

## Reaffirming Our Baptism: A Proposal for Confirmation Reform

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At a rural Uniting Church, the minister performs a service of dedication of a child, calling it a 'christening'. The church has a strong emphasis on 'believers' baptism, hence confirmation rarely takes place. In a suburban Uniting Church, two middle aged women present themselves for confirmation. Both speak of being baptised as infants as the 'done thing', later falling away from church, then having significant experiences of coming back to faith and 'becoming Christian' as adults. A group of young people stand before another congregation. While all have grown up within the church, some are to be baptised and some confirmed. The baptisms take place by immersion in a tank specially brought into the church. In a church where infant baptism is common, the immersion of young adults presents a powerful symbol of a person freely choosing by faith to die and rise in Christ. When encouraged by a youth worker to join the upcoming confirmation class, a young woman replies 'What's the point? I'm already a Christian, and I'm involved in the congregation here. Why should I have to do anything else to join the church?'

The time is overripe for a reappraisal of our beliefs and practices concerning confirmation and membership in the Uniting Church. In congregations, confirmation faces serious questions regarding its rationale and relevance. Assembly agencies and task groups are examining the nature of the church's membership in relation to its mission. The Eighth Assembly of the Uniting Church noted a decline in the church's total membership at the same time as it encouraged congregations to take seriously the task of evangelism. While the purpose for reviewing confirmation is not simply to retain members, the relationship between baptism and membership is a key aspect of the need for revision.

I propose that the church should reclaim the unity of the sacrament of baptism by removing the term and practice of 'confirmation' as a separate post-baptismal event. In its place a repeatable rite of baptismal reaffirmation, accompanied by appropriate educational and pastoral processes, should be offered to

persons as a recognition of and/or rite of passage to a new faith experience. Baptismal reaffirmation opportunities should be offered to children, younger teenagers, older teenagers and adults in developmentally appropriate forms. Baptismal reaffirmation, both corporate and personal, needs to be offered at least annually in congregations.

Reaffirmation of baptism, not to be confused with rebaptism, is a strong ecumenical practice and features significantly in the Uniting Church liturgies in *Uniting in Worship*<sup>1</sup>, in which confirmation is defined as a 'reaffirmation of baptism'. In reaffirming our baptism we declare the wonder of God's love and salvation through Christ, and pledge ourselves again to Christ's ministry in the world. Baptism occurs once-and-for-all. A reaffirmation does not repeat our baptism, instead we recall our baptism and its meaning for our lives.<sup>2</sup> The personal declaration of faith contained in confirmation is rightly located within baptismal recollection.

Reaffirmation of baptism may take place in any service of worship: in a sense we can reaffirm our baptism every time we worship. In the world-wide church, reaffirmation of baptism is common at Easter and Pentecost. The questions in the liturgy recall the questions asked at baptism, the Creed declares our faith in God, and the pledge renews the promise to follow and serve Christ. Water may be sprinkled from the font as a further reminder of baptism, and people may be invited to make the sign of the cross on their foreheads. Personal reaffirmation of baptism may take place at any time, according to the need to witness 'to the fact that the Holy Spirit given in baptism has awakened a response of faith in a person's life.'<sup>3</sup>

Preparation for baptism, confirmation and reaffirmation of baptism needs to be seen in conjunction with its liturgical expression. Education for Christian discipleship is a vital and necessary dimension of what it means to be a worshipping, witnessing community of faith. Catechesis and formation enjoin faith with understanding, providing a framework of meaning for the interpretation of human experience and for the vision of Christian vocation. While the church's doctrinal statements and liturgies do not define the educational phase, it is nevertheless a strong Protestant tradition expressed within the Uniting Church. This paper, which has a particular educational focus, is part of a longer unpublished paper on the roots and reform of confirmation.

<sup>1</sup> Assembly Commission on Liturgy, *Uniting in Worship*, Melbourne, Uniting Church Press, 1988.

<sup>2</sup> R. Gribben, *A Guide to Uniting in Worship*, Melbourne, Uniting Church Press, 1990.

<sup>3</sup> Assembly Commission on Liturgy, *op. cit.*, p. 58.

