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Confirmation and its Preparation – Expectations and Effects

Patrik C. Höring

Abstract:

The preparation for confirmation is connected with lots of hopes and expectations: Ministers, volunteers, the congregation, the parents – even the Bishop who leads the liturgy of the confirmation – all have specific goals in mind they hope to reach. But does that meet the situation of young people attending a preparation course? A survey in the Roman-catholic diocese of Cologne gives insights into the situation of the juveniles and the volunteers who are engaged in the preparation courses and tries to find out what effects of the preparation could be observed.

Keywords: Confirmation, Youth Ministry, effects, empirical research

1. Context

The survey reported in the following was funded by the Roman-catholic diocese of Cologne and deals therefore with the preparation of the sacrament of the confirmation in the *Roman-catholic church in Germany*. Some more aspects to this specific context are outlined below.

Confirmation is used to be celebrated at about the age of 16. In dioceses in the southern part of Germany or in Austria participants are younger, about 11 to 13 years age. In the northern part of Germany, mainly in urban areas, and in parts of Switzerland participants are older, up to 18 years. Cologne represents the midpoint.

The preparation courses are usually situated in the local parish. There are exceptions, e.g. catholic schools who offer confirmation as a part of their school programme or catholic youth organisations who offer a confirmation course during their weekly programme or on weekends or holidays, amongst catholic scouts even as a hike. Other examples are the so called „Youth Churches“, former parish churches in the major towns which are now supposed to build up new congregations especially for juveniles, or congregations at universities which offer confirmation too. The following article refers to the standard model: preparation and celebration of confirmation in the local parish.

Preparation is understood to take place before the celebration of the confirmation. There are suggestions to celebrate first and to deepen the experience afterwards. But this is actually realised very seldom.

Preparation takes about half a years' time, it starts mainly in autumn and terminates in spring or early summer of the following year.

The courses are mainly conducted by lay ministers which means in Germany: full or part time employees with theological degree who are not part of the clergy (*Pastoralreferenten-/Gemeindereferenten/-innen*). They are supported by a team of volunteers, people of all age – it depends on the parish if they are more or less retired teachers or more young people who passed confirmation in the last year.

How is preparation done? Mainly in small groups who gather at home or in parish premises led by one or two volunteers on a weekly basis. Other parishes prefer to meet once or twice a month for a whole Saturday or Sunday in a bigger group of up to 100 or even more. These meetings are accompanied by other additional activities from which the juveniles can or must

choose: one week spent in Taizé or a social project and of course Sunday services with the parish people or youth services just for them.

2. Status of Research

Catechesis in general still suffers from an empirical and theoretical deficit. Catechesis of catholic confirmation in particular is the subject of several systematical-, liturgical- and practical-theological works of the recent years: Winger 2019, Lutz 2018, Rehberg-Schroth 2012, Höring 2011, Langenbacher 2010, Hauke 1999, Hilberath/Scharer 1998¹. In addition, there are numerous guidelines in the German-speaking dioceses (in recent times: Feldkirch 2017², Münster 2014³, Cologne 2008⁴).

The topics dealt within these are mostly the search for the 'meaning' of confirmation as a sacrament, its relationship to Baptism (and to First Holy Communion) regarding the gift of the Holy Spirit, the order of the initiation sacraments, the right age.

More extensive empirical work, however, is sought in vain. In the past, individual dioceses have carried out smaller surveys (Regensburg 2013, Limburg 2007/08, Speyer 2006, Essen 2004). However, a deeper examination of the situation of the addressees could hardly be found.

3. Hypotheses based on Theory and Practice

What picture do theory and practice currently provide? Referring to literature mentioned above and to own observations while working with parishes and practitioners the following findings might document the necessity of this research project and give possible hypotheses:

- Understanding and objectives in catechesis are divergent or unclear. Accordingly, contents and methods might become inconsistent, possibly also unspecific. In order to give more clarity

¹ Philipp Winger, *Initiationsritus zwischen Taufe und Eucharistie. Ein liturgiewissenschaftlicher Beitrag zu einer Theologie der Firmung*, Regensburg 2019; Christian Lutz, *Firmung Jugendlicher im interdisziplinären Diskurs. Theologie – Ritual – Empirie*, Würzburg 2018; Kerstin Rehberg-Schroth, *Geprägt fürs Leben – Ein Segen sollst du sein. Auf der Suche nach einer verbindenden Theologie von Firmung und Konfirmation*, Ostfildern 2013; Patrik C. Höring, *Firmung – Sakrament zwischen Zuspruch und Anspruch. Eine sakramententheologische Untersuchung in praktisch-theologischer Absicht*, Kevelaer / Düsseldorf 2011; Jesaja Langenbacher, *Firmung als Initiation in Gemeinschaft. Theologie von Firmlingen – eine Herausforderung und Bereicherung für die Lebens- und Glaubenskommunikation in der Kirche*, Berlin 2010; Manfred Hauke, *Die Firmung. Geschichtliche Entfaltung und theologischer Sinn*, Paderborn 1999; Bernd Jochen Hilberath, Matthias Scharer, *Firmung – Wider den feierlichen Kirchenaustritt. Theologisch-praktische Orientierungshilfen*, Mainz / Innsbruck / Wien 2000.

² Katholische Kirche Vorarlberg, *meine Firmung 4.0. Leitlinien für die Firmpastoral in der Diözese Feldkirch*, o.O. 2017.

³ Bischöfliches Generalvikariat Münster (Ed.), *Begeisternd. Orientierungsrahmen für die Firmpastoral im Bistum Münster*, Münster o.J.

⁴ Abteilung Jugendseelsorge im Erzbistum Köln, *Impulspapier: „Firmung als Beauftragung zum Apostolat“* (2008), in: Patrik C. Höring, *Firmpastoral heute. Theologischer Anspruch und pastorale Realität*, Kevelaer / Düsseldorf 2008, 103-113.

could to positively influence the effectiveness of catechesis and promote the development of the church a research project should deal with goals and objectives.

- There is dissatisfaction, even if the mood is not catastrophic - after all, volunteers are regularly found! The dissatisfaction is higher among full-time staff than among volunteers. It can be assumed that this dissatisfaction is dependent on the divergence between their own theological premises (if these are clear, see above) and the possibilities of feasibility. This is probably the real reason for the frequent desire for a change in the age of the confirmation (mostly upwards). Research should reveal possible divergences as assumed.

- For both questions a nearer view on the expectations of juvenile candidates and the volunteers is needed. These expectations might be unspecific. Or they might be connected to a theological understanding of confirmation which include the following aspects (cf. Höring 2011): (1) Confirmation as a new opportunity to come to faith or to develop faith to an 'adult level' (whatever that means = anthropological dimension of confirmation); (2) Confirmation as a further step towards or into church and as a ritual of being sent to mission (ecclesiological-missiological dimension); (3) Confirmation as the celebration of the Holy Spirit (spiritual dimension); (4) Confirmation as becoming part of Jesus Christ (christological dimension). In principle, it can be assumed that the understanding of Confirmation depends on one's own image of the Church and God.

- Referring to the feeling of dissatisfaction mentioned above it is vital to know how newly confirmed persons understand confirmation in retrospect to make conclusions on the effectiveness of the catechetical process.

4. Aim and Methodology of the Project

Therefore the project reported here focused in the first place on the question if there might be any effects connected with the preparation process done and how they meet the expectations of the juveniles and the volunteers. So juveniles and volunteers were asked first: What do they expect? What ideas do both have regarding confirmation? Does it converge? Does it converge with the theological understanding of confirmation? And the juveniles were asked a second time, just before or shortly after the confirmation itself: How did their expectations met the reality of the course? Are there any effects visible between the two dates?

The research was conducted as a quantitative survey using a standardised questionnaire. This enabled a direct comparison of the same sample group before and after the preparation of the confirmation. The data was evaluated with the help of the statistics program IBM-SPSS. These data were made available to the participating parishes for counselling processes by the pedagogical staff of the regional Catholic youth agencies, who were also already involved in the data collection.

In addition to general biographical data (gender, age, origin, educational background) and questions regarding religious socialisation (religiousness of the parental home) and church involvement (attendance at church services, prayer, voluntary work), the questionnaire focused on the following topics in particular:

- Expectations for the preparation of the confirmation

- Personal prior understanding of the sacrament of confirmation
- Reasons for the application
- Attitudes towards church and faith or the connection between both
- Attitudes to the image of God and to individual aspects of the Christian faith.

In addition, the activities and events and the preparation for confirmation in general were evaluated.

