



CONFIRM NOT CONFORM FOR ADULTS

SESSION 1:

INTRODUCTION TO *CNC FOR ADULTS*

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THEOLOGICAL STATEMENT

Confirm not Conform was first developed as a youth confirmation program that encourages youth to recognize their own beliefs and give voice to their convictions. What we soon discovered was that adults, too, need a forum in which they continue to explore their faith and examine their convictions to see how they have been shaped and developed over time. *CnC for Adults* seeks to offer that forum.

Many adults in the *CnC for Adults* program will have experienced the very confirmation program that *Confirm not Conform* was designed to counteract: a conformation program. At the very age when many people are most open to exploration, they were instead required to sit down, stay still, and learn how their faith was supposed to be. Many participants in this kind of program may have never had a chance to articulate their faith separate from what it was “supposed” to be.

Other adults may not have had an opportunity in recent years to look at their faith, to notice how their beliefs may have changed since their youth—and change is very likely. They may be surprised to find how far they have traveled from the beliefs they held in former years.

Still others may be continual seekers who simply enjoy the process of exploring their faith.

Finally, other participants may be coming to confirmation for the first time. As they prepare for confirmation, they will have a great deal to offer as they bring fresh perspectives to the information and to the confirmation process.

Whatever the case may be, this session helps adults to consider where they have been in their faith, to appreciate where they are now, and to prepare for the steps to come.

PRE-SESSION CHECKLIST

Before the day of the session

- Communicate with participants the time and location of the first session.
- Make sure to prepare the overall schedule for your *CnC for Adults* program. This session provides an overview of how you want to proceed with the program overall, including dates for future presentations.
- Review all the scripted and spoken parts of the session. Remember, the provided text is merely a suggestion – improvise, add to it, or change it as you see fit.
- Review the timeline for this session. The timeline is a suggestion only, and you should feel free to adapt it if more time is needed for an activity or a high-energy discussion.
- **Make sure you have the following on hand:**
 - Pens
 - Different color markers
 - White board and markers (or chalkboard and chalk)
 - Flip chart paper
 - Notepaper or 8 ½ X 11 paper (at least 2 sheets for each participant)
 - Pads of post-it notes (at least 1 for each participant)
 - *Information Sheet* handout (found in the Session Materials) or create a handout of your own
 - *World Religion* assignment sheet (found in the Session Materials)
 - *The Gospel According to You* worksheet (found in the Session Materials)
 - Schedule of *CnC for Adults* sessions to distribute

On the day of the session

- **Set up the room [approximately 30 minutes]**
 - Check the space you'll be using. Is there enough room for everyone? Enough chairs and floor space?
 - On the white board or a piece of flip chart paper, write
 - Who
 - Why
 - When
 - What
 - Want
 - On the white board or another piece of flip chart paper, write
 - Opening Ritual
 - Rules of the Road

- Discussion
 - Calendar
 - Spiritual Practice
 - Chaos and Creation
 - Homework
 - Closing Prayer
- On the top of one piece of flip chart paper, write the words “Rules of the Road”
 - On the top of one piece of flip chart paper, write the word “Chaos”
 - On the top of one piece of flip chart paper, write the word “Creation”
 - Have copies of all handouts and pens available to distribute easily
 - Make sure post-it notepads are either placed where people can reach them or where you can easily reach them to distribute
 - Have additional pieces of flip chart paper available
 - **Breathe deeply.**
 - Step away from all the preparations. Take a moment to do what you need to do to center yourself. Say a prayer, take a walk—what do you need to do to be present for this session?

Session timeline

-0:05-0:10	Welcome and Introductions
0:10-0:15	Agenda
0:15-0:20	Opening Ritual
0:20-0:40	Activity: Rules of the Road
0:40-0:55	Discussion: Confirmation or Conformation
0:55-1:05	Activity: Chaos and Creation
1:05-1:10	Introduction to Spiritual Practices
1:10-1:20	Calendar
1:20-1:25	Homework
1:25-1:30	Closing Prayer

