

Expanding the Nurture of High School Age Youth

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Introduction

I did not begin the curriculum project with any intention to address the subject which is the title of this article. But in the process of researching the present nurture of high school youth and planning the new curriculum, I felt that something should be done to raise this issue for discussion among all those responsible for the nurture of youth from 7th to 12th grade in our congregations.

Two suggestions for expanding the nurture of high school age will be made toward the end of this paper. Perhaps it would be best to state them in capsule form at the outset so that they are borne in mind throughout your reading of this document. The first proposal is that there be a prescribed course of study for all high school age youth until January of their 12th grade year at which time a church rite would mark the completion of this prescribed course. A second proposal (which would help carry out the first proposal) is that our present practice of confirmation be continued in a slightly altered form in which we would agree that confirmation could take place within an 18 month window from the end of 7th grade to the middle of 9th grade depending on the individual congregation's particular situation.

Please note that neither of these proposals is essential to the implementation of the new curriculum. However, as will be shown in this paper, the new curriculum could assist greatly in carrying out an expansion of the Christian nurture of our high school youth.

As a basis for discussing such an expansion, please consider the following five items:

- A. The need for expanding the nurture of high school age youth
- B. The opportunities for expanded nurture in the new curriculum
- C. The positives and negatives of our present custom of confirmation
- D. The age of readiness for reception of Be Lord's Supper
- E. Two proposals for an expanded Christian nurture of high school age youth

Since this article is intended for discussion by pastors and teachers and lay leaders, it will be presented in outline form for more easy reference in the various discussion forums in which it is considered.

A. The Need for Expanding The Nurture of High School Age Youth

1. The present status of youth nurture in our congregations:

- a. Some congregations have made an analysis of the high school youth in their congregations after confirmation and have found that the number who are still spiritually active (Sunday church attendance and attendance at communion) is alarmingly low (often less than forty percent.)
- b. This parallels the survey made of youth groups in our synod in connection with the new curriculum project. The pastors' responses are given on page A-24 of Appendix I (A), and at the bottom of the page an analyst of the statistics given. This analysis points out that although the majority of congregations have a youth group, 2 out of 5 do not. In addition it is noted that the majority of those who do have a youth group meet only once a month. Add to this the fact that many of those who have meetings once a month commented that only a small percentage of their young people attend the youth meetings regularly, or that they were having a hard time keeping the youth group going. The analysis summarizes: "This indicates that the nurture of youth is a weak spot in our education program which needs to be given a good deal of attention in the new religion curriculum."
- c. Summary: The sad fact is that a growing number of our confirmands are getting little or no spiritual nurture in the years right after they are confirmed. Fewer and fewer are attending church

and communion, and only a very small percentage are involved in Bible study in a youth group or youth Bible class.

2. The need for expanding the nurture of high school youth:

a. Scripture calls for more than just a cognitive knowledge of basic doctrine. In Matthew 28:20 Jesus urges that Christian nurture include “teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you.” The Greek word translated “obey” in the NIV has a dual meaning of holding onto and putting into practice in one’s life. In past generations when most young people had a Christian home in which the truths of Scripture were modeled for them by Christian parents (although with many shortcomings on the part of parents because of the sinfulness of us all), we depended on this kind teaching to be done more in the home than in class. In the past we lived in a society which was at least outwardly Christian, and some standards of morality were upheld by law, in the public media, in entertainment, and in the public life of the citizens of our country. Sadly, neither is very true any more. Thus in instructing young people we need to do more than we did in past generations in order to fulfill what Jesus urges in Mt 28:20.

b. Scripture characterizes Christian instruction as leading individuals to a maturity in which people are “no longer infants, tossed back and forth by the waves, and blown here and there by every wind of teaching and by the cunning and craftiness of men in their deceitful scheming (Eph 4:14)” and not being taken captive by “hollow and deceptive philosophy, which depends on human tradition and the basic principles of this world rather than on Christ (Col 2:8).” When we realize that the a very things described in these passages surround our high school students in public education, in the entertainment world to which they are constantly exposed and to which they are so easily attracted, and in the constant pressure of their peers at school and at work- it begs us to far more in the Christian nurture of youth than we are doing now.

c. Some specific facets of our society which call for more nurturing of our high school youth:

aa) Young people’s gradual seeking of independence from their parents is a God-given thing. It is God’s will that a young person leave father and mother and be united to his/her spouse (Ge 2:24). This process in our society involves the young person making more and more of his/her own choices and acquiring a personal set of values which guide words and actions when parents are no longer at hand to do so. In the past this process began during the high school years and was completed only as the young person left home to go to college or to begin working or to establish an independent family. Today the process more often than not begins in 7th and 8th grade, and the student in the early years of high school is making most of his own choices (where he will go to school, whether he will have a part-time job, what electives he will take in senior high school, what movies and TV shows he will watch, what music he will listen to, how he will spend the money he earns or which his parents give him, etc.) on the basis of his own personal values. The question is: Does our present instruction prior to confirmation, prepare the young person to make all these decisions in accord with our Savior’s will (Eph 5:15-17)?

bb) Peer pressure has always been a strong factor in the life of a young person because as one gradually grows apart from one’s parent(s) a person begins to seek the company of and the approval of one’s peers. Unless the young person attends one of our synod prep schools where he/she has the constant companionship of fellow Christians at least during the five weekdays both in loss and out of dam; or unless the young person attends an area Lutheran high school where he/she has the companionship of fellow Christians during the school hours, the young person is under the constant bombardment of worldly peer

pressure which comes at him/her at school and at work and (depending on whether he/she has fellow Christians as friends and a good rapport with his/her parents in a truly Christian home) also in his/her leisure hours. Again the question should be asked: Does our present instruction prior to confirmation sufficiently prepare the young person for this kind of constant peer pressure in the high school years?

cc) Many high schools today are not neutral religiously but anti-Christian to one degree or another. It isn't only the matter of evolution being taught in science classes, but the anti-Christian philosophy imparted by non-Christian teachers in social studies classes (e.g. in sociology, which is a required course in many high schools, subjects such as these are taught: marriage and divorce, the meaning of death, the role of religion in society, standards of morality in society, the function of the family, what is and what is not deviant behavior in sexual matters, the roles of men and women in society, population control involving birth control and abortion), in English classes (e.g. modern literature predominates in literature classes so that current life in our society can be studied from the viewpoint of modern writers), and in home economics classes (e.g. marriage, the family, birth control and abortion, choosing a spouse, the roles of men and women in the home). Add to this the worldly way of life modeled for our youth by some very influential teachers and popular fellow students. and we need to ask again: Does our present instruction prior to confirmation prepare the young person for this kind of daily educational setting during the high school years?

