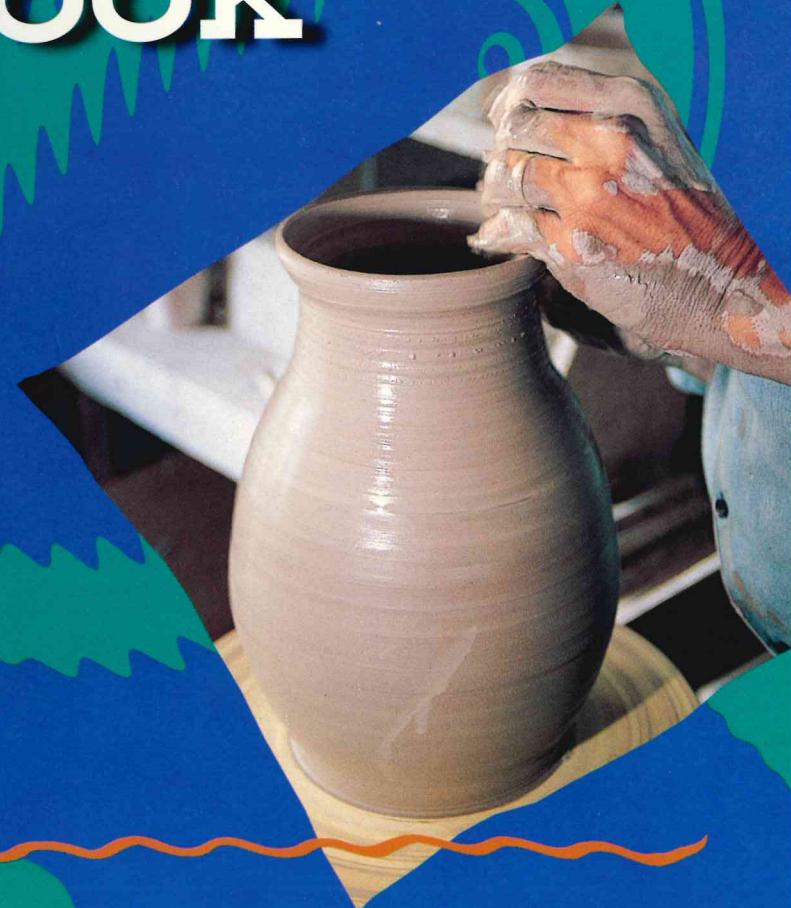


creative  confirmation

creative  confirmation




# Family Book



ISBN 0-8066-0037-3



**Augsburg Fortress**

Printed on 50% recycled paper  
(10% postconsumer fibers) 

15-5390

CON S

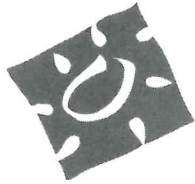
creative  confirmation

# Family Book

by Richard W. Swanson

Augsburg Fortress, Minneapolis





# Contents

<b>What is confirmation and why is it so important?</b> .....	3
<b>Table (and other places!) talk</b> .....	7
◆ Introduction .....	7
◆ Ideas for Bible reading .....	8
◆ Ideas for the vegetative state (Couch Potatoes, Inc.) .....	10
◆ If you are BIG fans .....	13
◆ "This will all be so much easier when you are old enough to get your license" .....	13
◆ Things to do while waiting .....	14
◆ Which brings us to family service projects .....	18
◆ Ideas for people who can no longer preview all the movies their teenagers see .....	19
◆ Ideas for people who know that teenagers want to have a job someday .....	23
◆ Ideas for when things go terribly wrong .....	24
◆ Ideas for when very frightening things happen .....	25
◆ An assortment of church seasonal ideas .....	28

## Creative Confirmation Series Family Book

Editors: Randi Griner and Tim Vinger  
 Designer: Connie Helgeson-Moen  
 Illustrator: Tim Nyberg

Photographs: © Robb Helfrick, front cover; Jeff Greenberg/AAA Stock Photos, back cover; Jim Whitmer Photography, pages 5, 11, 15; Skjold Photographs, 9; Gehman Photo Illustrations, 18; CLEO Freelance Photo, 25.

Scripture acknowledgments: Unless otherwise noted, scripture quotations are from New Revised Standard Version Bible, copyright 1989 Division of Christian Education of the National Council of the Churches of Christ in the United States of America. Used by permission.

Quotations from *Lutheran Book of Worship (LBW)* are copyright © 1978 *Lutheran Book of Worship*.

Copyright © 1994 Augsburg Fortress  
 May not be reproduced.

Manufactured in U.S.A.  
 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 0 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9

 Printed on 50% recycled paper  
 (10% postconsumer fibers).

## WHAT IS CONFIRMATION MINISTRY AND WHY IS IT SO IMPORTANT?

What is confirmation? Confirmation can be a nuisance, one more thing to try to fit in with volleyball, basketball, and guitar lessons. Confirmation can be a joy, a wonderful occasion for people at a fascinating age to meet with pastors and other adults and talk about things that matter. Confirmation can be a permanent resident of churchly emergency rooms, and has been pronounced dead so many times it should get a volume discount on obituaries. Confirmation is an ill-defined entity with enough names to fill a phone book, having been called, variously, "Affirmation of Baptism," "Confirmation," and "Consternation," as well as things that probably couldn't be printed here.

Confirmation has been understood as the stand-in for believer baptism. It has been understood to be unnecessary because of baptism. It has been moved earlier or later, been made shorter or longer, been designed as a stop-gap, catch-up, baling-wire-and-bubble-gum program for things people were supposed to know (but didn't), for things people were supposed to feel (but didn't), for things people were supposed to believe (but, being in seventh, eighth, or ninth grade, had no clear idea about in the first place).