SESSION 1

WELCOME AND INTRODUCTIONS

~15 MINUTES

- Welcome participants as they arrive and hand each one an *Information Sheet* (found in the Session Materials at the end of this document) and pen.
- Give participants a few extra minutes before starting introductions.
- Introduce yourself and anyone else who will be helping with the class.
- Ask participants to introduce themselves by briefly (~1 minute) answering the following questions:
 - Who are you?
 - Why are you in this program?
 - When were you confirmed (if you were); when did you join the church (if you did), or when did you start coming to this church?
 - What do you remember about your confirmation program (if you were confirmed)?
 - What do you want to get out of *CnC for Adults*?
- Use the Who, Why, When, What, Want list on the whiteboard or flip chart paper as a reference.
- Give your answers first so they see how brief and simple the responses can be.
- Take notes on participants' responses, especially what they want to get out of the program.
- Introduce the *CnC for Adults* program using your own words or the following:
 - *Although you're here for different reasons and with different goals in mind, we hope that all of you will find CnC for Adults to be an opportunity*
 - *to discover some of the basics of the faith without worrying about what you ought to know;*
 - *to unearth and challenge some of your assumptions about what faith ought to be;*
 - *and to acquire some tools so that you can claim your own religious authority.*
 - *Confirm not Conform was originally created so youth could examine what they really believe and why without worrying about whether it's the right thing or not. CnC for Adults offers you the same opportunity. We hope that you gain a lot from the experience, and we will do our best to create a safe place for you to explore topics or questions that may have been dormant for years or have never even considered.*
- When introductions are done, go over the agenda for the evening.

AGENDA

~5 MINUTES

- Referring to the list on the whiteboard or flip chart paper, explain what will be covered during this session. Use your own words or the following to flesh out the agenda.
 - *Opening Ritual:* This will take just a couple of minutes and will help establish what we're about in this program as we begin to explore what we believe.

- *Rules of the Road:* To make this a safe place, we need to establish our group norms. We'll spend about 15 minutes making sure we are agreed on our expectations.
 - *Discussion:* We will take a few minutes to talk about our definitions of confirming and conforming.
 - *Chaos and Creation:* We hope that this program will allow you to ask questions about issues of faith, large and small. The Chaos and Creation activity begins that process.
 - *Spiritual Practices:* One expectation for you in this program is that you will engage in spiritual practice. We'll explain more about what we mean by that when we get there.
 - *Calendar:* We will distribute the calendar for the dates of upcoming sessions. We'll also make some decisions on some long-range projects and assignments you'll need to prepare.
 - *Homework:* Yes, there will be homework. We hope you will find it worthwhile, and maybe even enjoyable.
 - *Closing prayer:* The session will end with a prayer.
- Ask if there are any questions. If there are, answer them as you can and as seems to make sense at this time. Defer questions that will be answered by a later activity to that activity.
 - Try not to spend too long answering questions. Move on to the Opening Ritual.

OPENING RITUAL

~5 MINUTES

- Give a piece of notepaper or 8 ½ X 11 paper to each participant.
- Have each participant write down what they have been told to believe. This can be things they have been told by church, family, employers, the media, or society at large. These can be things they believe, things they think they ought to believe, or things that they think are completely untrue.
- Give everyone a few minutes to write a list. It will probably be incomplete, but will give people an idea of how much they have been told by others to believe.
- After participants have had a chance to write their lists, ask them to take a moment to look at the many things they have been told to believe.
- Allow a moment of silence.
- Say, using your own words or the following:
 - *These may be things you believe fervently. These may be things you doubt. These may be things you don't believe at all. But others have asked you to believe them for reasons of their own, both positive and negative. Our goal is for your beliefs to be yours because you have thought about them, wrestled with them, and made them your own.*
- Allow another moment of silence.

- Read the following passage of Scripture:
 - A reading from the first letter of Paul to the Corinthians: “When I was a child, I spoke like a child, I thought like a child, I reasoned like a child; when I became an adult, I put an end to childish ways. For now we see in a mirror, dimly, but then we will see face to face. Now I know only in part; then I will know fully, even as I have been fully known.” (I Cor. 13:11-12, NRSV)
- Lead participants in the following prayer:
 - O God who knows us fully, in all our doubts and all our certainties: help us to put away childish things, to reason with all our hearts and minds so that we may know ourselves and discover you, within our hearts and within one another, through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.
- Have participants tear up their lists and put all the pieces in a pile in the center of the circle or table (or wherever you are gathered).
- Explain that you’ll be talking a little more about what just happened shortly, and then move on to the Rules of the Road.

ACTIVITY: RULES OF THE ROAD

- Say, using your own words or the following:
 - As we have already started to see, *CnC for Adults* asks you to share some things that may make you feel vulnerable: sharing what you believe, for example, or revealing things you don’t know or have doubts about.
 - *CnC for Adults* also involves a lot of group discussion and activities.
 - As a result, it’s important that the group decides right from the start how we are going to work together and what are our group norms.
 - First we’re going to take about a minute of silence to think about our personal rules for positive interaction.
 - Consider:
 - How you would like to be treated when you are sharing an idea or giving a report;
 - What behaviors you think show respect and care for yourself and others;
 - What you think sets the stage for a positive and fruitful discussion.

