

Confess

Introduction

“Do you confess Jesus Christ as your Savior, put your whole trust in his grace, and promise to serve him as your Lord in union with the church, which Christ has opened to people of all ages, nations, and races?”

Confessing often makes people nervous. To confess is to openly embrace and associate with something we hold to be true. When we confess a belief or an allegiance, we reveal something important about ourselves and invite others to hold us accountable. Our confessions may range from trivial to life changing: We confess to liking a color or a musical artist; we confess opposition to certain political practices; we confess an affinity for a sports team. In all of these cases, confessing removes from us the opportunity to say, “Well, I never actually said. . . .”

Our society puts a premium on our giving and keeping our word. In criminal justice, confessing to a crime closes a case. When a criminal confesses, no further investigation is necessary. In journalism, reporters are trained to gather information from individuals through careful questioning, eliciting confessions through conversation. Confession indicates a deep commitment to a belief, a truth, or a way of life.

a positive and proactive confession

Within the “Renunciation of Sin and Profession of Faith” portion of “Baptismal Covenant I” (page 34 of *The United Methodist Hymnal*)—the first vows in the confirmation service, following the introduction and “Presentation of Candidates”—we find a call to confession. This service does not ask those being confirmed to confess their sins; rather it asks them to repent of their sins. The confession is positive and proactive: “Do you confess Jesus Christ as your Savior, put your whole trust in his grace, and promise to serve him as your Lord, in union with the church which Christ has opened to people of all ages, nations, and races?”

With difficulty, we must accept that the simple words “I do” are capable of containing our answer to this question: to proclaim Jesus Christ as God and Savior; to trust his grace to draw us toward Christian perfection; to join with all believers—regardless of age, nation, or race—in service to God.



HAVING REJECTED AND ACCEPTED, WE CAN NOW CONFESS

This confession is the culmination of our previous rejection of wickedness, evil, and sin and of acceptance of God's power to resist the same. Having repented of sin and accepted God's freedom, those taking these vows can confess Christ and their reliance on God's grace and promise to join with others in doing the work of God's kingdom. The final phrase in this vow "people of all ages, nations, and races" echoes Paul's teaching in Galatians 3:26-29:

For in Christ Jesus you are all children of God through faith. As many of you as were baptized into Christ have clothed yourselves with Christ. There is no longer Jew or Greek, there is no longer slave or free, there is no longer male and female; for all of you are one in Christ Jesus. And if you belong to Christ, then you are Abraham's offspring, heirs according to the promise.

This session will help you guide the youth as they confess Christ as Savior, learn to trust in his grace, promise to serve him as Lord, and cooperate in union with the church that surrounds them. The power of our given word is substantial. As we confess Christ with our mouths, may we also learn to confess him with our lives.



Supplies and Preparation

Basic Supplies

<input type="checkbox"/> Bibles of various translations <input type="checkbox"/> markerboard or large sheets of paper <input type="checkbox"/> markers <input type="checkbox"/> pens or pencils	<input type="checkbox"/> clear tape and/or glue <input type="checkbox"/> masking tape <input type="checkbox"/> index cards or paper cut about the same size (3-by-5 or 4-by-6) <input type="checkbox"/> sheets of posterboard	<input type="checkbox"/> paper (Use paper that has already been used on one side as much as possible, depending on the activity.) <input type="checkbox"/> scissors
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Activity

preparation

Other Supplies

WHAT?