And, confirmation is what it was meant to be: an effort created by church families for families to help strengthen, develop, and confirm the faith of their children. As such, it has provided, year after year, an occasion for families to look each other in the eye and talk about what it is that we really believe, what we really hope for, what we really try to accomplish. It is with this last, surprisingly hopeful, understanding of confirmation that this *Family Book* seeks to work. This book offers insight and ideas about ways to communicate together throughout the confirmation journey.

## Confirmation is: a mo(ve)ment from the future

Garrison Keillor presents confirmation in Lake Wobegon as the first occasion on which Lutheran children are allowed to drink coffee. He is right. Somewhere in the guts of confirmation is a celebration of the moment when the adult world moves to pull a child into the future.

This is rooted in a remembered culture that understood adult responsibilities to begin when children could legally leave school: ninth grade. From that moment on, the confirmed person, having finished the preliminary business of childhood, began the business of earning the right to be taken seriously as an adult.

Things haven't changed much. Think about it. Does adulthood arrive with a driver's license? Or one's first ride on a crosstown bus? Or do you need to pay rent or have a mortgage to be an adult? Does adulthood arrive when formal education is concluded? Perhaps, but that might occur at 18, or 20, or 22, or 30. Does it come with your first job, or with the first job you care about, or with the birth of children, or with marriage?

The answer to all these questions is yes/no, because in any given life, adulthood arrives in broken lots, by the basketful, not the carload. It is the same with confirmation.

## Confirmation is: a mo(ve)ment from the past

Confirmation is also a moment and movement from the past. The past, in this case, is a very specific past: it is your child's baptismal past, as is made clear by the church service that will celebrate this enterprise in which you are engaged.

*Lutheran Book of Worship* calls this service "Affirmation of Baptism." This is a good name, mostly because of the presence of the word *Baptism*. Everything in this process, everything in the celebration in church, everything in the aims of family and congregation has to do with Holy Baptism.



Listen to the stories adults tell at their teenagers' confirmation. They talk about what happened at the baptism: who cried, who slept, who spit up. Our teenagers think we tell these stories to embarrass them. They may be right. But there is something else going on. We are telling stories about a moment that was bigger and more important than we knew at the time.

At baptism, we thought we were joining our children to the faith and to the family that gave us life. It seemed simple enough. Things have gotten more complicated since then. Raising children has proved harder than we might have guessed. Living, working, managing, recovering—all have proved to be both surprisingly exciting and amazingly difficult. Believing, also, is more difficult for us than we might have guessed back when our children were baptized.

We tell baptism stories at confirmations partly because of the changes, the difficulties, the surprises. We tell the stories because of the way baptism holds our children as they approach a life that



is more complicated than they can guess on the day of confirmation. We tell baptism stories because they carry a promise from the past that gives us hope as we look to the future.

## Confirmation is: a mo(ve)ment from forever

Because confirmation pulls baptism back into the present, it also pulls in all the other people who have been baptized and have been surprised by the changes: parents and grandparents, as well as cousins, aunts, and uncles who live too far away to see you very often. It also pulls in what the book of Hebrews calls "so great a cloud of witnesses," those faithful people long dead who crowd around every moment, surrounding and supporting us.

It pulls in as well the great cloud of the future that is yet to be. Your child was baptized into the life and mission—and therefore into the future—of the church. Other people will believe because of the life and witness of your child. Confirmation is a moment when we remember and celebrate God's moving to pull your teenager into the life, the mission, and the future of the church.

## Confirmation is: a mo(ve)ment in real time

Along with the ideas, reasons, and hopes goes a real-time schedule. There will be events. There will be class sessions. There will be retreats. There will be meetings. Encourage your congregation to set a comprehensive schedule of these activities, and to make it available early on to the families involved. As busy as we all are, who could make it otherwise?

## TABLE (AND OTHER PLACES!) TALK

### Introduction

If confirmation is a mo(ve)ment during which you and your teenager talk about what matters—what you trust, what you hope for, what you work for—the question that occurs to anyone with a normal schedule is: During what free time are we going to start doing this confirmation activity when we hardly have time to do what we have to do now? Good question.



It may be that it will work best for your family to build a time together into your day, perhaps a half-hour in the evening that you will protect as a time to think about the moment and movement of confirmation. That is a good option, and one worth trying.

It may also be, however, that your family cannot find a space to build such a time together. If this is your situation, do not give up. You will have to be creative, clever, and even sneaky. The process of talking, thinking, praying, planning, and worshipping together is a central part of confirmation, too important to be let go without a fight.

Start with your family's daily choreography. Who gets up when? Who dashes out to catch which bus? Who drives whom where and when? Who is with whom, and when? What are the moments when just two of you are together (even in the car)? Who watches what on TV?

Then look at the ideas in this book. They are a mixed lot, meant to be suggestive rather than directive. Which of them look as if they might fit into your moments together? Be creative. The idea is to let the pattern of confirmation grow deep into your life together. If you can find ways to do that, this process will be strong and valuable for everyone.

## Ideas for Bible reading

*How you read the Bible together is as important as what you read. When you read, make sure that you read long enough passages so that what people are thinking about is not just a little untraceable snippet of Scripture. Give yourselves something big enough to be worth chewing on. The challenge will be to develop a pattern of reading together that opens the door to everyone's perceptions and shuts out no one.*

How might you do that? You might start by thinking of the Bible as the place to begin discussions rather than as the place to end them. Sometimes the readings will raise questions that perhaps create struggles. Martin Luther translated the Bible into the common language of his country's people so that *everyone* would be able to read and struggle with God's truths found in Scripture.





Reading and struggling with Scripture can happen during the confirmation experience in your family. This book offers some suggestions for reading the Bible together. You may wish to explore the Bible texts printed in the *Youth Journal* that accompanies the Creative Confirmation Series, or try using the texts used in worship on Sunday.


