

3.3 Confirmation Work in Switzerland

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During a confirmation service, the minister starts participating actively for the first time after about 45 minutes. Up until that moment, 16 year old Reto and his fellow confirmands had led through their presentation including some pieces of theatre and music about Psalm 23. After these ambitious presentations, the minister offers a kind of summarizing interpretation and finally blesses the young people with a touch on their shoulder and a handshake.

In another parish, a service – lasting for almost two and a half hours – finds confirmands, among them Flurina, repeating parts of the catechism, which is followed by an extensive sermon held by the minister on Tobit 12, 6-15 and on the theme of fate and coincidence, which the congregation has to listen to for more than half an hour. After receiving their blessing, Flurina and the other confirmed young people finally serve the Holy Communion to the congregation.

A third service takes place under the motto »world tour«. The church is decorated with balloon-globes and a world map. Again, the confirmands are intensely involved in the whole presentation. By decorating the church they now illustrate their own understanding of being part of one world. The sermon of the female minister has the symbol of a suitcase as its centre and she says: »The main aim of the year was that you learn to speak«.

The »ideal observer« could wonder, whether these casual situations are happening »under the roof« of the same Reformed Church and if there is something like a common theological understanding of confirmation work and the whole confirmation year amongst all the persons involved.

3.3.1 General Overview

The Socioreligious Context of Confirmation Work

Due to the Reformed theological self-understanding as a church of individual faith and priesthood of all, the high estimation of participation in everyday political life and finally, due to the cantonal structures with autonomous Reformed parishes, there is not *one* tradition, *one* general idea or even more, *one* common organisational principle of confirmation work in Switzerland. Instead, a high regional and local plurality in this field of church practice has to be noticed. Therefore, to try to describe confirmation work in Switzerland generally is more or less impossible or would at least lead to a voluminous handbook (cf. Wegenast 2001).

Nevertheless, to describe confirmation work in the one canton of Zurich gives some worthwhile impressions about the overall situation in Switzerland. First, because the general sociological and ecclesiological situation in the different German-Swiss cantons and their Reformed Churches is rather similar. Secondly, in many cantons organisational and pedagogical reforms are under way at present, so the closer look at one canton can be considered as significant for general challenges and developments to be noticed in Reformed Switzerland. Therefore, the following explanations will focus on the tradition and present situation of confirmation work in the Evangelical-Reformed *Landeskirche* (regional Church) of the Canton (Swiss federal state) Zurich.

Confirmation Work in Transition

The Reformed Church of Zurich is not only one of the largest cantonal Churches in Switzerland but understands itself to be the »Church of Zwingli and Bullinger« in a specific sense of the Reformed tradition of freedom of faith. Looking at the present situation in general, as in most other European countries, there is a strong tendency of secularisation – if not laicism – within the Swiss society with a noticeable number of Church members loosening their ties to their Church or leaving the institution for good. The Reformed as well as the Catholic Churches – especially in the German-Swiss context – find themselves on a religious market, that is, in a dynamic situation of intensive competition and amongst alternative religious competitors with obviously successful initiatives to gain public attention.

In accordance to this, a radical loss of tradition and Church membership has been noticed (cf. Dubach/Campiche 1993; Campiche 2004; Dubach/Fuchs 2005; Baumann/Stolz 2007a), though this does not mean that religion has faded away completely but has rather changed in practice and mode of expression (cf. Stapferhaus Lenzburg 2006; Stapferhaus Lenzburg/Fachhochschule Nordwestschweiz Pädagogik 2006; Anselm et al. 2008).

Between 1970 and 2000, in the whole country the percentage of members of the Reformed Church compared to the overall population has declined from 46% to 33% (Bovay 2000, 11), in the city of Zurich from 53% in 1970 to 30% in 2000. Beyond that, one dramatic result has to be noticed: more than 55% of the people who are still members of the Reformed Church say that they do not feel a part of their local parish (Bovay 2000, 14). In the same period of time the proportion of people not belonging to a religious group has risen significantly from 1% to 11% (Bovay 2000, 11). Recent surveys show that the number of Church members continues to drop (Bovay 2000, 11), i. e., in the Reformed Church in the Canton Zurich from 2000 to 2005 by another 4%. As of December 31, 2006, 37% were members of the Reformed Church in the Canton of Zurich, 29% of the Roman Catholic Church and 33% were members

of other confessions, religions or without any affiliation (Evangelisch-reformierte Landeskirche des Kantons Zürich 2008, 47).

Participation

Even if the number of re-entries into the Church has risen over the last years, sociologists of religion notice that traditional Christian religiosity is losing importance, whereas fundamentalism, spirituality and religious plurality gain ground (cf. Baumann/Stolz 2007b, 63ff. and also Humpert 2004). Nevertheless, the number of young people attending confirmation work is still very high without any remarkable decline. In 2007, 4169 young people in 179 parishes were confirmed in the Canton of Zurich – compared to 4075 in 2006 and compared to 3155 baptisms in 2007 (Evangelisch-reformierte Landeskirche des Kantons Zürich 2008, 48). Even in the larger cities of Winterthur and Zurich, the proportion of confirmands is well over 60 % of the overall age group and up to 90 % in the more rurally situated parishes.