The answers were mainly recorded using a 4-step scale. In a few cases an open question was followed by a free text field. The answers were formed after open discussions with a couple of juveniles and regarding own experiences when advising catechists and the following empirical studies:

Schweitzer, Friedrich; Elsenbast, Volker (Ed.): *Konfirmandenarbeit erforschen. Ziele – Erfahrungen – Perspektiven*, Gütersloh 2009 und weitere Bände

Shell Deutschland Holding (Ed.): *Jugend 2019. Eine Generation meldet sich zu Wort* (18. Shell-Jugendstudie), Frankfurt / Main 2019

Ziebertz, Hans-Georg et.al.: *Religiöse Signaturen heute. Ein religionspädagogischer Beitrag zur empirischen Jugendforschung [RPG 3]*, Freiburg i. Brsg./Gütersloh 2003.

For the volunteers the questionnaire was adapted and some specific questions were added. The survey of the catechists took place only once, at the beginning of the preparation course.

5. Key Findings

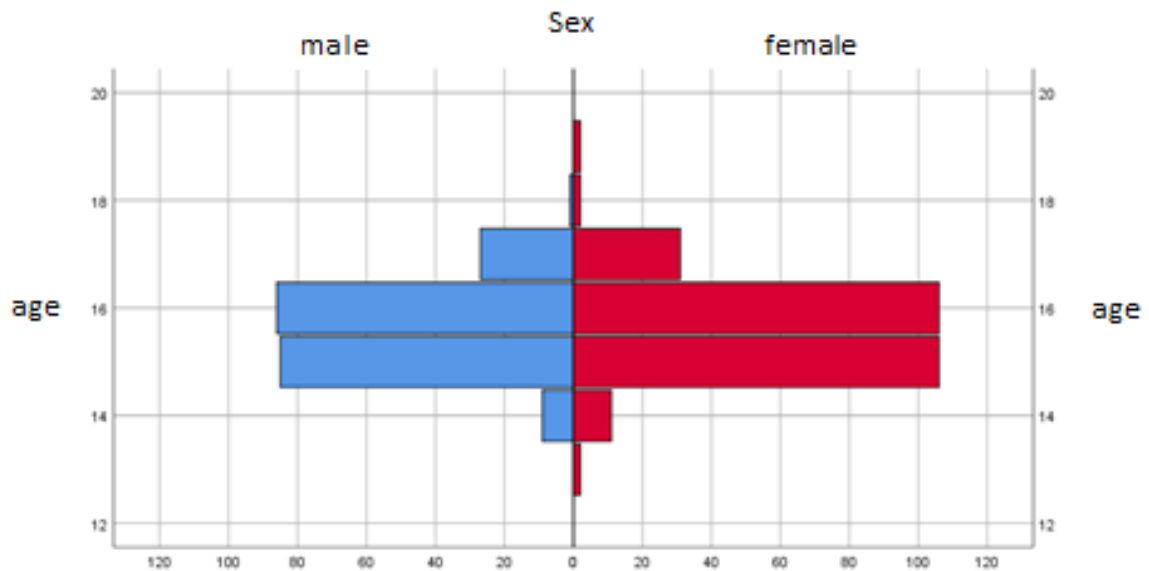
5.1 Sample Size and General Conditions

The questionnaire was returned by 468 juveniles in 11 parishes. 193 questionnaires allowed a comparison of the answers at the beginning and end of the confirmation. 30 catechists in 5 parishes could be interviewed. The sample comprises interviews in the period from autumn 2017 to spring 2019.

5.1.1 Who is actually (still) coming to the confirmation course? The target group: the young people

Age, gender, school type

Who's coming? – the target group

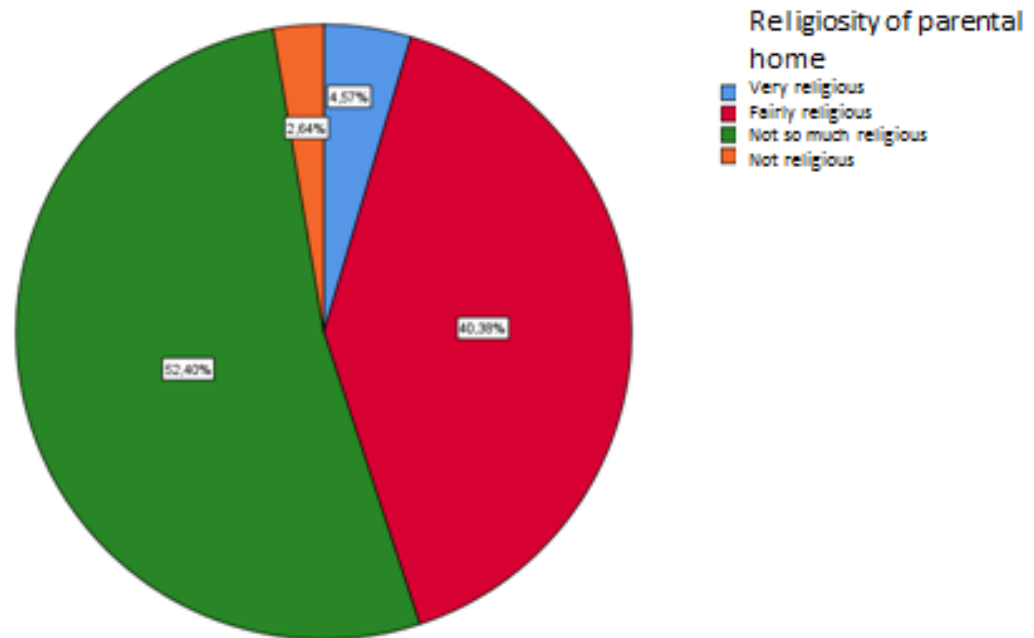


In the parishes surveyed, the age range is 13 to 19 (average: 15.6) years. Regarding gender the female group is slightly bigger. Regarding the school types, the general rumour is confirmed that the Church addresses mainly young people in higher schools.

Previous experiences and religious socialisation

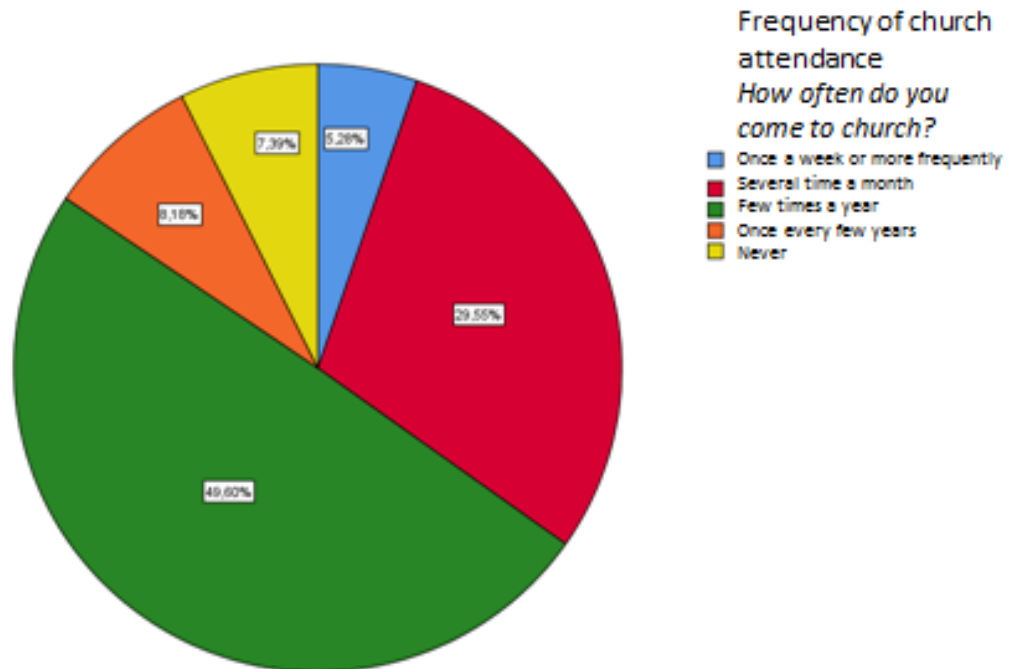
Many catechists complain about the heterogeneity of the groups, the wide range of previous experiences in matters of religion. This is clearly reflected in their self-assessment regarding their own parental home: a good 44% rate their parental home as "very" or "fairly religious", while a good 54% describe it as "less" or "not religious at all".

