



John Roberto



# faith formation

with a **new  
generation**



with Lisa Brown,  
Tanya Eustace Campen,  
Lynn Barger Elliott,  
and Lee Yates



John Roberto

**faith**  
**formation**  
with a **new**  
**generation**

with Lisa Brown, Tanya Eustace Campen, Lynn Barger Elliott, and Lee Yates



Faith Formation with a New Generation

Copyright © 2018 Lifelong Faith Associates. All rights reserved. Except for brief quotations in critical articles or reviews, no part of this book may be reproduced in any manner without permission from the publisher. For reprint permission contact Lifelong Faith Associates at [jroberto@lifelongfaith.com](mailto:jroberto@lifelongfaith.com)

Cover and book design: Hillspring Books, Inc.

Publishing consultant: Huff Publishing Associates, LLC

Scripture quotations are from New Revised Standard Version of the Bible, copyright © 1989, Division of Christian Education of the National Council of Churches in the United States of America.

ISBN 978-0-9823031-9-1

LifeLong Faith Publications

Lifelong Faith Associates

133 Old Towne Road

Cheshire, CT 06410

[www.LifelongFaith.com](http://www.LifelongFaith.com)

# CONTENTS

<b>Introduction</b>	<b>1</b>
◆ <b>CHAPTER ONE</b>	<b>5</b>
◆ <b>A New Vision and Approach for a New Generation</b>	
◆ A Personal Reflection—Lisa Brown	
◆	
◆ <b>CHAPTER TWO</b>	<b>27</b>
◆ <b>Intergenerational Faith Forming Experiences</b>	
◆ A Personal Reflection—Lee Yates	
◆	
◆ <b>CHAPTER THREE</b>	<b>45</b>
◆ <b>Family Faith Forming Experiences</b>	
◆ A Personal Reflection—Tanya Eustace Campen	
◆	
◆ <b>CHAPTER FOUR</b>	<b>69</b>
◆ <b>Age-Group Faith Forming Experiences</b>	
◆ A Personal Reflection—Lynn Barger Elliott	
◆	
◆ <b>CHAPTER FIVE</b>	<b>85</b>
◆ <b>Designing Faith Formation with the New Generation</b>	
◆	

# INTRODUCTION



Since 2007 I have been at work proposing twenty-first century approaches to lifelong faith formation that respond creatively and proactively to the changing world around us. My journey began with the *Faith Formation 2020* project and book, which explored the changing context of faith formation and envisioned what faith formation in congregations could look like by 2020. In *Reimagining Faith Formation for the 21st Century*, I built on the work of *Faith Formation 2020* by proposing a vision and new practices for lifelong faith formation.

I have worked with gifted and forward-thinking teams of leaders to research and develop four books and to conduct four symposium programs that explored different facets of lifelong faith formation: intergenerational, family, adult, and children and adolescents. The resulting books—*Generations Together*, *Families at the Center of Faith Formation*, *The Seasons of Adult Faith Formation*, and *Faith Formation with a New Generation*—provide the theory and practice of twenty-first century approaches to lifelong faith formation.

*Faith Formation with a New Generation* is written as a proposal for the future of faith formation with children and adolescents. It is a proposal to transform the way to envision and design faith formation. It reflects a more holistic and comprehensive approach to faith formation grounded in the best understanding of the key factors that contribute to growth in faith and discipleship in the first two decades of life and build a solid foundation for a lifelong faith. You will find *something old* in this book—the centrality of an intergenerational faith community and the family; and you will find *something new*—twenty-first century approaches and methods for engaging a new generation of young people (Gen Z) and their parents.

We need a new vision and approach for engaging the new generation in growing as disciples and maturing in faith. Far too many churches are guided by a vision and approach that is not responsive to the needs of young people and their families and is woefully out of date in our contemporary world. Churches still have classrooms of children organized by grade levels using textbooks and Bible studies, and youth groups

with a variety of high-energy activities conducted in the youth room, all scheduled on a weekly basis between September and May and held at church. These programs operate as if nothing has changed in our world, and that we have not learned anything new about how children and young people learn and grow in faith.

The world around us has changed. The Internet and digital technology is transforming our lives; families in our communities come in a variety of forms and configurations; the religious practices and engagement of people have changed; and a new generation (Gen Z) of young people has emerged. Yet far too many congregations are using program models and educational approaches they inherited from the nineteenth or twentieth century, expecting them to address the lives of twenty-first century children, adolescents, and their families.

We need to change our approach. Imagine what faith formation with children, teens, and parents would look like if we “started from scratch.” What models and approaches would we use? What types of faith formation opportunities would we offer? When? For whom? Where? What resources would we need? What technologies would we use?

The flow of this book will guide you and your congregation in designing faith formation with children and adolescents using the features of this new approach.

Chapter one presents the essential features of a twenty-first century approach to faith formation with children, adolescents, and their parents. It is the keynote chapter for the rest of the book.

Chapter two explores how the intergenerational faith community provides rich resources for faith formation and guides you in identifying how to provide intergenerational faith forming experiences for children and adolescents.

Chapter three explores the central role of families in a faith community and guides you in utilizing five core strategies for family faith forming experiences for children and adolescents.

Chapter four explores how Generation Z is learning in new ways and guides you in reimagining and redesigning age-group faith formation with children and adolescents.

Chapter five integrates the ideas from your work in chapters two through four to design a faith formation plan that personalizes faith formation with children, adolescents, and their families.

The book proposes a new approach to faith formation that is more community centered, while at the same time being more person centered. We are presenting a vision and practice for faith formation in intergenerational faith communities, family communities, and life stage and affinity groups. We are engaging you in developing 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. Finally, we are proposing a new way of designing faith formation fashioned around the lives and faith growth needs of children, adolescents, parents, and the whole family. We call this a personalized approach to faith formation.

We hope this book will guide and support your congregation in envisioning a new way to form disciples of Jesus Christ and promote lifelong faith growth in children, adolescents, parents, and the whole family.

## The Writing Team

**Lisa Brown** is the former director of children's ministry and communications coordinator at St. Paul's Episcopal Church in Mt. Lebanon, Pennsylvania. Now a digital missionary for Membership Vision, she helps people find God in the digital space. In addition to designing her own VBS programming, Lisa has created Sunday school and confirmation programs, nursery school lessons, and Girl Scout and Boy Scout Camporees. She is the author of *The Best VBS Workbook Ever!* (Church Publishing, 2017).

**Tanya Eustace Campen** is an ordained deacon and currently serves as director of intergenerational discipleship for the Rio Texas Conference. Tanya holds a doctorate of philosophy in Christian education and congregational studies from Garrett Evangelical Theological Seminary. She has two decades of experience in the local church and two years at Discipleship Ministries of the UMC as the director of children and intergenerational ministries. Tanya writes regularly on issues concerning children, families, and intergenerational ministry.

**Lynn Barger Elliott** is affiliated faculty in the congregational and ministry studies department at Calvin College and a resource development specialist for intergenerational and youth initiatives for the Calvin Institute of Christian Worship. She teaches courses related to youth ministry, supervises student internships, and develops and curates resources and networks of experts and practitioners in the area of intergenerational and youth ministry. She is an ordained pastor in the PCUSA and serves on the staff at Mayflower Congregation Church in Grand Rapids, Michigan, where she is responsible for directing youth and family ministries. Lynn has a master of divinity degree from Princeton Theological Seminary.

**John Roberto** is the founder of Lifelong Faith Associates and is on the leadership team of Vibrant Faith where he serves as the coordinator of training services and project coordinator of the Vibrant Faith Institute. He works as a consultant to churches and national organizations, teaches courses and conducts workshops in faith formation, and has authored books and program manuals in faith formation. His latest publications include *Families at the Center of Faith Formation* (2016), *Seasons of Adult Faith Formation* (2015), *Reimagining Faith Formation for the 21st Century* (2015), *Generations Together* (2014), and *Faith Formation 2020* (2010).

## 4 Faith Formation with a New Generation

**Lee Yates** is the pastor of Covina Community Church in Covina, California, a teacher, storyteller, and writer. Lee also serves as managing editor for *InsideOut Camp Curriculum*, writes curriculum and program materials for Christian denominations, and consults with congregations on faith formation. Lee graduated from Lexington Theological Seminary.

### Online Resources at LifelongFaith.com

We have prepared a variety of resources on LifelongFaith.com to support you in using *Faith Formation with a New Generation* in your church. Go to the “New Generation” section of the website for 1) planning tools, 2) toolkits on intergenerational and family faith formation, 3) background articles, 4) resources for personalizing faith formation including examples of Pathways and Playlists, 5) a list of curated resources for faith formation, and 6) program ideas for faith formation with children and adolescents.

---

#### Lifelong Faith Associates Books

- Amidei, Kathie, Jim Merhaut, and John Roberto. *Generations Together*. Naugatuck, CT: Lifelong Faith Associates, 2014.
- Kehrwald, Leif, John Roberto, Gene Roehlkepartain, and Jolene Roehlkepartain. *Families at the Center of Faith Formation*. Naugatuck, CT: Lifelong Faith Associates, 2016.
- Linthicum, Dorothy, Jim Merhaut, Kyle Oliver, Janet Schaeffler, and John Roberto. *The Seasons of Adult Faith Formation*. Naugatuck, CT: Lifelong Faith Associates, 2015.
- Roberto, John, with Lisa Brown, Tanya Eustace Campen, Lynn Barger Elliott, and Lee Yates. *Faith Formation with a New Generation*. Naugatuck, CT: Lifelong Faith Associates, 2018.
- Roberto, John. *Reimagining Faith Formation for the 21st Century*. Naugatuck, CT: Lifelong Faith Associates, 2015.





# CHAPTER ONE

## A New Vision and Approach for a New Generation

◆ ◆ ◆ ◆ We need a new vision and approach for engaging the new generation in growing as disciples and maturing in faith. Far too many churches are guided by a vision and approach that is not responsive to the needs of young people and their families and is woefully out of date in our contemporary world. Churches still have classrooms of children organized by grade levels using textbooks and Bible studies, and youth groups with a variety of high-energy activities conducted in the youth room, all scheduled on a weekly basis between September and May, and held at church. These programs operate as if nothing has changed in our world, and that we have not learned anything new about how children and young people learn and grow in faith.

The world around us has changed. The Internet and digital technology is transforming our lives; families in our communities come in a variety of forms and configurations; the religious practices and engagement of people have changed; and a new generation (Gen Z) of young people has emerged. Yet far too many congregations are using program models and educational approaches they inherited from the nineteenth or twentieth century, expecting them to address the lives of twenty-first century children, adolescents, and their families.

We need to change our approach. Imagine what faith formation with children, teens, and parents would look like if we “started from scratch.” What models and

approaches would we use? What types of faith formation opportunities would we offer? When? For whom? Where? What resources would we need? What technologies would we use? This chapter presents the essential features of a twenty-first century approach to faith formation with children, adolescents, and their parents. The following chapters elaborate on these essential features, providing ideas and practices to guide congregations in developing a new approach to faith formation.

## Why Is Faith Formation with Children and Adolescents So Important?

There are many reasons why it is important to invest in faith formation during the first two decades of life. In the National Study of Youth and Religion, Christian Smith and his colleagues found that young people committing to live their lives for God is one religious experience that is among the most important factors in leading teenagers into the highest levels of emerging adult religion. They found that almost 60 percent (58.8%) made their first commitment to live their lives for God before the age of fourteen. Most of them probably committed to God during the childhood years. Approximately 6 percent made a first commitment from ages fourteen to seventeen and another 5 percent from eighteen to twenty-three. Thirty-one percent of young adults reported never committing to God as a teenager or emerging adult. Smith says that one can expect few of them probably ever will. *So, 85 percent of young adults who have committed their lives to God appear to have made their first commitment before age fourteen.*

These findings complement and reinforce one of the larger stories of this research: that *the religious commitments and orientations of most people appear to be set early in life* and very likely follow a consistent trajectory from the early formation through the adolescent and into the emerging adult years. Some young people do make dramatic shifts into lower and higher religious commitments and practices later in life that would not be expected from their early life experiences and formation. But they are a minority. Most are set early in life to follow one religious trajectory or another—mostly formed by the religious lives of their parents and by social connections to their congregations and embraced in personal religious beliefs and practices—which they tend to follow as they grow into emerging adulthood. When it comes to commitment to God, it is not that experiences and changes during the teenage and emerging adult years do not matter religiously for people—they do, especially for some. It is instead simply that *what matters for most even more is what happens religiously before the teenage years, which powerfully conditions most of everything that happens thereafter* [emphasis added] (Smith and Snell, 247).

Two points are worth repeating: 1) religious commitments and orientations of most people appear to be set early in life; and 2) what matters most is what happens religiously before the teenage years, and that the early formative experiences powerfully condition everything that happens later.

To reinforce these key findings, Smith and Snell write:

The lives of many teenagers who are transitioning into the emerging adult years reflect a lot more religious stability and continuity than is commonly realized. Everything simply does not change. The past continues to shape the future. This is important to know, because it means that religious commitments, practices, and investments made during childhood and the teenage years, by parents and others in families and religious communities, matter—they make a difference. Appreciating the stabilities and continuities that usually override unpredictable changes also reinforces the basic sociological insight that people’s lives are profoundly formed by the social networks and institutions that socialize them, that the relational and social structures that compose and order life are not easily changed or inexplicably made irrelevant. Again, who people are is very much a product of where they are socially located, of what social and relational forces that have formed their lives. And who people are usually does not randomly and unaccountably change over time. *What people have been in the past is generally the best indicators of why they are what they are in the present and what they will likely be in the future* [emphasis added] (Smith and Snell, 256).

The flip side of the early commitment to live one’s life for God is that most Americans who leave their childhood religious identity to become unaffiliated generally do so before they reach their eighteenth birthday. More than six in ten (62%) religiously unaffiliated Americans who were raised in a religion say they abandoned their childhood religion before they turned eighteen. About three in ten (28%) say they were between the ages of eighteen and twenty-nine. Only 5 percent say they stopped identifying with their childhood religion between the ages of thirty and forty-nine, and just 2 percent say age fifty or older (Jones and others, *Exodus* study, 5).