Finally, establish ground rules for your reading and interpreting. The first rule of reading together is: Acknowledge that if someone heard it, it's in there. Sometimes you will read a passage, listen to it together, and hear such different things you won't believe you were in the same room. It will be tempting to pronounce judgment on someone else's interpretation. Sometimes another interpretation may sound wrong. Reading and interpreting Scripture as a family requires a commitment to listen to each other and remain open to any additional questions about a text. It is okay to disagree. It is also okay to ask a pastor or teacher to help you better understand the passage.




## Ideas for the vegetative state (Couch Potatoes, Inc.)

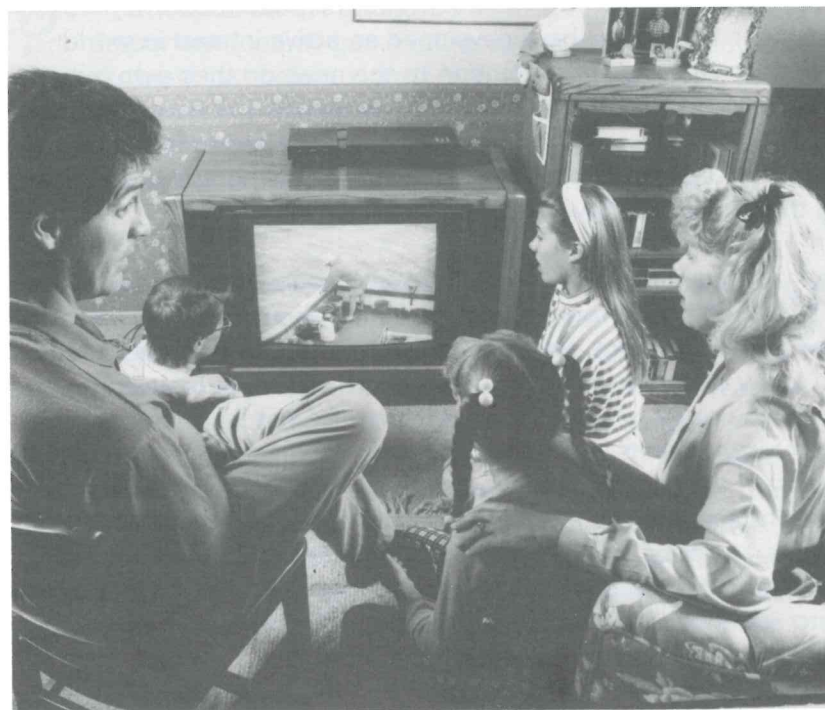
 **If you watch TV together (or even together separately), play Catechism Rummy:** Give points for the person who can make the most connections between Luther's Small Catechism and the show you just watched. Connections can be of any sort. There might be tensions in the show that are addressed in the catechism. There might be hopes in the show that are shared in the catechism. You might want to give extra points for finding connections that do not involve the Ten Commandments, since those connections are fairly easy. Look especially for connections that involve positive elements, for ways TV shows touch positive hopes and dreams that appear important in the Small Catechism.


 **If that were our family, what would we do?:** This is a simple exercise in active TV watching. (It is also an exercise in narrative criticism, for those who are interested in such things.) In the middle of watching the joys and disasters that dance through normal TV shows, ask what your family would do in such situations. Sounds simple, right? The interest and complexity comes with practice. Look for and try out alternative courses of action. Weigh the consequences of the various options. Use this exercise as an occasion for group daydreaming. Think of ways your principles, your hopes, your dreams, and your faith shape your responses.

 **Imagine what happens next:** TV shows break at tense points for commercials about toothpaste and laxative. Use these breaks to invent possible futures for the story that has been suspended. Encourage wild creativity. We imagine the future out of our hopes and dreams, out of the things we trust and work for. This exercise allows for reflection on what dreams are worth dreaming, and allows for family practice at dreaming big enough dreams.

 **What story is this like?:** When you think about it, there is a limited number of stories that we can tell. Because that is true, we tend to tell the same story over and over again. This is


especially true on TV. There may only have been three shows since "I Love Lucy." When you watch TV together, make guesses about what other stories are the same as the one being told on the screen. Include stories of all types. Give extra attention to biblical stories that cover the same ground. (Genesis, Exodus, Joshua, Judges, Ruth, 1 and 2 Samuel, and 1 and 2 Kings are a good place to go to find stories that also show up on TV. No kidding.)





 **But you used to love this show:** You've run into it. Shows that your teenager used to watch suddenly become BORING, sometimes over night. No one knows why. You might use such moments as an occasion to talk about the dimly remembered past. Your teenager's childhood will shape and create responses to life, faith, and the world, even when she or he has largely forgotten those earlier times. Some days it will seem as if your teenager remembers none of the past at all. Look for connections to this dim past. Talk about hopes and dreams that went with that time. Recognize that you and your teenager may well remember these times differently. Odds are, no one is right. In fact, perspectives and time



may have created some valuable differences. Don't use this as an occasion to forcibly harmonize your family memories of childhood. Instead, use it to hear things about what it is like to be a kid, and what it is like to have a kid.


 **If you watch the news together (or separately):** Headline prayers work in any situation where both you and your teenager watch the news (or read the paper), but they work best when teenagers have developed an active interest in world events so that they pay attention to the news on their own initiative. Talk to each other about the news reports you have seen. Note those that seem most important to each person in the conversation. Develop a practice of praying for the people and events in the stories that have attracted your interest.


 **I need to know more:** This won't sound like part of a confirmation program until you think about it. As you listen to the news, encourage everyone to listen for things that they need to know more about. Having identified these areas, brainstorm ways you could go about learning more. Do not let this be an occasion for the adults in the room to remind the teenagers of how ignorant they are because they are only kids. That will kill this exercise. Instead, use this as an occasion for everyone, especially the adults, to notice the things that are important and worth knowing more about. How does this fit into confirmation? Part of moving into adulthood involves joining the club of adults who have realized that they don't know everything after all.