Some rules you might want to suggest:

We will honor everyone’s time and start and end class at the scheduled time.

We will participate in discussions and risk offering our thoughts, ideas, questions, and beliefs.

We will treat the thoughts, ideas, questions, and beliefs of others with respect. We will not worry if others believe something different from us, trusting in God’s love for all.

We will commit to attending every session. If we must miss a session, we will inform the leader in advance.

- Hand out another piece of notepaper or 8 ½ X 11 paper so that people can jot notes.
- Give participants a minute to gather their thoughts.
- After a minute, ask the group to suggest their Rules of the Road.
- Write down their answers on the flip chart paper titled *Rules of the Road*.
- Revise as needed, but don't get into the weeds. Create your best list in the time allotted and assure participants that the Rules can be amended as the need arises.
- Let them know that the Rules will be recopied onto a clean sheet of flip chart paper and will be posted for each session of *CnC for Adults*.
- Inform them that they will be able to put these *Rules of the Road* into practice right away as you begin a discussion about the difference between confirming and conforming

DISCUSSION: CONFIRMATION VS. CONFORMATION: ~15 MINUTES

Note: A word about discussions in CnC for Adults: The format for discussion questions that you see below will be used throughout the program. We hope that the potential follow-up questions and notes will make it easier to guide and direct discussion, but always bear in mind that you are welcome to go literally outside the box if you think that will be the most effective way to have the conversation you need.

Discussion Question	Potential Follow-up Questions	Facilitator Notes
The “CnC” in <i>CnC for Adults</i> , as you may or may not know, stands for “Confirm not Conform.” How do you define “conforming”?	Can you give me some examples of how people conform?	Write their answers down on a piece of flip chart paper. Invite several people to provide a definition. These definitions do not need to agree, and you do not need to come up with one definition. You may wish to add the definition that conforming is “doing or believing something a larger group or someone in authority thinks you should do or believe,” if something similar does not emerge.
What are the advantages of conforming?		This question challenges the idea that conformity is always negative. For example, conforming to traffic laws keeps people safe. Conforming to someone else’s exercise routine means you can rely on another person’s expert knowledge and don’t have to figure it out yourself. The point here is simply that conformity, although seen as a terrible thing, can actually be practical, comforting, or useful.

So what does it mean to confirm something?	Can you give me some examples of what you mean by confirming?	Write their answers down on another piece of flip chart paper. Invite several people to provide a definition. These definitions do not need to agree, and you do not need to come up with one definition. You may wish to add the definition that confirming is “doing or believing something because you have made the choice to do so,” if something similar does not emerge.
Are the <i>Rules of the Road</i> we just created conforming or confirming, or a combination of the two?	Why do you think so?	There is no one right answer to this question. However, people’s response to it will tell you a great deal about what confirming or conforming means to them.
Thinking back to the opening ritual, what kind of reaction did you have?	What did it feel like to write down what you had been told to believe? What was it like to look at that list? What was it like to tear that list up?	Answers will vary. Again, people’s responses will tell you a great deal. Some may find the experience liberating, while others may find it very frightening. Some may even be angry. Be sure not to tell them how they ought to feel! Do not step in to rescue or reassure. Let them feel how they feel.
What surprised you about your list?	For example, what were some unexpected sources of your beliefs? Did you discover some beliefs you were under pressure to conform to? Did you discover some beliefs you didn’t know you had confirmed?	Adults may be surprised to recognize how much pressure—peer and otherwise—they are under to conform to certain beliefs. They may also be surprised to discover deep-seated beliefs they had not previously acknowledged.
When you think about your spiritual life, would you say most of your beliefs are conforming or confirmed?	If you went through Confirmation in a religious organization, would you say that you were confirmed or you were conformed?	Of course it could be a mix of both. There’s no right or wrong answer to this.

Conclude the discussion by using your own words or the following:

Throughout our lives, people constantly have to make decisions about whether or not to confirm or to conform. Sometimes conforming is the appropriate thing to do; at other times, it disempowers us or forces us into pretending to be what we are not. The goal of *CnC for Adults* is to help you to be intentional in your beliefs and your life choices, rather than simply going along for the ride, letting other people decide what’s right for you, or taking on a false identity. But to make informed decisions, you need some information. For our next activity, we’re going to start to explore some gaps in our knowledge or questions we may have had for a very long time.

