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Reimagine Faith Formation for the 21st Century

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Topics

Reimagine Faith Formation for the 21st Century explores the vision and practices for 21st century faith formation that can guide a congregation in developing faith formation for all ages and generations that addresses the diversity of people's life situations, needs, spiritual hungers, and religious needs.

1. Vision and Practices for 21st Century Faith Formation
2. Intergenerational Faith Formation for All Generations
3. Families at the Center of Faith Formation
4. Faith Formation across the Life Span—Childhood through Adulthood
5. Missional Faith Formation
6. Developing a Integrated Plan for Faith Formation for All Ages and Generations

Handouts/Resources/PowerPoint Presentations:

- Lifelong Faith website: www.lifelongfaith.com/lifelong-faith-formation.html

Resources

- *Digital Cathedral*. Keith Anderson. Church Publishing, 2015.
- *Faith Formation for a New Generation*. LifelongFaith Associates, 2017.
- *Families at the Center of Faith Formation*. LifelongFaith Associates, 2016.
- *Generations Growing Together*. LifelongFaith Associates, 2014.
- *Intergenerational Christian Formation*. Holly Allen and Kristine Ross. Intervarsity Press, 2012
- *Reimagining Faith Formation for the 21st Century*. LifelongFaith Associates, 2015.
- *Seasons of Adult Faith Formation*. LifelongFaith Associates, 2015.

Online

- *Lifelong Faith Formation* website: www.lifelongfaith.com
- *Families at the Center of Faith Formation* website: www.FamiliesattheCenter.com
- *Seasons of Adult Faith Formation* website: www.SeasonsofAdultFaith.com

Part 1. Vision & Practices for 21st Century Faith Formation

We are on the doorstep of a new decade. So many of the trends and challenges we experience today were just emerging as this decade began: a ten-decade life span, the millennial generation starting families, baby boomers entering their “retirement” years, the younger generations leaving organized religion, multiple family structures and living arrangements, the diversity of ethnic cultures, the recognition of gender and sexual diversity, and more.

The arrival of a new decade is a good time to create an “agenda” for the future of faith formation. I am proposing seven areas for development on my agenda for the future. I believe these are important for the future of faith formation, and they are areas that I want to dedicate my time and energy. So here’s my agenda for action.

1. Developing a New Ecology of Christian Faith Formation

We know from research and practice that faith is formed in intergenerational faith communities, in families, in peer groups across the life cycle, and in missional settings where people are introduced to the Christian faith. We need to start thinking and acting ecologically in everything we do. For example, if we are creating a plan for children’s faith formation, we need to consider how we will engage children in faith community experiences with all generations (including worship), how we will equip parents to share faith at home and build families of faith practice, and how we will build relationships with and engage children and parents who are not involved in the faith community (e.g., baptized but not engaged). Once we have identified faith forming experiences in the broader ecology, we can identify the unique age-group experiences we need to provide children.

2. Focusing on Faith Maturing

We need to focus faith formation on the essential characteristics of lifelong growth in Christian faith and discipleship. These characteristics would incorporate knowing and believing, relating and belonging, practicing and living. With a lifelong vision of maturing faith we could address each characteristic in developmentally-appropriate ways at each stage of life. For example, if “*sustaining a personal relationship with Jesus Christ supported through regular prayer, faith sharing and Bible reading*” was one of these faith maturing characteristics, the task of faith formation would be to ask how we can accomplish this with children, youth, young adults, midlife adults, mature adults, and older adults. In this approach we would build our “curriculum” around the people and the faith maturing characteristics.

3. Personalizing Faith Formation

We need to tailor faith formation to the individual journeys of children, youth, young adults, adults, and families in order to address their increasing spiritual and religious diversity and life stage needs. One of the latest educational innovations is personalized learning, i.e., tailoring the educational environment—the what, when, how and where people learn—to address the individual needs and interests of each person. To personalize faith formation we need to create “faith growth pathways” that use the faith maturing characteristics and, with the help of a mentor or small group, guide people in discerning their faith growth needs. For example, if we took the characteristic “*seeking*

spiritual growth by actively pursuing questions of faith, learning what it means to believe in God, and what it's like to be a disciple of Jesus Christ" we could provide a tool that helps them discover their faith growth needs using a continuum from "exploring" to "getting started" to "making progress" to "going deeper" with short illustrations for each one. In this approach we would then develop a personalized faith growth plan—or what educators are now calling "playlists"—of content (print, audio, video, online) and direct experiences to address their needs.

Spiritual-Religious Identities

Vibrant Faith and Engaged in the Congregation. A religious faith is central to the lives of the engaged. These are who are actively engaged in a Christian church, are spiritually committed, and growing in their faith. These are parents who are transmitting this faith to their children and are actively engaged as a family in a church community. These are children, adolescents, adults, and parents/grandparents who are spiritually committed and growing in their faith. They have found their spiritual home within an established Christian tradition and a local faith community that provides ways for them to grow in faith, worship God, and live their faith in the world. They are practicing their faith at home and in daily life.

Moderate Faith Practice and Occasionally Engaged in the Congregation. These are adults and families, children, adolescents, and parents/grandparents who participate occasionally in church life—in seasonal celebrations, sacraments and milestones, major events, and age-group programs. For parents transmitting a religious faith primarily means bringing their children to educational programs at church. Some may even attend worship regularly and send their children to religious education classes. Their spiritual commitment is low and their connection to the church is more social and utilitarian than spiritual. While receptive to an established church, they do not have a faith commitment that would make their relationship with God and participation in a faith community a priority in their lives. Their occasional engagement in church life does not lead them toward spiritual commitment.

Spiritual, but Not Religious. These are adults who are spiritually engaged (relationship with God, meaningful spiritual life), but involved in organized religion and an established Christian tradition. Some may join a nondenominational Christian church focused on their spiritual needs, while others may find an outlet for their spiritual hunger in small communities of like-minded spiritual seekers, in local or global acts of service, or in online spiritual resources and communities. The Spiritual but Not Religious reflect a growing minority of the American population, especially among young adults.

Unaffiliated. For the unaffiliated religion is not personally important in their lives (and their family's life). They are not affiliated with organized religion and established Christian churches. The Unaffiliated reject all forms of organized religion and reflect a steadily increasing percentage of the American population, especially among young adults. Many adults (Millennials and Gen X) left organized religion because they stopped believing in the religion's teachings (top reason) or their family was never that religious when they were growing up or their experience of negative religious teaching about or treatment of gay and lesbian people (PRRI research, 2016). Many parents are "first generation Nones" and are now raising their children in religiously uninvolved and unaffiliated homes creating a "second generation of Nones."

4. Becoming Intentionally Intergenerational

We need to become intentional about strengthening the intergenerational character of our congregations and faith formation experiences. We can create a plan that (1) *utilizes* the intergenerational events and experiences of church life (community life events, worship and the lectionary, seasons of the year, service and mission projects, prayer and spiritual formation) as a primary “content” in faith formation by *preparing* people with the knowledge and practices for participating, by *engaging* people in the event, and by *reflecting* upon the meaning of the event and how to *live/practice* in daily life; (2) *infuses* intergenerational experiences and relationships into existing ministries and programs, such as age group programs; 3) *connects* the generations through new intergenerational programs and experiences that bring together all of the generations for learning, celebrating, praying, reading the Bible, serving and working for justice, and worshipping. One area ripe with possibilities is to develop grandparent-grandchildren programming, such as a VBS, summer camp, service/mission projects, field trips, and more.

5. Empowering and Equipping Parents and the Family

We all know how important parents and the whole family are in the faith forming process. Today’s families—of Gen Z children and teens, and Millennial and younger Gen X parents—present new challenges and opportunities. We will need to create new faith formation initiatives for the home, and learn from them what approaches and practices work best. There are proven strategies that can guide the development of a comprehensive plan for family faith formation including: (1) *At Home*: discovering God in everyday life, forming faith practices, and celebrating milestones and rituals; (2) *In the Faith Community*: celebrating seasonal events, encountering God in the Bible, and connecting families intergenerationally (learning, service, community life); and (3) *With Parents*: developing a strong family life, and empowering parents and grandparents as faith formers. With the new digital tools and media we have the ability to reach today’s parents and families anywhere and anytime with engaging and interactive faith forming content. (See *Families at the Center of Faith Formation* for the strategies.)

6. Designing Twenty-First Century Learning Experiences

We can dramatically improve our effectiveness in promoting faith growth and learning by using the new approaches and methods that are being designed by educators for twenty-first century learners of all ages—children, youth, and adults. We know today’s younger generations learn best in environments that are interactive, participatory, experiential, visual, and multi-sensory. Among today’s most promising educational innovations are *personalizing learning* (see #3), *blended learning* and *flipped learning*, *micro-learning*, and *immersive learning*. All of these new approaches and methods are enhanced by the use of digital technologies, methods, and media.

- ▶ *Blended Learning* integrates learning in physical and online settings where a person has some control over time, place, path, and/or pace of the learning experience. One form of blended learning is *Flipped Learning* in which the content moves from the group learning space to the individual learning space (usually online), and the group space is transformed into an interactive learning environment for discussion and application. Congregations are already flipping confirmation preparation (learning online plus interactive group activities in gathered settings), extending gathered events with online content for continued learning, and providing online faith formation or live webinars for individuals or groups.

- ▶ *Micro-learning* experiences are short-form—5, 10, 15 minute—learning experiences designed for anywhere, anytime learning that be combined into multi-part learning programs. Micro-learning experiences are one response to short attention spans and mobile learning. We can curate a series of micro-learning experiences (on a digital platform) to engage people in all types of faith formation content.
- ▶ *Immersive learning* is faith-forming experiences that are interactive, participatory, experiential, visual, and multi-sensory. With the rise of anytime, anywhere faith formation content we need to ask: “What is the role of gathering people for faith formation?” Today children (and their parents), youth, and adults can access online most of the content that we teach at church. We have already been offering these types of experiences. What if we expanded our immersive learning opportunities (VBS, retreats, mission trips, and more) and focused our gathered settings on immersive faith formation in extended settings (half-day, full day, weekend, weeklong) offered throughout the year (but not weekly).

7. Embracing New Leadership Roles

We need to develop new leadership roles to match with the new approaches to faith formation in the twenty-first century. We are blending “traditional” roles like developing religious content, designing programming, managing programming, and teaching/facilitating programming with three new roles: *Architect*, *Curator*, and *Digital Designer*. We are becoming *learning architects* who design and/or identify environments which can become settings for faith formation, e.g., homes, workplaces, coffee shops, online communities, and more. We can design content and experiences to “deliver” to that setting. We are becoming *designers of digital platforms* (websites, social media) where people can connect with each other, access content, engage in learning activities, and more. These platforms provide 24x7 faith formation. While we may not personally possess these new digital skills, our congregations most likely have people who do. We are becoming *curators* of religious content and experiences. When there is an abundance of content, our role shifts from creator to curator. Curators are engaged in finding and identifying high quality content in all formats, matching it with the needs of people, providing the content on a digital platform (and often in gathered settings), and engaging people with the content.

Part 2. Intergenerational Faith Formation

Congregations can enhance the power of intergenerational faith formation experiences in three connected ways.

1. *Utilizing* the intergenerational events and experiences of church life (community life events, worship and the lectionary, seasons of the year, service and mission projects, prayer and spiritual formation) as a primary “content” in faith formation by *preparing* people with the knowledge and practices for participating, by *engaging* people in the event, and by *reflecting* upon the meaning of the event and how to *live/practice* in daily life
2. *Infusing* intergenerational experiences and relationships into existing programs and activities, such as bringing mature adults into children and youth programs for interviews, storytelling, and mentoring; and transforming age-group programs (vacation Bible school, service projects) into intergenerational experiences
3. *Connecting* the generations through new intergenerational programs and experiences that bring together all of the generations for learning, celebrating, praying, reading the Bible, serving and working for justice, and worshipping. For example, developing grandparent-grandchildren programming—VBS, summer camp, service/mission projects, field trip; and/or creating new intergenerational learning programs, service programs, retreat experiences, camp experiences, and much more.

#1. Utilize the Intergenerational Events and Experiences of Church Life

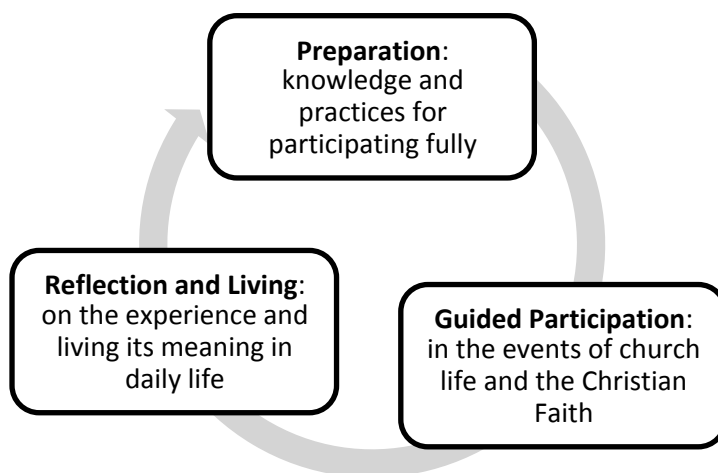
Every congregation already has events and experiences that can be enhanced and strengthened to unlock their faith forming potential.