Who's coming? – the target group



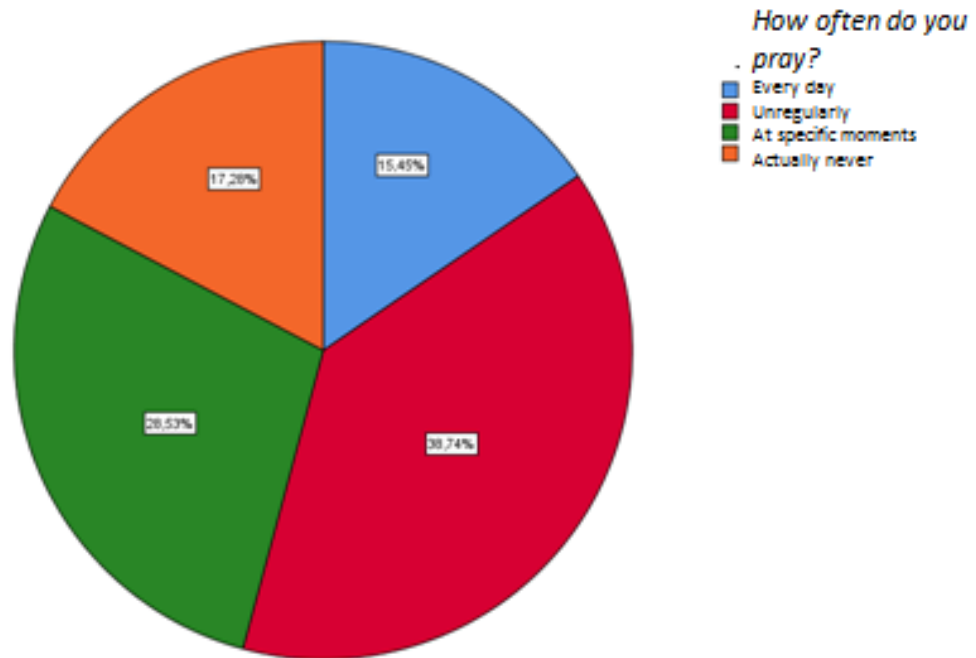
Catechesis challenges this - or could take up the heterogeneity as a chance for a common, mutual learning process between 'more experienced' and 'less experienced' candidates. In any case, catechesis is also the chance for taking up anew a thread of conversation and relationship with those who kept distance since first Holy Communion.

Who's coming? – the target group



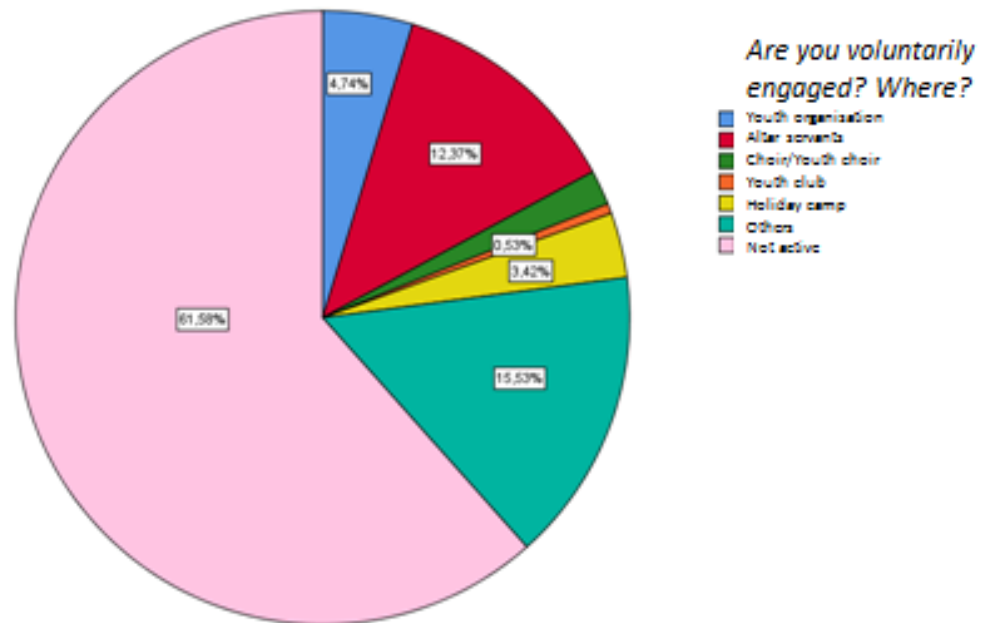
When asked about church attendance or individual praying, a smaller group of regular participants (whereby daily praying is more common than weekly attendance at church services) was found, while on the other hand quite a large group comes here and there to church services. After all, about 15% do not bring regular liturgical practice with them.

Who's coming? – the target group



Studies regularly report that religious experiences, attitudes towards religion and church are not only connected with the parental home but also with the own relationship to the local parish. This relationship can be nurtured by volunteering in youth ministry or other activities offered by the local congregation.

Who's coming? – the target group

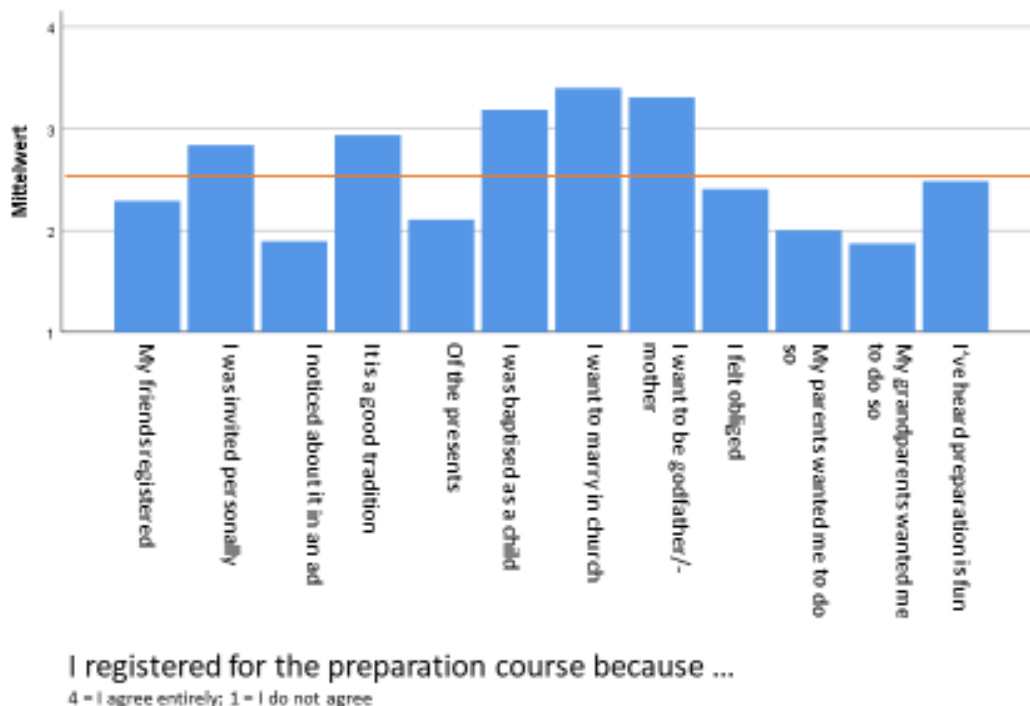


Two thirds are not involved in church. Among the opportunities for participation, altar servants stand out as the largest group, followed by youth associations and holiday camps. Under "Other" are people who are involved several times (e.g. as altar boys and at a holiday camp).

5.2 What's it all about? Motivation and Expectations

The project was a good opportunity to discuss some myths often met when talking about confirmation. The main one: The juveniles attend only because they will be offered presents when passing confirmation. Or they attend because parents told them to do so. The second myth is that they might not be interested in any religious topic. They might be interested in meeting up with former schoolmates but not the least to talk about Jesus or the eternal life or even their own longing. Both myths might lead to a disappointment at the end of the day because obviously the juveniles do not return to parish life, which can be easily proven by looking in the next Sunday service. This often leads to the impression: All our work was for nothing and our work has no visible effect. And that's exactly the point: Is there no effect visible? Or no effect at all?

In order to counteract the legends, the young people were asked why they had registered. The result is surprising:



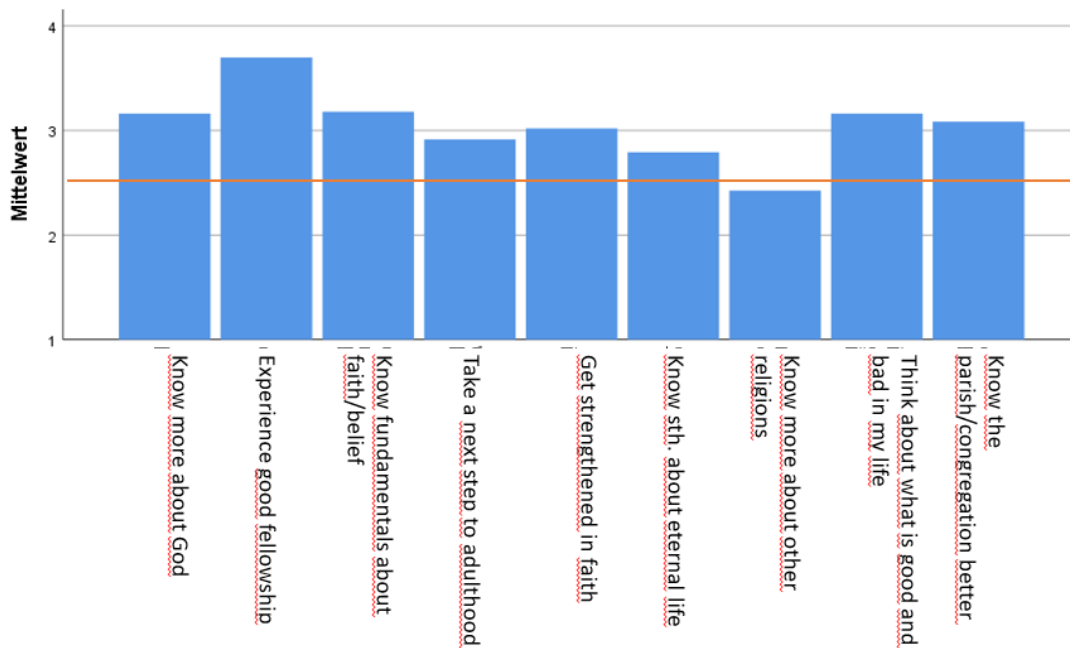
It is obviously not the expected gifts (although some will certainly welcome them) and not the wish of parents or even grandparents. This may reflect the average age of a good 15 years. It is also less the friends who motivate to participate (possibly an indication of a beginning diaspora situation: it is no longer common practice to participate in church).

