services with again active participation of the confirmands and some times under the direction of young people;
- new liturgies for the celebration of confirmation that are in line with the more recent understanding of working with young people.

Participation

About 90 % of all Protestant 14-year old adolescents are confirmed, amounting to about 250000 confirmands every year. The rate of participation has been very stable over the years with about 30 % of all adolescents of this age in Germany or more than 90 % of the adolescents who have been baptised. This stability is also mirrored by the interview surveys carried out regularly by the Protestant Church in Germany / *Evangelische Kirche in Deutschland* (EKD) at ten years intervals (see Huber/Friedrich/Steinacker 2006). The survey data indicate that many people appreciated their time as confirmands, even if they have forgotten most of the contents offered to them.

But there are some indicators, that this stability might be challenged. The number of the unchurched in Germany has clearly increased throughout the last decades. Demographic developments also speak against the assumption of stability. Birth rates are way down with the traditional (non-immigrant) German population, and this part of the population includes most of the Protestants. Among the children between the ages of 3 and 6 years, more than 30% have an immigrant background (most of them are non-Protestant, cf. Konsortium Bildungsberichterstattung 2006, 143). The »greying of the pews« due to demographics is well under way in most of Germany. In addition to this, some parts of eastern Germany as well as some urban locations in western Germany suffer from a special loss of young people, mostly caused by social and economic depression. Confirmation work in such places has to face very difficult circumstances, for example, with not being able to put together workable groups or not being able to celebrate confirmation every year due to the lack of adolescents in the congregation.

It is probably fair to assume that the increasingly multicultural and multi-religious character of the general population allows for more flexibility in everyone's attitudes. Multiculturalism may work against the maintenance of traditional patterns. Yet contrary effects cannot be excluded either. Multiculturalism may have polarizing effects and may thus motivate young people – or their parents – to more clearly claim what they perceive as a Christian identity.

Equivalents Outside the Protestant Churches

There is a secular equivalent – or at least a parallel – to confirmation that has received a lot of attention recently. During the 19th century, the so-called *Jugendweihe* (a ceremony of dedicating young people) was introduced independently of the Church by so-called »enlightened people«. In the 1950s, this tradition was reactivated by the socialist GDR government as part of their anti-church policies. Young people were pressured into taking part in this secular or pseudo-religious ceremony organised by the state and charged with socialist ideology. After the end of the GDR in 1990, the ceremony remained in place although it had lost its support from the state. Until today, a certain number – estimates run up to more than 50% – of adolescents in eastern Germany take part in it. Participation in the ceremony is less demanding than confirmation since there only is a very short period of preparation. Given the low rate of church membership in the respective regions, the *Jugendweihe* may be perceived as the only access open to young people longing for some kind of initiation rite. In western Germany, though, the *Jugendweihe* has not found many adherents, so it is in fact restricted to the former GDR-region.

In western Germany, it is the Catholic version of confirmation (*Firmung*), celebrated at the age of 15 or 16 years, that parallels the Protestant confirma-

tion. Within the Catholic tradition, the *Firmung* appears to be less important than the celebration of First Communion at the age of 9. Consequently, participation is lower than with the Protestant equivalent. This is why confirmation is often considered a defining characteristic of the Protestant Church.

Other rituals celebrated, for example, by Muslim youth in Germany have not gained much visibility. This is also true for the Jewish Bar Mitzvah, mostly due to the small number of Jews living in Germany after the Shoah.

Official Aims for Confirmation Work

The aims for confirmation work authorised by the regional Churches reflect the changing approaches to working with confirmands. Traditionally, the appropriation of the Christian faith clearly took priority over all other aims. The faith was presented and explained in the catechism that also served as the basis for a catechetical exam held during the confirmation service. In some cases, the confirmands were expected to speak a formal oath testifying to their personal willingness to accept the Christian faith.

Contemporary aims stated by the Church are much more likely to stress the need for the Church to open up for young people. At least to some degree, Church and ministers are expected to take the perspective of the confirmands as opposed to the confirmands having to take over the expectations of the Church. The time of preparing for confirmation is seen as a chance for young people to encounter the congregation as a place that is hospitable to them and that allows them to meet people and activities that might be of interest to them.

References to the official aims stated in Church documents, however, are of limited validity in Germany. There is very little supervision and German ministers like to follow their own personal objectives. Consequently, the reality of confirmation work is reflective of a much broader scope of different aims that only roughly follow the official guidelines.

From the confirmands' perspective, the aims of participation have also changed within the last decades. In former times, participation in confirmation training was often motivated by a sense of social or family pressure. Nowadays, most of the adolescents feel less urged by traditional motives. The expectation of a big family party on the day of confirmation and the usually very attractive presents have become important motives. Because children are now invited to participate in the Eucharist in many of the parishes, one traditional motive for confirmation, admission to the Eucharist, is no longer that important. Moreover, the right to get married in the Church or to receive a Christian funeral is not premised on confirmation anymore, at least not in a strict sense. Confirmands often mention their full membership in the Church as an important motive but also the right to act as godparents.