- *The feasts and seasons of the church year* provide a natural rhythm and calendar for fashioning faith formation for children, adolescents and the whole family: Advent and Christmas, Epiphany, Baptism of the Lord, Call of the Disciples, Ash Wednesday, Lent, Holy Week, Easter, Easter season, Pentecost, and many more throughout the year.
- *Sunday worship and the Scripture readings* (lectionary or sermon series) provide a rich curriculum for the whole community with its cycle of weekly Scripture readings.
- *Ritual, milestone, and sacramental celebrations* provide events rich in theological meaning and faith practice that celebrate the faith journey throughout life.
- *Acts of service and justice*—locally and globally—provide a focus on mission to the world and put in action biblical and church teachings on service, justice, and care for the earth.
- *Prayer and spiritual traditions* provide times for reflection, praying as a community, and living the practices of the spiritual life through the community’s life together
- *Congregational events* that originate within the life and history of a individual congregation, and celebrate and reinforce the congregation’s identity and mission

In order to tap into the power of these events, faith formation can be fashioned around the event using a simple three-step methodology:

1. *Prepare* people—intergenerationally or in age groups—with the knowledge and practices—for participating in the event, experience, or activity,

2. *Experience/participate* in the intergenerational event , experience, or activity
3. *Reflect* upon the meaning of the event and discover how to *live/practice* that learning in daily life



This method can easily be incorporated in a variety of faith formation settings—intergenerational programming, family-centered programming, and/or age group programming. Consider the possibilities of making church life and events your faith formation curriculum throughout the year.

- People prepare for Sunday worship and rehearse the Scripture readings; they experience Sunday worship with the faith community; and they are equipped to live the Sunday worship experience at home and in their daily lives (with activities and resources delivered online).
- People learn about the a particular justice issues and the biblical and church teachings on the justice issue; they experience action to serve those in need, work for justice, and care for creation—locally and globally; and they reflect on that experience and integrate it’s meaning into their lives as Christians.
- People learn about the Bible and how to read it, interpret it, and apply it to their lives; they experience the Bible at Sunday worship and in the life of the community; and develop their own practice of Bible study and reading.
- People learn about Jesus by studying the Gospels; they experience the life, ministry, death and resurrection of Jesus through the seasons of the church year; and they reflect upon their understanding of Jesus and how to follow him.
- People learn about prayer and spirituality and how to develop their spiritual lives through prayer and spiritual disciplines; they experience the prayer life of the faith community; and they are equipped to develop their own practice of prayer and the spiritual disciplines.

#2. Infuse Intergenerational Experiences into Current Programs and Activities

Think of all the possibilities for incorporating intergenerational relationship building and experiences using the programs and activities your congregation is already offering—age-specific programs and all ages community activities. Allow the following ideas to spark your own thinking about the potential for infusing an intergenerational element into current programs and activities.

- Include all generations in Sunday worship and involve all generations in worship leadership roles—music, art, hospitality, reading Scripture, and more. While there may be time during

the Scripture readings and sermon/homily when children have a separate experience, it's important to have children involved with the whole worship community for most of the service.

- Add other generations into current age-group programs, such as mission trips, service projects, retreat experiences, and vacation Bible school. Consider adding intergenerational experiences into VBS such as a grandparent component or redesigning the youth mission trip into an all ages mission trip from adolescents to older adults.
- Incorporate intergenerational dialogues, interviews, and presentations into programming—providing opportunities for children and youth to experience the wisdom, faith, and interests of (older) adults; and then reverse the process and provide opportunities for the (older) adults to experience the wisdom, faith, and interests of children or teens through presentations, performances, and discussions.
- Add a mentoring component into children, adolescent, and parent programming: parent mentors for baptism parents, confirmation mentors, learning-to-pray spiritual direction, justice and service mentors—to name a few possibilities.
- Connect people of different generations who have insights and life experiences that may be helpful to other generations, for example midlife and mature adults helping new parents with financial management and household management, or young people helping older adults navigate the digital and online world.
- Involve the whole community in praying for special moments and experiences, for example: birth and baptism of a child, young people on a mission trip or retreat weekend, a milestone event such as first communion or graduations.
- Add intergenerational relationship building and activities into social and recreational activities in the congregation, such as the church picnic and after worship gatherings.
- Develop specific roles for the younger generations in church leadership, such as adolescents serving as teachers in children's faith formation or as worship leaders.
- Develop a leadership or ministry apprenticeship for younger generations to serve in church ministries and leadership positions.

#3. Connect the Generations through New Intergenerational Programs and Experiences

A third way to enhance the power of intergenerational faith formation experiences in your congregation is to create new programs and activities that bring together all of the generations for learning, celebrating, praying, reading the Bible, serving and working for justice, and worshipping. Here are ideas for creating new intergenerational learning and intergenerational service programming.

Intergenerational Service Models

Intergenerational service provides many benefits to the whole church community. Intergenerational service helps narrow the generation gap between older and younger church members; recognizes that all people in the church, regardless of age, have talents to contribute that are valuable and important; assists young people in feeling a part of the church today, not just the church of tomorrow; connects the generations and builds relationships as they serve God by serving their neighbor; and communicates that it is the responsibility of all Christians, regardless of age, to serve people and work for justice as a follower Jesus Christ.

Here are several ideas for creating new programming that engages all ages in serving those in need, caring for creation, and working for justice. There are so many local, national, and global organizations that provide educational resources and action projects your church can use to create new intergenerational programming.

An Annual Church-Wide Service Day

Mobilize the whole faith community through an annual church-wide justice and service project. Create a four-week, church-wide campaign that culminates on a Sunday where the entire congregation engages in service projects in and with the community. As an individual church or with churches in your area, select a local and global project already developed by a justice or service organization. Then develop an annual theme, such as poverty, care for creation, peacemaking. Prepare the whole community for the service engagement, utilizing the resources developed by the partner organizations. Include 1) worship and prayer experiences focused on the particular theme or project; 2) educational sessions including social analysis of the issues and reflection on the teachings of scripture and the Christian tradition; 3) household activities on the theme or project such as prayers, learning resources, and action suggestions; 4) a website with the resources, activities, action projects, and features to allow people to share what they are doing; and 5) special presentations by experts on the issues and by people engaged in action on the issue.

A Monthly Intergenerational Service Project

Using the same design as the church-wide service day, a congregation can develop a monthly service project that addresses one particular need or issue (local and/or global) each month. Each month's project can include a short educational program of the topic, an action project, and reflection on the project. Themes for the service projects can correspond with calendar events and seasons, as well as church year seasons. Examples include Back to School (September) and school kits for students, Thanksgiving (November) and feeding the hungry, Lent (February or March) and serving the poor, and Earth Day (April) and caring for creation.

Intergenerational Service Nights at Church

Service Nights are simple, self-contained programs at church that feature five to ten service activity stations that engage all ages in doing a simple project for the benefit of a group in need. At one station people might create greeting cards for the elderly or for sick church members. At another booth they might make blankets for a homeless shelter. At another booth they might bake cookies or make sandwiches for a soup kitchen. Many organizations provide the organizational logistics a church needs to a service project, for example Feed My Starving Children provides the resources for people to pack food that will be shipped to people in need.

Intergenerational Learning Models

For more than 20 congregations from a variety of Christian traditions have been developing and implementing new models of intergenerational faith formation and learning. Intergenerational learning provides a way to educate the whole community, bringing all ages and generations together to learn with and from each other, build community, share faith, pray, celebrate, and practice the Christian faith. The key is that everyone is learning together—young and old, single and married, families with children and empty-nest families, and it involves the whole family—children, parents, grandparents, in a shared experience of the Christian faith.

We know from the research findings that one of the most significant features of intergenerational faith formation is the way it builds community among people, and relationships across ages and

generations. Central to building relationships and community is creating an atmosphere of hospitality and welcoming at intergenerational learning sessions where everyone feels a sense of belonging, acceptance, and respect. *This welcoming spirit is as important as the content being taught.* The intergenerational learning model creates the environment and experiences where people of all ages learn from each other and grow in faith together. Adults gain meaningful insights from their interaction with children and youth; and children and youth experience meaningful support from non-parental adults. Intergenerational learning creates an environment in which participants feel safe to learn, ask questions, and grow in faith on a deeper level.

We know from the research that intergenerational learning strengthens parental and family faith by encouraging the whole family to participate—children, teens, parents, and grandparents. It equips parents (and grandparents) to be faith formers of their children by developing their competence and confidence through such faith-forming experiences as sharing stories, celebrating rituals, praying together, reading the Bible, and more. Intergenerational learning provides activities that model the practices that churches want parents and families to live at home. The research findings also revealed that families *enjoy* opportunities to pray, learn, and be together (even if parents may resist participating initially).

Model #1. Generations of Faith

The Generations of Faith intergenerational model is based on the work of James White in his book *Intergenerational Religious Education* (Birmingham: Religious Education Press, 1988). White identified four patterns of relationships that shape the four components of an intergenerational religious education learning experience: 1) in-common experiences, 2) parallel learning, 3) contributive occasions, and 4) interactive sharing.

The model created by the Generations of Faith Project used White’s four components in the following way. This model can be used for all ages intergenerational faith formation or for family faith formation with children, adolescents, and their parents (and grandparents).

1. Gathering and opening prayer
2. All-ages learning experience: intergenerational learning begins with a multigenerational experience of a theme that all generations can share together.
3. In-depth learning experience: through structured learning activities each generation—families with children, adolescents, and other adults—explores the biblical and theological understanding of the topic, using one of three possible formats:
 - The *Age Group Format* provides parallel, age-appropriate learning for groups at the same time. Though age groups are separated, each one is focusing on the same topic—utilizing specific learning activities that are designed for their life cycle stage: families with children or children alone, adolescents, young adults, and adults.
 - The *Whole Group Format* provides a series of facilitated learning activities for everyone at the same time using intergenerational or age-specific small groups or table groups.
 - The *Learning Activity Center Format* provides structured intergenerational and age-specific learning activities at a variety of stations or centers in a common area.
4. Sharing learning reflections and application: in intergenerational groups participants share what they learned and prepare for applying their learning to daily life using resources and activities provided in print or online.
5. Closing prayer service

Congregations are using the intergenerational model of learning in a variety of ways:

1. To develop a faith formation curriculum for the whole community using intergenerational faith formation as the primary learning model, supplemented by age-specific and affinity group faith formation models
2. To extend a topic featured in the faith formation program for children or teens, to the whole community through intergenerational learning
3. To replace a topic in the children or adolescent program with intergenerational learning on the same theme
4. To add intergenerational learning to milestone and sacramental preparation and celebrations
5. To conduct intergenerational faith formation around church year feasts and seasons, such as Advent-Christmas, Lent, Holy Week, Pentecost, and more
6. To add intergenerational learning experiences into a vacation Bible school, camp, or summer program
7. To conduct intergenerational learning in preparation for service projects and actions for justice
8. To sponsor an intergenerational retreat for the whole community.

Churches that make intergenerational learning their core faith formation experience for all ages conduct monthly, bi-weekly, or weekly intergenerational programs, and then offer a variety of age-group or affinity-group programs throughout the month or year to address specific age-appropriate needs. These churches replace or modify their age group programming to place the emphasis on all ages learning together. They develop a multi-year curriculum for the whole community built around themes from the Bible, the cycle of Sunday lectionary readings, church year feasts and seasons, Christian practices, service and social justice, prayer and spiritual disciplines, core Christian beliefs, and moral teachings.

Since the early 2000s St. Elizabeth of Hungary Church in Acton, Massachusetts, has been offering monthly intergenerational learning as the core faith formation experience for all ages. Their curriculum is liturgically-centered, connecting faith formation with the realities of daily experience and the Eucharistic celebration. For St. Elizabeth the Sunday Eucharist is the heart of all efforts to know, love, and serve Jesus Christ. This is where their community accompanies everyone on their journey of life and faith. They schedule intergenerational learning monthly between Labor Day and the Easter season with four sessions per month to accommodate the large number of participants and their different schedules. Every session begins with a meal. What follows varies from month-to-month, but usually includes an opening activity in common and age-appropriate breakouts (grades K-4 with at least one parent, middle school, high school, and adult). Each session runs no longer than two and one-half hours. Each month's theme is drawn from one of the Sunday lectionary readings in that month. Some years they adopt a theme—2017-18 is Discipleship—while other years have a monthly theme drawn directly from the lectionary readings. In addition to monthly programs, St. Elizabeth sponsored a 24 hour intergenerational experience of prayer, learning, service, and worship called “24 Hours with the Lord” and has sponsored an intergenerational mission trip. To learn more about their work go to <http://www.seoh.org/faith-formation/gift>.

While St. Elizabeth is a large suburban parish, Our Lady of Fatima is a small town church in New York State. Since the early 2000s they have been doing monthly intergenerational faith formation called GIFT, a parish model of intergenerational, life-long, event-centered faith formation. All ages gather once a month for a learning session around a yearly theme. In 2017-18 they are focusing on Mary, the mother of Jesus, and learning through her about the life of Jesus. Gatherings are on Saturday, and begin with a potluck supper immediately following the 4:00 pm Mass.

St. Anthony on the Lake parish in Pewaukee, WI has been offering family-intergenerational faith formation for over 25 years. They started with 20 families and have grown to over 350 families, which includes adult-only households. Offered on Sunday mornings or Monday evenings (whatever is most convenient for people), twice a month mid-September through March, the program begins with an intergenerational activity and breaks into age-group learning where both parents/grandparents, children, and youth explore faith themes covering the Bible, the Creed, sacraments, morality, and prayer and spirituality. The Sunday program begins at 10 am with fellowship and concludes at 12 noon; the Monday program begins with a light supper at 5:30 pm and ends at 7:30 pm. To learn more about their program go to: <http://www.stanthony.cc/family-program>.