Questions about the theological and liturgical inconsistencies of confirmation have been addressed in detail elsewhere.<sup>4</sup>

### Some historical perspectives

Biblical and liturgical scholars generally agree that the New Testament offers no real justification for confirmation.<sup>5</sup> In particular, the references to baptism and the gift of the Spirit in the Book of Acts have a different theological purpose, namely the reception of the Good News by the Gentiles, with validation by the apostolic connection of the Spirit to Christ.

Likewise, there is scholarly ecumenical consensus on the sufficiency of baptism as a sacrament of initiation, as expressed in the WCC document, *Baptism, Eucharist and Ministry*.<sup>6</sup> While the church through the ages has emphasised various purposes for confirmation—catechetical, confessional, transitional, for example—these are not in any sense required for baptism to be ratified or completed. Even the apparent origin of confirmation as a post-immersion hand-laying and epiclesis of the Spirit has been questioned by Aidan Kavanagh, who suggests that it began as nothing more than a post-baptismal dismissal by the bishop.<sup>7</sup>

During the fifth to ninth centuries, this laying on of hands became a separate rite of confirmation performed by a bishop who would visit a local parish, sometimes several years after a child had been baptised by the local priest. The medieval church gave various explanations for the importance of confirmation, elevating its status to being a sacrament alongside Baptism and Eucharist.

A number of leaders of the Reformation, including Luther and Calvin, rejected confirmation as an unscriptural invention of the Catholic Church. However they saw great value in a period of intentional instruction in church doctrine, followed by examination and the opportunity to make a personal declaration of faith in Christ. This confessional emphasis gave rise to a present understanding of confirmation as the time when an individual confirms that they have claimed personally the faith which was offered on their behalf at baptism. Wesley's ambivalence about confirmation<sup>8</sup> also allowed its appropriation by modern evangeli-

<sup>4</sup> Richard Osmer, *Confirmation*, Louisville, Geneva Press, 1995; P. R. Monkres and R. K. Ostermiller, *The Rite of Confirmation*, Cleveland, United Church Press, 1995.

<sup>5</sup> C. Jones, G. Wainwright and E. Yarnold, *The Study of Liturgy*, New York, Oxford University Press, 1978.

<sup>6</sup> *Baptism, Eucharist and Ministry*, Geneva, WCC, 1982.

<sup>7</sup> A. Kavanagh, *Confirmation: Origins and Reform*, New York, Pueblo Publishing, 1988.

<sup>8</sup> C. Williams, *John Wesley's Theology Today*, Nashville, Abingdon, 1960.

als as an opportunity for public declaration that a post-baptismal conversion 'event' has taken place.

In the years prior to church union the place of confirmation was certainly open to debate. The 1963 proposals regarding the Basis of Union, *The Church, Its Nature, Function and Ordering*, acknowledge that baptism calls forth a response of faith. 'Since baptism is the sign of the beginning of the work of Christ in the life of the person, it can be called "the washing of regeneration and renewal in the Holy Spirit which He poured out upon us" (*Titus* 3:5), but since it is a dynamic sign standing over the whole of his life, it requires growth into the inheritance that baptism brings. (*Col.* 3:1-15)<sup>9</sup> To this effect confirmation is described as 'an effectual sign'<sup>10</sup> through which baptised members might have confirmed to the promises of God and be renewed in discipleship. In the final *Basis* this was altered to 'The Uniting Church will seek ways...'. Andrew Dutney says that the Basis was 'clearly intending these "ways" to include something over and above the regular pastoral ministries in the church, something "purpose-built" and related to sacramental worship', hence leaving open the relationship between confirmation and the sacraments.<sup>11</sup> While highlighting the dependency of confirmation on baptism, the authors of the *Basis* leave the way open for reaffirmation of baptism other than solely through confirmation.

As reflected in the UCA Constitution and Regulations, confirmation in the UCA appears to stand in the tension between the Reformation heritage and the modern liturgical renewal emphasis on the priority and sufficiency of divine grace expressed in baptism. In the latter regard, Graeme Ferguson rightly asserts that: 'In ancient practice Confirmation is...to ratify and confirm what has been performed in Baptism as truly the work of God and his Spirit'. As part of baptism, the act of confirming was a confirmation by the church that the grace of God was the initiating, dynamic power which was active in baptism.

### Formation and Education for Christian Discipleship

From an ecumenical perspective, the WCC Lima document declares that baptism is seen as involving and celebrating participation in Christ's death and resurrection, conversion, pardoning and cleansing, the seal and promise of the Holy Spirit,

<sup>9</sup> *The Church, Its Nature, Function and Ordering*, Melbourne, Uniting Church Press, republished 1984, p. 22.