Preparation of the Personnel

Confirmation work is one of the basic responsibilities of most ministers in Germany. This is why the first question in this context must be about ministerial education and training. The study of theology in Germany includes practical theology and religious education. Confirmation work, however, is not always an explicit part of the general programmes in this field. Since many ministers also have to teach religion classes in state schools, they have to be prepared for a whole spectrum of pedagogical tasks. After the time at the university comes a second phase with approximately another two years of practical training (*Vikariat*), partly in a congregation and partly in a specialised training institute. Both educational contexts regularly include some exposure to confirmation work.

Additional full-time personnel like youth workers or deacons study in special church-related schools or college-type institutions (now typically leading to a Bachelor degree). Depending on their interests, confirmation work may or may not figure explicitly within their training. Although deacons and Christian youth workers are the ones who have a professional emphasis on working with young people, they are often not involved in confirmation work in the local parishes.

In theory, ministers and elders share the responsibility for confirmation work in the parish. Yet in common practice, the elders are often only involved to a small degree. The training of volunteers is a task left to the individual congregation or, more realistically, to the individual minister.

Research

Theories and models for working with confirmands have been a topic of theology in Germany since the Reformation (Schweitzer 2006, 26 ff., 239 ff.). The continuous production of catechisms testifies to this as does the continued search for improving the methods of instruction. German 17th and 18th century pietism was very productive in this direction and the educational approaches of the time of the Enlightenment also added their new ideas. Since the 19th century, there has been a prolonged discussion on the ideal time for confirmation (mostly at a later age) as well as on more holistic models of what was called the »comprehensive catechumenate« integrating the family as well as the congregation.

The academic discussion on working with confirmands has been especially lively since the 1960s, the time when the current reform era started (overview: Domsgen/Lück 2008). This was also the time for the first empirical approaches to confirmation work (Ilg/Schweitzer 2009). The Church surveys mentioned above include a small number of questions related to confirmation work. Other studies, for example, on how young people can develop positive relationships to the church, made reference to confirmation work as one of the possible factors

in play (cf. Feige 1982). Larger studies focussing exclusively on confirmation work have remained rare (cf. Elsenbast 2009). Moreover, they tended to work with interviews administered to the ministers, thus looking at the confirmands exclusively through the eyes of adults and church professionals.

Theology and Ecclesiology

It is easy to see that no single theological or ecclesiological position can be responsible for the current shape of confirmation work in this country. German Protestantism is characterised by its plural nature that includes a whole spectrum of theological viewpoints. Yet such differences should not make us overlook that there also are common tendencies that are characteristic for the understanding of confirmation work in the German context.

The tendency not to focus on the institutional needs of the church is an important example for a shared characteristic. Theologically it is based on the contemporary theological understanding of human dignity based on the creation in the likeness of God (Gen 1). It can also be supported by an interpretation of the justification by faith that emphasises God's appreciation of the individual person in this process. Correspondingly, the church is not considered an authority that makes demands on children or on parents but is seen as a place of open communication based on participatory structures. The church is supposed to serve the people within the church and beyond by being a welcoming community that is open for different needs and for new ideas.

Ecclesologically, the separation between church and state is another important background. In Germany, this separation took place more than 90 years ago. Yet until today, the process of finding a new place in society has not come to a final end. Most recently, the idea of civil society has started to become influential in this process (Huber 1998, 267ff.). According to this idea, the church should not allow itself to be limited to the private sphere but should strive to become an intermediary structure that can operate as a mediator between the state and the individual citizens, for example, by supporting attitudes of commitment to the common good, solidarity and other values.

Concerns About the Future in the German Discussion

As has become clear above, the impression of continuity and stability is probably not as well-based with confirmation work in Germany as it appears on first sight. General social and cultural developments like pluralisation and individualisation may have their effects on the adolescents' willingness to participate in the programmes offered by the Church. Recent reports from the different *Landeskirchen* (regional Churches) show that the future of confirmation work is currently an urgent topic for many ministers and youth workers (cf. Ilg/Schweitzer/Elsenbast 2009).

Not surprisingly, the demographic change is one of the most troubling issues linked with the future of confirmation work. As mentioned above, this is especially the case in eastern Germany with its increasingly one-sided age-structure and in addition, with its dominant unchurched culture. The long-term effects of this development on confirmation work could indeed be dramatic. In the *Evangelische Landeskirche Anhalts*, for example, the number of young people being confirmed declined in 2006 to an average of one person in each parish per year. Under such circumstances the traditional parish-based forms and settings of confirmation work are becoming more and more obsolete.

Another major concern expressed by the persons in charge, is the future of confirmation work in urban contexts. With the accelerating process of detraditionalisation, the understanding of confirmation as an integral part of the individual biography is increasingly losing its plausibility, also because the identification with the local parish is much lower here than in rural areas. There seems to be an ongoing need for future improvements that keep confirmation work in line with the specific requirements of today's urban youth and lifestyle.

Moreover, the fact that so many of the adolescents do not participate in any church programme after confirmation is a worrisome issue for many ministers and youth workers. Creating more connections between the different programmes offered by the church is therefore regarded as an important task for the future.