Opening Ritual	Have on hand supplies for the youth to add fruit to the vine.	<input type="checkbox"/> vine from previous sessions <input type="checkbox"/> vine fruit (1 for each student) <input type="checkbox"/> copies of <i>The United Methodist Hymnal</i>
Signed, Sealed, Delivered		
The Last Thing You Expected	Prepare posterboard strips with unusual facts about yourself.	<input type="checkbox"/> prepared posterboard strips

SO WHAT? PART 1

Trust: The One Who Knows	Optional: Make copies of the "Confirmation Vows" handout, from the website.	<input type="checkbox"/> copies of <i>The United Methodist Hymnal</i> or of the "Confirmation Vows" worksheet
Trust: Simple Math	Prepare posterboard or construction paper as described in the "Preparation" in the margin next to the activity.	<input type="checkbox"/> sheets of posterboard or construction paper prepared according to the instructions
Promise: Pinkie Swears		
Promise: Real Promises		

SO WHAT? PART 2

Unity: Closer Than a Brother		
Unity: Put Me in, Coach	Gather items specific to your congregation, showing its connectedness to other UM congregations.	<input type="checkbox"/> 3 to 5 kickballs or similarly sized balls

NOW WHAT?

Closing Ritual	Write the benediction, "John Wesley's Rule," on a markerboard; or print out the poster from the website.	
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What ?

Supplies

- vine from previous sessions
- vine fruit (1 for each student)
- copies of *The United Methodist Hymnal*

Preparation: Have on hand supplies for the youth to add fruit to the vine.

Note: Take time before you get started to talk with the confirmands about what they read and wrote in the “Accept” section of their CREDO STUDENT JOURNAL.

Option: Instead of asking the youth about the word *confession*, write it on a markerboard. Invite the youth to write on the board some words, phrases, and images that the word brings to mind.

Supplies

- paper
- pens or pencils

Preparation: Do this activity yourself. Be prepared to read to the confirmands the confession that you write.



OPENING RITUAL

(10 minutes)

As the confirmands arrive, give each of them a cutout of a piece of fruit. Invite the confirmands to reflect on the previous session and to write on their fruit something they learned or experienced during that session. Ask the confirmands to affix their fruit to the vine. Remind them that these fruit represent ways that we, as Christians and United Methodists, live in response to God’s grace.

When all of the confirmands have arrived, invite each person to talk briefly about what he or she wrote on his or her piece of fruit. (You might also ask why he or she attached the fruit to a particular branch or near a particular leaf.) Then hand out copies of *The United Methodist Hymnal*, and ask the confirmands to turn to the “Affirmation From 1 Corinthians 15:1-6 and Colossians 1:15-20” (888). Invite a volunteer to read the Leader part. Everyone else should read the part of the People.

SIGNED, SEALED, DELIVERED

(15–20 minutes)

Begin by asking the confirmands:

- ✦ What comes to mind when you hear the word *confession*?

Say: “Often people associate the word *confession* with guilt, apology, or penitence. And honestly admitting our mistakes *is* an act of confession. But confession is much more than just telling people that we messed up.”

Hand out paper.

Say: “Imagine that you have been arrested because of your faith, and you have decided to write a full confession of your ‘crime.’ As clearly as possible, write what you believe to be true about your faith and your relationship with God. When you have finished, sign your name to your confession.”

Read aloud your confession as an example.

Be patient with the youth during this exercise. This may well be the first effort by some of them to express their faith in words, and some of them might struggle. Some youth might not be ready to write out such a confession. Be clear that this is a “no wrong answers” activity. It is not a trap or an attempt to coax them into saying things that they do not believe or understand. The purpose of the activity is merely to help the confirmands gauge where their relationship with God stands.

Give the confirmands plenty of time to write their confessions. If some of them would like to volunteer to read aloud what they have written, invite them to do so.

Then ask:

- ✦ How difficult was it to put your beliefs into words?
- ✦ Before you did this activity, how much thought had you given to what you believe and why?
- ✦ Did you come to any new realizations about your faith while writing your confession? (Invite confirmands to explain these realizations if they feel comfortable doing so.)

THE LAST THING YOU EXPECTED

(10–15 minutes)

Tell the group the 5 things about yourself that you prepared beforehand. (See the note in the margin.) Use masking tape to post the strips on the wall. Tell the youth to rank these statements in order from easiest to believe to most difficult (with the easiest to believe at the top).