dd) Though it certainly is included in the previous points, still the importance of the sexual development of the young person during the high school years makes it worthy of separate treatment. As the sex drive develops in the teenager, it becomes a dominant factor in his/her life. Our society complicates the matter by encouraging steady dating already in 7th and 8th grade so that by 9th and 10th grade holding hands is considered kid stuff. Does our present instruction prior to confirmation prepare young people for the heightened and hastened expression of their sexuality which they must deal with in our society?

ee) The independence of high school youth noted in several of the previous points also contributes to a heightening of the natural skepticism of youth. This skepticism is very often not really a matter of conviction but a searching as a result of inadequate information or a reaction to indoctrination in Scripture without the ability on the part of the young person to analyze what he/she has learned on the basis of a personal study of Scripture. Does our present instruction prior to confirmation prepare our young people with enough information to deal with the many questions which he/she will face during the high school years, and does it give the young person enough Bible study skills that he/she will be able to reexamine what he/she has learned (his/her indoctrination) on the basis of a personal study of Scripture?

ff) The world in which our high school youth live and study and work is saturated with ecumenicalism. In school from teachers and friends, at work from the boss and coworkers, from TV programs and movies, from music they listen to and from teenage magazines with articles on the new age philosophy and all its philosophical cousins, our young people will imbibe the attitude that it really doesn't make any difference what you believe, as long as it helps you be a good person. Does our present instruction prior to confirmation prepare our young people for a lifetime of ecumenical softening which will constantly be eating away at their faith and their Bible-based convictions in regard to false teachings?

gg) The high school student does not have enough experience in life to be mature in dealing with the many life situations he/she will meet in today's world. The young person

needs to be guided by God's holy will as expressed in his law and needs to be motivated by the gospel if his/her words and actions are to be carried out in a God-pleasing way. Since today's high school student needs to do both things more and more on his/her own for the reasons noted previously, doesn't this beg for continued religious instruction through some, if not all, the high school years?

hh) Since, as was noted earlier, there is less and less modeling of Christian truths by parents in the family setting (because of broken homes, because of both parents being so busy with jobs and careers. because of the declining spirituality in our homes), we need to use methods that get students active more than in the past in order to have students think about and talk about the truths so they understand them better and retain them longer. We need to spend far more time on applications as well, connecting the truths we teach with life situations so that the student realizes how these truths apply in his/her life (since we can't assume that this will happen naturally at home or to some degree in society as well.) This necessity suggests that our religious instruction can only be done, to the in-depth way it needs to be done, by more hours of instruction spread out over four or five years rather than being crowded into a hundred hours in two years.

d. Though there are these many negative facets of our society which call for more nurturing of our high school youth, we want the major emphasis to focus on the positive. You will note, therefore, that in the description of the new curriculum which follows on the next page many of the courses stress the development of the knowledge of Scripture along with developing skills in reading and applying the Bible, in witnessing, and in loving service to others.

3. It is true that high school students, given the independence youth enjoy today, want to be treated like and instructed like adults. At the same time, as they gain experience with life, they come to realize they still have much to learn and so are open to guidance that is given by adults in a loving and non-demeaning way. So though young people may outwardly protest a prescribed course for them in the high school years, a well-planned and edifying curriculum which addresses the spiritual needs of youth will be accepted inwardly.

B. The Opportunities for Expanded Nurture in the New Curriculum

1. In the new curriculum the Bible study in grades 7 and 8 which accompanies the study of the catechism is more closely connected to that done in grades 9-12 than to grades 1-6. There are several reasons for this change:

a. There was a need to do something to give 7th and 8th graders a clear message that what they will study in 7th and 8th grade is not a mere repetition of what they studied in grades 1-6. Different Bible study content, a format more like that of grades 9-12, and a more challenging method of studying the Bible are all used to give this message.

b. In addition to giving this message, there was a need for a slight change in the approach to teaching in order to take into account the mental and psychological development of 7th and 8th graders. On page 81 of the new curriculum, this need is described in these three statements: -Because the mental development of 7th and 8th graders enables them to delve more deeply into those spiritual truths they have already learned as well as to explore the application of those truths in many different ways; -Because their emotional and volitional development (the psychological development) means they are becoming quite independent in regard to their personal attitudes and habit; -Because they can function well in a group, learning not only from

the words and actions of their teachers but also being greatly influenced by the actions and opinions of their peers.

c. The change in content was also necessary to address more directly the spiritual needs of 7th and 8th graders living in our present society. Not only is there a need to study doctrine more formally as is done already in the study of the Catechism, but there is also a great need to begin to develop personal Bible-study skills and to address specific spiritual subjects which 7th and 8th graders must wrestle with living in today's world.

2. A brief capsule of the courses offered in the new curriculum in grades 7-12 (Cf. pp 81-143 of the new curriculum for rationale, more details on each course, and scope and sequence.)

a. 7th and 8th grade: -catch-up on Bible history, the history of God carrying out his plan of salvation for lost mankind (if necessary, that is, if the child does not come to 7th grade with this well in hand.) -two years of catechism study - direct Bible study (courses with 6 to 12 lessons on: Bible study skills, the Psalms, John's gospel, Romans, Ephesians, 1 and 2 Peter, Galatians, Revelation) - spiritual topics (courses with 6 to 12 lessons on: questions that trouble me. my relationships with others in my life, my Christian identity as a redeemed child of God, other religions and me, sharing my faith with others, refusing temptations or pressures in my life, making decisions in my life, God's gift of sex to me, beginning to plan my life as one of service to my Lord and Savior)

b. 9th and 10th grade: -lessons for my life from the OT and the gospels (courses of 9 to 18 lessons each following a chronological sequence through the OT and studying the gospels topically) - spiritual topics (courses with 6 to 12 lessons each on: problems in my life. my sexuality, making God-pleasing choices in my life, establishing good relationships with peers and adults in my life, focusing my Bible reading, dealing with things of the world which I meet in my life, witnessing for Christ in my life, worship of God in my life, beginning to make plans for my whole life as a Christian already now) -treasured Bible portions from the OT and gospels which I can turn to often in my life for spiritual help and comfort

c. 11th and 12th grade: -lessons for my life from Acts and the epistles (courses of 6 to 12 lessons each) -spiritual topics which look to adult life (courses of 6 to 12 lessons each on: my marriage and my Christian home, my spiritual gift(s) and its (their) use in nurturing and serving others, being an active and responsible church member, Christian worship at home and with members of my church family, my Christian stewardship of money and possessions, sharing the Gospel in every opportunity God gives me. my life as a citizen of the U.S., my Christian life plan) - treasured Bible portions from the epistles which I can turn to often in my life for spiritual help and comfort - Bible doctrine course with 14 lessons on doctrines of special interest today or which are under attack in our society today

