

# I Believe ...

A Two-Year Confirmation Program for the 21st Century



Developed by  
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# I Believe In...

## A Two-Year Confirmation Program for the 21st Century

### Introducing -- A New Approach to Confirmation

You have before you a two-year confirmation program that engages young people in experiencing and reflecting on what it means to name Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior in the context of the Episcopal Church. Our approach is Bible-based and uses the stories of biblical people to tell the story of Christianity and to illustrate its precepts. The program combines traditional classroom teaching with opportunities to discover and encounter Christ in our own lives and in the lives of others. The program incorporates:

- Classroom reflection
- Weekend retreats focusing on our life with God in Christ
- Community service focusing on sharing the love of God
- Mentoring by mature Christians as they explore faith in daily life
- Exploring our life of prayer and worship
- An introduction to lay ministry through “internships” in the student’s own congregation

### How the program Works

This program is intentionally flexible and designed to be led by either a clergy or layperson and preferably one of each. The first year is designed to ground the student in the basic tenants of the Christian faith. The second year explains a little of the history, the Episcopal tradition, and the values we bring into our lives as a result of our faith in Christ. Some congregations may wish to combine first and second year students with one leader. By studying ‘Year 1’ first, students progress from the general to the specific. By studying ‘Year 2’ first, students progress from the specific to the general. Either way works just fine.

A critical element of the program is the broader role given to the congregation. While sponsors are usually involved to some extent in the confirmation process, this program gives them, the student’s family, and other members of the congregation a more active role in helping candidates understand what it means to join the body of Christ. Students are encouraged to explore community service and lay ministries in their own parish and to understand the calling we all have to serve Christ in each other. This program also encourages students to explore the excitement of a lifelong quest for something bigger than themselves and at the same time very personal -- a relationship with Christ.

### Managing the Program

Basic program materials you will need include a congregation or parish calendar, the leader’s guide and a guide for each student. Each lesson outline includes a lesson objective, opening and closing devotions, background and context information, a short scripture passage or text reference, a choice of discussion questions, options for related

activities, and an additional resource list. The student guide also includes 'Connections' (conversation starters), and a 'Think About It,' quote for each week. Separate sections explain sponsorship, retreats, and internship and offer suggestions for blending these program elements with classroom instruction.

For both the students and congregation to get the most out of the additional program elements, you will want to schedule well ahead and ensure that everyone is aware of your plans. You may also want to have a school calendar on hand for your planning as well.

### **Additionally, please consider**

Leaders of any confirmation program must also cope with other complications posed by the 21st century. First, many students find themselves coping with split families, one weekend here, the next there. It can be difficult to convince the sharing parent that students need to be in class every Sunday for two years. However, the attempt needs to be made. One suggestion is to discuss the program with both parents and provide each with a copy of the student guide or even the leader's guide to help them understand the program and give them the opportunity to be involved. The lessons are reasonably adaptable and the exercises can even be done at home with parents and some amount of feedback submitted via email. Depending on your church's computer resources, it may also be possible to include absent students in your classroom electronically.

Second, both the leader and student's guides include additional resource lists with each lesson where possible. They may or may not be the same for any given lesson. The leader's list tends to include resources geared to in-depth study of the scripture and historical context, whereas the student's resources list may include novels, websites, or other historical material geared more particularly to students.

And last, the term he or she, his or hers may be used interchangeably throughout the text. We ask you to remember that these are merely conveniences used when the gender of the subject isn't certain.

Leading students of any age in a discussion of faith is not an easy task. We've provided as many aids as possible, but how you use them is up to you. If you have questions, comments, or suggestions, please feel free to contact us through our publisher, LeaderResources at 1-800-941-2218 or [www.LeaderResources.org](http://www.LeaderResources.org).

God Bless and keep you on the journey you are about to begin.

Year 1

Leader Guide

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## Introducing:

### **YEAR ONE: The Salvation Story — Our Story as God's Children**

The intent of these lessons is to help us claim the salvation story as our own – and encourage us to understand ourselves as loved by and called to love God. Using Scripture and our language of worship in the Book of Common Prayer, this section focuses on the story of God's relation to us and our relation to God.

#### **Understanding the lesson plan layouts**

This program is split into two years of programming. Lessons are labeled 'Year 1' or 'Year 2' for convenience but either year can go first. By using 'Year 1' first, students progress from the general to the specific. By using 'Year 2' first, students progress from the specific to the general. Either way works just fine.

Lesson plans are numbered in a format that indicates year, section and lesson. For example, Lesson 1a2 would be the 2<sup>nd</sup> lesson in Section A during Year 1, while lesson 2d4 would be the 4<sup>th</sup> lesson of Section D during Year 2.

Some smaller congregations have combined first and second year students into one class and that's okay too. Do what works best for your situation.