Give them plenty of time to work, then ask:

- ✦ How did you decide which statements were most and least believable?

Reveal which of the statements are true. (*all of them*)

- ✦ Did any of these truths about me surprise you?

Then ask a volunteer to read aloud Acts 9:17–22, Saul's initial reception by other Christians.

Ask:

- ✦ If Saul had greeted the Christians in Damascus with the statements below, how, do you think, would the Christians in Damascus have ranked his statements in order of believability?
 - My name is Saul.
 - I am from Tarsus.
 - On my way here, I had a vision of the risen Christ.
 - I have renounced my former ways and become a Christian.
 - I am here to proclaim the gospel of Christ.
- ✦ How, do you think, did Saul's faith change so radically, from his being a persecutor of Christians to becoming a preacher of the gospel?
- ✦ When have you been surprised to learn about someone else's faith? Why were you surprised?

SUPPLIES

- posterboard strips on which you have written unusual facts about yourself (See "Preparation," below.)
- masking tape

preparation: Identify 5 things that are true about you. One to 4 of them should surprise the youth (such as "I am a former ballet champ," "I co-wrote the song 'Pac-Man Fever,'" "I was the 1988 Tiddlywinks World Champion"). Write each of these statements in large letters on posterboard. Then cut the posterboard into 5 strips so that each fact is on a separate strip.



SO WHAT? PAr t 1

Supplies

- Bibles
- copies of *The United Methodist Hymnal* or of the “Confirmation Vows” worksheet

Preparation: Make copies of the “Confirmation Vows” handout, from the website. Think about examples from your own life about what kinds of things you would or would not trust with your most-trusted person. Make these general examples.

TRUST: THE ONE WHO KNOWS

(10–15 minutes)

Hand out hymnals or the “Confirmation Vows” worksheet. Ask a volunteer to read aloud the third vow (below and the third non-bold paragraph on page 34 of the hymnal):

Do you confess Jesus Christ as your Savior,
put your whole trust in his grace,
and promise to serve him as your Lord,
in union with the church which Christ has opened
to people of all ages, nations, and races?

Say: “This vow is a confession. When we take this vow, we confess that Jesus Christ is our Savior, that we trust in his grace, and that we will join with other Christians to serve Christ. Let’s look at each part of this vow, starting with the word *trust*.”

Ask:

- ✦ What does it mean to trust someone?
- ✦ How do you decide how much you will trust someone?

Ask the confirmands to spend a few moments thinking about the people they trust most. Ask a volunteer to describe whom he or she trusts most and to tell why. Were there specific actions that made a certain person trustworthy?

Then ask the youth to narrow their list of trustworthy people to a single person.

Ask:

- ✦ Who is the one person you trust more than anyone else? (The confirmands need not tell the name of the person whom they trust more than any other person.)
- ✦ Is there anything with which you would not trust the person you identified? (If the youth are reluctant to talk about what they will or will not trust this person with, spark conversation with examples from your own experience.)

Then ask a volunteer to read aloud Proverbs 3:5-6. Ask:

- ✦ How is putting trust in God similar to and different from trusting another person?
- ✦ How much do you trust God with the day-to-day details of your life?
- ✦ What, if anything, keeps you from fully trusting God with every aspect of your life?



TRUST: SIMPLE MATH

(15–20 minutes)

Set out the pieces of posterboard or construction paper on the floor. Ask the confirmands to work together to form an equation. When they have finished, ask them to explain their equation. Allow for creativity, but try not to let things get too silly. Eventually guide them to the equation “ME + GRACE = PERFECTION in GOD.”

Say: “As United Methodists, we strive for Christian perfection—loving God with our whole hearts, loving our neighbors as ourselves, and making every effort to live a righteous and holy life. But we don’t achieve perfection on our own. As our confirmation vows say, we put our ‘whole trust’ in God’s grace.”