3. Those young people attending a synod prep school or an area Lutheran high school which adopts the new curriculum would take all these courses. Those who attend a weekly one hour youth Bible class in a congregation would take some of the courses in their entirety and selected portions of all the others. The intent would be that every young person would receive at least some instruction in all the courses.

4. Note that there are basically two emphases in the 7th through 12th grade courses in the new curriculum:

a. One is a study of the Bible which has a chronological sequence following the development of God's plan of salvation but does more than study selected Bible history lessons as in grades 1-6. This Bible study takes the students into all the books of the Bible while at the same time

highlighting the truths of law and gospel from these books which apply to their lives as teenagers.

b. The other is a study of spiritual topics on the basis of pertinent passages of Scripture which address their spiritual needs as teenagers, especially those noted under A.2,c (pages 2-4 above).

C. The Positives and Negatives of Our Present Custom of Confirmation

1. At the present time the prescribed course for the nurture of youth in our congregations ends with confirmation. Since confirmation marks an important time in a young person's life, namely the time when he/she begins to receive the Lord's Supper most, if not all, of our congregations will want to retain this custom. At the same time, if we want to expand the prescribed course so that it continues through the high school years, it might be beneficial to make a few minor changes in our present practice of confirmation so that this custom will no longer be the end of the prescribed course for our youth.

2. What confirmation is not:

a) Confirmation is not a sacrament nor a rite commanded by God. It is an adiaphoron (neither commanded nor forbidden) which has become along-standing tradition in WELS.

b) Confirmation is not a renewal of the baptismal covenant. [*The Shepherd Under Christ*, p120] "The pastor should guard against speaking of confirmation as a renewal of the baptismal covenant. The wording in some liturgies may lead to this way of speaking. The baptismal covenant is one that God makes with the child and is permanent. God need not renew it; man cannot renew it. Nor should we assume that children have fallen away from it and need to return to it in confirmation. Some liturgies also contain the term "renewal of the baptismal vow." If by this is meant that the child now for himself speaks the confession and promises spoken in his name by the sponsors in baptism, this is admissible. However, the term appears to be subject to misunderstanding and ought to be avoided."

c) Confirmation is not a rite which marks the leaving of an inferior relationship with God to a more important relationship. Being counted as a communicant member of the congregation as well as a baptized member means nothing in one's relationship to God. It simply means that the person is now able to examine himself in preparation for the Lord's Supper and so is permitted to come to the Lord's table with the other communicant members.

3. What confirmation is:

a) "Confirmation is a church rite in which a congregation gives its catechumens who have been instructed in Christian doctrine according to the Bible and the Lutheran Confessions an opportunity to confess their faith before the church; prays for the children with the laying on of hands, and invites them as such who have sufficient spiritual maturity to participate in the Lord's Supper. This definition draws attention to the following significant points: 1) The instruction of the children, 2) the opportunity for a public confession of their faith, 3) the prayer of the congregation in their behalf, 4) the invitation to partake of Holy Communion." [*The Shepherd Under Christ*, p.119)

b) The instruction needs to be more than just some simple law and gospel and a basic understanding of the Lord's Supper because attendance at communion also is a confession of oneness in faith with all the other communicants. Thus preconfirmation instruction in the WELS includes the study of the six chief parts of *The Small Catechism*, and the pastor presents the confirmation candidates as having demonstrated their understanding of these basic doctrines of the Christian faith.

4. But confirmation is more according to present practice. It also includes an important promise on the part of the confirmand. The question is asked of the confirmand in the confirmation rite whether he/she intends “to continue steadfast in the confession of this Church, and suffer all, even death, rather than fall away from it” and “faithfully to conform all your life to the rule of the divine Word, to be diligent in the use of the means of grace, to walk as it becomes the Gospel of Christ, and in faith, word, and deed to remain true to the Triune God, even unto death.” Certainly every Christian will be ready to make a promise such as this at any time in life, but to make it in a formal way in a major rite of the church assumes two things: that the person making the promise has received sufficient instruction and is sufficiently mature for this promise to be made by the Christian. Several questions suggest themselves: 1) Is it realistic to assume that every eighth grader has sufficient instruction and is sufficiently mature to make this promise? 2) Might it better to have a promise that is less final in suggesting that the end of the prescribed course has been reached and emphasizes instead the person’s intention to continue in his/her study of God’s Word?

5. Some positives as the result of a long-standing tradition:

- a) The power of tradition leads even parents who are weak spiritually to want their child to be confirmed.
- b) The long-standing tradition makes being confirmed together a special bond that the members of a given class share with each other. For example, a person will say concerning another, “He/she was a member of my confirmation class,” and one important part of church anniversaries is the display of pictures of all the confirmation classes.
- c) Certainly any changes which are made in our present practice ought not overlook these positives.

6. Some negatives as the result of a long-standing tradition:

- a) The outward custom begins to predominate over the inner purpose, and the motivation can become an outward fulfilling of custom rather than inward and spiritual. This becomes evident in the words and actions of more and more parents and children and, as a consequence, perhaps also of pastors. Parents become more concerned about getting their child confirmed than having their child thoroughly instructed. Parents do not insist on good attendance and careful study on the part of their child. and they often ask whether the time spent instructing their child couldn’t be cut in order for their child to do other things. Children of such parents take their cue from the model they have at home and content themselves with “putting in” their two years and memorizing enough “to get confirmed.” Pastors facing the situation in which the outward custom predominates over the inward purpose are tempted to choose the “lesser evil” (in the case of such parents and children) of confirming the child, even though the child’s spiritual attitude is suspect, rather than alienate the child and parent
- b) The elaborate ceremony which has grown up in connection with the long-standing tradition (gowns, flowers, pictures, gifts, and family celebration) accentuates the atmosphere of the end of something rather than a beginning. Thus the oft repeated statement on confirmation day to the confirmand, “Well, you made it!”
- c) Changes which would help lessen these negatives might well be worth considering.