- Have two pieces of flip chart paper on the wall: one labeled “Chaos” and one labeled “Creation.”
- Make sure each participant has a post-it note pad (and pen if they don’t have one).
- Introduce the activity with these words or your own:
 - *The goal of this activity is to allow you to share what it is you don’t know or don’t understand without worrying about judgment or criticism. It is not about finding the answers; for the moment, it’s about finding the questions.*
- Explain that they will have five minutes or so to write as many questions as they have on the post-its. After the time is up, they will be posting their questions on the “Chaos” sheet.
- Let them know that this is not their last opportunity to post questions.
- Suggest the following questions to get their juices flowing:
 - What words get used in church that you don’t understand?
 - What rituals or parts of the church service are mysteries to you?
 - What ideas, images, or stories in the Bible make no sense to you?
 - What are you sure everyone else knows, so you don’t ask about it for fear of looking dumb?
 - What questions of yours has the church never answered to your satisfaction?
 - What are you most interested in learning more about—what do you really want to know?
- Give people about five minutes to write their questions.
- Once they have written their questions, they can post them on the “Chaos” flip chart sheet.
 - If you notice that some questions are the same or similar on the flip chart, you can pile the post-its on top of one another, but don’t worry about getting these charts organized. It’s Chaos!
- After everyone has posted his or her questions, explain that though many of the questions will be answered during the course of the program, the more important thing for right now is that they know
 - what the questions are and
 - that it is normal—and good!—to have them.
- Don’t answer any of the questions right now. Invite people to take a look (if they haven’t already) at all the questions already posted.
- Let them know that these sheets will be posted for each session, and that as any questions get answered, the post-its with that question will be moved to the “Creation” sheet.

- Say, using your own words or the following:
 - Another regular feature of *CnC for Adults* is that you will have homework. Some of it will be pen and paper homework (and we will give you your first assignment in a little bit), and some of it will be a daily spiritual practice that you will choose.
 - Remember the term is “spiritual *practice*” not “spiritual getting-it-exactly-right.” If you choose to do a spiritual practice that you find you love and can do every day just as you planned it, that’s terrific. If you choose to do a spiritual practice that you end up cheating on or sleeping through or messing up, that’s terrific too. Either way, you’ll be able to reflect on what you did and what you learned about yourself, and about God.
- Inform participants that the spiritual practice they choose need to have two characteristics:
 - It needs to be **realistic**—something that they honestly think they *could* do;
 - It needs to be a **stretch**—something that they are not already doing.
- The spiritual practice can change with each session, but we encourage participants to keep up only one practice from one session to the next, even if it doesn’t seem to be working out. (Remember: it’s *practice*!)
- Encourage participants to be creative when they decide on their spiritual practice. It does not need to follow a formula or resemble what they have been told spirituality *ought* to look like. The following list of potential spiritual practices is merely to get them thinking and is in no way meant to be a recommended or comprehensive list:
 - Find something to be thankful for every day
 - Go for a walk
 - Take a moment of silence before eating
 - Say a prayer while brushing your teeth
 - Wash your face “in the name of the Father, and the Son, and the Holy Spirit,” with three handfuls of water
 - Spend 10 minutes every day sitting and doing nothing
 - Give up one premium cup of coffee each day and donate the money to a charitable cause.
- One participant in *CnC for Adults* came up with this spiritual discipline: each morning at the beginning of the work day, he wrote down a list of the things he was grateful for and a list of the things that were annoying him. He kept the list of things he was grateful for as a reference on his desk, and put the list of annoyances through the shredder. He reported how much better he felt once he was able to put those annoyances aside.
- Give participants a minute to consider what they might like to do for a spiritual practice between now and the next session. Have notepaper available in case they want to jot down notes.

- Let them know that at each session they will have an opportunity to report on how the spiritual practice went. The focus of Session 2 will be an exploration of spiritual practices.

CALENDAR

~10 MINUTES

- If at all possible, have a full calendar of the dates and times when the sessions of *CnC for Adults* will be meeting. (More information on setting up the calendar is found in your *CnC for Adults Getting Started Guide*.)
- Point out some of the major topics that will be addressed (Scripture, Creeds, etc.).
- As you go over the calendar with the group, point out the session (or sessions) in which they will be asked to give presentations.
- Inform the group that they will have two assignments: one involving memorizing and reciting a passage of Scripture, and one involving a short (5-7 minute) presentation on a different religion.
- Explain that more information on picking a passage to memorize will take place in Sessions 5 and 6. For right now, they will be getting some information on the other assignment: studying another religion.
- Pass out the *Choosing a Religion* handout and go over the instructions.
- Using either your own list of religions and/or the list below, assign each person a religion to study (or let them choose). Have them write the name of their assigned religion on their handout. If at all possible, have each person study a different religion.
- **Make sure to write down which person is assigned to which religion, and be sure to save the list!**
 - Animism
 - Baha'i
 - Buddhism
 - Confucianism
 - Gnosticism
 - Hinduism
 - Islam (this can be divided into Sunni and Shia)
 - Jainism
 - Judaism (this can be divided into Orthodox and Reform)
 - Scientology
 - Shinto
 - Sikhism
 - Taoism
 - Wicca
 - Zoroastrianism

- Inform them that though they don't need to do anything on this assignment right away, it might help them to keep an eye out for information about their religion on the news both to learn more about it and to see how it is perceived by the culture more broadly.
- Ask if there are any questions at this time. Then move on to the Homework.

