

# *Diving Deep*

Preparing Youth and Adults for Baptism & Confirmation  
Craig Mitchell

## **Session Outline**

- A brief history
- UCA understandings
- Three Emphases
- Designing a Program
- Resources and Ideas

## **Christendom**

- High levels of church affiliation
- “Christian” culture
- Baptism / christening common
- Confirmation a rite of passage for church children
- Faith nurtured in Sunday School and youth group

## **Post- Christendom**

- Low levels of church affiliation
- Secular culture
- Baptism / christening rare
- Confirmation rare
- Few Sunday Schools or youth groups
- Cultural and religious diversity

## **Baptism in Ecumenical Perspective**

In 1982 the World Council of Churches published BEM *Baptism, Eucharist and Liturgy* (also known as the Lima document) which stated an ecumenical consensus regarding baptism. It named five dimensions of the meaning of baptism as an expression of God’s grace.

- being united with Christ (death & resurrection)
- signifying gift of the Spirit
- marking conversion/transformation/new life
- joining the body of Christ
- declaring God’s coming reign

This is what we understand baptism in the name of the Trinity to mean.

BEM also stated, because the church needed reminded, that the ‘norm’ of baptism is not infant baptism but **believer’s baptism** – baptism in the New Testament is firstly that of people making a conscious choice to respond to God’s grace. That is also the understanding of the Uniting Church. Baptism is the act of a missionary church.

In the very early church - no set formula  
some kind of baptismal preparation - varied  
use of water in the name of Jesus or the Trinity  
some kind of laying on of hands and prayer

From second century, development of a time of baptismal preparation called the “catechumenate” (from 40 days in some places as long as three years) – daily teaching including creed and Lord’s prayer, moral inquiry, fasting, exorcism.  
Catechesis = formation and education

### **The Early Church** - Hippolytus (circa 215 AD)

- newcomers to the faith are examined by their ‘teachers’ as to their manner of life and vocation
- they spend three years as hearers of the word, and during that time their conduct is scrutinized; they receive instruction about Christian living and pray, meeting separately from the baptized
- they received bread and cup but not eucharist
- after three years, those who are to be baptized are chosen based on the testimony of their sponsors regarding their conduct (as distinct from their beliefs)
- they are then prepared for baptism, including daily imposition of hands and exorcism, and presumably instruction
- an explanation of the meaning of baptism was given by the bishop after the baptism had taken place (mystagogy)

John Westerhoff and O.C. Edwards, Jr., *A Faithful Church: Issues in the History of Catechesis*, Wilton: Morehouse-Barlow, 1981.

What is happening?

- Candidates of catechumens are coming from beyond the church, beyond the faith, as pagans or believers in other gods
- Becoming Christian requires learning about the faith (namely from the testimony of the apostles/Scriptures and the creeds), but also about what it means to *be* Christian.
- Becoming Christian is about turning away from one’s former evil ways (hence renunciation of evil and exorcism) and taking on a new way. Candidates are

examined by their teachers as to their lifestyle as well as their beliefs.

- Becoming Christian involved learning to pray and read the scriptures and learning a new moral way of living.

## **2nd to 4th century**

As the second century progresses, initiation became increasingly the prerogative of the local bishop. Evidence of chrism or anointing either as the seal of the Spirit conveyed *in baptism* or a seal of the Spirit *after baptism*.

- Baptism is normally to take place at Easter or Pentecost (Tertullian)
- The normal minister of baptism is the bishop, but can be delegated to a presbyter, deacon or lay person, with the bishop reserving the laying on of hands
- baptism of adults is normal, and baptizing of infants also practiced
- catechumenate has developed

From 4<sup>th</sup> century, baptism was allowed if there was any risk that they might die. Hence local presbyters administered baptism, with the 'seal' or confirmation left for the visit of the bishop. Thus 'confirmation' became separated from baptism, and began to have its own justification. Baptism was seen to be incomplete without the seal of confirmation and gift of the Spirit.

