Introducing Adoptive Theology Through the Practice of Confirmation for Ecclesial Revitalization

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This doctoral project entitled

INTRODUCING ADOPTIVE THEOLOGY THROUGH THE PRACTICE OF CONFIRMATION FOR ECCLESIAL REVITALIZATION

Written by

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and submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of

Doctor of Ministry

has been accepted by the Faculty of Fuller Theological Seminary

upon the recommendation of the undersigned readers:

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INTRODUCING ADOPTIVE THEOLOGY THROUGH THE PRACTICE OF CONFIRMATION FOR ECCLESIAL REVITALIZATION

A MINISTRY FOCUS PAPER
SUBMITTED TO THE FACULTY OF THE SCHOOL OF THEOLOGY
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IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT
OF THE REQUIREMENTS FOR THE DEGREE
DOCTOR OF MINISTRY

BY
CAROL A. WUNDERLICH
MAY 2020
ABSTRACT

Introducing Adoptive Theology Through the Practice of Confirmation for Ecclesial Revitalization
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Doctor of Ministry
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2020

The goal of this project is to explore the practice of confirmation as a means of substantive faith transmission and ecclesial revitalization within a United Methodist context informed by the apostle Paul’s adoption metaphor. Chap Clark has proposed a hermeneutic of adoption as a framework for congregations to conceive and engage their role in fostering spiritual identity formation in adolescents. Intentional intergenerational ministry is foundational for developing the mutuality necessary for a thriving congregation. Practice learning is a critical component in nurturing, equipping and empowering young people within the household of God. In an adoptive context, mature members build bridges to young people to share consequential faith. As adults create catechetical community, they also experience spiritual growth and the congregation thrives as its vitality is renewed by the continuous energy and creativity of emerging generations.

Confirmation has functionally become an end point of Christian education and spiritual formation leaving people suspended in an early adolescent state of Christian identity. Many congregations cling to confirmation with hope that it will ignite a journey of substantive discipleship for early adolescents but do not implement the ministry to bring about the desired end. Congregations caught in systemically siloed ministry structures fall short of living into their baptismal and confirmation vows. Introducing adoptive theology and ministry practices through confirmation can lead to substantive faith transmission for early adolescents and revitalized ecclesiology for the congregation.

The confirmation ministry design for this project was implemented at Mt. Zion United Methodist Church in Highland, MD.

Content Reader: Dr. Mindy Coates Smith

Words: 248
To my husband and sons, John, JW and Joshua and to every congregation with whom I have shared the ministry of God’s reign
# TABLE OF CONTENTS

## PART ONE: MINISTRY CONTEXT

**INTRODUCTION**  
2

**CHAPTER 1: MOUNT ZION UNITED METHODIST CHURCH, HIGHLAND**  
11

## PART TWO: THEOLOGICAL REFLECTION

**CHAPTER 2: LITERATURE REVIEW**  
25

**CHAPTER 3: THEOLOGY OF THE NEW MINISTRY INITIATIVE**  
41

## PART THREE: MINISTRY PRACTICE

**CHAPTER 4: MINISTRY OUTCOMES**  
69

**CHAPTER 5: IMPLEMENTATION PROCESS AND EVALUATION**  
84

**SUMMARY AND CONCLUSION**  
101

**APPENDICIES**  
112

**BIBLIOGRAPHY**  
132
PART ONE
MINISTRY CONTEXT
INTRODUCTION

“Churches throughout the ages and around the world have the perennial vocation to teach the basics of Christian belief and practice to young people.”¹ The transmission of substantive Christian faith to rising generations has always been and remains challenging, especially amidst postmodern culture characterized by its “absence of religion as a central concern for life.”² Christian Smith, in summarizing the results of the National Study on Youth and Religion, concluded that the insufficient transmission of the major tenets and practices of Christianity between generations has led to its “degenerating into a pathetic version of itself, or more significantly, . . . [to its] actively being colonized and displaced by a quite different religious faith” he calls Moralistic Therapeutic Deism.³ Religious beliefs and practices of rising generations are largely inherited from the adults around them with generational shifts typically drifting to lessen contextual friction between religion and society.⁴ The result is that the Church faces the ongoing challenge of “cheap grace,” the choice to follow the appearance of faith rather than to invest in the life of

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sacrifice and community called for by the gospel.\textsuperscript{5} It is the work of the Holy Spirit to enliven spiritual identity within individuals and communities, but “churches can (and must) help by plunging teenagers into Christianity’s peculiar God-story, and by inviting young people to take part in the practices that embody it.”\textsuperscript{6}

Families have the greatest impact on children’s identity formation, an influence mediated by factors internal and external to the family system, including parenting styles, biology, and cultural expectations.\textsuperscript{7} Significant individual and corporate adult connections beyond the family also affect identity formation.\textsuperscript{8} Parents who hope to instill a lifestyle of discipleship in their children should cultivate participation in communities with healthy intergenerational relationships as part of the process of faith transmission.

When we realize that in our evolutionary past we raised children collaboratively and . . . other designated and trusted individuals in our tribe cared for our offspring, we realize how unnatural being isolated as a parent, or as a family, truly is. When it comes to village life for the teen, during the time he or she is pushing against parents, there would be other adults in the tribe to whom the teen could turn for security and connection.\textsuperscript{9}

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Macro-culture in the United States is eroding healthy identity formation. Skewed ideals of therapeutic and expressive individualism, protracted adolescence, mass-consumer capitalism, social fragmentation, isolation and atomization of the individual, privatization of religion, collective anxiety produced by violence, the rise and demise of the middle class, urbanization and suburbanization, the ubiquity of technology, digital communication and the World Wide Web have cumulatively assaulted adolescence.10 In their basic need for safe relationships and nurturing community, young people have been systematically abandoned by adults whose job it is to nurture and equip them for healthy identity development.11 Consequently, teens are reluctant to trust adults and a new situationally pragmatic, post-modern identity has taken root.12 Adults are perceived to value adolescents based on their performance in changeable, adult-defined scenarios in academics, athletics, religion, and other arenas.13 In response, teens create a subculture impermeable to adults, but which is infected by competitiveness and distrust engendered by adults, leaving teens also unable to fully trust their peers.14 The demand for prescribed
performance across a variety of settings leads to the development of identities which vary across relational contexts as young people present themselves differently in various spheres of interaction. Failure to trust adults as guides to maturity and the inability to form an integrated sense of self puts at risk the ability to transition to higher-order understanding of the self that typically should emerge in early adulthood and which includes “many of the attributes [which] reflect beliefs, values, and moral standards.”

American Christianity is culpable in its own decline. The expansion of siloed youth ministry programs, has disrupted the intergenerational character of Christian community, derailing corporate accountability for faith transmission. The Church may be the only remaining institution which brings all age groups together simultaneously, yet generational fragmentation within the building is the norm. The emphasis on cultivating attendance has led to the ascendency of consumeristic entertainment focused programs rather than ministry designed for spiritual formation.

Following WWII, Christian Education distinguished itself from public education, with the unintended consequence of effectively removing itself from daily collective

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culture where it had been unofficially undergirded by a network of Christian adults.\textsuperscript{19} Faith became confined to the milieu of the congregation.\textsuperscript{20} The emergence of professional Christian Educators ensured theologically correct content but created a crisis of efficacy among lay volunteers who feel unqualified to teach religion.\textsuperscript{21} The centralization of religious authority has become so prevalent that those who want to enrich the lives of young people now volunteer in contexts where it is easy to avoid religious beliefs or practices. Discipleship is reduced to private moral formation and cognitive assent that can be discovered, discussed and affirmed without ever leaving the Sunday school classroom.

The ascendance of the Christian Right, its close affiliation with the Republican Party and events such as 911 have fueled general distrust and disillusionment with religion. Attempting to be a social lubricant in this skeptical, multi-cultural public arena, mainline Christianity has diluted its unique beliefs and practices so “that it no longer poses a viable alternative to imposter spiritualities like Moralistic Therapeutic Deism.”\textsuperscript{22}

There is hope for the Church. Young people are not abandoning authentic Christianity. The “Nones” and “Dones” have shunned the inconsequential, imposter faith that the American Church has handed them. Most have not experienced a faith that


\textsuperscript{20} Osmer, \textit{Religious Education Between Modernization and Globalization: New Perspectives on the United States and Germany}, 42.

\textsuperscript{21} Ibid., 41–42.

\textsuperscript{22} Dean, \textit{Almost Christian: What the Faith of Our Teenagers Is Telling the American Church}, 36.
deeply engages and empowers their spiritual identity.\textsuperscript{23} The Church’s vocation remains to transmit substantive faith.

It appears that the greater the supply of religiously grounded relationships, activities, programs, opportunities, and challenges available to teenagers, . . . the more likely teenagers will be religiously engaged and invested. Religious congregations that prioritize ministry to youth and support for their parents, invest in trained and skilled youth group leaders, and make serious efforts to engage and teach adolescents seem much more likely to draw youth into their religious lives and to foster religious and spiritual maturity in their young members.\textsuperscript{24}

Confirmation, as a means of spiritual education and maturation has a convoluted but persistent place in the Church.\textsuperscript{25} In mainline Protestantism, confirmation is currently plagued by a graduation effect.\textsuperscript{26} Perceived as the completion of the Baptismal rite and a finalization of church membership vows, Christian parents often consider it their last religious obligation in raising their children.\textsuperscript{27} It has become a culmination rather than a nascence of discipleship. Yet most churches want the practice to continue. Five of the United Methodist congregations I have served emphasized confirmation in their youth ministry job descriptions and job interviews. There remains a lingering hope tinged with desperation that it will have life-long impact on Christian identity formation among young people. In this vein, Katherine Douglass considers confirmation an ecclesial

\begin{enumerate}
\item \textsuperscript{23} Ibid., 205; Smith and Denton, \textit{Soul Searching: The Religious and Spiritual Lives of American Teenagers}, 262.
\item \textsuperscript{24} Smith and Denton, 261–62.
\item \textsuperscript{27} Osmer and Douglass, \textit{Cultivating Teen Faith: Insights from the Confirmation Project}, 6.
\end{enumerate}
opportunity to reinvigorate “faith formation of almost half of American youth before they launch into young adulthood, . . . while they are still present in the body of Christ.”28

Denominations have made technical updates to confirmation programming. Curriculums cover the theology of core Christian tenets, history, and denominational doctrine and practices. These are the things the Confirmation Project research claims young people say they hunger for.29 Most churches contextualize their pedagogies for wholistic learning appropriate for early adolescence.30 New designs allow for varied teaching methods; adjusted program length and requirements; and bridge with local social and cultural practices.31 Intergenerational efforts include nurturing relationships between leaders and students, mentoring, and faith enacted in the whole body of believers through participatory inclusion. Most programs also involve parents with the hope of undergirding spiritual formation within the family.32

Developmental markers and rites of passage are important for identity formation and maturation.33 Rites of passage, as thresholds of exploration and change, mark the


31 Ibid., 13–15.

32 Ibid, 15.

most significant transitions of life and identity.\textsuperscript{34} Confirmation, in addition to being a principle conduit for faith transmission, has been loosely considered a Christian rite of passage, though it often lacks attendant change in status and role for those confirmed. Early adolescents are ripe for this type of experience and can be effectively engaged in discipleship exploration through adjusted curriculum and pedagogical models. But to create an environment of faith transmission conducive for spiritual identity formation requires adaptive change. At the heart of the infant baptism-confirmation model, is a theology that invites full inclusion of young disciples. Chap Clark believes congregations must move beyond assimilation to “develop the kind of strategy and create the kind of environment where young people can not only envision themselves as vital members of that flawed-yet-redeemed family [of God] but also be put on a pathway to actually experiencing this reality.”\textsuperscript{35} Adoptive theology is the hermeneutic which Clark believes provides the ecclesial \textit{telos} for ministry with youth (Jn 1:12, Rom 8:15, Mt 22).\textsuperscript{36} Adoptive theology is well-suited to redefine confirmation as the corporate work of the congregation for sharing the fundamental practices and beliefs of Christianity in a manner significant for continuing spiritual identity formation of its young people. It offers a framework for collaborative ministry and a future trajectory that have long been absent.

\begin{flushleft}
\textsuperscript{34} Grimes, \textit{Deeply Into the Bone: Re-Inventing Rites of Passage}, 5; Johnson, \textit{The Rites of Christian Initiation: Their Evolution and Interpretation}, xvii.

\textsuperscript{35} Chap Clark, \textit{Adoptive Church: Creating an Environment Where Emerging Generations Belong} (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2018), 4.

\textsuperscript{36} Ibid., 2–3.
\end{flushleft}
This project will introduce the hermeneutic of adoption and enact strategies of adoptive ministry through the confirmation ministry at Mt. Zion United Methodist Church. First, this involves holistically engaging confirmands in experiences promoting faith exploration and formation. Second, adults involved in youth ministry and confirmation, including parents, will be provisioned with an understanding of adoptive theology and the tools to nurture, equip and empower confirmands both within the program and beyond the confirmation ceremony. Third, it will promote an intergenerational ecclesial atmosphere open to practices of adoptive ministry. This includes leading the Church Council through a study of effective ministry strategies for thriving ministry with young people. The project will cast a wide vision of adoptive ministry, enlisting and equipping adults to intentionally engage with young people and include teenagers through specific invitation to share in the wider life of the congregation.
CHAPTER 1:

MOUNT ZION UNITED METHODIST CHURCH, HIGHLAND, MD

Mt. Zion, Highland is a United Methodist congregation located in Howard County, MD, one of the ten wealthiest counties in the country.\(^1\) The congregation’s roots date to two Civil War era churches, on opposite sides of the slavery issue, who shared meeting spaces.\(^2\) Pindell’s Methodist Episcopal Church, South was organized in 1866 and met in Pindell’s School House, not far from Mt. Zion’s current location.\(^3\) Zion Chapel, a Northern Methodist congregation, was likely formed in 1861.\(^4\) This congregation built a church in 1868 on a small parcel of the current property.\(^5\) While the building was under construction they also met in the school. However, services ceased in 1872 and the building was purchased in 1888 by the M.E. South congregation.\(^6\) A new building with

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\(^3\) Ibid., 3–6.

\(^4\) Ibid., 7.

\(^5\) Ibid., 7.

\(^6\) Ibid, 9.
stained glass windows, new furnishings and an organ was completed in 1919.\textsuperscript{7} Membership grew slowly through the mid-1950s.

Rapid suburban growth began in 1955 as science and defense industries located near Mt. Zion and the church expanded its facility including a new sanctuary in 1962.\textsuperscript{8} By 1982, with 725 members, “Mt. Zion had a modern plant of church facilities and land having an estimated worth of $1,000,000 all paid for and mortgage free.”\textsuperscript{9} These years established the congregation’s self-image as growing, mission-minded, forward-thinking, fiscally capable, and responsive to the community.\textsuperscript{10} Surrounded by farmland, the church retained its rural ambiance, but the congregation was well-educated, professional, suburban, predominantly white, and upper middle-class. There were thriving program ministries for all ages.

1983 began another critical era. Suburbanization was exploding and Mt. Zion focused on equipping lay leadership and expanding participation.\textsuperscript{11} That year, a hundred new members were received, there was a 25 percent increase in worship attendance and a 30 percent increase in Sunday school attendance.\textsuperscript{12} The congregation emerged as a flagship in the Baltimore-Washington Conference.\textsuperscript{13} A building expansion was completed

\begin{footnotes}
\item[7] Ibid., 12–16.
\item[8] Ibid., 22–28.
\item[9] Ibid., 34.
\item[10] Ibid.
\item[12] Ibid., 13.
\end{footnotes}
in 1986 increasing space for youth and children’s programming, expanding the fellowship hall, improving the sanctuary, and administrative space. By 1988 membership was 942 with average worship attendance of 413 and 217 in Sunday school. In 1989 Mt. Zion Christian Preschool opened with expansions in 1992, 1993 and in 2002. Kairos Pastoral Counseling Center opened in 1990 in the former parsonage and the first female pastor was appointed as associate pastor. Average attendance peaked in 1992 at 471 then dipped to 359 in 1994. Reflecting the national financial downturn, giving slowed in the early 1990s, but the congregation responded with determination. Finances curtailed building expansion plans, and the church faced critical space limitations hampering program development.

A 1993 bequest created an endowment fund which together with significant program budget cuts helped navigate the decrease in giving. In 1996 the new associate pastor joined the staff as both director of Christian education (DCE) and director of Kairos Counseling Center to reduce salary expenses. Membership reached 1119 in 1997

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14 Ibid., 14–16. 1984 was designated by the Church Council to focus on youth ministry.

15 Ibid., 17.

16 Ibid., 60–61.

17 Ibid., 17–18, 59. In 2000 a full-time therapist was hired and a Parish Nurse Program was started.

18 Ibid., 21.

19 Ibid., 23–24.

20 Ibid., 24.

21 Ibid., 25.

22 Ibid., 26.
with average attendance of 409. In 1998 the Conference appointed a lead pastor with a track record for growing attendance and giving resurfaced, attendance grew, participation was high, community groups were using the facility, the congregation was partnering with community services, and there was a waiting list for the preschool. Paying off the 1985 building project was a priority so future facility and parking expansion could proceed. The turn of the millennium brought sanctuary renovations, the addition of a contemporary worship service, revitalization of the Shepherding Ministry and a new wing of classrooms and offices. The church was managing its growth in a responsive and measured manner and had a high profile in the community.

In the early 2000s, the associate pastor, director of youth and Christian education ministries and of Kairos Counseling Center, engaged in ethically questionable behavior and actively undercut the senior pastor among the congregation. The division damaged Mt. Zion’s self-image and publicly embarrassed the congregation. These events launched a trend of failure to bring in new members and a tremendous loss of laity

23 Ibid., 21.
24 Eng, 29; Joe and Anna Yurick, 150th Anniversary Celebration: Mount Zion United Methodist Church, Et. 1862, DVD (Columbia, MD: Home Video Studio, 2012).
26 Yurick, 150th Anniversary Celebration: Mount Zion United Methodist Church, Et. 1862.
27 Gary Sheffield-James, Follow Up Conversation with Senior Pastor, October 2, 2019. The SPRC asked for him to be appointed elsewhere. The last six months of his tenure the congregation was divided into two camps and the behavior of the Associate Pastor was described to the current pastor as a “scorched earth policy.” Kairos Center was closed.
28 Gary Sheffield-James, Conversation with Senior Pastor, September 10, 2019.
willing to engage in ministry leadership.\textsuperscript{29} In 2002, the church reported having 1,100 members with an average attendance of 386, celebrated nineteen baptisms, had 389 children and forty-five youth enrolled in Sunday school with an average attendance just under 200, 170 active leaders for children through adult education, fifteen students enrolled in confirmation, fifty participants in youth group and a $741,000 budget.\textsuperscript{30} By 2006 average attendance fell to 344, there were only twelve baptisms, just thirty-four leaders engaged in Christian education ministry, only sixty-eight children and thirty-seven youth registered with the Sunday school.\textsuperscript{31} The budget shrunk to $665,000. As Mt. Zion drew in on itself to heal, the shift in American culture towards viewing religion as irrelevant was hitting its stride and became especially prevalent among the professional demographic surrounding the Mt. Zion.\textsuperscript{32} In 2006 a large non-denominational community church, opened an impressive facility in the heart of the new planned community just four miles from Mt. Zion. This congregation’s proximity to the new neighborhood, its professional staff, ministry programing for all ages and family configurations, and an adept online presence quickly supplanted Mt. Zion’s place in the community.


In 2007-2008 the Mission, Vision, and Core Values Task Force worked to reframe Mt. Zion’s self-understanding. The mission statement, “Touching Lives for Jesus Christ,” was adopted. Stephen Ministry was established in 2010 and continues as a small, vital outreach to the community. In 2013, the Open Doors Food Pantry was started, and now serves approximately 125 families a month. Mt. Zion’s Sunday morning schedule included three worship services. During the first and last service elementary children left worship for children’s church. Sunday school for all ages was held consecutive with the middle service.