The last concern to be mentioned here seems to be of particular urgency. At the present time, many schools in Germany are expanding their school hours in order to develop programmes covering most of the day. Consequently, there will be more competition for the remaining hours of the day that are left to the adolescents' individual disposal. Therefore the question, whether confirmation work can and should cooperate with schools, is currently being intensely discussed in Germany. Half of the German federal states (*Bundesländer*) have regulations that guarantee one school-free afternoon per week for grades 7 and 8 in order to provide the necessary time for confirmation classes. Whether these regulations will continue or not is an open question which is of central importance for the future of confirmation work.

3.1.2 Description of the Study

The German study (*Bundesweite Studie zur Konfirmandenarbeit*) was the first empirical survey conducted at a national level. It was led by the University of Tübingen (Friedrich Schweitzer, Wolfgang Ilg), the Comenius Institute (Volker Elsenbast) and the Office of the Evangelical Church in Germany / EKD (Matthias Otte). A board consisting of members with scholarly background, church

officials and others with regional responsibility for confirmation work accompanied the study. The aim of the study was to gain insights into the reality of confirmation work. Representative results were gathered for every *Landeskirche*. The detailed results are published in Ilg/Schweitzer/Elsenbast 2009, additional information is available on www.konfirmandenarbeit.eu.

Procedures

The aim of the study was to conduct a complete survey of randomly selected parishes. In every participating parish the questionnaires were given to all confirmands and to those workers who were active at least three times during the confirmation year. In parishes that ran several independent confirmation groups, questionnaires were filled in only by the largest group. In addition to this, the parishes were invited to distribute additional questionnaires to parents. 62% agreed to this optional possibility and distributed the parents' questionnaires at the beginning of one of the meetings offered for parents of the confirmands shortly before confirmation.

The sample of parishes was selected by an independent institute that specialises in social sciences (GESIS – Leibniz Institute for Social Sciences). This selection was done on a random basis to assure that the selected parishes are representative for the respective *Landeskirche*. In June 2007, 1148 parishes were invited to take part in the study. 635 parishes (= 55%) had the questionnaires filled in by workers and confirmands. Those parishes that declined to participate, often indicated that, at the present time, there were no confirmands in the parish. Others did not want to take part because the minister's position was vacant or because of other obvious reasons. Only a few refused the request to participate due to general unwillingness. For computing the overall results, weighting factors were applied according to the number of confirmands in each *Landeskirche*.

The questionnaires follow the general scheme described in part 2. Additional questionnaires looking back to the first phase of confirmation time in childhood and about the perceived relation of Protestant confirmation and civil confirmation (*Jugendweihe*) were given to the parishes in which this was applicable. The results of these questionnaires will not be reported in this chapter.

The confirmands' questionnaires were filled in at the beginning of a regular confirmation lesson. The confirmands placed their questionnaires into an envelope which was then closed and sent to a data analysis company. Intensive checks on plausibility were performed. The acceptance of the study was high. Most leaders reported that the confirmands liked working on the questionnaires and that they appreciated being taken seriously with their opinions in the questionnaires. When asked how they liked filling in the questionnaires in

t_2 , only 14% of the confirmands said it annoyed them, 64% thought it was »okay« and 22% said they liked filling in the questionnaires.

Overview on Data

Table 4 gives the number of valid questionnaires collected.

Table 4: Number of questionnaires (Germany)

	t_0	t_1	t_2	percentage matched
units	635	634	613	100%
confirmands		11513	10961	79.9%
workers		1601	1444	78.7%
parents			5788	83.9% with confirmands

3.1.3 Setting of Confirmation Work

Most of the Protestant parishes in Germany have one or two confirmation groups per confirmation period. On an average 16.5 confirmands form a confirmation group (18 in western; 9 in eastern Germany).

The framework for confirmation work is determined by every *Landeskirche* individually. The main difference lies in the duration of the confirmation time, that spans either over one year (which is the case in most southern *Landeskirchen*) or over two years (which is typical for the northern and eastern *Landeskirchen*). An average German parish has 45 hours (SD = 21!) of normal instruction plus three special days with the group, one or two outings/camps (altogether three nights) and one day trip. Especially the camps have become widely used, and only a small minority of parishes (8%) do not offer any camp during confirmation time.

One can wonder about the low frequency of some other activities. Only 38% of the parishes have their confirmands take part in internships in the parish, only 42% undertake joint activities with Christian youth work in the parish. This shows one of the major problems of confirmation work. In itself it often seems to be a successful programme, but too often it is not linked to other church activities. Although the interest in a Christian youth group rises during confirmation time (cf. chapter 3.1.4, p. 64) the confirmands often do not get connected to an adequate youth group in their parish or region because of a missing concept to connect both fields.