Model 2. Logos

A second model of intergenerational (and family) learning has been created by GenOn Ministries (www.genonministries.org) and includes weekly intergenerational experiences for children and/or youth that creates an intentional arena where all ages can learn about and practice the art of Christian relationships. In these cross-generational gatherings, everyone eats together, plays together, studies together, and prays together. These four parts, plus weekly congregational worship, make up the whole, providing everyone involved a cross-generational arena in which to have a complete, holistic experience of Christian nurture. In addition, young people also lead in congregational worship on a regular basis.

The four-part learning model includes:

1. *Bible study*: A time for each grade or a combination of grades to study the Bible as the model for Christ-centered living. Churches can use a non-denominational curriculum developed by GenOn for LOGOS or their own curriculum.
2. *Worship skills*: Choir, drama, bells, or other arts are rehearsed at LOGOS and then presented regularly in corporate worship. Each church decides the best fit with its own liturgy and worship style.
3. *Family Time*: The shared meal is a time to gather regular “table families” of various ages who eat together each week for the entire program year. Kitchen teams prepare dinners that are served family style, using table settings and serving dishes practicing the art of serving one another.
4. *Recreation*: All have great fun in a cooperative atmosphere, often drawing on the hobbies and interests of adults in the congregation willing to share their passions on a one-time basis or longer.

Model 3. Messy Church

A third model of family/intergeneration learning is *Messy Church* (<http://www.messychurch.org.uk>, <http://messychurchaustralia.com.au>) started in 2004 in the UK with a simple question: “How can our small church reach the many families in our community?” Messy Church was created for those outside the church, and became church for them, not a stepping stone to Sunday morning church. Messy Church is church for families who may not find other forms of church appealing and who don’t yet belong to a church. There are now thousands of Messy Churches all around the world in most denominations.

A typical Messy Church meets monthly and includes four parts:

1. A flexible, relaxed arrival time with drinks and snacks
2. Creative exploration of a Bible story or theme through many creative experiences for people of different learning styles and of all ages. Children and adults are not separated and are encouraged to explore the story or theme together
3. A short but explicit time of worship with story, music and prayers that builds on the creative exploration that has already occurred.
4. A generous welcome and hospitality is expressed through an invitation to share a delicious home-cooked, sit-down meal with others

The key values which define Messy Church are Christ-centeredness, creativity, and joyful celebration in a spirit of generous, inclusive hospitality. Messy Church tries to focus on people as they are and form relationships with whole families, no strings attached.

Model 4. Intergenerational Vacation Bible School

A fourth, emerging model is family/intergenerational vacation Bible school. Congregations have begun to re-think vacation Bible school, redesigning a child-only experience into a family or intergenerational experience. One approach to intergenerational VBS has all ages participating for three or four evenings in the summer with food, fun, music, learning, and games. The program incorporates typical VBS Bible content and interactive learning, but everything is intergenerational. A typical evening design (3 hours) could look like this: registration, light meal, opening /music, Bible story, outdoor activity/inside craft, and snacks and closing. A second approach begins each evening with a family-style meal. Then the children participate in Bible stories and activities, while the adults (parents, grandparents) participate in an adult-themed session. Families then reunite in the church for music and prayer to close the evening.

Other Models

For additional models of intergenerational faith formation check out the case studies in the two volumes of *Let's Kill Sunday School and Birth Cross + Gen Ministries* from Faith Inkubators.

Application of Intergenerational Ideas

1. Utilizing the intergenerational events and experiences of church life (community life events, worship and the lectionary, seasons of the year, service and mission projects, prayer and spiritual formation) as a primary “content” in faith formation by preparing people with the knowledge and practices for participating, by engaging people in the event, and by reflecting upon the meaning of the event and how to live/practice in daily life
2. Infusing intergenerational experiences and relationships into existing programs and activities, such as bringing mature adults into children and youth programs for interviews, storytelling, and mentoring; and transforming age-group programs (vacation Bible school, service projects) into intergenerational experiences
3. Connecting the generations through new intergenerational programs and experiences that bring together all of the generations for learning, celebrating, praying, reading the Bible, serving and working for justice, and worshipping. For example, developing grandparent-grandchildren programming—VBS, summer camp, service/mission projects, field trip; and/or creating new intergenerational learning programs, service programs, retreat experiences, camp experiences, and much more.

Part 3. Family Faith Formation

The family provides a significant and irreplaceable role in faith formation with children and adolescents. When Christian Smith and his colleagues in the National Study on Youth and Religion looked for the factors that produced highly religious emerging adults, they focused on parents and the family as the primary (but not only) influence. They reported that through the processes of religious socialization young people with seriously religious parents are more likely than those without such parents to have been trained in their lives to think, feel, believe, and act as serious religious believers, and that that training “sticks” with them even when they leave home and enter emerging adulthood.

Research studies over the past twenty years continue to affirm this truth. We know the factors that make a significant difference in promoting faith in children and adolescents:

- parents’ personal faith and practice
- a close and warm parent-child relationship
- parent modeling and teaching a religious faith
- parent involvement in church life and Sunday worship
- grandparent religious influence and relationship
- family conversations about faith
- family faith religious practices including praying, reading the Bible, serving others, and celebrating holidays and rituals.

In a recent study, *Nothing Less: Engaging Kids in a Lifetime of Faith*, Lifeway Research asked 2,000 Protestant and nondenominational churchgoers—of all whom attend services at least once a month and have adult children ages 18 to 30—what parenting practices pay off over the long haul when it comes to spiritual health. They asked parents to think about their children today (18-30 years old) and what proved to be significant in developing their faith and spiritual life. They discovered nine things parents do to influence the long-term spiritual condition of their young people (not ranked in order).

- Parents participated in mission trips as a family as their kids were growing up.
- Parents participated in service projects with their kids as they were growing up.
- Parents frequently shared Christ with unbelievers as their kids were growing up.
- Parents personally read the Bible several times a week or more as their kids were growing up.
- Parents encouraged their teen to serve in the church.
- Parents typically asked for forgiveness when they messed up as their children were growing up.
- Parents encouraged their children’s own unique talents and interests as they grew up.
- Parents attended churches that emphasized what the Bible says as their kids were growing up.
- Parents taught their children to tithe as their kids were growing up.

The research and the Christian tradition make it clear: family-centered faith formation, parent engagement, and parent formation need to be central in faith formation with children and adolescents. We need to embrace a new set of beliefs and attitudes in our work with families:

To believe that God is actively present in family life, and that the family is the first community and the most basic way in which God gathers us, forms us, and acts in the world.

To see the family as the essential and foundational environment for faith nurture, faith practice, and the healthy development of young people.

To inform parents of their essential role and empower them to fulfill their role as faith formers of children and adolescents.

To reinforce the family's central role in promoting healthy development and faith growth in children and youth, and enhance the faith-forming capacity of parents and grandparents.

To build faith formation around the lives of the today's families and parents, rather than having the congregation prescribe the programs and activities that families will participate in.

To address the diversity of family life today by moving away from "one size fits all" programs and strategies toward a variety of programs and strategies tailored to the unique life tasks and situations, concerns and interest, and religious-spiritual journeys of parents and families.

To overcome the age-segregated nature of church and its programming by engaging parents and the whole family in meaningful intergenerational relationships and faith formation that involves all ages and families.

To build upon the assets, strengths, and capacities present in parents and families, rather than focusing on their deficits and solving problems.

To partner with parents in working toward shared goals and aspirations for their young people by supporting, equipping, and resourcing them.

#1. Nurturing Family Faith Practices

Equipping and resourcing families to practice their faith at home through prayer, devotions, reading the Bible, rituals, milestone celebrations, service, learning, and more.

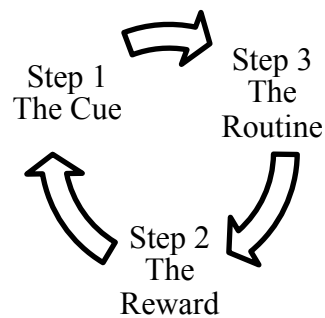
The family at home is the community where Christian faith practices are nurtured and practiced. We have discovered through research that certain faith practices make a significant difference in nurturing the faith of children and adolescents.

1. Reading the Bible as a family and encouraging young people to read the Bible regularly
2. Praying together as a family and encouraging young people to pray personally
3. Serving people in need as a family and supporting service activities by young people
4. Participating regularly in Sunday worship as a family
5. Being involved in a faith community and serving in church as a family and as young people
6. Eating together as a family
7. Celebrating rituals and holidays at home
8. Having family conversations
9. Talking about faith, religious issues, and questions and doubts
10. Ritualizing important family moments and milestone experiences
11. Celebrating holidays and church year seasons at home
12. Providing moral instruction

Faith practices are learned and practiced as they woven seamlessly into the fabric of daily life. They can become “habits of faith.” Consider this when you woke up this morning, what did you do first? Did you hop in the shower, check your messages, put on your sneakers and workout or go for run, or have breakfast? Did you tie the left or right shoe first? What did you eat for lunch? What did you do when you got home in the evening?

Most of the choices we make each day may feel like the products of well-considered decision making, but they’re not. They’re habits. Charles Duhigg, in *The Power of Habit*, writes that at the core of every habitual pattern is a habit loop. The habit loop can be broken down into three basic steps. First, there is a cue, a trigger that tells your brain to go into automatic mode. The cue can be internal, such as a feeling or thought, or external, such as a time of day or the company of certain people (which is why it’s easier to exercise among our running buddies, but harder to study when our friends are in the library). The second part of the habit loop is the routine, the behavior that leads to the reward. The routine can be physical (eating a donut), cognitive (“remember for the test”), or emotional (“I always feel anxious in math class”). The third part is the reward. Not surprisingly, the reward can also be physical (sugar!), cognitive (“that’s really interesting”), or emotional (“I always feel relaxed in front of the TV.”). The reward determines if a particular habit loop is worth remembering.

Here is the process of creating a habit, drawn from Charles Duhigg’s *The Power of Habit*.



The Cue: Every habit has a trigger.

- What time will this habit occur?
- Where will you be?
- What else will be around?
- What will you have just finished?
- What emotion do you think you will be feeling?

People do not need all these to create a habit. Only one of them is needed to become a cue. But the more people test out, the faster the habit takes hold.

The Reward

- What reward will you give yourself at the end of the behavior?
- Do you actually enjoy this reward? After a few days, ask: Do you crave this reward when you are exposed to the cue? After two weeks ask: Do you crave the intrinsic reward of the habit (how it makes you feel) more than the extrinsic reward (what you give yourself as a treat)?
- If yes, people have created a powerful habit. If not, people need to choose a new reward.

The Routine: This is the behavior you want to become a habit.

Studies show that the easiest way to implement a new habit is to write a plan:

“When ____ (cue) _____, I will ____ (routine) _____ because it provides me with _____ (reward) _____.

People should post their plan where they will see it. Try it for a week. Eventually, studies say the new behavior will become automatic)

We can help families integrate the faith practices into their daily routine by designing activities that present the faith practices in a way that will lead toward making the practice a habit. We can design activities for a particular practice (like reading the Bible) that only take 5 or 10 minutes, suggest a variety of ways to integrate the activity into daily life, have people create a plan, and invite people to reflect on the benefits of the practice after their experience.

One example of helping families form “habits of faith” comes from Traci Smith who proposes a 7-day start up plan for integrating faith practices into daily life using the activities in her book *Faithful Families: Creating Sacred Moments at Home*. This approach provides an immersion experience for families out of which habits can develop. Explore the other programming ideas at the end of this section.

#2. Celebrating Milestones

Celebrating one-time milestones and annual milestones through experiences at home and in the congregation that activities of naming, equipping, blessing, gifting, and reinforcing

A milestone is a an action or event marking a significant change or stage in development. These life and faith markers can provide important times for engaging families when they are most open to change and growth. Milestones are significant moments in life’s journey that provide the opportunity for families to experience God’s love and grow in faith through events in the life of the church community and family life. Milestones faith formation provides a natural opportunity to create a partnership between the congregation and the home. Here is a plan from Milestones Ministry (<https://milestonesministry.org>):

Children & Youth

- Birth and Baptism
- Anniversary of Baptism: Remembering our way of life
- Prayer: Relationships with God and family
- Welcoming young children to worship: An intentional invitation
- Beginning faith formation at church: First steps for a young child
- Kids and money; Good stewards of God’s gifts
- Blessing of the backpacks: A Fall milestone for all ages
- Communion: learning more about the Lord’s Supper
- Bible: Placing Scripture in hands and homes
- My Body, God’s Gift: Sexuality as God’s good gift
- Middle school: Created in God’s image
- Beginning confirmation: Walking with youth in their faith journeys
- Confirmation: An evening of honor
- Driver’s license: Driver’s license as rite of passage
- Mission trip: Community blessings at home and away

- High school graduation: Equipping graduates for the journey

Adults

- New job: connecting God’s presence at work
- New home: Affirming the physical, spiritual, and emotional transition to a new living space
- Empty Nest: affirming adults in a new season of life
- Return from military deployment: establishing a new norm
- Marriage
- Anniversary of Marriage: remembering our promises of love and life together
- Becoming a parent: nurturing and safeguarding a child
- Faith community: life together as the people of God
- Affirming spiritual gifts: connecting passion with service
- Aging parent: affirming primary care givers
- Grandparents: From generation to generation
- Retirement: A major life transition
- Loss of a loved one: remembering God’s promises for us all

Milestone faith formation can be developed around five elements: *naming, equipping, blessing, gifting, and reinforcing*.