The results from the *Exodus* study by the Public Religion Research Institute survey are affirmed by a 2017 study of Catholic youth and young adults in *Going, Going, Gone* (Saint Mary’s Press): “The median age when formerly Catholic teens and young adults left the faith is thirteen. Nearly four in ten (39%) report leaving between the ages of thirteen and seventeen. Only 5 percent say they left before age five and 18 percent between the ages of five and nine. About a quarter (24%) left between ages ten and twelve. Eleven percent left in the first few years of adulthood, between eighteen and twenty-two. Only 3 percent left from ages twenty-one to twenty-five.”

It’s worth repeating that the majority of unaffiliated Americans who were raised in a religion left before they were eighteen years old. When children and young

adolescents leave a religion, we can safely assume that their parents (or the whole family) have stopped practicing as well. We now have two generations of religiously unaffiliated: parents and their children.

It should be pretty clear that what we do in faith formation with children and adolescents can make a huge difference when they are young and most importantly as they grow into adulthood. Faith formation in the first two decades of life sets people on a trajectory toward adult faith. *What we do in faith formation and how we do it matters, a lot!*

## Who Is This New Generation?

We are learning from experience and research studies about the newest generation, *Gen Z*. It's important to remember that generations are cultural-historical ways of understanding people. They are social constructs—helpful descriptions, but never complete. Studies are emerging on some of the dominant themes or characteristics of this new generation born on or around 2000 (some observers put the date in the late 1990s, others in the early years of the 2000s) and continuing through at least 2015 if not 2020.

What's important for church leaders to know is that Gen Z brings new attitudes, perceptions, experiences, concerns, hungers, and interests that need to inform and shape the direction of faith formation. A 2018 study by Barna Research, *Gen Z: The Culture, Beliefs, and Motivations Shaping the Next Generation*, identified nine important characteristics of Gen Z.

1. *Technology*. The Internet is at the core of Gen Z's development, a uniquely powerful influence on their worldview, mental health, daily schedule, sleep patterns, relationships, and more. Devices are almost constantly on their person and on their minds.
2. *Worldview*. The world of Gen Z (and in turn, their moral code) is highly inclusive and individualistic. This diverse, open-minded group of young people is sensitive to others' feelings and experiences and wary of asserting any one view as right or wrong.
3. *Identity*. Their views of gender identity and expression are just one way teens are wrestling with how to accept and affirm other people, to create "safe space" where each person can be herself or himself without feeling threatened or judged.
4. *Security*. Gen Z has come of age in a post 9-11 nation reeling from the 2008 recession, and many teens are anxious about their future. Their goals revolve around professional success and financial security, and a majority says their ultimate aim is "to be happy"—which a plurality defines as financial success.

5. *Diversity.* As the most racially, religiously, and sexually diverse generation in American history, Gen Z expects people to have different beliefs and experiences, and they seem to have a greater appreciation for social inclusiveness compared to generations before them.

6. *Parents.* As the offspring of mostly Gen X parents, many in Gen Z appear to have a complicated dynamic with their family. They admire their parents, but most don't feel family relationships are central to their sense of self—a major departure from other generations.

7. *Religious identity.* Engaged Christians are much more likely than average to consider their religious beliefs (and to a lesser extent, achievement and family background) very important to their identity. The one-third of teens with no religious affiliation is, by contrast, far less likely to say that religion (12%) or family (22%) are significant factors when it comes to their sense of self.

8. *Morality and values.* One-quarter of Gen Z strongly agrees that what is morally right and wrong changes over time based on society, and 21 percent believe each individual is his or her own moral arbiter.

9. *Faith and church.* Irrelevance is a key word for this generation when it comes to faith, truth, and church. Not only does Christianity stand in direct contrast with many of the beliefs and attitudes of Gen Z—on the existence of objective morality and spiritual truth, for example—but the practice of faith, especially as part of a Christian faith community, seems to many teens simply not to be relevant. It doesn't seem to have a bearing on their real day-to-day lives (Barna, 12, 13, 43, 55, 74).

Generation Z is also learning differently than past generations. Gen Z is searching for authentic and meaningful experiences. They are more independent in how they learn. They have an aptitude for self-reliance and an ability to self educate; they are adept at using the new digital tools and methods to learn. At the same time, Gen Z values face-to-face interaction and collaboration, and an environment where they can share and cocreate their education with their peers. The preferred way to engage a Gen Z group of learners is to provide authentic learning experiences using methods such as project-based learning, active learning, and activities that utilize their creativity, such as artwork, video presentation, and more. Generation Z loves videos and YouTube, especially short pieces of content that run from sixty to ninety seconds. For them, learning is one continuous, multifaceted, completely integrated experience.

## A Vision of Faith Maturing

We want a robust, life-giving, vital, and vibrant faith formation for children and adolescents that develops them as disciples of Jesus Christ and equips them to follow the way of Jesus. We want young people to develop a loving relationship with Jesus, embrace his good news, and follow him in their daily lives—becoming witnesses of God’s reign in the world. This type of faith formation is a way of the head, the heart, and the hands: “‘You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind.’ This is the greatest and first commandment. And a second is like it: ‘You shall love your neighbor as yourself’” (Matthew 22:37–39). Jesus presented faith as a whole way of life.

The goal of all faith formation with children and adolescents (and their parents) is forming disciples of Jesus Christ and providing a foundation for lifelong growth in Christian faith and discipleship. There are six essential elements that shape our approach to forming young people as disciples of Jesus Christ. (These elements are adapted from the *Spirit and Culture of Youth Ministry*.)

1. *Disciples know Jesus Christ.* Discipleship is grounded in the teachings, life, death, resurrection, and Lordship of Jesus Christ alive and present. Disciples are in relationship with Christ, learn about Christ, and follow Christ’s leading. Congregations cultivate relationships with Jesus Christ through worship, prayer, community building, study, retreats, and service.

2. *Disciples know the Bible.* Discipleship is anchored in the study of the Bible. It is in the Bible that young people learn the story, the truth that shapes the life of faith. Congregations engage young people in experiential explorations of the Scripture texts where they can “hear” God speaking truth to their lives.

3. *Disciples know the Christian faith.* Discipleship is learning the Christian faith. The Christian faith has a history, traditions, beliefs, and values that are critical to its shaping and transforming power. Congregations guide young people in exploring the long and rich life of the people of God, creating more sturdy beliefs, engaging the tough questions, and assisting them in finding their own “faith voice.”

4. *Disciples make faith a way of life.* Discipleship is the “knowledge of faith” becoming a way of life. Discipleship is regularly described as much in languages of the “heart” and the “hands” as of the “head.” It is not enough for young people to know the content of Scripture or to understand the richness of Christian beliefs. They need to participate in faith as a way of life—“living into” faith that is simultaneously centered in God yet genuinely their own. All this is carried on with an eye on tradition and experience, text and context, and faith and life.

5. *Disciples are mentored.* Discipleship is formed in relationships with mentoring individuals and communities. Even though discipleship is primarily a faith relationship in which Christ is at the center, young disciples are formed in relationship with

other Christians. Congregations are intergenerational crucibles in which conversation, relationships, and practices wrap youth in a culture of “knowing and doing God.” Within these congregations, people walk intentionally and directly alongside young people providing diverse, concrete snapshots of following Jesus Christ as these mentors encourage and teach through their presence, speech, and action.

6. *Disciples are equipped.* A young person’s strengths and gifts of the Spirit are integral to discipleship. To follow Christ involves a call to witness and to serve others. To make disciples is to identify a young person’s spiritual gifts and equip children and adolescents for service in the church and the world. Congregations combine study, fellowship, personal strengths, and spiritual gifts discovery with service to equip young disciples to follow Jesus Christ in the church and into the world.

We can give shape to forming disciples and promoting faith growth through ten essential characteristics of Christian faith and discipleship that incorporate knowing and believing, relating and belonging, and practicing and living. We are proposing ten characteristics—drawn from the Christian faith tradition and from research on what makes a difference in people’s lives—that 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.

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 one’s 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 and ritual celebrations, and through 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.

In the approach we are proposing in this book, we build faith formation around the faith maturing characteristics and the spiritual-religious needs of young people and their families, and then develop program approaches and create and curate the

resources that are needed to foster faith growth. For each characteristic we ask questions such as: What do we need to do to help children and adolescents? How can we engage children and adolescents and their families in . . . ? How do we equip children and adolescents and their families for . . . ?

This change of emphasis reflects a significant shift from a provider-centered, program- and content-driven approach to a *person-centered approach* to faith formation. We need to focus on children and adolescents growing in faith and ask how can we accompany them relationally and programmatically. Instead of asking what program or textbook we need to adopt or what content we need to teach, we focus on the person growing in faith. We start asking how we promote growth in faith and discipleship from birth through the high school years—a faith that provides a foundation for adult faith.

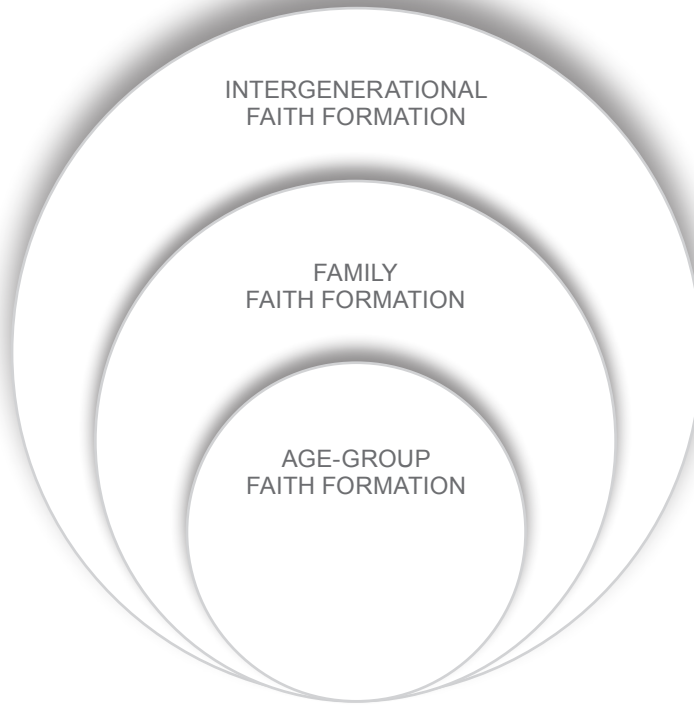
These ten characteristics need to be contextualized within specific Christian traditions, within the specific ethnic-cultural traditions and identities of faith communities, and within the unique socio-cultural needs of faith communities. They serve as a guide for congregations to develop faith formation with children and adolescents (and their parents). They provide a way to direct energy and attention to specific goals or outcomes. They provide a way to develop a seamless process of fostering faith growth from birth through the first nineteen years of life.

## A New Approach to Faith Formation

This new approach to faith formation is more community centered, while at the same time being more person centered.

We know from research and practice that faith is formed in intergenerational faith communities, in family communities, and in life stage and affinity groups. A plan for faith formation with children and adolescents incorporates intergenerational faith forming experiences by engaging children and adolescents in faith community experiences (including worship) with all generations and family faith forming experiences by equipping parents to share faith at home and engaging in family faith practice. Age-group faith formation is then situated within this ecology of faith formation. The blend of intergenerational, family, and age-group settings makes for a comprehensive approach to faith formation.





## Fostering Faith Growth in the Intergenerational Community

We need to become intentional about strengthening the intergenerational character of our congregations and enhancing the faith forming influence of the whole community. Increasingly, Christian congregations are rediscovering the importance of intergenerational faith formation and are making cross-age relationship building a defining characteristic of their community life. Over the last two decades, 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.

Research provides evidence of the enduring importance of intergenerational experiences for the faith formation in the younger generations, as well as for adults and the whole family. Involvement in all-church (intergenerational) worship during high school is more consistently linked with mature faith in both high school and college than any other form of church participation. We are learning the more

teenagers serve and build relationships with younger children, the more likely it is that their faith will stick. We are learning that when adults in the congregation show an interest in young people and build relationships with them, young people feel welcomed and valued, and the influence of adult-youth relationships continues into the college years. Young people who have at least five adults from church make a significant time investment in their lives—personally and spiritually—are more likely to keep attending church (see *Sticky Faith*).

Congregations whose basic ministries are intergenerational have a significant impact on the faith growth and commitment of young people. In these congregations young people are welcomed and expected to participate and lead in church-wide ministries, including worship, education, fellowship, outreach, and decision-making. At Sunday worship adults and youth greet each other, and groups of adults gather for informal conversation with young people before and after the services. Young people feel at home in these safe and nurturing communities where their participation, energy, concerns, questions, and faith life are valued. They turn to adults in the congregation for guidance and care. Young people come to know a living and active God through relationships in the community. They get to know Jesus Christ through the witness of believers and ongoing relationships with persons and communities who know Jesus. These young people are surrounded by multiple, reinforcing spheres of relational Christian influence and immersed in a larger, multigenerational community of quality relationships informed by faith in Jesus Christ (see *The Spirit and Culture of Youth Ministry*).

We can become more intentionally intergenerational by:

- 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 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.
- Infusing intergenerational experiences and relationships into existing ministries and programs, 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.
- 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.

Chapter two presents ideas for intergenerational faith formation.

## Fostering Faith Growth in the Family

We need to make parents and the whole family central to faith formation in the first two decades of life. We all know how important parents and the whole family are in the faith forming process. Research studies over the past twenty years continue to affirm this truth. The 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.

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.

Emerging adults who grew up with seriously religious parents are through socialization more likely: 1) to have internalized their parents' religious worldview, 2) to possess the practical religious know-how needed to live more highly religious lives, and 3) to embody the identity orientations and behavioral tendencies toward continuing to practice what they have been taught religiously. At the heart of this social causal mechanism stands the elementary process of teaching—formal and informal, verbal and nonverbal, oral and behavioral, intentional and unconscious, through both instruction and role modeling. We believe that one of the main ways by which empirically observed strong parental religion produced strong emerging adult religion in offspring is through the teaching involved in socialization (Smith and Snell, 256).