What motivates is the prospect of being able to get married in church with confirmation.⁵ (Although not required by canon law, this myth persists, possibly supported by church members with Polish or southern European background. It is also possible that the result was induced by the answer proposed by the research team itself, since church marriage is still highly valued by contemporaries close to the church). A motivator is also the later assumption of the godparenthood (for which confirmation is actually a prerequisite). Often, however, participation also seems somehow logical, because one is baptised and Confirmation seems to be a "good tradition" of the Church.

Depending on the parish - and depending on local practice - it is sometimes also the good reputation of confirmation preparation that it is "fun" (which today means that young people do not only enjoy entertainment but also deep satisfaction). Not to be underestimated in catechesis is also the personal address (which includes a personal letter from the parish).

With regard to this overall picture there are no differences between the younger and the older, even if the sample is differentiated according to migration background. However, differences are noticeable when previous experiences are taken into account: For those who "actually never" attend church services, friends and gifts, but also parental will play a much greater role. Once they are there, young people certainly have expectations of what they have chosen to do.

⁵ Cf. also Carsten Haeske, Kati Niemelä, Das finnische Erfolgsgeheimnis. Impulse aus der Konfirmandenarbeit im Land der tausend Seen für die deutsche Jugendarbeit, 378, Tab. 2, *deutsche jugend* 58 (2010), 377–384.



During the course I would like to ...

4 = I agree entirely; 1 = I do not agree

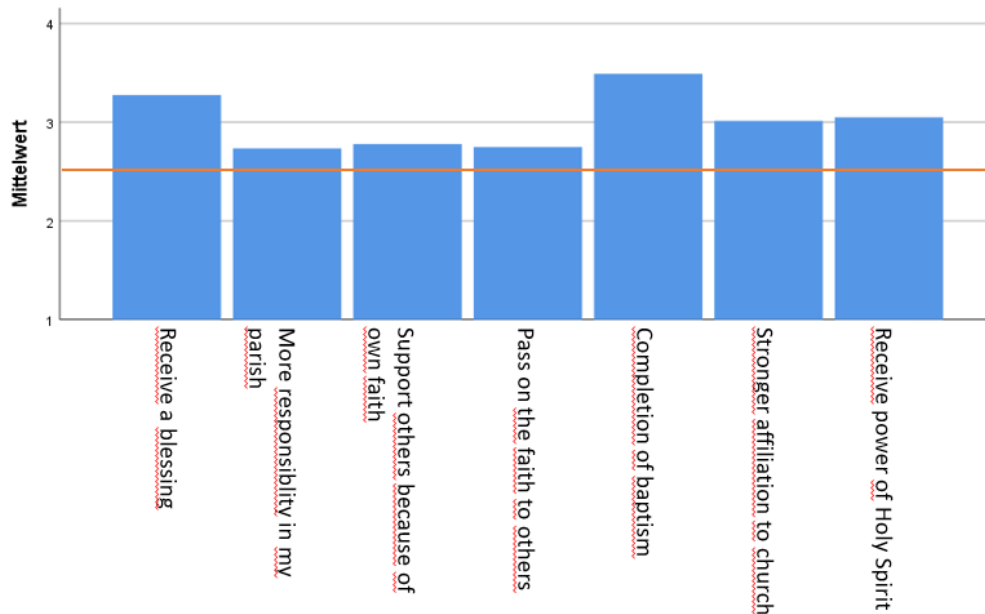
Apart from the desire for "good fellowship", they are definitely interested in "learning more about God", "getting into reflection" and even "getting to know the church better". These interests coincide to a large extent with the intentions of the catechists, who are even more concerned that the young people should have a "good community" and learn "more about God".

5.3 What is Confirmation? The Understanding of the Sacrament

A central question was the understanding of confirmation. Are the ideas of the young people (and also of the catechists) compatible with what the Church understands by confirmation? First of all, the young people were asked an open question, the answers to which were clustered according to frequency. Most frequently, Confirmation is associated with a (another) learning process in faith ("learning more about faith", "getting closer to God"), often also connected with the institutional side of faith as belonging to a religious community ("confirmation of faith by the Church"). Just as often aspects of a decision and growing up were connected with it. For many, Confirmation is also the continuation of First Communion instruction and is characterised by the possibility of marriage and the assumption of sponsorship.

Confirmation for me is...

(Candidates t1)



The answers only just exceed the arithmetical mean of 2.5. Somehow the juveniles suppose that confirmation has something to do with one's own baptism (or perhaps this connection has already been addressed in the letter of invitation). And: Confirmation is a form of blessing - however understood.

Aspects connected with Confirmation, such as increased membership and responsibility in the church or congregation or the witnessing of faith are hardly ever affirmed. While the aspect of the "completion of baptism" is affirmed by all young people equally, the other aspects of Confirmation find a clearly higher approval among young people with a high frequency of worship services ("once a week and more often") than among young people with a low frequency of worship ("actually never").

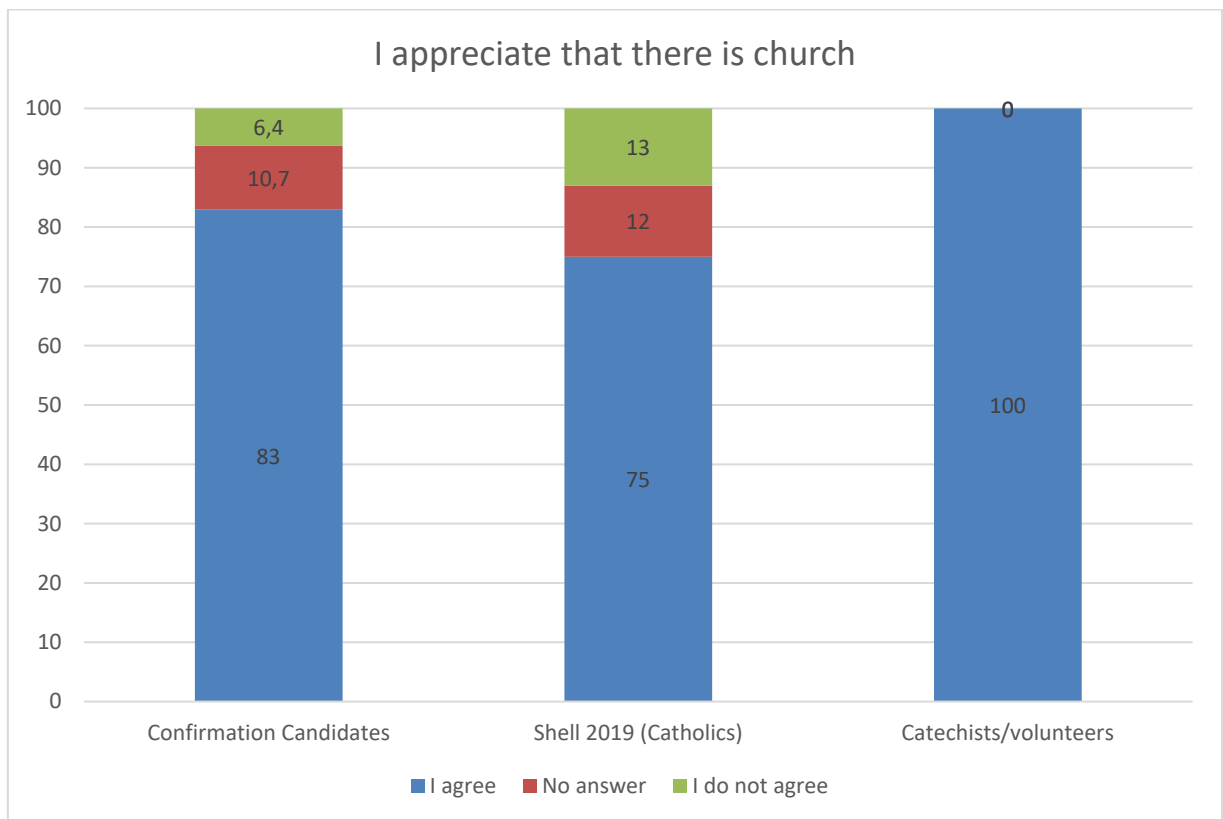
Catechists, on the other hand, find the aspect of the "power of the Holy Spirit" particularly important, and also the ecclesial and missionary aspects find more approval than among the confirmands. The "responsibility in the congregation", however, is affirmed in a similarly restrained way; perhaps one has already been immunised against unrealistic expectations in this regard.