<sup>10</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 23.

<sup>11</sup> Andrew Dutney, *Manifesto for Renewal*, Melbourne, Uniting Church Press, 1986, p. 110.

incorporating into the body of Christ, and a sign of the reign of God now and in the world to come. The proposed reform of confirmation begins with an acknowledgement that baptism celebrates the sovereign grace of God, and in so doing helps to effect that grace in the life of the church.

God's initiative of divine grace invites human response: this is always God's intention. It is both appropriate and necessary to give ritual expression to people's responses to God's saving love. Confirmation, at least in its post-Reformation expression, has been seen as a celebration of this evangelical dimension of baptism. Christian faith and discipleship are a lifelong journey lived in community. Within this shared experience of faith, individual growth and change take place. The journey of faith needs to be celebrated, stimulated, nourished and encouraged.

Andrew Dutney summarises one of Davis McCaughey's contributions to church union discussions as follows:

The sacraments must be understood as sources of faith. The united church would be better served if its Confession worried less about the 'quasi-philosophical and theological definition' of the sacraments, and concerned itself more with their use. It is not so important to define what they *are*, as to affirm what they *do*—to describe 'the significance of the sacraments for faith'.<sup>12</sup>

The purpose of the sacraments is to engender faith and faithfulness, to convey grace in order that God's people may be renewed along with all Creation. D'Arcy Wood says that 'When we receive and respond to the Word (and the enacted Word in the sacrament) we are born anew. In this sense baptism is part of the new birth. It does not "save" or "regenerate" in and of itself but it is part of the gracious gift of God to us. It is, as the Reformation taught, a true means of grace. It conveys the blessings of salvation to us who are baptised as well as to those who see and hear the event.'<sup>13</sup>

As Christian disciples, we live out our baptism as we live eucharistically within the inbreaking reign of God. Baptism assumes subsequent participation in Eucharist and in continuing renewal/reaffirmation of Baptism. While these are liturgical practices, they are also an ongoing, dynamic dimension of what it means to be the people of God. Yet our manner of being church often

<sup>12</sup> Davis McCaughey, *Language About The Church*, 1956, cited in A. Dutney, *Manifesto for Renewal*, Melbourne, JBCE, 1986, p. 91.

<sup>13</sup> Letter from D'Arcy Wood (on behalf of Commission on Liturgy) to Rev. Ian Tanner, 4 October 1985.

diminishes the sense in which discipleship is baptismal and eucharistic in a daily sense.

Stanley Hauerwas observes that the efficacy of the sacraments is not due to some abstract or general quality of sacramentality, but because they are grounded in the life, death and resurrection of Jesus Christ.<sup>14</sup> We learn to live out our baptism as disciples of Jesus Christ by participating in a community of faith whose practices express his life, death and resurrection. Such practices are both informal and formal, general and specific, regular and occasional, intentional and spontaneous.

To a large degree confirmation has been valued as an opportunity to express practices of the body of Christ which otherwise receive little systematic treatment. These practices include: personal, public confession of faith; intentional teaching of doctrine; initiation into lay ministry roles; exploration of contemporary issues in the light of faith; and mentoring relationships between younger and older Christians. Through confirmation, such 'goods' have been made available to people at times when they have been especially open to growth and commitment, often associated with developmental rites of passage (e.g., youth to adult).

The sacramental nature of the church requires such practices if faith is to be formed and discipleship expressed. Christ's presence in and through the church is contiguous with the Christ-like character of its members, expressed and transmitted through the practices of the ministry of the whole people of God. However, these 'goods' have not been readily available to church members at times and for purposes other than in relation to confirmation. Not only does the existence of a separate rite of confirmation imply that baptism is incomplete, but its one-off nature has denied the possibility of people participating more regularly in baptismal reaffirmation and in the educational and formational processes associated with confirmation. Moreover, the one-off expression of confirmation has often resulted in individuals being pushed into the process at a time when they were not especially ready for what it had to offer them. The main challenge for the church is not the reordering of confirmation but the reappropriation of a sacramental sense of engendering Christian discipleship among all ages and at all times.