Additional program elements such as the retreat are included in the section introductions where they fit with the text and lessons. However they will need to be scheduled as they fit best in the lives of the students, leaders and the congregation.

**Kick-off workshop:** One session, (a mini-retreat) on a Saturday weaves together discussions on discernment with trust and team building exercises. It ends with a simple lunch students prepare for each other. Note: if you are engaging two different year groups of students in a single class, this exercise can be done at the beginning of both years. As an alternative, use this exercise with new students only and use the review session potluck with continuing students.

#### **Section 1a – God's act of creation — Formed in love for love.**

- Two lessons focusing on creation stories in Genesis 1 and 2: human beings – created in the image of God, and life in the garden with God. The sessions explore our identity as children of God formed by God in love, for love.
- Finding a sponsor or mentor – *“Been there, done that, and still looking.”* Part of one session focuses on the sponsorship program and building a relationship with an older Christian during a required number of meetings over two years. This topic may be presented as part of the kick-off mini-retreat or as part of a class session. See separate section at the end of this file.

## ***Kick-off Mini Retreat*** **“The Journey Begins”**

**Objective:** Through discussion, exercises and prayer, students prepare for a two-year journey to explore the Christian faith and claim it for their own.

**Program outline for the Mini-retreat:** Our journey toward faith is rather like Abraham’s journeys as told in Genesis. To help students better understand that confirmation is the beginning and not the end of their own journey, share Abraham’s story, and then help them plan a hypothetical walking journey.

**Preparation:** Find a state road map that shows a 600 mile radius around your church. If possible, draw a circle around that 600 mile radius. This map will be posted in the meeting room and students will help choose a significant location (a cathedral, another church, or a pilgrimage site) that is approximately 600 miles from your church. (You may wish to do some research on what locations might work before class so you can help answer questions.) The 600 mile number is a symbol of the journey they are undertaking. A group walking and carrying their own equipment and food can travel about 10 miles a day. There are 60 sessions in this program, so  $60 \times 10 = 600$ .

**Opening devotions:** Read Psalm 131, BCP p. 785. Alternate suggestions include psalm 121, BCP p. 779, or a format of your choice. Note: Psalms 120 - 134 are the Psalms of Ascent and are thought to reflect a pilgrimage to Jerusalem.

**Background to the story:** The story of Abraham is a journey of faith and exploration, not unlike the journey teens make toward confirmation and adulthood.

Throughout the book of Genesis we read of Abraham’s journey of faith and toward faith. His journey actually begins with his father, Terah, who decides to move his family to Canaan. However, when they reach Haran, he decides to settle there. Then the lord says to Abram, “Leave your country, your relatives and you father’s family, and go to the land I will show you,” Genesis 12:1. Abraham goes, not knowing where the Lord will send him. He goes first to Canaan. But there is a famine, so he heads into Egypt. The Egyptian king commands him to leave and he returns to Canaan.

Abraham faces both danger and tough decisions on his journey. God says, “Abram, don’t be afraid, I will defend you, and give you a great reward,” Genesis 15:1. On the journey, God changes his name from Abram to Abraham. God promises him a son, but as the years pass, Abraham begins to doubt. Abraham argues with God to save the cities of Sodom and Gomorrah. God destroys the cities, but saves Lot (Abraham’s nephew) and his family. Abraham’s faith is tested yet again when God tells him to sacrifice his son and at the last moment saves him.

In the story of Abraham, we learn that God does not always give Abraham what he wants, exactly when he wants it or necessarily in the way he prefers. We also learn that God does defend Abraham, does keep his promises, and does listen to prayers.

Abraham's life is a journey of faith, just as ours must be. Abraham's story is summarized in Hebrews in the text below.

**Lesson text:** Hebrews 11: 1-4, and 8-10. Ask a student to read the text aloud from The New Century Bible (text below) or a translation of your choice.

Faith means being sure of the things we hope for and knowing that something is real even if we do not see it. Faith is the reason we remember great people who lived in the past.

It was by faith Abraham obeyed God's call to go to another place God promised to give him. He left his own country, not knowing where he was to go. It was by faith that he lived like a foreigner in the country God promised to give him. He lived in tents with Isaac and Jacob, who had received that same promise from God. Abraham was waiting for the City that has real foundations – the City planned and built by God.

### **Understanding the story – discussion points and exercises:**

#### **Exercise 1: Discernment**

Lay the map mentioned above on the floor or tape it to a wall. Adults and students work together to choose an appropriate pilgrimage site. Once the site has been chosen, talk about what walking

make a list of what skills the group will need for the trip. Then ask them each to list on a separate piece of paper the skills they each bring to the journey. Compare the lists. Explain that all of their individual talents may not be apparent yet, but will emerge during the journey, as they are needed.

