

3. After Confirmation: Results for Switzerland

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3.1 Background Information

As in other countries, the question of possible effects and of the sustainability of confirmation work is intensely and continuously raised by church boards and councils of the Swiss Reformed Churches as well as by the ministers and workers in the parishes. Due to the fact that in Switzerland the number of church members is steadily declining by about 1% a year, one has to ask whether attractive forms of confirmation work could help to provide stronger ties between the younger generation and the Church to slow down this decline and process of de-institutionalisation. Looking at the results of t_1 and t_2 , one gets the impression that confirmation work in Switzerland is quite successful in terms of the satisfaction of the young people (Schlag/Koch 2015; Schlag et al. 2016; for the Zurich results in the context of the first European study cf. Schlag 2010 and Schlag/Voirol-Sturzenegger 2010). Core goals like personal and faith development, individual participation and responsibility seem to be fulfilled for the majority of the confirmands. The pedagogical and theological program of confirmation work in Switzerland is obviously successful in attracting many young people's interest and in encouraging them to stay or become an important part of church and parish life. But what is the situation two years after confirmation?

3.2 How the t_3 -Study Was Conducted

In summer 2015, two years after confirmation, all former confirmands that had participated and declared in t_2 to be willing to participate in a next survey, were contacted again by the Zurich team. They received a questionnaire either by mail for a »paper and pencil«-procedure or by email and an invitation to participate in the online-survey. The Swiss survey consisted of 60 items and variables and gave space for one open answer (»What else I would like to say ...«). Another 17 items and variables were offered for the ones engaged in church youth work with space for another open answer (»What I would need to be even more satisfied with my involvement in voluntary church work ...«). Anonymity was guaranteed. As an incentive to participate there was a lottery of iTunes-vouchers worth a total of 1000,- CHF.

As it could be expected, the number of responses was – with about 1400 out

Table 34: Swiss sample sizes in t_1 (2012), t_2 (2013), and t_3 (2015)

	t_1	t_2	t_3	$t_1-t_2-t_3$	Valid questionnaires from volunteers within the t_3 -sample
N	7217	6437	1229 (19% of t_2)	662 (10% of t_2)	91

Table 35: Background factors of the Swiss sample (%)

	Sex: boys/girls	Contact to the Church* age between 5-9 years/ more than 9 years	Parents interested in religion	Bedside prayer	More than 250 books at home	Parents active as volunteers**
	C/QM01	CM11/12	CJ01	CJ02	C/QM04	CP17
$t_1/t_2/t_3$	36/64	54/69	21	49	25%	33
t_1/t_2 only	51/49	48/63	17	41	15%	26

* at least 3 times; ** at least one parent who is volunteering.

of 4000 mails sent out – much lower than in t_1 and t_2 due to the fact that the group setting of confirmation time no longer existed.

To secure the standards of the longitudinal survey only such items were integrated into the analysis which were answered by the young people who took part in t_1 , t_2 and t_3 . Due to the fact that in Switzerland the postal codes were not asked for in t_3 , the matching of all received questionnaires was only possible for about 660 out of 1400. In the following presentation of the results only the matched data are integrated.

It can be supposed that the questionnaires have been filled out by the confirmed with higher motivation and probably with a more positive perception of confirmation work and the church. So even if the lottery-incentive might have influenced the motivation to participate in t_3 , the results concerning the background factors show the drift from t_2 to t_3 . It also showed that the level of education was higher than in t_1 with 44% aiming for a Matur/Gymnasium in t_3 and only 29% in t_1 and that in t_3 more girls (64%) than boys (36%) participated.

Concerning the Swiss data-set, it must be mentioned that certain items were only asked in Switzerland, mostly in t_2 and t_3 to gain special insights into the attitudes among the adolescents and their relationship towards the Swiss Re-

formed Church including ethical orientation. This article does not consider these additional results in detail, but they are occasionally mentioned (they are marked in *italics*).