Confirmation is confirmation by the bishop (as the church) that baptism has taken place by chrism (anointing), essentially doing/repeating that which would normally take place at the end of baptism.

## **The Reformation Church**

The focus of confirmation shifts to being a way to develop Christian identity related to belief - Protestant belief generally and also denominational beliefs - hence catechisms. Faith is a gift but living out our faith is shaped by what we believe. Confessing our faith is a claim for freedom in Christ and unity in Christ.

- Affirmation of infant baptism
- Development of catechisms
- Focus on correct teaching
- Preparation for informed confessions
- Knowledge of faith a basis for vocation
- Confession a basis for freedom and unity
- Confirmation before communion

### **Richard Osmer "Confirmation"**

- in the early church, preparation for baptism is **catechumenal** – about formation in Christian discipleship
- But the giving of the Spirit, signified by chrismation, is separated, hence in the Medieval period, confirmation itself becomes **sacramental**.
- In the Reformation it takes on a **catechetical** or instructional role, teaching the substance of the faith – creed and confessions – leading to public confession of faith.

### **Craig's Research** - late 1990s

- Churches emphasising confirmation for younger teenagers as a last chance to convince them to be part of the church. Low retention rates.
- Move from doctrinal teaching and assent to developmental, personal faith exploration.
- Moving from short, class experience to longer, life experience
- Discipleship rather than doctrine

### **Richard Osmer**

- We assign to the confirmation process a body of learning that should already have been part of people's discipleship journey. Why is that?
- The more that people are engaged in lifelong faith formation, the less we need to try to cover everything in a short course. Rather it is about affirming where we are 'at' now in our journey.
- The less that people have been engaged in lifelong faith formation, the more we might need to offer a longer experience of discipleship formation around confirmation.

### **1980s to now**

Work related to *Uniting in Worship 2* and *The Belonging Kit*

- Confirmation is not separate from baptism
- Confirmation has two meanings: the Church confirms God's promises declared in baptism, and we affirm our willingness to live by that faith
- Confirmation is a reaffirmation of baptism
- Reaffirmation of baptism should take place repeatedly
- Reaffirmation can involve the whole congregation or individuals
- Reaffirmation can include water
- Confirmation is still linked to institutional membership (2015 Assembly)
- Recovery of the catechumenate - *Becoming Disciples*
- An annual invitation and process culminating at Easter

What does this mean?

- Confirmation should not be the first or last opportunity for people to reaffirm their baptism publicly.
- Confirmation can be seen as one step in the lifelong journey of becoming Christian.
- Confirmation may represent a particular decision of "owning" the faith of baptism or it may not.
- Neither confirmation nor baptism are about correct belief.
- Both baptism and confirmation are about receiving new life and seeking to follow Christ.
- Both baptism and confirmation are about celebrating the gift of the Spirit
- Both baptism and confirmation are about celebrating the gift of Christian community

Baptism and Confirmation Service are one.

### **BELONGING, BELIEVING, BEHAVING**

Some of the more recent discussion in faith formation has talked about three emphases

- *Belonging, Believing and Behaving*

**Belonging** - our hope is that people will grow to know that they belong to God and they belong to God's people. The way that we grow in belonging is by... belonging. You can't fake welcome, acceptance, inclusion etc in the long term.

### **Faith is caught, not taught**

But more importantly - most of us belong before we believe. John Westerhoff famously said that *faith is caught, not taught*. We are formed in faith by participation in the body of Christ, and this is grounded not in repetition but in relationships. We know the love of God through the love of others.

**The dynamic of growing in faith is primarily relational, not ideological** (Charles Foster)

So if I want people to grow in lifelong faith then as a leader one of my primary aims is to help build deep, honest, accepting, positive relationships for people within the body of Christ. For young people, or people who are new to the church, these relationships probably don't yet exist across generations.

My first role as leader is not as teacher but as host and facilitator for relationship-building. A short series of discussions about beliefs with the minister probably won't do a lot to build relationships with the whole church. My hope is for people to love the

church with all its faults.