Take a 10-minute break. Materials needed include a tray, small juice glasses or paper cups, a bottle or container of juice (apple, cranberry, etc., not soda) and a jar of olives (as a reminder of Abraham's journey) and oranges, peeled and sectioned, or grapes. Ask two students in the group to be the 'servants' and to prepare a tray of juice and bowls of olives and orange slices or grapes. Have them offer each of the other students a drink and small snack.

#### **Exercise 2: Group building**

Abraham did not make the journey alone. He had family and friends that he learned to trust. Trust often begins with knowing more about each other. Divide students in teams of two and ask them to spend 5 minutes each telling the other person where they were born, a little about their parents, brothers and sisters, and to describe the best moment of their lives and the worst. Then have each student give the group a 2 – 5 minute summary of their partner. If time permits, ask the students to swap partners and do the same thing again.

Take a 10-minute break. Have two other students prepare the trays and offer orange slices or grapes.

Exercise 3. Decision-making (Chose option a or b)

Option a. Gather the students around a large newsprint pad (turned on its side) or a dry erase board. Draw 5 columns. Label columns as follows. Gather information, List options, Consequences to myself, Consequences to others, and 5. Decision. Then using a simple decision, i.e. whether to attend a party on the night before a test, ask students to fill in the 5 columns. Then take a more complicated decision, such as whether or not to actually organize the walking pilgrimage to the location used as an outline for this workshop. Fill in the same 5 columns. Discuss decision making in general.

Option b. Ask one of the college students in your parish who has already been confirmed to discuss with students how he or she makes simple decisions. Ask him/her to also discuss how they made their own confirmation decision and how that has affected them in the years following. As an alternative, ask him/her to conduct the exercise in option a. Ask him/her to include his/her own experiences with decision-making, good and bad, in the discussion.

10-minute break. Have two other students prepare the trays and offer small glasses or paper cups of water.

Exercise 4. Give each student a copy of the student guide. Explain that the program will be a two-year journey that you will make together. Review the table of contents and program parts. Ask them to start thinking about possible sponsors and review dates with their family for the first service project and retreat.

Final exercise. Students share a simple meal of bread, cheese, olives, and water. Have the students wash their hands and then cut bread from a whole loaf, cut cheese, gather olives, and pour water for the person next to him or her. Ask one of the students to say a simple grace for the meal. Afterwards, ask everyone to wash his or her own plate and glass.

**Closing devotions:** Pray together *For Guidance* # 58, BCP p. 832. As an alternative, use Luke 10: 3-6 (Jesus sends forth the seventy) or a format of your own choice.

**Dismissal:** Invite the students to continue the journey with you in confirmation class the following Sunday.

(Lesson 1a1)

***The Story of Creation:***  
**“Formed in love for love”**

**Objective:** To understand the orderly unfolding of God’s creation that culminates in the creation of human beings in His image.

**Opening devotions:** Daily Devotions, BCP p. 137. Alternate suggestions include Psalm 104 or portions of it or Hymn 406 in the Hymnal 1982, written by St. Francis of Assisi, or use a format of your choice.

**Background to the story:** Genesis contains the magisterial account of God’s work of creation. In the opening sentence a wind, the Hebrew word “ruach”, which also means “spirit”, moves across the dark waters and then God speaks, “Let there be light”, and creation commences.

This story introduces several important insights. First, God unfolds creation and is personally involved in each step. God creates *ex nihilo* – out of nothing. The image of a formless, watery void derives from the mythic stories of creation from ancient Canaanite culture. Genesis stresses that creation proceeds from God and does not precede God, establishing the distinction between creator and creation. We do not worship creation; we worship the Creator.

A second important theme in Genesis is God’s delight in the essential goodness of creation emphasized by the repetition of the phrase, “and God saw that it was good.”

Additionally, notice the orderly process of God’s creation. Basic distinctions between light and dark, land and sea give way to increasingly complex life forms. God’s work culminates in the creation of human beings, formed in His likeness. They receive a divine blessing and are charged with the responsibility of caring for creation.

God ends by resting and blessing the Sabbath or seventh day.

**Lesson text:** Genesis 1:1 - 2:3. Ask one of the students to read aloud from a translation of your choice.

**Understanding the story — discussion points** (Choose two or three as class time permits):

1. Discuss God’s work of creation. How involved is God in creation? What does this tell us about God?
2. In what order does creation unfold over the six days? What patterns emerge?
3. What does God think about creation? What is God’s response to creation?
4. What does it mean for human beings to be given dominion over creation?