1. *Naming* the sacred and ordinary events that take place in daily life—beginnings, endings, transitions, achievements, failures, and rites of passage, and creating rituals and traditions that shape our identities and give us a sense of belonging to the family of Jesus Christ.
2. *Equipping* brings people together for learning, builds community, invites conversation, encourages storytelling, and provides information. A family or intergenerational learning program—at church or home or in the community—prepares the individual and the whole family for the milestone and for living faith at home.
3. *Blessing* the individual and marking the occasion in a worship service and in the home says that it is *all* about faith. God is present in all of daily life, making the ordinary sacred. Offer a prayer to bless the lives of those involved in the milestone moment: a prayer during worship for those participating in the milestone moment and a prayer at a small group or with family at home.
4. *Gifting* offers a tangible, visible item that serves as a reminder or symbol of the occasion being marked as well as a resource for the ongoing nurture of faith in daily life.
5. *Reinforcing* the milestone with a follow-up gathering of those involved in the milestone moment to help it gain deeper roots in the life of faith of those who participated.

#3. Celebrating the Seasons of the Year

Celebrating church year seasons and calendar seasons at home, at church, and in the community

Calendar events and the feasts and seasons of the church year provide a natural rhythm for faith formation at home throughout the year. The church year seasonal celebrations can engage families in the intergenerational life of the church, providing a natural way to connect church and home in faith formation. Consider some of the opportunities that occur each year.

Calendar Year Events: New Year’s Eve and Day, Martin Luther King Jr. Day, Valentine’s Day, St. Patrick’s Day, Earth Day, Mother’s Day, Memorial Day, Father’s Day, Independence Day, Labor Day, Start of School, Halloween, Thanksgiving

Church Year Feasts and Seasons: Advent, Christmas, Epiphany, Ash Wednesday, Lent, Holy Week, Easter, Pentecost, St. Francis Day–Blessing the Animals (October 4), All Saints and Souls (November 1–2)

Every church year feasts and seasons provides an opportunity to connect home and church, and to explore more deeply the theological and spiritual meaning of the feast or season. The content and activities for the home can include rituals, learning activities, prayers, Bible reading, and ideas for action (serving, working for justice). There are an abundance of print, audio, and digital content for most feasts and seasons of the church year.

A calendar year event provides a way to connect the family with the church and/or the wider community. Calendar year events provide a way to engage in missional outreach to parents and families. Imagine hosting a blessing of the animals at church for the whole community on a weekend close to the Feast of St. Francis on October fourth. For example an event like Martin Luther King Jr. or Earth Day can involve a family activity but also engaged in a community-wide action project and a prayer service at church or in a neighboring congregation. Consider Earth Day:

Earth Day in the community: community-wide cleanup, planting a community garden, planting trees in the community, and more.

Earth Day at church: all-ages workshop on caring for creation, story time at the public library focused on environmental awareness books, an ecumenical prayer service for caring for creation, an intergenerational program on the theological and biblical foundation of caring for creation, a church energy audit, adopting a global project to address the effects of climate change, recycling activities.

Earth Day at home: planting a family garden, mealtime creation prayer, daily Bible verses on caring for creating for April, children’s activities to explore and experience caring for creation, storybooks and videos on caring for creation themes, home energy and recycling audit.

How can the congregation more fully engage families in celebrating the feasts and seasons with whole community? How can the congregation equip, support, and provide resources for families to live church year feasts and seasons at home?

#4. Reading the Bible through the Year

Encounter God in the Bible through the year and develop the practices of reading and studying the Bible.

One way a congregation can implement this idea is through lectionary-based faith formation programming that explores the Sunday readings in family or intergenerational settings. Churches who do not use a lectionary-based approach can adopt a multi-week sermon series that focuses on a theme connected with Biblical teachings. Programing can include whole family activities, as well as age appropriate learning activities.

A second way to implement this idea is to focus on family resources that flow from the Sunday worship experience. The key is to extend and deepen the experience of Sunday worship at home through activities, practices, and resources. This includes providing a variety of age-appropriate and whole family digital content on the church’s faith formation website. Determine a focusing theme or topic that emerges from the scripture readings and make that the lens you use to select resources.

Many churches now provide weekly online faith formation for families and age groups centered on Sunday worship, the readings, and the sermon.

A family faith formation plan can include the following elements, designed around the theme from Sunday worship:

- family conversation questions on the theme of the Sunday readings.
- activities for the church year feast or season (when appropriate).
- weekly table ritual.
- a podcast or video of the sermon with a study guide for the parents, children’s creative Bible activities, storybooks, video presenting the Bible story.
- daily prayer, weekly family devotion.
- short bible reading for each day of the week, online resources for studying the Bible (print, audio, video).
- ideas for living the biblical teaching in the family or in the community.

Practical Strategies for Enhancing Family Faith

1. **Develop a family faith formation website.** Develop a family website with engaging family faith forming activities—print, audio, video, apps, and more—tailored to families with children and adolescents (and with parent content as well). The website serves as the resource center with content and activities and as a portal to family activities online. This is essential element of all of family strategies.
2. **Seasonal family festivals and gatherings.** Develop family gatherings or festivals around the four seasons—fall, winter, spring, and summer—or around the church year—Advent-Christmas, Lent, Easter, Pentecost. Select a theme for each gathering such as a faith practice and/or seasonal event and/or Scripture readings. Schedule these as part of the annual calendar. Connect Sunday worship with the family festival.
3. **Connect to Sunday worship.** Find ways to connect faith practices and seasonal formation at home to readings in the Lectionary or in a sermon series, provide a short intro to living faith at home, and show people the at-home activities on the family faith formation website.
4. **Schedule a yearlong plan for milestones.** Integrate milestones formation and celebration that can be schedule into a yearly plan of church-based faith formation for each age group. For example:
 - August: Blessing of the backpacks
 - September: Beginning faith formation at church
 - October: Bible: Placing Scripture in hands and homes
 - November; Kids and money—being good stewards of God’s gifts
 - February: My body, God’s gift
 - March: Drivers license (for those who have and are about to receive a license)
 - April: Communion
 - May: High school graduation
 - June: Mission trip

5. **Make faith practices a seasonal focus.** Make a Christian practice the focus of a season or individual months through all family or intergenerational learning, worship and preaching, and service/action. For example, during the Lenten season the congregation and family can focus on one or more practices that reflect the theology and liturgies of the season, such as forgiveness, discernment, prayer, or transforming the world.
6. **Create family immersion experiences.** Design an extended time programs (half-day, full day) that teach faith through immersion experiences—at church or out in the community—where families can experience a practice first hand, such as hospitality at a homeless shelter or serving a meal at a soup kitchen or caring for creation by planting a garden.
7. **Develop a monthly seasonal event.** The seasons of the year offers a variety of opportunities for families to celebrate, learn, and have fun together. Select one family activity for each month of the year, reflecting the calendar seasons and the church year seasons, and publish the activity on the family website. Here's a example:
 - January: Martin Luther King Jr.
 - February: Ash Wednesday
 - March: The Real St. Patrick
 - April: Easter and New Life
 - May: Mother's Day
 - June: Vacation Travel
 - July: Independence Day
 - August: Back to School
 - September: Fall Harvest
 - October: A Helping Halloween
 - November: Thanksgiving
 - December: Christmas is Coming!

#5. Equipping Parents and Grandparents as Faith Formers

Equipping parents and grandparents with the knowledge and skills necessary for faith-forming: how to transmit faith and values to their young people, how to become a Christian role model, and how to build a community of faith at home that nurtures faith growth in the young.

We know that factors that make a significant difference in promoting faith in children and adolescents include: parents' personal faith and practice, a close and warm parent-child relationship, parents' modeling and teaching a religious faith, parents' involvement in church life and Sunday worship, grandparents' religious influence and relationship, family conversations about faith, and family faith religious practices including praying, reading the Bible, serving others, and celebrating holidays and rituals.

In a recent study by Lifeway Research, *Nothing Less: Engaging Kids in a Lifetime of Faith*, researchers 2,000 Protestant and nondenominational churchgoers of all whom attend services at least once a month and have adult children ages 18 to 30. Researchers wanted to know what parenting practices pay off over the long haul when it comes to spiritual health. They asked parents to think about their children today (18-30 years old) and what proved to be significant in developing their faith and spiritual life. They discovered nine things parents do to influence the long-term spiritual condition of their young people (not ranked in order)

1. Parents participated in mission trips as a family as their kids were growing up.

2. Parents in ministry of service projects with their kids as they were growing up.
3. Parents frequently shared Christ with unbelievers as their kids were growing up.
4. Parents personally read the Bible several times a week or more as their kids were growing up.
5. Parents encouraged their teen to serve in the church.
6. Parents typically asked for forgiveness when they messed up as their children were growing up.
7. Parents encouraged their children's own unique talents and interests as they grew up.
8. Parents attended churches that emphasized what the Bible says as their kids were growing up.
9. Parents taught their children to tithe as their kids were growing up.

There are three components of a parent and grandparent strategy: 1) promoting their spiritual and religious growth, 2) developing their faith forming skills, and 3) equipping them with the knowledge and skills for parenting today.

Spiritual and religious growth. This content will need to be tailored to the four spiritual-religious identities of parents—active, occasional, spiritual/uninvolved, and unaffiliated; and to the traditions, beliefs, and practices of the particular Christian tradition. This content includes, but is not limited to: developing a relationship and commitment to Jesus, experiencing the presence of God in daily life and relationships with others, praying, having Christian moral and ethical values to decide what is right or wrong, serving those in need and applying faith in the world, growing spiritually, reading and studying the Bible, and developing a well-informed Christian faith (Christian beliefs).

Faith-forming skills and practices. This content would include, but is not limited to: having family conversations about religious topics, reading and discussing the Bible, prayer as a family and as individuals, participating in Sunday worship, celebrating family rituals and milestones, celebrate holidays and seasons, engaging in actions of service, justice, and care for creation, talking about faith and the religious tradition, and providing moral instruction and discussing moral issues.

A helpful framework for thinking about the parent faith forming skills and practices is contained in the research study by Christian Smith and Justin Bartkus. They identify three primary roles parents play in transmitting religion.

1. *Sponsor of the Faith:* Parents are the point of access between the church and their children. If children are not initially exposed to the Christian faith by their parents, they usually will not be exposed to it at all.
2. *Gatekeeper of the Faith.* Parents have nearly total control over how much and what sorts of religious content their children encounter—whether prayer, reading the Bible, or receiving Communion will occur regularly in their lives; whether they will be exposed to relationships and communities that have a religious dimension, and so forth. Parents are thus the “gatekeeper” of religious content for their children. To use another metaphor, parents are like a faucet, determining whether religious content will arrive in children's lives at an occasional drip or in a regular flow.
3. *Interpreter of the Faith.* Parents are definitive role models, mentors, who embody a specific manner of being Christian. They teach children how to apprehend the world, how to understand what is good and what is evil, how one ought to affectively, intellectually and practically engage with the world, and so on. They do not just “represent” the faith; in many

cases, they are the only meaningful embodiment of that faith in the lives of children. Parents render faith a matter of flesh and blood rather than a lifeless mishmash of doctrines and teachings. If children do not “see” the Christian faith in the “face” of their parents, they will likely never gain sufficient familiarity with it to commit to practicing the faith in the long run. (Adapted from Smith and Bartkus, 15)

Knowledge and skills for parenting. Based on the Developmental Relationships research from the Search Institute we can identify important practices for effective parenting. This content includes, but is not limited to:

- expressing care to young people by listening to them, being dependable, encouraging them, and make them feel known and valued
- challenging young people by expecting them to do their best and live up to their potential
- providing support for my young people by encouraging their efforts and achievements and guiding them to learn and grow
- treating young people with respect, hearing their voice, and including them in decisions that affect them
- inspiring young people to see possibilities for their future, expose them to new experiences and places, and connect them to people who can help them grow
- demonstrating a warm and affirming parenting approach
- creating a warm, caring supportive family environment.
- practicing effective communication skills
- managing “screen time” and social media use
- learning effective discipline practices
- creating a warm, caring supportive family

Suggestions for Parent Programming

1. **Parent website.** A parent or family faith formation website can provide online learning experiences (workshops, webinars, courses, audio podcasts, video programs). A website can provide parents with resources in all three content areas in a variety of media. The website can also extend learning from gathered parent programs. The website can include original programming created by the congregation and curated programming from other sources. Digital initiatives, such as the website or webinars, provide a way to reach a wider audience of parents in the community. A great example of a website designed for parents is ParentFurther (<http://www.parentfurther.com>).
2. **Parent programs.** In gathered settings (large group or small group) or online (webinars, online courses, video programs) parent programs can be created and/or curated using the content suggested earlier.
 - Incorporate parent formation and education into congregational events that already engage parents, such as parent preparation programs for baptism, first communion, or confirmation, as well as the celebration of milestones
 - Add a parent-only component to family-intergenerational learning programs that addresses parent faith formation or skills development while their children are participating in child-focused activities. Gather the groups together for a shared experience to put into practice what they learned.