3.3 Main Results

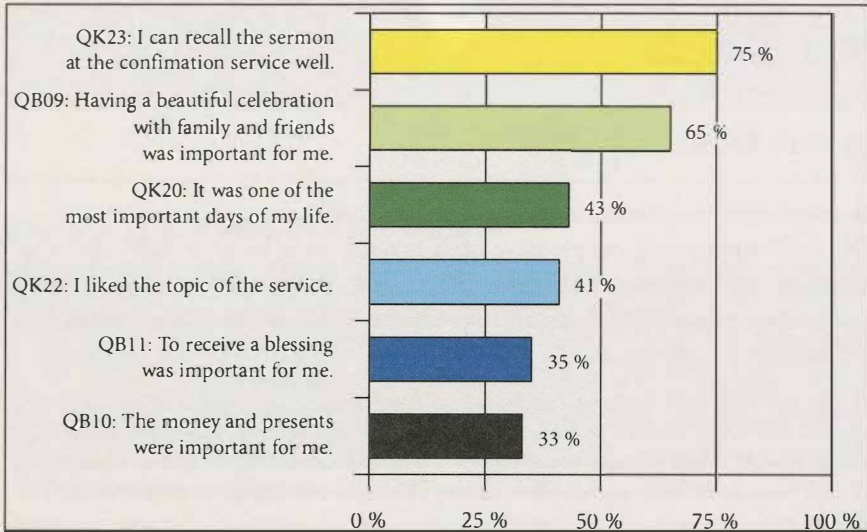
Looking back at Confirmation Time and the Confirmation Day

The confirmed young people have been asked to look back to their confirmation time and day of confirmation: 83 % are at t_3 satisfied with their whole confirmation time (QN01), and 77 % would recommend to others to take part (QK21). As one girl states:

»Confirmation time and the confirmation itself were a very thrilling and exciting time. It was my first step in becoming an adult, because I noticed, that in the view of the church I was almost a grown-up. I would recommend it to everybody. One doesn't need to be very faithful, but during this time one learns to know oneself better.« (f, t_3)

The confirmation itself was for 43 % something they consider as one of the most important experiences in their life (QK20). Concerning the service, 67 % remembered the topic of the service well and in a positive sense (QK22). It has to be mentioned here that in almost all Swiss Reformed parishes the topic of the confirmation service is decided at least together with or even completely by the confirmands themselves. Even with the two year's time between t_2 and t_3 , 65 % of the youth state that the family celebration on the day of their confirmation was important for them (QB09).

Less intense are the memories or the importance of the presents they received (QB10), which was only important for 33 % in comparison to 52 % in t_1 (CB10) and 64 % in t_2 (KB10) – which can hardly be a surprise: once the presents – probably especially the »material ones« – were received, they seem to lose their importance for the adolescents and play retrospectively a much smaller role. In Switzerland the former confirmands were asked if they remember the sermon at the confirmation service positively (or well) (QK23) which 33 % affirmed. The rather low number might be explained by the fact that in Reformed confirmation services the sermon of the minister is very often reduced to only a brief sequence – almost a kind of short reflection or response – due to the fact that the confirmands contribute widely to and are highly responsible for this service.

Figure 30: Remembering the confirmation day (t_3 , 2015), Switzerland

N = 644-662; the share of those with a positive response (5, 6, 7) on a scale 1 to 7 (1 = not applicable at all; 7 = totally applicable).

The Development of Beliefs and Religious Attitudes

Concerning their faith, 33 % say that they have the impression of having been strengthened in their faith by and during their confirmation time (QB08): A girl states:

»Confirmation time has offered me the opportunity in many different areas of life, to widen my horizon. Sometimes interesting discussions developed, which were very inspiring. Therefore I would say that confirmation time has not necessarily strengthened my faith, but enlarged my general knowledge and drew my attention to topics like e. g. Martin Luther King.« (f)

Looking at it in a longitudinal perspective, three developments from t_1 to t_3 can be examined:

Firstly, a certain stability concerning faith or a slight decrease can be noticed because the percentages in t_1 , t_2 and t_3 are very close to each other. This is true for: »There is life after death« (CE02), which has 60 % agreement in t_2 and t_3 . The same can be said for »Faith in God helps me in difficult situations« (CE08) with t_1 : 41 %, t_2 : 43 % and t_3 : 40 % and »God loves all humans and cares about each one of us« (CE03) with t_1 : 57 %, t_2 : 58 % and t_3 : 55 %. Similar results can be found for »God created the world« (CE01): t_1 : 33 %, t_2 : 30 %, t_3 : 28 %. Thus, certain statements about faith, especially when they concern the Christian faith

(like CE02) and personal faith show a certain kind of stability (CE08) – and obviously the faith in God is still of importance, or to quote:

»Just recently things were not easy for me, I had much stress and some other things. But God has helped me to go through these times, I prayed a lot.« (m)

Also concerning the question about wanting one's own children to be baptised, stability can be noticed: »If I will have children, I want to have them baptised« (CG03) finds 84 % approval in t_1 , 87 % in t_2 and again 84 % in t_3 . But looking at t_3 on the whole, it is only a small number of items showing slight or no changes.