HOMEWORK: THE GOSPEL ACCORDING TO WHOM

~5 MINUTES

- Let the group know that they will be asked to do brief homework assignments with each session. These will generally be reflective in nature, rather than research-intensive.
- For their first assignment, they will be asked to reflect on what it is they believe in—not what other people want them to believe, but what they actually believe.
- Hand each participant a copy of *The Gospel According to Whom* handout (found in the Session Material).
- Review the instructions at the top of the sheet and ask if there are any questions.
- Ask if there are any questions about the program as a whole, and answer as needed.

CLOSING PRAYER

~5 MINUTES

- Thank everyone for participating in *CnC for Adults*, and for their work in this session.
- Remind them of the date of the next session.
- Explain using your own words or the following:
 - This first session has laid out a lot of information about what is expected of you: spiritual practices, presentations, general behaviors. So for our closing prayer, we will take a few minutes for you to express what *you* want out of this program, either silently or aloud.
- Allow people to stay where they are. For this first session, we encourage you not to have people hold hands, stand in a circle, or take any particularly “prayerful” position. People are often too well-programmed by the church about what prayer is supposed to look like. Staying in the same posture as the rest of the session implies that prayer is not a separate activity from everything else they have been doing.
- Begin the prayer by saying “Let’s pray.”
- After allowing time for people to share their prayers silently or aloud, end the prayer with your own summary of what you have heard and a simple Amen.

Before you leave, keep the *Rules of the Road* sheet to make a clean copy. Be sure to hang on to the *Rules of the Road* so you can post them for every session.

POST-SESSION REVIEW

At some point before your next session, meet as a team (if there is a team) or schedule some time for yourself and spend a few minutes reviewing what went well and what could be changed. Some things to consider:

- Is this a chatty group or do they need to be drawn out? Did discussions run longer or shorter than expected?
- Given what you saw in this first session, are there any Rules of the Road that will need special attention?
- What did participants say they wanted to get out of the program? How might those wants be fulfilled?
- How did the space work for your group? Was it too big or too small? How might you need to adjust the environment to accommodate this group?
- If you were doing this session again, what would you do differently?
- What did you learn from leading this session?
- What affected you personally? What questions did this session raise for you? How will you address them?

Be sure to take a look at the next session. Figure out:

- What needs to happen by then?
- Are there any questions from the “Chaos” sheet that might be answered in the session?
- What materials do you need to gather or purchase?
- Who will do these things?
- When will they be done?

And congratulations! You’ve finished your first session!

SESSION MATERIALS

INFORMATION SHEET

Name: _____

Street address: _____

Email address: _____

Best phone number to reach you: _____

Other phone number (and type—home, work, cell): _____

Have you been baptized? Yes No Do Not Know

Have you been confirmed? Yes No Do Not Know

Any other important information:

ASSIGNMENT: WORLD RELIGION

Religion: _____

Date of presentation: _____

Instructions: Create a profile and presentation for the religion you are studying.

The presentation should be approximately 5-7 minutes long and contain the following information :

- The central belief or beliefs of the religion
- Its key leader or leaders (either historic or current)
- What you have to do to become a member
- What kind of rituals are part of the religion
- What are some of its key holy writings
- What are some of its important laws—what do you have to do if you are a member
- What you like about this religion
- What you don't like about this religion

You are welcome to use videos, images, music, or props for your presentation.

If your presentation requires special equipment, please check at least three days before the session to make sure we have the equipment you need.

We look forward to your presentation!

THE GOSPEL ACCORDING TO YOU

Instructions:

What do you believe?

Sit quietly for a minute or two and think about what you believe. What is it that you think matters? Is it friendship? Being kind to others? Chocolate ice cream on a hot day? How did you come to believe that? Was there a particular experience that gave you this realization or was it a process? Did someone tell you or did you figure it out yourself?

Use the space below to write, draw, or otherwise express what you believe in. It doesn't have to be religious (though we welcome that). It just has to be true for you.