Remind the confirmands of what they learned about God’s grace in the “Way of Salvation” session in the “Confirm Your Faith” unit.

Refer to the equation they made. Ask:

- ✦ What might be wrong with trying to reduce our experience of God’s grace to a simple math equation?

Ask a volunteer to read aloud Ephesians 2:8-10.

Say: “Paul, who wrote this letter to the Ephesians, makes it very clear that we cannot achieve salvation or perfection on our own. So confessing Jesus Christ as our Savior and putting our ‘whole trust in his grace’ go hand in hand.”

Ask:

- ✦ According to this passage from Ephesians, how will we respond to God’s grace? (*by doing “good works”*)

PROMISE: PINKIE SWEARS

(15 minutes)

Ask the confirmands to stand in a circle. The youth will be doing a “pinkie promise” exercise, linking pinkie fingers in an outward expression of agreement or covenant. As you read a series of statements, one by one, each youth should find someone within the circle with whom he or she is willing to “pinkie promise.” The activity should follow this form:

You read the statement: “I will call you to say, ‘Hey,’ every day for a week.”

Have the youth pair up. One person in each pair will repeat the statement. Then the second person in each pair will repeat the statement. After each has voiced the promise, the two will say together, “Pinkie promise?” If both agree, they will each extend the pinkie finger on their right hands, link pinkies, and shake them in agreement. The confirmands should find a different partner each time you read a statement.

SUPPLIES

- Bibles
- sheets of posterboard or construction paper prepared according to the instructions below

PREPARATION: Write the following mathematical equation onto separate pieces of posterboard or construction paper: ME + GRACE = PERFECTION in GOD. (“ME” should be on one piece; “+” on a second; “GRACE” on a third; “=” on a fourth; and “PERFECTION in GOD” on a fifth.) To make things more interesting, you might choose to add more mathematical symbols, such as “-” or “x” or “÷” or “<” or “>.”

NOTE: If possible, use posterboard or construction paper that has already been used on one side.

SUPPLIES

- Bibles



Following the form above, read these statements as the confirmands form pairs and make pinkie promises.

- ✦ I promise to never steal your shoes.
- ✦ I promise to not toilet-paper your house this year.
- ✦ I promise to pray for you all week.
- ✦ I promise to save you a seat in [Sunday school, youth fellowship, or worship] next week.

At the conclusion of the exercise, ask:

- ✦ Were these difficult promises to make? Why, or why not?
- ✦ Have you ever had to make a truly difficult promise? (Allow volunteers to name such promises, but be clear that they should not betray anyone's trust.)

Ask a volunteer to read aloud Mark 14:29-31. Then ask:

- ✦ What did Peter promise Jesus? Do you think that this was a difficult promise?
- ✦ Was he able to keep his promise? (See Mark 14:66-72.)

Have another volunteer read aloud John 21:13-17. Then ask:

- ✦ How does Jesus treat Peter in this passage, despite the fact that Peter had broken his promise?

Say: "As we promise to serve God with our lives, we must remember that God's grace works to restore us even when we stumble."

PROMISE: REAL PROMISES

(15 minutes)

Work with the confirmands to compile a list of the most ridiculous promises that they can remember making. Write these on a markerboard. Encourage the youth to think of promises from early childhood, if they can recall them, such as, "I'll clean my room every day for a year if we can go to the amusement park," or "If you get me this present for Christmas, I won't ask for any presents for my birthday or for next Christmas," or the classic "I'll be your best friend for life."

When you have a good-size list, have the confirmands vote for the best promises categories such as *most absurd*, *easiest to fulfill*, *most likely to be a complete bluff*, *probably broken*, and other categories that the confirmands come up with.

Then ask:

- ✦ What does it mean to promise to serve God as your Lord?
- ✦ Whom do you know who serves God with his or her whole life? How do you know that is true?
- ✦ What is challenging about being faithful to a promise to serve God?

supplies

- Bible
- markerboard
- marker



Have volunteers read aloud Ruth 1:1-18. Ask:

- ✦ How would you describe Ruth's level of dedication to Naomi?
- ✦ How can you show that same level of dedication to God?