Attempting to reflect the diversity of the community, Mt. Zion’s first African American female lead pastor was appointed in 2015. She inherited a shrinking church of 664 members of whom 635 were white and only fifteen black, and an average attendance of 266. Her leadership style clashed with the collaborative style of the congregation’s lay leadership and this led to two years of intense discord. The Sunday morning schedule was compressed to three hours, eliminating the middle service so there

33 Yurick, 150th Anniversary Celebration: Mount Zion United Methodist Church, Et. 1862.
34 Ibid.
36 Ibid., 285–86.
37 Bettye Ames, Interview with Church Council Chairperson, September 25, 2019; Sheffield-James, Conversation with Senior Pastor. The perception by the Chair of the Church Council is significant because she is one of the few black members and a professional woman. I was offered several examples of unilateral decisions made and implemented by the pastor.
was no longer worship at the same time as Sunday school.38 A congregational rift
developed accompanied by another round of public embarrassment for the
congregation.39 Membership fell to 582 with an average attendance of 235 and only one
child was baptized in 2016.40 After just two years, the Conference appointed a new lead
pastor. Several ministry staff were invited to find other places of employment as a result
of their part in the discord.41

By the Spring of 2019 children’s Sunday school was reduced to two multi-age
classes lead by just four teachers. Some Sundays registered no children in attendance.
Youth Sunday school shrunk from three to two classes. Every class used a different
curriculum and often classes just did not happen due to lack of leadership. KidZone
children’s church was often cancelled due to lack of leader availability. In the absence of
a youth pastor, four volunteers ran the 2018-2019 youth group and there was no
confirmation ministry.42 The congregation did celebrate paying off the mortgage from the
2002 building project in April 2019.

38 This is remembered as having caused several families to leave because they liked the one-hour
adult worship while kids are in Sunday school format. Christian education time was shortened to 45
minutes.

39 Sheffield-James, Conversation with Senior Pastor.

40 “UMData.Org”; “Dare to Believe. 2015 Official Journal. Minutes of the 231st Session of the
Baltimore-Washington Conference of The United Methodist Church.,” 686. The Conference no longer
keeps statistics on the number of people involved in ministry leadership with children and youth.

41 Sheffield-James, Conversation with Senior Pastor. There has been a high degree of staff
turnover due to retirements, more lucrative opportunities and Conference need in other congregations.

42 This included a young adult who grew up in the church, but who was on staff as the part-time
youth leader at another congregation whose youth ministry did not meet on Sunday evenings.
Recognizing the need to restore vision and order to the ministry with children and youth, the Staff Parrish Relations Committee created a fulltime position and sought a theologically trained professional with experience. I was hired at the beginning of May as the youth and children’s pastor (YCP). Several things became apparent. First, leadership is committed to reestablishing a thriving ministry with children and youth, but the vision remains centered on restoring attendance numbers for a program ministry that is largely isolated from the adult congregation. Most members no longer have young people at home. They want emerging generations in the church but fail to understand how youth ministry involves them. Several couples with older youth and emerging adult children are heavily involved with Young Life, which largely serves as a conduit for the youth ministry of the larger non-denominational church established in the early 2000s.

Second, children and youth are virtually invisible in worship. Several young people do attend worship but are rarely up front and there are few families with younger children. On Communion Sundays, there is no children’s church, so elementary children who are present do get to participate in Communion.

Finally, ministry leaders are exhausted and frustrated. Most have multiple leadership roles and express feelings anger and defeat when others do not demonstrate the same sense of responsibility. To save time and resources, intentional discipleship has given way to the practice of finding warm bodies to fill spots. The out-going children’s minister confessed to recruitment fatigue. Infrequent attendance due to full

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43 One high school student has been recruited and mentored for the Sunday morning tech team. There is a Children’s Time every Sunday and the youth choir sings once a month during the school year. The Children’s Choir no longer exists. Adults serve as acolytes.
extracurricular schedules, precludes the involvement of many gifted people in ministry leadership. Physical spaces designated for young people’s ministry are in decline as the facility ages. The lack of upkeep conveys the impression that children’s ministry is not that important. In addition, The United Methodist Church is facing a denominational crisis concerning its stance on the inclusion of LGBTQ+ persons. This conflict is occupying the energy and attention of church leadership and generating anxiety for the future even while there is mountainous concern for the present.

Mt. Zion is surrounded by farmland, larger estates and two small, well-established neighborhoods. Maple Lawn, the planned community of more than 1000 residential units, conceived in 1996 is less than five miles away and still developing new neighborhoods. It is marketed as a self-contained neighborhood for elite business, scientific and government employees. Its website does not offer any links to religious communities. Grace Church, the large non-denominational church which opened in 2006, is the only religious congregation in the immediate neighborhood.

44 It is a ministry death spiral: Without leadership, effective ministry falters and without effective ministry, families do not see Mt. Zion as capable of meeting their spiritual needs. Attendance declines, giving decreases creating difficulty justifying budgets for ministry with a shrinking population of children and youth. Minus budget resourcing, discipleship ministry becomes a more difficult task.

45 The children’s and youth ministry offices looked like storage sheds overcrowded with old smelly, mismatched furniture and cardboard boxes of resources and they had not been touched by the paid cleaning company for more than a year. Furniture in the ministry spaces is also old, some dry rotting, stained and is not functional for the space.

46 There are eight smaller United Methodist church and a variety of other small Protestant churches within five miles of Mt. Zion. There is also a large Catholic Church with a school on site.


48 Ibid.

49 The Baltimore-Washington Conference Center relocated in Maple Lawn business district just as development was starting, but it functions as a business not as a worshipping community.
The five-mile radius around Mt. Zion is 56 percent white, 20 percent black, 14 percent Asian and is one of the most highly educated areas in Maryland. The average household income is $149,184. The 2018 population was 117,489 and is expected to grow by 10,000 in the next ten years. The average age is forty years old, but 20 percent of the population is under eighteen. Fifty-nine percent are married and 29 are never married. The number of households is projected to reach 45,024 by 2028.

The two dominant demographic cohorts are American Royalty (26.4 percent) and Silver Sophisticates (22.8 percent). American Royalty live in exclusive neighborhoods and enjoy life; tend to be spiritually entitled; see church membership as a social status; prefer large influential churches with programs, resources and a strong reputation in the community; and they expect to shape policy and choose personnel. Attendance is

50 “MissionInsite: Community Engagement Specialists for Faith & Nonprofit Groups Fullinsite Report,” Demographics, People View, 11, 20, accessed July 17, 2019, https://peopleview.missioninsite.com/app/#/welcome/study-select?returnTo=%2Fwelcome. The final 10 percent is mostly Hispanic or Latino. One third have a graduate or professional degree and another third a bachelor’s degree.

51 “MissionInsite: Community Engagement Specialists for Faith & Nonprofit Groups Fullinsite Report,” 13, 15. Average household income is expected to increase by a little over $10,000 in ten years.

52 Ibid., 4–5. In 2018 there were 1,354 births and 1,460 people of all ages who moved to the area.

53 Ibid., 6–7. The largest group are now late elementary and middle school students, but that will shift to a greater younger elementary population in ten years.

54 Ibid., 10, 16. Seventy-six percent of households in 2018 were families while twenty percent were single person households.

55 Ibid., 12.


57 Ibid.
sporadic but they are generous when churches demonstrate excellent stewardship.\footnote{58}
Spirituality is part of their healthy lifestyle.\footnote{59} The Silver Sophisticates are mature, upscale singles and couples over sixty-five who view religious activities as the right thing to do, and are the backbone of their congregation.\footnote{60} They are philanthropic; socially liberal; consider church part of the education and social service networks; prefer congregations with outreach initiatives; and are open to diversity and worship variety, but are often uncomfortable in the presence of change.\footnote{61} Both groups wrestle with loneliness and concern for long-term financial health.\footnote{62} They prefer churches with professional, trained and well-paid staff and pastors who function as a CEO.\footnote{63} Christian Education and theology are engaged as personal improvement.\footnote{64} Silver Sophisticates are a major segment of Mt. Zion’s membership. They no longer have offspring at home, but are comfortable with intergenerational ministry, visionary discipleship, concerned with leaving a legacy, and will invest in youth ministry because they see the young people as the future of the church.\footnote{65}

\footnote{58} Ibid.
\footnote{59} Ibid.
\footnote{60} Ibid.
\footnote{61} Ibid.
\footnote{62} Ibid.
\footnote{63} Ibid.
\footnote{64} Ibid.
\footnote{65} Ibid.
A smaller demographic (9.7 percent) are “affluent couples and multigenerational families living [together or in close proximity in] a wide range of lifestyles.” Church membership is important for holidays and life-cycle events like baptism and confirmation, but other family activities take priority over church. Family roots, relationships and traditional values keep them loyal to family oriented congregations and denominations. They like blended, upbeat, inspirational styles of worship that will provide Christian lifestyle coaching. Mt. Zion has a considerable number of families from this demographic who want ministry in place for their children when the family attends, but who are not invested in participation or leadership with any consistency.

“Prosperous, middle-aged married couples living child-focused lives in affluent suburbs” comprise 5.2 percent of the population. They are spiritually entitled and struggle with feelings of loneliness. They prefer large churches, quality age-graded programming and professional youth pastors, worship that is relevant for youth and they value ideology over theology. Life revolves around providing the best opportunities for their children and spirituality is just one aspect of a healthy, morally responsible lifestyle. These are the families whose children attend the Mt. Zion Christian Preschool,

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66 Ibid.
67 Ibid.
68 Ibid.
69 Ibid.
70 Ibid.
71 Ibid.
72 Ibid.
but who are affiliated with other congregations such as Grace Community Church where their older children can easily fit into a large program ministry when they attend church.

Mt. Zion’s situation appears grim, especially its ministry with young people. The events of 2003 which led to the congregation being ill-prepared for the most recent population changes continue to impact ministry. Strategies that formerly served the church well in difficult seasons will not be adequate in their new religious and social landscape. There are obvious technical changes that could lead to small victories and generate positive energy for ministry. Recruiting and training new ministry leaders, aligning curriculum, refreshing children and youth ministry resources and spaces, and upgrading communicating practices can be quickly implemented.

Mt. Zion needs to acknowledge their national and local context and adapt sustainable ministry models and focused faith transmission in a community that considers ministry with children, youth and families a low priority.73 New strategies and metrics need to be developed and celebrated. The congregation must recapture a robust understanding of their identity as the called and adopted family of God, aligning its work with the purposes of Father, Son and Holy Spirit, not dependent upon its own efforts. Confirmation remains a relevant ministry practice in the minds of many adult congregants who remember it as important in their own faith development or to the faith and participation of their older children. The transmission of foundational Christian beliefs and practices, within the hermeneutic of adoptive theology through the confirmation ministry could be a springboard for ecclesial renewal.

PART TWO

THEOLOGICAL REFLECTION
CHAPTER 2:
LITERATURE REVIEW

Charles Foster, in *From Generation to Generation*, diagnoses faith transmission and formation using educational theory. In the later part of the twentieth century, mainline Protestant churches “generally cease[d] to envision a lively and robust future for themselves through the children in their congregation . . . [and gave] up on a commitment to education at the heart of their liturgies of infant baptism or dedication.”¹ Christian education programs continue, but lack the support and reinforcement that once connected spiritual formation to the work of the congregation for the sake of the Church and the spread of the gospel. The Church faces three adaptive challenges. First, Christian education must escape the Sunday school classroom and live throughout the congregation in order to cultivate competent disciples.² Second, congregations must reimagine themselves as “catechetical cultures of faith formation and transformation” nurturing sustained faith-based relationships.³ Third, the stories of faith need to be celebrated

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² Ibid., 8–9.

³ Ibid., 9.
through daily ecclesial practices so that young people can connect Scripture with their own stories.\textsuperscript{4}

Education is integral to the survival of a community as it passes along the substantive beliefs and practices that form the identity of its members.\textsuperscript{5} Education is most impactful for identity development when it occurs in relationship. Communities must also be able to pass along beliefs and practices with a trajectory of influence, so they remain relevant to identity formation through time and circumstances.\textsuperscript{6} Vital transmission requires mutual participation from individuals who claim, faithfully renew and carry forward a community’s traditions and rituals in the present and into the future.\textsuperscript{7}

Consequential education engenders competency in learners while building upon itself as learner competency evolves.\textsuperscript{8}

Christian curriculum continues to be developmentally appropriate, but lacks the integration of practice and discovery learning.\textsuperscript{9} Practice learning involves learners in the life of the community so that they see and imitate the behaviors of mature disciples.\textsuperscript{10} With repetition, imitated behaviors begin to embody developmental learning and

\textsuperscript{4} Ibid., 11.
\textsuperscript{5} Ibid., 26.
\textsuperscript{6} Ibid., 27.
\textsuperscript{7} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{8} Ibid., 29–31.
\textsuperscript{9} Ibid., 31, 34.
\textsuperscript{10} Ibid., 32.
intensify the relationship between the learner and the community.\textsuperscript{11} Discovery learning is critical for congregations because it is what enables communities to faithfully imagine new possibilities and to adapt to changing circumstances.\textsuperscript{12} “The interdependence of developmental, practice and discovery learning [are necessary] in forming personal and congregational faith. . . . [and] must be deliberately engaged and systematically sustained over time if this community is to be renewed through its children.”\textsuperscript{13} Participation in Christian community and spiritual identity formation has become optional and episodic with the loss of reinforcing structures, congregational catechetical culture, a compelling narrative of God in a diverse culture, intergenerational relational mentoring.\textsuperscript{14} Families, age cohorts, congregations and denominational agencies invested in the faith formation of young people need to become mutually reinforcing to optimize catechetical culture.\textsuperscript{15}

Foster offers tremendous insight on the necessity of holistic Christian education for substantive faith transmission. The developmental, practice and discovery learning model provides a metric for structuring confirmation pedagogy and goals. His work aligns with Wesley’s understanding of faith transmission through accountable discipleship as a means of grace and a conduit through which the Holy Spirit works to transform human spiritual identity.

\textsuperscript{11} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{12} Ibid., 34.
\textsuperscript{13} Ibid., 36–37.
\textsuperscript{14} Ibid., 50.
\textsuperscript{15} Ibid., 38.
In *Growing Young*, Kara Powell, Jake Mulder, and Brad Griffin studied churches who were “engaging young people ages 15 to 29; and . . . growing – spiritually, emotionally, missionally, and sometimes also numerically.” Congregations should continue to invest in the spiritual formation of young people if for no other reason than the vitality and renewal their presence brings to the community. Research revealed six core commitments that churches who are growing young consistently demonstrate. The first, keychain leadership, involves the intentional commitment on the part of staff and volunteer leaders to be aware of and decentralize power and to entrust it to others, particularly young people. People are transformed from ministry consumers to contributing partners through intentional, sustained recognition and equipping in their giftedness to share in the ministry and leadership of the church.

Empathizing with today’s young people, the second commitment, requires compassionately understanding youth and young adults in the postmodern landscape. Questions of identity, belonging and purpose are difficult in our culture of extended adolescence, constant cross-context performance pressure, and the lack of safe

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17 Ibid., 40–42.

18 Ibid., 25–27, 42–43. Size, location, the age of the congregation, denomination, the “cool quotient,” facility, budget, worship style, “watered-down” teaching and entertainment programming were not significant factors in the success of Growing Young churches.

19 Ibid., 43, 50–84.


21 Ibid., 43, 88–122.
boundaries, nurturing institutions and relationships. Empathy enacts the Good News through grace, unconditional love, and inclusion in God’s work in the world.

The commitment to take Jesus’ message seriously pushes through Moralistic Therapeutic Deism to embrace the fullness of Christ’s radical, inconvenient call to sacrifice and action. Centering on God’s redemptive acts rather than abstract principles gives value to life-long, deep exploration of Christian faith that allow for uncertainty and difficult questions, personal testimonies, meaning-embodied ritual practices, and openness to the on-going work of the Holy Spirit. The fourth commitment, fueling warm community, focuses the community on sharing life together rather than programmed busyness. Nurturing, intergenerational relationships impact identity formation as people are authentically valued within a family defined by God’s reign.

Of the six, “making the intentional decision to disproportionately prioritize young people (within the context of their families) is the inflection point between [congregations who are] growing young and [those who are] growing old.” It is the most difficult commitment because it requires the entire congregation to sacrifice focusing inward on the comfort of existing members to continually prioritize the needs of rising generations.

22 Ibid., 95–113.
23 Ibid., 115.
24 Ibid., 43, 126–59.
26 Ibid., 43, 163–92.
27 Ibid., 169–76.
28 Ibid., 44.
for faith formation.²⁹ It defines the institutional drive to utilize resources and attention throughout the entire congregation on the spiritual formation of young people.³⁰ This commitment, by extension, requires congregations to invest in parents and families.³¹

Finally, being the best neighbors is the commitment to gracefully loving the community outside the walls of the church while navigating the tension of Christ’s call to holiness in the midst of broken human culture.³² As congregations actively see and seek their local and global neighbors in order to make the world a better place, embracing diversity and avoiding judgmental attitudes, young people will receive the transmission that love for God and neighbor are central to the gospel.³³

Growing Young offers practical hope in a season of decline and anxiety. It joins attitude and effort as partners with bi-directional influence in faith transmission, provides specific action ideas, and the opportunity to develop new metrics to measure ministry. It is a tool to begin the conversation of what is necessary to be committed to ministry with young people and to build fundamental congregational efficacy in the practice of faith transmission for identity formation. Due to its well-defined time and program boundaries, confirmation is an excellent ministry in which the Church Council and youth leaders can explore practical application of the core commitments as they study the book.

²⁹ Ibid., 199–200.
³⁰ Ibid., 201.
³¹ Ibid., 203–8.
³³ Ibid., 237, 242–55.
Research consistently reveals that parents are integral to faith transmission and the spiritual formation of their children. It is the Church’s responsibility to help equip parents for that role. *Growing With* by Kara Powell and Steven Argue extrapolates authoritative parenting strategies to navigate the developmental transitions of adolescence and emerging adulthood while allowing for the work of the Holy Spirit in spiritual formation.34 Reimagining parental roles allows young people space to grow, to evolve their unique identities without the expectation of assimilation or the sense that their parents have abandoned them to traverse the journey to adulthood alone.35 “Growing With parenting [is] a mutual journey of intentional growth for both ourselves and our children that trusts God to transform us all.”36 Three areas parents must navigate with their growing children are family, faith and world.37 Powell and Argue introduce three verbs that emphasize the mutuality of the growth process. Withing is “a family’s growth in supporting each other as children grow more independent.”38 Faithing is “a child’s growth in owning and embodying their own journey with God as they encounter new experiences and information.”39 Adulting means “a child’s growth in agency as they embrace opportunities to shape the world around them.”40


35 Ibid., 43.

36 Ibid., 17, 22–36.

37 Ibid., 36.

38 Ibid., 37.

39 Ibid., 39.
The adolescent and emerging adulthood journey can be pictured as overlapping developmental stages: Learners, Explorers, and Focusers.41 Learners, thirteen to eighteen years old, are rapidly expanding their knowledge, awareness and capability in all contexts including how to differentiate their faith from that of their parents.42 Explorers, in late-teens through early-twenties, are launching themselves into new experiences and ways to relate to the world, including understanding how what they believe affects their lives.43 The mid- to late-twenties is when emerging adults, Focusers, invest themselves more intentionally in careers, relationships and honing their identity.44

Three parenting modes correspond to the three phases.45 Teachers are parents who maintain the closeness required to understand their Learners in order to “integrate new ideas, skills and competencies into the frameworks and paradigms . . . teenagers already possess.”46 They are patient with practice and failure, deal in specifics, stimulate reflection, recognize adolescent agency and work collaboratively.47 Explorers need parent Guides who can, because of their greater life experience, empathize and evaluate the depth and type of support explorers need to thrive.48 Focusers need parent Resourcers

40 Ibid., 42.
41 Ibid., 52.
42 Ibid., 52–53.
43 Ibid., 53–55.
44 Ibid., 55–57.
46 Ibid., 58.
47 Ibid., 58–60.
48 Ibid., 61–63.
who stay warmly connected, interested and willing to offer perspective and encouragement, but who respect their young person’s agency and unique choices.\textsuperscript{49}

When it comes to faith transmission and spiritual identity formation, parents adapt from laying foundations of practice and belief during childhood to equipping young people to develop strategies that will empower them to continue to mature in faith intellectually, emotionally, and relationally across life contexts.\textsuperscript{50} Parenting for faith development should deal in the concrete “good news” rather than abstract principles; allow for questioning and doubt; initiate transparent faith conversation; model the intersection of faith and life in difficulty, celebration and in everyday moments.\textsuperscript{51} Parents should encourage and model engagement in Christian community, or churching, as Powell and argue refer to it.\textsuperscript{52} As young people differentiate from parents, congregations provide social capital to support ongoing faith development while religious practices create openings for conversation.\textsuperscript{53} Parents can advocate for congregations to value, invest in, and integrate emerging generations in all aspects of corporate life to foster continued maturation and allow young people to have their own stake in the church.\textsuperscript{54}

\textit{Growing With} provides a way to conceptualize healthy parenting transitions to match the maturing needs of young people. It encourages parents to remain engaged

\textsuperscript{49} Ibid., 63–65.
\textsuperscript{50} Ibid., 137–42.
\textsuperscript{51} Ibid., 142–58.
\textsuperscript{52} Ibid., 165–68.
\textsuperscript{53} Ibid., 169–72.
\textsuperscript{54} Ibid., 172–79.
rather than abdicate their parental role in faith transmission. Empowerment is critical for this time when many parents disengage because they see confirmation as a completion of their religious obligation and they doubt their efficacy for engendering continuing spiritual formation with their adolescent children. Parents expect to have responsibility or engagement in the process of confirmation. Reading Growing With in a parenting group could cast a vision for their continued parenting for Christian formation beyond confirmation in partnership with the church and a lead to a new understanding of parents and children as mutually adopted spiritual siblings in the ecclesial family.