3.1.4 Confirmands

General Characteristics and Background Information

49.6 % of the confirmands are male, 50.4 % are female. German law states that at 14 years of age, a person reaches religious maturity. Confirmation takes place in the year when confirmands turn 14. The data show only few exceptions from this age (6 % younger than 13; 2 % older than 14 in t_1). 6 % of the confirmands were not baptised when asked about it in t_1 . In most parishes they are baptised during confirmation time (43 %) or in the last weeks before (25 %) or on the day of confirmation (31 %).

In Germany, the special situation of young people with a migration background (i. e., no German citizenship, or a confirmand or one of the parents not born in Germany) has received quite a bit of attention. 10 % of all confirmands match at least one of these criteria. Half of them (5.1 % of the total) can be characterised as *Aussiedler* (ethnic German repatriates from the former Soviet Union and its successor states).

Germany still divides the students at the age of ten into three different tracks or types of school. 43 % of all confirmands attend the *Gymnasium* (qualifying for university admission), 29 % attend the *Realschule*, 13 % attend the *Hauptschule* (the term *Hauptschule* = main school is no longer appropriate; only between 20 % and 30 % of the ten year olds attend this type of school), the other confirmands (14 %) attend other schools. Valid comparison data for the distribution of school types among Protestant 14 year olds are not available, but one can assume that the rate of those who do not join in confirmation training is higher among the less educated.

Concerning Religious Education in school the situation differs between the different federal states. The legal guidelines are drawn up by the German constitution where Religious Education is defined as a regular subject that is to be taught in accordance with the principles of the religious communities. Usually a confirmand starting confirmation time will have experienced seven school years of RE with two hours per week. In the study, 73 % of the confirmands state that they are currently taking part in Religious Education in school. 71 % say that they were in contact with Christian children's groups or church-related events at least four times since they turned 5 years old. The assumption, that the confirmands nowadays have had »no prior acquaintance with the Church«, that can sometimes be heard, does not hold true according to these data.

Motivation for Participation

The reasons for participating in confirmation time vary. Only a few of the items in section CA and CB gain more than 50 % approval. An important factor is confirmation itself. The items related to this event rank highest. It is interesting

to see that the importance of the three different attributions to confirmation changes during confirmation time. While the family party, money or presents, and the blessing in church have nearly the same rate of consent in t_1 , the family party and the blessing are stressed more than the motives of money/presents in t_2 . The financial aspect is much more important for male than for female confirmands and also in the West a lot more than in the East. Female confirmands emphasise the right of becoming a godparent as a motivational factor more than male confirmands.

Expectations and Experiences

The two items with the strongest consent in the whole German survey are CE12 and KE12 (both 96%): »By the end of the confirmation time I definitely want to be confirmed«. This shows that the confirmands come to the programme with a clear intention that, with almost every one of them, has been formed before the programme itself has begun. This implies that almost none of them starts confirmation training with the intention to »check out what the church is like and if I want to be confirmed«. The decision for or against confirmation is made before registration.

The expectations (as asked in section CK in t_1) indicate that, at least in the beginning, many confirmands do not consider the confirmation time as a matter of fulfilling the conditions for being confirmed. Their most important aim is »to take part without too much stress« (77% approval; CK10). They consider it important that confirmation time offers youth-work-like activities, especially camps (67%; CK06) and »action« in general (57%; CK05). Learning Christian texts by heart (20%; CK02) and coming into personal contact with the leaders and workers (21%; CK03) are not in their focus when starting their confirmation time.

Looking back, only 19% state that their confirmation time was stressful (KK10), although 80% report having attended the group meetings regularly (KK08). The reported effects of confirmation training show that confirmation time motivates many of the young people to think about the Christian faith and their own attitude towards it. 70% agree that they learnt more about God and faith (KB01), 55% say that they were strengthened in their faith (KB08). The difference in these numbers show, that confirmation work is not perceived as an instrument of indoctrination. It is possible to go through confirmation work and to learn about its contents, but still to withdraw oneself from faith. This fact and also the result that 16% of the confirmands explicitly tick a negative box when asked whether they believe in God (KE09), makes one wonder, if it is a wise idea to have confirmands confess their faith publicly during the confirmation ceremony. There is always a minority of confirmands who want to be

Table 5: Satisfaction with different aspects in confirmation time (Germany)

To what extent are you satisfied with ... (1 = not satisfied at all; 7 = totally satisfied)	M	SD	satisfied (5,6,7)
KN01: the whole confirmation time	5.04	1.42	67 %
KN02: having fun	5.27	1.63	72 %
KN03: content/topics of lessons	4.42	1.31	49 %
KN04: feeling of community	5.23	1.54	71 %
KN07: minister / person primarily responsible for confirmation work	5.28	1.68	72 %
KN08: other teachers/workers	5.12	1.64	69 %
KN10: church services	4.29	1.56	47 %
KN11: camp(s)	5.40	1.72	73 %
KN13: prayers in the group	4.27	1.50	43 %
KN14: music, songs and singing	4.44	1.77	51 %

N = 9009-10772. Option 8 »we didn't have that« was used as a filter.

confirmed but do not identify with the Church's belief. How can it be avoided that they publicly have to confess something their heart does not support?