The continuity of young people attending confirmation time seems to be even more astonishing because confirmation work takes place during the last obligatory year of school, that means, at the age of 15 or 16. Despite this so-called »critical age« and the reflective potential of adolescence, this does not seem to have any negative effect on the decision to be confirmed. Obviously confirmation time is still acknowledged as one of the highlights of the individual and family biography. There seems to be a wide demand on the part of young people to experience this time as meaningful, the group atmosphere as adequate to their own feelings and the contents of the confirmation class to be of individual relevance.

Official Aims for Confirmation Work

Looking at the historical and theological background, as in some other cantonal Churches, baptism in the Reformed Church of Zurich is »some kind« of prerequisite to be confirmed but not a necessary one – the relevant article shows with its formulation »as a rule« (Kirchenordnung 2008, Art. 74) the typical Reformed liberal mixture of a fixed order and the openness for individual interpretation. Due to the practice of baptising children, Zwingli stressed the point that later they should be able to confess their faith which had been confessed by their parents at their baptism. Like Luther, he refused to understand confirmation as sacramental practice. The main aim of confirmation was a pedagogical one in the sense of teaching children the ability to understand the Gospel, remembering and confirming their baptism and to participate maturely in the life of the Church.

In 1628, an order by the Reformed Church of Zurich established that ministers should offer in-depth instruction to young people, who had not been

taught sufficiently about the Communion by their parents. This led to a formal instruction and final exam culminating in the admission to Communion. In 1760, the first public confirmation services were held. In 1797, the whole congregation of ministers in Zurich appealed to the Church Council to establish confirmation in the whole canton, but the matter was not closed before 1846. In 1834 the state law on religious education referred to confirmation as the end of the obligatory school which should take place at the end of the school year. The young people should be at least 16 years old. Since the 1920s there have been intensive discussions about the appropriate age of the confirmands as well as about the confirmation vow. The latter was left out as well as the final exam in the new Church Order from 1968. Since the new Order of the Zurich Liturgy, approved by the Church Parliament in the late 1960s, there has been no set form for confirmation. In this time W. Neidhart's study on confirmation with his emphasis on the »non-theological factors« (cf. Neidhart 1964) supported a new understanding and the development of creative forms of confirmation work in the parishes.

In the 1970s and 80s and due to the noticeable erosion of the *Volkskirche* as well as new interpretations of the confirmation service (cf. Müller 1988, 69-92) there was an intense debate if young people who were not baptised could be allowed to be confirmed. This was not regulated until 1989 when the Church Parliament in Zurich decided this question positively and implemented baptism »as a rule« for dealing with this question. Since the end of the school term in July 1989, confirmation services are normally held between Pentecost and the end of June. Before that, in 1980, with the introduction of Communion for children, confirmation lost its character as admission to Communion. It has developed more and more into a ceremony of becoming part of the parish with the right to be a godfather or godmother and taking part in Church elections. Confirmation is nowadays mostly seen as expression of the full mature membership of the Reformed community.

Compared to this wide understanding of confirmation, it seems quite surprising that there are obligatory prerequisites for being confirmed: attending confirmation courses, but also religious-pedagogical courses and religion as a school subject (cf. Kirchenordnung 2008, Art. 74). This finds its expression in the most recent outline of the Church Order where the articles on confirmation are not placed in the section »preaching and service« but in the section »child, youth and family« as one of the religious-pedagogical offerings of the Church. It is stated that »the confirmation responds to God's yes as it is expressed in baptism. In the confirmation service the community asks in the name of the confirmands for God's blessing. Confirmation is the invitation for a responsible Christian existence and for participation in the life of the regional Church« (Kirchenordnung 2008, Art. 73).

In many places, confirmation work is held once a week but also very often in weekend courses, altogether in 72 lessons (= lessons à 45 minutes). One of the major events and experiences is the confirmation camp which can last between three and seven days and takes place very often in the starting phase of the confirmation year.

Ministers are not obliged to teach the young people a certain amount of catechetical or dogmatic contents. Because the Reformed Church does not commit itself to a written confession, there is no official framework or something like a confirmation handbook which ministers have to use. This indicates a principal Reformed caution about given curricula »from above«. As a result of the aim to gain religious maturity, one of the main characteristics of a Reformed confirmation service in the Canton Zurich is the high participation, not unusually offering an almost unlimited responsibility of the young people to plan and even to lead a service in the light of their religious self-presentation.

Preparation of the Personnel

Confirmation work is one of the basic educational responsibilities of youth ministry work in the Swiss Churches, especially since in many cantons »religion« as a school subject has been taken over more or less completely by the state (cf. Schlag 2009). Due to that, the Reformed Church in Zurich recently established a comprehensive and broad catechetical curriculum that should prepare the children for the later confirmation time. So confirmation work with its chances and challenges is one of the main fields of ministerial training at the Faculties of Theology as well as within pastoral training courses. But students do not automatically come across confirmation work in their studies. Due to the recently established Bologna-System at the Swiss universities, they are only obliged to attend one seminar and one lecture in the field of religious education during their whole time of theological studies which then is, of course, not automatically a course in confirmation work.

One also has to know that a student pastor position (*Vikariat*) consists of only one year which means that many skills have to be acquired in continuing education courses during the first full-time pastoral assignment (*WEA – Weiterbildung in den ersten Amtsjahren*). So during the first years of pastoral work there is very often no adequate time to »just experiment« with certain ideas and innovative methods of confirmation work because the young ministers are often »all of a sudden« on full duty and carry responsibility for their own congregation and confirmation class.