 **Who thought this was news, anyhow?:** This is an exercise in cultural resistance. In a culture that feeds us selected bits of predigested scandal, violence, and information, all dispensed in carefully measured sound-bites, it may be a helpful thing to encourage a little suspicion about what we are being fed. Especially if you watch the news together, encourage people to listen for news items that are not news, just scandal or cheap journalism. When such an item has been detected, encourage the person who smells something rotten to wonder aloud who it was that thought this


junk was news, anyhow. This might annoy others if you ever watch the news at someone else's house, but think about it: When was the last time you did that?

## If you are BIG fans . . .

 **The sermon on the gridiron:** The next time you watch an important football game (other sports work, too, but football works best), just before kickoff read the Sermon on the Mount (Matthew chapters 5–7) together. As you watch the game, look, listen, and feel for ways the game flows with and against the Sermon on the Mount. (Hint: the Beatitudes create all manner of tension.)

 **Us and them in team sports and religion:** While watching a team sport, notice the ways the two sides treat each other. For instance, notice that groups of the most vocal fans tend to sit in the midst of other supporters of their team. Notice the reaction of fans, players, and commentators to an injury of a member of their own team. Compare the reaction when the injury happens to a member of the other team. Notice the use of color, music, clothing, ceremony—all the things that mark the boundary between "us" and "them." Think together about how this connects to the relationship between groups of Christians, and between Christians and members of other religions.

## "This will all be so much easier when you are old enough to get your license"

 **Things to do on the way to early-morning (fill-in-the-blank) practice:** The key here is "early morning." For much of the year it is probably too dark to read in the car. For much of the population it will be too early to do much talking anyway. Keep it simple.

If your confirmation program involves memory work, perhaps this is a time when you could try together to remember the sec-



tions of the catechism or other material that is to be memorized. In the dark, there will be no sneaking of peeks. This will require that you, as parent, also be engaged in memory work, but that in itself might be a helpful addition to your teenager's confirmation process.

You might also use the time to try together to remember bits of the service or sermon from the past Sunday. This will take some practice but might be useful.

Some families also find that this time is a most productive time to talk about things their teenagers are excited about, working on, or hoping for. It all depends on what sort of conversation comes easiest in the morning.

An interesting possibility might be to try a condensed version of "Responsive Prayer 1" from *Lutheran Book of Worship* (pages 161-163) during your early morning drive. You might, for instance, begin by praying the Lord's Prayer together. Next say the Apostles' Creed. You might conclude by praying Luther's morning prayer (*LBW*, page 163):

We give thanks to you, heavenly Father, through Jesus Christ your dear Son, that you have protected us through the night from all danger and harm. We ask you to preserve and keep us, this day also, from all sin and evil, that in all our thoughts, words, and deeds we may serve and please you. Into your hands we commend our bodies and souls and all that is ours. Let your holy angels have charge of us, that the wicked one have no power over us. Amen.

The dark of early morning would require memorizing this prayer together, but it is a good one and would be worth the effort.

## Things to do while waiting

It is amazing how much time we spend waiting: in the parking lot for another sibling to finish (fill-in-the-blank) practice; in line at the grocery store; in a drive-up fast food line; at the doctor or dentist office; and so forth.

Involve the whole family in the confirmation process during times of waiting, especially if there are younger siblings. Older siblings might complicate the process, but you already know how your kids treat each other.



**Prayers for times of waiting:** Waiting prayers of all sorts are appropriate. For starters, check out the following Prayers of the Day for the Sundays of Advent from *Lutheran Book of Worship* (*LBW*, pages 13-41):

### First Sunday in Advent

Stir up your power, O Lord, and come. Protect us by your strength and save us from the threatening dangers of our sins, for you live and reign with the Father and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever. Amen.

### Second Sunday in Advent

Stir up our hearts, O Lord, to prepare the way for your only Son. By his coming give us strength in our conflicts and shed light on our path through the darkness of this world; through your Son,




Jesus Christ our Lord, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever. Amen.


### Third Sunday in Advent


Lord, hear our prayers and come to us, bringing light into the darkness of our hearts; for you live and reign with the Father and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever. Amen.


### Fourth Sunday in Advent

Stir up your power, O Lord, and come. Take away the hindrance of our sins and make us ready for the celebration of your birth, that we may receive you in joy and serve you always; for you live and reign with the Father and the Holy Spirit, now and forever. Amen.


 **Work while you whistle:** Confirmation assignments can be completed during times of waiting. The trick will be to keep the books you need handy for use during these times and still have them available when it's time to go to class.

 **Confirmation conversations:** Make a list of confirmation-related topics that will be important to talk to each other about. Do this at home, but keep the list in a place where it will be easy to pull out for conversation during long waits. Make sure that both parents and youth get to contribute to the list. Include topics related to being Christian in a complicated world, becoming an adult, and ways to help and support other people. Update this list frequently.

 **Hey, God, why . . . :** List 10 questions somebody should ask God. Make frequent additions and modifications to this "Top 10" list. Encourage wild and important questions. Keep the boundaries far out.


 **"And God saw that it was good":** List 10 things that happened at school, or work, or home that offer evidence that this is a good world, created by God. Evidence might include many different sorts of things. Things that work right, or even elegantly, might be taken to be evidence that God created a good and workable world. Things that are, in themselves, deeply beautiful might also be such evidence. Skills and strengths that people bring to

their work and their relationships also point to a competent creator. It is so easy to see things that are broken, things that go wrong. It is important to pay close attention to the created goodness of the world, and to put some effort into this practice.