Many of the results stress the importance of personal relationships. 73 % say they experienced good community in the confirmation group (KB02), 49 % say they came into personal contact with the leaders and workers (KK03). Both experiences are more frequent than the respective expectations in the beginning. The positive feedback concerning the parish is probably connected to this feeling; 63 % felt welcome and accepted by the local parish (KK37).

The items in t_2 support the assumption that confirmation time enhances competences and motivation for social engagement in society. More than half of the confirmands became aware of their social responsibility for others (52 %; KK44) and for peace (52 %; KK46), and some percent less also for ecological problems (43 %; KK45). 23 % say that during confirmation time they became motivated to help in church as a voluntary worker (KK27). This is certainly only a minority – but definitely more potential volunteers than actually do take part as workers in the parishes.

A clear disappointment, comparing expectations and experiences, lies in the way the confirmands are treated as relevant partners in giving shape to the confirmation time. Only 29 % had the feeling that they were allowed to decide about the topics (KK04) – this is clearly less than the 40 % that had expected to do so (CK04). With this result in mind, it is understandable that the percentage of confirmands who do not ascribe the Church the potential to answer their important questions rises from 34 % in t_1 to 37 % in t_2 . Confirmation work needs to prove that it deals with topics that are relevant for the adolescents.

Asking them about what they would like to talk about is an indispensable first step. Which topics might turn out to be of greater interest can be seen in chapter 3.1.6.

The critical issues mentioned above should not make one overlook the overall result, that confirmation work can generally be regarded as a very successful way of accompanying young people. Table 5 shows that the evaluation of most aspects by the confirmands is positive. Two out of three are basically satisfied with confirmation time in general. The most attractive aspects are camps, fun and community but also the minister and the other workers. The least satisfying aspects, church services and prayers in the group, are dealt with in chapter 3.1.7.

Attitudes towards Religion and Church

Compared to the other countries, German confirmands show slightly stronger religious attitudes, both concerning religious beliefs and religious behaviour (cf. appendix p. 308). Especially the confirmands in eastern Germany show much higher values for religious answers than the ones in the west. The reason is, that in eastern Germany the confirmands come almost exclusively from families with a church background, whereas in western Germany confirmands represent the whole variety of lower or higher church adherence. As expected, girls are more religious than boys and personal belief and religious behaviour is highly correlated with religiousness of the parents.

Table 6: General questions on faith and Church (Germany)

How would you describe your current attitude in general towards ... ?	very negative	rather negative	neither negative nor positive	rather positive	very positive
CF01: ... the Christian faith (t ₁)	2 %	4 %	36 %	47 %	10 %
KF01: ... the Christian faith (t ₂)	2 %	3 %	29 %	52 %	14 %
KF02: ... the Protestant Church (t ₂)	2 %	3 %	30 %	52 %	13 %

N = 10023-10563. The German questionnaires did not include CF02.

The results of the general items (Table 6) show that only a few confirmands are really »against« church and faith. Most of them tick the box »rather positive« or »neither negative nor positive«. They might be described as standing at some kind of »friendly distance« to the church and its creed. The comparison of CF01 and KF01 shows a slightly positive shift concerning the Christian faith.

Concerning attitudinal changes (sections CE and CG) from t₁ to t₂, the strongest shifts show up in the following items (mean values specified for matched cases; N ≥ 8293; criteria: difference > 0.25):

DIFF_CE10: I know what the Christian faith entails. (+0.49)

DIFF_CG08: I would be interested in taking part in a Christian youth group after confirmation. (+0.41)

DIFF_CG01: It is important for me to belong to the Church. (+0.26)

DIFF_CG04: Church services are usually boring. (+0.26)

It is not surprising that knowledge about Christianity grows over time, as the confirmation courses emphasise cognitive learning very much. The fact though that there is a growing tendency to join Christian youth groups is remarkable. The share of confirmands who tick box 5, 6 or 7 on the scale for the item CG08 / KG08 significantly rises from 18 % (t_1) to 26 % (t_2). The rising attractiveness is not restricted to youth work in general but relates to the church on the whole (DIFF_CG01). There is only one exception; church services are perceived to be boring by 49 % of the confirmands in t_1 . This attitude does not turn out to be a prejudice which would be proved wrong over time. On the contrary, the longer the confirmands experience services, the more they express their frustration about them (54 % agree with item KG04 in t_2).

Data from the Confirmands' Parents

It was a speciality of the German study to include parents in the survey. Some of the results are given in Table 7.

Table 7: Answers from the parents' questionnaire (Germany)

	M	SD	pos. (5,6,7)
PA01: How satisfied are you with confirmation work here overall? (1 »not satisfied at all« 7 »totally satisfied«)	5.51	1.44	77 %
PA02: How satisfied is your child with confirmation work here overall? (1 »not satisfied at all« 7 »totally satisfied«)	5.30	1.42	73 %
PA03: Did you feel adequately informed by the parish about what was going on during confirmation training? (1 »not adequate« 7 »adequate«)	5.47	1.66	73 %
PA04: Did your attitude towards the parish change during the confirmation training of your child? (1 »negative change« 7 »positive change«)	4.96	1.20	55 %
PA05: How much did your child tell you about his/her experiences in confirmation training? (1 »very little« 7 »very much«)	4.38	1.68	49 %
PA06: How important is it for you personally, that your child will be confirmed? (1 »not important« 7 »very important«)	6.05	1.33	87 %
PA07: How important is faith in God for you personally? (1 »not important« 7 »very important«)	5.77	1.42	83 %

N = 5338-5427.