Everything that the church does educates and forms its members in faith. John Westerhoff has helped the contemporary church to recover the notion of catechesis, 'the process by which persons are initiated into the Christian community and its faith, revelation and

<sup>14</sup> Lecture at Duke University, 1985. Stanley Hauerwas is Professor of Theological Ethics at Duke University, North Carolina, USA.



vocation; the process by which persons throughout their life-times are continually converted and nurtured, transformed and formed, by and in its living tradition.<sup>15</sup> He reminds us that while catechesis in the early church had a particular pedagogical strategy, namely verbal transmission, functionally, it had a broader and deeper meaning. For Westerhoff, catechesis means 'deliberate, systematic and sustained interpersonal helping relationships of acknowledged value which aid persons and their communities to know God, to live in relationship to God, and to act with God in the world'.<sup>16</sup>

Although this thinking about formation has been used regressively by churches as an excuse to discontinue any intentional education programs, it also reminds us that everything the church is and does teaches people about the nature of God and the scope of the gospel vision. The main agenda for learning about Christian faith and discipleship is the life of the local community of faith.

Charles Foster, in his book *Educating Congregations*, helps to shift the emphasis of Christian learning from external curricula to the local embodiment of the people of God.<sup>17</sup> Rather than suggesting that education happens automatically, Foster identifies intentional tasks which sustain communal memory, reclaim the relevance of the Bible, transform relationships, and engender hope. 'Only by repeated and increasingly conscious participation in the shared events evoking our community's identity and vocation do we begin to discover in that community's memory resources for envisioning and constructing a future filled with meaning and hope.'<sup>18</sup>

On the basis of this, baptismal reaffirmation can be seen as a repeated educational opportunity to engage with the tradition, with the life of the community, and with the call to serve Christ in the world. Instead of being a separate program, baptismal reaffirmation will be part of an integrated whole. The content and style of 'confirmation' education needs to reflect (and overlap with) the content and style of formation and education for the whole congregation. For example, some current confirmation programs suggest that candidates should experience the life of the church by visiting the property and finance committee and examining the church budget. We may joke about what this experience might be like, yet such apprenticing is not part of the regular life of most congregations apart from a special program such as confirmation.

<sup>15</sup> J. H. Westerhoff and O. C. Edwards (eds.), *A Faithful Church: Issues in the History of Catechesis*, Wilton, Morehouse-Barlow Co., 1981, p. 1.

<sup>16</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 3.

<sup>17</sup> Charles Foster, *Educating Congregations*, Nashville, Abingdon, 1994.

<sup>18</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 23.

Education for Christian discipleship is both tribal education and immigrant education: enculturation and acculturation. In *Psalm 78* we see the tribal image of parents passing on the faith of their ancestors to their children, from generation to generation. Horace Bushnell gave modern Christian educators the legacy of 'nurture' when he suggested that 'the child is to grow up a Christian, and never know himself [sic] as being otherwise'.<sup>19</sup> Bushnell's emphasis on nurture as the basis for faith formation in church and home provided a foundation for faith development theories of socialisation or enculturation. He believed that children learn to imitate not just the actions of their parents and elders, but they also take on the character which infuses those actions.

C. Ellis Nelson, John Westerhoff and Charles Foster are known proponents of a socialisation approach to faith formation, yet they are all critics of Bushnell. Westerhoff speaks of the necessity for both nurture and conversion as parallel processes. On the one hand we may experience faith as a 'natural' dynamic within the covenant community. On the other hand, due to human sinfulness, there is a necessity for ongoing transformation from the old life to the new. Rather than seeing nurture as preceding a conversion event, Westerhoff sees both as dual processes requiring formation and education in the life of the church.

Discipleship education is both *enculturation*—'tribal' socialisation in the ways of the faith community from 'within'—and *acculturation*, introduction for 'foreigners' or 'immigrants' into the ways of the followers of Jesus Christ. While the church nurtures us in the hope that God's ways will become 'natural' for us, it also proclaims and expects our transformation as sinful people needing redemption. Christian faith is both familiar and foreign, even to the baptised.

Will Willimon and Stanley Hauerwas explore this tension in their books *Preaching to Strangers* and *Preaching to the Baptised*.<sup>20</sup> *Preaching to strangers* is 'preaching to people who share no common tradition'. Rather than seeking to map the gospel onto normal or universal human experience, good education and good preaching must confront and question our notions of what is 'normal'. 'Preaching is meant to challenge the presumption that our 'understanding' is sufficient to hear the gospel. Preaching rightly requires us to be transformed if we are to hear what is being proclaimed.'<sup>21</sup>

<sup>19</sup> Horace Bushnell, *Christian Nurture*, Grand Rapids, Baker Book House, 1984, p. 10.