In many parishes there is also additional personnel like youth workers, catechists or young volunteers. Due to the fact that in Switzerland church-related training institutions do not exist, the professionals are trained in courses offered by the Educational Departments of the cantonal Churches (in Zurich it

is the »*Abteilung für Pädagogik und Animation*«). Special training programmes for volunteers involved in confirmation work are so far rather rare and not intensively institutionalised.

Theology and Ecclesiology

Even if the Reformed Churches in Switzerland do not explicitly rely on a common confession anymore, there is a broad ecclesiological consensus on what the Church can be and should be. The first and most important characteristic of Reformed ecclesiology consists of the undisputed conviction that the Church is formed by the free and individual will of each of its members, based on God's creation, his grace and justification of each person. Compared to the Lutheran tradition, the autonomy of individual faith is not only a theological standard but has deep implications on the self-understanding of the Church's and local parish's life, their communication structures, procedures and responsibilities. To put it in modern words: Reformed practice of faith is understood as something which can only be fulfilled by bottom-up and never by top-down structures within the Church.

This high estimation of individual faith practice in the light of a »participatory theology« has an important impact also on confirmation work within the participatory church. First of all, it is clear that confirmation work is mainly seen as initiated by each autonomous local parish which therefore carries the main responsibility for a successful confirmation year. Secondly, the active integration of young people is not something unusual compared to the regular church life but stands in a clear correspondence with the inner meaning of the Reformed Church. But thirdly, due to the lack of a Reformed Confession and the autonomy of the local parishes, it sometimes seems rather difficult to identify or make clear a common theological ground connected with the historic and dogmatic traditions of the Reformed Church. In between these chances, challenges and open questions, current confirmation work is situated – and also challenged to look for an adequate theological and pedagogical self-positioning within the demographic and societal developments.

3.3.2 Description of the Study

Procedures

The sample of parishes was selected by experts of the Faculty of Theology and the Department of »Pedagogy and Animation« of the Reformed Church of the Canton Zurich. Representativity was ensured by the Institute of Pastoral Sociology of the University of St. Gallen.

In a letter from the Tübingen team, that organised the survey for our coun-

try, 42 parishes were invited to take part in the study. 41 agreed to receive the materials for t_1 . In the end, workers and confirmands in 39 parishes filled in the questionnaires (39 in t_1 , 37 in t_2). As an important background factor, it should be mentioned that most of the parishes in the Canton Zurich are situated in a more or less urban context or are at least rather close to it which means a distance of no more than 40km to the major cities of Zurich or Winterthur, but all very well connected by a widespread public transport system. No weighting factors were applied for computing the results. The same questionnaire as in the German study was used, with only some minor changes (e. g., concerning the school types, etc.):

- t_0 : questionnaire for leaders describing the structure of the parish: June 2007
- t_1 : confirmands and workers: around September 2007
- t_2 : confirmands and workers: in spring / early summer 2008 (in every parish between 2-6 weeks before confirmation).

The questionnaires were filled in at the beginning of a regular confirmation lesson. On a voluntary basis, the parishes were invited to distribute additional questionnaires to parents. These questionnaires were administered in all the parishes that agreed to use the parents' questionnaire at the beginning of one of the meetings offered for parents of the confirmands.

Overview on Data

Table 19 gives the number of valid questionnaires collected.

Table 19: Number of questionnaires (Switzerland)

	t_0	t_1	t_2	percentage matched
Units	39	39	37	100%
Confirmands		598	578	78.2%
Workers		64	59	79.7%
(parents)			246	84.3% with confirmands

For interpreting the following results, it is important to know that for 56% of the confirmands it was »o.k.« to fill in the questionnaire and even 10% liked to fill it in, which can be taken as a positive reception of the project and its questions.

3.3.3 Setting of Confirmation Work

The framework for confirmation work is determined by the cantonal Reformed Church of Zurich. Due to that, the confirmation year normally lasts

from the beginning of the school term in August (sometimes even with a camp in the last week of the summer holidays) to the early summer of the following year. On an average the confirmation year consists of 30 lessons (one lesson = 60 minutes), almost three »Confi-days« and about three camp days. But these offers vary from parish to parish very much. So for example, one third of the parishes do not offer a »Confi-day« at all, one third of the parishes take no trips with their confirmands and one fifth have no camps in their programme. On the other side, there are almost 50 % that offer as many as four to even six days of camp!

It is also astonishing – but here in a problematic sense – that in almost three quarters of the cases the confirmands do not have the chance for something like an internship in their parish and only 25 % undertake joint activities with Christian youth work in the parish. Confirmation work in Switzerland is not linked to other church activities or groups as much as it could be.

3.3.4 Confirmands

General Characteristics and Background Information

The percentage of male and female confirmands is practically the same. In autumn before the confirmation, 39 % are 14 years old, 54 % are 15 years old. That shows that compared to Germany or Austria, the Swiss confirmands are one year older. Only 9 % of the confirmands are the only child in their family, but 80 % have one or two brothers or sisters. According to the parents' questionnaire, 80 % of the confirmands' parents are married, 17 % divorced.

The allocation of the confirmands to the different school types matches more or less the overall allocation of young people of that age in the Canton Zurich, apart from the fact that the number of »Sek. C«, which is the lowest type of the secondary school (with about more than 50 % pupils having an immigration background), is much lower among the confirmands. »Mittelschule« is the term for the school offering qualification for university admission and the number of »Mittelschule-pupils« is slightly higher compared to the overall allocation.