7. Summary: Confirmation according to the present practice in WELS is a major climax in the young person’s life. In one way this is commendable since it is the time when the young person begins receiving the Lord’s body and blood in Holy Communion together with fellow believers. In another way

the present practice might well be improved. If a way could be found to emphasize more the inner purpose over the outward custom, and if this in turn would help bring about an expansion of the nurture of youth into the high school years, these would be improvements on our present practice. The only intention of the two proposals which follow in part E is to move toward bringing about these improvements.

D. The Age of Readiness for Reception of the Lord's Supper

1. One of the proposals suggests that some congregations may want to consider having confirmation at the end of 7th grade. This would not be done unless the congregation had a program of nurture which enabled them to instruct the youth thoroughly in Bible history and the six chief parts of the catechism by this time. The other factor to consider is the age at which young people are ready to receive the Lord's Supper. This is not a minor matter and deserves careful consideration.

2. In the earlier rural and less technological days of American society, public education ended after eighth grade. Finishing eighth grade thus became a climax in a person's progression toward maturity and often marked the time when the young person took his/her place alongside the adults in full-time work on the farm or in the shop. It was natural in those days to have the first reception of Holy Communion correspond with this climax in the child's education because it paralleled fairly closely the young person's having sufficient instruction to participate in the Lord's Supper and to confess his/her oneness in faith with the other communicants.

3. In our present predominantly urban and increasing technological society, it is recognized that a young person's education should continue until at least twelfth grade. There is a growing consensus that the schooling should continue even beyond high school to include as a minimum at least two years of technical training. Given the religious and moral (immoral!) milieu of the society in which our children will live and work, it is not unreasonable to ask whether the young person today also needs a more in-depth study of God's Word beyond what he/she receives in the present Sunday school, Lutheran elementary school and catechism instruction. In the light of the changing society in which we live, don't we also need to consider doing more in the way of religious instruction than we have been doing for the past fifty to one hundred years? Has the time come for us to expand religious instruction past the time when young people are ready to receive communion by also instituting a prescribed course for the high school years?

4. But at what age is a young person ready to receive communion?

a) This is not an unimportant question since it is true as the confirmation rite states (opening paragraph of the Examination): "When children have attained such knowledge of the truths of the Christian religion as are contained in the Catechism that, pursuant to the injunction of St Paul, 2 Cor. 11:28, they are able to examine themselves, they should no longer be kept from the Holy Supper (emphasis ours)."

b) Luther said (*Formula Missae*) that churches should "not admit applicants unless they can give a reason for their faith and can answer questions about what the Lord's Supper is, what its benefits are, and what they expect to derive from it. In other words, they should be able to repeat the Words of Institution from memory"[Luther's Works, Vol. 53,p.32]

c) Walther said (*Pastoraltheologie*, p.265] that children should memorize the Small Catechism and show their understanding of it so that they are able to examine themselves according to 1 Co 11:28. The more able students should be able to substantiate the doctrines of the Christian faith

with clear Bible passages and to refute the false doctrines of the sects. Wherever possible there should be a minimum of 100 hours of instruction. 9

d) As far as age is concerned. Walther recommended the close of the twelfth year at the very earliest. and he based this upon the Jewish custom as we see it in the life of Christ, Lk 2:41,42.

e) Dr. J.H.C. Fritz followed Walther in suggesting that the child not be confirmed before he was twelve. He adds, "The usual age is fourteen; a year or two older is always better than a year or two younger. A congregation should, however, make no strict rule in reference to the age of confirmation, but leave this to the discretion of the pastor and perhaps the church council."

[*Pastoral Theology*, p.127ff]

f) Prof. John Schaller: "The correct age for confirmation is difficult to determine, for certainly not the number of years, but the state of one's understanding is the criterion for admission to the Lord's Supper. Luke 2:41 is not proof. but at best an analogy. Yet, there is a consensus, that the real age of discretion in respect to the Lord's Supper begins with the end of the twelfth year... It is likewise true that with a greater age no guarantee of a sufficient amount of spiritual understanding can be given. In the final analysis only the *Seelsorger* (the soul-caretaker) can understand and determine with certainty how matters stand with the confirmand. A determination of an age by a congregational resolution can, therefore, only have the import that confirmation is not to take place earlier, but not that it must take place then ...Such resolutions can be rudely misused." [*Pastorale Praxis*, p50]

g) Prof. August Pieper is quoted by the sainted Pastor Harold Warnke [Seminary class notes, early 1930's] as saying, "You cannot set a law when a child must be confirmed... My mother said, '*Warte bis du vernuenftig bist* (Wait until you have good, common sense),' and I waited until I was sixteen. Confirmation is to take place when the child is at an age where a learning of the way of salvation and confession before the world is necessary and a strengthening against the evils of one's flesh is mandatory- this is the time when the child begins to doubt his father's and mother's authority. He also learns to doubt the Word of God. This is the time to strengthen youths against unchastity, etc."

h) Schuetze and Habeck [*The Shepherd Under Christ*. p121f] comment: "Confirmation and admission to communion corresponds with Be completion of the eighth grade of schooling, when the child is 13 or 14 years of age. It must. however, also be recognized that a certain chronological age or the completion of a particular grade in school does not guarantee readiness for communion."

i) Summary: The people cited all indicate that reception as a communicant should not be delayed once a child understands and confesses the chief doctrines taught in the Catechism and is able to examine himself/herself prior to communion. All also agree that while setting an minimum age is advisable, this ought not become the determining factor in admitting young people to the reception of the Lord's Supper.