So preparation for baptism and confirmation requires mentors and it is a perfect opportunity to introduce people to the faithfulness of people in your congregation. People won't stay connected if they don't feel they belong.

## **BELIEVING**

**Believing** is not simply about doctrine, nor is it simply about saying "yes" to the Creeds. The phrase "faith with understanding" (based on Anselm's *faith seeking understanding*) is a reminder that there is a connection between our cognitive faith and our affective faith (head and heart). In fact the word "Creed" comes from the Latin *credo* which means "I pledge my heart" or "I give my allegiance" (Sarah Little, *To Set One's Heart*).

There are a few important things here

- Christian faith has a tradition (and we sit within that tradition both ecumenically and as protestants)
- Christian faith is also for today and it is contextual - the Scriptures are read and interpreted in our time and place
- Our personal beliefs and understandings develop and change over time. We never 'arrive' and are always growing in our understanding. At the same time, Christian belief is not 'anything goes' - Scripture and tradition.

So I think we're doing four things

- exposing people to some core Christian beliefs, not to test them, but to invite their allegiance
- we're doing this in a way that recognises that we're on a lifelong journey of faith and belief and that our assent is only ever based on our maturity at that time
- we are modelling something that Christians should be doing all the time - studying the sources of our tradition both prayerfully and critically
- we're recognising that baptism isn't a reward to correct belief - it is a sign of the gift of faith

## **BEHAVING**

**Behaving** is about discipleship being learned as it is lived. We act our way into new ways of thinking, not vice versa. For the early church, following Jesus was a "Way" and a "Life" with a particular shape. You can't teach people to live as Christians in four or six weeks. However, you can introduce them to some core faith **practices** and invite them to practice them more intentionally and regularly. Of course, the longer we do this, the more these practices are likely to change us.

Christian practices are personal and community, they are inward and outward, they are in daily life and not just in church life.

Charles Foster - **Developmental, Discovery** and **Practice** learning

**Developing a Rule of Life** - US Episcopalians with young adults

Preparation for baptism and confirmation can be a way to explore how we live as Christians

- why do we pray and read the Scripture, and when and how?
- what does participation in regular worship and sacraments look like?
- why and how to people share their gifts in ministry and service?
- why do people give of their resources and money and how does the church use it?
- how do we serve people in our local community and wider?

**BELIEVING, BELONGING, BEHAVING** are all aspects of intentional faith formation and education

### **EXPLORING A THEME**

Three tracks

1. *Belonging*: How is this expressed in Christian beliefs and experience
2. *Believing*: How is this expressed in Christian community?
3. *Behaving*: How is this expressed in Christian discipleship?

### **PLANNING A SESSION**

- God's Story - Scripture and Christian tradition
- Our Story - the Church and the world
- My Story - my personal beliefs, attitudes, practices

### **Example - WHO IS THE HOLY SPIRIT?**

- God's Story - Bible, Tradition, Beliefs
- Our Story - Church, world
- My Story - My beliefs, attitudes, faith, life

## HANDOUT - PLANNING TEMPLATE (EMPTY)

<b>BELIEVING</b>	<b><i>God's Story</i></b>	<b><i>Our Story</i></b>	<b><i>My Story</i></b>	<b>BELONGING</b>	<b>BEHAVING</b>
<b>God</b>					
<b>Jesus</b>					
<b>Holy Spirit</b>					
<b>Church</b>					
<b>Discipleship</b>					
<b>World</b>					