Although, as mentioned above, baptism is not a prerequisite for being confirmed, still 92 % of the confirmands are already baptised at the beginning of their confirmation year. The nationality of the confirmands is Swiss with 94 %; other nationalities are particularly confirmands of German and Italian nationality. The percentage of confirmands with a migration background is 19 % – although 95 % record Switzerland as place of birth. Fewer confirmands come from traditional immigrant populations like the Balkan states, but rather from western countries like Germany, Austria, Scandinavia or the U.S.

About half of the confirmands can remember having taken part more than three times in a church group or church event between the age of 5 and 9 (49 %) and even more remember doing so between the age of 10 and the beginning of confirmation time (71 %). It is also interesting that 32 % can not remember whether they have taken part in such church offerings between the age of 5 and 9 years.

Motivation for Participation

The Swiss confirmands say that the decision to register for confirmation time was mostly influenced by either themselves (49 %) or their family (45 %) – in addition to the formal importance of an official invitation.

Looking at the background of the motives in a differentiated way, it can be seen that the confirmands take into consideration not only their individual interests or the families' wishes but also stick to traditional reasons. 41 % name as a reason for registering »because it is a good old tradition« (CA03), 48 % »because I was baptised as a child« (CA04) – this, by the way, is the lowest mean value of all the participating countries. It seems that all aspects related to extrinsic motives and formal obligations are not as decisive for the confirmands to register for confirmation time as the view that confirmation is a good old tradition, which is related to their baptism and might be important for their self-orientation.

Expectations and Experiences

At the beginning of the year, the motives and expectations of the confirmands registering for the confirmation time show a polarity between life-related and faith-related questions. On the one side, faith-related questions are not so important for the majority: to »learn more about God and faith« (CB01), »to be strengthened in my faith« (CB08) and »to think about what is good or bad for me and my life« (CB07), the learning question (CB01) with the lowest mean value (3.27) of all countries. For only 5 % it is more or less important: »to learn central Christian texts by heart« (CK02) – again the lowest mean value compared with the other countries (1.79); for only 15 % »to attend the Sunday services regularly« (CK09); and for 29 % »to sing or make music together« (CK07). That »my questions concerning faith will play a role« (CK11) is hoped for by only 26 % compared to 49 % rejecting this and 25 % present a neutral position. To »receive a blessing on the day of confirmation« (CB11) is important for 32 %, but not so important for 49 %, again with a mean value (3.50) lower than all other examined countries apart from Sweden.

On the other side are the immediate life-related issues; 47 % of the confirmands want to »experience community in the confirmation group« (CB02) and 44 % »to meet and get to know friends« (CB06). It is important for 61 %

»to have a lot of action« (CK05) and for 65 % »to go on daytrips or for retreats/ camp with the group« (CK06) – all this »without too much stress« (79 %; CK10). The following motives seem to be very clear: »to have a beautiful celebration with family and friends on the day of my confirmation« (CB09), approved of by 60 % and »to get money or presents at the end« (CB10), approved of by 66 %.

Between these polarities some results show a broad variety of coping with growing maturity and questions of faith. Here it can be seen that many confirmands are very much »on the way and in the middle« of seeking for and finding orientation, but many still have not made up their minds about their own faith nor come to clear decisions. 42 % say that they registered for confirmation time »to come to my own decision about my faith« (CB03) and 41 % »to make an important step in growing up« (CB04). 35 % say that it is important for them »to find my own point of view concerning my own life« (CK01). In no other country is the expectation »to be allowed to decide about the topics together with my fellow confirmands« (51 %; CK04) as high as in Switzerland, also with the highest mean value of 4.38.

Looking at the experiences of the year, the following results have to be mentioned. The early expectations to have »a beautiful celebration with family and friends« and to »get money or presents« have risen by the end of the year (»celebration« from 60 % to 75 %; »money and presents« from 66 % to 71 %). That the number is higher towards the end of the year is probably not surprising because of the anticipation of the upcoming event.

Almost all percentages of the experiences near the end of the confirmation year are higher than the respective expectancies, most of all the experiences with the »good community« (from 47 % to 75 %; CB02/KB02), but also questions of the individual conduct of life. 41 % say that they »have been thinking about what is good or bad for me and my life« (KB07).

Table 20 shows the satisfaction with different aspects of confirmation time.

Table 20: Satisfaction with different aspects in confirmation time (Switzerland)

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	4.87	1.43	66 %
KN02: having fun	5.16	1.54	70 %
KN03: content/topics of lessons	4.53	1.33	52 %
KN04: feeling of community	5.30	1.47	73 %
KN07: minister / person primarily responsible for confirmation work	5.35	1.56	74 %
KN08: other teachers/workers	4.98	1.47	66 %
KN10: church services	4.17	1.43	43 %
KN11: camp(s)	5.49	1.64	76 %

To what extent are you satisfied with ... (1 = not satisfied at all; 7 = totally satisfied)	M	SD	satisfied (5,6,7)
KN13: prayers in the group	4.10	1.38	40 %
KN14: music, songs and singing	4.15	1.60	44 %

N = 385-573. Option 8 »we didn't have that« was used as a filter.

Attitudes towards Religion and Church

One would suppose that the confirmation year contributes not only to knowledge about Christian traditions and beliefs but also to personal faith of young people and a positive attitude towards the Church. The results show that the confirmands have obviously learnt a lot about the Christian faith. At the beginning, 46 % »know, what the Christian faith entails«, and at the end the number has gone up to 55 % (CE10/KE10).