5.4 Jesus yes - Church no? Attitudes towards Church and Faith

For decades the sentence 'Jesus yes - church no' marked the increasing privacy of religious attitudes and practice, an attitude that today seems to develop even to a more diffuse 'spirituality yes - religion no'.⁶ Therefore it seemed interesting to see whether also young people who are going to Confirmation follow such a maxim and how they assess church and its situation.

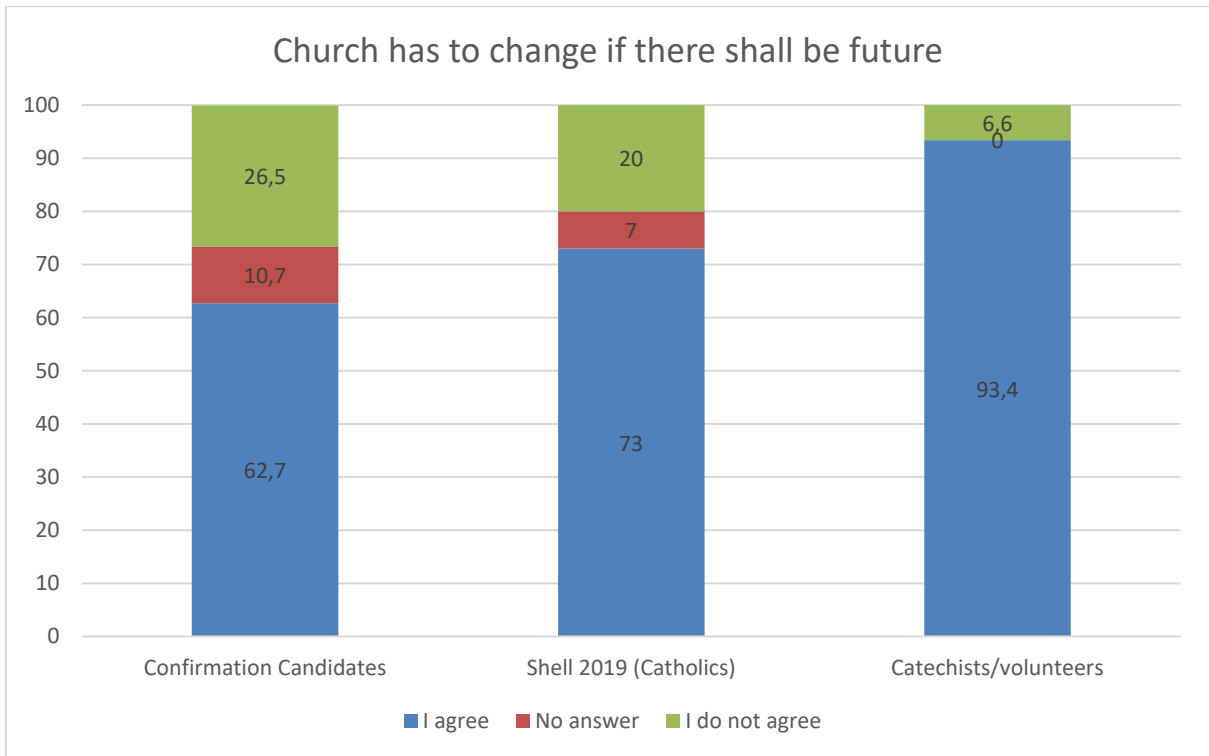
⁶ Cf. Patrik C. Höring, *Jugendlichen begegnen. Arbeitsbuch Jugendarbeit*, Stuttgart 2017, 77-87, 80.

For this purpose, questions were used which were initially in the Shell Youth Survey, which revealed young people's critical assessments of the church as an institution or faith community and its future.⁷

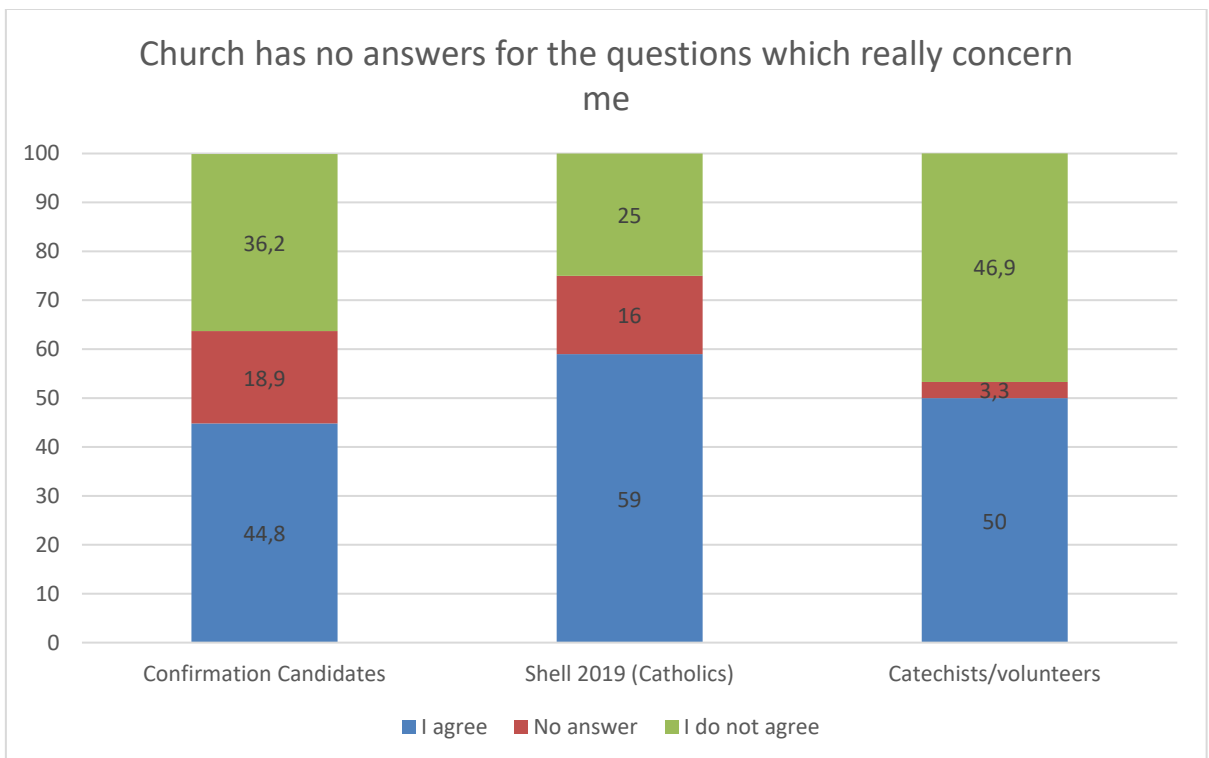


Similar to the Shell Youth Survey, the interviewed candidates for confirmation (as well as the catechists) show a positive attitude towards the Church. In contrast to the Shell Youth Survey, only a smaller quantity sees deficits in the Church with regard to its future (which the catechists perceive to a far greater extent).

⁷ Cf. Shell Deutschland Holding (Ed.), *Jugend 2019. Eine Generation meldet sich zu Wort*, Frankfurt am Main 2019, 156.