E. Two Proposals for an Expansion of the Christian Nurture of High School Age Youth

1. Proposal One: Have a prescribed course of study for high school youth which continues until January of their 12th grade year at which time a church rite would mark the completion of the prescribed course. [N.B. This rite would not replace the present confirmation rite as will become evident below.]

a. Why initiate a prescribed course for high school youth and a new church rite?

aa) Several of the reasons have been developed above: 1) Because considerably more nurture is needed than what we do now; 2) Because a course for the nurture of high school is in the process of being written and published; 3) Because this would remove

some of the negatives which have developed in connection with our present confirmation tradition (page 8 above) by removing the promise presently made in the confirmation rite and making confirmation the beginning of the young person's reception of communion but not the end of his/her religious instruction.

bb) Such a prescribed course which continues into the twelfth grade would parallel the time in the life of the young person when the requirement of his/her attending public school ends. In this way it would be similar to the time our present confirmation practice began when eighth grade marked both the end of person's public schooling and his formal religious instruction.

cc) In our society, this also marks the time when the young person has to begin to look ahead very seriously at his/her adult life. The decision has to be made whether to go out and enter the job market or go on to college or technical school. This decision probably also played into the young person's decisions about what courses to take in the junior and senior year in high school because if one goes onto college or technical school certain courses would be much more helpful than others. In short, what a person must think about as he/she is in twelfth grade often leads to a much more serious approach to life than may have been true only a short year or two before this time.

dd) This also allows the young person to take one or two of the initial courses for adults in the Training Christians for Ministry program and to begin to attend the adult Bible class if he/she chooses to do so before the end of the senior year. In this way the young person can begin to be involved in adult classes at the time when his/her thoughts are turning more and more to life as an adult.

ee) Since the young person has matured considerably beyond the person he/she was as a freshman or sophomore, it would be good for the student to get more involved than ever before (if time allows and the person chooses to do so) in one of the service activities of the congregation (e.g. teaching, evangelism, visitation, stewardship) before he/she goes off to college or to work in some distant place and unfamiliar congregational surroundings.

ff) Having all the young people attend a prescribed course until a given time makes it possible for the congregation to have a special rite in which: 1) The maturing young adults have the opportunity at this point in life to state their intention to take a greater personal responsibility for their own spiritual nurture now that they are beginning to make some other important adult decisions; 2) The congregation prays on their behalf; and 3) The congregation also encourages them to begin to use their time, talents and treasure in the work of the church as a n adult N.B. If January of the 12th grade seems to be a time that will not work well for everyone, perhaps congregations might be given the option of ending the prescribed course and having the rite at the end of the 11th grade if that works better in some settings.

b. Possible problems and their resolution:

aa) Problem: This is not going to be popular with the youth because now they are "done" with the prescribed instruction in 8th grade and this suggestion would mean they "have to go" to class until 12th grade.

Resolution:

- This will be particularly true only of those 6th, 7th, and 8th graders at the time when the new course is introduced. After a half dozen years this will calm down considerably, because of the turnover of classes. It is not like the introduction of a new Bible translation or a new hymnbook where there may not be widespread comfort with the new until a generation passes.

- The youth can be shown that there are good reasons for the change and that this is not an arbitrary decision on the part of those responsible for their spiritual nurture. As was stated earlier, they will still protest outwardly, but inwardly they will see the important purpose behind this change (with the exception of some who don't want to see the purpose and whose lack of spirituality would probably make them a problem in the present set-up also.)

- Rather than making a gradual transition by adding a year at a time, it might be better to make the change with the class that begins the new curriculum in 7th grade. The only thing that will be the same for this class would be the study of the catechism in 7th and 8th grade. Everything else (whether Lutheran elementary school or Sunday school) will be new, not only the content of the course but also the length of the course.

bb) Problem: What happens with a student who can receive communion but does not attend the prescribed course at the high school level?

Resolution:

-If the student is unable to attend for valid reasons (distance, no ride available, illness etc.) an alternate method of meeting the requirement could be devised (e.g. family study, personal study with, regular consultation with the teacher at set times.) Such an alternative method will make it possible for every high school youth to complete the prescribed course.

-If a person refuses to participate, one has a spiritual problem which is not much different from a young person in the present set-up who comes to catechism class with little or no knowledge of Bible history because he/she did not attend Sunday school, or who wants to be confirmed without learning and showing an understanding of the six chief parts of the Catechism, or who neglects the Word and sacrament after confirmation.

- We never deal with such problems in a legalistic manner; rather we practice evangelical admonition. In this case (as we do now with the neglect of Sunday school and catechism class) we would seek to lead the individual to a recognition of both the opportunity and the great need for high school age youth in our day and age to continue in a course of continued study of God's Word toward greater spiritual maturity. A high school age youth would be excommunicated only if despising of the Word became evident as a result of the admonition given.

- The formal adoption of a prescribed course for high school youth (along with an accompanying rite) by the synod and by each congregation should not be used as a club. However, it may well have the same effect as was noted earlier in connection with the present requirements in connection with confirmation, namely, of leading even those who are weak spiritually to attend.

cc) Problem: This will increase the number of teachers needed since there will be classes for 7 and 8, 9 and 10, 11 and 12.

Resolution:

- The materials from 7th to 12th grade will have a standard approach to teaching. This approach uses the repetition of a basic cycle (book, look, took) three to five times in every lesson no matter whether the lesson is a study of a Bible portion or a Bible topic or a Bible doctrine. This means the methodology will not be difficult to master because the teacher will not have to learn a number of different methods for different kinds of lessons. - The new Training Christians for Ministry courses for adults will provide the biblical background and the specific teacher training needed to teach youth Bible classes.

- The teacher's guide which will accompany every lesson will provide guidance for teaching the individual lesson. -In smaller congregations a 7-9 & 10-12, or a 7-8 & 9-12,

or a 7-10 & 11-12 grouping could be used without any great difficulty with the materials in the new curriculum.

2. Proposal Two: Continue our present practice of confirmation with a slightly altered form of the promise and agree that the time for confirmation could be as early as the end of 7th grade or as late as 9th grade depending on the individual congregation's particular situation.

a. Why consider any changes of our present confirmation tradition?

aa) Several of the reasons have been noted above: 1) Unfortunately, the outward custom in many instances has come to predominate over the inner purpose, and the motivation then becomes an outward fulfilling of custom rather than inward and spiritual; 2) The elaborate celebration that has grown up (gowns, flowers, pictures, gifts, and family celebration) around the rite accentuates that confirmation is the end of religious instruction rather than one step in a course of continuing spiritual growth; 3) We need to make some changes in our confirmation practice which will give us a better chance of implementing Proposal one above to bring about an expanded course of nurture for high school youth; with our present confirmation practice any such course would be dead in the water in quite a few congregations.