But the confirmands do not evaluate most of the statements concerning Christian faith as more true, convincing or personally important than at the beginning of the confirmation time. That »God created the world« (CE01/KE01) is approved by 30 % in the beginning and at the end of the year, that »there is life after death« (CE02/KE02) by 53 % resp. 50 %.

The percentage of confirmands that are not sure »what I should believe« remains almost the same during the year (40 % for CE05; 39 % for KE05) and that »Faith in God helps me in difficult situations« is confirmed by 23 % at the beginning and 25 % at the end of the year (CE08/KE08). Almost half of the confirmands do not think that »my questions concerning faith were addressed« (KK11). Moreover, the number of confirmands that »try to live according to the Ten Commandments« is not only very low right from the beginning (14 %), but is at almost on the same level (17 %) at the end of the confirmation year (CE11/KE11). Almost half of the confirmands say that they have not been strengthened in their faith (KB08). In general, it has to be mentioned that in no other country the mean values of the faith-related items are as low as in Switzerland, especially at the end of the year!

Also the number of confirmands thinking about God (CH01), praying by themselves (CH02) or praying together with others (CH03) hardly changes over the year. Compared to some other surveys and studies conducted in Switzerland, the number of confirmands that pray either by themselves or with others is surprisingly low. Obviously, confirmation time has not made prayer more important or attractive for the young people.

Similar observations can be made considering the attitudes towards the Church, towards the institution in general as well as the church practice. That »the church does not have answers to the questions that are important for me«, is said by 40 % at the beginning and by 43 % at the end of the year (CG02/

KG02), the highest agreement rate in all countries! The number of confirmands finding church services boring even increases from 56 % to 61 % (CG04/KG04).

Although 55 % say that they were »allowed to decide about the topics together with my fellow confirmands« (KK04) and 58 % felt welcome and accepted in the parish (KK37), looking at the real participation and activities within the church, the numbers seem to be rather low. 79 % (!) responded with one of the negative answers on the item that they »temporarily worked in programmes of the church (e. g., in a internship)« (KK26) and 59 % on the item »I took part in the preparation of church services« (KK31). Less than half of the confirmands say that during the time of confirmation training they »got to know our parish better« (KK25). In no other country are these items related to church life as low as in this context. The sceptical attitude towards attending Sunday services regularly at the beginning of the year (CK09) led at least to some positive experiences, e. g., with »worships adequate for young people« (KK30).

These results in the sense of more or less unchanging attitudes are confirmed by the general attitudes towards the Christian faith and the Protestant Church in general at the beginning and at the end of the year. Especially the percentage of confirmands that describe their attitudes towards faith and Church in general as »neither negative nor positive« keeps stable at around 45 % and the attitude »very positive« remains at a low level of less than 10 % (cf. Table 21).

Table 21: General questions on faith and Church (Switzerland)

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 %	9 %	45 %	36 %	7 %
KF01: ... the Christian faith (t ₂)	2 %	6 %	44 %	38 %	9 %
KF02: ... the Protestant Church (t ₂)	3 %	6 %	50 %	36 %	6 %

N = 509-550. The Swiss questionnaires did not include CF02.

Due to these results it does not seem to be surprising that 65 % of the confirmands did not become »motivated to help in the church as a voluntary worker« (KK27) and only 6 % at the beginning and only 9 % at the end of the year are »interested in taking part in a Christian youth group after confirmation« (CG08/KG08) – the lowest mean value (1.92/2.04) in all countries of our research.

At least the rather low expectation to come into contact with the leaders and workers at the beginning has risen from 22 % to an actual experience of 56 % (CK03/KK03), which does not necessarily mean they did not have a positive one in the beginning, but maybe just no expectation.

Nevertheless, the percentage of confirmands saying that »it is important for

me to belong to the church« increases from 21 % at the beginning to 30 % at the end of confirmation time (CG01-KG01) and the expectation to decide together with the fellow confirmands about the topics was in no country more fulfilled than in Switzerland (55 %; KK04) and above all, 84 % of the confirmands want to have their children baptised (KG03).

This raises the question about the non-cognitive and maybe even non-expressive reasons for some sort of »sense of belonging«, protection and institutional certainty beyond individual expressions and clarity of faith. In that sense, it might be assumed that the confirmands already show the same complex and sometimes ambivalent attitude of individual distance and openness towards the *Volkskirche* – the Church that wants to be open for everyone without putting much demand on the members – and its traditions, and therefore, do not differ significantly from adults.

Overall, confirmation time receives good marks when it is looked at as a whole year of experiences together with the group, the ministers and the workers. The whole confirmation time is rated as satisfactory by 66 % of the confirmands (cf. Table 20) and 51 % found the amount of time spent in confirmation preparation is just right. So at least the general impression of the confirmands is positive.

But even then, one must ask how much this impression is influenced by the experiences with the group itself and in which sense the »content/topic of lessons« (KN03) contributes to this position. One has to have in mind that the Swiss confirmands show the highest mean value of all countries on the item »I would prefer being confirmed without the confirmation time beforehand« (47 %; KK41). And the sense of satisfaction »with the whole confirmation time« is the lowest in all countries (mean 4.87; KN01).

Especially looking at the outcome of the year, the results show a rather critical attitude among many confirmands. 53 % find that the confirmation has little to do with their everyday life (KK35) and 46 % deny the point that confirmation time is »more interesting than what is usually done in school« (KK50), again the highest mean value of all countries.

Data from the Confirmands' Parents

It was a speciality of the German-speaking countries to include parents in the survey. Table 22 reports the results.