- Add a parallel parent program to the existing children and adolescent program where parents can gather occasionally while their children are in age-specific programs.
 - Add a parent component to vacation Bible school in the evenings or online.
3. **Laboratory experiences.** Immerse parents in hands-on experiences—with or without their children—that teach knowledge and skills for faith-forming and parenting. A family-centered worship experience can be an opportunity to teach parents about worship, reading the Bible, and how to do these things at home. A church-wide service day can be an opportunity to teach parents about the biblical basis of service and how to integrate service into family life. A church year seasonal celebration can be an opportunity to teach about ritual and how to celebrate rituals and church year seasons at home. These immersion experiences can be supported with online content for parents and for the whole family.
 4. **Parent mentors.** Provide guidance and support for parents and the whole family at each stage of life with mentors drawn from the grandparent generation who are actively engaged in church and bring decades of parenting and family life experiences. Congregations can identify and provide training for mentors (mentoring skills, understanding today’s family, learning how to access online resources and activities, and more). Developing relationships between parents and mentors can begin with birth/baptism. Mentoring can be life-cycle specific with mentors who focus on children or adolescents. Churches can also identify mentors (spiritual guides) who attend to people’s spiritual life, guiding them in growing in their relationship with God and learning more about the Christian faith.
 5. **Life cycle or affinity groups for parents.** Create gathered settings (church, home, community) and in online groups (such as a Facebook parents group) that provide opportunities for parents with children in the same age group to talk about parenting, get information and encouragement, discuss family life issues and challenges, and more. Congregations can also sponsor support groups for divorced parents, parents in blended families, parents of children with special needs, and other affinity groupings. An example of a life cycle support group is MOPS (Mothers of Preschoolers).
 6. **Have parents practice new skills with their own children during program sessions.** This is in contrast to training programs where no practice takes place or where parents are asked to role-play with another parent or the group leader.
 7. **Design programs that engage parents in the learning experience.** Parent programs need to have content that is relevant to parents and processes that help parents learn and want to participate in new learning. Here are several tips for designing and leading effective educational experiences for parents.
 - Create a supportive, caring environment for learning. Greet parents, provide time for them to get acquainted with one another, and encourage mutual support during and after the experience.
 - Actively engage parents in the learning. The amount they learn will be in direct proportion to how much they put into the experience.
 - Let parents be the experts. Show that you value their knowledge and experience by giving them opportunities to contribute to the learning experience.
 - Tie the learning activities around the parents’ experiences and values so they know “this is for me and about my family.”

- Focus the content on real needs, issues, and concerns, not just on content that parents ought to know. If, for example, you want to help parents teach their child/teen about healthy concepts of right and wrong, first identify the ways this connects with parents' needs or concerns regarding moral values, then develop the experience to reflect those concerns.
 - Include information and skills parents can put into action immediately. Such application reinforces and helps parents internalize what they learn.
 - Demonstrate how to use skills and practices during the program so that parents have a direct experience of how to use the skills or practice at home.
 - Provide resources that parents can use for their own personal growth and with their family. Consider developing a parent website with resources and links to websites to enhance and expand the learning experience.
8. **Use a variety of environments and methods to engage all parents, anytime and anywhere.** Use a variety of settings—independent, mentored, at home, in small groups, in large groups, church-wide, in the community, and in the world—to offer a diversity of programs as well as to offer the same program content in multiple learning environments. This provides parents with more options to participate and broadens the scope of parent formation and education offerings.
9. **Use online platforms and digitally enabled strategies.** Utilize the abundance of digital media and tools for parent formation and education—to engage parents anytime, anyplace, and just-in-time—and extend and expand faith formation from physical, face-to-face settings into their daily lives through digital content and mobile delivery systems. Online platforms for parents (websites) integrate the content (programs, activities, resources), connect people to the content and to each other, provide continuity for people across different learning experiences, and make everything available anytime, anywhere, 24-7-365. Digital media tools and resources—social media (Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, and more), webinars and online learning, video conferencing, videos, audio podcasts, and much more—provide more features in designing parent programs, more methods for delivering programs, and more ways to connecting parents to each other.
10. **Give parents a plan.** Reggie Joiner and the Think Orange team emphasize how important it is to give families a plan. “When parents show up at church, they are often asking silent questions that we must answer; questions they don’t even know they’re asking. To begin looking at parents through a different filter, imagine that every time a parent walks through the door, he or she is asking you to do three things:
- *Give me the plan.* Most parents are parenting reactively, yet many of them desire to be proactive. They want a plan that will give them a system of support, consistent influence, and a steady flow of relevant information. In essence, what they need from the church is a partner.
 - *Show me how it works.* Parents need to be influences as much as children do, and they desire to be engaged in the process in a way that prompts them to take the best next step. Church leadership has the potential to challenge them collectively and give them a network of families to connect with personally.
 - *Tell me what to do today.* If we are going to truly partner with parents, we have to give them specific instructions or resources to use this week. Sometimes parents have a lack of vision, but often they just don’t know where to start. Give parents a map and a schedule. (Joiner 2010, 89–90)

Part 4. Faith Formation across the Life Span— Childhood through Adulthood

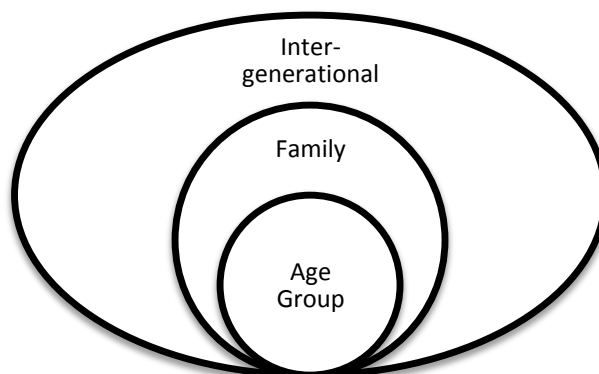
Promoting Faith Maturity

The goal of all faith formation is forming disciples of Jesus Christ and providing a foundation for lifelong growth in Christian faith and discipleship. We can form disciples and promote faith growth through ten essential characteristics of Christian faith and discipleship that incorporate knowing and believing, relating and belonging, practicing and living. These ten characteristics—drawn from the Christian faith tradition and from research on what makes a difference in people’s lives—can form the basis of helping people discern their faith journey and needs, and help the congregation accompany people through relationships, programs, activities, and resources.

Ten Faith Maturing Characteristics

1. Developing and sustaining a personal relationship and commitment to Jesus Christ
2. Living as a disciple of Jesus Christ and making the Christian faith a way of life
3. Reading and studying the Bible—its message, meaning, and application to life today
4. Learning the Christian story and foundational teachings of the Christian faith and integrating its meaning into ones life
5. Praying—together and by ourselves, and seeking spiritual growth through spiritual disciplines
6. Living with moral integrity guided by Christian ethics and values
7. Living the Christian mission in the world—serving those in need, caring for God’s creation, and acting and advocating for justice and peace.
8. Worshipping God with the community at Sunday worship, ritual celebrations, and the seasons of the church year
9. Being actively engaged in the life, ministries, and activities of the faith community
10. Practicing faith in Jesus Christ by using one’s gifts and talents within the Christian community and in the world

We can adopt a new approach to faith formation that is more community-centered, while at the same time being more person-centered. We can develop a plan for faith formation with children and adolescents that incorporates intergenerational faith forming experiences—engaging children and adolescents in faith community experiences with all generations (including worship), and family faith forming experiences—equipping parents to share faith at home and engaging in family faith practice. We are proposing that age group faith formation is situated within this ecology of faith formation. The blend of intergenerational, family, and age group settings makes for a comprehensive approach to faith formation.



Faith Maturing Characteristic	Intergenerational	Family	Age Group
1. Developing and sustaining a personal relationship and commitment to Jesus Christ			
2. Living as a disciple of Jesus Christ and making the Christian faith a way of life			
3. Reading and studying the Bible—its message, meaning, and application to life today			
4. Learning the Christian story and foundational teachings of the Christian faith and integrating its meaning into ones life			
5. Praying—together and by ourselves, and seeking spiritual growth through spiritual disciplines			
6. Living with moral integrity guided by Christian ethics and values			
7. Living the Christian mission in the world—serving those in need, caring for God’s creation, and acting and advocating for justice and peace.			
8. Worshipping God with the community at Sunday worship, ritual celebrations, and the seasons of the church year			
9. Being actively engaged in the life, ministries, and activities of the faith community			
10. Practicing faith in Jesus Christ by using one’s gifts and talents within the Christian community and in the world			

Personalizing Faith Formation

We are proposing to form disciples and promote faith growth through ten essential characteristics of Christian faith and discipleship that incorporate knowing and believing, relating and belonging, practicing and living. These ten characteristics—drawn from the Christian faith tradition and from research on what makes a difference in people’s lives—can form the basis of helping people discern their faith journey and needs, and help the congregation accompany people through relationships, programs, activities, and resources.

We are proposing personalizing faith formation as a way to address the increasingly diverse spiritual-religious identifies of people today. Personalizing learning, one of the latest educational innovations, seeks to address the diverse learning needs of people in educational settings. We can bring this innovation into faith formation. We personalize faith formation in order to address the greater diversity in religious practice and engagement among our people. Personalizing faith formation provides a way to address the diverse faith growth needs of adults by tailoring the faith forming environment—the what, when, how and where people learn and grow—to address the spiritual and religious interests and needs of people. It means providing variety and choice in faith formation programming, activities, and resources around the lives of people.

We know from research and experience that adults represent at least four religious-spiritual identities:

- *People with a vibrant faith and relationship with God who are engaged in the faith community.*
- *People who participate occasionally in the faith community and whose faith is not central to their lives.*

- *People who uninvolved in a church but spiritual.*
- *People who unaffiliated and have left involvement in organized religion.*

We need to tailor faith formation to address these four identities at each stage of life. The days of a one-size-fits-all program are gone. No one program, class, or resource can address the diverse faith growth needs of people today. We can create personalized approaches that use the faith maturing characteristics to guide people in discerning their faith growth needs, and providing content, experiences, and activities that help them to grow from where they are

We can take each characteristic and develop a *Pathways Guide* to help people discover where they are in their faith journey using a continuum from “getting started” to “growing” to “going deeper” with short illustrations for each one. Then we can develop a personalized faith growth plan—or what educators are now calling *Playlists*—of content (print, audio, video, online) and direct experiences to address their needs.

There are two ways to design a personalized plan for faith formation. The first utilizes a *Pathways Guide* to help people discern their faith growth needs and then provides *Playlists* of content, experiences, and activities to address those needs. The second approach personalizes a congregation’s faith formation offerings by tailoring them to distinct faith growth needs through a variety of *Playlists* and inviting people to select the activities that best address their spiritual and religious journey.

Approach One: Personalize the Faith Pathways for People

A *Pathways Guide* is a process for helping people discern where they are in their faith journey and to chart a path for faith growth—to get from where they are to a closer relationship with Jesus and a deeper practice of the Christian faith.. People should be able to clearly understand where they are in their faith journey and their next steps in faith growth. They don’t have to do everything, they just need to do the one next thing. A *Pathway* focuses on faith maturing. The goal of a *Pathway* is to develop disciples and promote faith growth. A *Pathway* is created around the church’s vision of discipleship and maturing faith—identifying characteristics of faith maturing that can be used for people to discern their faith journey and chart a path for growth.

Approach One uses the ten faith maturing characteristics (or similar characteristics from your Christian tradition) to create a *Pathways Guide* to help people discern their faith growth needs, and then design *Playlists* of content and experiences that address each characteristic. The *Pathways Guide* incorporates a rating scale for discerning faith growth needs, for example: Getting Started, Growing, Going Deeper.

Playlists of content and experiences are developed for each characteristic with activities targeted to each rating on the discernment continuum (getting started, growing, going deeper). There are *Playlists* for each “level” on the continuum. *Playlists* incorporate intergenerational, family, and age group programming in gathered programs at church, small groups, online, mentoring, and more. The *Playlists* are published on a digital platform to make it easy for people to access them. They can also be connected to an online classroom like Google Classroom or Edmodo or Schoology.

Approach One works well around major milestones and sacrament preparation, providing a way to connect with people where they are in their faith journey and personalizing their preparation experience. Create a *Pathways Guide* for Christian initiation and new member formation, marriage,

baptism, first communion, confirmation. A *Pathways Guide* can be used at the beginning of a new year of gathered faith formation programming to provide a more personalized experience for people. A *Pathways Guide* can be used with parents to discern their faith growth needs (as well as the whole family) at parent meetings and family-centered programming. It works best in an environment where you can guide people in discerning their faith growth needs and connecting them to *Playlist* that is designed for them.

Design Process

1. Identify a target audience(s): children, adolescents, parents, and/or the whole family.
2. Identify how and where you will use the *Pathways Guide*.
3. Develop the characteristics of faith growth you want to use in your *Pathways Guide*. Use the ten characteristics of maturing faith or use characteristics of faith growth specific to the content of the event or program (such as preparing for confirmation).
4. Develop a ‘discernment continuum’ that gives people a way to reflect on their current growth. Use a faith growth continuum such as Getting Started, Growing or Making Progress, Going Deeper; or a rating scale: How true is each statement for you: 1= not true from me , 3=somewhat true for me, 5=very true for me.

Approach Two: Personalize the Faith Formation Offerings

A second approach to personalizing faith formation, when you cannot use a *Pathways Guide* with people, is to offer a variety of content, experiences, and activities developed around the ten characteristics or the program’s content, and tailored to the different faith growth needs of people (getting started, growing, going deeper). In Approach Two the *Playlists* provide the way to personalize faith formation. For example, to help children, adolescents, parents, or the whole family read and study the Bible, we can offer three different types of Bible content and experiences for those who are getting started, growing, and going deeper. These activities can be intergenerational, family, age group, and online. All of the content and experiences are published on a digital platform for people to access.