In Adoptive Church, Chap Clark views the concept of assimilation as the culprit at the heart of the failure to transmit consequential faith to rising generations of adolescents. He reframes the work of youth ministry using the paradigm of adoption based on the words of Jesus in John 1:12 and Paul’s ecclesiology in Romans 8:14-17. Adoptive theology “sees the church, and who we are together as God’s household, and then creates a pathway for the young to enter into that family through youth ministry.” The task of the church is to strategize and create an environment of faith transmission in which young people can imagine and experience themselves as fully included and contributing members of God’s family.

55 Clark, Adoptive Church: Creating an Environment Where Emerging Generations Belong, 2.
56 Ibid., 2–3.
57 Ibid., 8.
58 Ibid., 4.
The ecclesia must first, acknowledge the mutual adoption of all members through the work of the Holy Spirit in shaping how God’s family lives and works together.\textsuperscript{59} Second, it is the responsibility of “the more mature and interconnected family members to engage those who are weak or disempowered.”\textsuperscript{60} Third, programs must intentionally connect with and make space for vulnerable populations rather than be ends in themselves.\textsuperscript{61} Finally, leaders must utilize their authority to empower others to grow in their identity and agency within God’s reign.\textsuperscript{62} Adoptive ministry will thrive as congregations pursue spiritually empowered relationships to offer authentic community to young people.\textsuperscript{63} Humility and service to others must be at the heart of the congregational identity and practice.\textsuperscript{64} The atmosphere of genuine hospitality, openness to young people from outside of the congregation, and corporate ownership of youth ministry by the whole body for the sake of the whole body are necessary ministry components.\textsuperscript{65}

Given the present American cultural climate, when the community of Christ offers authentic nurturing, empowerment and belonging, young people experience the

\textsuperscript{59} Ibid., 10.

\textsuperscript{60} Ibid.

\textsuperscript{61} Ibid, 10–13. By vulnerable, Clark means unempowered. Young people are not regularly in positions of authority of power in churches or in society, therefore they are vulnerable.

\textsuperscript{62} Ibid., 11.

\textsuperscript{63} Ibid., 14–15.

\textsuperscript{64} Ibid., 15–16.

\textsuperscript{65} Ibid., 16–17.
connection of religious teaching and lived discipleship.  

Though spiritual identity formation is a unique experience for every individual, community is essential to discipleship. In community believers are engaged in loving, theologically sound, accountable, ongoing repentance which leads to trust in God’s reign, and directs personal growth and service in a trajectory aligned with God’s reign. In a community defined by adoptive theology, everything aligns with the goal: “To create an environment where young people are encouraged to live into their calling in Christ as agents of the kingdom within the household of God.”

Implementing adoptive youth ministry requires establishing clear goals that are widely communicated and owned by the whole congregation, a realistic evaluation of present ministry context, understanding the congregational options and resources for ministry, and creating a structured plan. It is essential to collaborate with individuals and groups to form partnerships with a vision for adoptive ministry throughout the congregation and to equip leadership and laity with a vision for how everything they do either works for or against the purposes of faith transmission and transformation.

Clark’s concepts of nurture, empowerment and inclusion largely coincide with the theories and findings from the first three resources. His unique perspective in allowing

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66 Ibid., 33–43.
67 Ibid., 45–58.
68 Ibid., 60.
69 Ibid., 69–81.
70 Ibid., 83–130.
71 Ibid., 38, 134–55.
the theological question why to determine the ministry what and how gives an impetus and a telos to congregational transmission of belief and practice that is murky in the other resources.\footnote{Ibid., 131–34.} The ministry of spiritual education should be motivated and shaped by divine desire for God’s Church, not by a congregation’s drive to survive. Providing the answer to the why, is critical in envisioning future ministry that overcomes systemic reluctance to change as the ongoing work of the Holy Spirit in our adoption as God’s children is revealed.\footnote{Ibid., 157–76.}

Nurture, empowerment and inclusion are vital concepts for confirmation. Nurture provides safety for young people to grow into their identity.\footnote{Ibid., 38–40.} Empowerment is the scaffolding for young people to grow into autonomy.\footnote{Ibid., 41.} Inclusion offers young people integral belonging and participation in the mission of God alongside the family of God.\footnote{Ibid., 43.} Employing adoptive ministry with young people ostensibly engaged in an intense period of faith transmission and ecclesial involvement during confirmation promotes their experience of practice and belief which will encourage their continued spiritual formation within the family of God.

Despite a steep decline in participation and growing questions regarding its effectiveness as a means of communicating consequential faith to adolescents,
confirmation continues as a standard practice in mainline Protestantism. The Confirmation Project conducted a three year study of current practice and theology of confirmation as part of the Church’s ongoing mission to make disciples. Cultivating Teen Faith shares and interprets the team’s findings with an eye to the future. Confirmation continues to be seen as a means of grace connected with the work of the Holy Spirit affirming or confirming the baptismal vows and strengthening young believers for continued growth as disciples. It is an opportunity to deeply investigate core Christian belief and practice. The most significant conclusion of the study is that “confirmation fulfills its faith-forming potential most effectively when it is approached not as a program with requirements to tick off but as a process of formation that is connected in multiple ways to the broader congregation’s relationships, practices, traditions, and experiences.”

Many churches contextualize and diversify confirmation pedagogy to meet the needs of students and families. Most confirmands were motivated by the expectation of


78 “The Confirmation Project,” March 7, 2017, https://theconfirmationproject.com. The research was conducted 2014-2017 with churches in the African Methodist Episcopal Church, the Episcopal Church, the evangelical Lutheran Church, the Presbyterian Church (USA), and The United Methodist Church.

79 Osmer and Douglass, Cultivating Teen Faith: Insights from the Confirmation Project.

80 Ibid., 2.

81 Ibid., 2, 132.

82 Ibid., 2.

83 Ibid., 4–5, 17–18, 194.
learning more about God and strengthening their faith.\textsuperscript{84} Parents, students and leaders agreed with some variation in priority, that the goals were to learn about Christianity, strengthen personal faith and for students to mature in responsibility for their continuing faith development.\textsuperscript{85} Confirmation ministries that included parents, fostered intergenerational relationships, allowed space for difficult questions, and included young people in impactful faith practices were more likely to have a lasting faith strengthening effect.\textsuperscript{86} The creativity, commitment and passion of leaders and the congregation to design a confirmation ministry that effectively engages young people in faith transmission was more important than any specific curriculum.\textsuperscript{87} The faith young people experience in their homes is important for the way students approach faith development experiences and their lasting impact.\textsuperscript{88} “Confirmation is not a significant independent factor in faith formation, but is inextricably intertwined with other factors.”\textsuperscript{89} Most confirmands are involved in their churches and are familiar with faith practices and beliefs prior to confirmation.\textsuperscript{90}

Recapturing the ecclesial understanding of confirmation as one phase of an ongoing process of faith transmission and spiritual identity formation within the context

\textsuperscript{84} Ibid., 5–6. Rather than because of obligation or for social interaction.

\textsuperscript{85} Ibid., 6, 132.

\textsuperscript{86} Ibid., 6, 132–33, 136.

\textsuperscript{87} Ibid., 133, 137–38, 140.

\textsuperscript{88} Ibid., 8–10, 89–113.

\textsuperscript{89} Ibid., 11–12.

\textsuperscript{90} Ibid., 13.
of supportive Christian community is an important goal for congregations in overcoming the graduation effect. Confirmation has been a practice in need of a theology and more recently in need of a future trajectory. Congregations need a vision and strategy, in which confirmation plays a strategic role, that will allow them to imagine a vital future as they invest in the lives of young people. Parents need to rediscover their role in the continuing faith maturation of their older adolescents and emerging adults. And young people need dynamic, holistic education in the practices and beliefs of Christian faith so they can be strengthened and encouraged for continued spiritual formation within and for the reign of God. Confirmation is an ecclesial opportunity to initiate the theological, theoretical and practical changes needed for congregations to renew themselves in and for the work of consequential faith transmission with emerging generations.

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91 Ibid., 14.
CHAPTER 3:
THEOLOGY OF THE NEW MINISTRY INITIATIVE

The theological architecture of adoptive ministry, as drawn from the Pauline corpus, “describe[s] the familial privilege both Jewish and gentile Christians have with God and one another in Christ” encapsulating the spiritual and ontological realities fostering Christian identity formation.¹ Paul’s metaphor exposes the nature of the soteriological transformation from “life outside of Christ” to “life in Christ,” framing truth in both theological and socio-cultural references.²

Jesus’ earliest followers functioned as family united by their belief in the ministry, death and resurrection of Jesus and their baptismal and Eucharistic practices.³

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¹ Chap Clark, ed., Adoptive Youth Ministry: Integrating Emerging Generations into the Family of Faith (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2016), 2, 4–5; Chap Clark, “Strategic Adoption: Developing a Holistic Ecclesiology.” Most of the following material on Paulin adoption theology is drawn from Growing Young as a Strategy for Adaptive Change in light of the Apostle Paul’s Metaphor of Adoption, a paper submitted by Carol Wunderlich to the faculty of Fuller Theological Seminary May 2018.


Paul’s ecclesiology integrates his Shammaite Pharisaic roots, his status as a Roman citizen and his faith in Jesus to intrigue congregations with diverse membership using the figurative language of family. For example in his letters to the Thessalonians, his “constant use of the word adelphio, literally ‘brothers’, calls up in his world the shared working and family life of a close kinship-group. The premise . . . is that God has created a new Messiah-family . . . based on and characterized by nothing less than the self-giving love of Jesus.”

The word Huiothesia as employed by Paul has two possible translations; adoption and sonship. The Hebrew Scriptures contain no equivalent forensic term and it is rarely used by Paul’s Jewish contemporaries. He employs it five times (Gal 4:5; Rom 8:15, 23:

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9:4; Eph 1:5) and only with mixed gentile-Jewish congregations in cities under direct Roman rule who are experiencing ecclesial dissonance. As a metaphor, adoption weaves Jewish theology of divine sonship with Roman legal practices and fictive kinship to create a filial model for the Church. It appears amidst references to historic episodes from Israel’s past which define its election as God’s son, but reinterprets them through the new lens of adoption to reveal “the selection of believers as sons, their justification, as it were their birth as sons, and also the fact that from then on they will live as members of God’s family, under [God’s] guidance and authority, under [God’s] potestas.”

According to Jewish covenantal theology, God alone is righteous because of God’s unerring faithfulness to God’s promises; God, as judge, impartially upholds the law, punishes sin and defends the defenseless to accomplish God’s purposes both within human history and eschatologically. Though God’s righteousness remains qualitatively and eternally unique, God can bestow righteousness upon a vindicated party regardless of

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their moral goodness.\textsuperscript{12} Justification establishes righteousness; adoption then intensifies the human-divine relationship as believers are spiritually reborn into God’s household.\textsuperscript{13} *Huiothesia* is an “organizing metaphor for Paul’s doctrine of salvation.”\textsuperscript{14}

In Galatia, Jewish Christians were demanding, and gentile converts were submitting to, adherence to the Law as a pathway to membership in God’s family.\textsuperscript{15} “[Paul] resisted the application of the law to gentiles, not because he was the apostle of freedom, but because he believed that the Jewish law did not apply to gentiles.”\textsuperscript{16} Galatians 4:1-7 recalls the Exodus and argues the futility of continued adherence to the Law or the taking up its yoke.\textsuperscript{17} In Egypt, the Israelites were slaves even as they were heirs to the Abrahamic Promise (Gal 4:1).\textsuperscript{18} Gentile Christian’s status as God’s children is likewise established through the Abrahamic Covenant which was intended for the salvation of the whole world.\textsuperscript{19} Christ has fulfilled the Law, so the Abrahamic Covenant once again takes precedence and through faith in Christ the gentiles are incorporated into

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{12} Ibid., 97–99.
\item \textsuperscript{13} Burke, *Adopted into God’s Family: Exploring a Pauline Metaphor*, 23–20.
\item \textsuperscript{14} Ibid., 41.
\item \textsuperscript{17} Scott, *Adoption as Sons of God: An Exegetical Investigation into the Background of Huiothesia in the Pauline Corpus*, 154–61; Wright, *Paul for Everyone: Galatians and Thessalonians*, 45.
\item \textsuperscript{18} Scott, *Adoption as Sons of God: An Exegetical Investigation into the Background of Huiothesia in the Pauline Corpus*, 147.
\item \textsuperscript{19} Wright, *Paul for Everyone: Galatians and Thessalonians*, 32; Wright, *What St. Paul Really Said: Was Paul of Tarsus the Real Founder of Christianity?*, 121.
\end{itemize}
Abraham’s family as heirs.\textsuperscript{20} All are redeemed from slavery by adoption; the Jews from the tyranny of the Law and the gentiles from the elements of the world.\textsuperscript{21} God’s liberation is exposed through a threefold pattern; the revelation of God’s Son, humanity’s representative under the Law (Gal 4:4-5), the sending of the Spirit to bear witness to believers’ status as sons (Gal 4:6-7), and the revelation of God’s name, \textit{Abba}, Father (Gal 4:7).\textsuperscript{22} This pattern echoes that of the Exodus; Israel’s sonship, as God’s first-born (Ex 4:22, Jer 31:9), witnessed to by the leading of God’s Spirit (Ex 13:20-21), and the revelation of God’s name, YHWH (Ex 3:4, 6:2-8).\textsuperscript{23} Jesus’ life, death and resurrection unveil the new Father-Son/sons-Spirit relationship, and accomplishes the redemption of the gentiles.\textsuperscript{24}

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\item\textsuperscript{21} Wright, \textit{Paul for Everyone: Galatians and Thessalonians}, 44–45.


\item\textsuperscript{23} Kim, “Another Look at Adoption in Romans 8:15 in Light of Roman Social Practices and Legal Rules,” 134; Scott, \textit{Adoption as Sons of God: An Exegetical Investigation into the Background of Huiothesia in the Pauline Corpus}, 167; Wright, \textit{Paul for Everyone: Galatians and Thessalonians}, 47.

Pneuma was regarded in the ancient world as a material element composed of divine substance which shaped and held reality together.\textsuperscript{25} The indwelling Spirit organically connects gentile Christians to Abraham’s genealogy; they are one substance with Christ.\textsuperscript{26} The Spirit’s intimate presence is the inheritance of God’s children (Gal 3:14) along with freedom (Gal 5:1) and their present and future life as new creations (Gal 6:15).\textsuperscript{27} Adoption establishes the on-going purposeful relationship between God and God’s children, by God, through Jesus and the Spirit.\textsuperscript{28} “When this is cashed out in terms of the underlying covenantal theme, it means that they [adopted sons] are declared in the present, to be what they will be seen to be in the future, namely the true people of God.”\textsuperscript{29}

The early church in Rome was largely gentile, possibly former God-fearers, mixed with a small contingent of Jews.\textsuperscript{30} Romans 1:3-4, establishes Jesus as the

\begin{footnotesize}
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\item Thiessen, Paul and the Gentile Problem, 117.
\item Ibid., 117–99. “The halakhic principle suggests that God’s grafting of gentiles, wild olive shoots, into this cultivated tree, means that they now participate in the same holiness as the root.”
\item Burke, Adopted into God’s Family: Exploring a Pauline Metaphor, 126-128,133, 135–37. In the OT the Spirit is present intermittently, now the Spirit permanently dwells with believers. “Life in the Spirit is lived out not by an external regulatory code, but through the indwelling power of the pneuma.”
\item Scott, Adoption as Sons of God: An Exegetical Investigation into the Background of Huiothesia in the Pauline Corpus, 175–84.
\item Wright, What St. Paul Really Said: Was Paul of Tarsus the Real Founder of Christianity?, 129.
\end{enumerate}
\end{footnotesize}
fulfillment of God’s adopted Davidic messianic lineage of sons/kings (2 Sam 7:12-14). It also “implies [and is affirmed in Romans 8:3, 29] that the Son’s resurrection is prototypical of the future resurrection of the dead.”

2 Samuel 7 is critical to Jewish adoption theology. God’s initiative in claiming David’s lineage as anointed sons comes in the midst of David’s abject awareness of his own weakness, affirming that it is God, not David who will build an eternal dynasty. God is Father for the succession, blessing, reprimanding and providing an inheritance (2 Sam 7:11b-16). During the Babylonian captivity 2 Samuel 7:12-14 came to signify that God would reestablish Israel with a Davidic king. The Jews considered Roman subjugation a continuation of exile and joined apocalyptic and eschatological hope to this restoration.

Paul employs the adoption metaphor (Rom 8:15, 23) after exposing the inadequacy of both the Law and human ability to achieve righteousness apart from divine intervention. Romans 8:29-30 portrays adoption as an eternal act of love by God evoked by God’s eminence and grace. Using Exodus imagery, he contrasts life enslaved to the

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31 Scott, Adoption as Sons of God: An Exegetical Investigation into the Background of Huiothesia in the Pauline Corpus, 237–44; Wright, What St. Paul Really Said: Was Paul of Tarsus the Real Founder of Christianity?, 45. Messianic sonship is also in Psalms 2:7-8; 89:26-29. The King/Messiah/son figure was a representative of God’s people.

32 Scott, Adoption as Sons of God: An Exegetical Investigation into the Background of Huiothesia in the Pauline Corpus, 244.

33 Ibid., 114, 244.

34 Ibid., 96–104.


36 Ibid., 105.

37 Burke, Adopted into God’s Family: Exploring a Pauline Metaphor, 77.
law of the flesh with life in the Spirit.\textsuperscript{38} Jesus, God’s Son and humanity’s messianic representative, overcomes slavery of the flesh by fulfilling the Law through his death and resurrection (Rom 8:4).\textsuperscript{39} Through adoption, God’s Spirit, contiguous with the Son’s Spirit, is sent to dwell in believers to lead them from slavery into righteousness (Rom 8:10) through adoption.\textsuperscript{40} “Filial relationships in the ancient world . . . were governed by the principle of reciprocity.”\textsuperscript{41} Jesus died not in place of sinful humanity but, shared in human death so humanity can share in his death and in his resurrection (Rom 8:17).\textsuperscript{42}

The futility of slavery is juxtaposed with the assurance of an heir in Romans 8:15-16. God’s Spirit joins with the spirits of adopted sons to witness to their status as co-heirs with Christ (Rom 8:15-17). An heir has peace that God has established his/her righteousness whereas the slave is subject to fear because righteousness can never be earned. Paul’s use of \textit{Abba} extends the metaphor, recalling Jesus’ prayer in Gethsemane.\textsuperscript{43} Romans 8:15 and 26 assures God’s sons they will be strengthened by the Spirit for the trials they must endure because of their obedience to the Father. Invoking


\textsuperscript{39} Scott, \textit{Adoption as Sons of God: An Exegetical Investigation into the Background of Huiothesia in the Pauline Corpus}, 245–48; Stott, \textit{The Message of Romans: God’s Good News for the World}, 220.

\textsuperscript{40} Stott, \textit{The Message of Romans: God’s Good News for the World}, 224–25.

\textsuperscript{41} Burke, \textit{Adopted into God’s Family: Exploring a Pauline Metaphor}, 76.

\textsuperscript{42} Dunn, \textit{The Theology of Paul the Apostle}, 223.

\textsuperscript{43} Burke, \textit{Adopted into God’s Family: Exploring a Pauline Metaphor}, 90; Scott, \textit{Adoption as Sons of God: An Exegetical Investigation into the Background of Huiothesia in the Pauline Corpus}, 262; Stott, \textit{The Message of Romans: God’s Good News for the World}, 233. \textit{Abba} evokes Jesus’ awareness of sonship at his baptism. The connection between God’s Spirit and baptism in Jewish thought is in Ez 36:26-28.
the image of God’s Son in the garden also signals that his obedience undoes the disobedience in the first garden that led to death and decay. Romans 8:18-24 affirms that Jesus’ death and resurrection “re-express this Adam soteriology as Adam Christology.”

Romans 8 recalls Genesis 12:1-3 as God’s purposeful blessing of all people through Abraham for the full restoration of their creation identity. Adoption has both present and future aspects. It is only as Spirit-empowered sons live as co-heirs with the Son, heir to Abraham, fullfiller of the Law, God’s Messiah, that they will be joint heirs to the Son’s sovereignty and eschatological dominion of creation (Rom 8:12, 17-25).