The results show a high satisfaction with confirmation work in general. However, it should be taken into account that the answers are not representative for all confirmands' parents but for those who come to the parents' meetings with the minister. 84 % of the questionnaires were filled in by mothers, 16 % by

fathers (not taken into account some questionnaires that were filled in by a couple).

The most remarkable result from the parents' questionnaire deals with the estimation of confirmation. When asked »How do you celebrate the confirmation day in your family« the answers were: 0% »not at all«; 11% »rather a small party«; 13% »a party like others, for example birthday parties«. 77% ticked the answer »one of the most important events in the life of my child«. The strong support of the families surely is an underlying factor for the stability of participation in confirmation work over the last years.

3.1.5 Workers

Background Data

Among the workers there are different types of employees and volunteers: 636 ministers, 20 ministers-in-training, 103 deacons / employed youth workers, 37 other full- or part-time workers and 746 volunteers. Altogether, they form the data base of the workers. These numbers show that the cooperation with volunteers has become part of confirmation work in many parishes. However, this is not true for eastern Germany (excluding Berlin). In the East, the proportion of ministers to volunteers is 10:1.

Among the ministers the share of women is only 24%, among the volunteers it is 63%. The mean age of ministers is 46.4 years, that of the volunteers 22.9 years. 58% of the workers are younger than 18 years old (usually called: the »teammers«).

Compared with the workers' situation in countries like Finland, it is surprising that only in a minority of German parishes employed youth workers are involved at least selectively in confirmation work. In fact, it is quite frequently the case that a youth worker is responsible for youth groups, special youth services or camps in a parish or a Church region but does not have any personal contact to the confirmands of this region. One reason for this paradoxical situation (the people who are especially trained for working with young people are excluded from the largest field of work with young people) lies in the self-concept of youth work which emphasises the voluntary character of the participation as well as the independence from the »official« Church administration.

Motives of the Employed Workers

Concerning the topics they consider to be relevant in confirmation time (section WA; cf. p. 319 in the appendix), the ministers focus strongly on classical topics related to the catechism: Jesus Christ, Holy Communion and Baptism receive an average of more than 6.6 on the 7-point-scale. Least importance is assigned to »other religions«, »body and sexuality« and »violence and crime«

(all below 4.0). The strongest difference in the rating of ministers and volunteers can be seen in the answer to item WA16 »friendship«. This item reaches a mean of 4.30 with the ministers and 5.59 with the volunteers.

The ministers thus comply highly with the traditional agenda of confirmation lessons, whereas the volunteers' interests go along with those of the confirmands.

Motivation and Qualification of the Volunteers

When asked about previous experiences of working in church groups (children's clubs, Sunday school, etc.), 73% of the volunteers stated at least some experience of this kind. Nevertheless, only half of the volunteers have gone through a special training course for youth work. And no more than 19% were especially trained for working with confirmands. There is certainly a high need for training in this field to be developed within the next years. One indicator for the lack of training is the question WE01 »I know the official guidelines for confirmation work«. 89% of the ministers, but only 48% of the volunteers affirm this statement. The emergence of young volunteers in German confirmation work somewhat parallels the situation in Finland, with two important exceptions. First, the number of volunteers is much lower, and secondly, there is no systematic education or institutionalised training programme on a supra-regional level. Each parish develops its own training programme or (more often) prefers to qualify their volunteers on a »learning by doing« basis.

Surprisingly, the share of those who consider their pedagogical competence (WE09) as inadequate is higher among ministers (9%) than among volunteers (8%). This is different with inadequate theological competence. Only 1% of the ministers, but 18% of the volunteers tick one of the disagreeing boxes for the corresponding item WE10.

Expectations and Experiences

Comparing the aims and the self-estimated outcomes of confirmation work, the data indicate that many confirmation workers – ministers and volunteers alike – follow conventional patterns more frequently in their actual practice than they would really like to. The following items from t_1 and t_2 give an impression of this gap between aims (t_1) and perceived reality (t_2) of one's own pedagogical practise:

- 62% want the confirmands to be involved in the selection of topics for the confirmation time, but only 22% report that this in fact happened (WB09/VB09).
- 88% perceive it as important that confirmation time supports confirmands in their personal and social development, but only 72% state that this was the case (WC04/VC04).

- 87% think in the beginning of confirmation time that confirmands should experience forms of worship adequate for young people, but only 69% affirm in t_2 that special services of this kind have happened in fact (WB04/VB04).
- 85% aim at letting confirmands know what the youth work of the church offers them, but only 69% say that this was the case (WC06/VC06).
- 61% perceive it as important that confirmands should learn central Christian texts by heart (already a much higher share than, for example, in Austria and Switzerland), but 82% say that this has happened in the end (WC03/VC03). No other item had such a gain from t_1 to t_2 in the workers' estimation.