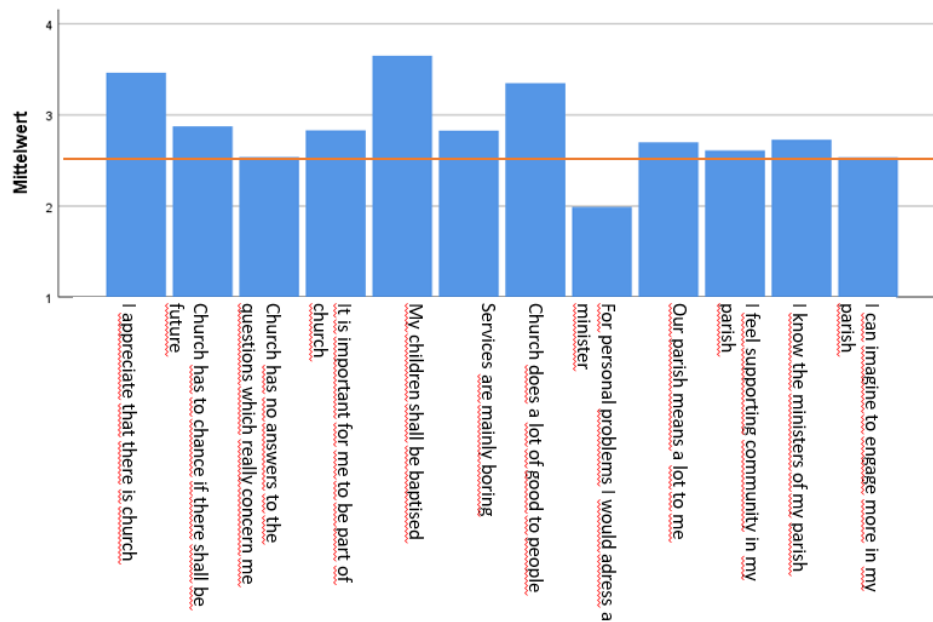
In contrast to this only less than half of them are still convinced that the church would not have any answers to their actual questions. So it can be put in the following formula: very high approval of the institution, at the same time definitely criticism of the sustainability and moderate approval of the church's loss of relevance.



Further questions complete the picture: The great approval of the church is visible in the high approval of the question about the baptism of one's own children as well as in the opinion that

the "church does much good". But the agreement remains abstract to a certain extent, because the local congregation does not seem to be the place where church is discovered. Only some people experience church as a community that means a lot to them and in which they would like to get more involved. Since only a few of the employees are personally known to them, they would not be approached if problems arose.

Church (Candidates t1)



There are big differences between young people with a high frequency of worship and others: the former feel a stronger sense of belonging to the church, due to more intensive experiences with church and congregation, they find worship less boring, probably due to regular liturgical practice or experiences with alternative worship services, they appreciate the local congregation more because they seem to be better integrated into the network of relationships. And: They trust the church much more to provide suitable answers to their questions of life. It is not surprising that the catechists also show a greater closeness to the local congregation, since they volunteer in the congregation and thus come into close contact with the employees. Furthermore, questions developed by Ziebertz for the survey "Religiöse Signaturen"⁸ were used to characterize the relation between church and personal faith. They differentiate in three categories: "Identity" = "Church belongs to faith"; "Difference" = "Faith is also possible without church" and "Self-construction" = "Faith must be determined by himself".⁹

⁸ Cf. Ziebertz, Hans-Georg et. al., *Religiöse Signaturen heute. Ein religionspädagogischer Beitrag zur empirischen Jugendforschung [RPG 3]*, Freiburg i. Brsg./Gütersloh 2003, esp. 123-157.

⁹ Ibid., 146.

Like the people interviewed by Ziebertz et al.¹⁰ the juveniles here share the credo of modernity: faith is a private matter, which does not necessarily have to be (but can be!) related to church. Personal freedom is the basic date: "The freedom of the individual is above religion"¹¹ or "self-determination" is "the basic date of the religiosity of young people"¹².

The most rated answer is: "What religion is, everybody has to find out for himself" or "Faith is something that people do themselves".¹³ This shows clear signs of the type of self-construction according to Ziebertz.¹⁴ Exclusivist concepts ('Outside the church no salvation') also find no approval. Nevertheless, other religions do not play a major role either, which may be due to the fact that there are only few moments to come in contact with them - despite their obvious presence in public and media - or that there is no deep discussion of concepts of religion amongst juveniles. In this situation church still seems to play a role or is at least a theoretical factor. Because a meaninglessness of church does also not find approval. Well, Church is not necessary either, one can "believe also without Pope and church".

Again differences between young people with frequent and less frequent church attendance are noticeable: Those who participate less frequently tend clearly more to concepts of "difference" and "self-construction" of faith. To them other religions have a slightly greater importance and church is less important for their faith.

Catechists do not fully agree with the relevance of freedom and self-determination. For them, Church has a far greater significance for the development of their faith, although they do not agree with any exclusivism.

5.5 Image of God

To reveal the juveniles' conceptions of God some questions of Ziebertz's study were used again¹⁵, supplemented by aspects of religious experience and religious practice. Ziebertz et al. noted a big deficit of religious experience while at the same time such experiences by others were appreciated¹⁶. Thus the question arose as to whether a longing in this regard could be perceived among the candidates for the confirmation.

As in Ziebertz et.al., an atheistic/antitheistic position does not find many advocates. The idea that God is "not above us" but "in the hearts of the people" seems to be a favorite concept. Such concept makes it possible to have experiences with such God. And it seems plausible that God acts in this world. Therefore it is acceptable that people make the experience of his presence. However, oneself does not feel this closeness so strongly, but would certainly wish for it, whereby prayer - as the way to feel and cultivate the relationship with God - does not seem to be particularly difficult.

But also rather biblical conceptions, which belong to the church's faith, find approval: God loves people; there is life after death; Jesus rose from the dead; God forgives sin and this is even experienced as comforting. Overall, however, the approval remains at a low level. It

¹⁰ Sample included 729 pupils of a 9th year of a „Gymnasium“ in lower Franconia, Germany. Cf. *ibid.*, 54-57.

¹¹ Deutsche Shell (Ed.), *Jugend 2000*, Bd. 2, Opladen 2000, 147.

¹² Ziebertz, *Religiöse Signaturen heute*, 259.

¹³ Cf. 5.6.3 in this article.

¹⁴ Cf. Ziebertz, *Religiöse Signaturen heute*, 146, image 9.7.

¹⁵ Cf. *ibid.*, 337.

¹⁶ Cf. *ibid.*, 253-258.

seems that the young people tend towards certain ideas, but are not completely convinced of them.

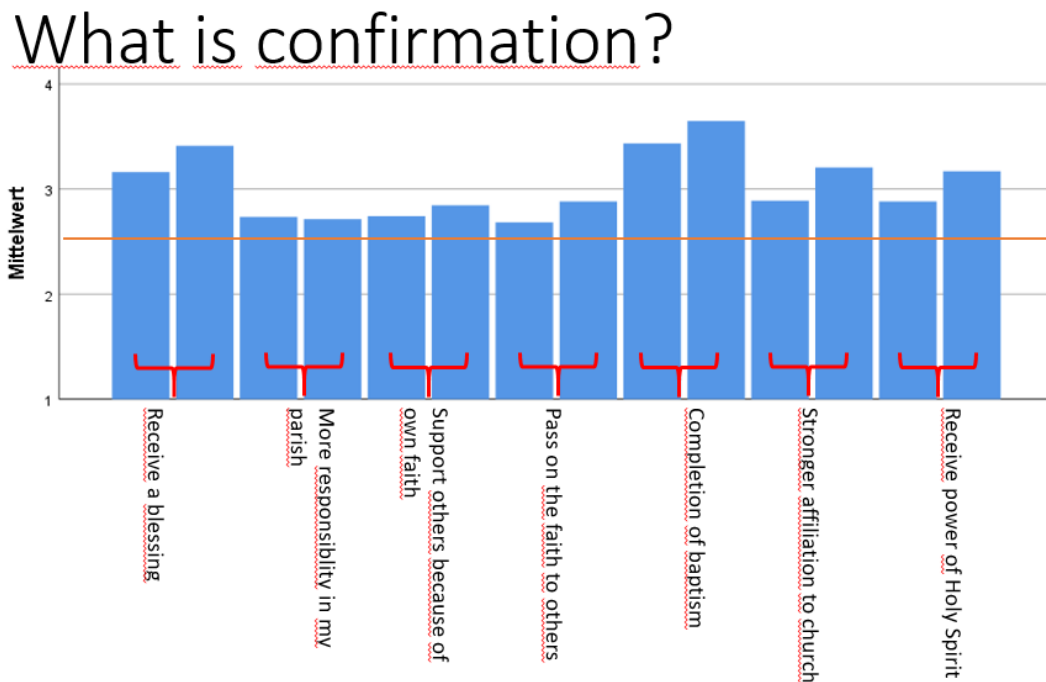
This is different with catechists. Their attitudes differ by higher rates of agreement with most conceptions of God, so that also the agnostic-unconvinced attitude that one "cannot say whether there is a God or not", which found approval among the young people, was clearly rejected by the catechists, as well as the atheistic position (with one exception). Catechists therefore appear as personalities less contested in faith - probably not the worst prerequisite for an engagement in catechesis.

5.6 Development and Learning Outcomes

The purpose was to find out about possible developments during the preparation. For this reason, almost identical questionnaires were presented to the young people again immediately before or after the celebration of the confirmation, so that comparisons can be made directly with the individual questions.