Divine adoption is “for the purpose of [God] working through us to bring about the transformation of the world” in anticipation of history’s eschatological culmination. When God’s sons are revealed in the resurrection, creation will be liberated from decay (Rom 8:18-21). The Spirit who powered Christ’s resurrection (Rom 8:11) will be the


means of resurrection and the fulfillment of the adoption of God’s sons.\textsuperscript{51} The present indwelling Spirit is the first fruit of adoption (Rom 8:22) who engenders yearning for the final consummation and transformation to the likeness of the first born, Jesus (Rom 8:23, 29, 34).\textsuperscript{52} In Paul’s inaugurated eschatology, the Spirit effects continuity between the already and the not yet.\textsuperscript{53}

Romans 9:4 locates Israel’s adoption in a list of privileges of Israel’s covenant relationship with God.\textsuperscript{54} The use of 
\textit{huiotesia} recalls its earlier occurrences, but it is used here with only the “ethnic, political and religious entity” of Israel in mind.\textsuperscript{55} God, the righteous judge, has chosen people to fulfill God’s purposes, regardless of human estimations of suitability (Rom 9:6-29).\textsuperscript{56} Paul then reengages the metaphoric understanding of adoption to redefine Israel as a theological entity as opposed to a biological or political reality.\textsuperscript{57} The righteous judge has acted, adopting Jews and gentiles

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{51} Scott, \textit{Adoption as Sons of God: An Exegetical Investigation into the Background of Huiotesia in the Pauline Corpus}, 256; Wright, \textit{Paul for Everyone: Romans, Part 1}, 147.
\item \textsuperscript{52} Scott, \textit{Adoption as Sons of God: An Exegetical Investigation into the Background of Huiotesia in the Pauline Corpus}, 255, 259; Wright, \textit{Paul for Everyone: Romans, Part 1}, 152. Rom 8:23, 29 and 34 refer to God’s promises to God’s adopted son, the Davidic Messiah in 2 Sam 7:14, Ps 2:7-8 and 89:24-29.
\item \textsuperscript{54} Burke, \textit{Adopted into God’s Family: Exploring a Pauline Metaphor}, 48; Dunn, \textit{The Theology of Paul the Apostle}, 504; Heim, \textit{Adoption in Galatians and Romans: Contemporary Metaphor Theories and the Pauline Huiotesia Metaphors}, 251, 256, 261. The trajectory of Paul’s list moves from the collective sonship of Israel to individual messianic representative of Israel.
\item \textsuperscript{55} Heim, \textit{Adoption in Galatians and Romans: Contemporary Metaphor Theories and the Pauline Huiotesia Metaphors}, 253, 267–73.
\item \textsuperscript{56} Stott, \textit{The Message of Romans: God’s Good News for the World}, 266–75.
\item \textsuperscript{57} Heim, \textit{Adoption in Galatians and Romans: Contemporary Metaphor Theories and the Pauline Huiotesia Metaphors}, 260.
\end{itemize}
through the work of the Son and the Spirit. God’s true sons will recognize the continuity of this relationship with God’s covenantal nature.\(^5^8\) Thus Romans 9:6 can assert that God’s word has not failed.

The epistle to the Ephesians positions the salvation identity of adopted children in the identity of Jesus, God’s Son (Eph 1:5).\(^5^9\) The Holy Spirit is a seal and a “deposit guaranteeing our inheritance” until the final redemption (Eph 1:13-14). Themes from Galatians and Romans echo; God’s initiative, the essential nature of Jesus’ death and resurrection, and the connection between adopted sons and God’s intention for creation.\(^6^0\) The metaphor demarcates Paul’s ecclesiology, what it means to be called into the household of God, setting aside human allegiances, “to become members of a vibrant, dynamic, organism” (Eph 2:19-22).\(^6^1\)

_Huiōthēsia_ has a widely attested first-century Roman forensic meaning.\(^6^2\) The Greek notion of divine election or adoption was effectively coopted by the Romans.\(^6^3\) It stipulated that the gods had divinely appointed the earthly ruler to ensure the continued

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\(^{5^8}\) Ibid., 267. Rom 9:8, 9:25-26, and 11:17-24 amplify this point.


\(^{6^0}\) Ibid., 8–9.

\(^{6^1}\) Burke, _Adopted into God’s Family: Exploring a Pauline Metaphor_, 79–83; Kim, “Another Look at Adoption in Romans 8:15 in Light of Roman Social Practices and Legal Rules,” 142.

\(^{6^2}\) Heim, _Adoption in Galatians and Romans: Contemporary Metaphor Theories and the Pauline Huiōthēsia Metaphors_, 126.

\(^{6^3}\) Ibid., 71.
prosperity of the people. Roman adoption was also the legal means by which political, economic and military power and resources were bestowed upon an heir elected by the gods as revealed through signs and omens. Paul’s understanding of how the Spirit designates and affirms the sons of God through adoption (Gal 4:6; Rom 8:11, 14-17) has this notion of divine election in view.

Adoption of sons in elite Roman society, even in the presence of biological heirs was also well-known. The father-son relationship was central to the social, religious, economic and political structure. Relationships were defined by the flow of power and resources; their primary concern being the future continuity of the family. Adoption, always initiated by the paterfamilias, served to “perpetuate the familia and the gens” and to protect family wealth and power. Both adrogatio and adoptio involved the adoption of a man whose ties with his family of origin were severed completely. Adoption

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64 Ibid., 71.
65 Ibid., 72.
69 Burke, Adopted into God’s Family: Exploring a Pauline Metaphor, 265; Scott, Adoption as Sons of God: An Exegetical Investigation into the Background of Huiothesia in the Pauline Corpus, 4.
ascribed the honor of the *paterfamilias* to the adoptee.\textsuperscript{71} The adoptive father held the right to direct the son’s relationships, enact discipline in the best interests of the family, and even held the power of life and death.\textsuperscript{72} An adopted son was completely re-socialized as a member of the adoptive family, thus Paul’s incredulity over the Galatians “deserting the one who called” them by returning to the practices of Judaism (Gal 1:6).\textsuperscript{73}

Based on this cultural meaning of *paterfamilias*, ‘father’, Galatians 4:2 and 4:6 form a linguistic frame.\textsuperscript{74} Paul compares the Law to a temporary guardian whose oversight depends not upon the maturity of the child, but the decision of the father (Gal 4:1-2).\textsuperscript{75} In ancient families, the head of the household was both the determinant of power and identity for all members of the household. Both the Law and pagan religions enslaved and restricted freedom. God, the father, terminates that enslavement. “Just as the human father was solely responsible for determining when his son should come of age, so also God the Father has a timetable in mind. . . and the clock of salvation history cannot be turned back to the Law.”\textsuperscript{76}

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\textsuperscript{71} Burke, *Adopted into God’s Family: Exploring a Pauline Metaphor*, 153, 167. Paul may have thought they were dishonoring to God in their behavior towards each other and in clinging to the law.

\textsuperscript{72} Burke, 264; Lyall, “Roman Law in the Writings of Paul: Adoption,” 466.

\textsuperscript{73} Burke, *Adopted into God’s Family: Exploring a Pauline Metaphor*, 268.

\textsuperscript{74} Ibid., 85.

\textsuperscript{75} Ibid., 86.

\textsuperscript{76} Ibid., 87.
Adopted and natural sons were equally “obligated to perpetuate the *nomen*, the *pecunia*, and the *sacrum* of the family.”\(^{77}\) The adoption metaphor creates equity among contentious Jewish and gentile Christians based on the Greco-Roman concept of *consortium*, or joint inheritance (Rom 8:17).\(^ {78}\) Fidelity to God’s household supersedes allegiance to all prior affiliations. Often the disclosure of a Roman emperor’s heir was fraught with suspense and intrigue, especially in Rome.\(^ {79}\) Cosmic expectancy surrounds the revelation of God’s heirs (Rom 8:18-27) implying that power of the Empire and its persecution of the church is negligible compared to the dominion of God’s household.\(^ {80}\)

Roman adoption also had now and not yet aspects.\(^ {81}\) An adopted heir possessed the spirit or *numen* of the father and fully participated in the family, even while the father lived.\(^ {82}\) Thus the inheritance began at the moment of adoption to be fulfilled in the future. This is also the nature of the inheritance of God’s sons (Gal 4:6; Rom 8: 11, 16, 23-24).\(^ {83}\) Adoption, initiated by Jesus’ death and resurrection will be fully realized in the future.

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\(^{77}\) Ibid., 265; Kim, “Another Look at Adoption in Romans 8:15 in Light of Roman Social Practices and Legal Rules,” 138; Scott, *Adoption as Sons of God: An Exegetical Investigation into the Background of Huiothesia in the Pauline Corpus*, 12.


\(^{80}\) Elliott, “Romans 13: 1-7 in the Context of Imperial Propaganda,” 188.


\(^{82}\) Ibid., 272, 275.

\(^{83}\) Ibid., 272.
Pushing the adoption metaphor beyond mundane parameters, Paul employs the image of slavery in both Galatians and Romans. In Roman society, slaves were insignificant, vulnerable and considered immature (Gal 4:1-3).\textsuperscript{84} The manumission of slaves was an economic and cultic process in which freed slaves frequently returned to their former master’s household, with slightly improved status as they worked to increase the honor of their patron (Rom 8:12).\textsuperscript{85} The notion that a former slave would be freed by an heir of the household, adopted by the patriarch and offered the equal status of a son would have been a radical, outrageous realignment of relationships (Gal 4:4-7).\textsuperscript{86}

Julio-Claudian Emperors, though never equal to the Olympians, were considered divine humans, or sons of god.\textsuperscript{87} Divinity was bestowed through a god’s generosity and “solidified because of a god’s perpetual benefactions.”\textsuperscript{88} Worship of the imperial family’s genius and numen, as a political and religious contract between the people and their leaders, legitimated and concentrated the Empire’s power upon the Emperor.\textsuperscript{89} Worship was the appropriate response to the philanthropy of the paterfamilias of the Roman Empire.\textsuperscript{90} In the act of worshipping the living emperor, citizens believed “his reach

\textsuperscript{84} Punt, “Pauline Brotherhood, Gender and Slaves: Fragile Fraternity in Galatians,” 154.

\textsuperscript{85} Ibid., 155.

\textsuperscript{86} Kim, “Another Look at Adoption in Romans 8:15 in Light of Roman Social Practices and Legal Rules,” 139–40. Adoptions of slaves was rare and their rights as sons were restricted.

\textsuperscript{87} Mary Beard, \textit{SPQR: A History of Ancient Rome} (New York: Liveright Publishing Corporation, 2015), 430–31; Peppard, \textit{The Son of God in the Roman World: Divine Sonship in Its Social and Political Context}, 36. Rituals were performed on behalf of Emperors who were under the protection of the gods.


\textsuperscript{89} Ibid., 40, 43.

\textsuperscript{90} Ibid., 44.
transcended space and time, . . . even while he mediated between heaven and earth."

The imperial family was evidence that humans could be grafted into divine lineage through fictive kinship established by adoption, even in the presence of natural-born sons. The early Church’s use of the Son of God as a Christological title, may be a theological critique of its use by the Roman emperors. Paul’s metaphor implicitly contrasts God’s reign with Rome, challenging the power of earthly rulers and systems.

Adoptive theology offers a vision to reverse ecclesial erosion, heal the detrimental effects of postmodern culture and reimagine the Church and its local expressions for the transmission of substantive faith with emerging generations. The goal of ministry oriented by adoption theology is “to show young people that their calling and destiny is located not only in God’s story but among God’s people living out that story.”

First, adoptive theology re-establishes a holistic identity and future orientation based on kinship in and through God’s Spirit and God’s eschatological telos. By understanding God’s intention for freedom and mutuality within robust, accountable, transformational community, imposter theologies fueled by expressive individualism are

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91 Ibid., 45.


shown to be inadequate. Our mutual belonging to God and to each other according to God’s purpose enriches our roles and invests in the identity formation of emerging generations. Mature Christians live together in such a way that faith transmission is an intergenerational means of grace as everyone is encouraged to perceive and to respond to the work of the Spirit within them. This radical ecclesial environment creates freedom from programmatic path dependency and from fear generated by measuring ministry against institutional history and congregational comparison. It leads to ministry decision-making and implementation based on what is best for the whole community thus allowing the organic emergence of new, adaptive contextual ministry practices.

Second, adoptive theology understands, “There are three fundamental longings of youth: the longing to be nurtured (supported, loved), the longing to have a mission and a place in that mission (agency), and the longing to belong.” The local church has a unique gift to offer emerging generations as they wrestle to survive in the current culture. Identity formation is often foreclosed or atomized in the absence of supportive, cross-contextual relationships based on mutuality, pneumatic awareness and personal agency.

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96 Ibid., 23.


The impact of healthy intergenerational catechetical environment for integrated identity formation and spiritual growth pushes the church beyond the standard concerns of building, attendance, programs and budget. The radical inclusion espoused by adoption theology calls for more than assimilation, the demand that young people must be shaped in our own image, and concedes commitment to each individual’s maturation into their identity as a unique bearer of the imago dei. Rather than individual cognitive assent to abstract principles partitioned within the Sunday school room, substantive faith transmission permeates the lives of young people as the compelling narrative of God and the individual’s place in that story are instilled through practice learning, reinforced through a web of significant faith-family relationships and milestones of maturity that are recognized and celebrated. Evidence of spiritual identity formation will be the fruits of the spirit growing in people.

Third, adoptive theology reorients ecclesial privilege and power to promote equality and mutuality. “Hierarchy, power, authority – they are all biblical, but the reasoning behind and the application of these human expressions are given in service of the household of God, not to be used for personal gain or influence.” Each person has


inherent value and gifts. Accommodation, or bridge-building, by the mature for the less mature, by the powerful for the vulnerable (Mt 25:40, 45; 1 Cor 8-11) is at the heart of the divine-human relationship and should be the governing principle for building human community. As Jesus aligned himself with humanity through his incarnation, inviting our own adoption as co-heirs, and as the Spirit empowers our confidence and giftedness as God’s children, so mature disciples must take the initiative to invite, nurture, equip and empower younger members for their role in the family. Religious authority is effectively decentralized as unbalanced power and resources are redistributed enabling the growth of a broad base for faith transmission.

Wesleyan soteriology aligns well with Paul’s adoption metaphor. The points of emphasis include God’s initiative and timing, the coordinated work of the Trinity to effect salvation, human futility apart from God’s grace, the importance of nurturing and accountable community as a bridge to grace, and the on-going and purposeful nature of spiritual maturation through intentional practice.

In Wesley’s theology, God’s initiative is displayed first as prevenient grace, which has in mind God’s eschatological desire for the redemption of all creation. The saving work of Jesus is real and present in every life even before it is acknowledged or accepted and points past itself to awaken the human awareness of sin.

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Justifying grace is experienced as both intellectual assent that Jesus is God’s son and a conviction of the heart that his redemptive work is efficacious for everyone.\textsuperscript{105} This deep assurance of God’s provision in the face of human inadequacy leads to repentance, which is made possible only because of God’s gift of human agency.\textsuperscript{106} Repentance offers new identity, ready to align itself with the death and resurrection of Jesus and the ongoing work of the Spirit.\textsuperscript{107}

Sanctifying grace is a conjunctive or co-operant relationship with God in the sense that “God and humanity ever work together in the process of redemption . . . with stress on the divine initiative . . . [which] does not in any wise depend either on the good works or righteousness of the receiver.”\textsuperscript{108} Wesley considered sanctification a second change following justification, in which the believer embraces their new identity as a child of God through inward witness of the Spirit.\textsuperscript{109} The believer begins to live with the intentionality of an heir.


\textsuperscript{107} Collins, \textit{The Theology of John Wesley: Holy Love and the Shape of Grace}, 180.


“The means of grace are ‘outward signs, words, or actions ordained of God, and appointed for this end – to be the ordinary channels whereby [God] might convey to [people] preventing, justifying or sanctifying grace.’ So understood, grace is not amorphous . . . but emerges in the context of words, signs and actions, and other media that communicate the substance of both divine favor and empowerment.”\textsuperscript{110}

The instituted means of grace include prayer, studying the scriptures, the Eucharist, fasting, and participation in Christian conference.\textsuperscript{111} Acts of mercy and justice are also effective as means of grace. Orientation towards the transformational divine \textit{telos} is necessary so these behaviors do not become empty religious practice.\textsuperscript{112}

Perfecting grace is the Spirit’s work intensifying the believer’s intimacy with God through which one is drawn “into the inner life of the Trinity . . . and is comprehensible only as one practices it in a purifying relation to the other one and the ground of that love – that is, only as one practices the deepening intimacy at the point where intimacy is of ultimate significance in the koinonia.”\textsuperscript{113} The momentum of Christian life moves the believer towards perfection and it is possible for mature believers to experience moments of limited perfection, or holiness, in numinous communion with God.\textsuperscript{114}


\textsuperscript{111} Collins, \textit{The Theology of John Wesley: Holy Love and the Shape of Grace}, 257–58, 262. Baptism, though a sacrament, is likely not listed since it is not repeatable.

\textsuperscript{112} Collins, 258; Wesley, “The Means of Grace.”


\textsuperscript{114} John Wesley, “On Perfection,” The Sermons of John Wesley, 1784.
Wesleyan ecclesiology calls the Church to a life of sacramental practice centered around the celebration of the Lord’s Supper, the family meal of God’s household.\textsuperscript{115} It is as Christ’s love and sacrifice are celebrated as signs of redemption and love for one another, that God’s grace becomes the ontological identity of the congregation and each participant.\textsuperscript{116} This internal posture of the community will organically manifest emerging ministry oriented towards the \textit{telos} of God. United Methodists practice communion as an open table, recognizing the sacrament as a means of grace, a bridge to God’s grace experienced within the fellowship of believers, for all who desire a relationship with God. Jesus’ use of table companionship as a pathway to the community of his followers models inclusivity without regard for status or catechetical and ritual preparation.\textsuperscript{117}

Belonging in the family of God in the Christian era has historically been connected to initiation rites: baptism, the Eucharist and confirmation. Baptism and communion, which have clear precedent in the ministry of Jesus and his followers, formed the basis of the church’s “catechetical and liturgical practice . . . [and reflect] how that community understood its missionary and evangelical responsibilities.”\textsuperscript{118} The outpouring of the Spirit at Pentecost supplanted the Law making baptism the defining


\textsuperscript{117} Johnson, \textit{The Rites of Christian Initiation: Their Evolution and Interpretation}, 3–7.

mark of God’s people.\textsuperscript{119} New Testament baptismal practices are diverse, but always include water, the activity of the Holy Spirit and a new identity in the community founded upon the ministry, death and resurrection of Jesus.\textsuperscript{120} Acts 2:38 reveals formulaic elements of ritual initiation practiced by the earliest Christians: “Repent . . . be baptized . . . in the name of Jesus . . . that your sins may be forgiven . . . receive the gift of the Holy Spirit.”\textsuperscript{121} The New Testament evidences the practice of hand-laying to signify the presence of the Holy Spirit connected to baptism, though sometimes it was separated from the water ritual (Acts 8:1-25, 9:1-19, 10). Other references link hand-laying to vocational commissioning associated with a time of “instruction preceding or following a rite of blessing, anointing, and/or sending”.\textsuperscript{122}

Baptism, hand-laying and the Eucharist were a liturgically unified experience until roughly 500 C.E.\textsuperscript{123} Baptism included a washing, followed by the laying on of hands, which was either preceded or followed by consignation and the Eucharist meal.\textsuperscript{124}


\textsuperscript{120} Johnson, The Rites of Christian Initiation: Their Evolution and Interpretation, 31, 37. Baptism is for the forgiveness of sins, the gift of the Holy Spirit, initiation, anointing, enlightenment, sealing, and symbolic participation in Jesus’ death and resurrection.


