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CHAPTER 3

REIMAGINING THE MODEL

*You never change things by fighting the existing reality.
To change something, build a new model that makes the existing model obsolete.*

(Buckminster Fuller)

We are witnessing transformations in the way we think about learning, reflecting the convergence of new technologies, digital media and tools, and network thinking. The MacArthur Foundation's Digital Media and Learning Project identified three major transformations:

A shift from education to learning. Education is what institutions do—learning is what people do. Digital media enable learning anywhere, anytime; formal learning must be mobile and just-in-time.

A shift from consumption of information to participatory learning. A new system of learning must be peer based and organized around learners' interests, enabling them to create as well as consume information. It encourages learners to experiment and create, to produce and design things.

A shift from institutions to networks. In the digital age, the fundamental operating and delivery systems are networks, not institutions such as schools, which are a node on a person's network of learning opportunities. People learn across institutions, so an entire learning network must be supported ("Re-imagining Learning in the 21st Century").

A revolution in technology has transformed the way we find each other, interact, and collaborate to create knowledge as connected learners. What are connected learners? Learners who collaborate online; learners who use social media to connect with others around the globe; learners who engage in conversations in online spaces; and learners who bring what they learn back to inform their schools, workplaces, communities, and the world.

The “Connected Learning” approach developed by a team at the Digital Media and Learning Research Hub and supported by the MacArthur Foundation provides insights into the transformation of learning in the digital age. Connected Learning is anchored in research, robust theories of learning, and the best of traditional standards, but also designed to mine the learning potential of the new social and digital media domain. It harnesses the advances and innovations of our connected age to serve learning. Just as earlier generations tapped the tools of their time to improve learning, we must do the same in the digital age.

The Connected Learning approach can be summarized in the following characteristics:

Interests. Interests foster the drive to gain knowledge and expertise. Research has repeatedly shown that when the topic is personally interesting and relevant, learners achieve much higher-order learning outcomes. Connected learning views interests and passions that are developed in a social context as essential elements.

Peer Culture. Connected learning thrives in a socially meaningful and knowledge-rich ecology of ongoing participation, self-expression, and recognition. In their everyday exchanges with peers and friends, young people fluidly contribute, share, and give feedback. Powered with possibilities made available by today’s social media, this peer culture can produce learning that’s engaging and powerful.

Production-centered. Connected learning prizes the learning that comes from actively producing, creating, experimenting, and designing because it promotes skills and dispositions for lifelong learning, and for making meaningful contributions to today’s world.

Shared purpose. Today’s social media and web-based communities provide unprecedented opportunities for children, youth, adults, parents, and teachers to share interests and contribute to a common purpose. The potential for cross-generational learning and connection unfolds when centered on common goals.

Openly networked. Connected learning environments link learning in school, home, and community because learners achieve best when their learning is reinforced and supported in multiple settings. Online platforms can make learning resources abundant, accessible, and visible across all learning settings (Ito, et al.).

Connected Learning is active, relevant, real world, effective, hands-on, networked, innovative, personal, and transformative. It connects three critical spheres of learning: academics, a learner’s interests, inspiring mentors and peers. (See the appendix Connected Learning Principles on page 81.)

Another important trend is the personalizing of learning, facilitated by learning networks, digital content, social connectivity, and devices to connect with the content and people. Katherine Prince has outlined the features of a “Vibrant Learning Grid” in which educational leaders can create a flexible and personalized learning ecosystem that meets the needs of all learners. She describes several of its key features:

- Learners will move seamlessly across many kinds of learning experiences and providers, with teachers and learning guides supporting them in customizing and carrying out their learning journeys.
- The ways in which we organize learning will diversify, with “school” taking more forms.
- Learning will no longer be defined by time and place—unless a learner wants to learn at a particular time and in a particular place.
- Learners (and their families) will create individualized learning playlists reflecting their particular interests, goals, and values. Those playlists might include schools but also a wide variety of digitally mediated or place-based learning experiences—at museums, science centers, libraries, and more (Price 16–17).

At the heart of this transition to twenty-first century learning is the question: What if learning adapted to each person instead of expecting each person to adapt to the school or the curriculum or the program?

The central themes of the transformation in learning need to be central features of congregational faith formation: putting learners at the center of our thinking; enabling and trusting learners to be co-creators of their learning experiences; connecting learning authentically to life concerns and real world issues; making room for new modes of learning and new methods of teaching; fostering collaboration in learning; and organizing structures around learners’ needs.

Congregations can embrace the transformations happening in the world of learning. We will need a new model that embodies the best developments in learning and brings to life the interconnected components of the new faith formation ecosystem in a practical way.

A NEW MODEL: THE FAITH FORMATION NETWORK

In an earlier era if you wanted to learn more about the Bible, you could take a Bible course at a fixed time—at a church, seminary, college, or other education provider, or read a book—perhaps recommended by your pastor and borrowed from your

church's library, or watch a video—on VHS of course! Your options would have been limited. In the twenty-first century if you want to learn more about the Bible, your options are greatly expanded. You could do any combination of the following:

1. Take a course at church or college or seminary.
2. Take a course online—at a scheduled time with a group or at your own time and pace.
3. Read and view videos online at a Bible website, such as www.entertheBible.org from Luther Seminary.
4. Join an online Bible study group at another church or on Facebook.
5. Watch a video series on YouTube from a scripture scholar, such as N.T. Wright, as you read his book or watch a video series produced by another congregation that is available for free on their website.
6. Find a mentor in your community or online who will guide your self-directed Bible study.
7. Listen to audio versions of your book(s) using your smartphone as you commute to work each day.
8. Download a Bible study app, engage in daily Bible readings and reflections, and share your reflections with others who are studying the Bible using the app and social media.
9. Create a blog to post your thoughts on what you are learning and invite others to offer their insights.
10. Organize your own learning group by gathering a group of people who are interested in learning more about the Bible and using print, audio, video, and online resources to guide your small group.