These exemplary results show that the theory of confirmation work, which the workers hold, is ahead of the practical implementation. As will be shown below, this is also true for active participation of confirmands in church services and cooperation with schools. Many workers know about the importance of involving youth and their perspectives but in their practical work, they fall back to traditional settings.

3.1.6 Didactics

Methods and Materials

When asked about the pedagogical measures they use in their teaching, the following measures received the highest values: discussions, working with biblical texts, group work, prayer, lectures/narrations, singing and stories/narratives. This indicates a focus on methods that often are typical for traditional school lessons. 59% of all leaders never use individualised forms of learning, 43% abstain completely from talking with external experts in the group, 28% from experiential methods. Certainly there has been a shift from earlier classroom settings to more open, experience-based learning, but these modern ways of teaching have not yet been introduced in all parishes (details: see section VH in appendix p. 329).

This is also mirrored by the material being used. The Bible is used »often« in 59% of the parishes and »sometimes« in 34% – no other material or media reaches this importance. Worksheets and material produced by the leaders themselves are also widely used. Concerning the use of an exercise book (many of them are on the German book market, the favourite one is called *Kursbuch*, Lübking 2005), there are two groups of parishes. Those who have an exercise book mostly use it regularly. On the other side, there are 42% of the parishes that do not use such a book at all. The options »seldom« and »sometimes« were ticked only by a few leaders (VI05). New media is only used by a small minority.

When confirmand groups sing, they use the traditional church hymn books as often as modern Christian songs (details: see appendix p. 330).

Topics

Table 8 compares the importance of topics stated by workers and confirmands in t_1 . The two lines at the top of the list (marked light grey) show the topics where the interest of confirmands exceeds that of the workers. The lines at the bottom of the list (marked dark grey) are the topics that are emphasised much more by workers than by the adolescents.

Table 8: Comparison of importance of topics in t_1 (sorted by difference between workers and confirmands) (Germany)

Importance of topic	workers	confirmands
Friendship	67%	88%
Other religions	37%	44%
Violence and crime	49%	48%
The meaning of life	78%	68%
Justice and responsibility for others	84%	65%
Baptism	92%	60%
Jesus Christ	95%	56%
Course and meaning of Sunday services	79%	34%
The Lord's Supper	90%	43%

N = 1580-1596 (workers); N = 11270-11373 (confirmands). For details cf. sections WA and CL in the appendix.

The assumption that confirmands would only be interested in »non-church-related« topics is not supported by these results. Topics like baptism and Jesus Christ receive more interest than, for example, violence and crime, although this interest is not as high as the workers' aim of teaching about these topics. The biggest difference between workers and confirmands is related to the Sunday services and (not independent from this) the Lord's Supper. It may well be said that a difference in interest between confirmands and workers is natural for an educational setting. The striking result actually lies in the upper part of the table. There are two topics, which the confirmands are more interested in than the workers. For both topics it is easy to imagine how they could be dealt with in the framework of confirmation work. Friendship is a topic that may well be linked to issues of Christian faith. It has a lot to do with major Christian values like faithfulness and loyalty, patience and altruism. In confirmation work this topic could not only be spoken about, but rather be connected to experiences by using games where it is important to rely upon each other, etc. The topic »other religions« is not yet dealt with in many parishes (which is confirmed

by the fact that only 33% of confirmands in t_2 report that they have learnt more about other religions during confirmation time; KB15). Ministers often state that this topic is sufficiently discussed in Religious Education in school. Although RE does in fact include the topic of other religions, it might well be a task of confirmation work to deal with the question how the Christian faith relates to other religious convictions. In a pluralistic situation, where, for example, Muslim faith is not something to simply know about in the sense of knowing about countries far away, but rather a reality in everyday life in Germany, confirmation work should face the challenge of a multireligious society and enable young people to reflect about their faith in relation to the faith of others.

Effects of Confirmation Time

The self-reported effects of confirmation time show that confirmation time, in general, is a positive experience for young people. Most of them experience a good sense of community in the group (73%; KB02) and feel enabled to come to an individual decision about their faith (60%; KB03). The relation to the parish, in general, is positive (63% feel »welcome and accepted; KK37). It is probably related to these experiences of good relationships that a good proportion of the confirmands become more sensitive to social issues in society during their confirmation time. More than half of the confirmands affirm the experience that their commitment to other people (52%; KK44) as well as to peace (52%; KK46) is important. Almost every fourth became motivated for voluntary work in the church (23%; KK27) – a much higher percentage than the number of those who actually turn out to help as volunteers and also a considerable number in terms of commitment in society in general.

On the other hand, the data show that the claim of introducing a change of perspective into confirmation work (*Perspektivenwechsel*) has not yet taken place in many parishes. Only 34% of the confirmands state that their questions concerning faith were addressed (KK11), only 29% had the feeling that their opinion was taken into account when the leaders decided about the topics (KK04). Almost one out of two confirmands states that what was learnt in confirmation time has little to do with one's everyday life (47%; KK35).