We need to empower and equip parents as faith formers of their children. The research is quite clear: *the single most powerful force in a child's religious formation is the spiritual personality of the parent*. In a study of Catholic parents—that can be easily generalized to all Christian parents—Christian Smith and Justin Bartkus 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 as 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).

We need to create new initiatives for family faith formation at each stage of life (young children, older children, young adolescents, older adolescents) and for equipping parents as faith formers of young people. We need to develop a comprehensive plan for family faith formation including initiatives:

- *At home:* discovering God in everyday life, forming faith practices (praying, reading the Bible, serving others), and celebrating milestones and rituals.
- *In the faith community:* celebrating seasonal events, encountering God in the Bible, connecting families intergenerationally (learning, service, community life), and offering whole family gatherings for learning, worship, service, and relationship-building that provide high-quality family experiences and model the types of faith practices families can do at home.
- *With parents:* developing a strong family life and empowering parents and grandparents as faith formers.

With 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.

Chapter three presents ideas for faith formation with families.

## Fostering Faith Growth in Age Groups

We need faith formation specifically targeted to the ways that Gen Z young people learn. 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. 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 personalized learning, blended learning, flipped learning, microlearning, and immersive learning. All of these new approaches and methods are enhanced by the use of digital technologies, methods, and media.

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. *Microlearning* experiences are short-form (five, ten, or fifteen minutes) learning experiences designed for anywhere, anytime learning that be combined into multi-part learning programs. These learning experiences are one response to short attention spans and mobile learning. We can curate a series of microlearning experiences (on a digital platform) to engage people in all types of faith formation content.

3. *Immersive learning* involves faith forming experiences that are interactive, participatory, experiential, visual, and multisensory. 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 need to expand our immersive learning opportunities (VBS, retreats, mission trips, and more) and focus our gathered settings on immersive faith formation in extended settings (half day, full day, weekend, week-long) offered throughout the year (but not weekly).

Chapter four presents ideas for faith formation with children and adolescents.

## Personalizing Faith Formation

With greater diversity in religious practice and engagement today, we need to tailor faith formation to the religious and spiritual journeys and needs of children, adolescents, and parents. Gone are the days of one-size-fits-all programs and groups. No one program, class, youth group, or resource can address the diverse religious and learning needs of young people today. There are at least four “religious-spiritual identities” in our young people and their parents around which we can fashion faith formation.

1. *People with a vibrant faith and relationship with God who are engaged in the faith community.* For these people religious faith is central to their lives. 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, and parents 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 as a family.

2. *People who participate occasionally in the faith community and whose faith is not central to their lives.* These are people who participate occasionally in church life—Sunday worship, seasonal celebrations, community events, and age-group programs. For parents transmitting a religious faith that often means bringing their children to educational programs at church and participating because of their children. Their spiritual commitment is not central to the way they live their lives, 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.

3. *People who are uninvolved in a church but spiritual.* These are people who are often called “spiritual but not religious.” They have left participation in an established church. Many believe in God, have a relationship with God, and are growing spiritually. Many practice their Christian faith unattached to a faith community or tradition. Parents, though not involved in a church, may send their children to church programs, and the parents may participate at times with their children.

4. *People who are unaffiliated and have left involvement in organized religion.* These are the “Nones.” They no longer believe religion is important in their lives. Many parents are “first generation Nones” and are raising their children in religiously uninvolved and unaffiliated homes creating a “second generation of Nones.” Many parents left organized religion because they stopped believing in the religion’s teachings (usually a top reason) or because their family was never that religious when they were growing up or because of their experience of negative religious teaching about or treatment of gay and lesbian people (*Exodus*, 2016).

Personalizing faith formation provides a way to address the diversity we are facing by tailoring the faith forming environment—the what, when, how, and where people learn—to address the spiritual and religious interests and needs of children, adolescents, and parents. It means providing variety and choice in faith formation programming, activities, and resources around the lives of people. Personalizing

faith formation uses the ten faith maturing characteristics to create *Pathways* to guide people in discerning their faith growth needs, and then creates *Playlists* of content and experiences that address their needs and interests.

Chapter five explores how to design personalized approaches to faith formation.

## Integrating Digitally Enabled Faith Formation Strategies

We need to design faith formation for the digital age, utilizing a variety of digital methods, media, and tools. The digital transformation of society is making possible new ways of learning and faith formation. Learning and faith formation are now mobile—anytime, anyplace, 24x7. People have the digital devices to stay connected and access learning and faith formation on the go. There is an abundance of high-quality digital content for faith formation—audio, video, print, websites, apps, online learning platforms, and more. New digital media and learning methods mean that we can provide multiple ways to learn and grow with activities and experiences that reflect different learning styles and multiple intelligences. Digital media and online activities, especially videos, mean that we can develop content in smaller units (microlearning) that better suit today’s learners who have shorter attention spans. A faith formation website can serve as an online learning center, a portal to activities and resources, and a connecting point for people. Online classrooms, like Edmodo, Schoology, and Google Classroom, provide safe spaces for young people, parents, and adult leaders to engage in faith forming experiences and interaction.

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, camp, or retreats with regular online content and activities.

The digital possibilities are almost endless. We need to design faith formation with children, adolescents, and parents with digital strategies embedded in them. We need to design faith formation that is mobile, takes advantage of the abundance of content so we can personalize faith formation, provides an activity or program in multiple formats so that people can learn in the way they learn best, utilizes a website as a hub for faith formation and online classrooms for programming, and provides micro faith forming activities and experiences that connect together into a seamless faith formation program.

Chapters four and five integrate digital strategies into faith formation with children and adolescents.

## Developing New Leadership Roles and Skills

To bring to life a twenty-first century approach to faith formation, leaders will need to develop new roles and skills. The traditional roles of faith formation leaders have included developing religious content, designing programs and activities, managing programs, and teaching or facilitating programs. These were essential skills in an era when resources were scarce or limited and the majority of programming was being done at church in gathered settings.

These three new leadership roles will enable us to design and implement new approaches to faith formation in the twenty-first century.

1. *Learning architects* who design and/or identify environments that can become settings for faith formation, for example, homes, workplaces, coffee shops, online communities, and more; and design content and experiences to “deliver” to that setting.
2. *Designers of digital platforms* (websites, social media, online classrooms) where people can connect with each other, access content, engage in learning activities, and more—providing 24x7 faith formation.
3. *Curators* of religious content and experiences who find and identify high-quality content in all formats, match it with the needs of people, provide the content and experiences in a variety of environments and on a digital platform, and connect and engage people with the content and experiences.

This new approach will blend the four traditional roles with the three emerging roles described above. The four traditional roles will continue into the future but in a much more limited way. We still will need to design programs and activities when we cannot curate them from other sources. We still will manage programs and activities in gathered settings, but increase the number environments for faith formation. Increasingly our time and energy will be spent designing learning environments, designing and managing digital platforms, and curating content and experiences.

## Conclusion

The flow of the book will guide you and your congregation in designing faith formation with children and adolescents using the features of this new approach. Each chapter provides ideas and practices for one of the features.

Chapter two explores how the intergenerational faith community provides rich resources for faith formation and guides you in identifying how to provide intergenerational faith forming experiences for children and adolescents.



Chapter three explores the central role of families in the faith community and guides you in utilizing five core strategies for family faith forming experiences for children and adolescents.

Chapter four explores how Generation Z is learning in new ways and guides you in reimagining and redesigning age-group faith formation with children and adolescents.

Chapter five integrates the ideas from your work in chapters two through four in designing a faith formation plan that personalizes faith formation with children, adolescents, and their families.

---

### Online Resources

- For planning tools, activities, and resources go to the “New Generation” section of [www.LifelongFaith.com](http://www.LifelongFaith.com).


### Works Cited

- Gen Z: The Culture, Beliefs, and Motivations Shaping the Next Generation*. A Barna Report produced in partnership with Impact 360 Institute. Barna Group and Impact 360 Institute, 2018.
- Jones, Robert P., Daniel Cox, and Rachel Lienesch. *Exodus: Why Americans Are Leaving Religion—and Why They’re Unlikely to Come Back*. PRRI, 2016.
- McCarty, Robert J. and John M. Vitek. *Going, Going, Gone: The Dynamics of Disaffiliation in Young Catholics*. Winona, MN: Saint Mary’s Press, 2017.
- Martinson, Roland, Wes Black, and John Roberto. *The Spirit and Culture of Youth Ministry*. St. Paul, MN: EYM Publications, 2010.
- Powell, Kara, Brad Griffin, and Cheryl Crawford. *Sticky Faith—Youth Worker Edition*. Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2011.
- Smith, Christian with Patricia Snell. *Souls in Transition: The Religious and Spiritual Lives of Emerging Adults*. Oxford University Press, 2009.
- Smith, Christian and Justin Bartkus. *A Report on American Catholic Parenting*. Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame, 2017.



## A PERSONAL REFLECTION

Lisa Brown



Before we can begin to consider how faith formation must be adapted to meet the needs of others, I find it helpful to look at examples of my own formation. Not recollections of childhood experiences, but rather the more recent experiences that contribute to my ongoing formation as an adult Christian. These experiences illustrate both the mistaken assumptions we as Christian formation leaders continue to make and examples of what actually encourages profound formation.

I am, by nature, a book person—a reader and a writer. To learn about anything, my first instinct is to read about it. Google has enhanced and supplemented my book-buying tendencies, but even so, my instinct is to read, read, read. Like most educators, I seek the perfect book, curriculum, class, or educational series that will bring enlightenment. I love learning; I love information; I love ideas. And yet, in every recent instance when I went into a faith-based learning environment expecting to gain intellectual and informational knowledge, it was ultimately the *relational* aspects that provided the greatest impact on my personal faith formation. I didn't find God in the intellectual details, but rather in the relationships formed with others who were seeking the same information, asking the same questions, reading the same books, and sharing the same assignments. Most importantly, I've since forgotten much of what I read, and I misplaced the assignments; but the relationships I formed have only grown in significance. In every new face, in each connection, I experience a visceral reminder that we are all made in God's image, and thus our understanding of God is most enhanced by our relationships with others.

As such, I believe that true ministry, true formation, is always relational, experiential, and communal. Formation can absolutely be enhanced and contextualized with informational learning, but profound formation occurs in relationship with one another.

This model is rooted in scriptural tradition. Jesus called and formed his disciples by inviting them to walk, talk, listen, learn, and experience his ministry first hand,

at his side. There was no formal classroom instruction from a prescribed curriculum—just followers bearing witness to his words and engagement with others.

**The first change** in our approach to faith formation with children and youth must be *one that considers the young person not just as an individual but in the context of their relationships*. We must approach formation primarily as a way of helping young people know and experience God through their relationships within the wider world, the intergenerational church community, within the context of their families, and only then, in the context of their same-age peers. This is an absolute inversion of our current faith formation model that segregates young people by age group, isolates them from the broader context of the church and all its people, and emphasizes informational learning.

If we accept that profound formation is steeped in relationships, the questions we must ask ourselves are: How do we foster relationships in ways that facilitate and emphasize formation as a Christian? What is the glue that binds these relationships and makes them formational for young Christians? To establish the relationship, we need a shared purpose, and we need to share experiences.

Too often what passes as faith formation has been reduced to theme-driven childcare. This model denies and neglects the potential for even very young children to engage in real ministry in every aspect of the life of the church and the parish community. If we wish to form authentic Christians, we must allow them to engage in authentic ministry.

Shawn Schreiner, priest and author of *The Rite Place: Kids Do Church! Adults Do, Too!* explains, “Young children need to be invited in age-appropriate ways to be ministers of the faith. They should never be given the message that they are the ‘future of the church.’ They are the church with us, right here and now, and they have their rightful place in the world and in their faith communities. What better way to keep children in the church, than to invite them to engage in leadership from the earliest of ages! More than keeping them in church, we are modeling that baptism really does equal ministry” (Schreiner, 23).

**The second change** in our approach to faith formation with children and youth, therefore, must be *one that includes young people in every facet and aspect of the church and the community’s ministries*. It is not enough to merely be together and to pursue shared ministry. This work must be contextualized and framed by cultivating a shared identity.

Stories provide the foundation of identity; stories orient and inspire us. It is through story telling, story sharing, and story making that we forge a Christian identity and make meaning of Christian teachings and traditions in our lives. Stories are meaning-making lenses through which we consider our actions and our relationships. Through stories, we are better able to know ourselves, know one another, and know God. Throughout the gospels, Jesus turns again and again to narrative parables to help his followers understand themselves and their role in the kingdom of God.

Today, we can tell the Christian story at four different levels:

- Scriptural stories: the foundational stories of our faith.
- Denominational stories: the interpretational lens through which we view Scripture and through which we share our histories and traditions.
- Congregational stories: the reflections of who we are as a unique community at a particular point in time.
- Personal stories: stories of the transformative power of God in our lives.

**The third change** in our approach to faith formation with children and youth must be *one that harnesses the identity-shaping power of storytelling at all levels*. We must share our stories with young people not as static historical documents, not as rigidly prescribed broadcast lessons, but as invitational opportunities to participate, share, and shape the ongoing story of the people of God. In today's remix culture, young people expect to engage in and adapt narratives, media, and content. In a culture that seeks immersive, life-changing experiences, we must offer young people the chance to wrestle with Scripture, to engage in and narrate real ministry opportunities, and use available platforms to amplify their authentic voices and the stories they tell.

Fortunately, today's digital platforms provide such amplification. And as digital natives, young people are comfortable in engaging with one another and telling their stories in the virtual world.

**The fourth change** in our approach to faith formation with children and youth must be *one that engages young people everywhere they congregate—in both the virtual and physical world*. As formation leaders we must recognize that for young people, the line between the virtual digital self and the physically embodied self is blurred, if indeed the line exists at all. Rather than see this as a threat, we must recognize the unprecedented opportunity the digital space offers us and find ways to facilitate its use on faith formation.