<sup>20</sup> W. Willimon and S. Hauerwas, *Preaching to Strangers*, Louisville, Westminster/John Knox Press, 1992; W. Willimon, *Peculiar Speech*, Grand Rapids, Eerdmans, 1992.

<sup>21</sup> W. Willimon and S. Hauerwas, *Preaching to Strangers*, pp. 5, 10.

We recognise that society is less 'Christian' than previously, and that Christian education cannot assume knowledge of the basics of Christian faith. At the same time we practise our faith as people who already walk in the way of Jesus. A practical implication of this is that preparing young people for confirmation is little different from preparing adults for baptism. We cannot assume that those who have been nurtured in the church are 'insiders': they also need to experience the continual transformation of 'becoming Christian'. Those who are relatively new to the church are being inculcated into a new culture of faith, yet faith can only be appropriated from within. Meanwhile we recognise that God is in the world and speaks to the church from beyond its bounds, bringing new words and guiding our way: newcomers do not come empty-handed to the table of religious experience.

Education must be appropriate to the developmental stages and learning preferences of people. Significant rites of passage, accompanied by intentional education, enable people to appropriate renewed beliefs, behaviours and patterns of belonging. Being human inevitably involves change and growth—new perspectives, new capabilities, new roles and tasks. Gwen Kennedy Neville reminds us that a culture's special ceremonial events, in particular, rites of passage, 'act to establish a new set of expected behaviours, or a new and changed pattern of activity for participants, as they pass through one type of activity into another'.<sup>22</sup>

Such rites of intensification, for example, puberty or marriage rituals, often involve ritual separation, preparation, celebration and maturation. These phases perform a number of functions, sociological and psychological, in terms of equipping a person for a changed role and status, and preparing the tribal group to accept the new status and participation of a person. Most people can attest to the power of such experiences in their lives, from graduations to vacations, births to funerals.

Bill Myers quotes L. S. Vygotsky as saying that passages of development are preceded by 'wading into the water', when one enters a 'zone of proximal development'. Myers says that 'With the child or youth who stands at the edge of their knowing in the presence of a caring peer or adult, there is a moment occasioned by the invitation of transcendence when the child or youth is at the edge of their very being.'<sup>23</sup> A caring adult standing with the young person can intentionally provide the scaffolding which will help the

young person build something new on their previous experience or understanding.

At its best, confirmation has performed such a role of heralding a new level of faith maturity (youth or adult), combining intentional education, liturgical celebration and vocational recognition. In recovering the completeness of the sacrament of baptism, there is a danger that the church may assume that all subsequent growth is gradual. Rather, we should acknowledge that as individuals and groups we need rites of intensification in order to negotiate and accommodate substantial changes. David Tacey makes this point quite powerfully in contrasting the rites of passage of the Pitjantjatjara people with the cultural entrapment of Western adolescence.<sup>24</sup>

Some such rites of transition may be developmental, relating to puberty or adulthood, but in a heterogeneous culture with few tribal norms, they also need to occur at times which relate to other personal transformations. It is through such experiences that the particular nature of the connections between the personal and the communal is recognised, celebrated and strengthened. Whereas confirmation has been a one-off experience, baptismal reaffirmation can and should be a repeatable rite with associated phases of separation, preparation and maturation. The nature and style of the rite of passage should relate to the developmental characteristics of the person and the characteristics of the transition being appropriated.

Effective baptismal education must engage both the Christian tradition and the contemporary world in a praxis dialogue so that people may learn to live into the Christian vision of the reign of God. Christian education is about both transmission and exploration, continuity and change. Shared praxis learning, articulated by Paulo Freire and popularised by Thomas Groome, has become a major methodology for Christian educators over the past twenty-five years. To live as faithful Christians in the present is to live within an unfolding salvation story, between the already and the 'not yet'. Within the tradition of the Christian Story, the church's history and teachings, we seek to discern and also to celebrate the Christian Vision of the new Creation. Our vocation as baptised people is to share in the ongoing mission of Christ to welcome and work towards the reign of God in all the world.