3.1.7 Church Services

Church services turn out to be one of the most problematic factors in German confirmation work. The obligation to take part in Sunday services is kept up in nearly all parishes. Usually a confirmand has to attend church about 20 times during the confirmation period. 93% of the parishes have invented ways to check the fulfilment of this duty, usually by church attendance cards that have

to be signed by the ministers. As shown in chapter 3.1.4, the mere presence in the services does not seem to impress confirmands a lot. The share of those who consider services as boring rises over time.

It is evident that an improvement of church services seems to be vital for the future of confirmation work. Not only by theologians but also by young people is the Sunday service seen as the hallmark of the Church. If this hallmark is experienced as a boring event, one must not wonder why many confirmands turn away from the Church after confirmation. Correlation analysis shows however, that boring services are not a God-given fate. If services, at least in some parts, take on a youth cultural style (for example concerning music) and if confirmands are allowed to take part in the preparation of services, satisfaction with Sunday services is much higher than the average. Thus, there are possibilities to enhance satisfaction of confirmands with worship. Or as a girl put it on her questionnaire: »I find it unfair, that church services aim at the elderly people. In our parish, the confirmands account for 50-60 % of all churchgoers. Some more pep, like in a youth service, wouldn't harm anyone, would it? Please do something about it, before we all fall asleep!«

3.1.8 Conclusions and Challenges

In conclusion, we want to describe three challenges that arise from the empirical findings. Confirmation work obviously still needs to do more in order to realise the conceptual promise of youth orientation. The institutionalized preparation of the personnel has to be adjusted to the greater involvement of voluntary workers. A major challenge – if not threat – arises from new developments in the school system that leave only very limited space of time for an activity like confirmation work.

As mentioned above in this chapter, there has been a noticeable shift towards a more subject-related and youth-oriented understanding of confirmation work in the German discussion in the last decades. But how does this broad conceptual agreement relate to the perceptions of the confirmands themselves? The results of the German study, including more than 11000 confirmands, show a high degree of satisfaction with activities in confirmation work. But still only a third of the confirmands felt that their own questions about faith were addressed, and almost half of them stated that what they learnt during confirmation time had little to do with their everyday life. Church services were, as seen above, perceived as particularly frustrating and boring. So there seems to be a certain gap between the theory and praxis of confirmation work at this point. There are clear hints that the problems with implementing the pupil-oriented turn have much to do with the didactics in this field. The methods that

are currently practiced in German confirmation lessons are still in many parishes quite close to those used in school, and the choice of topics does in many cases not meet the interests of the confirmands.

Although, in the beginning, the motives for participation are very much linked to the ceremony of confirmation and its implications (family celebration, gifts and blessing), the confirmation time is cherished by many of the adolescents when looking back on it. One important reason for this is the fact that some central elements of youth work have been introduced into confirmation work, especially outings and camps. Volunteers, many of them only slightly older than the confirmands, support the ministers in large numbers (especially in western Germany). They mostly get involved in extra meetings outside the weekly confirmation lessons and are enthusiastic about their experiences in confirmation work. Yet a system of training such volunteers has not been established on a wider scale, which leads to a situation in which one out of two volunteers has not undergone any special course for confirmation or youth work.

In an open question, the leaders had the possibility to write about their experiences with the effects of changes in the educational system on confirmation work. The answers show that, as presumed above, this question is indeed of great urgency for the parishes. After the reform of high school education in Germany, which has reduced the total time by one whole year, many confirmands attending the new *Gymnasium* face a heavier school workload, which leads to a decreasing willingness to invest time and effort in additional activities like confirmation work.

But still only one third of all workers stated in t_1 that »our confirmation work should cooperate with the school« (WD06). And even in these cases, this general aim almost never leads to concrete action. Only 5% of all workers affirm in t_2 , that there has actually been cooperation between school and confirmation work in the ongoing confirmation period. One obvious reason is a structural problem. Each confirmation group is composed, on an average, of pupils from 5 to 6 different schools. It is hard to imagine how cooperation on such a basis should look if confirmation work does not want to give up its claim of bringing together adolescents from different school types. In light of this, confirmation work has to put more emphasis on its positive contribution to society at large. Only a strong profile in the public sphere will obtain and secure the time resources that are needed for doing good work with the adolescents.

This leads us to a final observation. In a competitive society like Germany with increasingly uncertain employment prospects, the question asked by many confirmands in respect to confirmation work »What do I get out of it? Why should I go there?« takes on an additional meaning. At least implicitly, they are not just asking about the meaning of this activity but also about its palpable

implications for their personal and professional future. Convincing answers will have to address such questions. This being the case, it causes additional concern that so many German confirmands feel that confirmation work is out of touch with their daily life. The high popularity of ethical themes with the confirmands seems to indicate as well that the church has to consider possibilities for broadening its work with young people by not focussing exclusively on matters of faith but also on matters of mastering one's life in other respects.