Example of a Playlist: Reading the Bible (Families with Children)

Getting Started

- Participate in the Bible workshop for parents that is offered twice a year
- Watch the “Reading the Bible with Children” video and/or listen to the podcast on the family website
- Begin the practice of a weekly Bible story reading and/or video viewing using the resources on the family website
- Use the online Guide to select and purchase a recommended children’s Bible, and an adult study Bible for parents
- Engage the children in the summer vacation Bible school program

Growing

- Continue the weekly Bible story or video practice
- Practice the FAITH5 each day: Share the highs and lows of the day every night; read a key Bible verse or story every night; talk about how the Bible reading might relate to your highs and lows; pray for one another’s highs and lows aloud every night; bless one another before turning out the lights of the day.
- Participate in the family scripture reflection after Sunday worship each week

- Learn how to pray with the Bible by watching the video online and using the prayer activities online
- Participate in the church wide “30-Day Bible Experience” of reading one gospel at home.
- Engage the children in the summer vacation Bible school program

Going Deeper

- Continue the FAITH5 daily practice
- Join an adult Bible study group offered by the church
- Engage the whole family in a 365 day “read the whole Bible” experience using the resources on the family website
- Develop a personal Bible study plan using the resources on the family website
- Participate in the family scripture reflection after Sunday worship each week
- Engage the children in the summer vacation Bible school program

Develop Playlists of Content & Experiences

A faith formation playlist is a curated group of digital (online, video, audio, print) and gathered (church, home, small groups, etc.) faith forming experiences and resources that are tailored to the specific faith growth needs of people around a particular characteristic of faith maturing or theme/topic. Playlists are developed for each “stage” on the discernment continuum, such as Inquiring, Getting Started, Growing, Going Deeper. Each playlist provides a variety of ways for people to learn and grow in faith.

Developing a Playlist

1. **Select content and experiences** to address each faith maturing characteristic with activities for each category of discernment, e.g., Inquiring, Getting Started, Growing, Going Deeper.
 - Incorporate intergenerational experiences
 - Incorporate family experiences
 - Incorporate age-specific experiences
2. **Using a variety of settings** or environments for faith growth: independent/individualized, mentored, at home, small group, large group, intergenerational /whole church, and world
3. **Address the ways people learn** through a variety of activities: verbal-linguistic (word / book smart), logical-mathematical (number / logic smart), visual-spatial (art / picture smart), bodily-kinesthetic (body / movement smart), musical-rhythmic (music / sound smart), naturalist (nature / environment smart), interpersonal (people / group smart), intrapersonal (self / introspection smart)
4. **Use a variety of methods**
 - Read
 - Write/keep a journal
 - Engage in storytelling and create stories
 - Feature films, TV shows, videos
 - Create a media project or video
 - View or create art
 - View or take photographs
 - Watch or engage in drama
 - Listen to or create a podcast
 - Listen to or create music
 - Conduct a demonstration
 - Experience games, simulations, video games
 - Analyze or create a case study
 - Develop an apprenticeship or internship
 - Create an exhibit

- Experience prayer and rituals
- Take a field trip
- Participate in a mission trip
- Engage in or create a service / action project
- Develop a mentor relationship

Publish Playlists

Publish the Playlists on a digital platform and use social media for connection, interaction, and sharing learning reflections. You can add the playlists to your existing church website or create a website just for faith formation and link it to your church website. Building a website is made much easier today by the availability of online website builders that provide predesigned website templates, drag-and-drop features to create webpages, and hosting for the website. Three popular website builders to explore are *Weebly* (www.weebly.com), *Wix* (www.wix.com), and *Squarespace* (www.squarespace.com). All three have easy to use features and very reasonable subscription fees. For advanced users *WordPress* (<http://wordpress.org>) provides thousands of predesigned templates, lots of customization features, and ready-to-use apps. *WordPress* does require an understanding of web design and some programming ability.

Designing using 21st Century Learning Methods

1. **Blended learning** integrates learning in physical and online settings where a person has some control over time, place, path, and/or pace of the learning experience. One form of blended learning is *Flipped Learning* in which the content moves from the group learning space to the individual learning space (usually online), and the group space is transformed into an interactive learning environment for discussion and application. Congregations are already flipping confirmation preparation (learning online plus interactive group activities in gathered settings), extending gathered events with online content for continued learning, and providing online faith formation or live webinars for individuals or groups.
2. **Micro-learning** experiences are short-form—5, 10, 15 minute—learning experiences designed for anywhere, anytime learning that be combined into multi-part learning programs. Micro-learning experiences are one response to short attention spans and mobile learning. We can curate a series of micro-learning experiences (on a digital platform) to engage people in all types of faith formation content. Breaking content into small learning units, micro learning, will enhance comprehension and retention of knowledge, skills and practices. Generation Z loves videos and YouTube, especially short pieces of content that run from a minute to 90 seconds.
3. **Immersive learning environments** involve faith-forming experiences that are interactive, participatory, experiential, visual, and multi-sensory. With the rise of anytime, anywhere faith formation content we need to ask: “What is the role of gathering people for faith formation?” Today children (and their parents), youth, and adults can access online most of the content that we teach at church. We have already been offering these types of experiences. We can expand our immersive learning opportunities (VBS, retreats, mission trips, and more) and focused our gathered settings on immersive faith formation in extended settings (half-day, full day, weekend, weeklong) offered throughout the year (but not weekly).
4. **Multiple ways of learning** addresses the eight multiple intelligences into learning experiences, providing a greater variety of ways for young people to learn: verbal-linguistic (word smart, book smart), logical-mathematical (number smart, logic smart), visual-spatial (art smart, picture smart), bodily-kinesthetic (body smart, movement smart), musical-rhythmic (music smart,

sound smart), naturalist (nature smart, environment smart), interpersonal (people smart, group smart), and intrapersonal (self smart, introspection smart). While not every program can incorporate activities for all eight intelligences, having a greater variety of ways to learn promotes more effective learning and engages teens more fully in the learning experience.

5. **Multisensory learning** means utilizing all of the senses in a learning experience where young people can taste, smell, touch, and hear things related to the topic of the session. Gen Z thinks of the world as a canvas to paint with words, sights, sounds, video, music, web pages, and anything they can create. Multimedia means using multiple modalities to engage young people. They are also a generation of “content creators” who live to create, and given the chance to do so they will merge multiple media into one complex but comprehensive whole.
6. **Project-based learning** involves completing complex tasks that typically result in a realistic product, event, or presentation. Project-based learning is 1) organized around driving questions that lead young people to encounter central concepts or principles; 2) focused on a constructive investigation that involves inquiry and knowledge building; 3) learner-driven, in that the young people are responsible for making choices and for designing and managing their work; and 4) authentic, by posing problems that occur in the real world and that people care about.
7. **Collaborative learning** involves young people in small, non-competitive groups where they can discuss and process together what they are learning, work together on projects and activities, and practice and present what they are learning. Learning spaces are organized for learners’ participation in a “learning community”—recognizing that learning takes place in a social context and relies on communication and interaction with others. Gen Z learns best in an environment where they can share with and co-create their education with their peers. Collaborative learning requires creating an environment that is safe, caring, accepting, and trustworthy so that young people feel free to share, discuss, question, and apply.
8. **Visual learning** guides young people in learning to “read” or interpret visual images and how to use visual images to communicate. Visual literacy includes: 1) interpreting, understanding, and appreciating the meaning of visual images, 2) communicating more effectively by applying the basic principles and concepts of visual design, 3) producing visual images using computers and other technologies, and 4) using visual thinking to conceptualize solutions to problems.
9. **Practice-oriented learning** means incorporating real-life application activities into the learning experience. Practice is a part of the learning process, not the result of it. Research is demonstrating that young people learn more deeply when they apply knowledge to real-world problems and when they take part in projects that require sustained engagement and collaboration.
10. **Storytelling** makes learning stick. Tell relevant stories, present case studies and show examples. Talk about your own mistakes and your own successes. Allow young people to respond to stories and case studies. Let them exchange stories with each other.

Digital Strategies for Faith Formation

We need to design faith formation with digital strategies embedded in them. We need to design faith formation that is mobile; that takes advantage of the abundance of content so we can personalize faith formation; that provides an activity or program in multiple formats so that people

can learn in the way they learn best; that utilizes a website as a hub for faith formation and online classrooms for programming; and that provides micro-faith forming activities/experiences that connect together into a seamless faith formation program.

Here are five strategies for using digitally enabled strategies in faith formation.

1. **Extend Programming:** We can extend gathered events and programs into people's daily lives by providing online content that helps people to go deeper. For example, we can extend Sunday worship into the home and daily life with daily Bible readings, prayer activities, learning activities, faith conversations, and more.

We can extend an age group program with online activities that deepen knowledge and provide application activities or projects. We can extend intensive programs like VBS or camp or retreats with regular online content and activities.

2. **Flip Programming:** We can “flip the classroom or program” by creating a digital platform to provide the content that people would learn in the gathered setting in an online learning space using print, audio, video, and more. And then transform the gathered program using interactive activities, discussion, project-based learning, and practice and demonstration.

We can redesign children's faith formation so that children and their parents are learning online at home and doing activities together, and then refocusing “class time” to engage children in creating projects and activities that demonstrate their learning.

We can design a high school confirmation program that provides the content that used to be taught in the weekly sessions in an online platform for individual learning—watching videos, reading short materials, and writing a reflection journals; engages the young people in small groups during the month to discuss their online learning; and then meets monthly in a large group gathered session for discussion, interactive activities, and application of the content to living as a Christian today. During the year retreats, worship, and service projects offer additional gathered sessions. One example of the type of video content for adolescents is the Video Catechism, produced by the Catholic Diocese of Wheeling-Charleston, WV (vcat.org), that provides short videos for the major teachings in the Catholic Catechism. There are similar types of video program in all Christian traditions.

3. **Online Programming:** We can develop a complete online faith formation experience with faith forming content and experiences. For example we can build an online “forty-day Lenten curriculum” that connects the Lent events at church with online content for experiencing and practicing Lent in daily and home life. We can include prayer activities, daily Bible readings, daily devotions, Lent study resources, videos, service activities, and more.

We can use video conferencing with services like Zoom.us to create webinar programming for adolescents, parents, and the whole family. For example we can create a monthly one-hour parent formation webinar program delivered to parents at home using a video conferencing program like Zoom. We can build the program around the knowledge, skills, and practices for effective parenting and for parent as faith formers. Invite a guest presenter and invite parents to participate online. Sponsor two or three parent dinners during the year (with babysitting) for parents to gather in-person to meet each other, discuss the webinars, etc.

We can also set up online faith formation centers with resources for people to access 24x7. For example, we can provide an online prayer and spirituality center where people can access daily prayer reflections and devotions, offer prayer intentions, pray for others, learn about spiritual practices, download prayer activities for the home, and more.

4. **Multiple-format Programming:** We can develop multiple formats for gathered programs by video and/or audio recording programs and then developing small group and independent programming using the video or audio content. Produce a webpage with the video or audio content and the programming for small groups and independent learning. Use social media (like a Facebook group) or an online classroom to facilitate online interaction and discussion. This provides a great way to offer other ways for people who cannot participate in the fixed time program to access the content and engage in learning at a time that works best for them.
5. **Prepare and Follow-Up Programming:** We can utilize online formats to prepare people for an event or program, such as the celebration of a sacrament or milestone, or participation in a mission trip. This is an especially helpful process when it is difficult to gather people for the preparation and/or follow-up. Use the online platform to *prepare* people for the event with the appropriate content (experiences, activities, video/audio, and resources). *Engage* people in the event or program. Use the online platform to *sustain and apply* the learning and growth with appropriate content (experiences, activities, video/audio, and resources). Use social media (like a Facebook group) or an online classroom (like Edmodo or Google Classroom) to facilitate online interaction and discussion.

Curating Resources for Faith Formation

One of the essential skills for developing Playlists of rich content and experiences is learning how to *curate* high quality faith formation content in all forms and media that can engage people in learning and growing in developmentally appropriate ways targeted to their faith growth needs.

Curation may be a new word for many, but it has a long history. The term *curator* comes from the Latin word *curare* meaning “to care for.” Every time we visit a museum we experience the work of museum curators who acquire, care for, develop, display, and interpret a collection of artifacts or works of art in order to inform, educate, and entertain us. Museum curators are subject-matter experts who guide a museum’s overall art collection. Librarians have a similar curation task—they curate books and media in a variety of forms, including digital—to inform, educate, and entertain us. Like museum curators, librarians have done this for centuries. The Library of Alexandria (Egypt) in the ancient world have had curators over two thousand years ago!

A content curator is someone who continually finds, groups, organizes, and shares the best and most relevant content on a specific subject to match the needs of a specific audience. Content curators provide a personalized, high-quality selection of the best and most relevant content and resources available. They do not create more content, but make sense of all the content that others are creating.

How does curation apply to faith formation? When faith formation was a matter of selecting the right print resource or program from the right religious publisher, there was little need for curation. Leaders simply selected the right resource. But even in the era of “the resource is the curriculum,” many faith formation leaders were curators. To design home-grown programming they would search through print resource, films, and music to design a retreat or a youth meeting or an adult topical

series or a parent workshop. They never thought of themselves as curators, but that is what they were doing—searching through a variety of resources, selecting the most appropriate resources to match with the needs of the people and the program, and then using the resource in the program design.

We now live in an era where there is an abundance of religious content in digital form—audio, video, apps, e-books, websites—and in print form. We are benefiting from the rise of online resource centers with freely accessible, high quality religious content and experiences that congregations, families, and individuals can access. In the new digital world of abundant resources, the role of the faith-formation leader is shifting from *providing* religious content and programming to *curating* religious content and experiences for all ages.

So what is a faith formation curator? A faith formation curator is a trusted guide who continually finds, groups, organizes, and connects the best and most relevant content and resources on a specific subject to match the needs of a specific audience. The resources can come in many forms: people resources, programs at church and in the community, and media resources (print, audio, video, online, digital). Curation is the way that faith formation leaders connect programming with high quality resources.

We can identify three steps in the process of curating faith formation: 1) research and organize resources, 2) evaluate resources, and 3) connect the resources to programming. The research and organize phase of the process is continuous. Good curators are always searching for new resources and organizing them for future use.

Step 1. Research and Organize the Resources

The first step in the curation process is researching and reviewing resources. This is the collection phase. There's no need to select or evaluate resources at this stage—the key is to collect as many high-quality resources for faith formation.