 **What can we do to take care of it?:** List 10 things that are evidence that the world does not work the way God created it to work. The concern in the previous exercise about the ease with which we see things that are broken is important. Don't let this become an exercise in bashing the world. There's enough of that already. Instead, use this exercise to talk about what it will take to preserve, repair, and redeem God's creation, given all the things that are broken.

Some things that might emerge are patterns of unfair treatment of people at work, school, or home. Some early confirmation-age people are especially sensitive to issues of fairness. This might provide an occasion to set these concerns in the context of the movement that is confirmation, and to begin to talk about adult responsibility for fairness and justice.

You might also hear about actual things that are broken at school. While this may seem to be too simple a response, it may, in fact, provide an occasion to talk together about human responsibility as caretakers in the creation to provide for proper maintenance and support of public institutions like schools. It may also allow conversation about what it takes to keep things in working order, which is ultimately a serious religious issue.

 **Help hope grow:** This exercise springs from the previous one. There are things broken around us. Some of what is broken is people. In such a world, it is a Christian calling to find ways to offer hope, to live hope, to speak hope, to help hope grow.

Think of five things that you can do to help hope to grow. Make plans to do two of them. These things might be as simple as writing a joint letter to a grandparent or relative (who would be surprised and pleased to hear from you!) or more complex like deciding once a month to gather rubbish from a street near your home. Plan two things you can do, and actually do them.



## Which brings us to family service projects

Since confirmation is a time to think about what it means to live in the world and witness to hope, even in the face of death, it is a time to look for ways to commit yourselves as a family to a project (or even several projects) through which you can act out your responsibilities as God's people in the creation. This could mean all manner of different activities, from things explicitly evangelical to things relating to feeding, clothing, and sheltering people. It could be as simple as inviting a neighbor to church with you. Look in your congregation and community for something your family could do together during the period of your youth's confirmation.


Should this be a permanent project? Who can say "permanent" these days? Do it for a while. See what happens after that. Maybe



you have been doing this for many years. Maybe then what you need is to look at what you do and pick one project that will be your confirmation project and do it with an increased emphasis on family cooperation and connectedness. Make this something that you don't miss in the crush of other details. It might be interesting if you choose to involve your youth in an activity that the adults in your family normally have had for their own. This might be an occasion to incorporate your youth in the beginning of adult responsibility.

What sort of projects might you undertake? It all depends on what projects are active locally. Is there a chapter of Habitat for Humanity in your area? Does your community schedule spring "paint-a-thons" or "fix-up-a-thons" to help people maintain their houses? This is another good sort of project for family involvement. Try to pick something in which everyone can be involved.

## Ideas for people who can no longer preview all the movies their teenagers see

 **When the movie turns out worse than expected:** Sometime it will happen. Sometime you will send your teenager off to a movie and afterwards receive a glowing report about the movie. You will then go to the movie yourself, half expecting to like it, wanting at least to discover what your teenager loves these days. And you will hate the movie.

In fact, you won't just hate the movie, you will *despise* it. You will *abhor* it, though you have made a careful practice of not abhorring anything. Coming out of the theater you will feel as if you had laid down and rolled around in the nasty stuff that made your shoes stick to the theater floor. So what do you do then?

Whatever it is, it must be some sort of confirmation experience. A first step: give your teenager room to like or dislike the movie. Teenagers who are driven to adopt an extreme position either liking or disliking will generally do so, thinking it to be their duty to maintain their honor and integrity on this ground and no other. Try approaching your reactions to the movie in a way that



allows your teenager to like what you dislike and (sometimes) you will find that they also dislike what you dislike. Easy to say. Tough to do. You're right.



Begin the conversation by saying, "I saw the movie you enjoyed so much last night and I'm wondering which parts you liked best?" Perhaps the reason your teenager enjoyed the movie had very little to do with what you disliked. Use this opportunity to learn just what your teenager, or your teenager's friends, say they enjoy these days. Feel free to ask questions that will challenge them to think further about what they are watching. "What do you think the violence in this movie tells any females who watch it?" Or, "How would the humor expressed in this movie affect someone with a physical disability?"

Sometimes it is your responsibility to dislike things your teenager loves. The child will think you are crazy. That is a service parents provide their children: unfollowable craziness on demand. Such moments are difficult and delicate. When you are done, you need your teenager to know what you dislike and why. You need to make arguments that you think will work their way into your teenager's reasoning. You need to be sure that you have been heard.

Your teenager needs something else entirely, which complicates things. Your teenager needs freedom to decide. Initially, that may look a lot like freedom to disagree. Later, it may result in decisions that look a lot like yours. Maybe. Sometimes you may have misunderstood the movie. Teenagers will always tell you that this is the case, and sometimes they may be right. That doesn't make your reaction unimportant, but it does mean you will need to pay attention to the arguments your teenager offers, no matter how they are offered.

How is this part of the mo(ve)ment of confirmation? Such tense conversations are workshops in what it means to be an adult Christian. It is in such conversations that your teenager will learn to make arguments against things in the culture and community that Christians need to oppose. Out of good workshops come effective arguments.



**When the movie is excessively violent:** Such movies may provide an occasion for conversation about heroism. It is too bad, but many movies about heroes are exceedingly violent. Who is a hero? Does it take violence? Sometimes, clearly, it does, and not just in cheap movies. Some people who are properly called heroes committed violent acts. One thinks of the Norwegian commandos who destroyed the Nazis' supply of heavy water and thus prevented them from developing atomic weapons. There are many other such stories.

Does it *always* take violence? Clearly it does not. There are people properly called heroes, even without including "sports heroes," who deserve the name though they were carefully nonviolent. The customary trio of Gandhi, Mother Teresa, and Martin Luther King Jr. comes on stage at this point, once again right on cue. These people deserve to be mentioned as heroes, but they needn't be on stage alone. Think of others who might properly be called heroes, even though they avoid violence quite carefully.