In this example we see the shift to a networked approach to learning for an individual. Learners now have the ability to construct their own networks of learning, utilizing a variety of new technologies and the abundance of high-quality print, audio, video, and online resources that are readily available to them. Learning networks not only provide access to a virtually endless array of learning opportunities, but can offer learners multiple points of entry that provide individualized pathways of learning and faith growth.

What if we reimagined congregational faith formation as a network of relationships, content, experiences, and resources—in physical places and online spaces? This networked model of faith formation is *lifelong*—each stage of life from birth to death—and *life-wide*—everywhere, anytime learning within a network of mentors,

teachers, family, and peers. It provides a wide variety of engaging and interactive content and experiences in online and physical settings (home, congregation, community, world). It offers faith formation content and experiences to respond to the diverse religious and spiritual needs of people today—from the spiritually committed and engaged to the spiritual but not religious and the unaffiliated. It enables congregations to become centers for lifelong learning and faith growth for *all* people by utilizing the best of the new digital technologies to bring an abundance of meaningful and engaging faith-forming experiences—in the congregation and the world, and in a variety of media—to people of all ages.

Adopting a network approach to congregation faith formation reflects the fact that we are living in the age of networks.

Networks are everywhere. The brain is a network of nerve cells connected by axons, and cells themselves are networks of molecules connected by biochemical reactions. Societies, too, are networks of people linked by friendships, familial relationships and professional ties. On a larger scale, food webs and ecosystems can be represented as networks of species. And networks pervade technology: the Internet, power grids and transportation systems are but a few examples. Even the language we are using to convey these thoughts to you is a network, made up of words connected by syntactic relationships (Barabasi and Bonabeau, 52).

Images of networks appear in the Scriptures. Jesus uses the image of the vine and branches to describe his relationship with the disciples (church) and their relationship with him: “I am the true vine, and my Father is the vinegrower. . . . Abide in me as I abide in you. Just as the branch cannot bear fruit by itself unless it abides in the vine, neither can you unless you abide in me. I am the vine, you are the branches. Those who abide in me and I in them bear much fruit, because apart from me you can do nothing” (John 15:1, 4–5).

Paul uses the image of the body to describe the early Christian community. “For just as the body is one and has many members, and all the members of the body, though many, are one body, so it is with Christ. For in the one Spirit we were all baptized into one body—Jews or Greeks, slaves or free—and we were all made to drink of one Spirit” (1 Cor. 12:12–13).

We are all part of networks—our families, our schools, our workplaces, our religious congregations, our social circles, our online life. Networks—collections of people (and their resources) connected to each other through relationships—aren't new. They're as old as human society.

What is new is that in the twenty-first century this understanding of networks has been expanded to include the digital network of the Internet, the World Wide Web, and the new social media platforms and tools. New tools and technologies are changing the way we communicate and connect. The changes can be seen in

the way people are working together to create and disseminate knowledge. The shift is not just in the new Web 2.0 technologies. It's in the way that increasingly widespread access to these tools is driving a fundamental change in how groups are formed and work gets done. Today we can turn to people, organizations, and resources anywhere in the world to help us answer questions, connect to relevant content and resources, or just share our life experiences and stories. These new approaches to connecting people and organizing work are now allowing us to do old things in new ways and to try completely new things that weren't possible before.

Another way to view the network vision of life and church is Keith Anderson's image of the *digital cathedral*, which evokes "an expansive understanding of church in a digitally-integrated world, one that extends ministry into digital and local gathering spaces, recognizes the holy in our everyday lives, and embodies a networked, relational, and incarnational ministry leadership for a digital age."

In fact, the cathedral was not just a monumental building, as we often think of it today, but rather a networked, relational, incarnational community that included people with a surprising range of beliefs and practices. Within premodern cathedral grounds were breweries and bakeries, granaries and gardens, monasteries and markets. Beyond the walls, the cathedral proper extended to the forests, fields, and villages where a diverse array of ordinary believers found the sacred in their waking and their sleeping, their toils and their leisure. People lived life fully "in cathedral"—in relationship to one another within an expansive, everyday understanding of "church."

Well, today, the places that are "in cathedral" are both local and digital—coffee shops, pubs, and parks; Facebook, Twitter, and Instagram—as well as in the digitally-integrated connections people with smartphones and tablets make between their local participation and their digital networks.

What if we were to reclaim this larger sense of "cathedral" and "church"—one that encompasses our daily working and living, that includes both local spaces like pubs, coffee shops, and parks, but also digital gathering spaces such as Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, and YouTube? How can we understand all of these online and offline spaces as part of an expansive, networked whole? And how would this shift our practice of ministry, our leadership, and our assumptions about the loci of spiritual practice?

In this view, the spiritual life experienced "in cathedral" would include not just worship at the local church building, but also a family bustling through breakfast on the way to school and work. It would extend to bus stops, classrooms, coffee shops, offices, cafés, and so on, all of these holding the potential of further connection through smartphones, tablets, and

laptops. In this digital cathedral, any node in the network can mediate the divine in everyday life, can function as sacred space. Here, our lowly digital devices invite pilgrimage every day across these networked sacred spaces.

Imagined this way, the digital cathedral is not a call to return to a time when church was at the center of the culture—even if that were possible. Rather, it is a warm, digitally-integrated embrace of the rich traditions of Christianity, especially the recovery of the premodern sense of cathedral, which encompassed the depth and breadth of daily life within the physical and imaginative landscape of the church.

Anderson's understanding of the digital cathedral is a great way to imagine a networked approach to life, learning, and church. (See his book *The Digital Cathedral: Networked Ministry in a Wireless World*.)