It is helpful to develop a list of trusted expert curators to assist you in researching and evaluating resources. We all know people in faith formation who make it part of their work to stay current with the best resources. Make a list of these people and invite them to be part of the curation support system.

It is also helpful to develop a list of high-quality online resource centers with high-quality content. Be selective—this does not have to be a long list of websites. Select resource centers with well-produced content. Review websites from national and regional denominational agencies, religious publishers, churches, and religious organizations online faith formation content. For a list of online resources for faith formation go to the “Curation” section of the LifelongFaith.com website. Be sure to subscribe to faith formation blogs and newsletters that review faith formation resources to make it easier for you to keep up-to-date on what's new. Blogs and newsletters are produced by individuals, denominational offices, seminaries, religious organizations, and religious publishers. A good example of a faith formation blog (and online resource center) is *Building Faith* (www.buildfaith.org) from Virginia Theological Seminary.

Here is a checklist of the types of resources to research:

- People: teachers, mentors/guides, program leaders, small group leaders, guest presenters
- Community programs: churches, agencies, organizations,

- Educational institutions: colleges, seminaries, educational organizations
- Retreat and spiritual life centers, monasteries
- Regional and national denominational programs, events, and websites
- Museums
- Books (with study guides)
- E-books
- Apps
- Audio podcasts
- Audio learning programs
- Videos, feature films, and TV shows
- Video learning programs
- Online courses
- Online activities

One of the easiest ways to develop a library of faith formation resources is to create homegrown resources by saving and archiving church programming. Develop a plan for recording presentations and programs at church in audio/and or video format. Think of all of the opportunities throughout the year for recording program that can be used in other learning formats such as self-study or small group study. Consider weekly sermons, presentations, special events, concerts, and more. Develop a YouTube channel for the congregation to store and categorize all of the video recordings.

Step 2. Evaluate Resources

Every faith formation curator needs standards for evaluating faith formation resources that reflect their Christian tradition and the needs of their congregation. A set of evaluation standards needs to be developed locally. Consult denominational resources for evaluating curriculum resources. Most denominations have evaluation standards for assessing educational resources or textbooks. This can serve as a basis for developing the congregation’s evaluation standards.

Here are ten categories for developing a resource evaluation checklist. Add one or more focusing questions to each category. Try to keep the checklist short so that it is easy to use. Use the evaluation criteria to review potential resources.

1. Biblical content and interpretation
2. Theological content and emphasis
3. Developmental appropriateness
4. Ethnic-cultural appropriateness
5. Inclusive of diversity
6. Respect for diverse ways of learning
7. Appearance and visual appeal
8. Ease-of-use
9. Quality of experience
10. Ability to be incorporated into daily and home life

Step 3. Select Resources for Playlists

Select the best resources for your target audience to match with each faith maturing characteristic on your *Pathways Guide* and with the different “levels” of faith growth. Select content and experiences for your *Playlists* that include intergenerational, family age-specific, and online and digital.

Example: Adult Pathway Model

We believe that growth in our relationship with God and in following Jesus (discipleship) is a lifelong process. We are constantly trying to grow deeper in our relationship with God and in living the Christian way of life each day. Our church is committed to helping you grow wherever you may be in your faith journey. We are committed to helping you live the Christian way of life everyday.

To help you discover areas for growth and to help us serve you better, please take a few minutes to complete the Adult Faith Growth Pathway. It will help you identify strengths and areas of growth in your own life. Use these statements to assess where you are honestly and prayerfully. Rate “How true each statement is for you” using the rating scale: 1 = not true from me , 3 = somewhat true for me, and 5 = very true for me.

- | | | | | | |
|--|---|---|---|---|---|
| 1. I am growing in a personal relationship with Jesus Christ. | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 2. My faith shapes how I think and act each and every day. | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 3. I make the Christian faith a way of life by integrating my beliefs into the conversation, decisions, and actions of daily life. | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 4. I am aware of God present and active in my own life, the lives of others, and the life of the world. | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 5. I have a real sense that God is guiding me. | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 6. I seek spiritual growth by actively pursuing questions of faith, learning what it means to believe in God, and what it’s like to be a disciple of Jesus Christ. | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 7. I devote time to reading and studying the Bible. | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 8. I use the Bible to discover how I should think and act. | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 9. I pray to God and take quiet time to reflect and listen to God. | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 10. I am growing spiritually through spiritual practices such as contemplation, <i>lectio divina</i> , praying Scripture, daily Examen (reflection), and meditation. | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 11. I can articulate the fundamental teachings of the Christian faith. | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 12. I am growing in my understanding of the Christian faith—beliefs, traditions, and practices. | | | | | |
| 13. I exercise moral responsibility by applying Christian ethics, virtues, and values to making moral decisions. | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 14. My faith helps me know right from wrong. | | | | | |
| 15. I live a life of service by caring for others and reaching out those in need. | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 16. I am involved in ways to promote social justice and address injustice in the world. | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 17. I am involved in actions to care for creation. | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 18. I share the Good News of Jesus through my words and actions. | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 19. I participate actively and regularly in the worship life of the church community. | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 20. I participate in the life, ministries, and leadership of the church community. | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |

Ways I Can Grow

- Areas Where I Need to “Get Started” (look at the numbers 1 and 2)
- Areas Where I Need to “Grow” (look at the numbers 2 and 3)
- Areas Where I Want to “Going Deeper” (look at the numbers 4 and 5)

Example: Family Pathway Model

We believe God dwells in every family and that family life is sacred. The profound and the ordinary moments of daily life—mealtimes, workdays, vacations, expressions of love and intimacy, household chores, caring for a sick child or elderly parent, and even conflicts over things like how to celebrate holidays, discipline children, or spend money—all are the threads from which families can discover God and weave a pattern of family faith.

To help you discover areas for growth and to help us serve you better, please take a few minutes to complete the Family Practices and Parent Practices. It will help you identify strengths and areas of growth in your own life and in your family’s life by identifying how frequently you (or your family) engage in particular faith practices and parenting practices. Rate “How true each statement is for you” using the rating scale: 1 = not true for me, 3 = somewhat true for me, and 5 = very true for me. After you complete the review, identify areas of strength in your life as a parent and in your family life. Then identify areas that you and/or your family need to develop.

1. We eat together as a family.	1	2	3	4	5
2. We engage in positive communication as a family.	1	2	3	4	5
3. We have family conversations about things that are important to us.	1	2	3	4	5
4. We make decisions and solve problems as a family.	1	2	3	4	5
5. We treat each other with respect and dignity.	1	2	3	4	5
6. We support each other: encouraging, expressing care, standing up for each other	1	2	3	4	5
7. We talk about faith as a family.	1	2	3	4	5
8. We pray as a family (meal time, bedtime).	1	2	3	4	5
9. We pray as a family during times of struggle or crisis.	1	2	3	4	5
10. We celebrate meaningful traditions and rituals as a family (holidays, birthdays, accomplishments, etc.).	1	2	3	4	5
11. We read the Bible as a family.	1	2	3	4	5
12. We use the Bible as guidance for how we should think and act as a family.	1	2	3	4	5
13. We serve people in need as a family..	1	2	3	4	5
14. We work to overcome injustice in our world as a family.	1	2	3	4	5
15. We engage in projects to care for the environment as a family.	1	2	3	4	5
16. We encourage children/teens to talk about their doubts and questions about faith.	1	2	3	4	5
17. We talk about faith and our religious tradition with our children and teens.	1	2	3	4	5
18. We ask about our children/teens perspectives on faith, religion, moral issues, social issues, etc.	1	2	3	4	5
19. We participate in Sunday worship as a family	1	2	3	4	5
20. We participate in church activities as a family	1	2	3	4	5
21. We celebrate the church year seasons at church (Advent, Christmas, Lent, Easter)	1	2	3	4	5
22. We celebrate the seasons of the church year at home (Advent, Christmas, Lent, Easter)	1	2	3	4	5
23. We encourage and support our children/teens to participate in church activities.	1	2	3	4	5

Areas We Are Strong as a Family (Review ratings of 4 and 5.)

Areas We Need to Grow as a Family (Review ratings 1, 2, and 3)

Example: Parent Pathway Model

We believe that parents are the most important religious influence on their children, and it is our responsibility as a church to support and encourage you. We know that faith is formed when there is a substantial investment of thought, time, and intimacy by parents. Our church is here to support you as a parent in developing a strong, healthy, faith-filled family life.

To help you discover areas for growth and to help us serve you better, please take a few minutes to complete the Family Practices and Parent Practices. It will help you identify strengths and areas of growth in your own life and in your family's life by identifying how frequently you (or your family) engage in particular faith practices and parenting practices. Rate "How true each statement is for you" using the rating scale: 1 = not true from me, 3 = somewhat true for me, and 5 = very true for me. After you complete the review, identify areas of strength in your life as a parent and in your family life. Then identify areas that you and/or your family need to develop.

- | | | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| 1. I express care to my children/teens by listening to them, being dependable, encouraging them, and make them feel known and valued. | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 2. I challenge my children/teens by expecting them to do their best and live up to their potential. | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 3. I provide support for my children/teens by encouraging their efforts and achievements and guiding them to learn and grow. | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 4. I treat my children/teens with respect, hearing their voice, and including them in decisions that affect them. | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 5. I inspire my children/teens to see possibilities for their future, expose them to new experiences and places, and connect them to people who can help them grow. | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 6. I demonstrate a warm and affirming parenting approach | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 7. I create a warm, caring supportive family environment. | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 8. I practice effective communication skills with my children/teens. | | | | | |
| 9. I work with my children/teens to manage "screen time" and social media use. | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 10. I read and study the Bible. | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 11. I use the Bible to discover how I should think and act. | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 12. I encourage my children/teens to read the Bible. | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 13. I pray to God and take quiet time to reflect and listen to God. | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 14. I encourage my children and teens to pray. | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 15. I am engaged in service to people in need . | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 16. I work to overcome injustice in our world. | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 17. I am engaged in projects to care for the environment. | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 18. I provide moral instruction and how to decide right and wrong. | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 19. I take time to grow in my relationship with God as a parent | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 20. I take time to grow in my understanding and practice of the Christian faith. | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |

Areas I Am Strong as a Parent (Review ratings of 4 and 5.)

Areas I Need to Grow as a Parent (Review ratings 1, 2, and 3)

Example: Adolescent Faith Growth Pathway

We believe that growth in our relationship with God and in following Jesus (discipleship) is a lifelong process. We are constantly trying to grow deeper in our relationship with God and in living the Christian way of life each day. Our church is committed to helping you grow wherever you may be in your faith journey. We are committed to helping you live the Christian way of life everyday.

To help you discover areas for growth and to help us serve you better, please take a few minutes to complete the Faith Growth Pathway. It will help you identify strengths and areas of growth in your own life. Use these statements to assess where you are honestly and prayerfully. Rate “How true each statement is for you” using the rating scale: 1 = Rarely true of me, 2 = Sometimes true of me, 3 = Occasionally true of me , 4 = Almost always true of me, 5 = Always true of me.

1. I know that Jesus Christ is the son of God who died on a cross and rose again. 1 2 3 4 5
2. I live my life and make moral decisions guided by moral values that tell me what is right or wrong behavior. 1 2 3 4 5
3. I am optimistic, trusting, and I am convinced that I can do much to make the world a better place. 1 2 3 4 5
4. I am involved in actions to serve those in need. 1 2 3 4 5
5. God cares for me in a special way. 1 2 3 4 5
6. My faith helps me know right from wrong. 1 2 3 4 5
7. I feel God’s presence when I serve people in need. 1 2 3 4 5
8. I feel God's presence in prayer. 1 2 3 4 5
9. I am keenly aware of the presence of God in my life. 1 2 3 4 5
10. I see evidence that God is active in the world. 1 2 3 4 5
11. I accept opportunities to learn how to speak naturally and intelligently about my faith. 1 2 3 4 5
12. I speak out publicly against specific social injustices.
13. I have a real sense that God is guiding me. 1 2 3 4 5
14. I am a religious person.
15. I feel God's presence in my relationships with other people. 1 2 3 4 5
16. My faith shapes how I think and act. 1 2 3 4 5
17. My religious faith is important in my life today. 1 2 3 4 5
18. I seek out opportunities to help me grow spiritually. 1 2 3 4 5
19. I ask sincere and searching questions about the nature of a life of faith in God. 1 2 3 4 5
20. I feel God's presence when I worship (at school, at church/synagogue/mosque) 1 2 3 4 5
21. My life is committed to Jesus Christ. 1 2 3 4 5

Part 5. Missional Faith Formation

Missional Outreach

Designing missional faith formation *expands and extends the church's presence through outreach, connection, relationship building, and engagement with people where they live—moving faith formation out into the community*. This involves developing targeted approaches and strategies designed around the particular needs and life situations of the unchurched and unaffiliated. These approaches and strategies need to be contextual—built around the congregation, community, and the needs of people. For example:

1. Develop community settings for church ministries and faith formation by celebrating weekly worship in a community center, offering courses and workshops in a school or community center or coffee shop, and more.
2. Open church events and programs to the whole community such as vacation Bible school.
3. Create a vibrant and inviting website and an active Facebook page to connect with people.
4. Connect with people's life issues and situations by offering career mentoring, job referrals, parenting courses, life skills courses, and more.
5. Connect with people during transitions and milestone moments such as marriage, birth of a baby, graduations, funerals, and more.
6. Develop high quality, relationship-building events designed to draw people from the wider community into relationships with people from your church such as social events, concerts, service projects, and children's programs.
7. Organize small groups on a variety of themes from life-centered to faith-centered that meet in a variety of locations (homes, coffee shops, community centers), for example: life situation groups (moms, dads), interest or activity groups, discipleship groups, spiritual sharing groups, Bible study groups, theology study groups, service groups, prayer or spiritual disciplines groups, support groups, and study-action groups.
8. Sponsor community-wide service days and service projects that are open to everyone.
9. Create digital initiatives that reach everyone such as conducting parenting webinars that are offered online.