The world is full of interesting characters. Which of them would you in your family call heroes? On what grounds? This discussion might be the most valuable of all.

Compare stories about heroes in movies and stories about heroes from real life. How are they similar? How are they different?



Do heroes have it easier or harder in movies? Why? How? Where does heroic living come from? Is it something rooted in accidents of life, in character, in faith, in training, in community, in necessity? What do you think? Think of heroes who are people of faith. Think of heroes who are not. Are there interesting similarities and differences that seem important to you?



**When the movie is full of naked people:** These may be movies that your family does not see. They may be movies that you have decided do not matter very much, at least not next to other things that are out there. But your teenager may very well see such movies sometime. It might be interesting to “read” such movies next to biblical stories that cover similar ground. (Yes, there are naked people in the Bible.) Genesis 3 is a good place to start reading. The two humans are naked and the story treats it as a normal and good thing.

Explore what nakedness seems to mean in the Genesis story. The possibilities are endless, probably. The goodness of human bodies is certainly affirmed. It is also interesting, however, to notice that the story takes nervousness about nakedness, a normal human response since middle childhood, to be a persistent sign of what has gone wrong in a world where no one is safe from prying eyes. Staring and drooling emerge as signs of just how much has gone wrong.

Explore other relevant places in the Bible, such as the story of David and Bathsheba from 2 Samuel 11. (This story, by the way, is not about seduction or even about adultery. It is a rape story.) Or look at the story of Potiphar’s wife and Joseph (Genesis 39). The Song of Solomon is a particularly rich place to look for such material as well. Might these conversations with your child be embarrassing? They could easily be, but they are probably still worth having.

In all these passages, and in any others you find, ask about the function and meaning of nakedness in the text at hand. You will notice that, in the case of both Bathsheba and Joseph, it serves as an indicator of vulnerability to abuse. Wonder together about the goodness of human bodies and the wonders of sex, gender, and physical love.

## Ideas for people who know that teenagers want to have a job someday



**God’s creative care:** Think of five people whose jobs involve them in something that might reveal God’s creative care for the world. Encourage your teenager to do the same. Compare your lists. Look for interesting ways your notions of “God’s creative care” differ from each other. Think together about ways to expand your notions.



**What do you love?:** Part of finding a job is discovering what somebody will pay you to do. That’s clear. Another part of finding a job, however, involves discovering a vocation, finding something you are called to do. Sometimes these two discoveries arrive at the same time. How do you discover a vocation? It’s hard to say. Lots of different ways, probably. This exercise offers one possible way that might prove interesting for everyone involved.


Begin by having everybody involved make a list of 10 things they love to do. Include arts, games, tasks, skills, anything you can think of. For each thing that shows up on a list, brainstorm together about how each might properly be called service to God, to creation, to life.

Take all the ideas for each person and arrange them in several different groupings. For instance, gather those ideas that seem to be most interesting and those that seem least interesting. Gather those that seem most practical and those that seem least. Gather those that take the most preparation, education, and training. Also gather those that seem to work together, forming a progression from one idea to the other.

Now dream together about what might be. This is especially important, because it may indicate possible courses of action to get from the present to the future. If God uses the things you love to call you to service, this activity may give a hint about what path that call might follow. Dream together about what jobs might be within reach now that could help the move from the present to the future. Will your teenager be hired for any of the jobs you




dream up? Maybe. You never know. This brainstorming might just be a thing that helps in getting a job. It's worth a try, anyhow.

 **When your teenager gets turned down for a job:** This is not so much a specialized confirmation activity as it is an exercise in real working theology. Everybody gets turned down for a job sometime. Adults know that. Your teenager is just learning it.

Take some time and remember how it felt the first time an employer decided that you looked nothing like what he or she wanted to hire. Remember the effect it had on your notions of how the world worked. Here you are, a person with all sorts of ability, as promising as anyone can be, and they don't think you look like someone suited to sweep floors, stock shelves, load trucks, or ask, "Would you like fries with that, ma'am?"

No fancy exercise here. Just pay attention to your teenager and remember that the reactions that go with this experience have everything to do with what Christians believe about God's relationship with humanity.

## Ideas for when things go terribly wrong

 **When relationships end:** This is a profoundly religious experience. If you've been through the painful ending of a relationship, you remember. Maybe you prayed. Maybe you bargained (with God or with the other person in the relationship). Surely it took over your world for awhile.


Sometimes the relationship is ended by the other person. Sometimes it is ended by your teenager. Sometimes it just fades away. Sometimes nobody is quite sure what happened. Sometimes it ends for good reasons.

It will be important to remember that you may not know enough about the relationship to know why it is ending. Because this is true, you may not know enough to argue for giving it another try, or for getting out now, or for being glad, or devastated, or anything.

Your teenager will make a decision. Your part, in this mo(ve)ment of confirmation, is to make sure that the basic truth of our faith gets acted out. That basic truth is that God sticks with people, no matter what. You act that out by sticking with your teenager and perhaps by talking about what such dreadful experiences mean for your faith.

If it works, talk about what a person prays for at such a time. Talk about what a person hopes for. Talk about what a person does next. It's not enough. It doesn't make the hurting stop. But it does act out something important about our life together as people of God. We also stick with each other, no matter what.



 **When friends or family members die:** Death is a part of life that can create a profound sense of loss and be difficult to accept. "Why?" is a question that is often asked and is itself anxiety producing. Talk with your teenager about the person who has died. Don't force conversation, but be ready to be a sounding board for their grieving. The death of a family member can be very difficult. Allow feelings to be released during your times together. Remember that your teenager's friends can be as close as family. The death of a friend is a death in the family for a teenager. You might, therefore, find a way to take time off work and go to the funeral with your teenager. See also the Holy Week ideas on page 32 of this book.