Twenty-first century faith formation will look and feel and operate as a network. It will no longer resemble the linear, one size fits all model of the industrial age. As a network it will provide a diversity of religious content and experiences for all ages and generations, 24x7x365, in face-to-face (physical) and online (virtual) settings. It will incorporate an immense range of faith formation opportunities.

CHARACTERISTICS OF FAITH FORMATION IN A NETWORK MODEL

Variety of Content, Method, Format, and Delivery

In a network model, faith formation is designed around the life tasks, needs, interests, and spiritual journeys of individuals and families across the whole life span.

We are moving from a provider-centered, program-driven model where denominations, publishers, and churches determined the curriculum to a *learner-centered model* where the content and experiences are designed around the people and where they have control over their learning. Individuals and families have an active role in shaping their own learning and moving along personal trajectories of faith growth. A faith formation network provides a congregation with a means to offer relevant content that addresses the spiritual and religious needs of people and the ability for them to engage with that content in ways that reflect how they learn and grow best. A network approach provides more options for people of all ages to find programs, activities, and resources that match well with how they learn and grow in faith.

Faith formation provides a variety of learning experiences that can engage the whole person in learning. Faith formation networks address the whole person and how they learn best by offering programs, activities, and resources that emphasize different “intelligences”—word-centered, verbal-linguistic, logical, musical, visual, intrapersonal, interpersonal, naturalist, and bodily-kinesthetic (see the work of Howard Gardner). While it may be difficult to incorporate all eight intelligences in a particular program or activity, a network approach provides a way to offer programs, activities, and resources that emphasize different “intelligences”—one that is word-centered, another musical, another visual, etc.—so as to engage as many people as possible.

People have different learning styles. Some learn best through direct, hands-on, concrete experiences; some through reflective observation; some through an exploration and analysis of knowledge, theories, and concepts; and others through active experimentation with the new knowledge and practices. A network provides a way to offer programs reflecting the four different learning styles, such as immersion programs, workshops, presentations, small group study, and retreat experiences to name a few.

Faith formation provides a variety of experiences, programs, activities, resources, and social connections 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. We are moving from the one size fits all curriculum and programming of an earlier era to a variety of religious content—experiences, programs, activities, and resources—that connects with people’s spiritual and religious needs. A network approach gives us the ability to offer activities that target the particular spiritual or religious needs, interests, passions, concerns, or life issues of individuals, families, and groups. We no longer have to worry about reaching a mass audience with one size fits all programming. We can diversify faith formation offerings and tailor them to people’s needs and busy lives.

This movement from one size fits all to a variety of faith formation offerings is made possible by the abundance of religious content—print, audio, video, online, and digital—and programming that is now available. And this is made possible by the creation of an online platform that integrates, delivers, and communicates the content and programming with a variety of ways to learn and that is easily accessible and available, anytime and anywhere. In the network model faith formation becomes personal, portable, and participatory—the key characteristics of the mobile technology revolution.

A faith formation network incorporates seven learning environments, in online spaces and physical places, to provide a variety of ways for people to learn and grow in faith that respects their preferred styles of learning, their life situations, and their time constraints. The seven environments provide a way to offer the same content or program in multiple learning environments, giving people different ways to learn and grow in faith. The seven environments include:

- on your own (self-directed)
- with a mentor
- at home
- in small groups
- in large groups
- in the congregation
- in the community and world

A variety of learning methods can be used with each of these seven learning environments. Creating this variety of learning environments is aided by the development of an online platform that integrates, delivers, and communicates the faith formation offerings.

Faith formation incorporates formal and informal learning. Informal learning describes a lifelong process whereby individuals acquire attitudes, values, skills, and knowledge from daily experience and the educational influences and resources in their environment, from family and neighbors, from work and play, from the marketplace, the library, the mass media, and the Internet. Informal learning can be intentional or not. There might be a teacher, but it’s probably a colleague or friend. We might read an article or book, visit a website, listen to a podcast, or watch a video online. We might visit Home Depot or Lowe’s for a clinic on home repair or gardening or stop by our local bookstore or library for a reading group or special program. We might go online to access any one of the thousands of “how to” videos on YouTube. We might watch one of the TV channels devoted to informal learning, such as cooking channels that teach people how to cook and try new recipes or home improvement shows that present examples and teach techniques.

Both formal and informal learning can be *intentional*—when an individual aims to learn something and goes about achieving that objective or *unexpected*—when in the course of everyday activities an individual learns something that he or she had not intended or expected. Most faith formation programs are formal and intentional learning. We can expand *informal* and *intentional* faith formation when we make available a variety online activities, print resources, audio podcasts, videos, apps, and more that people can access on their own, anytime, anywhere.

Personalized Learning and Faith Growth

Faith formation provides the opportunity for personalized and customized learning and faith growth, giving people an active role in shaping their own learning and moving along their own personal trajectories of faith growth. People are guided by trusted guides who find the right programs, activities, and resources to match with their learning needs.

We know from learning sciences research that more effective learning will occur if each person receives a customized learning experience. People learn best when they are placed in a learning environment that is sensitive to their learning

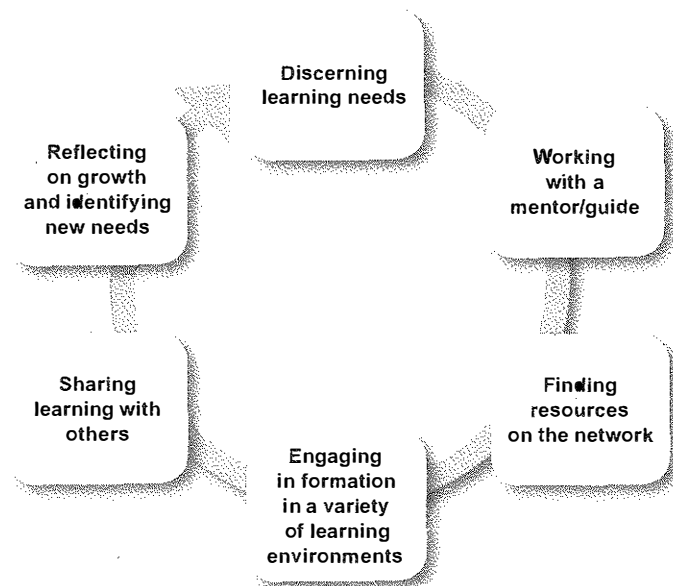
needs and flexible enough to adapt strategies and resources to individual needs. We can now meet people at the point of their spiritual, religious, and learning needs and offer personalized pathways for faith growth.