\textsuperscript{124} Alistair Stewart-Sykes, “Manumission and Baptism in Tertullian’s Africa: A Search for the Origin of Confirmation,” Studia Liturgica 31 (2001): 137–38; Kavanagh, Confirmation: Origins and
Preceding baptism, there was a period of catechetical instruction preparing the initiate both theologically and ritually for vocation and sacramental life.125 “Structural evidence points to . . . confirmation being in fact the dismissal or missa terminating the baptismal synaxis” which maintained its own structure, becoming particularly associated with the Holy Spirit, and welcomed the initiates to their new status among the believers and to a place at the communion table.126 Baptizing the children of believers, even infants, became the normative practice beginning about the second century and since that time the Church has evolved through various modes of Christian instruction, rites of initiation, and theologies how the Holy Spirit is manifest in the lives of these children as they mature.127 Confirmation became its own sacrament within the Roman Catholic Church, but was decried by Luther and Reformation leaders as superficial and void of spiritual efficacy.128


128 Martin Luther, “The Babylonian Captivity of the Church,” Project Wittenberg, 1520. Luther believed confirmation could add nothing to water baptism. It was a form of ecclesial idolatry on the part of the bishops.
Some Protestant traditions retained the form of confirmation as a ceremony of affirmation following a distinct period of faith education, but eliminated its practice as a sacrament. The Reformers stressed the need for life-long faith formation rather than a single discrete period of catechism. The Anabaptists entirely rejected infant baptism and confirmation rites, advocating for the catechization and baptism of professing adults.\(^{129}\)

Wesley allowed infant baptism as a sacrament, but his understanding of the further need for new birth in the Spirit, diminished its significance to a bestowal of nominal Christianity.\(^{130}\) *The Book of Discipline of The United Methodist Church* imparts responsibility to the congregation for nurturing the baptized person in the power of the Spirit, so that they may grow in grace and be prepared to receive God’s justifying and sanctifying grace according to divine timing.\(^{131}\) It is a means of grace only as the vows of parents and community are taken seriously. Wesley’s own experience reinforced that the Spirit moves as it will regardless of age, spiritual discipline or education.\(^{132}\)

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Methodism has included a service of confirmation in worship resources since 1964.\(^{133}\) According to the 2016 *Book of Discipline*, “baptism and profession of faith initiates one not only into a congregation but also into the body of Christ . . . through the baptismal covenant persons are called into ministry and participate in Christian formation.”\(^{134}\) At the appropriate developmental age, those baptized as infants or children are invited to participate in confirmation as “both a human act of commitment and the gracious action of the Holy Spirit strengthening and empowering disciples.”\(^{135}\) Parents, sponsors, pastor and congregation have mutual accountability for nurturing and educating confirmands. In keeping with Reformation theology, the hand laying ritual and the Holy Spirit are linked with the baptismal rites and there is no implication that confirmation signifies a baptism by the Holy Spirit or fulfills Wesley’s theology of second birth.\(^{136}\) Confirmation is possible by prevenient grace. The 1992 denominational study, *By Water and the Spirit: A Study of the Proposed United Methodist Understanding of Baptism*, recommended eliminating the term confirmation to recapture the Wesleyan synthesis of sacramentalism and evangelicalism.\(^{137}\) The proposal retained a service of affirmation

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\(^{135}\) *The Book of Discipline of The United Methodist Church*, 156, 160, 162.


\(^{137}\) “By Water and the Spirit: A United Methodist Understanding of Baptism” (The Baptism Study Committee of The United Methodist Church, 1992).
“within the context of repeatable rites of reaffirmation for the baptismal covenant.”

It was adopted in 1996, but the language and ritual of confirmation persists and remains ideologically the practice of initiation into the church most associated with youth in mainline Protestantism.

Confirmation is a unique and appropriate opportunity for ecclesial renewal in for a congregation’s self-understanding as adoptive community. It can be reconceived as the first among many opportunities for individuals to affirm their maturing spiritual identity, continuing catechetical growth, and/or further vocation within God’s Reign. As a time set apart and celebrated, confirmation captures the attention of the entire congregation and refocuses it on its identity and accountability to provide the environment for substantive faith transmission and to particularly nurture, equip and empower emerging generations in their identity and agency within God’s reign. It also offers a window of opportunity to support parents in their growth as an appropriate and strong presence in their children’s on-going discipleship journey.

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139 Stamm, Sacraments and Discipleship: Understanding Baptism and the Lord’s Supper in a United Methodist Context, 162.
PART THREE

MINISTRY PRACTICE
CHAPTER 4: MINISTRY OUTCOMES

The postmodern Church needs renewal. The Gospel’s message has become garbled in transmission and the vitality of Christian community is increasingly insignificant even for those who profess belief. Adoptive theology is a call to correct ecclesial course. Ministry rooted in adoptive theology, particularly as it relates to emerging generations, mandates each iteration of God’s gathered community “to create an environment where young people are encouraged to live into their calling in Christ as agents of the kingdom within the household of God.”¹ Mature members must take initiative to build bridges to young people through practices of radical hospitality. Adolescents need nurturing and the safety to grow into their identity.² They need the social capital provided by a network of invested adults who offer the scaffolding necessary to grow into autonomy.³ Emerging adults need to be empowered for consequential inclusion in the mission of God within the family of God.⁴

¹ Clark, Adoptive Church: Creating an Environment Where Emerging Generations Belong, 60.
² Ibid., 61–62.
³ Ibid, 64–66.
⁴ Ibid, 62–64.
Every adult must grasp their responsibility and each aspect of ecclesial life must be implemented with this goal in mind. Intentional communal accountability for the spiritual development of young people through healthy faith inculcation has been specifically mandated since the Israelites prepared to enter the Promised Land (Dt 6:1-9). Preparing the hearts and minds of young people to recognize and align themselves with the work of the Holy Spirit is fundamental to God’s on-going transformation of individuals and human culture in anticipation of the eschatological work of re-creation. This mandate shapes the congregational vows for the United Methodist Baptism, Confirmation, Reaffirmation of Faith, Reception in The United Methodist Church and Reception into a Local Church.5

Older generations of Mt. Zion desire ecclesial revitalization. They recognize this requires engaging with emerging generations but lack an understanding of how to do so within the current culture and their siloed ministry structure. Leaders express “feel[ing] slighted because the young people do not initiate with them, or do not seem to respect them” and do not display the same sense of commitment to their church.6 They are especially concerned about the lack of urgency young people demonstrate about gathering as a church family for worship, fellowship and service. Confirmation holds an important place in the congregation’s conception of adolescent faith formation and as a pathway to increasing adolescent participation. However, the centralized view of


religious authority and conception of discipleship as assimilation handicaps them from embracing their role as an adoptive community.

Implementing a confirmation ministry for the 2019-2020 school year was one of the priorities for the new YCP hired in Spring of 2019. There were seventh and eighth grade students who were ready for the process. Members hope for congregational vitality though confirmation, a hope that is especially important following several years of dissention and turmoil. After a year without a youth pastor, hiring for this position and doing confirmation conveys a sense to members that the church is getting back on track.\footnote{Comments were made to this effect by youth ministry volunteers, The Staff-Parish Relations chair, the Church Council chair and several parents of youth.} Confirmation embodies both a restoration to normative ministry and presents a favorable occasion for the congregation to explore its vision, understanding and practice of ministry with emerging generations.

Confirmation is fundamentally about belonging. It is undertaken with the intent of preparing, celebrating and including young people in the mission of God’s reign within a specific body of believers. It is ideal for considering how we invite, nurture, equip and empower young people in their spiritual identity in early adolescence so that confirmation functions as a mean of grace preparing young people to recognize and receive God’s justifying and sanctifying grace. It opens the possibility for to evaluate how the congregation fosters spiritual development beyond confirmation. Parents’ attention may be more focused on their child’s spiritual development during confirmation than at any
other point, creating a chance to shape and encourage their parenting for faith as their child matures through adolescence and emerging adulthood.

Confirmation should be recognized as a time of mutual affirmation of spiritual identity and agency within God’s reign for individuals and for the corporate body. The Wesleyan view of prevenient grace allows confirmation to be among the first steps a young person within the community of believers takes towards receiving and believing what Christ has done for them on “a trajectory toward continual growth” and maturity.\(^8\) Situated within an adoptive faith community, it can be one significant opportunity among many for intentionally discipling young people and for mature disciples to renew their non-self-serving commitment to God’s reign through the household of God and their mutual life in the Holy Spirit.\(^9\)

Ecclesial community is revitalized in and through investing in a robust future by engaging emerging generations. The transformation from mere rhetoric to actual prioritization of ministry with emerging generations and their families through all aspects of the life of the church is a formidable but crucial task.\(^{10}\) Implementing strategies and ministry framed by adoptive theology will allow the congregation as a whole to participate in practice learning that will nurture, equip and empower its communal efficacy to live into its adoptive identity as God’s household. Increasing opportunities for

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\(^8\) Clark, *Adoptive Church: Creating an Environment Where Emerging Generations Belong*, 49.


intergenerational worship, fellowship and service must be prioritized along with exploration of the major tenets of Christian faith and freshly discerning the covenantal responsibility of God’s community for faith transmission.

The process will require engaging three audiences. First, the young people participating in the confirmation program. Second, their parents. Third, the ecclesial community with specific attention to ministry leaders. Ministry leaders include youth leaders and Sunday school teachers, confirmation mentors, the Worship and Arts Committee, Missions, the pastor, and the Church Council. Some elements of the strategy will be specific to each group while others will overlap as they work cooperatively creating an adoptive church context at Mt. Zion. Adoptive theology will be presented starting with the statement of its goal as adapted for Mt. Zion’s setting: To create an environment where young people are encouraged to live into their calling in Christ as agents of God’s reign. To practice adoptive ministry, mature members must take the initiative to provide young people nurture and safety to grow into their identity, equipping to grow into autonomy and a sense of belonging through empowerment for full inclusion in the mission of God within the family of God.

One of the primary functions of confirmation is to pass along core Christian beliefs and practices to young people in an educationally and age-appropriate manner. In previous years the pastor and youth leader have led the year-long confirmation ministry, using the current United Methodist curriculum and that included other strictly accounted required elements such as attendance at weekly worship and youth group, meeting with assigned mentors to complete curriculum workbooks, writing personal creeds, and parent chaperones for each class meeting. Traditionally the confirmation ceremony has included
a great deal of pageantry. The focus has been on individual efforts for cognitive understanding of faith in order to assimilate into the congregation membership.

The current confirmation program will retain the school-year format to allow for extended interaction with the students and families with the goal of meeting about two times a month for class time conversation. Classes will continue to be jointly led by the pastor and the YCP. This both meets the expectation of the congregation and allows for personal interaction between the students and the pastoral staff to promote intergenerational relationship building. It also provides a solid theological foundation for discussing core beliefs and practices of Christianity and appropriate leadership to allow students freedom to ask and explore difficult questions of faith and tradition.

Wednesday evening is a good night to gather since it is mid-way through the week, a chance to engage with the students in a faith environment equidistant from Sundays which are already full with regular ministry opportunities including worship, Sunday school, youth choir and youth group. The hope is that the confirmands will engage in these ministries and not be disrupted by either overlapping or consecutive scheduling of confirmation. The confirmation meetings will happen in the main church building, rather than the Youth Center, so young people can get a sense of belonging in

11 This includes a parade of banners representing confirmation classes, made mostly by parents, and individual posters of students created by their parents hung around the sanctuary.

12 Twice a month does not over-burden middle school students and families who are busy with extracurricular activities and rigorous academics. The extended time in between classes may help the students feel less hectic about incorporating confirmation class and ministry activities.

13 Not all lay people have a sense of comfort in moving beyond printed curriculum to allow for free-wheeling theological conversations and questions.
spaces other than areas designated for youth ministry. There are other Wednesday evening activities, so the building feels alive and busy. Confirmands will witness people engaged in ministry other than on Sunday.

Confirmation classes will be based on the Re:form curriculum. The lessons are focused on faith and ecclesial questions, address issues of communal faith, and the materials are structured to engage young people in conversation, questioning and theological thinking. Instruction time is chunked to fit early adolescent attention spans and includes a variety of reinforcing experiences to appeal to multiple learning styles. The curriculum promotes mutuality with opportunities for students to contribute to the learning of the whole group. Class time will not include parents. In the past parents have taken turns attending to help enforce discipline implying that young people are not mature enough to participate appropriately in their own discipleship nor are pastoral staff capable of leading in an effective engaging manner. Students will be encouraged to recognize their own accountability to participate in their spiritual formation. This will encourage warm mentoring friendships between young people and their spiritual leaders.

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14 The former parsonage has been designated as the Youth Center. It is across the parking lot from the main church building and is the locus for youth ministry activities. It is a comfortable space for the students, but physically reinforces isolation. Couches are the main type of furniture and may promote a posture of passive reception versus critical engagement in the learning process.

15 Re:Form Anti-Workbook, Re:Form (Minneapolis, MN: Sparkhouse, 2010); Re:Form DVD Set, Re:Form (Minneapolis, MN: Sparkhouse, 2010); Re:Form Leader Guide, Re:Form (Minneapolis, MN: Sparkhouse, 2010); Re:Form Traditions DVD: Methodist, Re:Form Traditions (Minneapolis, MN: Sparkhouse, 2011); Re:Form Traditions Leader Guide: Methodist, Re:Form Traditions (Minneapolis, MN: Sparkhouse, 2011).

16 This includes large group and small group discussion and problem solving, use of visual and performance art, active play, worship, individual reflection, writing and reading.
rather than youth feeling force-fed a requisite amount of information in order to achieve institutional membership.

Parents will be equipped for their continuing role in the discipleship of their children during confirmation. Following each class meeting, the YCP will send parents an email summary of the class content with overt encouragement to continue the conversation.\(^1\) This reinforces the classroom experience, equips the parents with feelings of efficacy and empowerment to address theological topics with their student and allows for the family to practice faith conversations in a manner that reduces feelings of awkwardness. It also allows for the confirmands to reinforce their learning and be equipped, empowered participants in these family conversations.

Curriculum lessons on the Apostle’s Creed will be used together as the base sessions for a weekend confirmation retreat early in the school year. This provides an extended and focused time removed from daily distractions to investigate the foundational tenets of Christianity in a wholistic manner. A retreat supports group building as students and leaders participate together in the sessions as well as initiative courses, structured play and creative activities, meals, worship and free time. Since some of the young people have not regularly engaged in the church or youth ministry prior to confirmation, this time will serve to better integrate the group. Sunday evening youth group leaders will participate as small group discussion facilitators and in other retreat activities to allow for warm intergenerational and mentoring relationship building.

\(^1\) This helps parents to understand content, provides a prompt to engage their student and not be put off by a noncommittal response about what happened in confirmation. The young people have also been equipped to contribute to the conversation through recent engagement with the topic. It can be inclusive of other family members.
Beyond the printed curriculum and class time, confirmands will be asked to participate in their spiritual development in a variety of intergenerational and peer-group ministry settings. Currently, young people are almost completely absent from worship leadership, mission and outreach ministries, and the administrative leadership of the congregation. Mt. Zion’s youth are largely siloed from the wider congregation and are viewed as consumers of the church’s ministry. Confirmation students will be asked to participate in a Church Council meeting and invited to have a voice in business and ministry discussions. They will serve at Mt. Zion’s Open Doors Food Pantry to experience mission service work to see how adult members partner with community-based organizations to meet a critical need in the community. They will serve alongside adults from the congregation to plan, prepare and implement event-based hospitality ministries such as the Breakfast With Santa, a Walk-Through Nativity drama, and an Easter Egg Hunt to extend invitation to families in the community and create an atmosphere of warm hospitality.

Confirmands will be asked to regularly attend worship with their family. They will also be trained and equipped to participate in worship leadership as acolytes, introducing and reading Scripture, and serving communion. This will help them to understand the importance of these worship practices, to see the role of appropriate preparation in leading worship, to know they are supported, capable and welcome in worship leadership, and to encourage them to participate in these and other worship roles in the future. This will also allow the congregation to appreciate and affirm the gifts and unique energy young people bring to worship and open the door for increased and broader involvement of emerging generations in regular corporate worship.
Confirmands will be encouraged to regularly participate in other on-going youth ministry programs to build a network of supportive friendships with peers and mentoring adults. These include Trinity youth choir, middle and senior high Sunday school and Sunday evening youth group. Stand-alone opportunities focused on fellowship, service, retreat and worship opportunities will be highlighted for their participation.\textsuperscript{18}

Students will be asked to choose and invite their own mentors from among Mt. Zion’s congregation. Their instructions for this process will be to seek out someone whose life and engagement with the congregation’s ministry reflects deeply committed discipleship.\textsuperscript{19} This will afford confirmands the opportunity to discern and become more aware of how adults around them embody their faith. A mentor might be someone with whom they already have a relationship or someone they respect and would like to know better. Both student and mentor will be encouraged to engage this relationship through the lens of adoption theology so they can come to perceive themselves as siblings in Christ’s family with the older nurturing, equipping and empowering the younger.

Confirmands will work with their entire family to identify, decide upon and implement a family service project beyond the scope of current Mt. Zion service ministries. The student is to take the initiative to observe situations that need to be addressed through acts of compassion or justice and to plan how their family can work

\textsuperscript{18} These include fellowship events such as snowtubing, a service project, and a denominational youth worship retreat.

\textsuperscript{19} Parents will be instructed to allow the young person to choose their own mentor and to do the actual invitation of that person. Parents are welcome to help the student determine what qualities to look for in a mentor, how they might ask the person they choose to be their mentor and to be a supportive presence when they extend the invitation to the chosen person.
together to meet that need. After the service project, the family will be instructed to talk together about how the experience intersected with their Christian faith and enriched their relationships with each other and with Christ. The youth will be invited to share these experiences with the confirmation class and possibly with the congregation.

At the beginning of the confirmation process, young people and their parents will be invited to attend an informational meeting with the pastor and the YCP to review a proposed schedule for all the elements of confirmation. The importance of each element of confirmation for laying foundations of faith in preparation for the transforming work of the Holy Spirit in the lives of each young person within the family of faith will be made clear. Students and parents will be invited to consider Paul’s adoption metaphor and its significance for understanding the confirmation process as the gathered and called community of Christ creating an environment of nurture, equipping and empowering for young people’s identity and agency within God’s reign. Families will be asked to prioritize this ministry process as a unique opportunity. It will be clarified that confirmation does not make young people Christians, nor is it the end of their Christian formation. Confirmation will be presented as the beginning of a new phase in the young person’s spiritual journey and one of the first of many opportunities in their lives to make a public affirmation of discipleship and growth.

Parents will also be invited to develop their understanding of their evolving role with their adolescent and emerging adult children. Mt. Zion has an adult Sunday school class geared towards parents of teens. The group has been meeting for many years and is led by a couple whose youngest child will participate in Confirmation this year. Beginning in September, the class will read the book Growing With and parents of
confirmands will be invited to join the study. Those unable to participate in class will receive a copy of the book to read. *Growing With* will equip parents with a healthy model of how to continue to engage and encourage spiritual growth in adaptive and appropriate ways with their maturing children following confirmation. Additionally, parents of all Mt. Zion youth will be invited to participate in several Sunday evening Youth Group experiences designed especially for intergenerational parent-student interaction.

The third audience for confirmation is the congregation of Mt. Zion. It is the confirmation students’ catechetical community. Within the hermeneutic of adoptive theology, as the local embodiment of God’s family, emerging generations are shaped and transformed by involvement with their maturing siblings in faith. Confirmation captures the attention of the congregation in a sustained manner that other youth ministry does not and implicitly creates opportunity for the congregation to evaluate its role and vision for discipling emerging generations. Often this teachable moment in the life of the church is over-looked. This project proposes both a broad-based and targeted approach for sharing a vision for adoptive ministry with the congregation.

First, the pastor will be introduced to adoptive ministry as it is framed by Chap Clark in *Adoptive Church* through conversation with the YCP. The pastor will be asked to read *Growing Young* to evaluate its suitability for use as a book study for the Church

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21 Two evenings will be set aside for parent-youth nights at youth group. One will be on Epiphany Sunday and one on a Sunday in Lent. The group will prepare a meal to share, participate in a fun activity and then join in an alternative worship experience.

Council. The research-based nature of this book will appeal to the corporate and scientific professionals on the Church Council and address their overriding concern for church growth while making space for adoptive theology to be part of the conversation. If the pastor agrees, the chair of the Church Council will be approached about using Growing Young as a book study to be led by the pastor as part of the monthly Church Council meetings beginning in September 2019. Every member of the Church Council will receive a book and be asked to come prepared to discuss a specific portion of the book at each monthly meeting. Particular attention will be given to the sixth chapter, “Prioritize Young People (and Families) Everywhere,” as the most significant entrée to discuss adoptive theology and the congregational context for ministry with young people. The Church Council will receive a printed statement of the goal of adoptive ministry with a copy of the Growing Young Core Commitment Wheel.

Second, the congregation will be exposed to the concepts and language of adoptive theology through social media posts and language employed in congregational literature such as the bulletin in connection with youth ministry. The pastor will also employ the theological concepts of adoptive theology in sermons and by drawing attention to the impact young people have in the community as they capably participate in worship leadership and other ministries of the church. The language of adoptive theology

23 Powell, Mulder, and Griffin, Growing Young: 6 Essential Strategies to Help Young People Discover and Love Your Church.

24 Ibid., 196–233.

will be habitually and intentionally employed by the pastor and YCP in conversation with members and guests regarding ministry with children, youth and young adults. Specific leaders will be targeted to be engaged with adoptive theology in relation to the confirmation students. These are persons who in their leadership of the Open Doors Food Pantry, the Worship and Arts Committee or other ministry role, will interact directly with the confirmands as they participate in ministries beyond class time. They will be asked to create bridges to the young people by introducing themselves and getting to know the confirmation students by name in order to engage with them beyond the context of the confirmands’ assigned participation in a specific ministry setting. They will also be asked to share how they came to serve in their ministry role and how it connects with their understanding of faith and vocation. Additionally, these leaders will be encouraged, with the appropriate consent of student’s parents, to invite the continued involvement of the confirmands in ministry activity and leadership.