Certainly as formation leaders, we may have an appreciation for the digital space as a repository for curated resources and information. Not only can we offer our young people a limitless library of every form of media, but we can offer it at the very moment they seek it, 24 hours a day 7 days a week! More importantly, however, the digital space is one where young people can form networked faith-based relationships that are not limited by traditional geographic boundaries. Their Christian identity is not one that is entirely connected to a local church or a gathering at a specific time. We need to look to the digital space as a means of extending, enriching, and enhancing relationships, and we need to help young people as they engage one another to do so in ways that are healthy, life-giving, and authentic.

We need to keep in mind that relationships in the digital space are real relationships. Furthermore, rather than seeing virtual engagement as being a poor substitute or a detriment to embodied presence, we need to recognize that these ways of gathering aren't mutually exclusive. The digital space can sustain young people and supplement their in-person connections to others. Rather than seeing one at

the expense of another, we need to recognize the value and increasing importance young people place on being both physically and virtually connected. We might ask, tongue in cheek, “What would Jesus tweet?” but we also must recognize that wherever people gather, virtual or otherwise, God is already present.

As faith formation leaders who seek to inspire a new generation of young people, we have an opportunity to reclaim the best of the old models in the brave new world of the digital space. My conviction that changes to Christian formation practices are necessary is, once again, an outgrowth of my own formational experiences. In the digital space, I’ve cultivated faith-centered relationships that despite transcending geographic boundaries are a daily source of strength and inspiration. Rather than detracting from engagement with my local congregation, my connections to other Christian formation leaders across the country enhance and inspire me in my local congregational ministry and sustain me until we can celebrate together. We walk the walk together and engage in the work of the church—physically and digitally—sharing stories of the ways in which God has transformed our lives. My hope is that I may model and encourage this in the young people that I serve, and help them grow into the fullness of their Christian faith.

---

**Works Cited**

Schreiner, Shawn M., and Dennis E. Northway. *The Rite Place: Kids Do Church! Adults Do, Too!* New York: Morehouse Publishing, 2014.





## CHAPTER TWO

### Intergenerational Faith Forming Experiences

◆ ◆ ◆ ◆ “Throughout Scripture there is a pervasive sense that all generations were typically present when faith communities gathered for worship, for celebration, for feasting, for praise, for encouragement, for reading of Scripture, in times of danger, and for support and service. . . . To experience authentic Christian community and reap the unique blessings of intergenerationality, the generations must be together regularly and often—infants to octogenarians” (Allen and Ross, 84).

We need to become intentional about strengthening the intergenerational character of our congregations and enhancing the faith forming influence of the whole community. Intergenerational learning provides a way to educate the whole community, bring 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.

Research provides evidence of the enduring importance of intergenerational experiences for the faith formation of younger generations, as well as adults and the whole family. Involvement in all-church (intergenerational) worship during high school is more consistently linked with mature faith in both high school and college than any other form of church participation. We are learning the more teenagers serve and

build relationships with younger children, the more likely it is that their faith will stick. We are learning that when adults in the congregation show an interest in young people and build relationships with them, young people feel welcomed and valued, and the influence of adult-youth relationships continues into the college years. Young people who have at least one adult from church make a significant time investment in their lives—personally and spiritually—are more likely to keep attending church (see *Sticky Faith*).

Congregations whose basic ministries are intergenerational have a significant impact on the faith growth and commitment of young people. In these congregations young people are welcomed and expected to participate and lead in church-wide ministries, including worship, education, fellowship, outreach, and decision-making. At Sunday worship, adults and youth greet each other, and groups of adults gather for informal conversation with young people before and after the services. Young people feel at home in these safe and nurturing communities where their participation, energy, concerns, questions, and faith life are valued. They turn to adults in the congregation for guidance and care. Young people come to know a living and active God through relationships in the community. They get to know Jesus Christ through the witness of believers and ongoing relationships with persons and communities who know Jesus. These young people are surrounded by multiple, reinforcing spheres of relational Christian influence and immersed in a larger, multigenerational community of quality relationships informed by faith in Jesus Christ (see *Spirit and Culture of Youth Ministry*).

Joyce Mercer suggests that the best curriculum for forming children, youth, and anyone else in Christian faith is *guided participation in a community of practice* where people are vibrantly, passionately risking themselves together in lives of faith in a world crying out for the love of Christ.

Guided participation in a community of practice puts a premium on both participation and practice. Watch children in play imitating the adults around them to see how even the youngest among us hunger to participate in the way of life they see enacted before them. That's a good instinct to follow, because people—children or otherwise!—don't become Christian by learning *about* what Christians do, say, or think (although at some point, particularly in adolescence and beyond, doing so can be an important part of deepening one's faith identity). We become Christian, taking on the identity of one who is a disciple of Jesus, by acting the way Christians act, and by talking the way Christians talk. Over time through practice, even our hearts and minds are formed in this way of life (Mercer, Patheos.com, August 13, 2013).

Mercer makes the point that guided participation in practice isn't just doing. It includes fully and actively practicing our faith in our everyday lives *and* making theological meaning out of the stuff of everyday life.



Bringing generations together within the church provides benefits and blessings for all ages, and in a special way for young people and their parents.

Intergenerational faith formation:

- Forms and deepens Christian identity and commitment as people develop relationships and actively participate in faith communities that teach, model, and live the Christian tradition and way of life.
- Strengthens relationships, connections, and community across generations; enhances their sense of belonging in the faith community; and provides valuable adult role models for children and adolescents.
- Provides a curriculum for the whole community—Sunday worship, the lectionary and church year seasons, learning, service, ritual and sacraments, prayer, and more—that is a shared experience in faith and belonging for everyone.
- Supports families by surrounding them with a community of faith and engaging the whole family in a variety of faith forming experiences together (caring relationships, celebrating, learning, praying, serving) and providing parents with opportunities to learn from Christians who are practicing their faith and raising faithful children.
- Strengthens the ability (confidence and competence) of parents and grandparents to promote religious socialization at home; be role models of faithful practice; engage in faith practices at home; and develop warm, affirming, and supportive relationships between parents (and grandparents) and their young people.

## Three Strategies for Enhancing Intergenerational Faith Formation

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

- *Utilize* 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 primary “content” in faith formation by preparing people with the knowledge and practices for participating in the event, by engaging people in the event, and by reflecting upon the meaning of the event and how to live and practice the experience in daily life.
- *Infuse* 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.

- *Connect* 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.

Following are ideas and strategies to consider in creating a plan to strengthen intergenerational faith formation with all ages, with a special focus on children, adolescents, and their family.

## 1. Utilize 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. We can fashion faith formation with children, adolescents, and the whole family around these events. Consider the following.

- The feasts and seasons of the church year provide a natural rhythm and calendar for fashioning faith formation: 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 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 an 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, in family groupings, or in age groups—with the knowledge and practices for participating in the event, experience, or activity.
2. *Experience/participate* in the intergenerational event, program, or activity.
3. *Reflect* upon the meaning of the event and discover how to live/practice that learning in daily life.



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

- 1) People prepare for Sunday worship and rehearse the Scripture readings; 2) experience Sunday worship with the faith community; and 3) are equipped to live the Sunday worship experience at home and in their daily lives.
- 1) People learn about a particular justice issue and the biblical and church teachings on the justice issue; 2) experience action to serve those in need, work for justice, and care for creation—locally and globally; and 3) reflect on that action experience and integrate its meaning into their lives as Christians.
- 1) People learn about the Bible and how to read it, interpret it, and apply it to their lives; 2) experience the Bible at Sunday worship and in the life of the community; and 3) develop their own practice of Bible study and reading.
- 1) People learn about Jesus by studying the gospels; 2) experience the life, ministry, and death and resurrection of Jesus through the seasons of the church year; and 3) reflect upon their understanding of Jesus and how to follow him.
- 1) People learn about prayer and spirituality and how to develop their spiritual lives through prayer and spiritual disciplines; 2) experience prayer experiences in the life of the faith community; and 3) 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 into the programs and activities your congregation is already offering. 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 for adolescents through older adults.
- Incorporate intergenerational dialogues, interviews, and presentations into programming, which provide opportunities for children and youth to experience the wisdom, faith, and interests of (older) adults. 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, such as parent mentors for baptism parents, confirmation mentors, learning-to-pray spiritual direction mentors, and justice and service mentors.
- 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 the birth and baptism of a child, young people on a mission trip or retreat weekend, or a milestone event such as first communion or graduation.
- 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 benefits to children, adolescents, families, and 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 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. Select local and global projects already developed by a justice or service organization. Then develop a theme, such as poverty, care for creation, or 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 and school kits for students (September), Thanksgiving and feeding the hungry (November), Lent and serving the poor (February or March), and Earth Day and caring for creation (April).

**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 they might make blankets for a homeless shelter or bake cookies or make sandwiches for a soup kitchen. Many organizations provide the organizational logistics a church needs to do a service project; for example, Feed My Starving Children (<https://www.fmsc.org/en>) provides the resources for people to pack food that will be shipped to people in need.

### Intergenerational Learning Models

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; children and youth experience meaningful support from nonparental adults. Intergenerational learning creates an environment in which participants feel safe to learn, ask questions, and grow in faith on a deeper level.

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).

**Generations of Faith model.** The Generations of Faith intergenerational model is based on the work of James White in his book *Intergenerational Religious Education*. White identified four patterns of relationships that shape the 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 multi-generational experience on a theme that all generations can share together.
3. In-depth learning experience: through structured learning activities with each generation—families with children, adolescents, and other adults—participants explore 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 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 create intergenerational vacation Bible school, camp, or summer program or add intergenerational learning experiences into them.
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, biweekly, 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 multiyear 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, such as discipleship, while other years have a monthly theme drawn directly from the lectionary readings. In addition to monthly programs, St. Elizabeth has sponsored a twenty–four hour intergenerational experience of prayer, learning, service, and worship called “24 Hours with the Lord” and has sponsored an intergenerational mission trip.

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, lifelong, event-centered faith formation. All ages gather once a month for a learning session around a yearly theme. One year they focused on Mary, the mother of Jesus, and learned through her about the life of Jesus. Gatherings are on Saturday and begin with a potluck supper immediately following the 4:00 p.m. Mass.

St. Anthony on the Lake parish in Pewaukee, Wisconsin, has been offering family-intergenerational faith formation for more than twenty-five years. They started with twenty families and have grown to more than three hundred and fifty 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 10:00 a.m. with fellowship and concludes at noon; the Monday program begins with a light supper at 5:30 p.m. and ends at 7:30 p.m.

**Logos model.** Another model of intergenerational (and family) learning has been created by *GenOn Ministries* ([www.genonministries.org](http://www.genonministries.org)) and includes weekly intergenerational experiences for children and/or youth that create 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 these elements.

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 to practice 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.

**Messy Church model.** This model of family/intergeneration learning (<http://www.messychurch.org.uk>, <http://messychurchaustralia.com.au>) started in 2004 in the United Kingdom 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 expressed through an invitation to share a delicious home-cooked, sit-down meal with others.

The key values that 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.

**Intergenerational vacation Bible school model.** An emerging model is family/intergenerational vacation Bible school. Congregations have begun to rethink 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 (three hours) could look like this: registration, light meal, opening/music, Bible story, outdoor activity/inside craft, 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 Ministry)* from Faith Inkubators.

## Application

Use the framework on the worksheet “Developing a Faith Formation Plan” (see page 41) to list the ways that your congregation nurtures the faith of children, adolescents, and the family/parents through intergenerational experiences in the faith community. Take each of the ten characteristics of faith maturing and identify the intergenerational relationship building, worship, rituals/sacraments, learning, service, prayer, and the other ministries and activities of your congregation.

Once your profile is complete, analyze the ways that your congregation nurtures the faith of children, adolescents, and the family/parents through intergenerational experiences.

- What are the strengths of your congregation?
- What are the areas that need improvement or attention in your congregation?
- What are the areas where new initiatives need to be created?

Review the “Intergenerational Strategies Toolkit” from the *Generations Together* book with strategies and ideas, and a variety of case studies of churches and intergenerational resources and activities by going to the “New Generation” section of [www.LifelongFaith.com](http://www.LifelongFaith.com).

Develop ideas for improving current activities and for creating new initiatives for strengthening the intergenerational faith forming power of your congregation. Ideas can apply to multiple age groups.

- How can you utilize 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 primary “content” in faith formation?
- How can you infuse intergenerational experiences and relationships into existing programs and activities?
- How can you connect 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?

---

### Online Resources

- For planning tools, activities, and resources go to the “New Generation” section of [www.LifelongFaith.com](http://www.LifelongFaith.com).
- For a list of curated resources for faith formation go to: [www.LifelongFaith.com](http://www.LifelongFaith.com).

### Intergenerational Resources

Allen, Holly Catterton and Christine Lawton Ross. *Intergenerational Christian Formation: Bringing the Whole Church Together in Ministry, Community, and Worship*. Downers Grove, IL: Intervarsity Press, 2012.

- Amidei, Kathie, Jim Merhaut, and John Roberto. *Generations Together: Caring, Praying Learning, Celebrating, and Serving Together*. Naugatuck, CT: LifelongFaith Associates, 2014.
- GenOn Ministries: <https://www.genonministries.org>.
- Martineau, Mariette, Leif Kehrwald, and Joan Weber. *Intergenerational Faith Formation*. New London, CT: Twenty-Third Publications, 2008.
- Melheim, Rich. *Let's Kill Sunday School and Birth Cross+Gen Ministries*. Stillwater, MN: Faith Inkubators, 2014.
- Melheim, Rich. *Let's Kill Sunday School and Birth Cross+Gen Ministries—Volume 2*. Stillwater, MN: Faith Inkubators, 2016.
- Mercer, Joyce Ann. “Cultivating a Community Practice.” Patheos.com, August 13, 2013. ([www.patheos.com/Topics/Passing-on-the-Faith/Community-Practice-Joyce-Ann-Mercer-08-14-2013.html](http://www.patheos.com/Topics/Passing-on-the-Faith/Community-Practice-Joyce-Ann-Mercer-08-14-2013.html).)
- Messy Church: <https://www.messychurch.org.uk>.
- Roberto, John. *Becoming a Church of Lifelong Learners*. New London, CT: Twenty-Third Publications, 2006.
- White, James. *Intergenerational Religious Education*. Birmingham, AL: Religious Education Press, 1988.