Examples

- Lifetree Café (www.lifetreecafe.com)
- Messy Church (<http://www.messychurch.org.uk>; <http://messychurchaustralia.com.au>)
- Dinner church: St. Lydia's, Brooklyn (<http://stlydias.org>)
- Slate Project: <https://www.slateproject.org>

Pathways

Create *pathways for people to consider or reconsider the Christian faith, to encounter Jesus and the good news, and to live as disciples in a supportive faith community*. Missional faith formation guides people as they move from discovery to exploration to commitment. The catechumenal process provides one example of a pathway with its ritual stages and formational content—participation in the life of the faith community, education in Scripture and the Christian tradition, apprenticeship in the Christian life, intimate connection with the liturgy and rituals of the church, moral formation, development of a life of prayer, and engagement in actions of justice and service. Programs like *The Alpha Course* cover the basics of Christianity in a multi-session course in a supportive small group environment.

These types of programs and processes provide pathways for people to grow toward a life of discipleship and lifelong faith.

The Unbinding the Gospel Project (GraceNet: www.gracenet.info)

(Unbinding the Gospel: Real Life Evangelism. Martha Grace Reese. Saint Louis: Chalice, 2006.

The process and integrated set of resources from Unbinding the Gospel Project empower the faith community—people of vibrant faith and active engagement—to share their faith with those are not engaged in the church community and/or not growing in faith. This process and the accompanying resources help the whole church change its habits to reflect practices of members and leaders of highly effective churches. They begin to pray daily, to talk about their faith with each other, and to take steps toward significant faith conversations with friends without a faith/church relationship.

The process was developed based on a four-year, Lilly Endowment study of superb evangelism that included over 1200 interviews, fifty site visits, and a major survey of congregations doing the best job reaching unchurched people. The study found fascinating things about churches that are doing a wonderful job with all different types of evangelism: (1) evangelistic churches exist all along the theological spectrum; (2) all sizes of churches are doing great evangelism—throughout the country; (3) leaders and members love Jesus—their spiritual lives keep growing; (4) these churches help their people articulate their faith—they encourage faith sharing; and (5) pastors maintain a laser-like focus on evangelism, on reaching out to people beyond church walls.

The process moves through the following steps:

Step One. Church Leader’s Study: Unbinding the Gospel. Designed for pastors, key congregational leaders and evangelism teams Unbinding the Gospel helps committed leaders deepen and start sharing their own faith, understand their cultural context, and begin to plan for authentic congregational faith-sharing. It works best as a seven- to ten-week small group study. Each chapter concludes with questions, scripture suggestions and group exercises.

Step Two: All-Church Saturation Study: Unbinding Your Heart: Forty Days of Prayer & Faith Sharing. This is a six-week, churchwide , small group E-vent! that can be conducted during Lent, summer or fall study for all established classes and small groups, and new ones formed just for the E-vent. The purpose of an all-congregation is to help people strengthen their own faith and to learn to talk about it with each other first, and then others outside the community. Each week, for forty days, people will (1) pray each day’s scripture and prayer exercise and work with a prayer partner; (2) study a chapter of the book with their small group, and (3) worship with sermons, music, and prayers centered on the week’s chapter. Unbinding Your Heart enriches the church’s community life. It helps individuals risk face-to-face encounters with God. The entire congregation begins to talk about their faith. The E-vent creates momentum in the church.

Step Three: An Experiment in Prayer and Community: Unbinding Your Soul. Many people who aren’t connected with a church would love to try a no-obligation experience of substantial spiritual discussion, prayer and community. Unbinding Your Soul prepares church members to invite their friends into a four-week small group experience with short study chapters, an individual prayer journal, prayer partner activities, and group exercises. Groups can choose an additional four-week segment: “Faith and Courage.”

Designing Faith Formation Tasks

1. Describe the audience:

- Who is your target audience? Develop a profile of your target audience by describing the life stage & religious-spiritual characteristics of your target audience. What are their greatest needs or interests?
- What challenges are you trying to address in reaching/engaging your target audience?

2. Develop creative responses:

- What are you currently doing with the target audience - programs, activities, etc.? How is your target audience currently engaged in parish life?
- What do you need to strengthen in your current approach?
- What do you need to eliminate or redesign in your current approach?
- What do you need to create? How can you creatively address the needs and interests of your audience? Imagine the types of experiences, programs, activities, resources you could offer. Think of the settings where faith formation could happen: at church, at home, as individuals, online, and other settings.

3. Identify potential directions:

- Review your list of what to strengthen, redesign, and/or create: Which ideas, strategies, programs, activities have the most promise?
- Do your ideas respond to the challenges you are trying to address in reaching/engaging your target audience.
- Select the ideas you would like to develop.

4. Design for the four religious-spiritual identities:

- People with a vibrant faith and relationship with God who are engaged in the faith community.
- People who participate occasionally in the faith community and whose faith is not central to their lives.
- People who are uninvolved in a church but spiritual.
- People who are unaffiliated and have left involvement in organized religion.

5. Personalize the process and the faith formation offerings with a variety of content, methods, times, and formats designed to engage all people.

6. Use digitally enabled and connected strategies to enhance and expand faith formation.

7. Design a website platform and a social media strategy.

8. Develop the complete faith formation plan, implementation steps, and timeline.

Congregational Faith Formation Assessment

The Congregational Faith Formation Assessment tool provides a way for your congregation to examine how it is forming faith through congregational life, family faith formation, age-group faith formation, missional faith formation and leadership. Engage the whole team (and other leadership groups) in completing the assessment tool. Rate each item on a scale from poor practice (1) to excellent practice (4). Items that receive a rating of 4 (excellent) or 3 (good) indicate areas of strength. Items that receive a 2 (adequate) or 1 (poor) indicate areas for growth. Analyze the results and circle the items that are in need of attention and development (scores of 1 or 2) and items that your congregation wants to strengthen even if it received a score of 3 (good).

Part 1. The Congregation Creates a Faith Forming Culture

	Practice			
	1=poor		4=excellent	
1. God's Living Presence: People experience God's living presence in community, at worship, through study, and in service.	1	2	3	4
2. Discipleship: People learn who God is and come to know Jesus Christ personally; learn how to be Christian; and how to discover the meaning of the Bible for their lives.	1	2	3	4
3. Community: People experience a life-giving spiritual community of faith, hope, and love; characterized by hospitality, welcoming, love, and support.	1	2	3	4
4. Worship: People experience spiritually uplifting worship experiences that are enlightening, fulfilling, inspiring, interesting, easy to understand, and relevant in daily life.	1	2	3	4
5. Liturgical Seasons: People experience the Story of Faith through the celebration of the feasts and seasons of the church year.	1	2	3	4
6. Rituals and Milestones: People experience God's love through rituals, sacraments, and milestones that celebrate significant moments in one's life and faith journey.	1	2	3	4
7. Prayer: People experience the presence of God as individuals and community through prayer and spiritual disciplines/practices.	1	2	3	4
8. Learning: People grow in faith understanding by learning the content of the Christian tradition, reflecting upon that content, integrating it their lives, and living its meaning in the world.	1	2	3	4
9. Moral Responsibility: People develop ethical/moral responsibility—learning about Christian perspectives on moral questions and how to apply their faith to decisions about what's right and wrong.	1	2	3	4
10. Service & Justice: People are engaged, locally and globally, in serving those in need, working for justice, and caring for God's creation.	1	2	3	4
11. Intergenerational Relationships: People develop intergenerational relationships and community where the Christian faith is shared, modeled, and lived.	1	2	3	4
12. Intergenerational Faith Experiences: People are engaged in intergenerational faith experiences and activities of worship, prayer, learning, and service as an integral aspect of congregational life.	1	2	3	4
13. Digital Ministry: People can grow in faith and discipleship through online faith forming content and social connections on the congregation's website(s) which provides content and experiences to extend participation in congregational life and ministries into daily life.	1	2	3	4

Part 2. The Congregation Equips Parents and Families

	Practice			
	1=poor		4=excellent	
14. Parental Faith: The congregation helps parents and grandparents grow in faith and discipleship, and practice a vital and informed Christian faith.	1	2	3	4
15. Parenting for Faith Growth: The congregation teaches parents and grandparents the knowledge and skills for forming faith at home: caring relationships, celebrating rituals and milestones, praying, serving, learning the Christian faith, and reading the Bible.	1	2	3	4
16. Parenting: The congregation equips parent and grandparents with the knowledge, skills, and confidence for parenting today, and how to develop a develop a close, warm, and affirming parenting style that promotes religious transmission at home.	1	2	3	4
17. Family Faith Experiences: The congregation provides whole family experiences that promote growth in faith and discipleship, and teach parents how to share faith and live faith practices at home.	1	2	3	4
18. Family Faith Practices: The congregation provides families with resources to nurture growth in Christian faith and practice at home: caring relationships, celebrating rituals and milestones, praying, serving, learning the Christian faith, and reading the Bible	1	2	3	4
19. Family Assets: The congregation strengthens family life by developing the assets that build strong families: nurturing family relationships, establishing family shared activities and traditions, maintaining family expectations and rules, adapting to daily challenges, and connecting to the community.	1	2	3	4
20. Digital Ministry with Families: The congregation connects with families at home through an online ministry (family website, social media) that provides social interaction and a variety of content (print, audio, video, websites) for family faith practices, parent faith formation, parenting, and family asset development.	1	2	3	4

Part 3. The Congregation Embraces Lifelong Faith Growth & Practice

21. Lifelong: The congregation provides a continuity of ministry and faith formation across the whole lifecycle from children through older adults that promotes growth in Christian faith and discipleship in age-appropriate ways at each stage of life.	1	2	3	4
22. Programming: The congregation offers a variety of age-specific experiences, programs, activities, resources, and social connections for every stage of life that are available anytime and anywhere, in physical places and online spaces, and conducted in variety of settings—self-directed, mentored, at home, in small groups, in large groups, church-wide, in the community, and in the world.	1	2	3	4
23. Online: The congregation uses their own website(s), as an integral component of age-group ministry and faith formation, that extends gathered ministries/programs through online content (print, audio, video) and experiences, blends online and gathered activities in individual programs, and offers online-only programs, activities, and resources—all of which are available anytime, anywhere.	1	2	3	4
24. Children: The congregation addresses the unique life tasks, needs, interests, and religious/spiritual journeys of children through a variety of faith forming experiences and activities focused on developing caring relationships, celebrating the liturgical seasons, celebrating rituals and milestones, learning the Christian tradition and apply it to life, praying, reading the Bible, serving /working for justice/caring for creation, and worshipping God with the faith community.	1	2	3	4

Practice
1=poor 4=excellent

- | 25. Youth: The congregation addresses the unique life tasks, needs, interests, and religious/spiritual journeys of youth through a variety of faith forming experiences and activities focused on developing caring relationships, celebrating the liturgical seasons, celebrating rituals and milestones, learning the Christian tradition and apply it to life, praying, reading the Bible, serving /working for justice/caring for creation, and worshipping God with the faith community. | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 |
|--|---|---|---|---|
| 26. Young Adults: The congregation addresses the unique life tasks, needs, interests, and religious/spiritual journeys of young adults through a variety of faith forming experiences and activities focused on developing caring relationships, celebrating the liturgical seasons, celebrating rituals and milestones, learning the Christian tradition and apply it to life, praying, reading the Bible, serving /working for justice/caring for creation, and worshipping God with the faith community. | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 |
| 27. Adults: The congregation addresses the unique life tasks, needs, interests, and religious/spiritual journeys of adults through a variety of faith forming experiences and activities focused on developing caring relationships, celebrating the liturgical seasons, celebrating rituals and milestones, learning the Christian tradition and apply it to life, praying, reading the Bible, serving /working for justice/caring for creation, and worshipping God with the faith community. | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 |

Part 4. The Congregation Engages in Missional Outreach

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|---|---|---|---|---|
| 28. Outreach: The congregation expands and extends the church’s presence through outreach, relationship building, and engagement with people who are not engaged in the faith community – the spiritual but not religious and the unaffiliated. | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 |
| 29. Outreach: The congregation offers faith formation targeted to the needs of the spiritual but not religious and the unaffiliated. | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 |
| 30. Pathways: The congregation provides pathways (programs, activities, experiences) for people to consider or reconsider the Christian faith, to encounter Jesus and the Good News, and to live as disciples in a supportive faith community – guiding people as they move from discovery to exploration to commitment. | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 |

Part 5. The Congregation Has Faithful, Competent Leadership

- | | | | | |
|--|---|---|---|---|
| 31. Spiritual Influence: The pastor and ministry leaders know and model the transforming presence of God in their lives and ministries. | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 |
| 32. Interpersonal Competence: The pastor and ministry leaders build relationships and community in the congregation, as well as in their ministries and programs. | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 |
| 33. Competent Leadership: The pastor and ministry leaders demonstrate effective leadership by modeling the way—aligning values and actions, inspiring a shared vision, challenging the process—being innovative and experimenting, enabling others to act, and encouraging the heart of others—affirming and celebrating contributions. | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 |
| 34. Competent Ministry: The pastor and ministry leaders reflect superior theological, theoretical, and practical knowledge and skill for leadership in the congregation and their ministries. | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 |
| 35. Volunteer Leadership: The pastor and ministry leaders nurture the faith and theological knowledge of volunteer leaders, equip them with knowledge and skills for their ministry, and provide continuing support and mentoring | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 |