SO WHAT? PAr t 2

UNITY: CLOSER THAN A BROTHER

(10-15 minutes)

Ask the confirmands to stand in as small of a circle as they can manage. This might involve some disorganized crowding, but a not-particularly-round circle is an acceptable result.

Ask:

- ✦ How did you go about getting into the circle?
- ✦ Was there any organization? Was anyone "in charge"?
- ✦ On a scale of 1 to 10, how successful would say you were in creating a circle?
- ✦ If all future circles were to be based on the quality of your circle, what would the future of circles look like?

Have the youth within the circle read aloud Acts 2:37-47, each reading a verse at a time until the entire passage has been read.

Ask:

- ✦ How organized does this "first circle" of the church seem?
- ✦ What does this "first circle" of the church look like?
- ✦ What sorts of things does this "first circle" of the church do? (*hold all things in common, teach and have fellowship, break bread, pray together*)
- ✦ Which of these things does our congregation still practice today?

Have the confirmands form a new circle. This time, instruct them to stand with their left hands outstretched to the middle of the circle, making a fist with their thumbs up (like a hitchhiker). Have them turn their left hands flat so that their thumbs are pointing to the right. Each person then should, with his or her left hand, grab onto the thumb of the person to his or her left and allow his or her left thumb to be grasped by the person on his or her right. The result will be a uniform circle of knuckles. The circle may still be imperfect, but a symmetry will have formed. While the confirmands are still in the circle, ask:

- ✦ How is this circle similar to or different from our previous circle? Does this circle feel more organized than our first circle?
- ✦ What are some big differences between the way the first "circle" of church happened in Acts and the way we "circle" for church today?

NOTE: If you choose to divide this session into two one-hour classes, break here.

SUPPLIES

- Bibles



SUPPLIES

- 3 to 5 kickballs or similarly sized balls

PREPARATION: Gather items specific to your congregation, showing its connectedness to other UM congregations.

Before class begins, tell one confirmand that he or she will be the “captain” of a game. Explain that, during the first stage of the game, his or her job will be to toss the ball across the room, even though there will be no one on the other side to catch it.

NOTE: Maps and information about annual conferences are available at www.umc.org. Additional materials are available at the website.

UNITY: PUT ME IN, COACH

(20 minutes)

With one kickball in hand, tell the youth that they are going to be playing a game. Assign a team captain (your previously selected and informed youth), and give the group about 60 seconds to come up with a team name. When they have their name, have all of the students move to one side of the room. Announce that they will be playing catch with another team on the other side of the room, then hand the ball to the captain.

On your signal, the captain should begin the game, even though there is no other team. Each time the captain throws the ball, return it to him or her and have the captain begin again.

After a few tries, ask:

- ✦ What’s missing?
- ✦ Is it any fun throwing the ball to no one?

Say: “When we play catch, we don’t really need an opponent, we need a teammate.” Instruct everyone to spread out.

Explain that, in catch, the main goal is to keep the ball off of the ground. Begin again, this time allowing the youth to toss the ball (gently) to one another. Add a ball. Then add another. Keep adding until all of the balls are in play. Continue until the youth drop one or two or until time dictates that you must move on.

Then ask:

- ✦ How did spreading out and playing cooperatively increase the number of balls we could keep in play?

Ask a volunteer to read aloud 1 Corinthians 12:12-27.

Say: “This Scripture emphasizes the importance of teamwork in the Christian faith. But this sort of cooperation involves more than just individuals working together as a congregation. It also involves congregations joining together to do God’s work.”

Discuss the connectional nature of The United Methodist Church. Explain how each congregation belongs to an annual conference, and tell the confirmands which annual conference your church belongs to.