A faith formation network, rich in a diversity of content and a variety of ways to learn, can guide people in creating their own personal learning pathways. Churches can develop processes for helping individuals and families diagnose their religious and spiritual learning needs (online and in person) that:

- discern learning needs
- create a plan (with a mentor/guide) for faith growth and find resources on the network
- engage in faith formation experiences
- reflect on [their] learning with a mentor/guide or small group
- identify new needs for growth and learning

A “faith-growth learning plan” helps people identify where they are on their spiritual journey, what they need for continuing their growth, who else might share that need, and the resources that could help them meet that need. Giving power to individuals and families to shape their own learning does not mean abandoning them to their own devices. Congregations provide mentors or guides to assist people in developing their growth plan, accessing the programs and resources that fit their plan, and evaluating their learning.

The Flow of Personalized Learning



Imagine redesigning confirmation by moving from a one-size-fits-all approach to a personalized approach using a network. Imagine beginning with discernment so that young people, with the help of a mentor, can talk about their faith journey; then determining the content and activities from the “confirmation network” that are most appropriate to their religious and spiritual needs; participating in those activities—on their own, with a mentor, at home, in small groups, in large groups, in the congregation, and/or in the community and world; and then reflecting with their mentor on their growth.

A Process of Active Inquiry and Intrinsic Motivation

Faith formation recognizes that learning is a process of active inquiry with the initiative residing within the individual. Faith formation networks recognize that the motivation for learning is intrinsic to the person and is driven by a need for autonomy (self-directedness), mastery, and purpose and meaning.

The traditional model of schooling has conditioned people to perceive the proper role of learners as being dependent on teachers to make decisions for them as to what should be learned, how it should be learned, when it should be learned, and if it has been learned. Today people are accustomed to searching out what they want to know, when they want and need to know it. People are becoming more and more self-directed in their learning, and they have almost unlimited access to information through the Internet and the wide variety of print and media learning resources available in our society today.

As learning becomes a process of active inquiry, where the initiative resides within the person, intrinsic motivation becomes a key factor in determining whether or not people will engage in faith formation and open themselves to learning and faith growth. Extrinsic motivation, such as faith formation participation policies (such as required hours or things that must be done in order to receive a sacrament), rarely motivate people to participate, learn, or grow in faith. In fact, they usually have the opposite effect.

Drawing on decades of scientific research on human motivation, Daniel Pink in his book *Drive: The Surprising Truth about What Motivates Us* exposes the mismatch between what research shows and how we motivate people. While carrots and sticks (policies and requirements) worked somewhat successfully in the twentieth-century, assembly-line model, that’s precisely the wrong way to motivate people today. He describes three types of motivation: Motivation 1.0 presumed that humans were biological creatures, struggling for survival. Motivation 2.0 presumed that humans responded to reward and punishments in their environment. Motivation 3.0 presumes that humans have a third drive—to learn, to create, and to better the world. Motivation 3.0 has three essential elements.

Autonomy: the desire to direct our own lives with autonomy over task (what they do), time (when they do it), team (who they do it with), and technique (how they do it).

Mastery: the urge to get better and better at something that matters—to be engaged in deliberate practice to produce mastery.

Purpose: the yearning to do what we do in the service of something larger than ourselves, to seek purpose—a cause greater and more enduring than ourselves.

Daniel Pink writes, “The secret to high performance and satisfaction—at work, at school, and at home—is the deeply human need to direct our own lives, to learn and create new things, and to do better by ourselves and our world (145).” Learning and growth in a faith formation network is a process of active inquiry, where the initiative resides within the person. Intrinsic motivation—autonomy, mastery, purpose and meaning—become key factors in determining whether or not people will engage in faith formation and open themselves to learning and faith growth.

Here is one example of how autonomy and mastery combine to motivate learners. A recent research study found that students want control of their own learning. When asked why learning through an online class might make school more interesting, 47 percent of students in grades 9–12, 39 percent in grades 6–8, and 25 percent in grades 3–5 responded that they wanted to learn online to control their own learning experience. Students do not expect online courses to be easier. They do, however, expect the online learning environment to facilitate their success because they can review materials when they want and are more comfortable asking teachers for help. And online teachers see great benefits to student online learning: 76 percent believe that online learning benefits students by putting them in control of their own learning.

Communities of Faith Learning and Practice

Faith formation intentionally nurtures communities of learning and practice around the shared interests, needs, life stages, and activities of individuals and families.

Faith formation can connect individuals and families to each other through communities of practice—groups of people who have a shared interest, passion, religious or spiritual need, life stage—who come together to learn with and from each other. William Synder describes communities of practice having three dimensions: “the domain (what it’s about); the topic (the issues that they are facing); and the community (the people who are involved).”

In a network approach, groups form naturally as individuals and families connect with others around shared interests, passions, needs, or life stage. Participation in these groups and their shared activities develop relationships, provide a supportive community, and promote learning and the application of that learning. By creating a network with a great variety of activities, congregations can intentionally promote the natural development of communities of learning and practice around these shared activities. This is a different approach from the congregations who adopt a small group model of church and then organize people into small groups.

Oftentimes this approach can feel artificial and contrived. In a network approach groups are self-organizing around activities that reflect their interests, passions, hungers, or needs.