## Ideas for when very frightening things happen

This is a general category. It would be nice if it could be an empty category. It is not. Families around yours will experience dreadful



violence. Your community will learn of calculating hate operating where no one would have guessed. You will be frightened. Such moments call for response and reflection as part of the mo(ve)ment of confirmation.



**Prayers for frightening moments:** The prayers for the Sundays of Advent in *Lutheran Book of Worship* are a good place to start. See pages 15-16 of this *Family Book*. Other prayers for frightening moments follow here (*LBW*, pages 13-41):

#### **The Transfiguration of Our Lord**

Almighty God, on the mountain you showed your glory in the transfiguration of your Son. Give us the vision to see beyond the turmoil of our world and to behold the king in all his glory; through your Son, Jesus Christ our Lord, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever. Amen.

#### **Fourth Sunday after the Epiphany**

O God, you know that we cannot withstand the dangers which surround us. Strengthen us in body and spirit so that, with your help, we may be able to overcome the weakness that our sin has brought upon us; through Jesus Christ, your Son our Lord. Amen.

#### **First Sunday in Lent**

Lord God, our strength, the battle of good and evil rages within and around us, and our ancient foe tempts us with his deceits and empty promises. Keep us steadfast in your Word and, when we fall, raise us again and restore us through your Son, Jesus Christ our Lord, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever. Amen.

#### **Third Sunday in Lent**

Eternal Lord, your kingdom has broken into our troubled world through the life, death, and resurrection of your Son. Help us to hear your Word and obey it, so that we become instruments of your redeeming love; through your Son, Jesus Christ our Lord, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever. Amen.

#### **Third Sunday of Easter**

O God, by the humiliation of your Son you lifted up this fallen world, rescuing us from the hopelessness of death. Grant your faithful people a share in the joys that are eternal; through your Son, Jesus Christ our Lord, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever. Amen.

#### **Fourth Sunday of Easter**

Almighty God, you show the light of your truth to those in darkness, to lead them into the way of righteousness. Give strength to all who are joined in the family of the Church, so that they will resolutely reject what erodes their faith and firmly follow what faith requires; through your Son, Jesus Christ our Lord, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever. Amen.

#### **The Holy Innocents, Martyrs**

We remember today, O God, the slaughter of the holy innocents of Bethlehem by order of King Herod. Receive, we pray, into the arms of your mercy all innocent victims, and by your great might frustrate the designs of evil tyrants and establish your rule of justice, love, and peace; through Jesus Christ our Lord, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever. Amen.




**Actions for frightening moments:** Some of the things that frighten us require prompt response. When people are in danger because of domestic violence, responsible people must intervene to protect people at risk. When disaster after disaster lands on a community, responsible people must find a way to carry each other as they go on. When bigots and haters feel free to act out their disease, responsible people must, together and individually, find ways to make arguments that counteract hate.


These sorts of responses are made by responsible people from all faiths, and by people who have no use for faith. At such moments it is clearer than ever that responsible people of all sorts need each other. Christian parents are responsible at such moments to act appropriately, and also to make clear to themselves and their families how their action fits into the ways Christians understand God and the world.

Claim such frightening moments as opportunities for your family to think and talk about some of the actions Christian people take. Encourage your teenager to dream of possible actions. Allow your teenager to hear your own dreams. Talk to each other about the reasons for Christian action at such a moment. Talk to each other about advisable and inadvisable courses of action. Above all, listen to each other. Use this time to model and practice skills your teenager will need.


## An assortment of church seasonal ideas

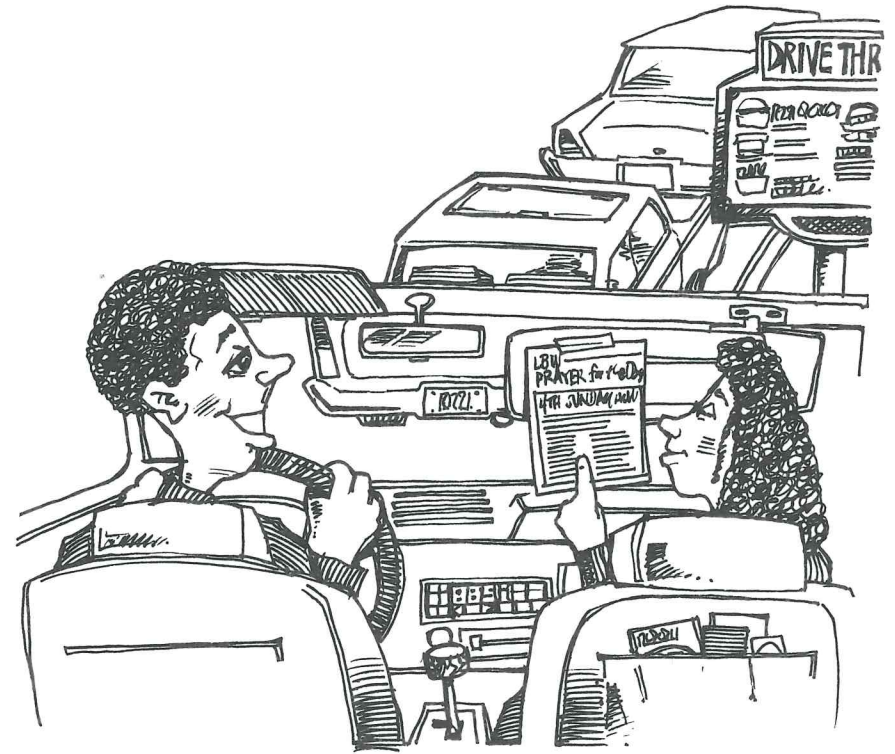
### Advent

 **What are you waiting for?:** Everybody's waiting for something. Talk to each other about what things each person in the family is waiting for. Encourage wild creativity and free expression. Gather even the most improbable dreams about what might happen in the future. This could be an activity that stretches beyond Advent and becomes an occasion for family dreaming.