## HANDOUT - PLANNING TEMPLATE (FILLED)

<b>BELIEVING</b>	<b><i>God's Story</i></b>	<b><i>Our Story</i></b>	<b><i>My Story</i></b>	<b>BELONGING</b>	<b>BEHAVING</b>
<b>God</b>	Bible - names & attributes of God	Video "Our Faith" or "Re:form"	Experiences of God Questions about God	Faith sharing in baptism / confirmation group	Engaging in faith conversations
<b>Jesus</b>	Compare Jesus' movies	Creeds	How have your beliefs and experiences changed?	Conversation with mentors	Engaging in faith conversations
<b>Holy Spirit</b>	Video - Spirit and Pentecost	Visit another church together	Fruit and gifts of the Spirit	Church visit Group affirmation	Discernment and affirmation
<b>Church</b>	Biblical images of church - Acts 2	Video interviews with church members	Action-reflection experience in church's life	Interview church members	Experience a church activity or ministry
<b>Discipleship</b>	"Everyday saints" movie	Examining Christian practices	Explore Christian practices for 4 weeks	Practices with mentors	Do a practice
<b>World</b>	BIG Questions about our world	Video about the church and mission	Choosing a mission project to support	Connect with mission partners or agencies	Choose a way to engage in mission



## **THREE DESIGNS**

Being with a getting to know you session with mentors.

End with a session about baptism and confirmation.

### **Six to Eight weeks**

- Explore Christian beliefs
- Mentor conversations about discipleship

### **Three months**

- Explore Christian beliefs
- Mentor conversations about discipleship
- Engage in discipleship practices

### **Twelve months**

- Explore Christian beliefs
- Mentor conversations about discipleship
- Engage in discipleship practices
- Engage in mission / service experiences

## VIDEO RESOURCES

### UNITING CHURCH IN AUSTRALIA

#### UCA Assembly Vimeo Channel

<https://vimeo.com/unitingchurch>

#### ***Our Faith - We Are the Uniting Church*** video Series

<https://vimeo.com/showcase/7411358>

<https://vimeo.com/showcase/6167719>

#### ***Our Story - We Are the Uniting Church*** video Series

<https://vimeo.com/showcase/4171225>

### UNITED METHODIST CHURCH, USA

#### Amplify Media

<https://amplifymedia.com/>

[Search on "confirmation"]

#### ***Confirm Series***

<https://my.amplifymedia.com/amplify/video/unitedmethodistpublishinghouse/23051-confirm/23054-confirm/61034-unit-1-introduction-our-journey>

#### ***Affirm Series***

<https://my.amplifymedia.com/amplify/video/unitedmethodistpublishinghouse/29646-affirm/29649-sessions/112812-affirm-session-1-the-faith-journey>

### CHUCK KNOWS CHURCH

<https://www.youtube.com/@ChuckKnowsChurch/videos>

### SPARKHOUSE

<https://www.wearesparkhouse.org/>

#### ***Re:Form***

<https://www.wearesparkhouse.org/store/category/286821/Re-form>

#### ***Animate***

<https://www.wearesparkhouse.org/store/category/286832/Animate>

#### **Sparkhouse Digital**

<https://sparkhousedigital.org/>

#### **Youtube**

<https://www.youtube.com/@wearesparkhouse>

<https://www.youtube.com/@wearesparkhouse/search?query=re%3Aform>

## PRINT RESOURCES

**Dear Kim** by Bill Loader

<https://www.billloader.com/DearKim.htm>

**The Apostles' Creed** by Ben Myers

<https://lexhampress.com/product/147146/the-apostles-creed-a-guide-to-the-ancient-catechism>

**The Belonging Kit** - UCA Assembly

<https://illuminate.recollect.net.au/nodes/view/19803?keywords=belonging+kit&type=all&highlights=WyJiZWxvbmdpbmciLCJraXQiXQ%3D%3D&lsk=8a9fd759d055dc644d22088f893031f1>

**Re:Form**

<https://www.wearesparkhouse.org/store/category/286821/Re-form>

**Animate**

<https://www.wearesparkhouse.org/store/category/286832/Animate>

**Making Disciples** by Will Willimon (United Methodist Church USA)

- <https://www.cokesbury.com/search?q=making+disciples&pagenumber=1>

**Being Disciples** by Rowan Williams

<https://spckpublishing.co.uk/being-disciples>

**Being Christian** by Rowan Williams

<https://spckpublishing.co.uk/being-christian>

**Being Human** by Rowan Williams

<https://spckpublishing.co.uk/being-human>