Secondly, there are certain topics which in the perspective of the young people lose their importance and find much smaller approval in t_3 than in t_1 or t_2 . As mentioned above, the importance of presents and the family celebration on the day of confirmation declined after confirmation which can easily be explained by the fact that this event just simply is over. But also for the aspect of a successful and sustainable learning a decline has to be noticed. That they have learned »more about God and faith« (KB01) is said by 65 % in t_2 , in t_3 by only 34 % (QB01). It seems as if the Swiss confirmands consider their own learning success in the long run as rather low – by the way, also compared to other European countries.

Thirdly, there are some topics and items which show a clear increase from t_1 over t_2 to t_3 . For example, two years after confirmation 15 percent points more of the young confirmed say that they know »what the Christian faith entails« (CE10): t_1 : 50 %, t_2 : 59 %, t_3 : 65 %. But this does not necessarily mean that this knowledge is of any higher importance for them. It seems that they differentiate between a certain knowledge about faith and a (critical) knowledge of orientation in terms of their own religion and confession. In direction of this interpretation the following result can be seen: the statement »The church does not have answers to the questions that are important for me« (CG02) is applicable in t_1 and t_2 for 40 %, and in t_3 for 47 %.

This can be illustrated by a quotation from the open answer sections in t_3 :

»Confirmation work should pay more attention to the young people's questions and not just push through a stubborn program, about things, which I already know. I miss the Christian ›values‹. Sadly, I often notice that the faithless are the better ›Christians‹. [...]« (f)

A gain in interest can be noticed in the field of ethical conscience. Statements like »Christian faith motivates to care about others« (CP/QP27) show from t_1 to t_3 a much higher approval: t_1 : 47 %, t_2 : 54 %, t_3 : 61 %. This affects also the question of moral consequences. The statement »Faithful people shall act as good examples« (CP/QP29) finds in t_1 50 %, and in t_3 63 % approval. But it seems as if during these two years also a certain critical and sorrowful attitude has been

developed and they seem to be increasingly worried. »I often worry about the future of the whole world« (KP/QP40) raises from 57 % in t_2 to 68 % in t_3 .

Relationship to the Church

The topics »Christian faith« and »attitudes towards the Church« are worth a closer look. There are positive as well as negative developments from t_1 to t_3 . The generally positive attitude towards the Christian faith (CF01) rises slightly from 67 % in t_1 to 70 % in t_2 , but drops down in t_3 to 56 % and loses therefore 14 percent points. Similarly, even if less dramatical, is the case with the item »How would you describe your current attitude towards our Church in general?« (CF02). 63 % approve of this in t_1 , even 70 % in t_2 , but in t_3 only 61 %. To illustrate the critical 39%:

»Faith in God for me is something private. I don't need any institutions to believe in God.« (m)

Especially having in mind that the attitude of the young people participating in t_3 is probably more positive towards the Church, this longitudinal result of a strong decline from t_1 to t_3 has to be taken very seriously. The European average shows in 70 % of the cases and the German share even in 78 % a positive attitude towards the Church; the Swiss former confirmands appear in fact less connected to their Church.

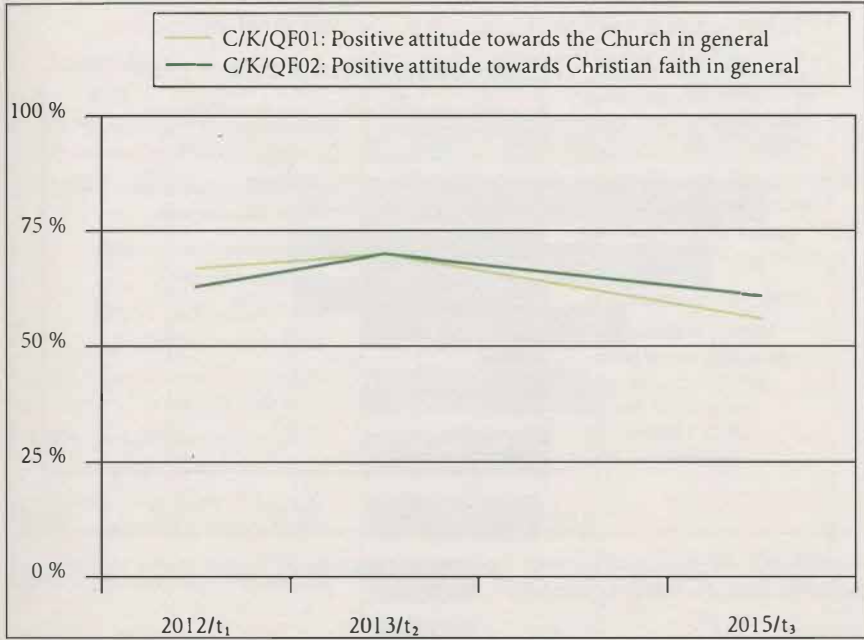
Of course it is not surprising that »Christian faith« and the »Church« are not as present in the daily lives of the confirmed as they were during confirmation time. So whether these results derive merely from this fact or whether the young people now consider faith and church really as less meaningful and attractive, can not be told clearly from these results.