bb) In addition, the growth of our synod across the U.S. and the widely varying circumstances in our many congregations have brought about frequent situations where a rather rigid tradition of having confirmation close to the end of eighth grade does not always serve the best spiritual interests of the young people of a given congregation or the congregation at large. We need to retain some kind of common time frame so we do not have disorder in our synod, but a little larger window of time (the suggestion is a year and a half window, from the end of 7th grade to the middle of 9th grade) for confirmation would be beneficial for many congregations. It would also allow them to implement the new curriculum in a way which better meets the spiritual needs of the children from birth to 12th grade in their particular situations. 13

b. What would be the "slightly altered" form that the confirmation promise might take?

aa) The practice of confirmation being the time when the young person is invited to partake of Holy Communion would be retained.

bb) The general practice of two years of catechism instruction by the pastor prior to confirmation would be retained. We ought not change this because this is one of the real positives of our present tradition. More importantly, it is a must if the child is to be properly prepared for the reception of the Lord's Supper (i.e. understands the real presence and is able on the basis of the knowledge of the six chief parts to confess oneness in faith with all the other communicants.)

cc) One change would be that time person who is confirmed understands that this does not complete the prescribed course of religious instruction and agrees to continue in this course through, the high school years. This change would also be reflected in the promise made by the confirmand. The promise in the present rite of confirmation (cf. C,4 on page 7) would be changed to put the emphasis on the intention to continue in the study of God's Word.

dd) Hopefully the changes noted in the previous point would again put more emphasis on the inner purpose of confirmation rather than the outward custom. And if the elaborate celebration did continue, it might well be focused on the young person's confession of faith and first reception of communion rather than on the end of religious instruction.

c What are some options a congregation might choose if we would agree on an 18 month window of time for confirmation to take place?

- aa) One option obviously would be for the congregation to retain the time for confirmation at the end of eighth grade since this would be in the middle of the 7th to 9th grade window
- bb) Another option would be for the congregation to have confirmation at the end of 7th grade if its program of education prepared the young people sufficiently by this time for the reception of the Lord's Supper. (Cf. the pros and cons of the options discussed below.)
- cc) A third option would be to have confirmation in the middle of the 9th grade.
- dd) A final option would be to have confirmation on an individual (rather than a whole class) basis sometime between the end of 7th grade and the middle of 9th grade.

d. Pros and Cons of the First Option (retaining confirmation at the end of 8th grade):

- aa) A congregation with a strong positive tradition would not have to disturb that tradition in any way except to initiate a policy that this would not mark the end of the confirmands' religious instruction.
- bb) Although the new curriculum can be implemented under this option without any difficulty, it would mean that some of the courses in the new curriculum would not be covered in the same depth as they would have been if these courses had been started one year earlier. This would be true especially in a congregation which does not have a Lutheran elementary school.

e. Pros and Cons of the Second Option (admitting students to communion after 7th grade):

- aa) With a prescribed course of study which continues through the high school years, the students could be instructed sufficiently to be invited by the congregation to the Lord's Supper at this time. This is especially true of students attending a Lutheran elementary school where catechism instruction begins already in the 5th grade. It could also be true of a congregation which does not have a Lutheran elementary school but has a strong Sunday school and vacation Bible school program with active parental involvement. In the new curriculum the study of the doctrinal truths of the catechism is one option for a 10-day VBS course each year from grades one to six. The new curriculum will also allow a congregation to work toward greater parental involvement than in the past if the congregation chooses to do so.
- bb) If the congregation wishes to have the two years of catechism instruction to be done by the pastor, this option would mean that the pastor's catechism class would begin with the sixth graders. This would not be a novelty since the religion curriculum survey indicated that about one-third of our pastors are doing this already.
- cc) Given the two previous points, waiting until the end of the eighth grade might be considered by some congregations in their setting to be an unnecessary delay of allowing young people to receive the Lord's Supper. Those congregations which are able to give sufficient instruction might find this is an unnecessary delay because their young people are at that very time in their lives when, because of the society they are growing up in, they also are in need of the strengthening of their faith which God provides by the gospel in this sacrament.
- dd) Having all the young people in a given class begin attending the Lord's Supper at the same time instead of at different times after the completion of the 7th grade (cf. the fourth option) retains several of the positives of the present confirmation practice even though the time is advanced by one year. It allows for a public examination and confession of faith as in the present confirmation practice. It also retains the lifelong association of confirmation class members who were confirmed together.

ee) It allows a congregation, especially one without a Lutheran elementary school, to use the 8th grade religious instruction to begin a more in-depth study of the two kinds of courses included in the new curriculum for 7th and 8th graders, namely, Bible study skills and topical courses.

ff) Without a strong commitment on the part of parents; the congregation, the pastor and the students to continuing with a prescribed course through the high school years, this option might lead to an even weaker nurturing of young people than our present confirmation practice. Students would be confirmed at an earlier age and the present four years of little or no religious instruction during the vital teen age years would be increased to five years.

f. Pros and Cons of the Third Option (students beginning to attend Lord's Supper at the middle of 9th grade):

aa) If the congregation feels that it has no chance of implementing a prescribed course of nurture for high school youth, at least one more half year is added to the pre-confirmation instruction

bb) If the congregation and pastor find it difficult because of circumstances (e.g. a widespread mission congregation) to complete a thorough pre-confirmation course of instruction, this option adds a little more time for that purpose.

g. Pros and Cons of the Fourth Option (students beginning to attend Lord's Supper at various times after the 7th grade and before middle of the 9th grade at the discretion of the student's parents] and the pastor):

aa) This puts the emphasis on the student's completion of meeting the Scriptural requirements for receiving the Lord's Supper (able to examine oneself, able to confess oneness in faith) rather than meeting an arbitrary time deadline. This option recognizes that not all students come to an understanding of spiritual truths in the same time frame and that not all students can memorize a given body of memory work at the same rate. (Cf. the quotes and summary under D,4 on pages 9 and 10.)

bb) This option involves the parent(s) in an important spiritual decision concerning their child and so makes them take a greater interest in monitoring the child's progress toward meeting the scriptural prerequisites for the reception of the Lord's Supper.

cc) This allows the first reception of communion to be a meaningful and important step in the young person's life while at the same time not making it an end in itself but integrating it into a continuous program of growing Christian maturity

dd) One problem with this approach is that it places the burden for deciding when a child may begin to receive communion even more fully on the pastor than the present custom does. At the same time it may well also ease that burden because the pastor can recommend each person individually rather than having to recommend one or more students about whom he may have some lingering doubts along with the group that has reached the given age deadline.