## Developing a Faith Formation Plan: Intergenerational

Use the framework on page 41 to list the ways that your congregation nurtures the faith of children, adolescents, and the family/parents through intergenerational experiences in the faith community. For each of the ten characteristics of faith maturing, identify the intergenerational relationship building, worship, rituals/sacraments, learning, service, prayer, and the other ministries and activities of your congregation. Many activities will appear in multiple age groups.

Once your profile is complete, analyze the ways that your congregation nurtures the faith of all ages through intergenerational experiences.

- What are the strengths of your congregation?
- What are the areas that need improvement or attention in your congregation?
- What are the areas where new initiatives need to be created?

Then continue with the planning steps in the “Application” section of the chapter on page 39.

Developing a Faith Formation Plan

Faith Maturing Characteristic	Young Children	Older Children	Young Adolescents	Older Adolescents	Family & Parents
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 (Trinity, Jesus, creed, morality, and ethics) and integrating its meaning into one's 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 through 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.					



## A PERSONAL REFLECTION

Lee Yates

I owe an apology to the grandmothers whose Sunday dinners I have interrupted, but I'm getting ahead of myself. It all started in seminary . . .

I began my ministry as a well-intentioned, over-caffeinated group builder. In just a few years, a handful of youth in a basement multiplied into a force to be reckoned with at church camp. I encouraged, inspired, coaxed, nagged, and cajoled. I was in the ear of youth, parents, and friends. I challenged families to prioritize their time, making room for church along with sports, arts, academics, and other activities. I challenged youth to challenge their parents and take control of their own priorities. I reminded youth that family time could be had anytime, but youth group was only ninety minutes a week, and they needed to be committed to each other in order to be a true community.

Twenty years later, I'm looking at research that tells me a youth who sits in worship with family or mentors and talks with that family about faith outside of church (like after worship at a family meal) is more likely to grow into a mature and committed Christian than those who only go to youth group. A giant lump formed in my throat. I had a hard time swallowing the data . . . and my lunch. I spent a few days thinking through what I was reading, and it matched what I saw on social media and in church newsletters. The youth who were part of active families in the church, even those who never came to youth group, were more active in the church (even if it was a different congregation) than those who just came to youth activities.

So, my apologies to all the grandmothers who were told, "Sorry Grandma, I have youth group tonight." My apologies to all the families that I told, "The youth need time with their friends in a spiritual context." For all the opportunities for youth to learn from the stories of grandparents and all the opportunities for the heirloom of faith to be passed down that were interrupted by another round of "dizzy-bat" relay races, I am so sorry!

If I could go back in time, I would check my ego (and my job title) at the door and deputize all the grandparents in the congregation. I would have assured them

that “youth minister” was the job of every adult in the church and challenged them to be my partners in an undertaking that was way beyond my ability, no matter how caffeinated I might have been.

If I could go back in time, I would ask the church to reevaluate its goals for youth ministry (along with every other age-group specific ministry) and challenge some of the assumptions we all made about the way we package, promote, and share faith.

If I could go back in time, I would be less concerned about the rituals and structure of my programming and more concerned about the ways families created rituals of faith in their shared life.

My apologies to the grandparents whose family meals I interrupted. Now, I need to ask for your help. Our youth need your stories. They need to hear from someone who is older than eighteen years old. They need to hear about how you wrestled with questions of faith and life in a different time, so they can glean from it how they can face the challenges of today. Our youth and children have yet to live in a time without war. Our youth and children need to hear what you saw in the civil rights movement as they seek justice today. Our youth need to know that change has always been scary, and that you survived it, having left your own impact on the world. This will assure them they can do the same. Our children and youth have so much time online and at school with peers. They need you to teach them about listening and relationships. They need you to share with them the faith that has shaped you, and through that sharing, God will shape them too.

My apologies to the congregations who had lots of youth who just didn’t “stick” after I left. We were all doing our best, but we now know enough to do better in the future. We have to pay attention to Paul’s words to Timothy in Scripture. These include the importance of listening to our youth today, but also the reminder that Timothy’s faith first lived in his mother and grandmother. Faith is not a commodity that we can package up and serve with VBS action figures or compressed into a magic confirmation curriculum. Faith cannot be outsourced to specialists, passing congregants from one age group to the next. Faith cannot be polished till all the rough edges are gone, all the loud children silenced, all the distracted youth focused, and a peaceful adult worship experience established for the glory of God. We have to be together—all of us—all ages as one body. Living in community with authentic relationships is how faith is formed.

My apologies to the families that I failed to equip. I didn’t even know that you needed something more. Until I became a parent, I didn’t fully understand your world. I had no idea how much you juggled and how much you needed to be spiritually fed. I had no idea how helpless so many of you felt in creating a faith experience at home. I wish I had known how powerful your influence really was and realized what powerful work we could have done together. I wish I had talked you into mentoring other youth who had no family investment in their faith. I wish I had found more ways to connect you to the church’s work with your children. Instead, I left you trying to explain to grandma why you just dropped your kids off with the designated expert at church. Please tell her, again, how sorry I am.







## CHAPTER THREE

### Family Faith Forming Experiences

◆ ◆ ◆ ◆ 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 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.

- Family faith 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 two thousand Protestant and nondenominational churchgoers—all of whom attend services at least once a month and have adult children ages eighteen to thirty—what parenting practices pay off over the long haul when it comes to spiritual health. They asked parents to think about what proved to be significant in developing the faith and spiritual life of their children when they were growing up. The study discovered nine things parents can do while their children are growing up to influence their long-term spiritual growth (not ranked in order).

1. Participate in mission trips as a family.
2. Participate in service projects with their kids.
3. Share Christ with unbelievers.
4. Personally read the Bible several times a week or more.
5. Encourage their teen to serve in the church.
6. Ask for forgiveness when they mess up.
7. Encourage their children's own unique talents and interests.
8. Attend churches that emphasize what the Bible says.
9. Teach their children to tithe.

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.

- 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.
- See the family as the essential and foundational environment for faith nurture, faith practice, and the healthy development of young people.
- Inform parents of their essential role and empower them to fulfill their role as faith formers of children and adolescents.
- 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.
- Build faith formation around the lives of today's families and parents, rather than having the congregation prescribe the programs and activities that families will participate in.
- 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.

- 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.
- Build upon the assets, strengths, and capacities present in parents and families, rather than focusing on their deficits and solving problems.
- Partner with parents in working toward shared goals and aspirations for their young people by supporting, equipping, and resourcing them.

## Five Strategies for Developing Family and Parent Faith Formation

Family faith forming experiences are an essential element of developing a faith formation plan for children and adolescents. The first four faith forming strategies focus on nurturing family faith; the fifth strategy focuses on parents.

Strategy 1. Nurturing Family Faith Practices

Strategy 2. Celebrating Milestones

Strategy 3. Celebrating the Seasons of the Year

Strategy 4. Reading the Bible through the Year

Strategy 5. Equipping Parents and Grandparents as Faith Formers

All of these strategies—and the variety of programs, activities, and resources to implement them—need to be delivered in developmentally appropriate ways and accommodated to the needs and interests of families with young children (0–5), older children (6–10), young adolescents (11–14), and older adolescents (15–19) and to the way young people think and assimilate information and values at each life stage.

Each of these strategies needs to be inclusive of and responsive to the variety of *family forms* that children and adolescents experience and the *ethnic-cultural* traditions of families. The strategies also need to be designed and targeted to the distinct *spiritual-religious identities* of parents and families today: the *Engaged* who demonstrate a vibrant faith with active engagement in church life, the *Occasionals* who demonstrate a variable faith practice with occasional engagement in church life, the *Spirituals* who are spiritually committed but not engaged in church life, and the *Unaffiliated* who are not affiliated with a church and not interested in religion and spirituality.

### Strategy 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. As you will see, these faith practices are incorporated in the ten characteristics of faith maturing.

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 are woven seamlessly into the fabric of daily life. They can become “habits of faith.” Think about your day. 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 with friends, 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.

Following 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 triggers to create a habit. Only one of them is needed to become a cue. But the more of them people test out, the faster the habit takes hold.

### The Reward

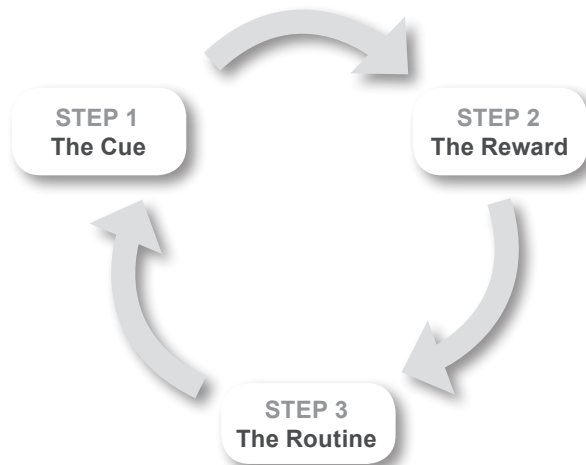
- What reward will you give yourself at the end of the behavior?
- Do you actually enjoy this reward? After a few days ask yourself: Do I crave this reward when I am exposed to the cue? After two weeks ask: Do I crave the intrinsic reward of the habit (how it makes you feel) more than the extrinsic reward (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. For example: design activities for a particular practice (like reading the Bible) that only take five or ten minutes; suggest a variety of ways to integrate the activity into daily life; have people create a plan; and invite them 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.

We can develop family faith practices in a variety of ways. Here are four ideas to start your thinking.

1. Incorporate formation in faith practices for the family and/or parents into existing programming, such as sacramental and milestones celebrations, age-group programming (develop several family programs as part of age-group sessions), Sunday worship (after-worship programming), vacation Bible school, service projects and mission trips, retreats, and more.
2. Make a faith practice the focus of each month or the seasons of the year through 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, and service. Combine the at-church experience with activities for families to do at home.
3. Develop a family faith formation website that features the “practice of the month” with engaging activities—print, audio, video, apps, and more—tailored to families with young children, older children, young adolescents, older adolescents, and the whole family. Provide “how to” information and videos for parents. The website can serve as a resource center with content and activities and as a portal to curated family activities on other websites.
4. Create family immersion experiences on faith practices. Design extended-time programs (half day, full day) that teach faith practices through immersion experiences—at church or 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. Combine the at-church experience with activities for families to do at home.

## Envisioning

*How can your congregation equip, support, and provide resources for families to live these Christian faith practices at home and in their daily lives, and form “habits of faith”?*

Use the twelve practices below to identify the ways your congregation currently nurtures family faith practices—at home, at church, online, and so forth—with families of young children, older children, young adolescents, and older adolescents. Think about the programming, activities, and resources. Some activities will apply to multiple age groups. For each practice identify the target age group(s).

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.

After you have identified current ways your congregation nurtures family faith practices, develop ideas for new ways that your congregation can nurture these twelve family faith practices at church, at home, and online.

## Strategy 2. Celebrating Milestones

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

A milestone is 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 are suggested milestones from birth to nineteen years old (see Milestones Ministry at <https://milestonesministry.org>).

- 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

Milestones 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.

The following example of the Bible milestone for children illustrates the elements. (For complete milestones designs go to [MilestonesMinistry.org](http://MilestonesMinistry.org).)



1. *Naming*: It is important to place the Holy Scriptures in the hands of children and parents/guardians as a faith formation tool in the congregation and in the home.
2. *Equipping*: Children and parents are invited to gather together around God's Word as they use, read, study, and play in the Bible. There is encouragement to use Bibles together as families.
3. *Blessing*: The blessing for those participating in this milestone provides a reinforcement and special time to encourage using the Bible together as a family.
4. *Gifting*: Children receive an age-appropriate Bible.
5. *Reinforcing*: Follow up after the Bible milestone by connecting one more time to explore how using Bibles at home can have a positive impact on the faith and daily life of the home.

The preparation experience for the Bible milestone includes a family program focusing on the importance of reading the Bible and ways to read to the Bible—alone and as a family. The milestone celebration includes a blessing of Bibles at Sunday worship and a blessing and devotion for the family to use at home. Follow-up activities, which can be provided online, provide a way to sustain reading the Bible as a personal and family practice.

### **Envisioning**

*How can your congregation prepare families for milestones and celebrate them with the whole community? How can the congregation equip, support, and provide resources for families to celebrate milestones at home?*

Here is a simple guide for developing a congregational plan for milestones faith formation.

1. Identify and describe the milestones at each stage of life.
2. Develop an annual calendar that designates specific Sundays or months of the year for each milestone celebration. Preparation programs for a milestone also need to be included in this annual calendar.
3. Use the five elements of milestones faith formation to develop the plan for each individual milestone: naming, equipping, blessing, gifting, and reinforcing.
4. Develop activities to be used *at church* and *at home*.
5. Develop the parent formation/involvement activities for the milestone.
6. Schedule a family gathering (parents, children, grandparents) for the milestone as a time to connect, learn, and pray together, as well as learn how to share, practice, and live faith at home. Sometimes this gathering is planned several weeks before the milestone celebration and at other times it happens on the same day as the milestone celebration.

Here is an example of a yearlong plan for milestones.

August: Blessing of the backpacks

September: Beginning faith formation at church

October: Bible—Placing Scripture in hands and homes

November: Kids and money—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

### Strategy 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).

Church year feasts and seasons provide 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 is an abundance of print, audio, and digital content for most feasts and seasons of the church year.

Following is an example of the Lent season from Ash Wednesday through Easter Sunday. Imagine providing a forty-day Lenten experience for the home that connects the theology and spirituality of Lent and Lent events at church with home life through a variety of activities for experiencing and practicing Lent at home—delivered online through the congregation’s faith formation website. Lent activities and resources for the home can include daily Lenten prayer, serving ideas, reflections on the Sunday readings, daily Bible readings, Lent devotions, Lent study resources and videos, Lent children’s activities, and much more.

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 4. An event to celebrate Martin Luther King Jr. Day or Earth Day can involve a family activity but also can engage in a community-wide action project and a prayer service at church or in a neighboring congregation. Following is an example for Earth Day.