Third, leaders engaged in ministry with adolescents will be introduced to the goal of adoptive ministry at the August youth ministry planning meeting for the 2019-2020 school year. This includes the Trinity youth choir director, middle and senior high Sunday school teachers and the Sunday evening youth group leaders. Each person will receive a copy of *Growing Young* and the group will briefly review the six core commitments at the August planning meeting. They will be asked to read the book with Mt. Zion in mind to determine specific steps ministry leaders can take to move the congregation toward more intentional engagement with young people. Throughout the year, the goal of adoptive youth ministry will be reinforced verbally and in written communications. Youth ministry leaders will be encouraged to share and implement
strategies that will move the youth ministry and wider congregation in the direction of building bridges toward the goal of adoptive ministry.

Confirmation mentors will be trained for their specific role in the confirmation process with a vision for developing the mentoring relationship into an ongoing supportive spiritual friendship. They will be provided an overview of the goal of adoptive youth ministry and how that relates to Mt. Zion’s confirmation ministry. The specific language of mutual adoption and their status as a more mature brother or sister in Christ’s family will be presented in the training meeting and reinforced in written materials. The mentoring relationship will be oriented towards the mutual faith journey of the mentor and student in the story of God’s saving grace and ecclesial community.

As each of the individual components of confirmation are implemented throughout the Fall of 2019 and Winter of 2020, ongoing conversations will take place. This will ensure that relevant ministries, committees, and individuals are communicating with one another and are integrating learnings from one area to each of the others. Beginning in February/March of 2020, an evaluative process will be undertaken to determine how adoptive ministry is becoming part of Mt. Zion’s theology and practice. This feedback will help identify future steps Mt. Zion can take to embody adoptive ministry to reinvigorate its identity as a vital catechetical community for emerging generations.
CHAPTER 5:
IMPLEMENTATION PROCESS AND EVALUATION

After joining the staff of Mt. Zion in May 2019, the YCP engaged the pastor and volunteer youth leaders multiple times to better understand the ministry context. Adoptive theology was proffered as a framework for youth and children’s ministry to inspire a healthier ecclesial identity. The pastor and Church Council chairperson were introduced to *Growing Young* and agreed to its use as a study with the Church Council beginning in September 2019. After discussion, the pastor accepted the YCP’s proposals for the 2019-2020 confirmation program. *Re:form* curriculum was purchased. The Worship and Arts Committee was advised that confirmands would be participating in worship as acolytes, liturgists and communion stewards. Dates were chosen for confirmation students to participate in a Church Council meeting and the Open Doors Food Pantry. Outreach events were identified for students to experience shared planning and implementation.¹ Guidelines for a family service project were developed by the pastor and YCP. Regular participation in worship, youth Sunday school and youth group were strongly encouraged as part of the pathway to confirmation. Mentors chosen by the

¹ The three events are Breakfast with Santa, Soup, Santa & Stable and the Easter Egg Hunt.
confirmands would meet with them at least three times utilizing materials provided by the YCP. Reservations were made at Manidokan Camp and Retreat Center for the middle of October, including a group building session on the initiative course. A schedule outlining the elements of confirmation was developed in August (Appendix A). A conference room was reserved for a confirmation information meeting to take place on October 2, 2019. A small conference room, equipped with a TV and DVD player, a white board, and appropriate furniture for the students and leaders was reserved for meeting nights. The confirmation ministry was announced in September in all church communications. Families were invited to indicate their interest and direct questions to the YCP and attend the October 2 meeting.

In August Growing With was shared with the organizer of the parenting Sunday school class. She agreed to use the resource with the class beginning mid-September and to invite parents of confirmation students. The YCP also extended an invitation by email to all parents of adolescents and emerging adults. Only three confirmation parents, already regular attendees, participated in the study. Beginning at the start of the school year the YCP frequently connected church members to the Fuller Youth Institute and Growing With Resources pages via emails and social media postings. Several parents report listening to the podcasts. The book study concluded at the end of November.

2 She is a life-long Mt. Zion member. Her fourth and youngest child will be in confirmation.

Youth Sunday school teachers, youth group leaders and the youth choir director were invited to a leader meeting on August 25, 2019 for lunch at a local restaurant.\(^4\)

Seven of eleven leaders attended. Adoptive theology was introduced along with its implications for ministry. They reflected comfort with the existing siloed youth ministry program, but an openness to try new things. Concerns crystalized around attendance and attractional activities rather than ministry for consequential discipleship. Leaders were given a handout stating the goal of adoptive youth ministry at Mt. Zion and encouraged to prayerfully reflect upon on how this goal would impact ministry at Mt. Zion (Appendix B). Adoptive thinking was reinforced with youth and children’s leaders through a weekday email devotional regularly including comments from the YCP relating the devotional to our mutual life as God’s family within God’s reign. Sharing the *With God Daily* devotional began on August 26, 2019.\(^5\)

Youth leaders were also given a copy of *Growing Young* to read in August and September. The YCP introduced the book by reviewing the Growing Young Core Commitment Wheel with conversation about how adoptive youth ministry informs each of the six strategies.\(^6\) The leaders agreed to a unified youth ministry calendar coordinated with Mt. Zion’s master calendar by the YCP.\(^7\) A plan was developed for a weekly youth

\(^4\) The week before, children’s ministry leaders met to discuss the 2019-2020 school year. They were introduced to adoptive theology as a framework for implementing Mt. Zion’s ministry with children.


\(^7\) Previously each aspect of the youth ministry operated independently.
ministry email for youth and families with information about congregational worship, Sunday school, youth choir, youth group and confirmation. The first email went out September 5 in advance of the school-year ministry starting September 8, 2019. Youth Sunday school teachers agreed to utilize curriculum by Orange for their respective age groups. Curriculum was purchased, and teachers were registered for access. Youth group Bible study will be designed by the YCP to integrate Sunday school content with Scripture and preaching from morning worship.

A meeting for parents and students interested in confirmation was held October 2, 2019. Families of eleven students were present and the meeting was led by the YCP and pastor. The purpose and importance of confirmation for adolescent discipleship was discussed. Adoptive theology provided the framework for the goals of confirmation. Families were given a copy of the schedule for the 2019-2020 confirmation ministry (Appendix A). Parents asked about minimum requirements for being confirmed. The pastoral staff reiterated the goal of young disciples being nurtured, equipped and empowered in and through the ecclesial community in the power of the Holy Spirit. Only

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8 The calendar also includes all-church and intergenerational opportunities as well as a “coming up” section to enable families to schedule ahead for ministry experiences in the future.


10 This strategy allows for the content youth receive in the morning in worship and Sunday school to be integrated and reinforced. Aligning the content of worship and the content of the youth and children’s ministries also equips families to extend faith conversations beyond church.

11 One family with two children decided against participating.
the retreat in October was considered mandatory since it was essential for initial group building and laying the theological groundwork of Christianity. Families were encouraged to prioritize confirmation as a significant phase in life-long spiritual formation rather than as a requirement to be checked in relationship with the church.\textsuperscript{12} The possibility that someone might choose not to be confirmed after going through all or part of the confirmation ministry was raised. The pastoral staff advocated for parents to allow their youth to make the final decision on being confirmed and assured the group that there would be other opportunities to acknowledge faith in Christ. Parents requested the continuation of two traditions, making a class banner and individual confirmation student posters.\textsuperscript{13}

The YCP taught the first confirmation class on October 9. Each ninety minute class is structured to include two lessons from \textit{Re:form} including a video and active content in the \textit{Re:form Anti-Workbook}.\textsuperscript{14} Teaching alternates between the YCP and the pastor every other meeting. Following every class, the YCP sends out an email wrap-up to parents outlining the class content, offering prompts to continue discussions at home and reminders of upcoming confirmation and youth ministry opportunities.

Preparations for the confirmation retreat were made by the YCP (Appendix D). Three youth group leaders were recruited to participate. \textit{Re:form} lessons on the Apostle’s

\textsuperscript{12} The YCP unofficially tracked participation in confirmation activities to see how families responded in the absence of mandatory requirements and to provide appropriate encouragement and support to the young people and their families through the process (Appendix C).

\textsuperscript{13} Parents make the banner, using Scripture and a design chosen by the students. It leads a procession of banners from former confirmation classes into the sanctuary on Confirmation Sunday. Parents make a poster of pictures of their child for Confirmation Sunday.

\textsuperscript{14} \textit{Re:Form Anti-Workbook}; \textit{Re:Form DVD Set}; \textit{Re:Form Leader Guide}. 
Creed were the basis for the teaching sessions and small group discussions.\textsuperscript{15} The pastor and YCP shared teaching responsibilities and the youth leaders facilitated small group time in each session. Weather permitted outdoor activities including group building time on the initiative course and a hike. Experiential worship based on Peter’s growth as Jesus’ disciple was held Saturday night ending with communion. Sunday morning worship was reflecting on the Trinity through painting. The retreat deepened understanding of the Trinity and strengthened the group bond.\textsuperscript{16}

In November, a schedule was created for confirmands to register to acolyte, serve communion and read Scripture in worship.\textsuperscript{17} The chair of the Worship and Arts Committee provided acolyte training in mid-November.\textsuperscript{18} The pastor instructed the class on serving communion. The YCP spoke with the young people about reading Scripture and prepares a script for each student reader including a brief introduction to the text, the Scripture reading and transitional elements (e.g. when to go to the lectern, instructions to rise for the Gospel reading). The YCP checks with each youth worship leader prior to worship to ensure they are prepared and to offer encouragement. The pastor and liturgist are in the chancel area to offer direction or assistance as needed during worship.

\textsuperscript{15} \textit{Re:Form Anti-Workbook}, 34–69; \textit{Re:Form DVD Set}; \textit{Re:Form Leader Guide}, 43–95.

\textsuperscript{16} Two of the nine students were outliers to the group prior to the confirmation ministry. The mutual experiences and extended time together facilitated their inclusion as part of the group. In meetings following the retreat, the young people were able to recall and relate the Trinity to other content.


\textsuperscript{18} He extended genuine warmth and welcome, equipped the young people to acolyte, and offered them theological understanding of the acolyte’s responsibility instilling significant value in their service.
Including and equipping confirmands in these roles has proved fruitful. First, several confirmands have signed up more often than was suggested. The schedule has been extended to accommodate their desire to serve. Second, adults are energized by the consistent presence and competence of the young people. Mutual trust is developing. Adults have been invited to share their appreciation directly with the young people. Third, adults involved in worship leadership (e.g. the tech team, the liturgist, ushers, and musicians) are also offering enthusiastic support to the young people for their participation. Fourth, young people are seeking other opportunities to engage. One confirmand has joined the tech team, a worship role suited to his interests. Two students requested to teach an elementary Sunday school class and have done so twice with support of the adult teaching team. Fifth, other young people are serving communion, reading scripture and being encouraged to bring their unique talents to worship.

In November, one confirmand attended the Church Council meeting and eight young people assisted with the Open Doors Food Pantry. Adults in both venues were welcoming and engaged the youth. The Church Council members invited the young person’s opinion in several discussions and asked him to share about confirmation.\footnote{Powell, Mulder, and Griffin, \textit{Growing Young: 6 Essential Strategies to Help Young People Discover and Love Your Church}, 163–95. This meeting included discussion of the 2020 budget, The United Methodist Church’s concerns and divisions over LBGTQ+ inclusion and chapter five of \textit{Growing Young}, “Fuel a Warm Community.”} The meeting exposed the complexities of church leadership and the atmosphere of mutual respect and the desire for thriving Christian community at Mt. Zion. Food Pantry organizers shared justice issues related to food access and human dignity. Students
witnessed community groups volunteering together and discovered the amount of work and resourcing required to run the ministry. Several students’ families stayed to work with them. In March, the young people will participate in whichever ministry experience they did not attend in November.

Once all the confirmation young people had chosen and enlisted mentors, a mentor orientation meeting was scheduled for Sunday, December 1 between worship services in the Chapel. The YCP prepared materials to review with the mentors to equip them for their role (Appendix E). Two mentors needed to meet on December 8 for training. The YCP conducted the meetings introducing the mentors to adoptive theology as a framework for understanding their role with their confirmand. They were encouraged to embrace their identity as a mature sibling in God’s family and engage in appropriate intergenerational experiences with the confirmation student and their family beyond the minimum expectations of the mentoring role.

The confirmation schedule incorporated three occasions for young people to participate intergenerationally in fellowship outreach events: Breakfast with Santa, Soup, Santa and the Stable, and the Easter Egg Hunt. Confirmands were asked to serve at one event. Breakfast with Santa is an event where leadership is shared between the United Methodist Women and the youth group. The Egg Hunt, scheduled for April 5, 2020, has engaged a few youth helpers in the past. The YCP is planning a wider array of activities that will team up adolescents and adults for shared leadership to foster cooperative

\[20\] Mentors also went through Mt. Zion’s Safe Sanctuaries screening process and the requisite training was part of the mentor preparation meeting.

91
intergenerational relationships. Soup, Santa and the Stable combined and expanded two events previously run simultaneously but separately.\textsuperscript{21} The event was designed to foster warm intergenerational community for everyone serving and attending the event. Most of the confirmation group were involved in Soup, Santa and the Stable. Several served at the Breakfast with Santa. The Egg Hunt participation is challenging since many families travel during Spring break.

Confirmation families were to engage in a service project chosen and planned by their confirmation student.\textsuperscript{22} The purpose is to empower adolescents to compassionately evaluate their context and to engage their interests and resources to affect vulnerable people in a manner consistent with Christian faith. Families were tasked to conduct a follow-up conversation regarding how their work intersected with and impacted their faith. Reminders to plan for the service project were emailed to the confirmands and parents in December, January and February. As of the end of February five of the nine students have completed or planned their project.

Confirmation is about individual spiritual formation and belonging to the community of Christ within a local body of believers. At the information meeting, families were directed to worship together regularly.\textsuperscript{23} Confirmands were encouraged to

\textsuperscript{21} The youth group staged a nativity scene outside while a children’s ministry gingerbread house activity ran inside. Soup, Santa & the Stable expanded the nativity to a walk through several scenes based on the narratives of Jesus’ birth. Youth and adult actors were part of each scene. Family crafts were led by youth and adult teams and focused on faith-based Christmas symbols. Homemade soups prepared by members of the congregation offered warm hospitality. Santa also came to greet the children and families.

\textsuperscript{22} Families were instructed to work beyond existing church ministries, but they were welcome to partner with other community-based organizations. The timeline for this to be completed was early 2020.

\textsuperscript{23} Two students have fathers of different faiths. The fathers of two others do not practice any religion. One’s mother works in the church nursery on Sunday mornings and does not attend worship. A fifth student’s family participates only irregularly through events such as Vacation Bible School.
grow in their relationship with their peers through Sunday school and youth group.

Family worship patterns have remained consistent with pre-confirmation participation though parents who do not regularly attend will do so when their child has a worship leadership responsibility. One exception to this is a young man whose parents do not regularly attend. He has joined the worship tech team and is in worship when he is working whereas prior to confirmation he never attended worship. All confirmands now regularly participate in Sunday school and youth group.24

Church Council members received Growing Young in early September with the goal of discussing two chapters at each council meeting from September through December. Each month, they received a handout of The Growing Young Core Commitment Wheel and the goal of adoptive youth ministry at Mt. Zion (Appendix B).25

Due to the length of budget deliberations, only chapter five was discussed in November. After other matters caused additional delays, the council completed the book study in February.26 Chapter six, “Prioritizing Young People (and Families) Everywhere” was discussed at length in the January meeting, a conversation that lasted over an hour.27

24 The younger sibling of one of the confirmands is now attending Sunday school and talking about being old enough to start youth group next year.

25 Fuller Youth Institute, “Church Resources: The Core Commitment Wheel.”

26 The other matters included finalizing the 2020 budget and conversation about the position of The United Methodist Church and Mt. Zion Congregation on LGBTQ+ inclusion. A new Church Council chairperson and several new committee heads took office in January 2020, but we were able to proceed with some continuity. The February discussion was especially powerful as it began with the question, “Who are our neighbors?” No one could answer this question. We acknowledged that ministry is difficult when we lack understanding of who we are to be in ministry with.

During the final weeks of February 2020 various means were employed to evaluate the process of introducing adoptive theology through the practice of confirmation for ecclesial revitalization. First, the pastor was invited to identify and evaluate the strategies he witnessed to introduce adoptive theology and practices. The pastor and YCP met on February 12 to discuss his observations.28

Regarding confirmation, the pastor noted the emphasis on the collaborative, intergenerational and synergistic character of the process as confirmands have been intentionally engaged with each other, pastoral staff, their families, other youth, church and youth leaders, and the congregation as integral to their spiritual development. He discerns that this has engaged the young people with their church family and has significantly impacted the congregation. They have witnessed the vitality that young people bring to leadership in worship and other aspects of ministry (e.g. events, Sunday school teaching, tech ministry).29 The intergenerational and corporate components of confirmation journey have engendered belonging among the young people and ecclesial hope among adults. He acknowledged the importance of the October retreat for generating a positive, inclusive group dynamic and fostering the expectation for significant faith-based experiences and conversation within the group.

The Growing Young study exposed the reluctance among Mt. Zion’s leaders to accept that youth ministry partitioned from ecclesial community does not lead to consequential faith formation for emerging generations. It also revealed their inability to

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28 Gary Sheffield-James, Adoptive Outcomes to Date, February 12, 2020.

29 The practice of children remaining in the sanctuary on communion Sundays, introduced by the YCP, reinforces the ‘rightness’ of having everyone present together as one body at the ‘family meal.’
envision an alternate ministry structure. Regularly communicating the goal of adoptive ministry and lifting the core commitments from *Growing Young* throughout the congregation has initiated the vision casting process and raised the awareness of some individuals for the investment that will be required for substantive faith formation and ecclesial renewal.\(^{30}\)

According to Mt. Zion’s Safe Sanctuaries policy, ministry volunteers are vetted and trained for appropriate leadership.\(^{31}\) The pastor noted that the YCP communicated and administered these responsibilities to emphasize the sacred responsibility of the community to provide a safe environment for emerging generations and those who serve. This was foundational for other conversations about ministry preparation and congregational nurture, equipping and empowerment of young people.

One unanticipated influence on introducing adoptive theology the pastor believed vital was the YCP’s work updating the church database for families with children, adolescents and emerging adults.\(^{32}\) This enabled contact with families in new, consistent and mission-appropriate ways. The YCP’s suggestions for updating Mt. Zion’s online presence and creating diverse and current content for the church’s social media

\(^{30}\) The pastor specifically mentioned the Communications chairperson intentionally seeking keychain leadership opportunities and the relational nature of the confirmation mentoring materials. He has specifically focused his preaching from Advent through the present on the corporate nature of life in Christ.

\(^{31}\) This is the responsibility of the Staff Parish Relations Committee and includes a background check and completing a volunteer questionnaire disclosing any past allegations of sexual misconduct. Submitting names of youth and children’s ministry volunteers, obtaining completed paperwork and training fall to the YCP.

\(^{32}\) The database has not been maintained for over four years.
engendered community, led to more effective communication, catalyzed interaction among members, and an cultivated an air of intentionality for ministry.\textsuperscript{33}

The pastor believes confirmation parents were empowered for withing and faithing in their family life through regular communication and encouragement from the YCP.\textsuperscript{34} He noted communication about confirmation and youth ministry, aligning young people’s ministry content with worship, opportunities for shared participation, and providing parenting resources. The YCP’s attendance at student extra-curricular activities, utilizing that time to connect with parents and sharing the young people’s talents via social media with the congregation was a new way for Mt. Zion to build bridges to youth, families and the community. Social media posts of adolescents leading worship, teaching children, serving in outreach and mission or enjoying fellowship also conveyed the importance of and opportunities for young members in the congregation. Families and young people enthusiastically received this attention as warm and empathetic.

On February 19 confirmands completed a questionnaire about their confirmation experience (Appendix F).\textsuperscript{35} Five specifically named the Trinity as one of the main things they have learned in confirmation. Other responses included a better understanding of

\textsuperscript{33}“Mt. Zion United Methodist Church,” Church, Mt. Zion United Methodist Church, accessed May 20, 2019, https://www.mtzionhighland.com/.

\textsuperscript{34}Powell and Argue, \textit{Growing With: Every Parent’s Guide to Helping Teenagers and Young Adults Thrive in Their Faith, Family, and Future}, 37–41.