Imagine a group forming around a Bible study offering on the faith formation network. They may do this in a small group, but they are engaged in a larger community of practice in their congregation or in the world focused on reading and studying the Bible. People in the small group connect, face-to-face and/or online, to study the Bible together and to learn how to apply the Bible in their daily lives. They can connect with other groups, via social media, to share their experience of learning and practice. They can share their learning with the whole congregation, providing an opportunity for everyone to grow in their understanding of the Bible.

Digital Platforms for Faith Formation

Faith formation incorporates digital platforms (websites) that integrate all of the content (programs, activities, resources), connects people to the content and to each other, provides continuity for people across different learning experiences, and is available anytime, anywhere.

We can already see (and have probably personally experienced) the power of digital platforms for learning. Universities across the country are making their courses available online for free. The Khan Academy (www.khanacademy.org) is providing thousands of instructional videos for elementary and high school education for free so that students can learn on their own and teachers can “flip the classroom” by having students watch the videos (the content) as homework and transform the classroom into a laboratory for applying the content. TED.com is making available the videos of all their world-class presenters for free and TedEd (<http://ed.ted.com>) is becoming a platform for creating customized lessons around TED Talks.

Art museums, children’s museums, natural history museums, libraries, science centers, and more are building interactive, multimedia online digital platforms for their content that serves as a second place for learning to complement their physical place. As just one example, the Boston Science Center (www.mos.org), a marvelous hands-on environment for experiencing and learning science, has built a digital platform for an online experience of the science center with their YouTube channel for their videos, a Facebook page, Pinterest boards for exhibits, Flickr photostream and Instagram sites for photos, and more. The Boston Science Center is now accessible 24x7x365 to everyone and is networked via social media.

In the digital age, congregations need to develop online digital platforms as a second place for faith formation with unique features and content, which also extends and expands programs and activities in physical settings. Increasingly churches will need to see themselves not as exclusive providers of faith formation,

but as platforms for bringing meaningful and engaging learning experiences to people and for guiding them to such experiences elsewhere.

A faith formation website provides the platform for publishing and delivering the experiences, content, programs, activities, and resources of the network, and for engaging people in learning and faith formation. A website provides the platform for *seamless* learning across a variety of experiences, resources, locations, times, or settings. The website, together with social media, provides continuity between faith formation in the congregation, at home, in daily life, and online.

The technological and skill barriers for building a digital platform continue to decrease with the availability of drag and drop website builders like Weebly (www.Weebly.com), Wix (www.Wix.com), and Squarespace (www.squarespace.com). For more advanced website building there is WordPress (www.wordpress.com) with its thousands of templates and plug-ins.

Blended Faith Formation

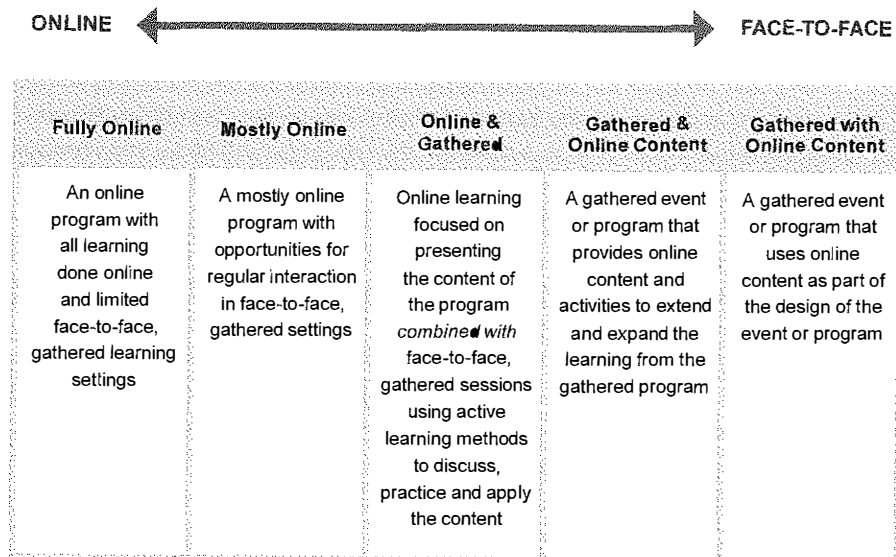
Faith formation integrates online and face-to-face learning, blending them in a variety of ways from online programs with minimal interaction in physical settings to programs in physical settings that utilize online content or extend the program using online content.

Michael Horn and Heather Staker describe blended learning as “a formal education program in which a person learns at least in part through online learning with some element of learner control over time, place, path, and/or pace; *and* at least in part at a supervised brick-and-mortar location away from home. The modalities along each person’s learning path in a course or subject are connected to provide an integrated experience” (Staker and Horn, 54).

The team at “More than Blended Learning” (<http://morethanblended.com>) describes a blended solution as “a learning intervention that combines a number of contrasting methods and/or media.” In the methods category, we can blend by *social context*—alone, one-to-one, in a group, in a community and by *learning strategy*—exposition, instruction, guided discovery, exploration. In the media category, we can blend by *delivery channel*—face-to-face, offline media, online media, and by *communications mode*—synchronous (same-time) and asynchronous (own-time).

Faith formation programs, activities, and experiences can be offered in a variety of places, integrating physical and online settings. These settings can be seen as a continuum: ranging from fully online programming to gathered programming in physical settings that use online resources. Blended faith formation usually combines online delivery of religious content and experiences with the best features of gathered face-to-face programs.

Blended Faith Formation Continuum



Imagine the possibilities for utilizing the five blended strategies in designing new programming, redesigning existing programming, surrounding events and programs with online content, and selecting a variety of digital programs, activities, and resources that can be used alone (fully online) or used in conjunction with face-to-face programs.