Discuss jurisdictional conferences, central conferences, and general conferences and how lay and clergy delegates gather to elect bishops and vote on resolutions and legislation.

Talk about how each congregation pays apportionments, which support the ministries of the annual conference and the global church. Introduce the youth to some of the agencies, boards, and ministries of the church; and explain how congregations support and benefit from these ministries. (Examples follow.)



Explain that The United Methodist Church is a connectional denomination. While each congregation is unique and has different strengths, individual congregations do not stand alone. They are accountable to the global church; they join together with other congregations to do God's work; they support ministries in their community and around the world; they send delegates to conferences and volunteers to participate in denominational mission work; they benefit from and contribute to resources provided by denominational boards and agencies.

Examples of denominational boards, agencies, and ministries:

United Methodist Committee on Relief (UMCOR): UMCOR is a ministry of the General Board of Global Ministries devoted to responding to natural disasters, alleviating hunger and poverty, supporting refugees and immigrants, and supporting health initiatives in impoverished nations. It relies on apportionment money and the donations and hard work of individual United Methodists and congregations.

United Methodist Volunteers in Mission (VIM): VIM, another ministry of the General Board of Global Ministries, equips volunteers to serve in their communities, elsewhere in their home country, or elsewhere in the world. VIM provides a wide variety of volunteer opportunities to fit a volunteer's spiritual gifts and availability. VIM receives support from apportionment money and from congregations that commission members as volunteers.

United Methodist Publishing House (UMPH): UMPH—through Abingdon Press, its publishing arm—publishes a wide variety of books, Christian education resources, and leadership resources in print and digital formats. Cokesbury, its retail arm, offers churches an even wider array of books, United Methodist-specific curriculum materials, leadership resources, and church supplies. Many of the people responsible for writing and developing UMPH products serve as clergy, staff persons, and ministry volunteers in United Methodist congregations.

General Board of Discipleship (GBOD): GBOD is an agency devoted to Christian discipleship and spiritual formation in The United Methodist Church. It equips and trains leaders in the areas of worship, Christian education, evangelism, stewardship, and age-level ministries, among others.

The Upper Room: The Upper Room is a publishing ministry of the General Board of Discipleship that provides resources for spiritual formation. It is best known for *The Upper Room* magazine, a daily devotional magazine that is published in several languages and distributed throughout the world. Upper Room also publishes *Devo'Zine*, a devotional magazine for youth. Many United Methodists from several countries have contributed devotional readings to either *The Upper Room* or *Devo'Zine*.



United Methodist Communications (UMCom): UMCom, the church's media arm, is responsible for UMC.org (the denominational website) and the United Methodist News Service, which provides news stories, photos, and video news segments to assorted media outlets. UMC.org and the United Methodist News Service lift up the ministries of congregations and annual conferences throughout the United Methodist connection. Among other things, UMCom also produces television commercials for The United Methodist Church.

Ask:

- How does our connectional system help us “play ball” better?
- How does the fact that United Methodist congregations are different but related help us open our doors to more people?
- How does our congregation work cooperatively with other churches? How does our congregation participate in the ministries of the global United Methodist Church?

NOW WHAT?

CLOSING RITUAL

(10 minutes)

Gather the confirmands into a circle. Go around the circle and allow each person to offer a prayer thanking God for your time together and all that the group has learned and experienced and asking for God's guidance as you go forth.

Close this prayer time by saying aloud and in unison the benediction, John Wesley's Rule.

NOTE: Before you dismiss, instruct the confirmands to read, reflect on, and journal about the material in the “Confess” section of the CREDO STUDENT JOURNAL before your next session. Also encourage them to try to do the activities related to “Confess” on the confirmand website.

SPECIAL NOTE: Ask the youth to bring their student journal with them to the next class.

SUPPLIES

- markerboard
- marker

PREPARATION: Write the benediction, “John Wesley's Rule,” on a markerboard; or print out the poster from the website.