\textsuperscript{35}The 2019 – 2020 confirmation ministry will not be finished until the confirmation service on May 31, 2020. The youth and parent questionnaires and the confirmation mentor meeting were conducted in February to evaluate the effect of introducing adoptive ministry practices through the first half of confirmation and to assess needs for mid-course adjustments.
Methodism, other denominations and world religions, the unity of the Church, the importance of baptism, Jesus’ resurrection and grace. One student summed up what he has learned about Christian faith, “Being a good Christian means trying to live like Jesus would and asking for forgiveness when you mess up.” Answers to how confirmation has directed them to serve and their vision for future involvement mentioned continuing with worship leadership and participation in youth activities and retreats. Two included the goal of talking with others about faith. One is anxious to participate in the youth Summer mission trip. On student, who was previously unengaged, expressed a desire to become part of the praise band.

Confrmands believe confirmation has helped them to see that discipleship includes modeling their lives like Jesus, continuing to learn about him, serving others and participating in the church. One young person now sees that Jesus’ life and ministry were purposeful rather than a collection of disconnected experiences and teaching stating, “It helped me understand why Jesus did the things he did.” Another shared that she often “does not feel loved” but accepts that Jesus loves her regardless of her feelings and her church family makes her feel welcomed. Everyone noted that the most meaningful things about confirmation were relational: growing closer to God, to each other and with the people in the church.

On February 20 confirmation parents were emailed “Confirmation Parent Questions” and asked to return their answers by February 23 (Appendix G). Six responses were received. Parents perceived faith development in their young people in a variety of ways including increased understanding and comfort in asking faith questions, more mature involvement in church, developing a strong and supportive peer group,
comprehension of prevenient grace and the Trinity, and an increase in personal Bible reading. Five utilized the wrap up emails to initiate conversations. One said, “The emails have helped me as the parent because I do not get very much detailed information from my son.” Every parent expressed the desire for the church to keep their young person involved in youth and intergenerational ministry and to engage them in using their talents in worship. Worship leadership, the Fall retreat and the ROCK retreat were cited by every parent as significant experiences for their children.36 One respondent shared, “Serving communion, lay reading and acolyting was a big deal for C. These opportunities connected him to Mt. Zion in new (adult like) ways.” Those who participated in the Growing With study believed it was beneficial in understanding how faithing changes through adolescence and emerging adulthood and how withing and churching must adapt. Two parents expressed a desire for more parenting resources.

On February 20 leaders who received Growing Young were emailed “Mt. Zion Leader Questions” and asked to return their responses by February 25 (Appendix H). The deadline was extended by a week and the YCP personally invited leaders to reply.37 Six completed questionnaires were returned.38 This low response is indicative of council members’ reluctance to conceive of change in ecclesial patterns and engage in adoptive ministry even to being unwilling to initiate contact with young people during the passing

36 ROCK is a Baltimore-Washington Conference Youth Retreat held annually in Ocean City, MD. Youth and leaders from all over the conference attend.

37 This allowed the YCP to deliver the questionnaire to church council members at the February meeting and invite their responses. It also allowed for the inclusion of reflection on the February Growing Young discussion to be incorporated in their response.

38 Four were from leaders active in youth ministry all of whom have multiple leadership responsibilities within Mt. Zion. One respondent, the youth choir director, was not sure that she received a book and would need to look for it.
of the peace. It might be symptomatic of the precedent expectation that ministry leadership requires no intentionality or theological investment in order to align with the *telos* of God’s reign.\(^\text{39}\) The youth leaders shared the belief that beyond providing staff and budget, Mt. Zion needs improvement in prioritizing young people and families throughout its ministry. They did not have consensus on which core commitment to focus on first but highlighted the need for increasing intergenerational connection to foster warmth, empathy and for practice learning leading to keychain leadership. Adults need safe spaces to listen to young people and emerging generations need safe space to participate in with adults.\(^\text{40}\) One interesting insight on perspective emerged. One senior adult suggested that youth join adults in existing adult settings (e.g. adult Sunday school classes) while the youth leaders see the need for adults to initiate bridge building by meeting young people in ministries where youth are or in new intergenerational spaces.

Confirmation mentors were invited to attend a meeting with the YCP between worship services on February 23. Three of the eight mentors attended. Two others offered insights via brief one-on-one conversations. Two mentors confessed to struggling with getting started with the mentoring conversations, one had not yet met with their confirmation student. The mentors who have friendships with parents of their confirmand were more at ease with mentoring. Those who had met with their students were pleased with the conversations, felt the mentoring materials provided adequate direction and

\(^\text{39}\) It became apparent in discussion that many council members did not read *Growing Young*.

\(^\text{40}\) One responded that we need a class for adults on “how to move beyond just tolerating or smiling benignly at young people.”
embraced the concept of being an older sibling in the faith community. One person who has mentored previously was relieved to not have a workbook to complete with the young person. The conversational process is more natural and consequential for mutual faith growth. All mentors believe that the ministry of the church will be strengthened by increasing opportunities for intergenerational relationship. One mentor participated in the *Growing With* study and commented on how the congregation would benefit from understanding withing and faithing in relation to ministry with emerging generations to enable capable of adulting within the family of God.⁴¹

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SUMMARY AND CONCLUSIONS

Introducing adoptive theology and practice at Mt. Zion United Methodist Church with confirmation ministry as the nexus for the initial stages of the process has met with some preliminary success and has illuminated potential obstacles. Adoptive strategies were able to directly address current issues facing the Church in Mt. Zion’s context.

One of the principle concerns of the postmodern Church is its failure to imagine and invest in the future through rich catechetical culture that passes along Christianity’s core beliefs and practices to emerging generations. The meaning of catechesis is derived from the Greek *katéchein*, “which means ‘to resound,’ ‘to echo,’ or to ‘hand down.’ . . . It highlights the repetitive interaction of the generations ‘handing down’ some theological idea, value or practice.”¹ In the absence of such culture, Christian faith is actively being supplanted by an imposter religion that is “almost Christian.”² The adoptive process of the confirmation ministry called for the use of a theologically and developmentally appropriate curriculum that was reinforced and supplemented in the confirmands’ families, peer group experiences and through participation in large group as well as one-on-one intergenerational ecclesial relationships.³ The effectiveness of this strategy was revealed as confirmation students were able to recall, reengage and integrate content

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³ Engagement with parents, youth leaders and mentors in reinforcing conversations were the most significant intergenerational interactions with the confirmation class content.
learned during confirmation experiences in other settings such as youth group and Sunday school. In some instances, students were able to merge subject matter and experiences from confirmation with learning from a different setting and use their own words to communicate their insight. Responses to the student questionnaire indicated several core Christian tenets, including the Trinity, the significance of Jesus’ life and a richer understanding of grace among their significant learnings. Aligning the curriculum for youth Sunday school and youth group with the Scripture and sermon from worship provided additional opportunity for young people to be equipped in doctrinally sound ways for theological integration and reflection across contexts.

The increased privatization of faith and centralization of religious authority in the closing half of the last century has resulted in the grandparents and parents of current adolescents and emerging adults who are unsure of their ability to share their faith in a substantial manner. Many have abandoned the effort. Adoptive theology affirms the mutuality of our Christian identity as children, brothers and sisters together in God’s family. The concept of discipleship as an ongoing process of growth and formation frees adults from having to have all the right answers. Adoptive identity enables parents and other adults to share the journey and learn in concert with young people. Youth leaders and confirmation mentors appreciated this new perspective on their role in the lives of the youth, though some wrestled with fully embracing adoptive relationships. In particular,

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4 The study of the Apostle’s Creed at the Fall retreat provided the Trinitarian theological groundwork for all that the confirmation group learned and discussed after that.

the less structured, conversational nature of the mentor-confirmad interactions were initially difficult for two of the mentors. The amount of intergenerational exposure adults have had with the young people at Mt. Zion appears to directly correlate to their comfort with adoptive roles. The more interaction adults have with emerging generations, the greater the ability to confidently conceive of themselves as older siblings.

Parents influence their children’s identity through both nature and nurture. Studies of faith in youth and emerging adults uniformly reveal the importance of parents for their children’s beliefs and practices. Adoptive ministry acknowledges the immeasurable impact of parents in the lives of their children. Adoptive identity allows parents to retain their expectation of authoritative respect from their children, but allows parents to continue to be nurtured, equipped and empowered within the ecclesial community, even as they are participating and guiding the spiritual formation of their child. Several practices were implemented with parents of confirmation students to foster adoptive relationships. First, parents and confirmads had to negotiate and determine their accountability and participation in the confirmation process in the absence of mandatory attendance guidelines. Second, parents were invited to participate in the

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6 Mentors were equipped with conversation guides and received the confirmation wrap up emails to keep them informed of class content and suggestions for continuing the conversation. The discomfort expressed by one mentor seemed to reflect his own sense of awkwardness about capably carrying on a conversation with an adolescent.


Growing With study to equip them for their evolving parenting as their children mature through adolescence and emerging adulthood. Third, parents were equipped and empowered for faith-based interaction with their families through the confirmation wrap up emails and links to online parenting resources. Fourth, parents had opportunities to participate with their young people in worship, in youth group and through the family service project. As reported on the parent questionnaires and in conversation with the YCP, parents who have engaged these resources and practices have found them enriching. Several shared the desire for the church to continue to help parents engage with their young people in the faith community and provide parenting resources.

The first words in the goal statement for adoptive ministry are, “To create an environment . . .” The environment of adoptive ministry is the catechetical ecclesial culture necessary for faith transmission and formation. Mt. Zion’s youth ministry, including confirmation, has functioned as an isolated branch of the church’s ministry. The youth ministry itself was compartmentalized, with little thought for the overarching goal of fostering faith transmission for spiritual formation in young people. Confirmation created a chance to deepen expectations and practices. Because it was a priority set by the Staff Parish Relations Committee for the new YCP, it provided a unique opportunity to work through and around a ministry which attracts the interest and hope of the congregation to engage leaders and members in congregational identity evaluation. This

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9 Clark, Adoptive Church: Creating an Environment Where Emerging Generations Belong, 60.

10 Foster, From Generation to Generation: The Adaptive Challenge of Mainline Protestant Education in Forming Faith, 9.
was an especially viable approach given the church’s stated desire for growth with a focus on ministry with youth and children.

Continuously sharing the goal of youth ministry in adoptive terminology in a variety of settings paired with the study of *Growing Young* had mixed outcomes (Appendix B). Adoptive theology and practices were offered in response to the spoken need to grow the youth ministry. Numeric expansion was clearly the type of growth desired. Adoptive theology emphasizes that vital ecclesial community does not exist for itself or as a business venture, but for the *telos* of God’s reign. Mt. Zion’s leadership needs to discern new metrics of success rooted in God’s purposes. Congregations thrive when they are in right relationship with each other and with God while living into their calling “to make disciples of Jesus Christ for the transformation of the world.” This may or may not produce numeric or financial growth.

*Growing Young* was the preferred resource to study with the Church Council and youth leaders for two reasons. Membership at Mt. Zion is largely comprised of business, government and science industry professionals. Since *Growing Young* is research-based and because the core commitments are organized in a manner similar to best practices scenarios, the YCP believed the content would be deemed creditable and actionable to the church leaders. *Growing Young* begins with social research and integrates theology and

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12 Church leaders and families want a building full of children and youth as in the past. Numeric and financial increase are what is implied by the phrase ‘church growth.’ Spiritual formation is not discussed as a core purpose to invite others to Mt Zion.

13 *The Book of Discipline of The United Methodist Church*, 93.
ecclesiology. *Adoptive Church* begins with theology and ecclesiology and works towards the social reality. The two resources overlap and weave together the ministry reality they describe and the vision they cast for the future of the Church. The conversation of chapter six of *Growing Young*, “Prioritizing Young People (and Families) Everywhere” at the January Church Council meeting was the greatest point of nexus.¹⁴

The primary obstacle to adoptive ministry that was repeatedly exposed through the *Growing Young* book study is the almost complete lack of face to face interaction among adults and young people at Mt. Zion. Youth are perceived as a collective, rather than as individuals. It was difficult for leaders to grasp the warm relational imagery of adoptive theology and think of the young people in the congregation as individual little brothers and sisters in Christ.¹⁵ It was especially challenging to initiate intergenerational contact. Seeing young people present as worship leaders energized many of the adults in the church. Council was excited to hear reports of the confirmation and youth ministry and to see social media posts the YCP shared. Yet not one of the council members was able to complete the homework assignment to greet a young person and learn their name during the weekly passing of the peace in worship.

Primary resources for this project emphasize revitalizing multigenerational ecclesial relationships as the principle means for transforming the culture of the postmodern Church. This is a critical adaptive challenge for Mt. Zion. Planning for

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¹⁵ The leadership cares about the young people. They provide generously for youth ministry in the budget, the staff and the facility. The business of interacting with young people is perceived as someone else’s job.
ministry that intentionally gathers the generations and integrates them in worship, learning, fellowship and service must become a priority for church leaders. Creating practice learning scenarios for adults to become comfortable bridge building and forming relationships that offer young people social capital will be an important component of future ministry initiatives.

Another acute issue for the congregation came to light in the February Church Council discussion of Growing Young chapter seven, “Being the Best Neighbors.”16 To begin the discussion, the question was posed, “Who are our neighbors?” No one answered that question. This clarified for the leadership team how unfocused the church has become in living into the mandate to make disciples. We have fallen into the trap of expecting our neighbors to discover the church rather than the congregation meeting and serving its neighbors.17 A plan for utilizing current demographic databases at our disposal to discover more about the people in the neighborhoods closest to the church as well as the people who live in proximity to many of Mt. Zion’s members is already underway as a direct result of the February council meeting. Actually meeting our neighbors face to face will be a significant goal.

Two impending factors will impact the congregation’s identity, mission and progress towards creating adoptive culture. The current pastor is retiring in June and a new pastor has been appointed to Mt. Zion beginning in July. The congregation is excited

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16 Powell, Mulder, and Griffin, Growing Young: 6 Essential Strategies to Help Young People Discover and Love Your Church, 234–70.

17 The church’s somewhat rural setting complicates, and the fact that few of the members live in the closest neighborhoods complicates the situation.
for the arrival of the new pastor, as he has worked in community-based ministries and has led growing churches in his last two appointments. The second complication is a denominational issue that is already having negative repercussions in local churches. The United Methodist Church is moving towards a split over LGBTQ+ inclusion. Mt. Zion has been expending great effort to carefully and gently understand the congregational position on the issues. Anticipated grief over the split and possible parting of ways is already evident. Uncertainty about the future is creating a feeling of being stuck in a state of insecurity.

Persisting in inculcating adoptive theology at Mt. Zion will need to proceed at a determined but measured pace. Continuing to promulgate the goal of adoptive youth ministry throughout the life of the church and helping leaders imagine and make space for emerging generations beyond the current youth ministry will be a significant part of the strategy and effort. Emphasis must be placed on young people’s spiritual formation and developing their gifts for life-long vocation within the body of Christ rather than expecting them to assimilate to existing practices.\(^\text{18}\) The whole congregation will be together in worship on Pentecost for the Confirmation Service. This will be an important venue for the young people to claim their maturing identity and agency within God’s household. It will also be an opportunity to remind the congregation of their identity and promises as we speak the congregational confirmation vows and to cast a vision of a robust future through this group of young people and though all emerging generations.

Inviting the new pastor to understand the adoptive ministry model and work towards integrating adoptive theology with his ecclesiology will be an important next step. The YCP has already suggested *Growing Young* and *Adoptive Church* as a way for him to understand what the pastoral staff has been working towards over the last year.

*Adoptive Church* accents the importance of creating a partnering ministry.\(^1^9\) Continuing to equip the current youth ministry leaders and undergird their comprehension and implementation of adoptive theology is important. Casting vision is vital to help us all to move beyond using attendance and fun as our primary measures of ministry. Guiding the team to develop new metrics and set goals before the 2020-2021 school year begins is on the agenda for the summer. Most of the youth ministry volunteers have been serving many years; therefore, another urgent goal is to discern, invite and train new leaders to join the team.\(^2^0\) To habituate the concept that the safety and nurture of every child is everybody’s responsibility, the YCP will work to assemble a youth and children’s ministry vision and support team.\(^2^1\) This may prove to be a challenging endeavor given the reluctance of many adults to conceive of what role they might have in the lives of emerging young people and the general sense that they lack the efficacy for such a role. Those who served as confirmation mentors are a potential starting point in forming this group as they are already familiar with adoptive theology and have had some recent intentional interaction with adolescents.

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\(^{1^9}\) Ibid., 86–104.

\(^{2^0}\) Ibid., 90–97.

\(^{2^1}\) Ibid., 97–102.
Finally, continuing to resource and equip parents of adolescents for withing, faithing and churching without over-burdening their already hectic schedules is a priority. Re-offering the *Growing With* study in the Fall in a different setting is a strong possibility. Continuing to communicate regularly with parents, making opportunities to affirm their children and parenting, and visiting with parents while attending extracurricular events are three practices that will continue. In all of them, the goal of adoptive youth ministry will be reinforced so parents can know that Mt. Zion takes theirs and their children’s time and faith seriously. In the Fall, we will begin the year with a parent meeting to understand how Mt. Zion can best partner with parents in discipling their adolescent children and initiate a parent’s online prayer group. Increasing intentional times for families to serve and learn together, with other believers and beyond the church, is also a priority for the new school year.

The challenges at Mt. Zion are not unique. In identifying confirmation as the focus for introducing adoptive ministry, we chose a program with a specific duration that simultaneously embodies the hope of the congregation for its future, has the potential to impact other ministries and groups in the church, and whose primary goal is the consequential spiritual formation of young people within the household of God. Framing confirmation in the language and practices of adoptive theology allowed this ecclesial understanding to flow into other aspects of congregational life, into the families of the young people and into the confirmands themselves. Mt. Zion has made initial progress


23 This includes mission service opportunities, youth and parent youth group times, short-term youth and parent studies during Sunday school, and providing at home seasonal devotional materials.
towards congregational revitalization and creating an environment open to
multigenerational ministry. Confirmation is a transitional experience for adolescents and
the community around them. Christian communities that hope to introduce adoptive
ministry for the revitalization of their culture should identify a similarly far-reaching
experience to inaugurate that transformation.

Attitudinal changes and spiritual development take time. Both are difficult to
measure. Cultivating the spiritual identity of adolescents within the body of believers
through practices of substantive faith transmission can revitalize the church community
as emerging generations bring their creativity, energy and insights on our rapidly
changing world to the ecclesiology. Confirmation, as a highly visible aspect of youth
ministry, can serve as a nexus for renewing congregational commitment to provide a
catechetical culture to nurture, equip and empower the young people already in the
household of God.
APPENDIX A

Confirmation 2019-2020 Calendar (Re:form Curriculum)

October
Wed., 2: Confirmation Information Meeting
Wed., 9: First Confirmation Class 6 – 7:30 (Who Wrote the Bible? & Is the Bible True?)
Fri., 18 – Sun., 20: Confirmation Retreat @ Manidokan Retreat Center (Creed Unit)
Wed., 30: Confirmation Class 6 – 7:30 (Why does the Bible Contradict Itself? & Is NT More Important than OT? & Why are there so Many Versions of the Bible?)

November (Attend Church Council on 18th or help in Food Bank on 23rd)
Wed., 6: Confirmation Class 6 – 7:30 (Why Should I Follow Jesus? & Can I Be a Christian w/o Church?)

December
Wed., 4: Confirmation Class 6 – 7:30 (Was Jesus God? & Did Jesus Know He was God?)
Fri., 6 – Sat., 7: Youth Lock-In to prep & serve Breakfast with Santa (and/or serve @ Soup, Santa and the Stable on Dec. 15)
Sun., Dec 15: Soup, Santa and the Stable

January (Family service project in Jan/Feb)
Wed., 8: Confirmation Class 6 – 7:30 (Why Did Jesus Have to Die? & Do I Have to Believe Jesus Performed Miracles?)

February
Wed., 5: Confirmation Class 6 – 7:30 (If there is Only 1 God, Why So Many Religions/Why Do Christians Believe Christianity is the Best))
Fri., 7 – Sun., 9: ROCK Retreat

Wed., 19: Confirmation Class 6 – 7:30 (Did the Methodist Church Really Start Because of Some Holier-than-thou Teenagers? & What the Heck is Prevenient Grace & Do I have to Learn Geometry to be Methodist?)

**March** (Attend Church Council on 24th or help in Food Bank on 21st)

Wed., 4: Confirmation Class 6 – 7:30 (If a Methodist Sings Out of Tune Does That Mean They’re Not Perfect? & What Actually Happens When Methodists are on a Mission?)

Wed., 18: Confirmation Class 6 – 7:30 (Did God Create the Devil? & Why does God let Bad Things Happen?)

**April**

Wed., 1: Confirmation Class 6 – 7:30 (What Does it Mean to Be Born Again? & Can I do Something Bad Enough to Make God Stop Loving Me?)