**Engaging the story -- For a deeper understanding, students become part of the story:**

Option 1. (Materials needed: newsprint flip charts, easel(s) and colored markers). Work together as a class or divide into groups of three or four students. Ask the students to imagine they have been hired to draw a mural depicting God's work of creation. Read Genesis 1 pausing at the end of each day and ask the students to draw images from each day on newsprint using a separate page for each day. Compare and discuss the drawings.

Option 2. Borrow a copy of an earth science textbook used in your school system and read to the class what it says or does not say about creation. Then reread Genesis 1. Discuss the similarities and the differences.

Option 3. (Materials needed: newsprint flip chart, easel and colored markers). Draw a line down the center of the pad and label one side 'What we know of God,' and the other side 'What God expects of us.' Have a student reread the passage and pause at the end of each day in the story. Ask students to decide what each day tells them about the nature of God and His expectations of us. Record those in the columns. Keep this chart and add to it in future sessions.

**Connections:** (Questions for students to consider and or discuss with sponsors, parents and friends in the week ahead).

1. Many people are fascinated with astrology – the belief that the stars control our destiny. How does the account of God's creation in Genesis challenge this?
2. What are our responses to creation?
3. Human beings were given dominion over creation and the responsibility to care for it. How are we doing? What should we, as individuals, do?
4. How do we honor the Sabbath in our lives? Why is it important that we do?

**Think about it!** "God saw everything that he had made and indeed it was very good." (Genesis 1:31)

**Closing devotions:** Psalm 104 or portions of it or close with your own format.

**Additional resources:**

*1982 Hymnal.* New York: Church Publishing Incorporated, 1982

*The Book of Common Prayer.* The Episcopal Church. New York: The Church Hymnal Corp. 1979.

Any Earth Sciences Text Book

**God's Act of Creation:  
"Created in the Image of God"**

**Objective:** Students discover and explore their identity as children of God, created in the image of God.

**Opening devotions:** Daily Devotions, BCP p. 137  
Alternate suggestions include *"For the Human Family"* from the Prayers and Thanksgivings section, BCP p. 815; Hymn 47; Hymn 8, or Psalm 95:1-7; or use a format of your choice.

**Background to the story:** Genesis 1:26-27 are highly significant verses that emphasize both God's creation of human beings and our God-given identity as children created in the image of God. They speak directly to teenagers wrestling with issues of self-identity and self-discovery.

God's use of plural pronouns, i.e., *"Let us make humankind in our image,"* envisions God announcing the creation of human beings to a heavenly court of angels. Since human beings are made in God's image, they possess an innate dignity and respect. Of similar importance is the understanding that both "male and female" are made in the image of God, and both share in God's blessing.

These verses may also lead into a discussion of God's gender. We know from historians and historical context, that the writer's chose to refer to God as He or Him partly as a matter of convenience and partly because authority figures of the time were male. The scriptures hint at both male and female traits. For some female allusions in the scripture, see Hosea 11:1ff, Psalm 139:13 and Luke 13:34.

Furthermore, Genesis implies that human beings are created with the capacity to receive and reflect the presence of God. Characteristics such as creativity, generosity, kindness, and the ability to give and receive love are signs pointing to our creation in God's image. The New Testament also develops the idea that we have the capacity to grow into the image or likeness of God. Our continuing connection to God is reflected in passages in such as Galatians 5:27ff. that refer to humans receiving the Holy Spirit and to signs or "fruits" of the Spirit in our lives.

To be made in God's image entails also a capacity to share in God's work. Contained in these verses is God's command to serve as caretakers for creation. God entrusts us with the responsibility for the prosperity of creation.

Finally, these two verses introduce a relationship, with God as beloved parent and us as beloved children. Jesus addressed God not as "creator", but as "Abba", which is

translated as “father”, but is closer to more familiar terms like “Poppa” or “Daddy”. To be made in God’s image conveys the idea of a loving, familial relationship.

**Lesson text:** Genesis 1:26-27. Ask one student to read aloud from RSV or a translation of your choice.

**Understanding the story – discussion points** (Choose two or three as class time permits):

1. We are told that both “male and female” are created in the image of God. Is one gender more important than the other?
2. What is the importance of verse 27 repeating three times that God “created” us?
3. How do our lives reflect the image or likeness of God?

**Engaging the story -- For a deeper understanding, students become part of the story:**

Option 1. (Materials needed: easel, flip chart and markers). Working together or in groups of three or four, ask the students to describe themselves and record their responses on newsprint. Reread the Genesis 1:26-27 and ask them to imagine how God describes them and record the answers. Ask students to discuss what qualities God and human beings share in common.

Option 2. (Materials needed: easel, flip chart and markers) Read the account of creation in Genesis 2:15-24. Ask students to compare this with the account in Genesis chapter 1. Compare especially the creation of Adam and Eve in each story? In what ways are the accounts different? Do the two readings disagree or compliment one another? Record and discuss their responses.