But in any case, strong and intense assessments can be found in this respect:

»It looks as if the number of young people that believe in God is decreasing. What I personally approve of. We slowly wake up and understand that we can't gain anything with faith. We think more logically and do not believe all of what is presented to us. Who believes in God must be very naive, it is about the same as reading a children's book story and believing that this is reality. The Bible is nothing but fictitious stories, which mankind should believe in so that money can be made from it. The church is part of the system and I hope that it soon goes down the tube. We will not let ourselves be fooled:» (f)

Church attendance after confirmation is low. A very small percentage of only 3 % attend Sunday services regularly, 45 % go to church one to four times a year, 40 % »almost never« and 9 % five to eleven times a year (QG11). A certain sceptical attitude towards the institution can be assumed, if one looks at the item: »My faith will always play a role in my life« (KP47). In t_2 43 % have affirmed this positively, whereas in t_3 it is only 38 %. Having in mind the results on the per-

Figure 31: Positive attitudes towards the Church and Christian faith in general (Switzerland): t_1 (2012), t_2 (2013), t_3 (2015)



N = 631/621; the share of those answering »rather positive« and »very positive« on a 5-point-answering scale.

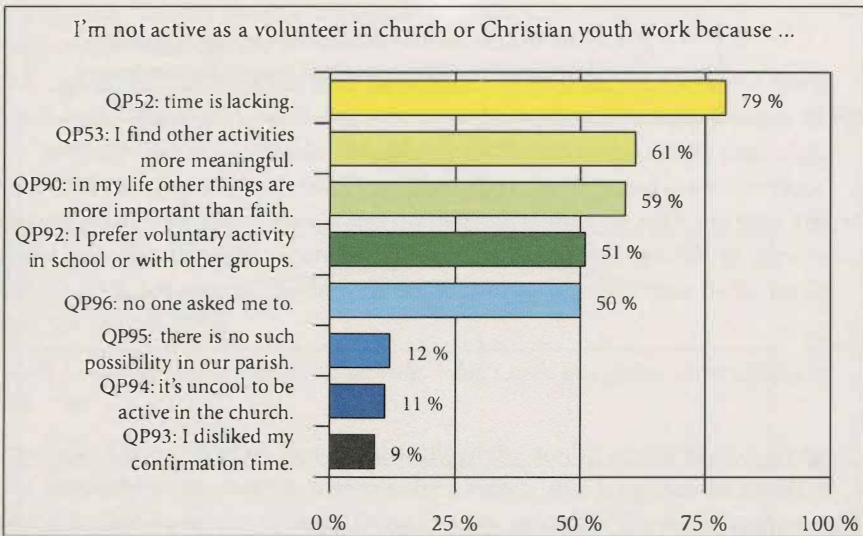
sonal faith (in the sense of a *fides qua*), it can be supposed that the personal and internal attitudes are less variable than the attitudes towards the institution or certain dogmatic statements (in the sense of a *fides quae*). The item »Jesus has risen from the dead« (CE04) functions as an example for the latter which finds a continuously declining approval from t_1 with 40 %, to t_2 38 %, and finally t_3 with 31 %.

Pathways into Volunteerism

In terms of their perception of the Church, 55 % say that they have lost contact with the Church after confirmation (QG20). This is in line with the result that only 24 % found programs within the Church (for example, youth work) that were »interesting to me« (QK08). 79 % of the young people participating in t_3 are or were not engaged in church children's or youth work (QP51).