Sun., 5: Easter Egg Hunt (afternoon)

Sun., 12: Easter Worship

Wed., 15: Confirmation Class 6 – 7:30 (Is it a Sin to Think about Sex? & How Do I Stop Doing Things I Shouldn’t Do?)

Wed., 29: Confirmation Class 6 – 7:30 (Is it OK to be Angry at God? & What Does God Think About War?)

**May**

Wed., 13: Confirmation Class 6 – 7:30 (Does Revelation Really Describe How the World Will End?)

Wed., 20: Confirmation Rehearsal

Sun., 31: Confirmation Sunday

**Expectations:**

1. attend worship & youth Sunday School 3 Sundays a month.
2. serve as acolyte, liturgist and serve communion at least one time each during the year.
3. It is recommended that students attend Youth Group at least 2 times a month.
4. Youth choose and invite someone from the congregation (not a family relation) to be their mentor during confirmation. Mentors will receive an orientation and be invited to participate with students in
confirmation classes/activities (not strictly required) and to have at least 3 structured interactions with the students (arranged and “supervised” by parents).

5. Youth & family are to participate in one service project of their choosing together that is beyond the scope of the regular outreach/mission ministries of the church. The family should talk together following the project about how the service project intersected with Christian faith (compassion and justice). The confirmand should be prepared to reflect on the experience in class and possibly in worship.
APPENDIX B

Youth Ministry at Mt. Zion

We want to create an environment where young people are encouraged to live into their calling in Christ as agents of God’s Reign within the household of God.

To accomplish this, the dominant culture (adults) must provide the following for the vulnerable (young adults, youth & children):

1. **Nurturing** – offer the safety to grow into their identity

2. **Empowering** – offer scaffolding to grow into autonomy

3. **Belonging** – offer full inclusion in the mission of God within the family of God.
## APPENDIX C

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name</th>
<th>Retreat</th>
<th>Rock</th>
<th>Food Pantry</th>
<th>Church Council</th>
<th>Bw Santa/ SSS</th>
<th>Egg Hunt</th>
<th>Acolyte</th>
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<th>Service Project</th>
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116
APPENDIX D

Confirmation Retreat @ Manidokan  CREED  October 18-20

**Friday**
- 6:00 pm  Leave for Manidokan
- 7:30 pm  Arrive & unpack
- 8:00 pm  Ice Breakers & The Retreat Scoop (Leader: C)
- 9:00 pm  Session 1: (Leader: C)  Can it be Proven that God Exists? AND Is God Male?
- 10:30 pm  Free Time/Board Games or other activities/Bed Prep
- 11:30 pm  Lights Out & Sleep

**Saturday**
- 7:00 am  Wake Up
- 8:15 am  Breakfast
- 9:00 – 10:30  Hike
- 10:30 am  Session 2: (Lead: G)  How can God be 3 in 1? AND Does God still Create Stuff Today?
- 12:15 pm  Lunch
- 1:00 pm  Low Ropes (Manidokan Staff)
- 3:15 pm  Free Time
- 4:30 pm  Session 3: (Lead: C)  Am I Really Supposed to Believe Mary was a Virgin?
- 5:30 pm  Dinner
- 6:30 pm  Session 4: (Lead: G)  Why did Jesus go to Hell? AND Holy Spirit: Wind, Fire or What?
- 8:30 pm  Bonfire (E) & Singing (G)  (C, D & J will be setting up Peter’s Walk)
- 9:30 pm  Peter’s Walk (C, J, D, G, E & J) & Communion
- 11:00 pm  Lights Out & Sleep

**Sunday**
- 7:00 am  Wake Up
- 8:15 am  Breakfast
- 9:00 am  Worship: (Lead: C) Creed & Painting
Session 5: (Lead: C) Why do we say we believe in “The Holy catholic Church” if we’re not Catholic? AND Do Cremated People go to Heaven?

10:30 am Clean Cabin/Pack Up/Free Time
12:15 Lunch
12:45 pm Leave for MZUMC
Welcome to the Confirmation mentor ministry!

The goal of Youth Ministry is to create an environment where young people are encouraged to live into their calling in Christ as agents of God’s reign in the household of God. Confirmation is one aspect of our work towards this goal.

Confirmation is:
1. An act of the Holy Spirit
2. A means of grace through which God is revealed
3. A renewal of the Baptismal covenant
4. A means through which our Christian identity is further formed
5. Focusing on becoming a disciple of Jesus by affirming and witnessing to our mutually held faith
6. Growing and maturing in our faith

Confirmation Mentoring exists to support students, on a one-to-one basis during their participation the Confirmation Ministry, to ENGAGE them in faith dialog and practice, to EQUIP them for God’s calling and work in their lives, and to EMPOWER them to honor God with their lives.

With that said, hear the words of Hebrews 10:19-25:

19 Therefore, brothers and sisters, since we have confidence to enter the Most Holy Place by the blood of Jesus, 20 by a new and living way opened for us through the curtain, that is, his body, 21 and since we have a great priest over the house of God, 22 let us draw near to God with a sincere heart and with the full assurance that faith brings, having our hearts sprinkled to cleanse us from a guilty conscience and having our bodies washed with pure water. 23 Let us hold unswervingly to the hope we profess, for he who promised is faithful. 24 And let us consider how we may spur one another on toward love and good deeds, 25 not giving up meeting together, as some are in the habit of doing, but encouraging one another—and all the more as you see the Day approaching.

BE ENCOURAGED!
Together, and with God’s help, we will have a tremendous Confirmation experience!

Contact Info:

Pastor G: phone email
Youth & Children’s Pastor C: phone email
WHAT IS A MENTOR?

A mentor is someone who serves as a trusted counselor or teacher to another person. The word “mentor” comes from Homer’s epic poem The Odyssey. The man, Mentor, was entrusted with the education and well-being of Telemachus, son of Mentor’s friend, King Odysseus. When the king left to fight in the Trojan War, he put his son into the care of his faithful friend.

In our 21st century context a mentor is like an older brother or sister who wants what’s best for their younger siblings and who seeks ways to help them grow into maturity and to encourage, equip and empower them within the family of faith. A mentor, covenants on behalf of the congregations to offer strengths, resources, and networks (friendships/contacts) in support of the mentee’s continuing growth as a disciple. Learning and growth happens as a byproduct of healthy intergenerational friendship grounded in mutual respect and faith in Christ.

WHAT WE HOPE YOU WILL DO

Pray
Pray for the work of the Holy Spirit in the life of the student you are mentoring.
Pray for their families, friends, & teachers.
Pray for your mentee to desire to share their gifts for God’s reign.
Ask your mentee for specific ways you can be in prayer for them.
Pray for your conversations, both before and after.
Pray for the other mentors.
Pray for all of the confirmands.

Encourage & Support Your Mentee
This can take many forms. You decide what works for your availability & is okay with your student’s parents/guardians. Here are some ideas:

- Seek out your mentee at church to say hi. Invite your mentee and their family to sit with you at church or at a church function.
- Google Early Adolescent Development & have realistic expectations for your mentee.
- Unconditionally accept them right where they are.
- Invite your mentee to participate with you in a church ministry where you serve (i.e. teach Sunday School/usher/sound board) or share a favorite hobby with them.
- Drop them a quick note/email/text (always copy parents on emails & texts) letting them know that you are praying for them. Pray with them when you are together.
- Affirm their perspectives (even if you don’t always agree).
- Attend/chaperone an activity your mentee is involved in at church or school
- Ask about what they are learning in Confirmation – or even attend a class with them.
Meet 3 Times with Your Mentee
Consult your mentee’s parents/guardians regarding scheduling times/places. Be cognizant of our Safe Sanctuaries policies available on our website (web address) or consult with Carol Wunderlich. A summary of Safe Sanctuaries policies are included in your Mentor Materials.

We hope your time together will resemble guided conversations.

1. **The first conversation** is a time to get to know your mentee and listening…. You might have to be patient and allow room for them to talk. Start by learning more about each other – interests, activities, family, etc… As a bridge, you might briefly share your own faith journey and how the Church has been meaningful in your life and if that has changed over time. Allow your mentee to share their faith “journey” to this point in their life and what is/has been important to them about Church. Explore Romans 8:14-17 and the imagery of the church as the household of God in which Jesus is the oldest brother and we are all his brothers and sisters. You can ask your mentee if they feel welcome, affirmed and able to contribute in a significant way in the church. Are they able to think of the church as a family? Ask about their hopes for Confirmation and how MZUMC can help them to grow as disciples.

2. **Your second conversation:** Beforehand, familiarize yourself with Wesley’s General Rules of Discipleship and print a copy from the website below to use in your conversation:

   **Wesley’s General Rules of Discipleship**
   
   **First:** By doing no harm.  
   **Second:** By doing good.  
   **Thirdly:** By attending upon all the ordinances of God; such are
   - The public worship of God  
   - The ministry of the Word, either read of expounded  
   - The Supper of the lord  
   - Family and private prayer  
   - Searching the Scriptures  
   - Fasting and abstinence


Explore the idea that we are more than “consumers” or “spectators” at church, but that God has gifted each us for a role in God’s reign. These roles may change as we change or our context changes. Look at the image of the church as the Body of Christ in Romans 12:4-8. Share what you believe your gifts are and how you use them to serve God. Ask your mentee what they think their gifts are and how they use them already and/or how they think God might want them to use these gifts in the future. Affirm their understanding of their gifts as you are able. Think together about the idea of using gifts as an offering to God, to honor God and reflect God’s love to others. Talk together, about Wesley’s General Rules and why they are important for us as Christians and as United Methodists (e.g. practicing faith in concrete ways as in the General Rules is to strengthen our faith and the faith of those around us for real life and not as an abstract, belief. Just like
practicing a sport or an instrument builds muscle memory to respond correctly in the game or performance situation).

3. **In your third conversation** explore how your mentee’s faith affects their daily life. Your conversation should focus on ways your mentee’s decisions about their life, goals, behavior, and values are shaped by the teachings of Christ and the Church. How are their friendships, the way they speak to/about others, the way they spend their money & time, their online activities, the ethical choices they are faced with and other decisions influenced by their growing discipleship? Read Romans 8:1-2, 5–9a (Ephesians 4:21 – 5:21 expands on this) together. Share appropriately from your own experience how you have endeavored to navigate difficult choices. Explore together how to understand grace and forgivenes.

**Be Present for the Confirmation Service**
We hope you will stand with your mentee and their family on **Confirmation Sunday, May 31, 2020 @ 10:00 AM at MZUMC**.

**OTHER “TO DOS”**

**Be Consistent**
To the best of your ability, honor your commitments as a Confirmation Mentor.

**Be Yourself**
Be thankful for who you are—for your personality, gifts, talents, abilities, and attributes. Believe that God knows you, loves you, has called you and will equip you to serve as a mentor.

**Be a Listener**
Take every opportunity to be a listener in your mentoring relationship. Avoid judging and lecturing. Listen attentively because you care and because you desire to treat the young person with dignity and respect.

**Be Honest**
Do your best to tell the truth always in your mentoring relationship, even when it hurts. In so doing, you will inspire the student to be honest with you. If you don’t know something, be honest & seek out an answer.

**Be Patient and Forgiving**
Be realistic about the expectations you have for the student you are mentoring. Do your best to demonstrate unconditional love in every circumstance by being gracious, understanding, slow to anger, patient, and forgiving. Don’t allow failures to destroy your relationship.

**Be Encouraging**
Bring out the best in your mentee by being generous with affirmation, encouragement, and praise. Do all that you can to inspire your student and to recognize the potential that this teenager has in Christ Jesus.

**Care for Your Spiritual Health.**
You should be healthy in your belief and practice in order to mentor a young person. If at any time you feel that you cannot faithfully represent Christianity or Mt. Zion, you should immediately let the Pastor know.
Be Faithful in the Content of Your Mentoring Conversations.
Follow the suggested conversation ideas as well as possible and utilize the suggested Scriptures. This material is one piece of the whole scope of the Confirmation ministry.

Let the Pastor and Youth & Children’s Minister know how they can support you.

Be aware of the ministries of MZUMC and look for opportunities to invite your mentee to become more deeply engaged in the life of the community (if they are not already).
Summary of MZUMC Safe Sanctuaries Best Practices

1. The Two-Deep Policy. There should always be at least two unrelated adults present when meeting with a student. Either meet in a public place, such as a restaurant or library where you can have a relatively private conversation in the line of sight of others or arrange to meet in a place that the student’s parent/guardian can be present, but not involved in the mentor/mentee conversation.

2. Parents/Guardians should be responsible for transporting students to and from meetings with mentors. (Safe Sanctuaries policies recommend 2 un-related adults for driving situations also).

3. When emailing or texting your mentee, mentors should copy parents/guardians in the contact.

4. Recognize and practice personal space boundaries. Do not initiate physical contact - allow students to initiate any physical contact like a hug. Side hugs are recommended. Use your words and your facial expressions to convey warmth and appropriate affection for your mentee.

5. Recognize and practice appropriate language and content boundaries during conversation. Keep things G and PG rated.

6. Respect your mentee’s confidentiality but be aware of the “Crisis Situation Policies” included in this packet. The student’s safety & the safety of those around the student are of principle importance.

7. All mentors will have a current (within the past 2 years) background check and Volunteer Questionnaire (annually updated) on file with Mt. Zion UMC.

8. All mentors are required to be active in the Mt. Zion UMC congregation for at least 6 months prior to serving as a mentor.
THE ART OF ASKING QUESTIONS

Simply telling your mentee what he or she needs to know can be ineffective for at least two reasons:

• The student is passive and uninvolved.
• The student may not be convinced he or she needs the truth, and therefore the words won’t have an impact.

The eternal truths of God and wisdom for everyday living are too important (and complex) to reduce to a lecture of platitudes and clichés. We need to master the art of asking questions.

A good question puts the ball in the court of the mentee. Questions create an opportunity for students to become more active participants. Good questions allow for self-discovery. Personal understanding and ownership can be facilitated by good questions. Teach young people to think for themselves!

Some Keys to Good Questions

• Discern the truth you hope to communicate, and then create good questions to lead your mentee there.
• Avoid yes-or-no questions. Go for questions that will cause your mentee to think deeper or share more details.
• Don’t settle for the “right answer.” When your mentee gives you a quick answer, are they saying something they believe, or just repeating something they’ve heard? Ask your student, “OK, I hear what you’re saying, but what does that really mean?”
• Be positive.
• Draw your mentee out by asking for more information. Ask questions like, “And then what did you do?” “How did you feel when that happened?” “How can I help you?”

The Art of Listening

Along with asking good questions you will need to be a good listener. There is a danger in wanting to supply a young person with answers too quickly. Don’t be afraid of a little silence – it provides room for thinking. Teenagers want to be heard just as any of us do. Here are some tips for active listening:

• Offer your undivided attention.
• Make eye contact.
• You do not have to be an expert or have all the answers.
• Accept what your student is saying. You don’t have to agree, but give your mentee support by showing interest in what he or she is saying, and don’t act anxious to change the subject or offer your advice.
WAYS TO SHARE FAITH WITH YOUR MENTEE

Be Real and Authentic
- Share your own spiritual strengths and/or challenges (without too many details).
- Share how God is working in your life currently or in the past.

Pray for Your Student
- Pray for God’s timing and agenda.
- Pray that you will fully surrender to God’s plan for your student (get yourself out of the way).
- Pray for God’s clear direction in conversation with the student.
- Ask your student how you can pray for them and then actually pray with them.

Unconditionally Accept Your Student
- Focus on positives (even if they seem small). It’s too easy to focus on the negative.
- Have realistic expectations of your student (remember where you were at that age & google “Adolescent Development” for a quick refresh on developmental realities).
- Help your student to feel valued and loved by the church community (not judged).
- Don’t compare your student to other students.

Know Your Church’s Ministry Opportunities and Programs
- Encourage your mentee to participate in the life of the church. Talk with a staff member about ways your student could get “plugged in” beyond youth group if they are not already.
- Invite your mentee to participate alongside you in a ministry role you have at Mount Zion.
- Be open to attending a ministry or school/extra-curricular function with your student.
- Work together with the youth ministry staff and volunteers who know your student.

Talk to Your Student About His/Her Relationship with God
- Ask your student questions (see “The Art of Asking Questions”).
- Don’t be afraid to be direct.

Share the Bible with Your Mentee
- Make sure your student has a Bible & Show them yours – especially if you have notes or markings that make it personal or reveal your own study.
- Look up verses together – that are/have been meaningful to you or from a Sunday worship service that stood out to you.
- Talk with your mentee about how to wrestle with/apply Scripture to his/her life.
TEENAGERS AND FAMILIES IN CRISIS

There will be times when parents and an adolescent clash and have problems communicating. It is important not to get in the middle. Do not take sides or make judgments. There may be opportunity for you to be a peacemaker. Discuss this with the Pastor or Youth & Children’s Minister so a plan of action can be determined.

However, it’s important to be prepared for possible crisis situations. Having some procedures in place will give you confidence to handle difficult times. You will not have to handle them alone; you will have your Pastor’s & Youth & Children’s Minister’s guidance.

DO NOT ever tell a student you will keep a secret! Before allowing the student to proceed, tell them that you may not be able to do that depending on what they tell you. If it is something that is harmful to your mentee or another person, you will have to act on it.

DO what’s right even though it is difficult. God can make something good come out of bad situations.

Contact the Pastor immediately if any of the following situations arise. If the situation calls for a report to Child Protective Services the ideal action to take is to make the call with the student. The Pastor can walk you through how to proceed.

General guidelines for crisis situations:
Physical Abuse
If you suspect or are told about it:
• Don’t overreact.
• Don’t promise to keep the secret.
• Acknowledge the courage it took to tell someone.
• Get specific information—who the accused is, residence, date and time of incident or length of time abuse has occurred, and so on.
• Help the student notify parents if applicable and call Child Protective Services.

Drugs and Alcohol
• Talk with your mentee about the importance of wise choices.
• Love the student, not the behavior.
• Don’t be afraid to confront your mentee or set boundaries.
• If this is a continuing problem, encourage your mentee to talk with his or her parents, and be there for that conversation. Talk about ways to help the student kick the habit.

Depression and Suicide
If the risk is moderate to high (the student has a plan to carry out a suicide attempt):
• Take immediate action. Don’t leave your mentee alone. Release the student directly to informed parents or another relative. Again, go with your mentee to talk to either a parent or counselor.
• Trust your gut. If you suspect a student might be suicidal, ask!
• Listen with compassion. Get your mentee talking.
• Ask open-ended questions to assess the seriousness of the threat. Boil down the problem.
• Help your student establish coping strategies.
• Refer your mentee and family to a counselor (the Pastor can help with this).
APPENDIX F

Confirmation Student Questions

1. What are two or three things you have learned about Christian faith from Confirmation so far?

2. How has Confirmation directed you to serve or take ownership in your church?

3. What new experiences have you had in Confirmation? What opportunities to be involved do you see in the future?

4. How has Confirmation helped you to understand what it means to be Jesus’ disciple?

5. What about Confirmation has been most meaningful for you?

6. How can Mt. Zion help you to continue to grow in your faith after Confirmation?
APPENDIX G

**Confirmation Parent Questions**

1. List two or three ways that Confirmation has helped your young person to grow in their understanding of Christian faith?

2. How has Confirmation helped you to talk about faith and church with your young person? Were the emails summarizing class content helpful as conversation tools?

3. How can Mt. Zion continue to nurture, equip and empower your young person after Confirmation?

4. What about Confirmation do you think has been most meaningful for your young person so far?

5. Did you participate in the Parenting Class book study of *Growing With*? If so, how did the study help you to think about parenting and faith as your child matures?

6. How can Mt. Zion help you as a parent in the future?
APPENDIX H

Mt Zion Leader Questions

1. Did you read the book *Growing Young*?

2. Which of the six core commitments (listed on pages 42-43 of *Growing Young*) seem most prevalent at Mt. Zion? Which seem missing?

3. Give examples of how you think young people can be more involved in leadership in our church?

4. Give examples of how our church empathizes well with young people?

5. How can we invite young people into the story of God?

6. Where do you see intergenerational relationships thriving at Mt. Zion? What could foster more and deeper connection across generations?

7. In what ways does Mt. Zion prioritize young people and families? In what ways do we need to grow in prioritizing young people and families?
8. In what ways does Mt. Zion neighbor well locally? Globally? How are we intentionally training young people to neighbor well?

9. Which of the six core commitments do you believe we need to improve on first at Mt. Zion? And what 2 or 3 steps should we take first?

10. Have you seen or heard the following: “The goal of youth ministry is to create an environment where young people are encouraged to live into their calling in Christ as agents of God’s reign within the household of God.”? What role do you see yourself playing in creating this type of environment at Mt. Zion?

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136


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