**Connections:** Questions for students to consider and or discuss with sponsors, parents and friends in the week ahead.

1. Think of a person in your life with whom you have had difficulty relating. Pray for that person and as you pray envision him or her as a child of God. After several weeks how has this affected your relationship with this person?
2. How does understanding yourself as a beloved child of God affect how you think/feel about yourself?
3. Who are people in your life in whom you have seen the likeness of God? What about them makes you say this?
4. How does your relationship with your parents reflect God’s relationship with His children?

**Think about it!** Substitute your name for “them” in “in the image of God he created ...”.

**Closing devotions:** Use the prayer, “*For the Human Family*”, BCP p. 815 or chose your own format.

**Additional resources:**

*The Holy Bible*, Hosea 11:1ff, Psalm 139:13, Luke 13:34, and Galatians 5:27ff

SECTION=====

**Introducing:**

**Section 1b -- Human disobedience - That nagging little word called “sin.”**

- Class sessions focusing on the temptation of Adam and Eve in the garden in Genesis 3, the story of Noah in Genesis 6-10, and the Tower of Babel in Genesis 11. These sessions emphasize how human beings seek to go their own way, trying to make themselves into gods, and examine the consequences. Connections are then drawn with the choices we confront today in our daily lives.
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***Adam and Eve in the Garden:***  
**“Love refused or that nagging little word called sin”**

**Objective:** Students explore the meaning and place of sin in human life through the story of Adam and Eve.

**Opening devotions:** Daily Devotions, BCP p. 137. Alternative suggestions include psalm 51 or portions of it, Canticle 14, BCP p.91, or a format of your choice.

**Background to the story:** The story of Adam and Eve’s temptation in Genesis chapter 3 is humanity’s story. Adam and Eve both confront and give in to the temptation to be disobedient to God’s commandment and the consequences are exile from paradise and a rupturing of intimate fellowship with God. The power of this story for teenagers is its ability to speak truthfully about the distortion of our relationships with God and each other that acting on temptation brings. This story thus becomes the biblical introduction to that nagging little word called “sin” and its consequences.

The issue of temptation, the desire to blame others for our choices (“Eve made me eat it”), and the hesitation to speak truthfully when confronted with our wrongdoing are familiar experiences in the lives of young adults. The story also encourages us to explore our emotional and spiritual responses to sin. After eating the fruit, Adam and Eve’s sudden awareness of their nakedness evokes a sense of shame and hasty stitching of makeshift clothing. They also fear the sound of God’s approach and seek to conceal themselves from the divine presence.

The story ends with Adam and Eve’s exile and a series of sobering statements by God about Adam and Eve’s future – Eve will experience pain in childbirth and Adam will have difficulties in tilling the soil. It also introduces God’s response to human disobedience – God graciously provides garments for Adam and Eve and clothes them. This provides the background to the New Testament where believers who have been baptized are spoken of as “clothed in Christ” (Gal 3:27).

**Lesson text:** Genesis 3:1-21. Ask a student to read aloud from the NRSV or a translation of your choice.

**Understanding the story – discussion points** (Choose two or three as class time permits):

1. Discuss the serpent’s temptation of Eve. What does he imply about God? What does he tell Eve will happen when she eats the fruit?
2. What are Adam and Eve’s responses after eating the Fruit of Knowledge? What do they do? Why?
3. Why are Adam and Eve afraid of God?
4. When confronted by God, what do Adam and Eve do?

5. At the end of the story, what does God do?

**Engaging the story -- For a deeper understanding, students become part of the story:**

Option 1. (Materials needed: markers and flip chart). Breaking up into groups of four or working as a class, reread the text and ask students to prepare a brief skit of this story with different students playing the parts of the serpent, Eve, Adam and God. Following the performance, discuss the following questions: When have we acted like the serpent? Like Eve? Like Adam? Like God? Record the responses on the flip chart on a separate page or add to the chart page from the exercise in Lesson 1A1 titled 'what we know about God and ourselves?'

Option 2. (Materials needed: markers and flip chart). Reread the text from a different translation, such as Eugene Peterson's, *The Message*. Explain to the class that you have been asked to conduct a survey of the experiences of teenagers. Ask the following questions and record the responses on the flip chart. How many of you have ever been tempted to act in ways that you knew to be wrong? How many of you have acted on that temptation? Do you know anyone who has not been tempted? When you have done wrong, how has that made you feel? After recording the responses reread the text. Identify and discuss similarities between the recorded responses and what happens in the story.

**Connections:** Questions for students to consider and or discuss with sponsors, parents and friends in the week ahead.

1. What are some of the actions in your life that have drawn you closer to God? What are some the actions that have made God seem distant?
2. When you have been tempted have you prayed to God for help? If so, what happened?
3. When you have done wrong have you said you were sorry to God? To the one you offended? How has that made you feel?
4. Have you experienced God's presence "clothing you"?