ee) Another problem in middle or large size congregations may be: How does the pastor find the time for the instruction of many individuals rather than one class. Several solutions suggest themselves: 1) The catechism booklets based on the blue catechism which will be part of the curriculum could be used for individual instruction as well as class instruction; 2) A special tutor or tutors might be used to assist the pastor (gifted Sunday school teachers, Lutheran elementary school teachers, or members who have retired from their jobs and enjoy working with young people); 3) This option does not necessarily mean all individual instruction, but might well be the teaching of the basic lessons in a class of 7th, 8th and 9th graders with individual follow-up until pastor and parent agree he/she is ready to receive communion.

ff) A program of total individual study without some joint classes conducted by the pastor would lose the very important aspect of catechism instruction in which young people learn together, talk about their faith with one another, and in the process learn to comfort and encourage and admonish one another.

h. An 18 month window allows some flexibility to accommodate the many varying circumstances in the congregations of our synod yet keeps the time of confirmation from becoming so varied that it becomes a problem when a family transfers from one congregation to another.

Conclusion

The question has been posed to the writer of this article on numerous occasions: Won't these two proposals result in this problem that we will have four types of members in our congregations: baptized, communicant, voting, and now also a second kind of communicant member who has not completed the prescribed course of religious education for youth? Perhaps the solution would simply be to distinguish between "junior communicant members [those ready to receive communion but not yet having completed the prescribed course for youth]" and "senior communicant members [those who have completed the religious education program, for youth.]" Maybe there is a simpler, better solution, but in any case this does not seem to be any kind of major problem compared with some of the considerations presented in this article.

In closing, permit me to make explicit what is hopefully quite implicit in this whole presentation. The two proposals are intended to do what the title of this article suggests. The first proposal suggests a prescribed course for 9th to 12 graders in order to take some definite steps toward improving what most, if not all, of us agree is in need of improvement in our day and age, namely, our nurture of high school age youth. The second proposal seeks to support the first proposal by making only one change in our present confirmation practice, namely, a change in the promise made by the confirmand. The suggested window for confirmation between the end of 7th grade and the middle of 9th grade does not require any change if a congregation prefers to retain confirmation at the end of 8th grade.

I have shared my thoughts with you. As I said at the outset, although the two proposals in this paper are not necessary for the implementation of the new religion curriculum, it was my work on the curriculum which led me to feel that this matter needed to be addressed in our midst. Whether what I have presented is the best way to go or not I leave for you to discuss and decide. But certainly something has to be done to change what is happening now in the nurture of our high school age youth. This matter is of great importance because more than a few souls are at stake. We cannot just do nothing. It is with the solemn obligations in mind which God has laid on us as leaders in his church that I commend this matter to you for your earnest consideration.

Commission on Youth Discipleship Ad Hoc Committee on Youth Nurture

Dear Pastors and Teachers of the Wisconsin Synod,

Over a year ago, you received a paper written by Prof. David Kuske about various aspects of youth nurture in the Wisconsin Synod. You were asked to give consideration to this paper both in conference meetings and in private discussions and then send your reactions to Mr. Gerald Kastens, the administrator of the CYD. About two-thirds of you have done so. Now an ad hoc committee has been called together to consider your responses and to take whatever action best reflects your thoughts in this important matter.

First of all, we want to thank you for the many responses that you sent in. It is obvious from what you have said that this paper addressed an important subject in our congregational work. In this letter we want to comment on five areas where concerns were expressed about some things in the paper. These five areas are: 1) What a "prescribed course" means; 2) The problem of teenagers who do not participate; 3) Changing the vow slightly at confirmation and adding a new ceremony at the 12th grade level; 4) Having a "window" for

confirmation from the end of 7th grade to the middle of 9th grade; and 5) Addressing the home situation as part of a youth nurture emphasis.

“Prescribed Course”

The paper spoke about a “prescribed course.” This was an unfortunate choice of terms because many understood it to mean that every congregation would be bound to teach exactly the same thing in exactly the same way. Perhaps a better way to express what was meant in the paper would have been to speak about a “basic course.” As in our catechism instruction, we would have a basic curriculum. Then each congregation would go about covering the content of that curriculum in the way that it chooses - by using the available course materials in the way that it deems best.

Teens Who Do Not Participate

A second concern was what to do about teenagers who do not participate. Nothing will be gained by legalistically forcing youth to participate. On the other hand, we do not have an established tradition in our congregations of having teenagers follow a study of God’s Word according to a planned curriculum. Realistically, patient and persistent encouragement over a generation will be needed to reach this goal without resorting to legalistic means. In working toward that goal, there are a number of things we can do to remove the roadblocks Satan will throw up in the minds of young people: 1) If we as a synod, by formal resolution or by simple consensus, agree that this is what most, if not all, congregations will do, then high school youth won’t look over the fence into other congregations and say, “Why are we being asked to do this? None of the high school students in other congregations have this kind of Bible study” 2) The young people will need to be shown that the purpose is their welfare; the course materials will have to be published in a format that is attractive to this age group; and the youth will need to discover that taking the courses of the curriculum truly benefice them spiritually in their lives as teenagers. 3) The curriculum will have to be flexible enough so that a teenager can take the courses in whatever way the congregation devises for its youth: a teacher holding a weekly Bible class; study at home - with the parents, or on his/her own with biweekly or monthly consultations with a teacher; et al. 4) Combined continual encouragement by the pastor, the congregation, the parents, and teenage peers - with discipline being carried out [as we do now with any member of our congregation] only when and if an adolescent shows he/she despises the Word and Sacraments in general, not just on the basis of non-attendance at classes or neglect of studying the courses in the high school curriculum.

Confirmation Vow - Ceremony

Concerns were also expressed about changing the vow at confirmation, and about having a new ceremony for 12th grade students. Rather than working toward making these common practice, it would be best if these were simply left as options that a congregation could use if it found them to be helpful in its program of spiritual nurture. The alternate confirmation vow, as the paper suggests, would emphasize the promise to be faithful in the use of the means of grace (which is the only way God can keep us faithful to death.) The optional ceremony in the 12th grade would have the same emphasis. It would be helpful if a sample vow and ceremony were provided for those who indicated they would like to use them.