The results show a high satisfaction rate with confirmation work in general. However, it should be taken into account that the answers are not representative for all confirmands' parents but only for those who attended the parents' meeting with the minister. 79 % of the questionnaires were filled in by mothers, 21 % by fathers (not taking into account that some questionnaires were filled in by a couple). A remarkable result from the parents' questionnaire deals with the

Table 22: Answers from the parents' questionnaire (Switzerland)

	N	M	SD	pos. (5,6,7)
PA01: How satisfied are you with confirmation work here overall? (1 »not satisfied at all« 7 »totally satisfied«)	228	5.46	1.18	79%
PA02: How satisfied is your child with confirmation work here overall? (1 »not satisfied at all« 7 »totally satisfied«)	230	5.00	1.28	71%
PA03: Did you feel adequately informed by the parish about what was going on during confirmation training? (1 »not adequate« 7 »adequate«)	234	5.20	1.68	70%
PA04: Did your attitude towards the parish change during the confirmation training of your child? (1 »negative change« 7 »positive change«)	235	4.42	0.95	31%
PA05: How much did your child tell you about his/her experiences in confirmation training? (1 »very little« 7 »very much«)	231	3.86	1.71	37%
PA06: How important is it for you personally that your child will be confirmed? (1 »not important« 7 »very important«)	234	5.41	1.47	74%
PA07: How important is faith in God for you personally? (1 »not important« 7 »very important«)	234	5.26	1.56	71%

N = 228-235.

estimation of confirmation. When asked »How do you celebrate the confirmation day in your family« the answers were: 0% »not at all«; 18% »rather a small party«; 27% »a party like others, for example birthday parties« and 55% »one of the most important events in the life of my child«.

Compared to Germany, not three out of four but »only« half of the parents see confirmation as one of the major events in life. Nevertheless, it can be said for Switzerland, that good support of the families surely is an underlying factor for the stability of participation in confirmation work over the last years.

3.3.5 Workers

Background Data

65% of the workers who filled in a questionnaire were male, 35% were female; there is a broad span of ages from 16 to 63 years with the majority of workers being between the age 42 and 46. 95% are Protestant and 82% are Swiss. More than three quarters of them are ministers or ministers-in-training, only a very small percentage consists of other full- or part-time workers and 10% are volunteers.

Almost half of the workers have more than ten years of experience with confirmation work, which can be seen as an ambivalent figure. On the one hand, it

points to the fact of broad and long professional experience, on the other hand, it could imply a rather strong persistence in unchanging and somehow proven individual ways and habits of teaching.

Compared to the fact that about two thirds of the confirmands had participated in church group activities before the confirmation year, the number of confirmands that are known by the workers is rather small. This might indicate the problematic fact that a large number of ministers do not participate in these activities so that their work with young people within the parish does not seem to be of high intensity before confirmation time.

Confirmation work is considered by the workers as a major field of work (57%) but interestingly enough, only very few (2%) see it as one of the most important fields. This might raise the question if there is a dissonance between the perception of the confirmation work of the »normal« church members and the workers.

Motives of the Workers

In the self-reports, some facts about the motivational background can be found.

Only 5% of the workers would »like to be relieved from working in confirmation training« (WE06) and 86%/90% consider their pedagogical/theological competence for this work as adequate (WE09/WE10). These results show clearly that the assumption of workers »suffering« during confirmation time has no basis. In contrast, the majority seems to almost enjoy the time being together with the confirmands. A second interesting result is that a majority of 77% complies with the official guidelines of confirmation work although there is neither an official workbook or handbook nor an obligation to teach a certain catechetical content (WE01; WE02).

It has to be mentioned that workers see only limited opportunities for confirmands to join in the church life. 53% report no suitable youth groups for newly confirmed adolescents (VL01). On the other hand, 72% of the workers see opportunities for confirmands »to help as a volunteer in our parish after confirmation« (VL02).

On the whole and at the end of the year, 78% of the workers are satisfied with the confirmation work in the parish (VM01), 94% still like doing the confirmation work (VM02) and even 98% (of the team-workers) find the teamwork successful (VM04).

Expectations and Experiences

The different items show not only the broad variety of different topics and contents during the confirmation year but also the workers' intention to combine personal questions with theological questions and with the present life of

the Church and parish. Obviously, confirmation work is widely understood as a time of networking (e.g., with the parents: 70%; WD08, and with the elders: 54%; WD09).

Most of the workers intend to activate the young people and to motivate them to become involved in church work. Due to the Reformed understanding of confirmation itself, the church services are prepared together with the confirmands in almost every parish (VD01 – 98%), which is by far the highest number of all the countries in this research programme.

Therefore comparing some results from the beginning and the end of the year is interesting. The workers were asked what they wanted the confirmands to experience (Items »W«) and what the confirmands experienced, learnt and did according to the workers' point of view (Items »V«). In general, the expectations of the workers were higher than what they stated at the end. 77% wanted the confirmands to work »temporarily in programmes of the church« and 66% said that this actually happened (WB02/VB02); 81% wanted the confirmands to »experience forms of worship adequate for young people« and 78% said that this was actually the case (WB04/VB04); 75% wanted the young people to »take part in the preparation of church services« and 69% confirmed that this really happened (WB06/VB06).