**Think about it!** "Be sober. Be watchful. Your adversary the devil prowls around like a roaring lion, seeking someone to devour. Resist him, firm in your faith." (I Peter 5:8-9a)

**Closing devotions:** Canticle 10, BCP p. 86 or close with your own format.

**Additional resources:**

*The Message*. Eugene Peterson, Translator. NAVPRESS Publishing Group, 2002.

***God's first covenant with humanity:  
"A rainbow in the clouds"***

**Objective:** Students explore God's response to human wickedness and God's promise — signified by the rainbow in the clouds — to never destroy life on Earth by water again.

**Opening devotions:** Daily Devotions, Morning BCP p. 137. Alternative suggestions include one or more of the "Prayers for the Natural Order" beginning on p. 827, BCP or a format of your choice.

**Background to the story:** The story of Noah's ark is arguably the most familiar story of the Old Testament, particularly as a children's story. This lesson provides young adults an opportunity to explore the story with its engaging themes of human wickedness and God's response to this wickedness from a changing, but more adult perspective.

The story of the flood shares characteristics with other Near Eastern stories such as the Gilgamesh Epic and Atrahasis myth. (See [Harper's Bible Commentary, p.91](#)). However, the author of Genesis uses the story to illustrate God's response to human corruption. The story begins with God's withering assessment of humanity's propensity for violence, "the Lord saw that the wickedness of humanity was great in the earth, and that every inclination of the thoughts of their hearts was only evil continually." (Genesis 6:5ff) With a revelation of God's inner life, the story continues, "and the Lord was sorry that he made humankind on the earth, and it grieved him to his heart."

Against this portrait of human corruption and divine anguish, we see Noah, a righteous man, who finds "favor in the sight of the Lord." God determines to send a destroying flood, yet also summons Noah to build a humongous boat, which will save Noah, his immediate family, and a remnant of all living creatures. As the story unfolds, God's creation is not so much destroyed as renewed. As the waters recede, God commands the creatures swarming out of the ark to "be fruitful and multiply," echoing both the content and even the language of his commands in the creation story.

The story culminates with God initiating a covenant or promise with all creation never to destroy all life again (Genesis 9.14-16). This is the first of a series of covenants God forms with his people pointing toward the establishment of the new covenant of forgiveness of sins and reconciliation with God, through the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ. Indeed the image of God preserving life amidst the flood shaped early Christian teaching about God's saving work through Christ in the sacramental water of baptism. (See I Peter 3:18-22).

**Text:** Genesis 6:5 - 9:16. Due to the length of this text, it would be helpful if students read this prior to class. For an extremely contemporary English translation, see Eugene Patterson's *The Message* or ask one of the students to read from a translation of your choice.

**Understanding the story – discussion points** (Choose two or three as class time permits):

1. Discuss how human beings are portrayed prior to the flood and God's response to human behavior.
2. How is Noah different? What does it mean to be "righteous"?
3. Why does God include all living creatures as well as human beings on the ark? What does this imply about God?
4. What is the "covenant" that God makes with humankind? What does this tell us about God?

**Engaging the story -- For a deeper understanding, students become part of the story:**

Option 1. Have the students read the section entitled "Human Nature" in "An Outline of the Faith commonly called the Catechism" (BCP p.845). How does the story of Noah and the flood illustrate what the catechism teaches about human nature? What are the similarities? Differences?

Option 2. (Materials needed: paper, preferably light gray construction paper shaped in the form of stones, and black markers or pens). Discuss the meaning of Noah's decision to build an altar to God and God giving the sign of the rainbow. (Altar--a sign of thanksgiving for preserving life. The rainbow -- a sign of God's decision never to destroy life by water again.) Pass out pieces of paper. Give the students 5 –10 minutes to silently write their own prayers of thanks to God. Explain that this is their way of building an altar to God. Include these prayers in the closing devotions. As students leave have them tape their 'stones" to a wall in the shape of an altar. If possible, the wall should be in a foyer or social area so that other members of the congregation can read the prayers, add stones of their own, and share this lesson.

**Connections:** Questions for students to consider and or discuss with sponsors, parents and friends in the week ahead.

1. Has human behavior changed as you think about events in the world?
2. Have you seen signs of God acting to protect and preserve life? Where and how?
3. What are some of the difficulties Noah faced in being obedient to God? What are some the difficulties that we face?
4. How do you think Noah's family, friends, and neighbors reacted to his building an ark?

**Think about it!** Give thanks to God the next time you see a rainbow.

**Closing devotions:** Use one of the “Prayers for the Natural Order” beginning on p. 827 of the BCP, or the prayers from option II above, or close with your own format.