*Earth Day in the community:* community-wide cleanup, planting a community garden, planting trees in the community, story time at the public library focused on environmental awareness books.

*Earth Day at church:* all-ages workshop on caring for creation, an ecumenical prayer service on 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 creation during April, children's activities to explore and experience caring for creation, storybooks and videos on caring for creation, home energy and recycling audit.

## Envisioning

*How can your 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?*

*How can your congregation partner with other churches and community organizations in sponsoring programs and activities for calendar year events? How can the congregation equip, support, and provide resources for families to celebrate calendar year events at home?*

One way to develop a plan for celebrating the seasons of the year is to develop a monthly seasonal event. 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. Incorporate Scripture, prayer, learning, service/action, ritual, and family conversation into each seasonal event. Highlight a theme for each event. Following is an example of a year.

January: Martin Luther King Jr. (justice, service, nonviolence)

February: Valentine's Day (love, commitment)

March: Lent (praying, fasting, almsgiving, repentance)

April: Easter (resurrection, new life) or Earth Day (care for creation)

May: Mother's Day (honoring parents, love, care, compassion)

June: Father's Day (honoring parents, love, care, compassion)

July: Independence Day (freedom, justice)

August: Back to school (new beginnings)

September: Fall harvest (gratitude, generosity, care for the earth)

October: St. Francis (simplicity, care for creation, care for animals)

November: Thanksgiving (gratitude, service, hospitality)

December: Advent and Christmas (renewal, incarnation, Messiah)

Develop seasonal family festivals and gatherings to support the seasonal plan using the four seasons—fall, winter, spring, and summer—or the church year seasons—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.

## Strategy 4. Reading the Bible through the Year

*Encountering God in the Bible through the year in Sunday worship and developing the practices of reading and studying the Bible with children, adolescents, and the whole family.*

One way to help families read the Bible is connecting them to Sunday worship and the lectionary with faith formation programming that explores the Sunday readings in family or intergenerational settings at church (after worship) and provides at-home resources to explore the readings from Sunday. Churches who do not use a lectionary-based approach can adopt a multiweek sermon series that focuses on a theme connected with biblical teachings. Programing can include whole-family or intergenerational activities, as well as age-appropriate learning activities.

A second way to connect Scripture to family life is by extending and deepening the Sunday worship experience at home through activities, practices, and resources from a variety of age-appropriate and whole-family digital content on the church's website. Determine a focusing theme or topic that emerges from the Sunday 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 designed around the theme from Sunday worship can include the following elements, published on the church's website for all to use.

- Family conversation questions on the theme of the Sunday readings.
- Activities for the church year feast or season (when appropriate).
- Weekly table ritual.
- 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.

## Envisioning

*How can your congregation connect the Sunday worship experience and the Scripture readings to family life throughout the week? How can the congregation equip, support, and provide resources for families to explore and live the Sunday Scripture readings throughout the week?*

## Strategy 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 parents (and grandparents) are the most important social and religious influence on their children, adolescents, and emerging adults. The faith of parents and grandparents, their role modeling, their teaching, and their warm and affirming parenting style are key factors in religious transmission and developing highly religious children, youth, and young adults. We know from research studies that the religious tradition of parents, their religious involvement, and whether the parents were of the same religious faith at marriage have a huge impact on how a faith tradition is transmitted to the next generation. Parental behaviors influence religious development through role modeling—what parents do in setting examples for religious practice and belief, such as attending church regularly, participating in church activities, and encouraging faith development at home through prayers, Scripture reading, and religious stories. It is important that parents show consistency between belief and practice: walking the walk and not just talking the talk.

### A Parent Plan

Every congregation needs an intentional plan that addresses parenting and grandparenting for faith growth at each stage in the first two decades of life: young children, older children, young adolescents, and older adolescents. A plan needs to incorporate three elements: promoting the spiritual and religious growth of parents, developing their faith forming skills, and equipping them with the knowledge and skills for parenting children and adolescents today.

We are proposing that every congregation develop a parent plan with a progression of workshops, webinars, courses, activities, support groups, and resources from infancy through the end of the adolescent years.

Each new stage would be introduced through a variety of educational opportunities and then sustained through support groups, continuing education, and online resources and activities.

- Birth: parenting young children.
- Start of school: parenting older children.
- Middle school: parenting young adolescents.
- High school: parenting older adolescents.
- Graduation from high school: parenting emerging adults.

For many churches, the life stages correspond to sacramental and milestone celebrations: baptism, first communion, and confirmation. These celebrations provide an excellent opportunity to infuse parent formation.

**Adult spiritual and religious growth.** One way to develop the content of parent faith formation is to create and curate programming and resources around the ten characteristics of maturing faith. Chapter five includes a religious growth discernment tool for parents and a process for developing faith forming experiences around the ten 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 (Trinity, Jesus, creed, morality and ethics) and integrating its meaning into one's 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.

Use gathered opportunities to help parents diagnose their spiritual and religious growth needs using the ten faith maturity characteristics and then provide a variety of ways for them to address their growth needs from gathered programs to online content and experiences. Provide theological and biblical formation in a variety of learning formats to make it easy for parents and grandparents to access the opportunities: independent (online), mentored, at home, in small groups, in large groups, or church-wide. Utilize online faith formation for parents using courses and resources from Christian colleges, seminaries, and Christian educational organizations.

Parent formation offerings need to be responsive to the needs and interests of parents in each of the four spiritual-religious types—Engaged, Occasional, Spiritual, Unaffiliated. There is no one-size-fits-all model of parent faith formation that will work today. (See chapter five for more guidance.)

**Faith forming skills and practices.** Christian Smith and Justin Bartkus identify three primary roles parents play in transmitting religion. These three roles can provide a framework for developing the faith forming roles and practices of parents and grandparents. At each stage of life, congregations can teach parents how to be effective sponsors, gatekeepers, and interpreters of the faith.

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 mish-mash 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).

Based on research findings and the wisdom of the Christian tradition, we can identify important faith forming skills and practices that can be incorporated into a parenting plan in developmentally appropriate ways. This content includes, but is not limited to:

- Having family conversations about religious topics.
- Reading and discussing the Bible with children and teens.
- Praying as a family and encouraging children and teens to pray.
- Participating in Sunday worship as a family.
- Celebrating family rituals and milestones.
- Celebrating holidays and seasons as a family.
- Engaging in actions of service, justice, and care for creation as a family and encouraging children and teens to serve.
- Talking about faith and the religious tradition, and providing moral instruction and discussing moral issues with children and teens.

Chapter five includes a family practices discernment tool that can be used with parents to help determine the key practices to include in parent formation.

**Knowledge and skills for parenting.** Research studies have identified some of the most important knowledge and skills for effective parenting. The Search Institute’s research into developmental relationships provides an essential source for the key content of parent education (go to <https://www.search-institute.org/developmental-relationships/developmental-relationships-framework>).

This knowledge and skills for parenting 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 young people by encouraging their efforts and achievements and guiding them to learn and grow.
- Treating young people with respect, hearing their voices, 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.

### Envisioning

Following are ideas for developing programming around the three content areas of parent and grandparent formation.

**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. It 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>).

**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.

**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.

**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.

**Life cycle or affinity groups for parents.** Create gathered settings (church, home, community) and 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).

**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.

**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. For example, if 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 and 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.

**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.

**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, 24x7x365. Digital media tools and resources—social media (Facebook, Twitter, Instagram), 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 connect parents to each other.

**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 influenced 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).

## Application

Review the ideas presented in this chapter and the ways your congregation already engages parents and families, and develop an outline of a congregational plan for family and parent faith formation in the first two decades of life. Consider the following elements in your outline.

- How will your congregation provide developmentally appropriate experiences, activities, and resources to nurture family faith practices at each stage: young children, older children, young adolescents, and older adolescents?
- How will your congregation celebrate milestones—at home and at church—from infancy through end of the second decade?
- How will your congregation engage families in celebrating the church year and calendar seasons of the year?

- How will your congregation engage families in reading the Bible through the year by connecting them to Sunday worship and the cycle of Scripture readings?
- How will your congregation equip parents and grandparents as faith formers of the children and adolescents by promoting their spiritual and religious growth, developing their faith forming skills, and equipping them with the knowledge and skills for parenting children and adolescents today?

Review the “Family Strategies Toolkit” from the *Families at the Center of Faith Formation* book with descriptions and examples of eight strategies, and additional family faith formation resources and activities by going to the “New Generation” section at [www.LifelongFaith.com](http://www.LifelongFaith.com).

---

#### Online Resources

- For planning tools, activities, and resources go to the “New Generation” section of [www.LifelongFaith.com](http://www.LifelongFaith.com).
- For an example of family and parent website with activities and resources go to: [www.FamiliesattheCenter.com](http://www.FamiliesattheCenter.com).
- For a list of curated resources for family faith formation go to: [www.LifelongFaith.com](http://www.LifelongFaith.com).

#### Works Cited

- Duhigg, Charles. *The Power of Habit*. New York: Random House, 2012.
- Joiner, Reggie. *The Orange Leader Handbook*. Colorado Springs: David C. Cooke, 2010.
- Magruder, Jana. *Nothing Less: Engaging Kids in a Lifetime of Faith*. Nashville: Lifelong, 2017.
- Pekel, Kent, Eugene C. Roehlkepartain, Amy K. Syvertsen, and Peter Scales. *Don't Forget the Families: The Missing Piece in America's Effort to Help All Children Succeed*. Minneapolis: Search Institute, 2015. Available at: <http://www.search-institute.org/research/developmental-relationships>.
- Roberto, John, editor. *Families at the Center of Faith Formation*. Naugatuck, CT: LifelongFaith, 2016.
- Smith, Christian and Justin Bartkus. *A Report on American Catholic Parenting*. Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame, 2017.


#### Selected Resources

- Barrie, Wendy Claire. *Faith at Home: A Handbook for Cautiously Christian Practices*. New York: Morehouse Publishing, 2016.
- Milestones Ministry. Milestone models at <https://milestonesministry.org>.
- Muldoon, Tim and Sue. *Six Sacred Rules for Families: A Spirituality for the Home*. Notre Dame: Ave Maria Press, 2013.
- O'Boyle, Donna Marie Cooper. *Feeding Your Family's Soul: Dinner Table Spirituality*. Brewster, MA: Paraclete Press, 2016.
- Scandrette, Mark and Lisa. *Belonging and Becoming: Creating a Thriving Family Culture*. Downers Grove, IL: IVP Books, 2016.
- Smith, Traci. *Seamless Faith: Simple Practices for Daily Family*. St. Louis, MO: Chalice Press, 2015.



## A PERSONAL REFLECTION

Tanya Eustace Campen



I began my ministry as a college intern at a mid-size United Methodist Church. My job included leading the weekly children's worship program. Each week I would greet children as they lined up to leave the sanctuary. I led them single file down a long hallway to the children's chapel where we would sing songs, hear a story, and say prayers together. I enjoyed my time with the children and enjoyed making worship fun and relevant for these three to eight year olds.

Yet over my four-year term as their worship leader, I quickly began to notice that while I knew the children, I did not know their parents, nor did the children or I really know or have an opportunity to meet other people in the congregation. At the end of children's worship, a parent or a sibling would arrive at the door of the chapel, greet their child, and then leave the church building onto the next activity of that day. I also began to realize that while these children participated in the first ten to fifteen minutes of "big church" as they often called it, these children were not learning the important traditions and rituals of the United Methodist faith—the children went silent when I led the Lord's Prayer; they stared blankly when I played the Doxology, and they were hesitant to take the communion elements that were brought to the children's chapel once a month. As a young ministry leader, I quickly realized something essential was missing in this weekly children's worship program.

Four years later, as a first-year seminary student, I accepted a position at a small urban church as their children's worship director. My job, as described by the senior pastor, was to provide programming for the children who came to church each week without parents or an identified adult in charge of their care. This church had an incredible ministry of outreach to their community. They realized that many parents in their community worked on Sunday morning so they decided to find a way to gather and bring the children of the community to the church each week for breakfast and worship. However, over time the children quickly became disruptive in worship, so the church decided to create the job position that I would

soon fill. I was told that my job was to watch the children, keep them busy, and make sure they did not interrupt worship.

A few weeks into my ministry I began to see my job differently. I saw my ministry as building relationships, getting to know the children, sharing the United Methodist traditions, talking with them about God, and inviting them to teach me about their traditions and their experiences of God and their understanding of faith. Our time together each week was rich with story, music, laughter, and learning.

Yet when we had Sundays where we would all participate in worship together everything changed—some would walk into the sanctuary hesitantly looking around with wide eyes and then waiting to see where I would lead them to sit. Others would run into the sanctuary moving through the pews never really sitting down for the duration of the service. Some children sat quietly in their pews; others wiggled, talked, giggled, asked questions, or said loudly, “This is boring!” It became abundantly clear to me one Sunday as I just sat and watched: the children do not know why or how to participate in worship and the adults do not know how to welcome, teach, or guide them! This was the revelation I shared with the senior pastor in staff meeting that week. By watching and listening to the children, I learned that they do not feel welcome nor do they feel part of the community, so it was no wonder they did their own thing when we came into the sanctuary a few Sundays during the year. Church was boring because it was something foreign to them that they were not truly invited to participate in.

I share these stories to say, that as I look back on my ministry experience, I can see how children have taught me about worship and the importance of experiencing worship together. This learning goes beyond the sanctuary and the corporate weekly worship event. It speaks to the developmental need for all persons to learn and grow in faith formation—together.

For me, this is what needs to change in our faith communities:

**First**, it is time for us to bring the community back together. While there are times meeting separately is important and helpful, we must be more intentional about creating environments when we are together—learning from and teaching one another, modeling and practicing the faith with people who are different than us and bring different gifts and experiences to the table. Children have taught me about the importance of community and of being able to observe and practice traditions and rituals. When others model these behaviors and spiritual practices and invite children to participate, younger members of the community thrive as they join the great chorus of the Christian community.