A “Window”

Opinions were divided on whether a “window” for confirmation from the end of 7th grade to the middle of 9th grade was a good idea or not. Some said this was already being done and so was a moot point: others maintained we ought to retain our practice of having confirmation at the end of 8th grade. The paper’s suggestion had two assumptions: 1) Confirmation at the end of 7th grade would take place only after thorough instruction in the six chief parts (e.g. children in a Lutheran elementary school who begin their study of the catechism already in 5th grade); and 2) The 8th grade year [in which students by long-standing tradition in our midst continue their formal study of God’s Word] would be used to begin the study of the courses that are part of the new 7th to 12th grade curriculum - with the hope that this would lead most, if not all, of the teenagers to continue with these

courses in the high school years. The divided opinion on this "window" suggests that there could be friction and growing suspicion among us if we do not come to some meeting of the minds on this matter. Perhaps it would be best if, either by formal resolution or by simple consensus as a synod, we agree that confirmation at the end of 7th grade were an option congregations might adopt with the two assumptions above as their rationale. Then it would be done by congregations, not to lessen their study of the Word, but actually as a way to increase that study by using the 8th grade to initiate the high school curriculum.

Youth Nurture and the Home

A number of the reactions suggested that trying to do something about youth nurture without addressing the home situation, particularly the spirituality of the parents, would be fruitless. There is little doubt that if the parents are not spiritually strong, this will have its effect on the child all the way along-in Sunday school, catechism class and the high school nurture program of the congregation. This should have been addressed more in the paper. The paper did assume that this matter would receive a good deal of attention in the new parenting materials being developed by the Board for Parish Services (which stress what it means to be a Christian parent and teach parents some helpful skills for nurturing their children.) It was also assumed that the new K-12 religion curriculum would support the new parenting materials by involving parents in nurture - starting at the birth of a child by giving parents more ways of getting into the Word themselves, as well as giving parents the help they need to use the materials of the new religion curriculum in nurturing their children in the family circle. Thus the youth nurture curriculum presented in the paper would not stand on its own. Instead, it would only be a part of a more general effort to get everyone children, teenagers, and parents more involved in the Word. It may take some time, under God's blessings, to see some fruits from these efforts. In the meantime it is important that we do our best to get teenagers more into the Word even if they do not have much spiritual support from their parents.

Summary

These were the major concerns expressed in the reactions received. The Live sections above are our assessment of how these concerns might best be met while also hopefully strengthening our whole approach to youth nurture. We will be forwarding this assessment to the Commission on Youth Discipleship. If you wish to give further input, send it to Mr. Gerald Kastens at the synod office.

Subject: Expanding the Nurture of High School Age Youth

Background: Over a year ago a paper written by Professor David Kuske about various aspects of youth nurture in the Wisconsin Synod was distributed to all pastors and teachers for discussion and reaction. An ad hoc committee was formed to consider the responses and to make recommendations concerning whatever action best reflects the thoughts and wishes of our constituency in this important matter

It was obvious that Professor Kuske's paper addressed an important concern of many parish leaders. Five areas of concern surfaced as a result of discussion and study on the circuit and conference level. The five areas were addressed in a subsequent document sent to all circuit pastors and conference chairmen. The five areas of concern are: 1) What a "prescribed course" for teenagers means; 2) The problem of teenagers who do not participate; 3) Changing the vow slightly in confirmation and adding a new ceremony at the 12th grade level; 4) Having a "window" for confirmation from the end of 7th grade to the middle of 9th grade; and 5) Addressing the home situation as part of a youth nurture emphasis.

The Commission on Youth Discipleship has received some reactions to this subsequent document which addressed these areas of concern. In general it seems this document has addressed these concerns to the satisfaction of most people.

Action: As a result the CYD is ready to suggest the following general course of action..

1. That every congregation be urged to use the new high school curriculum (when it is published) to establish a "basic course" for its youth from 7th to 12th grade. The term "basic course" means to say that

each congregation would go about covering the content of the curriculum in the way that it chooses. Hopefully, every congregation will teach the core curriculum and then also use the other available course material in the way that it deems best

2. That the problem of teens who might not be willing to follow this “basic course” be addressed in a number of ways: a) That the synod by formal resolution or by simple consensus agree that having a basic course for teenagers will be common practice so that the youth won’t look over the fence into other congregations and say, “Why are we being asked to do this? None of the students in the neighboring WELS congregations have a course for teens like this.” b) That the youth be shown that the purpose of this new basic course is their spiritual welfare, that the course material be published in an attractive format, and that the teachers of these courses be well-trained so that the youth find that taking the courses in this curriculum truly benefits them spiritually in their lives as teenagers. c) That the teenager be able to take the courses in whatever way (among a number of ways) that each congregation devises for its youth: a weekly Bible class; on his or her own with biweekly or monthly consultations with a teacher; study at home with the parents; etc. d) That the combined continual encouragement by pastor, congregation, parents and teenage peers be followed by discipline only when and if an adolescent shows he or she despises the Word and sacraments in general - not just on the basis of non-attendance at classes or neglect of studying the courses in the basic curriculum.

3. That an alternate confirmation vow and an optional ceremony for 12th graders who complete the “basic course” be developed. Both would emphasize the promise on the part of the young people to be faithful in the use of the means of grace. The terms “alternate” and “option” imply that these two items would be available as options that a congregation could use if it found them to be helpful in its program of spiritual nurture for youth.

4. That by formal resolution or by simple consensus of the synod we agree that a “window” for confirmation from the end of 7th grade to the middle of 9th grade be acceptable practice in our congregations. Two assumptions would underlie this resolution or consensus: a) Confirmation at the end of 7th grade would take place only after thorough instruction in the six chief parts [e.g. children in a Lutheran elementary school who begin their study of catechism already in the 5th grade]; and b) The 8th grade year for those confirmed at the end of 7th grade would be devoted to an intensive study of the appropriate courses of the new 7th to 12th grade curriculum with the hope that this would lead most, if not all, of the teenagers to continue with these courses in the high school years.

5) That parental cooperation in and support of the “basic course” for teenagers be encouraged by the use of the new parenting materials being developed by the Board for Parish Services and by the new K- 12th grade curriculum (which involves the parents in the nurture of their children and gives them the help they need to use the materials of the new religion curriculum in nurturing their children in the family circle.)

As was said earlier, the reactions of the 1994 district conventions to these basic proposals will help shape the final resolutions that will be presented to a future synod convention by the Commission on Youth Discipleship and the Commission on Parish Schools. Reactions by individuals in the synod will also be gladly received.