Gathered with Online Content

We can design a gathered program using online content from websites, videos from YouTube or other video sites, and blogs and other social media. With an abundance of high-quality digital content, this first option is the easiest way to bring the digital world into a gathered program.

Gathered and Online Content

We can connect church programs or events with online content that extends and deepens the experience through learning, prayer, ritual, action, etc. Gathered events and programs, such as Sunday worship, church year feasts and seasons, inter-generational and family programs, classes, youth group meetings, mission trips, retreat experiences, and vacation Bible school would all benefit from extending the experience with digital content for learning, praying, celebrating, having faith conversations, acting/serving, and more. The eight faith-forming processes (see

page 38) can serve as an organizing template for developing and selecting activities. Here are some examples:

- Extend Sunday worship through the week using a variety of digital content that deepens the understanding and practice of the Sunday readings, sermon, and church year season; and provides prayer, devotions, rituals, a video of the sermon with a study guide, service/action ideas, conversation activities, and more.
- Connect Vacation Bible School with families at home by providing activities online that deepen the content from each day of Vacation Bible School: study activities around the theme or Scripture story/message of the day, a prayer or devotion, a book to read, a video to watch, and more.
- Provide a forty-day Lent “curriculum” that connects the Lent events in church life with a variety of activities for experiencing and practicing Lent in daily and home life—delivered online through the congregation’s faith formation website. Here’s an illustration:

CHURCH LIFE EVENTS

Ash Wednesday
Lent Sunday liturgies
Stations of the Cross
Lent prayer
Lent retreat
Lent service
Lent soup suppers

DAILY AND HOME LIFE ACTIVITIES

Fasting activities
Praying activities
Service/almsgiving activities
Lectionary reflections
Lent study resources and videos
Lent devotions
Daily Bible readings

Online and Gathered

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. Here are some examples:

- Redesign children’s faith formation so that children (and their parents) are learning the content at home with online content (and/or a textbook) and doing activities with their parents at home, and then refocus “class time” to engage children in creating projects and activities that demonstrate their learning.
- Design a high school confirmation program that provides the content usually taught in the weekly sessions into an online platform for individual learning—watching videos, reading short materials, and writing a reflection

journal; engage the young people in small groups during the month to discuss their online learning; and then meet 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.

- Develop an online center for justice and service where people of all ages can find a justice issue that they are passionate about, learn more about the issue, and explore biblical and Christian teaching on justice. Congregations can provide a variety of ways for people to act on their justice issue—as individuals, families, or groups, through local and global projects. People can share their experiences with the whole congregation using social media.

Mostly Online

We can offer opportunities for individuals, families, and small groups to utilize the digital platform as their primary learning setting and provide opportunities for regular interaction in face-to-face, gathered settings or in a web conference format, such as a Google+ Hangout. Here are some examples:

- Offer one-hour parent webinar programs delivered to parents at home in a four-month timeframe: three monthly webinars followed by a parent gathering at church in month four.
- Offer online learning plans and resources for self-study or small group study with video recordings of adult faith formation presentations at church. Invite people to gather at the conclusion of their learning to share their insights with others who participated.
- Develop an online Bible study where groups can meet regularly in a physical setting or virtually through Skype or a Google+ Hangout for sharing their learning.
- Offer selected online courses and activities from colleges, seminaries, and religious organization through the faith formation website for individualized learning with the option for a mentor or small group gathering.

Fully Online

The rise of high-quality and easily accessible online religious content—courses, activities, print and e-books, audio and video programs, and content-rich websites—has made designing online faith formation feasible. Here are some examples:

- Offer adults a variety of online Bible and theology courses for individual study using online courses from colleges and seminaries, video programs on YouTube, online programs and webinars from religious publishers and organizations.

- 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.
- Provide an online parent resource center with the best knowledge, practices, and tools for parenting in print, audio, and video; include links to quality parent websites and family faith formation websites and set up a parent blog and/or Facebook page where parents can post their experiences, questions, and insights.
- Provide an online retreat experience available through a publisher or a religious organization.

FAITH FORMATION NETWORKS IN PRACTICE

At this point you are probably wondering, what would a faith formation network for an age group or generation or family look like in practice? Let's review the key design features of a network and then explore how to put them in practice in fashioning a faith formation network.

1. Faith formation is developed around the eight faith-forming processes—caring relationships, celebrating liturgical seasons, celebrating rituals and milestones, learning the Christian tradition and applying it to life, praying and spiritual formation, reading the Bible, serving people in need and working for justice and caring for creation, and worshipping God with the faith community. These eight processes provide both a *framework* for a comprehensive curriculum with age groups, generations, and families and the *content*—knowledge and practices—of the Christian faith.
2. Intergenerational faith formation and whole community faith experiences are at the *center* of all faith formation networks, engaging all ages and generations in the life and events of church life and the Christian faith through participation in intergenerational faith experiences.
3. Age-group and generational faith formation addresses the unique life tasks, needs, interests, and spiritual journeys of people at each stage of life.
4. Family faith formation nurtures family faith, develops the faith life of parents and grandparents, strengthens family life, and builds the parenting knowledge and skills of parents.
5. Missional faith formation expands and extends the church's presence through outreach, connection, relationship building, and engagement with people where they live; and provides 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.

6. Faith formation provides a variety of experiences, programs, activities, resources, and social connections 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.
7. Faith formation incorporates formal and informal learning.
8. Faith formation provides the opportunity for personalized and customized learning and faith growth, giving people an active role in shaping their own learning and moving along their own personal trajectories of faith growth. People are guided by trusted mentors/guides who find the right programs, activities, and resources to match with their learning needs.
9. Faith formation recognizes that learning is a process of active inquiry with the initiative residing within the individual. Faith formation networks recognize that the motivation for learning is intrinsic to the person and is driven by a need for autonomy (self-directedness), mastery, and purpose and meaning.
10. Faith formation incorporates digital platforms (websites) that integrate all of the content (programs, activities, resources), connect people to the content and to each other, provides continuity for people across different learning experiences, and is available anytime, anywhere, anyplace, 24x7x365.
11. Faith formation integrates online and face-to-face learning, blending them in a variety of ways from online programs with minimal interaction in physical settings to programs in physical settings that utilize online content or extend the program using online content.