**Second**, we must work to make sure faith formation for people of all ages is an active process. Faith formation is a process that all people, no matter their age, experience differently at different times and in different places. We do not simply receive faith because it is told to us. We do not believe because someone tells us we should. Children, adolescents, and adults are not piggy banks who simply receive the information that is being deposited. We need opportunities to wrestle with the information, to reflect on our own interpretations, to experience God at work

in the world, and to discern ways we feel called to respond. This is how we are strengthened in our faith. No matter our age we learn and grow when we journey with others and participate in an active faith life, together.

**Third,** we must remain flexible. After twenty years of ministry I know a lot more than I knew that first day as a college ministry intern. Persons of all ages have challenged, taught, encouraged, and shaped me. By paying attention, listening, trying new things, and having the courage to fail I can now see how I too have grown in my faith and in my ministry. When we pay attention we begin to see how children and adolescents grow in their faith and are strengthened in their work as disciples of Jesus Christ. When we invite children and adolescents into an active faith process and include them in the life of the church, they become active participants in all that God is doing in the church and in the world.

This is what needs to change in faith formation with children and adolescents. We must suspend our belief that our role as ministry leaders is to give information to different groups of people at different times and places based on age and life stage. We must let go of the notion that we have all the answers and our job is to give them to someone younger than us. In return we must courageously and boldly step out onto a new path, taking the hands of those in our community and asking: How are we going to experience God today? What can we do to praise God and share God's love with others? How can we actively participate in all that God is doing together?

The good news is that there are developmental, social, and cultural theories and tools that help us do this work in a way that persons of different ages can participate fully. We practice the faith together using the wisdom and the tools we have in our spiritual toolboxes. We share our tools; we sharpen the rusty ones; we pick up and try new ones that intrigue us; and we offer to help others build their spiritual toolbox as they discover what they need for their faith journey. It is a process that we participate in together. My hope is that you will find new tools for your toolbox. You may discover tools you have forgotten about or notice tools that have become rusty. As you pick up and assess these tools, I invite you to continually ask the question: How can I use these tools to invite and encourage children and adolescents in my faith community to participate in the life of the faith community? What tools do the children and adolescents in my faith community have to share with me? How can we use these tools to experience God and share God's love with others?

I know my toolbox is not the same as it was when I began this work. I've held onto some tools for a lifetime, and others I have traded out here and there along the way. It is now my joy and privilege to journey with church leaders as we combine our toolboxes and do the hard and holy work of creating inclusive and welcoming environments for persons of all ages to participate in the work and life of the faith community. My heart sings when I see persons of all ages singing, praying, laughing, working, and playing together. Twenty years have passed; I have had many more opportunities to learn and grow in my ministry. The people I am in ministry with continue to teach me, and in return I strive to teach others. This is how we grow in the faith—by participating in all that God is doing—together.







## CHAPTER FOUR

### Age-Group Faith Forming Experiences

◆ ◆ ◆ ◆ A robust, life-giving, vital, and vibrant faith formation for children and adolescents develops them as disciples of Jesus Christ and equips them to follow the way of Jesus. We want young people to develop a loving relationship with Jesus, embrace his good news, and follow him in their daily lives, becoming witnesses of God's reign in the world. The goal of all faith formation with children and adolescents is forming disciples of Jesus Christ and providing a foundation for lifelong growth in Christian faith and discipleship.

#### Discipleship and Faith Maturing

We can discern six essential elements that shape our approach to forming young people as disciples of Jesus Christ.

1. *Disciples know Jesus Christ.* Discipleship is grounded in the teachings, life, death, resurrection, and Lordship of Jesus Christ alive and present. Disciples are in relationship with Christ, learn about Christ, and follow Christ's leading. Congregations cultivate relationships with Jesus Christ through worship, prayer, community building, study, retreats, and service.

2. *Disciples know the Bible.* Discipleship is anchored in the study of the Bible. It is in the Bible that young people learn the story, the truth that shapes the life of faith. Congregations engage young people in experiential explorations of the Scripture texts where they can “hear” God speaking truth to their lives.

3. *Disciples know the Christian faith.* Discipleship is learning the Christian faith. The Christian faith has a history, traditions, beliefs, and values that are critical to its shaping and transforming power. Congregations guide young people in exploring the long and rich life of the people of God, creating more sturdy beliefs, engaging the tough questions, and assisting them in finding their own “faith voice.”

4. *Disciples make faith a way of life.* Discipleship is the “knowledge of faith,” becoming a way of life. Discipleship is regularly described as much in languages of the “heart” and the “hands” as of the “head.” It is not enough for young people to know the content of Scripture or to understand the richness of Christian beliefs. They need to participate in faith as a way of life—“living into” faith that is simultaneously centered in God yet genuinely their own. All this is carried on with an eye on tradition and experience, text and context, faith and life.

5. *Disciples are mentored.* Discipleship is formed in relationships with mentoring individuals and communities. Even though discipleship is primarily a faith relationship in which Christ is at the center, young disciples are formed in relationship with other Christians. Congregations are intergenerational crucibles in which conversation, relationships, and practices wrap youth in a culture of “knowing and doing God.” Within these congregations, people walk intentionally and directly alongside young people providing diverse, concrete snapshots of following Jesus Christ as these mentors encourage and teach through their presence, speech, and action.

6. *Disciples are equipped.* A young person’s strengths and gifts of the Spirit are integral to discipleship. To follow Christ involves a call to witness and to serve others. To make disciples is to identify the spiritual gifts of children and adolescents and equip them for service in the church and the world. Congregations combine study, fellowship, personal strengths, and spiritual gifts discovery with service to equip young disciples to follow Jesus Christ in the church and into the world. (These six elements of discipleship are adapted from the *Spirit and Culture of Youth Ministry*.)

Reflect for a moment on the goals of faith formation with children and adolescents in your congregation.

- How would you describe your goals for children’s faith formation? For adolescent faith formation?
- How do these six essential elements inform your congregation’s approach to forming young people as disciples of Jesus Christ?
- Where and how are young people experiencing these six elements?

- How could these six essential elements strengthen or reshape faith formation with children and adolescents in your congregation?

We give shape to forming disciples and promoting 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 of faith maturing form the essential content and outcomes that every congregation can use to fashion faith formation around children and adolescents, and accompany them through relationships, programs, activities, and resources.

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 one's 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.

## Viewing Children and Adolescent Faith Formation through the Ten Characteristics

Use the chart on the next page to develop a profile of what your congregation currently offers children and youth in age-group settings, organized by each of the ten characteristics. Some programs and activities will fit in multiple characteristics.

Once your profile is complete, analyze the ways that your congregation nurtures the faith of children and adolescents in age-group settings.

- What are the strengths in age-group faith formation?
- What are the areas that need improvement or attention?
- What are the areas where new initiatives need to be created?

Faith Maturing Characteristic	Young Children	Older Children	Young Adolescents	Older Adolescents
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 (Trinity, Jesus, creed, morality, and ethics) and integrating its meaning into one's 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 through 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.				

## Learning in New Ways with Children and Adolescents

Today's younger generations learn best in environments that are interactive, participatory, experiential, visual, and multisensory. Among today's most promising educational innovations are *immersive learning*, *blended learning*, *flipped learning*, *microlearning*, and *personalized learning*. We can dramatically improve our effectiveness in promoting faith growth and learning by using these new practices. All of these new approaches and methods are enhanced by the use of digital technologies, methods, and media. Following are ten practices of twenty-first century learning that can guide us in designing and conducting faith formation programming for a new generation.

1. *Immersive learning environments* involve faith forming experiences that are interactive, participatory, experiential, visual, and multisensory—exactly what Gen Z young people desire. Regular attendance at weekly programs is declining. We need to shift the focus of gathering young people to more highly relational, immersive faith forming experiences—ones that they cannot receive anywhere else. Congregations have already been offering these types of experiences (vacation Bible school, retreats, mission trips), but often as a special program. We need to dramatically expand our immersive faith forming opportunities to include a variety of extended time programs (half day, full day, weekend, weeklong) offered throughout the year on a variety of topics. Think about the level of engagement if all children's programming was like vacation Bible school.

2. *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.

3. *Microlearning* experiences are short-form (five, ten, and fifteen minutes) learning experiences designed for anywhere, anytime learning that be combined into multipart learning programs. Microlearning experiences are one response to short attention spans and mobile learning. We can curate a series of microlearning experiences (on a digital platform) to engage people in all types of faith formation content. Breaking content into small learning units—microlearning—will enhance comprehension and retention of knowledge, skills, and practices. Generation Z loves videos and YouTube, especially short pieces of content that run from sixty to ninety seconds.

4. *Multiple ways of learning* brings 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 young people 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, 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, noncompetitive 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 cocreate 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.

## Incorporating New Learning Practices in Faith Formation

Examine how well your current programming for children and adolescents embraces the ten practices of twenty-first century learning in faith formation programming with children and adolescents. Rate each item from 1 to 5: 1 = Rarely, 2 = Sometimes, 3 = Occasionally, 4 = Almost always, 5 = Always). Identify how you use the new learning practices.

After you have completed your analysis, explore how you can incorporate twenty-first century learning practices in children and adolescent faith formation. Identify programs or activities that are in need of attention. Use the following questions to help you redesign a program or activity.

- Which of the ten learning practices do you want to incorporate in the program or activity?
- What would a redesigned program or activity look like?
- How can you implement the redesigned program?

<b>Immersive learning environments</b> How do you do this?	1 2 3 4 5
<b>Blended learning</b> How do you do this?	1 2 3 4 5
<b>Microlearning</b> How do you do this?	1 2 3 4 5
<b>Multiple ways of learning</b> How do you do this?	1 2 3 4 5
<b>Multisensory learning</b> How do you do this?	1 2 3 4 5
<b>Project-based learning</b> How do you do this?	1 2 3 4 5
<b>Collaborative learning</b> How do you do this?	1 2 3 4 5
<b>Visual learning</b> How do you do this?	1 2 3 4 5
<b>Practice-oriented learning</b> How do you do this?	1 2 3 4 5
<b>Storytelling</b> How do you do this?	1 2 3 4 5

## Digitally Enabled Strategies in Faith Formation

The digital transformation of society is making possible new ways of learning and faith formation. Learning and faith formation are now mobile—anytime, anyplace, 24x7. People have the digital devices to stay connected and to access learning and faith formation on the go. There is abundance of high-quality digital content for faith formation: audio, video, print, websites, apps, online learning platforms, and more. New digital media and learning methods mean that we can provide multiple ways to learn and grow—activities and experiences that reflect different learning styles and multiple intelligences. Digital media and online activities, especially videos, mean that we can develop content in smaller units (microlearning) that better suit today’s learners who have shorter attention spans. A faith formation website can serve as an online learning center, a portal to activities and resources, and a connecting point for people. Online classrooms, like Edmodo, Schoology, and Google Classroom, provide safe spaces for young people, parents, and adult leaders to engage in faith forming experiences and interaction.

We need to design faith formation with children, adolescents, and parents 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 several possibilities for using digitally enabled strategies in faith formation.

**Extended programming.** Extend gathered events and programs into people’s daily lives by providing online content that helps people to go deeper. For example, extend Sunday worship into the home and daily life with daily Bible readings, prayer activities, learning activities, faith conversations, and more.

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

**Flip programming.** “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.

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.

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](http://vcat.org)) that provides short videos for the major teachings in the Catholic Catechism. There are similar types of video programs in all Christian traditions.

**Online programming.** Develop a complete online faith formation experience with faith forming content and experiences. For example, 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. Include prayer activities, daily Bible readings, daily devotions, Lent study resources, videos, service activities, and more.

Use video conferencing with services like Zoom.us to create webinar programming for adolescents, parents, and the whole family. For example, create a monthly one-hour parent formation webinar program delivered to parents at home using a video conferencing program like Zoom. 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, and so forth.

Design online faith formation centers with resources for people to access 24x7. For example, 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.

**Multiple-format programming.** 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 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.

**Preparation and follow-up programming.** 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.

## Building a Faith Formation Website

It is important to create a website platform that is designed for faith formation with children, adolescents, and their parents. This could involve a section of the church's website dedicated to faith formation or a separate website.

Building a website is made much easier today because of 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](http://www.weebly.com)), Wix ([www.wix.com](http://www.wix.com)), and Squarespace ([www.squarespace.com](http://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.

Here are several suggestions for web usability to keep in mind as you design your website (from Steve Krug's excellent and easy-to-use book *Don't Make Me Think: A Common Sense Approach to Web Usability*).

1. Don't make the user think; make web pages self-explanatory so the user hardly has any perceived effort to understand them, for example, clear choice of labels, clearly "clickable" items, simple search.
2. People generally don't read web pages closely; they scan, so design for scanning rather than reading.
3. Create a clear visual hierarchy and menu system (main menu, submenus).
4. Make it very clear how to navigate the site with clear "signposts" on all pages.
5. Omit needless words.
6. The home page needs the greatest design care to convey site identity and mission.
7. Promote user goodwill by making the typical tasks easy to do, make it easy to recover from errors, and avoid anything likely to irritate users.

## Incorporating Digitally Enabled Strategies in Faith Formation

Review your current faith formation programming with children and adolescents. How can you design or redesign faith formation with children, adolescents, and their parents using the five digitally enabled strategies.

1. *Extend programming.* Which current programs can you extend using online programming? Identify the kinds of content you would provide online to extend each program.
2. *Flip the program using online content.* Which programs are good candidates for flipping the content, i.e., is there high-quality digital content (audio, video, visual, print) available in an online format? Identify the programs you could flip. What will be available online? What will the gathered session look like when the content is online?
3. *Online programming.* What types of programs can you create online? How can you deliver programming online (webinar, streaming presentation)? How can you develop an online resource center as a portal to curated content?
4. *Multiformat programming.* Which programs are good candidates for multi-format programming? What would a design look like for one multiformat program?
5. *Prepare and follow-up programming.* Which programs can you use a digital strategy to prepare people online for an event or program and then follow up with online content and activities? What would a design for one program look like?

---

### Online Resources

- For planning tools, activities, and resources go to the “New Generation” section of [www.LifelongFaith.com](http://www.LifelongFaith.com).
- For a list of curated resources for faith formation go to: [www.LifelongFaith.com](http://www.LifelongFaith.com).