**Additional resources:**

*Harper’s Bible Commentary*, James L. Mays, Editor. Harper and Row, Society of Biblical Literature. San Francisco. 1988

*The Catechism*, (Pg. 845), The Book of Common Prayer, The Episcopal Church (USA) Sept. 1979.

*Many Waters*. Madeleine L'Engle. Farrar Straus Giroux. (January 1986).

**The Tower of Babel:**  
***“The Kingdom of God or the Kingdom of humanity”***

**Objective:** Students explore humanity’s continual temptation to displace God and establish the kingdom of humanity rather than the kingdom of God.

**Opening devotions:** “A Prayer attributed to St. Francis,” BCP p.833. As an alternative, read or sing hymn 573 in the *Hymnal 1982* or a format of your choice.

**Background to the story:** The story of the Tower of Babel, following as it does that of Adam and Eve in the garden and Noah and the flood, completes the cycle of stories in Genesis concerning humanity’s rebellion against God. This story closely parallels the story of Adam and Eve in Genesis 3. In both stories, humanity seeks to transgress divine limitations. Adam and Eve, the first created human beings, give in to temptation because they believe “their eyes will be opened and they will be like God” (Genesis 3.5). In the Tower of Babel, all humanity seeks to “make a name for itself” (Genesis 11.4) implicitly challenging the supremacy of God.

The word “name” in the quotation above is important. In the Hebrew language, the word “shem” or “name” refers to both “fame” or “renown”, as well as “progeny” implying that humanity is seeking to claim God’s glory as well as overcoming the limits of human mortality (See *Harper’s Bible Commentary*, p. 93). God thwarts humanity’s hubris by confusing the languages. While the story gives us a biblical explanation for the development of and diversity of different languages and cultures, it also serves as an example of God’s response to human arrogance.

**Lesson text:** Genesis 11:1-9. Ask one of the students to read aloud from NRSV or a translation of your choice.

**Understanding the story – discussion points** (Choose two or three as class time permits):

1. What is the tower builders’ attitude toward God?
2. The serpent in Adam and Eve’s temptation in the garden tells them that by eating the fruit they will become like God. How is the tower builders desire to “make a name for themselves” similar or different than the serpent’s temptation?
3. How does God respond to the tower builders? Compare this to God’s response to humanity’s behavior at the beginning of the Noah story? How is it similar? Different?

**Engaging the story -- For a deeper understanding, students become part of the story:**

Option 1. (Materials needed: paper and pencils). Divide the class into working groups of 4-5 students. Tell the students that the world's richest person (think multibillionaire) has asked them to design the largest, most impressive house that anyone has ever seen. Ask the groups to take 5-10 minutes to imagine and write a description of the house and property. At the end of the time ask the groups to share their ideas. Then ask the following questions:

- What do you think God would say about their house plans? Is building a large house necessarily against the will of God? Why or why not?
- Would their plans have been different if Jesus had been part of the design team? How? In what ways?
- To what extent did they consider God's point of view in designing their houses?
- How does their experience compare to that of the tower builders in the story?

Option 2. (Materials needed: flip chart and markers). Read the definition of sin in the Catechism (BCP p. 848). Ask students to think of and list some of the ways humanity seeks its own will instead of God's will in the world today. Write these on the chart. Next ask students to think about their personal lives at home, at school, and in the community. In what ways have they, as individuals or the people around them followed their own will instead of the will of God? For example, watching a TV program while ignoring a family member struggling with a problem or seeing a person at school who obviously needs help and avoiding them. Record each person's answers on the flip chart. End by reading the remainder of the section "Sin and Redemption" in the *Catechism* (p. 848-849).

**Connections:** Questions for students to consider and or discuss with sponsors, parents and friends in the week ahead.

1. How do differences in language still cause divisions among people? How do you personally react when faced with someone who doesn't speak your language?
2. How do people today seek to "reach to the heavens and make a name for themselves"? Would the cloning of human beings be an example?
3. How do we keep our lives focused on God and not ourselves?
4. In what ways do you see God healing differences among peoples?

**Think about it!** On the day of Pentecost Jesus' followers were "filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak in other languages as the Spirit gave them ability and all the world began to hear about God's deeds of power and love. (Acts 2).

**Closing devotions:** Sing or read Hymn 573 or close with your own format.

**Additional resources:**

*Harper's Bible Commentary*, James L. Mays, Editor. Harper and Row, Society of Biblical Literature. San Francisco. 1988

Year 1

Participant Book

# I Believe ...

A Two-Year Confirmation Program for the 21st Century



Developed by  
Andrew Sherman and Donna H. Barthle



## Introducing:

### The Salvation Story — Our Story as God's Children

Introduces the story of God's relationship to us and our relationship to God. The intent is to claim this as our own story – the way we understand ourselves as loved by and called to love God. Using Scripture and our language of worship in the Book of Common Prayer, this section includes:

**Kick-off workshop** One session, (a mini-retreat) on a Saturday weaves together discussions on discernment with trust and team building exercises. It ends with a simple lunch students prepare for each other.