Designing a Network

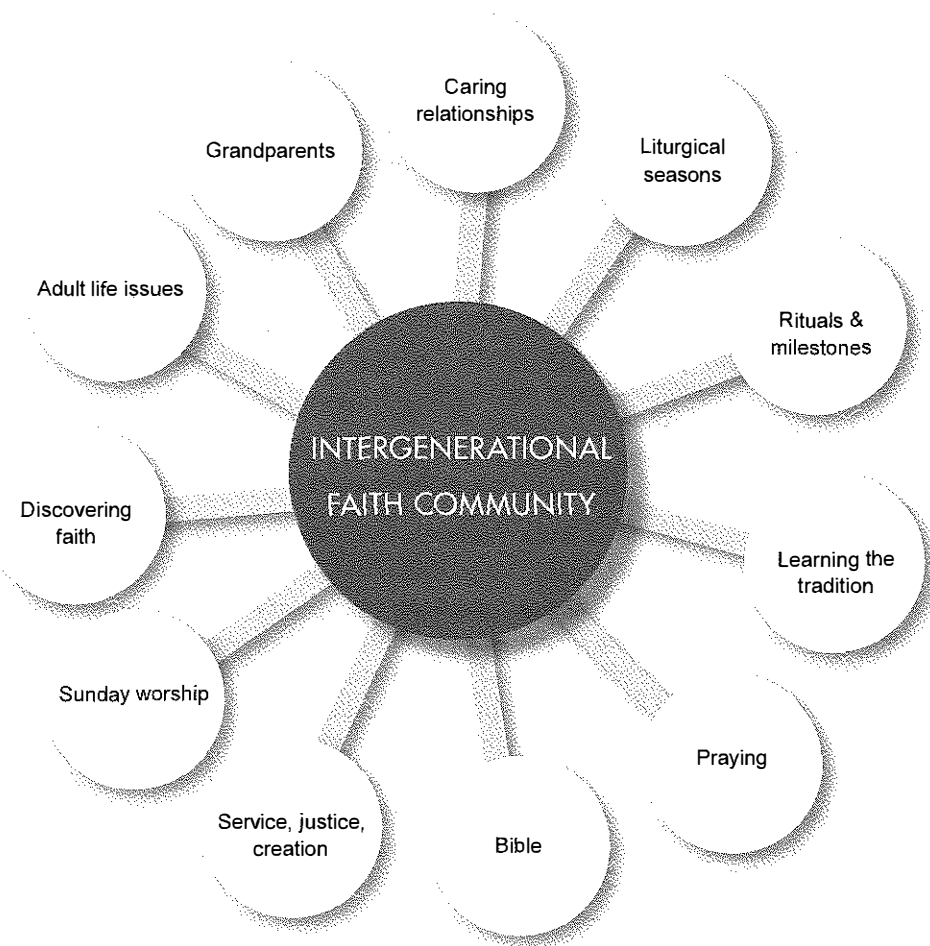
Imagine designing an Adult Faith Formation Network for adults in their 50s through the early 70s with content that provides developmentally- and generationally-appropriate faith knowledge and practices; engages adults intergenerationally in the life and events of the Christian community; and provides adult programs and activities in a variety of settings and media formats, organized around the eight faith-forming processes and three adult-specific content areas: adult life issues, discovering faith (outreach to the “churchless”), and grandparents.

At the center of the Adult Faith Formation Network is the intergenerational faith community with its events—Sunday worship, the feasts and seasons of the church year, ritual celebrations, acts of justice and service, prayer experiences, spiritual traditions, and the events that originate within the life and history of a individual congregation—and the connections and relationships across generations. It may also

have intentional intergenerational programming such as intergenerational learning and service projects. We want to utilize the events of church throughout the Adult Faith Formation Network and encourage adult participation in the life of the faith community and the opportunities for intergenerational connection and relationship.

Programming can be designed and offered in three, four-month seasons: January–April, May–August, and September–December. Here is an example of one season (January–April) that provides a variety of experiences, programs, activities, and resources in physical places and online spaces, and is 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. (For an illustration of an adult faith formation network and website go to: <http://holytrinityadults.weebly.com>.) As you read this example of adult faith formation, imagine developing similar networks for every age group in your congregation and for the whole family.

Adult Faith Formation Network



Caring Relationships

- Friday Lent simple meals
- Social gatherings for adults
- Intergenerational experiences and programs in the church community
- Career mentoring program between adults and young adults entering the workplace, addressing work issues, money management, career planning, living as a Christian in the workplace and world, and more

Celebrating the Liturgical Seasons

- A forty-day Lent “curriculum” that connects the Lent events in church life with a variety of activities for experiencing and practicing Lent in daily and home life—delivered online through the congregation’s faith formation website, including fasting activities, praying activities, service/almsgiving activities, lectionary reflections, Lent study resources and videos, Lent devotions, and daily Bible readings

Celebrating Rituals and Milestones

- Resources for celebrating adult milestones and life transitions, such as retirement, becoming a grandparent, at home with family and friends

Learning the Christian Tradition and Applying It to Life

- A theology book-of-the-month program with groups meeting at church, at home, in community settings, and online via web conferencing; and online content with discussion questions and links for further learning
- January theology enrichment series: four presentations at church by guest experts on a theological theme; video recording of each presentation for online viewing and small group learning; and online resources for continuing learning
- Online theology courses selected for individual study using offerings at colleges/seminaries and on iTunes University
- An online theology video library of presentations on theological topics for individual or small group study