The same phenomenon can be seen concerning the contents of the confirmation year. In general, at the beginning of the year, 100% of the workers wanted to help confirmands to »develop a personal point of view concerning their own life« (WC01) and 92% that they would be »strengthened in their faith« (WC02). At the beginning, 94% of the workers thought the confirmands should be »supported in their personal and social development«; at the end, the number had gone down to 67% (WC04/VC04). 81% of the workers said in the beginning, the young people should »get to know what the youth work of the church offers to them« but in the end 65% confirmed that this had happened (WC06/VC06). The hope that confirmands could be »won for continuing as voluntary workers in the church« was expressed by 53% of the workers, in the end this was affirmed by only 39% (WC07/VC07). And that the year would be a chance to »experience forms of meditation or prayer« (hoped for by 72%) was fulfilled by only 48% (WC10/VC10). And even the initial low aim of 13%, that the confirmands »learn central Christian texts by heart«, goes down to 8% at the end and is again by far the lowest of all the countries (WC03/VC03).

The same tendencies are seen in regard to personal conversation with each confirmand (from 81% to 75%; WD05/VD05), cooperation with the school (from 30% to 9%; WD06/VD06) and improving the contact between parents and the church (from 70% to 56%; WD08/VD08). Only the hope, that the »confirmation church service should be prepared together with the confir-

mands« expressed by 91 % of the workers led to the actual fulfilment by 98 % at the end of the year (WD01/VD01).

3.3.6 Didactics

Methods and Materials

From the perspective of the leaders, the following pedagogical measures were often used (items VH): discussion (63 %), group work (51 %), lectures/narrations (46 %). More activating and experience-oriented pedagogical measures were never or seldom used, like drama, role play (never or seldom: 57 %), learning paths (91 %), painting, drawing or other visual art (54 %), working with internet or text-messages (85 %), making music/musicals/musical games (80 %). But also such classical forms were rather rarely used, like reciting texts by heart (87 %) or even meeting people from the parish (63 %).

So, group work and discussion are still the favourites of the pedagogical measures during confirmation work. Many workers seem to be very reluctant to experiment with creative and »modern« forms of communication and there is still widespread hesitation to motivate confirmands to learn texts by heart.

In that sense, it is somehow not surprising that 54 % of the workers use the Bible sometimes, 29 % seldom and only 17 % often, the catechism 85 % never and 15 % seldom and a workbook for confirmands by 85 % never or seldom (items VI). But 68 % of the workers use materials produced by themselves often and 43 % use worksheets. Computer and data projector and other digital media are not or seldom used by 58 % resp. 69 % of the workers.

These results correspond with the confirmands' views (items KT). 81 % of them listened to stories or presentations nearly every meeting or sometimes and 85 % worked in small groups nearly every meeting or sometimes whereas 48 % never prayed together, 36 % never sang together and 81 % never recited texts learnt by heart.

Therefore most of them are in fact familiar with the Lord's Prayer, but knowing texts by heart is the exception. A Christian Creed is more or less known by heart by 17 %, Psalm 23 by 17 %, and the Ten Commandments by 38 % (items VU).

Topics

Table 23 compares the importance of topics stated by workers and confirmands in t_1 . The three lines at the top of the list (marked in light grey) show the topics in which the interest of confirmands exceeds that of the workers. The lines at the bottom of the list (marked in dark grey) are the topics that are emphasised much more by workers than by the adolescents.

Table 23: Comparison of importance of topics in t_1 (sorted by difference between workers and confirmands) (Switzerland)

Importance of topic	Workers	Confirmands
Friendship	76 %	87 %
Other religions	36 %	50 %
Violence and crime	48 %	69 %
The meaning of life	97 %	72 %
Justice and responsibility for others	95 %	65 %
Baptism	69 %	54 %
Jesus Christ	94 %	33 %
Course and meaning of Sunday services	77 %	21 %
The Lord's Supper	69 %	23 %

N = 583-592 (confirmands); N = 62-64 (workers). For details cf. sections WA and CL in the appendix.

Looking at the topics from the perspective of the workers, it can be seen that classical theological topics are estimated as important but not in all cases by an overwhelming majority of the workers, and looking at the Index iWA1, »aiming at Christian dogmatics«, this is the lowest mean value of all countries examined. On the other hand, in no other country do workers put so much emphasis on the aim that »the confirmation service should be prepared together with the confirmands« (91 %; WD01) and that this actually happens (98 %; VD01) as in Switzerland.

Furthermore, questions and issues of »real life« are considered at least as important as faith-related questions. In addition to the items mentioned above, workers also rate »Ecology and preservation of the Creation« (WA12) with 64 % and »Body and sexuality« (WA17) with 59 %. By the way, the workers' interest in the »meaning of life«, »other religions« and »violence and crime« is the highest compared to the other countries which might be due to the specific Zurich urban context.

Comparing the workers' and the confirmands' interests in regard to these items, there seems to be an emphasis on questions concerning everyday life experiences. In these topics, confirmands obviously share their interests with the workers. But almost all articulated interests of the workers concerning questions of faith are not considered as important by the confirmands.

But again, baptism plays a specific role. Whereas classical dogmatic contents are not of the very highest interest to the confirmands, baptism is for more than 50 % an interesting topic. And again, the articulated high interest in the topic »friendship« shows that confirmation time has, in addition to all experiences with and in the Church, its positive »hidden curriculum« in the close personal relations with others in and outside of the confirmation group.

Effects of Confirmation Time

Looking at the factors that influence the topics and activities during confirmation time, the workers consider the influence of the ministers or those persons mainly responsible as strong or very strong (100%). Compared to this, the confirmands have a strong or very strong influence of only 51 % and the official guidelines for the course of confirmation work only 30 % (items VJ).