The challenge for the Church to improve its presence can be underlined by the result that only 24 % »felt that there is nothing new to learn in the Church anymore« (QG21). The young people show a general interest in the Church and a certain share of them can well imagine participating in church programs,

Figure 32: Reasons for not being active as a volunteer in church or Christian youth work (t₃, 2015), Switzerland



N = 552-561; the share of those with a positive response (5, 6, 7) on a scale 1 to 7 (1 = not applicable at all; 7 = totally applicable).

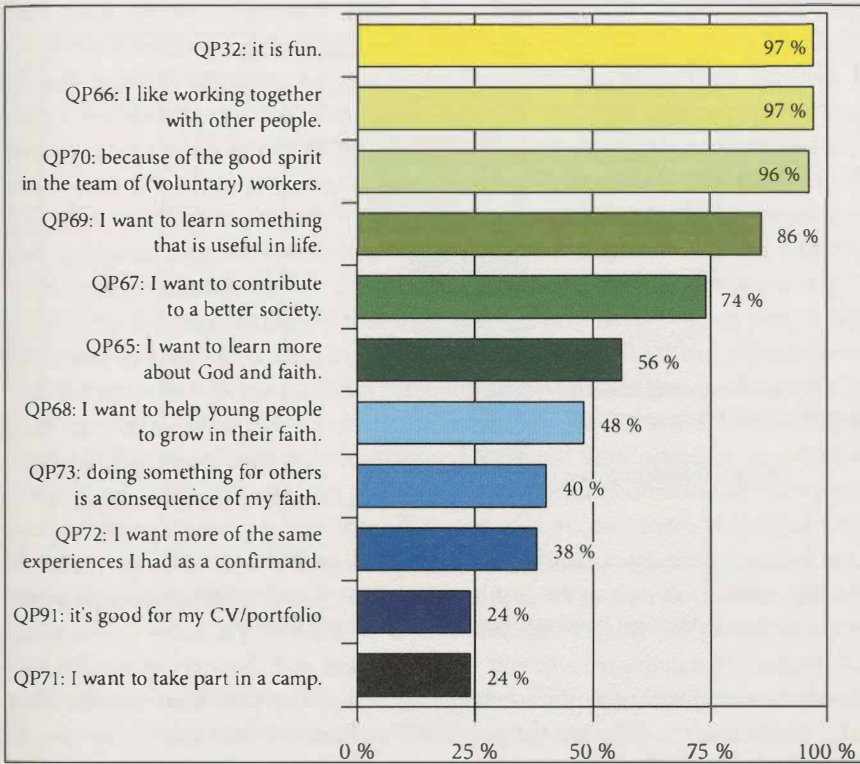
but this is obviously not adequately addressed by the Church. Just to mention it here: multi-level analyses show that these results are much more positive for the ones having experienced a stronger religious socialisation in their families whereas the experience of certain creative forms of confirmation work is not as important for these attitudes.

The confirmed young people had also been asked to tell the reasons for not being a volunteer in church children's or youth work: 79% say that they just do not have the time for it (QP52), which is understandable due to the age of the Swiss confirmands; many of them have already started vocational training or are in the middle of preparing their final school exams, or as one boy puts it:

»I would love to do more for the church, but beside my vocational training there is almost not any time left.« (m)

Figure 32 shows the respective reasons. Many factors from the daily life of the adolescents seem to prevent them from participating as a volunteer, but not the fact that confirmation time made a bad impression on them (QP93).

Once the young people have decided to participate, the reasons for being a volunteer are various. The highest consent is found for the motives like *»I like working together with other people«* (QP66). The social environment and the

Figure 33: Motives for being a volunteer (t₃, 2015), Switzerland

N = 90-91; the share of those with a positive response (5, 6, 7) on a scale 1 to 7 (1 = not applicable at all; 7 = totally applicable).