#### **Section 1a -- God's act of creation — Formed in love for love.**

- Two class sessions focus on the stories of creation in Genesis 1 and 2, and life in the garden with God. The sessions explore our identity as children of God formed by God in love, for love.
- *Finding a sponsor or mentor – “Been there, done that, and still looking.”* This can be discussed during the mini-retreat or as part of one class session. The Episcopal Church requires confirmands to be sponsored as members of the community of faith. This session focuses on the sponsorship program and building a long-term relationship with an older Christian during a required number of meetings over the two years. See separate section at the end of this file.

***The Story of Creation:***  
**“Formed in love for love”**

**Objective:** To learn how God created the world and then created human beings in His image.

**Opening devotions:** Daily Devotions, BCP p. 137. Alternatives include portions of Psalm 104 or Hymn 406 in the Hymnal 1982, written by St. Francis of Assisi.

**Lesson Text:** Genesis 1:1-2:3

**Background to the story:** Genesis contains the magisterial account of God’s work of creation. In the opening sentence, a wind -- translated from the Hebrew word “ruach”, which also means “spirit” -- moves across the dark waters and then God speaks, “Let there be light”, and creation begins.

**Understanding the Story – discussion points:**

1. How does God create? What does God do? What does God say? How involved is God in creation? What does this tell us about God?
2. As Creation unfolds over six days, what patterns emerge?
3. What does God think about creation? What is God’s response to creation?
4. What does it mean for human beings to be given dominion over creation?

**Engaging the Story -- For a deeper understanding, become part of the story:**  
Notes:

**Connections:** Consider these questions and discuss them with your sponsor, parents or friends in the week ahead.

1. Many people are fascinated with astrology — the belief that the stars control our destiny. How does the account of God's creation in Genesis challenge this?
2. What is our response to God's creation?
3. Human beings were given dominion over creation and the responsibility to care for it. How are we doing? What should we, as individuals, do?
4. How do we honor the Sabbath in our lives? Why is it important that we do?

**Think about it!** “God saw everything that he had made and indeed it was very good.” (Genesis 1:31)

**Closing devotions:** Psalm 104 or portions of it or close with your own format.

**To learn more:**

*The Holy Bible. The book of Genesis.*

*The Book of Common Prayer.* The Episcopal Church. New York: The Church Hymnal Corp. 1979.

Any Earth Sciences Text Book

**God's Act of Creation:  
"Created in the Image of God"**

**Objective:** Explore your identity as a child of God, created in the image of God.

**Opening devotions:** Daily Devotions, BCP p. 137. Alternate suggestions include *"For the Human Family"* from the Prayers and Thanksgivings section, BCP p. 815; Hymn 47; Hymn 8, or Psalm 95:1-7; or a format of your choice.

**Background to the story:** Genesis 1:26-27 emphasizes our identity as God's children created in the image of God. Both "male and female" are made in the image of God, and both share in God's blessing. These verses also lead to a discussion of God's gender. We know from historians that the writer's of the Bible referred to God as He or Him partly as a matter of convenience and partly because authority figures of the time were male. The scriptures hint at both male and female traits. For some female allusions in the scripture, see Hosea 11:1ff, Psalm 139:13 and Luke 13:34.

**Lesson Text:** Genesis 1:26-27

**Understanding the Story – discussion points:**

1. We are told that both "male and female" are created in the image of God. Is one gender more important than the other?
2. What is the importance of verse 27 repeating three times that God "created" us?
3. How do our lives reflect the image or likeness of God?

**Engaging the Story -- For a deeper understanding, become part of the story:**

Notes:

**Connections:** Consider these questions and discuss them with your sponsor, parents or friends in the week ahead.

1. Think of a person in your life with whom you have had difficulty relating. Pray for that person and as you pray envision him or her as a child of God. After several weeks how has this affected your relationship with this person?
2. How does understanding yourself as a beloved child of God affect how you think/feel about yourself?
3. Who are people in your life in whom you have seen the likeness of God? What about them makes you say this?
4. How does your relationship with your parents reflect God's relationship with His children?

**Think about it!** Substitute your name for "them" in the verse "in the image of God he created ...".

**Closing devotions:** Pray "*For the Human Family*", BCP p. 815 or use a format of your own choice.

**To learn more:**

*The Holy Bible.* Hosea 11:1ff, Psalm 139:13, Luke 13:34 and Galatians 5:27ff