Shared praxis is not equivalent to simple action-reflection learning. Groome's five steps include engagement with the tradition, as well as with voices other than our own from the

<sup>22</sup> John Westerhoff and Gwen Kennedy Neville, *Generation to Generation*, Philadelphia, Pilgrim Press, 1974, p. 97.

<sup>23</sup> W. Myers, (ed), *Becoming and Belonging*, Cleveland, United Church Press, 1993, p. 62.

<sup>24</sup> D. Tacey, 'Authenticity and Spirituality', *Proceedings from Exploring Adolescent Spirituality Seminar*, Melbourne, Centre for Adolescent Health, 1997.

richness and breadth of the Christian church. Charles Foster identifies the loss of *communal memory* as one of five fatal flaws in local church education, resulting in a cultural illiteracy in the church where people become slaves to the tyranny of their own experience.<sup>25</sup> We know from the National Church Life Survey that Uniting Church members rate among the lowest in terms of regular Bible reading. Through exploring our Christian heritage we are formed with an identity which is capable of seeing and hearing God's Word today, and which is clothed with the fruits of the Spirit for faithful living.

The forming and education of Christian disciples requires attentiveness to the tradition as well as to contemporary experience. Regrettably, Christian education at various times has tended to favour one over the other. Only in a Spirit-dwelt dialectic between the Story and the Vision can the church discover God's call to faithfulness today. Confirmation education must attend to the historical sources of faith, the experience of Christians through the ages, and the reality of the world in which we live as sources of revelation.

Foster says that the problem with most of our Bible teaching is that it is irrelevant and naive. He says that 'Theologically trained clergy, religious educators, and curriculum policy decision makers have withheld from laity the methods and skills to interpret the scriptures and to engage in theological reflection capable of opening up their deepest questions and illuminating their most hidden doubts.'<sup>26</sup> The education surrounding baptismal reaffirmation will not simply tell people *what* to think but will train them in *how* to think, to develop skills for theological reflection and biblical interpretation, for social analysis and cultural discernment. Historically, confirmation has rarely had such an agenda.

Denominational leaders must respect and respond to the relative autonomy of local congregations in decision-making regarding their life and witness. Local teachers and learners need to be able to make choices about the nature and timing of learning.

The Uniting Church is reclaiming the theological and political primacy of the local community of faith as the visible body of Christ in its worship, fellowship and witness. As Loren Mead says in *Transforming Congregations for the Future*, 'Yesterday's models, in which executives acted as if lording it over congregations are the best way to help them, work in fewer and fewer places.'<sup>27</sup>

<sup>25</sup> Charles Foster, *Educating Congregations*, 1994.

<sup>26</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 26.

<sup>27</sup> L. Mead, *Transforming Congregations for the Future*, Washington, Alban Institute, 1994.

The church of the future will look back on the present decade as the occasion of the death of the Sunday School. (The jury is still out on its resurrection.) Many social and cultural factors can be named as excuses. The base factors relate to slavish pursuit of a regulated program without clear goals and with little investment in local ownership of educational ministry. Further, a narrow definition of Christian education as taking place in a few particular programs has severely limited both the substance and the format of learning.

A corollary is that denominational education agencies have been seen primarily as servicing Sunday schools with generic curriculum and sporadic teacher training drives. The reality is that local ownership of learning and engagement with significant issues go hand in hand. The future of Christian education, including confirmation education, lies in the ways that we shape congregational life to attend to both the rich tapestry of the gospel and the myriad patterns of our lives together. These tasks have always been primarily local, but just as we have paid missionaries to do our mission work for us, so we have paid Christian education agencies to do the hard work of struggling with texts and issues so that we could get simple, digestible answers on a plate.

Any future attempts at confirmation/baptismal education need to be grounded in and oriented towards the shape of the local congregation, both theologically and organisationally. Within the scope of Uniting Church theology and polity, ministers, elders and learners must be free to make choices about the content, style, organisation and duration of learning. This is not simply an issue of freedom, but of resource style and orientation. The role of the denomination will be to help congregations make informed choices about the kind of learning they will undertake, and help make available to them the rich resources of the Christian tradition and the worldwide church. In practical terms this means providing a learning syllabus rather than a curriculum, a framework rather than a prescribed course.<sup>28</sup>

<sup>28</sup> I am indebted to John Emmet for this insight.