Praying and Spiritual Formation

- Lent spiritual practices course: a five-session spiritual practices course with sessions on prayer styles and traditions, fixed-hour prayer, contemplation and meditation, spiritual reading and praying with art and music, and Sabbath
- An online Lent retreat experience delivered daily via email

- Online prayer center with links to print, audio, video, and digital resources for daily prayer, devotions, liturgy of the hours, and more

Reading the Bible

- A six-week Lent Bible study program organized in variety of settings with a print resource and online support materials and videos
- Links to online resources for Bible study and a list of Bible apps for individual use

Serving People in Need, Working for Justice, Caring for Creation

- A variety of service/mission projects—just for adults or intergenerational—already offered by justice and service organizations, that provide a range of options for service, e.g., local one-day projects, short-term mission trips of two to five days, weeklong mission trips, and global expedition trips of ten to fourteen days
- An online justice and service center where people can learn about justice issues and the biblical and church teachings on justice, service, and care for creation

Worshipping God within the Faith Community

- Online resources for extending Sunday worship into daily life and family life using a variety of digital content that deepens the understanding and practice of the Sunday readings and sermon, and provides prayer, devotions, rituals, a video of the sermon with a study guide, service/action ideas, conversation activities, and more
- “Coffee and Conversation” groups after Sunday worship to reflect on the Sunday readings using *Lectio Divina*

Adult Life Issues

- Programs and small groups organized around adult life tasks and issues, such as children getting married, retirement, finances in later life, caring for an aging parent, dealing with illness
- Links to online programs and resources that address adult life tasks and issues, such www.AARP.org
- Connection to programs sponsored by churches or community organizations on adult life issues

Just for Grandparents

- Grandparent-grandchild programs, such as a mini-retreat program, trips, service projects, and more, organized by the church
- Articles and materials to help grandparents understand their role in faith formation and raising their grandchildren
- Faith-forming activities that grandparents can use with their grandchildren
- A list of recommended children’s Bibles, storybooks, and video programs that grandparents can use with grandchildren

Discovering Faith

- Sponsor a program, such as Alpha, for “churchless” adults who want to explore the Christian faith again or for the first time
- Develop a weekly program, such as Lifetree Café, in a community setting for adults who want to connect with a community, discuss spiritual matters, and explore faith
- Offer “reentry” experiences and mentors/guides for those who want to join the church community and need a gradual reintroduction to church life and the Christian faith

CONCLUSION

Chapters 2 and 3 have developed the vision for twenty-first century faith formation—a new ecosystem and a network model of faith formation. We now turn toward bringing the vision to life. The next two chapters provide knowledge and skills for designing and implementing a faith formation network. Chapter 4 guides you through a process for designing a faith formation curriculum. Chapter 5 introduces the role of the faith formation curator and the work of curating resources—finding the best resources in all media formats that match with people’s learning needs.

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APPENDIX

Connected Learning Principles

(<http://clrn.dmlhub.net/publication/connected-learning-an-agenda-for-research-and-design>)

In 2013, the Digital Media and Learning Research Network, supported by the MacArthur Foundation, issued a major report, "Connected Learning: An Agenda for Research and Design" that provides a foundation for developing new models of learning for the digital age that are powerful, relevant, and engaging. They describe the concept of *connected learning* as an educational approach designed for our ever-changing world, and to the realities of the digital age where the demand for learning never stops. Connected learning is anchored in research, robust theories of learning, and the best of traditional standards, but also designed to mine the learning potential of the new social media and digital media domains. It harnesses the advances and innovations of our connected age to serve learning.

Connected learning knits together three crucial contexts for learning:

1. **Peer Supported.** In their everyday exchanges with peers and friends, young people are contributing, sharing, and giving feedback in inclusive social experiences that are fluid and highly engaging.
2. **Interest-Powered.** When a subject is personally interesting and relevant, learners achieve much higher-order learning outcomes.
3. **Academically-Oriented.** Learners flourish and realize their potential when they can connect their interests and social engagement to academic studies, civic engagement, and career opportunity.

Core properties of connected learning experiences include:

1. **Production-Centered.** Digital tools provide opportunities for producing and creating a wide variety of media, knowledge, and cultural content in experimental and active ways.
2. **Shared Purpose.** Social media and web-based communities provide unprecedented opportunities for cross-generational and cross-cultural learning and connection to unfold and thrive around common goals and interests.

3. **Openly Networked.** Online platforms and digital tools can make learning resources abundant, accessible, and visible across all learner settings.

Design principles inform the intentional connecting of learning environments:

1. **Everyone can participate.** Experiences invite participation and provide many different ways for individuals and groups to contribute.
2. **Learning happens by doing.** Learning is experiential and part of the pursuit of meaningful activities and projects.
3. **Challenge is constant.** Interest or cultivation of an interest creates both a “need to know” and a “need to share.”
4. **Everything is connected.** Young people are provided with multiple learning contexts for engaging in connected learning—contexts in which they receive immediate feedback on progress, have access to tools for planning and reflection, and are given opportunities for mastery.

New media amplifies opportunities for connected learning:

1. **Fostering engagement and self-expression.** Interactive, immersive, and personalized technologies can provide responsive feedback, support a diversity of learning styles and literacy, and pace learning according to individual needs.
2. **Increasing accessibility to knowledge and learning experiences.** Through online search, educational resources, and communities of expertise and interest, young people can easily access information and find relationships that support self-directed and interest-driven learning.
3. **Expanding social supports for interests.** Through social media, young people can form relationships with peers and caring adults that are centered on interests, expertise, and future opportunity in areas of interest.
4. **Expanding diversity and building capacity.** New media networks empower marginalized and non-institutionalized groups and cultures to have a voice, mobilize, organize, and build capacity.