5.6.1 Understanding Confirmation

Not particularly surprisingly, the approval ratings for the individual response options increase, but only to a very small extent. This means that it was obviously not possible to convincingly convey the different dimensions of Confirmation, which also include ecclesial and missionary aspects. The reason might be: These aspects were also not dominant among the catechists.



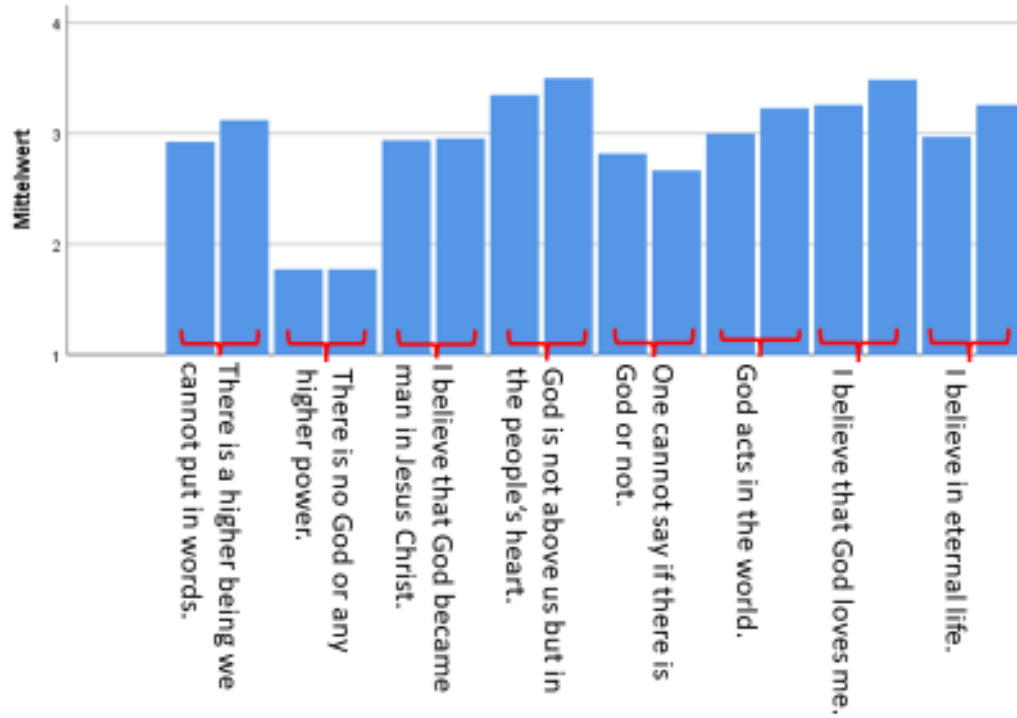
Confirmation for me is ... (t1 / t2)

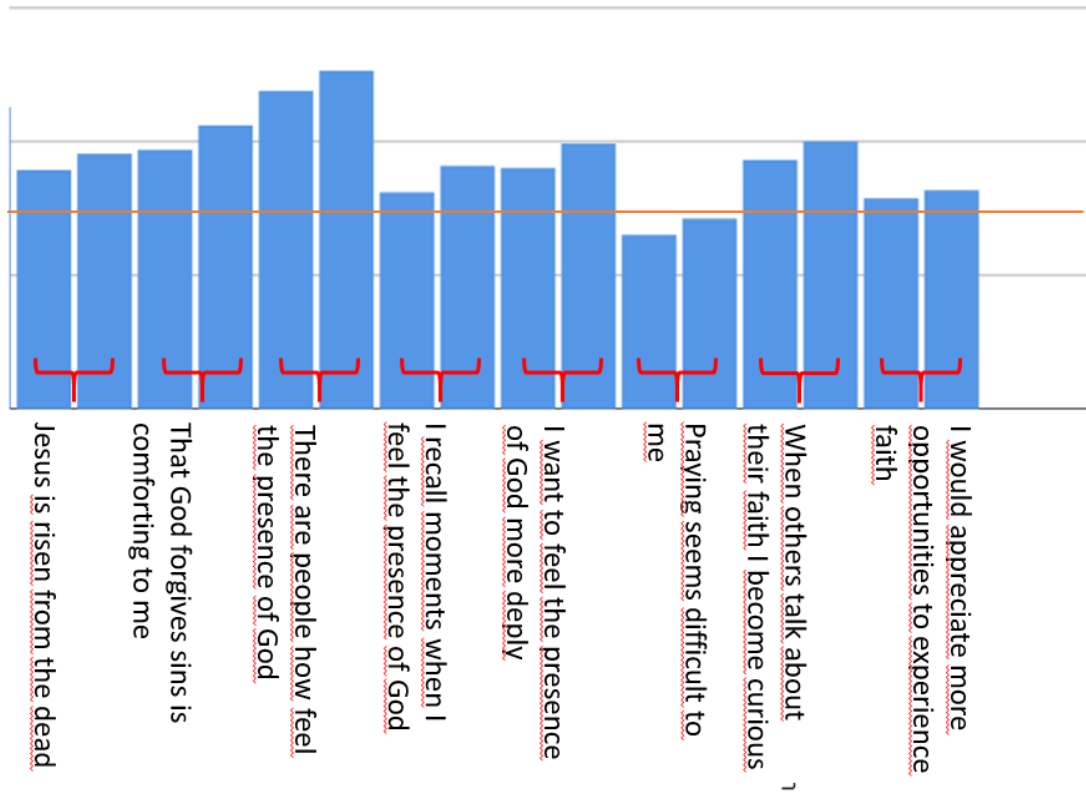
4 = I agree; 1 = I do not agree

5.6.2. Image of God

Reflecting the answers between t1 and t2 related to aspects of faith and experiencing faith a small increase is visible.

Image of God (Candidates t1/t2)

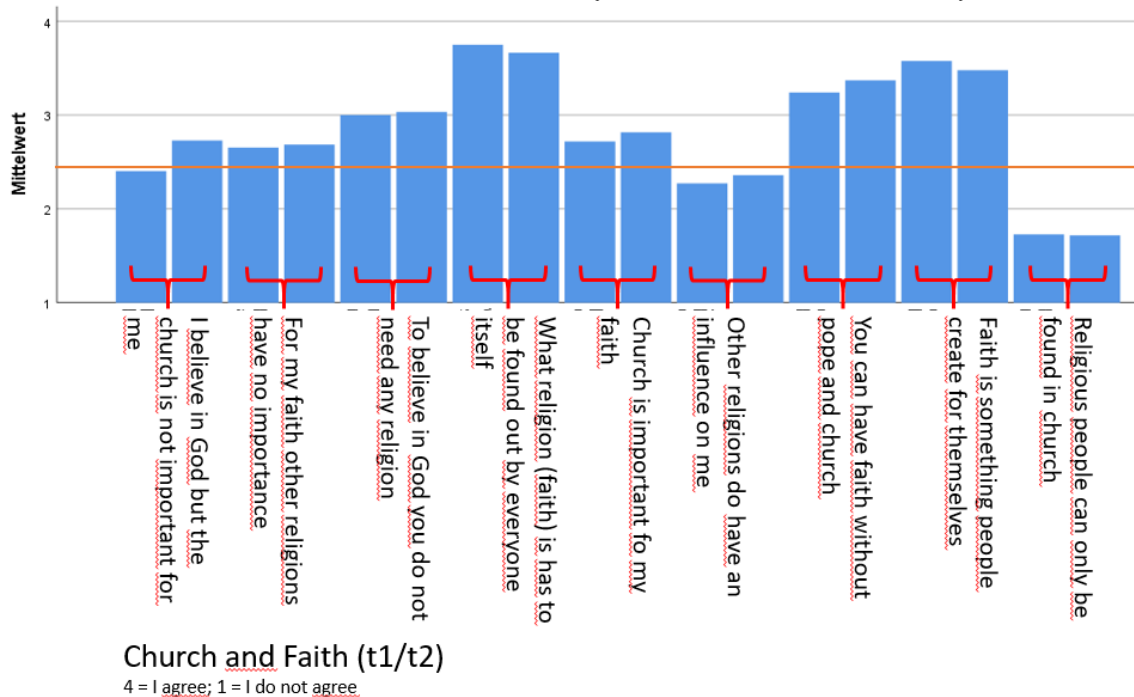




5.6.3 Church and Faith

A similar picture emerges from the answers regarding the relation between church and personal faith: Differences between the two moments of the questioning are hardly to be found.