The frequency of occurrences (VN) shows that contrary to common notion, confirmation time is not plagued with by permanent conflicts or chaotic situations producing overstrained and desperate ministers. Rather the opposite seems to be the case. After a class-meeting, the workers were »sometimes« or »very often« »satisfied with the way the confirmands participated« (83 %), satisfied »with what the confirmands have learnt and experienced« (96 %) and »satisfied with the way I did it« (98 %). Beyond that, many of the workers obviously have a high ability to create a comfortable framework and to cope with internal conflicts in a satisfactory manner.

3.3.7 Church Services

Compared to the other countries, the number of church services that confirmands have to attend is rather low. More than 80 % have to attend »only« 6 to 15 services during the whole year and in no parish a number higher than 15 services is required. Control of attendance is rather lenient in one third of the parishes. 85 % of the workers notice that the confirmands can take part in the Eucharist »right from the start of their confirmation training«. This result shows, probably in comparison with the practice within Lutheran Churches, the different meaning and practice of the Eucharist within the Reformed tradition and Churches, and also points to some ecclesiological conclusions from the fact that Swiss confirmands are normally two years older than in most other countries. Taking part in the Eucharist is a reference to the understanding that the confirmation time is seen as expressing and practising maturity in questions of faith and belonging to the Christian community.

The baptism of those confirmands who are not yet baptised takes place in 25 % of the cases on the day of confirmation, in 5 % 1 to 4 weeks before confirmation and in 2 % more than 4 weeks before confirmation. 48 % of the leaders observe that the confirmands can be confirmed without being baptised. This is due to the fact that according to the tradition and the Order of the Reformed Church of the Canton Zurich (as in many other Reformed Churches in Switzerland) baptism is not a prerequisite for being confirmed.

Looking at the church services from the perspective of the confirmands, it turns out that they are not estimated as very attractive, as a relevant piece or

even as a cornerstone of the confirmation year. Many confirmands find them, as mentioned above, rather boring, not only at the beginning but even more so at the end of the confirmation time.

On the other hand, it can be suggested and hoped for that the confirmands' own »final« confirmation service is excluded from this judgement because here the young people have the chance – and obviously grasp it – to express their own understanding of the confirmation year in the context of this public, familiar and personal event.

3.3.8 Conclusions and Challenges

The actual practice of confirmation in the Swiss Reformed Churches consists of a broad variety of approaches to the young people's questions and seems to take into consideration questions of individual maturity very intensely. This might be connected to and enforced by the older age of the Swiss confirmands but might also reflect a specific Reformed approach of taking into consideration the individual interests, attitudes and competences of the young adults in a theological perspective. In no other country is the aim to develop or to help to develop a personal view on life- and faith-related questions as high as in Switzerland. Confirmation time is still taken for granted by the confirmands as well as by the parents and the workers – and satisfaction is not low at all.

Nevertheless, the effects on personal faith-orientation seem to be rather small. Although almost half of the confirmands say that they have learnt more about God and faith during their confirmation year, it seems that the acquired knowledge and the various experiences do not lead to deeper personal convictions, a larger ritual practice, neither for themselves nor within the Christian community, nor a higher identification with the Church. There seems to be a remarkable gap between the workers' intention that confirmands should »be strengthened in their faith« and the answer of almost half of the confirmands, that this – in their own perception – does not happen. For a significant part of the confirmands leaving out the faith- and Church-related contents would not affect their positive perception of the confirmation time at all. Interestingly enough, identification with the Church increases the more young people make good experiences with church offerings, services and groups.

Although catechists, youth workers and volunteers very often have a specific emphasis when working with young people, they are so far not as much involved in confirmation training and work in the local parishes as they could and should be. This makes it important for the regional and local Churches to integrate them more intensively than is the case so far and to also open up

opportunities of training courses to reflect upon and to improve their own experiences regarding confirmation work.

In combination with the secular dynamics mentioned above, there are widespread discussions about the future of confirmation work (cf. Schlag/Neuberth/Kunz 2009). Due to the high variety of confirmation work, it is being discussed whether this liberal practice shows enough Reformed »corporate identity«. Efforts are being made to strengthen identity within the Reformed Churches' practice and to shape the confirmation time as a time to celebrate, to learn to live in a faith-orientated manner as well as to share joy and sorrow and to create community in the light of the Gospel. In this perspective, a new practical guide is currently being developed by the Department of Pedagogy and Animation together with the Faculty of Theology in Zurich, which is to provide a more common ground for confirmation work in the whole of the cantonal Church and also to be a source of inspiration for other Swiss-German Churches.

This framework should open up opportunities for young adults to gain knowledge about biblical and dogmatic traditions *and* theological interpretation, to practise their faith *and* to experience belongingness (»Beziehung *und* Beheimatung«) in their Church. In accordance to that, suggestions are being made to encourage ministers to intensify the experience-orientation and active involvement of the young people in the contents of the confirmation year.

Finally, ideas have to be developed to increase the possibilities for the younger generation to take over responsibility, to take part in churches' spirituality and solidarity and to shape their own projects after confirmation. This is to avoid the danger that religious socialisation becomes a completely internal field of church practice without any ties to the young people's real inner and outer world – that means the social and political context of the young people's life, their individual religious potential and their serious, optimistic and sometimes even desperate quest for meaning.