 **What are you preparing for?:** This is not meant as a down-to-earth corrective for the previous exercise. Careful preparation is important. So is wild-eyed dreaming. The two things may even feed each other. People may not be able to prepare for things without impossible dreams to give them courage. This is meant as an exercise in focused dreaming and in conversation about how a responsible Christian adult sketches a course toward the future.

Gather lists of things people are preparing for in the near future or the distant future. Do this in conversation at dinner or breakfast times. Talk about how much planning will be necessary to reach the goals that have been set. Talk about how an adult makes course corrections on the way to the future. Think together and dream together. Above all, listen to each other.


 **When you're in the drive-thru line:** This simple liturgy works best if you and your teenager (and other family members) find yourselves waiting in your car, such as in a drive-



thru line or traffic jam. Copy the Prayer of the Day for the fourth Sunday in Advent (printed on page 16 of this book) and put it in your car. (If you wait in lots of lines, it will be worth your investment of time.)

While you wait, read the prayer aloud; perhaps even pray it together. What you do next depends on how long you have to wait. You might try rewriting the prayer to fit waiting in the car. You might talk about what people in the car are wanting/hoping for for Christmas. You might also begin talking about what bigger things people are waiting and hoping for. This last activity might become a family way of waiting productively.

### Christmas

 **Materialism and making a living:** Everyone, by now, has heard and thought and wondered about the materialism of Christmas. This is a good and important matter for reflection. Think



together about what it means for your community that retail stores do such a large proportion of their business during the Christmas season.

Together, list 10 positive things that this period of intense buying and selling means for your community. Make sure that you pick positive things. There are more possibilities than could be listed. Encourage thought about jobs that are created for seasonal workers, such as your teenager, perhaps. Think about taxes that are paid, businesses that are supported that otherwise would not exist. How many clothing stores could your community support, for instance, if they had to rely solely on regular-season trade? Think about the web of trade that holds together the various parts of your community.

Now think together about the possible negative consequences of the flurry of buying and selling that goes with Christmas. Think hard and try to get beyond the usual complaints. Does this binge of buying and selling encourage an unbalanced pattern of employment? Does it encourage increasing reliance on temporary workers and diminished reliance on longtime workers who are trained and responsible? Does Christmas create a climate in which people increasingly need to own things, to accumulate things, to have mountains of stuff, in order to be real people? Does this create an unbalanced pattern of production in this culture?

We make lots of stuff, but we make it so that it will quickly fall apart or pass out of style, so that we can go out and buy another mountain of stuff. Think about the dance that has to go on between the positive and the negative. Think together about the tensions, the contradictions, the parts of the issue that are unresolvable.



**God is born?:** Talk about what it means to believe that God was born into the world. Have family or friends experienced the birth of a baby recently? What does this connection do to regular notions of who God is and what God is like? What does it mean to have to change God's diapers? What does it mean to suppose that God came as such a creature? At the least, all this implies a great deal about God's love for us and our love for God. Encourage free reflection on these questions.

Possible interesting responses might begin with thoughts about what it means to have to clean up after God. What does it mean that God, as a baby, would giggle, burp, and babble with delight, even at unexpected times. Interesting responses might also notice that people lose all sense of dignity around a baby. Quiet and reserved adults make faces, silly noises, and talk a strange new language, all because a baby is in the room.

### Ash Wednesday

Whether or not your family has been in the habit of attending Ash Wednesday services together, this might be a good time to start that practice. This service stirs all sorts of discussion among participants, especially if your congregation follows the historical observance of this day.

You might, for instance, talk about the nature of the confession of sin for the day. Were the right sins confessed? What was missed? What was overemphasized? What was just right?

You might talk about the historic practice of withholding the announcement of forgiveness until Maundy Thursday. Not all congregations do this, but it is customary in many places to include a detailed confession in the Ash Wednesday service but wait until Holy Week for a detailed absolution. Think together about the effect of this practice on worshipers. Think together about the effect of this practice on the season that stretches between Ash Wednesday and Maundy Thursday. Is it unfair to make people wait? Or are some things better if you wait?

All manner of response is possible. Use the conversation as an occasion to think together. Work at considering different viewpoints. Look especially at the effect of waiting on the season of Lent. At least one effect is that this season can become a time to think seriously about the tasks and responsibilities implied by the Ash Wednesday confession. If the confession, for instance, dealt with problems created by violence between people and nations, Lent might become a time to listen carefully for reports of such violence and to explore ways to work for safety and justice.

### Holy Week

Holy Week is a most important time in the life of Christians. It is during this short period that we act out the drama in which God promises hope even in a world that sometimes goes dreadfully

wrong. Holy Week, therefore, is a good time to think about things that go wrong and about hope in the middle of disaster.

Use this week in the spring to stop and talk about the things that were broken during the year, from promises to dreams. You might use this week to officially gather the disasters of the year for formal review. Don't do this as part of an exercise in wallowing in past pain. We all do enough of that as it is. Rather, do it as an exercise in frankness and honesty, in admitting what we all know. Things have gone wrong.

Easter is God's promise that death and disaster do not have the last word. As you look at the officially gathered disasters, talk about what it would take for God's promise to be true. Sometimes it will already be clear the promise is true. Sometimes the disaster will have been swallowed up in life, love, and support.

Sometimes, however, it will be far from clear that death does not have the last word. If your family finds this to be the case, it is important that you be honest with each other, and with God. Talk to each other about what you will need to do together to make the promise true. You may discover that it will also be helpful to talk to your pastor. If so, do so. Such moments are precisely why God created more than one person. We need each other at such times.