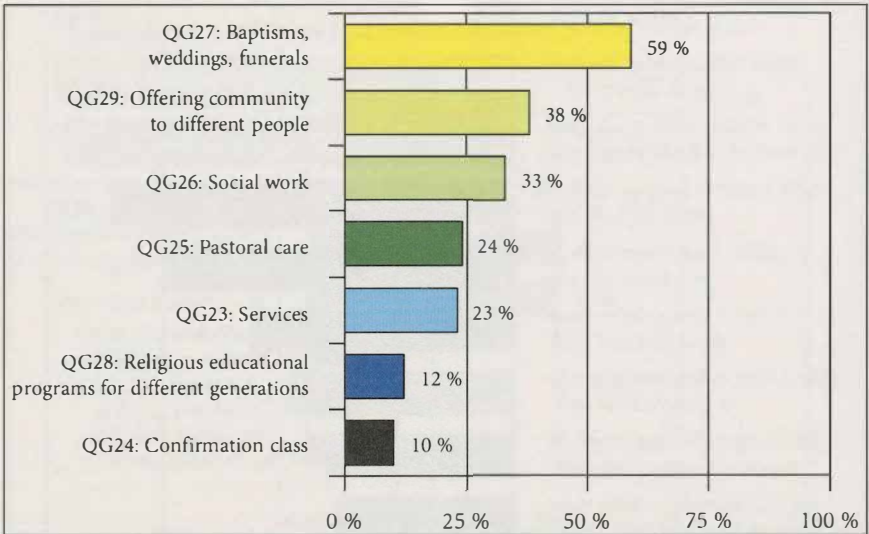
contact to other young people with the same aims seem also to be very important for the decision to participate and stay.

Not so important are motives like having the possibility to take part in another camp (QP71) with only 24%, which is surprising because of the high estimation of camps in t₁ with 80% (CS09) and very high satisfaction in t₂ with 87% (KN11).

About half of the adolescents who work as volunteers have not only a higher interest in experiencing community and fun, but also in developing and sharing faith.

Being asked what they see as the core duties of the Reformed Church in the Swiss survey, only 10% of the young people consider confirmation work as of high importance (QG24) whereas worship services (QG23) and pastoral care (QG25) are estimated by 23% resp. 24% as more important. With 59% ceremonies like baptism, wedding and funeral (QG27) are seen as most important

Figure 34: Most important tasks of the Reformed Church according to the view of the former confirmands (t₃, 2015), Switzerland



N = 656. Reading aid: 59 % of the confirmands thought in t₃ that baptisms, weddings and funerals belong to the most important tasks of the Reformed Church.

core duties of the church. Interestingly 38 % find it crucial that the churches offer community to different people (QG29). Or as it is stated:

»... In my opinion church has its right to exist, when it comes to defend social values and to fight against injustice.« (m)

In comparison to these results, the educational work of the churches finds a much lower relevance with only 12 % of the confirmed that see this as the most central duty.

3.4 Challenges for the Future

Even if the Swiss t₃-results cannot represent the views of all the young people that had been confirmed two years earlier, some tendencies can be depicted which might also be fruitful for developing and improving confirmation work (more in detail cf. Schlag et al. 2016, 343-365). Some aspects shall be highlighted here again:

Confirmation time and the confirmation service are remembered positively. Retrospectively, the confirmed only partly remember what they have learned or say that they have not learned a lot which is now still important for them. Ob-

viously, the Church as an institution and the Christian faith in the sense of a *fides quae* lose over the years their relevance amongst the confirmed. A large number of the confirmed still show a certain uncertainty concerning questions of faith – which must not necessarily be interpreted as something negative. It might well be the case that this uncertainty derives from intensive considerations or personal thoughts. Although these young people have experienced a lot of the church's educational work, they do not consider this as the most important element of church work – but again, this does not necessarily mean that they consider education as unimportant. Rather it might hint at the fact that other fields of church work are just being estimated as even more important. It should not be underestimated that only every fourth of the young people says that there is nothing to learn in the church anymore. The ethical dimension of the church as well as the personal relation to questions of the social and ecological environment have developed positively since confirmation time. Whether confirmation time itself has contributed to these developments or whether these are mainly dependent on age, the current political situation or the educational factor can not be determined clearly. But at least these individual attitudes can be estimated as possible links for the Church keeping in touch with its younger members. Therefore, these results also open up the window for the question of voluntary work. If it is true that the reason for participating in voluntary church work lies mainly in the positive experience of community with others – with faith questions included! – voluntary work in itself should clearly be developed into this direction.

To summarise: the general situation of a severe decline in membership should enforce the Swiss Reformed Churches to improve and enlarge their educational and ecclesiological programs and offers as intensely as possible. The results from all three studies impressively show the young people's potentials to think constructively about the »big questions« in life and also their willingness to participate wherever they feel needed with their personal abilities and competences. Thus, a convincing and professional pedagogical and theological work will firstly contribute to the Church's positive reputation, secondly and most crucial, it will hopefully help young people to orient themselves and to deal successfully with the complexities of personality, their personal spirituality and religion and plurality in modern society.