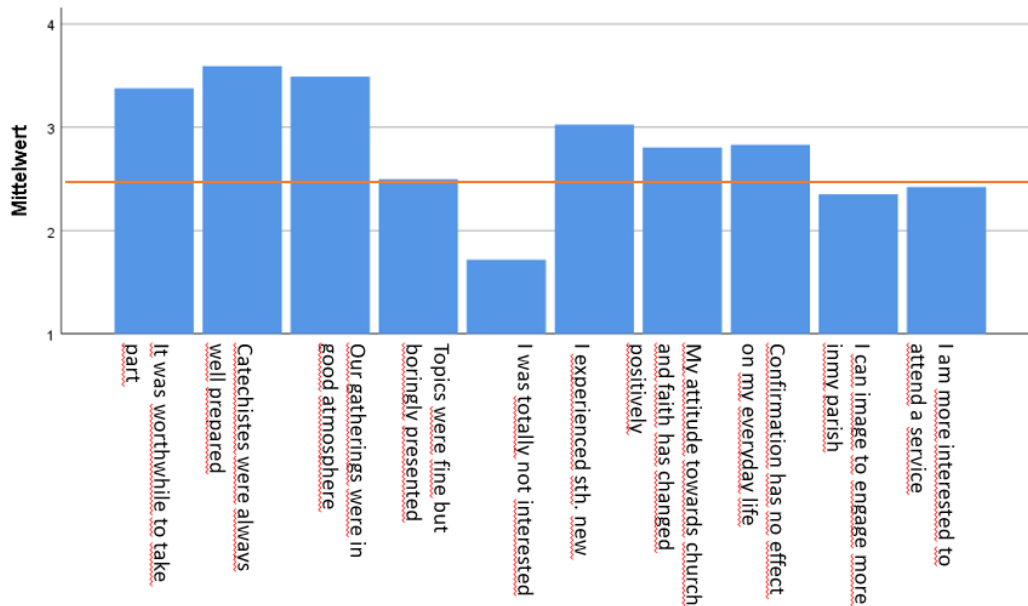
Church and Faith (Candidates t1/t2)



Also with regard to the image of church and local congregation, the changes are only minimal. Interesting observations can be made in the group of young people with a high frequency of church services: Here an increase in agreement with the answer that “the church had no answers to the actually important questions” can be observed. Also the willingness to turn to a pastor in case of personal problems decreased.

5.7 Retrospective Evaluation

But how did the young people experience their time together? Were their expectations fulfilled? Although the changes between the two survey dates may appear small, the process itself is generally evaluated positively. In this respect, questions may arise, for example about the method chosen for recording personal development: Is this possible by quantitative research?



Feedback

4 = I agree; 1 = I do not agree

The catechists, who were perceived as well prepared, as interesting people "from whom one could really learn something", were particularly positively evaluated. Attending the course is considered worthwhile and recommendable, even if one has not learned "many new things" and the "attitude towards church and faith" has only marginally changed. In any case, a greater interest in coming to the service or in getting involved in the church could not be induced. With regard to the concept of the course (weekly meetings, various trips, flat-sharing week, retreats, large group meetings, social project, church services, regional meetings) no clear picture emerges: While in one parish the journey is best, in the other it is the weekly meetings. Possibly, not only the setting alone plays a role, but also the concrete arrangement of the activity.

6. Conclusion

6.1 Results in Short

Confirmation preparation tends to appeal more to distant, but also to a smaller group of church-related young people. The heterogeneity can be both an opportunity and a burden. In any case, there is the possibility of reaching young people who are more or less 'far from church'.

The young people do bring a certain interest. It almost seems as if the young people give the church or the local congregation one last chance to prove themselves or to prove the relevance of church and faith. At the same time, this bears the risk of failure.

The understanding of confirmation seems rather conventional-individualistic. But among catechists missionary and ecclesial aspects are also less important. Possibly it is about the late

consequences of an individualistic religiosity cultivated over centuries and a low personal sense of mission, which distinguishes Catholicism (in Northern Europe) for instance from evangelical churches.

Looking back, the satisfaction is quite high, especially with regard to the catechists. This confirms the personal dimension, which is fundamental for learning processes of any kind and also for catechesis.

The practical consequences (for one's own everyday life, the relation to the service and the congregation) seem rather small. The reasons could be an inadequate catechetical practice but may have to do more with the research method, which cannot record such effects quantitatively. Furthermore, certain items have shown already higher approval ratings even at the beginning, which suggests that faith development is rather a gentle process of reassurance than a sudden conversion.

6.2 Recommendations and Questions to the Practice

- Developing differentiated concepts that meet the needs of the participants

Standard in many parishes is now a colourful range of activities, different kind of meetings, projects, trips, etc., of which the young people can choose a certain number according to their interest and time possibilities. The criteria for these as well as for the contents are often not sufficiently clear. Here, it is not uncommon to speculate or follow personal preferences.

The findings in this survey offer insights into the interests and desires of young people and document its variety which make differentiated concepts necessary. It is therefore highly recommendable to form the course following the actual interests and needs, the actual questions of the young people, which can be looked at e.g. in a personal registration meeting just at the beginning: What do you mean what you need in order to become clear whether the confirmation is really your desire? Here the previous experiences can be taken into account and an individual learning scheme can be suggested and agreed. This will meet what is understood in many parishes with Confirmation: a mature decision for Christ and the Church. Therefore the attendees should be taken seriously right from the start.

- Making Christian faith a practical life experience

Knowledge may be important, but the decisive factor in discovering Christian faith as a suitable way of life is experience and learning from reliable examples of Christian life practice. Since they are not only cognitively grasped, much more emotion and affection play a role. The findings here state a small desire of the juveniles regarding personal experience in faith. The reason remain unclear. But nevertheless settings should be sought in which spiritual experiences - e.g. in human encounters, in dealing with suffering and the limits of life, but also in prayer and contemplation - become possible.

- Volunteers are indispensable - mentoring as a possible form of catechesis should be further developed

The findings show a highly positive feedback regarding catechists. This supports the opinion that a careful selection and preparation of catechists is indispensable. It seems that it is fact (or

that deficits in this respect do not have a negative impact). These findings should be taken as a hint towards the role of catechists and the involvement of volunteers in catechesis. Their role should not be reduced to that of an animator or moderator of a group. Their role would be even more effective by using concepts of mentoring, which can complement or replace the conventional concepts used today. At the same time, mentorship would be a way to positively counteract the heterogeneity described above.

- Broadening the view beyond the confirmation ceremony

A new perspective could also develop the role of volunteers in a second respect. For there is often helplessness about how to deal with the problem that after the celebration the network of relationships that was previously established at great expense breaks down radically. There is in the findings actually no increasing interest in parish life visible, which might correspond with the fact, that very few parishes do anything more than merely to offer attending Sunday services. If the responsibility of the volunteers will not end with the Confirmation Day and will not be directed to the next course, then there would remain opportunity to take care of the further accompaniment of the newly confirmed, admittedly in a less intensive way. The catechists could invite the groups once a year. Mentors could continue to be available as advisors in the background. However, this would require the effort of recruiting new catechists for the next course and preparing them. Of course, the newly confirmed from previous courses could also be considered for this.

- Attracting young people as catechists

Even if the classical cliché of the retired RE teacher as the model of the catechist has probably not (or never) been found in practice, it can nevertheless be stated that catechesis is largely given by adults. The average age of the catechists in this survey is 44 years. Therefore, it seems appropriate to point to the good experience of the Lutheran Church of Finland, which has for many years relied on young teamers ("Young Confirmed Volunteers"), young people whose confirmation was not long ago and who are only a few years older than the confirmands.¹⁷ About 30% of those confirmed take part in training courses¹⁸, especially during the eight-day Confirmation Camps, which today make up over 90% of the confirmation work¹⁹, in order to support the church employees.

With young people in the catechist team, the Church gains a young face. In addition, it would be an opportunity for those currently not yet engaged in parish life – as stated above: nearly 62 % of the candidates! Admittedly: This survey shows also that the interest to be involved more is rather small amongst them.²⁰ However, factors can be named which facilitate the transition to voluntary work: voluntary participation, positive experiences with voluntary work, nice community experiences, targeted invitation to work.²¹

¹⁷ Cf. Carsten Haeske, Kati Niemelä, *Das finnische Erfolgsgeheimnis*, esp. 379.382f.

¹⁸ Cf. *ibid.*, 379; Tapani Innanen, Kati Niemelä, Jouko Porkka, *Confirmation Work in Finland*, 144.155, in: Friedrich Schweitzer, Wolfgang Ilg, Henrik Simojoki (Ed.), *Confirmation Work in Europe: Empirical Results, Experiences and Challenges. A Comparative Study in Seven Countries*, Gütersloh 2010, 139-161.

¹⁹ Cf. Haeske, Niemelä, *Das finnische Erfolgsgeheimnis*, 377, Tab. 1. 379.

²⁰ Cf. data regarding „Church and faith“ (5.4).

²¹ Cf. Wolfgang Ilg, Friedrich Schweitzer, *Die Konfirmandenzeit als Einstieg in ehrenamtliches Engagement. Ergebnisse einer Langzeitstudie*, *deutsche jugend* 66 (2018), 16-26, esp. 18-22.