### Works Cited

- Krug, Steve. *Don't Make Me Think: A Common Sense Approach to Web Usability*, Third Edition, Berkeley: New Riders, 2014.
- Martinson, Roland, Wes Black, and John Roberto. *The Spirit and Culture of Youth Ministry*. St. Paul, MN: EYM Publications, 2010.



## A PERSONAL REFLECTION

Lynn Barger Elliott

### Words Matter

The words we use are important. They betray beliefs and project futures. They tease and inspire. They defeat and distract. They define and confuse. I learned this when I arrived to my first position as a youth leader. After turning in my W-2 form, meeting the office staff, and getting the keys to my new office, I was asked, “Have you seen the crypt yet?” Wondering if this might be the space for alternative worship or perhaps the holy ground where the ashes of loved ones were laid to rest, I said, “Ahhh, no! Is that a place I should know about?”

My guide laughed and said, “Absolutely! That’s the place where you will spend most of your time!” Wikipedia’s definition of *crypt* fits the picture that flashed across my mind: “a stone chamber beneath the floor of a church or other building. It typically contains coffins, sarcophagi, or religious relics.”

I quickly learned that the youth rooms were affectionately named “The Crypt.” Now, it’s entirely possible that this name came from the location of these rooms on the church plant (well below ground level). Or the name might have been inspired by the narrow, dimly lit hallways that led to the small cinder block rooms below ground level. Either way, the space held a mystique as a space in the church where very few adults dared to venture.

Adding to the aura was that fact that youth most often used this room in the evenings, when the sun had set and no other adults were in the church building. If by chance the room was used on Sunday morning, as it was when the confirmation class met; its occupants were about as far away as possible from the sanctuary where other adults worshipped. Physically and functionally, the youth program was as far removed from the congregation as possible. No one really mentioned it. It didn’t seem intentional. It was just the way it was.

At the same time, I have never been included in the ministry of a congregation as fully as I was at that church. I went to all staff meetings. I had a nice, big office in the hall with the other pastors. I had an assigned day each week for

hospital visitations. I went to every session meeting and attended several committee meetings. I robed and led every worship service and had opportunities during the year to preach. For a congregation with four ordained pastors and multiple program staff, this was more than I expected and more than I ever received at smaller churches I served later in my ministry. During my two-year internship with this congregation, I was fully embraced as a ministry leader.

What that communicated to me was that the congregation had not relegated youth ministry to a lower level ministry in the congregation. They had in no way ostracized the ministry (though when one met in the crypt on a dark winter night, it sure felt like it). I don't think they meant to send a message that the youth were separate from or not welcome in congregational life, but it just played out that way. They didn't know what they were doing. They weren't paying attention to the words they were using.

The words we use and the names we give are important. They betray beliefs and project futures. They tease and inspire. They defeat and distract. They define and they confuse.

### **We Live in a Visual World**

That was more than twenty years ago. The world was a very different place. Selfies were taken with timers on cameras. Video games were set in finite worlds contained on CDs. Information was requested and brochures were sent. Personalities were expressed by posters on bedroom walls and concert tickets on bulletin boards. Memories were kept in scrapbooks and yearbooks.

Today's teens spend approximately nine hours on digital media every day. Whether playing video games; going to a social platform like Instagram, Twitter, or Snapchat; or taking and sending selfies, teens are fluent in the language of images—the ABCs of their communication. An emoji speaks a thousand words. A meme says it all. A YouTube clip provides all the instruction one needs. A website video interprets the mission and priorities of an organization. There is no doubt that as ministry leaders, we need to move towards a visual platform for effective teaching and communicating.

This year my ministry team decided to rebrand our youth ministry. After several brainstorm sessions, we settled on the word *Elevate*. It's a word that offers immediate images. It communicates upward movement. It's a word that demands action and issues challenge. Metaphors abound in this simple word: we need supplies, we need a team, we need a base camp, we need a guide, we need to train, we need to trust. One word paints a million pictures.

As I prepared to rewrite the text on our website, I did a Google search of other programs with the name *Elevate*. There are hundreds, probably thousands. I wanted to find inspiration, perhaps a few new ideas, on how to communicate the mission and values of our ministry using images that could be launched from this one word. As I read through page after page on websites, I was shocked to discover how few ministries connected their mission, values, and basic descriptions to their name.

They were good at identifying an image but hadn't finished the work of making a connection between the image and their ministry. For that, they needed words.

### **Words Still Matter**

One might be tempted to assume that we now live in a visual world, where Instagram and Snapchat hold the necessary elements of communication, and spelling and complete sentences no longer matter. In a world where tweets can set foreign policy and start national boycotts, their power is undeniable. However, I believe the future of ministry requires that we pay attention not only to the images we use, but also to the words we use to interpret these images.

Christian Smith, professor of sociology at the University of Notre Dame and director of the Center for the Study of Religion and Society, interviewed thousands of young people as he researched youth and religion in America. One of his discoveries was the shocking inarticulateness of American youth as they discussed their faith. They knew how they *felt* about their faith. They said they believed in God and knew what was right or wrong, but they did not have the words to describe their beliefs and were not able to explain how their faith shaped their lives or helped them understand morality. After thousands of interviews, Smith surmised that the church had offered experiences of faith but had failed to give young people the language to articulate this experience.

In efforts to be more relevant and contemporary, the church has abandoned much of its language. Churches became worship centers. Congregations became faith communities. Prayers became thoughts and energy. Hymns became worship. Ministry became loving on. Discipleship became mentoring. Fellowship became hanging out. Sin became struggles. And the list goes on.

When my kids started playing sports, I noticed they came home with a whole new language. They used words I did not know and obviously did not teach them. They needed to know these words to become a part of the team and to communicate with the coach and teammates. These words held a shared definitive meaning in that particular setting. They created unity. They determined clear pathways of communication. Whether you are on a stage or on a team or in a lab or in a robotics competition, each venue creates a culture through language.

I teach a class on a local college campus. One day we were talking about social media, and I asked the students to help me understand the appeal of Instagram. I noted that most of my generation just link their account to Facebook and their posts are repeated. I found it redundant. They jumped in right away to say that the challenge of Instagram was to not only find the image, but to find the phrase or the sound bite to communicate your thoughts. It took work. They had to stop and really think about what they wanted to say. It was a craft that required their creativity and wit. It was a discipline to hone their ideas into one concept.

It's been fascinating for me to watch the survivors of Parkland, Florida's Marjory Stoneman Douglas High School take their message to the world. They have waged a very effective war using images and minimal words. Their message has

been crystal clear and concise. They have demonstrated to the world the power of linking images with a few highly selective words.

As I engage in ministry in this increasingly visual world, I find it necessary to be intentional about capturing the right image to express what I would like to teach or discuss, but that's not all. I have challenged myself to engage in the craft of selecting fewer words to express what I want to say. Images are the new alphabet of communication. But words still matter.







## CHAPTER FIVE

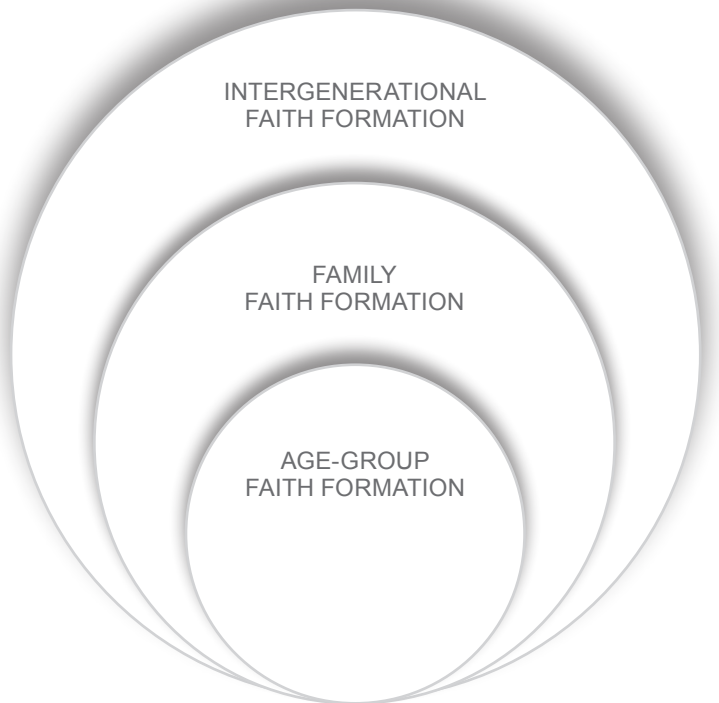
# Designing Faith Formation with a New Generation

◆ ◆ ◆ ◆ This book is a proposal and a guide for a new vision and practice of faith formation with children, adolescents, and their parents and whole family.

The goal of all faith formation with children and adolescents (and their parents) is forming disciples of Jesus Christ and providing a foundation for lifelong growth in Christian faith and discipleship. We can do this 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.

The new approach to faith formation is more community centered, while at the same time being more person centered. It is a vision and practice for faith formation in intergenerational faith communities, family communities, and life-stage and affinity groups. It involves developing 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. Age-group faith formation with children and adolescents 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.



This new approach designs faith formation fashioned around the lives and faith growth needs of children, adolescents, parents, and the whole family. It is a *personalized approach to faith formation*. This chapter explores how to design a personalized approach to faith formation, how to curate resources, and how to transform current age-group programming into personalized experiences for children and adolescents (and their parents).

## Developing a Comprehensive Plan

Before turning to personalizing faith formation, it is important to integrate all of the work from chapters two, three, and four to view the congregation's current and future comprehensive plan for faith formation with children and

adolescents—intergenerational, family, and age group. Organize all of your work into a chart or spreadsheet (see Faith Formation Plan sample format below) using the ten faith maturing characteristics. For each characteristic include the programs, events, activities, and resources in the three faith forming environments, organized according to the four age groups. Include parents with the appropriate age groups.

### 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 one’s 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 through 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.

Faith Formation Plan: Current and Future				
	Young Children	Older Children	Young Adolescents	Older Adolescents
Faith Maturing Characteristic	Intergenerational Family Age Group	Intergenerational Family Age Group	Intergenerational Family Age Group	Intergenerational Family Age Group

## Designing a Personalized Approach to Faith Formation

We are proposing personalizing faith formation as a way to address the increasingly diverse spiritual-religious identities of people today. Personalized learning, one of the latest educational innovations, seeks to address the diverse learning needs of young 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 young people and their parents. Personalizing faith formation provides a way to address the diverse faith growth needs of people 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 children, adolescents, and parents. 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 children, adolescents, and their families represent at least four religious-spiritual identities.

1. *People with a vibrant faith and relationship with God who are engaged in the faith community.* For these people religious faith is central to their lives. 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, and parents 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 as a family.

2. *People who participate occasionally in the faith community and whose faith is not central to their lives.* These are people who participate occasionally in church life—Sunday worship, seasonal celebrations, community events, and age-group programs. For parents transmitting a religious faith that often means bringing their children to educational programs at church and participating because of their children. Their spiritual commitment is not central to the way they live their lives, 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.

3. *People who are uninvolved in a church but spiritual.* These are people who are often called “spiritual but not religious.” They have left participation in an established church. Many believe in God, have a relationship with God, and are growing spiritually. Many practice their Christian faith unattached to a faith community

or tradition. Parents, though not involved in a church, may send their children to church programs; and the parents may participate at times with their children.

4. *People who are unaffiliated and have left involvement in organized religion.* These are the “Nones.” They no longer believe religion is important in their lives. Many parents are “first generation Nones” and are raising their children in religiously uninvolved and unaffiliated homes creating a “second generation of Nones.” Many parents left organized religion because they stopped believing in the religion’s teachings (usually a top reason) or because their family was never that religious when they were growing up.

We can see three and even four of these identities reflected in our current faith formation programming. Parents who bring their children for baptism can reflect the whole spectrum from parents with a vibrant faith to parents who are unaffiliated but whose parents and grandparents are active in a faith community. Children participating in vacation Bible school come from families who reflect several of these religious-spiritual identities. Adolescents participating in a confirmation program often reflect three or four of these identities. We know that our current one-size-fits-all approach to curriculum and programming is not addressing the diverse faith growth needs of people.

We are advocating for a transformation from a *program-centered* (or content-centered) *approach* to a *person-centered approach*—with the content, activities, and programs fashioned around the person and his or her faith growth needs. We design faith formation to address the 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 the offerings of a congregation’s faith formation 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 to help 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, and 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. It 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 a Playlist that is designed for them.

### Design Process

1. Identify a target audience: 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, and going deeper. Or use 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.

There are three examples of Pathways Guides at the end of this chapter. For additional examples of Pathways Guides and Playlists go to the “New Generation” section of [www.LifelongFaith.com](http://www.LifelongFaith.com).

## 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.

For two examples of websites designed as Playlists go to [www.FamiliesattheCenter.com](http://www.FamiliesattheCenter.com) and [www.SeasonsofAdultFaith.com](http://www.SeasonsofAdultFaith.com). For a list of curated resources go to the “Curating” section of [www.LifelongFaith.com](http://www.LifelongFaith.com).

### Faith Formation Playlists

A faith formation Playlist is a curated group of intergenerational, family, age group, digital (online, video, audio, print) programs, activities, 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 getting started, growing, and going deeper. Each Playlist provides a variety of ways for people to learn and grow in faith.

In the first section of this chapter you developed a comprehensive faith formation plan that provides an abundance of current and new programming that can be utilized in creating Playlists of content, experiences, programs, and activities for children, adolescents, parents, and the whole family. Following is a checklist for designing Playlists.

## Design Process

1. Develop Playlists for a target audience: children, adolescents, parents, or the whole family.
2. Select content and experiences to address each faith maturing characteristic with activities for each “level” of discernment, for example, getting started, growing, and going deeper. Use the four types of content and experiences in your Playlists as appropriate: intergenerational, family, age-specific, and online and digital. Some of the resources and programming will apply to multiple “levels” of faith growth needs. Review the “Curating Resources” section (page 94) in this chapter to develop a process for finding, reviewing, and using resources, especially digital resources, in designing your Playlists.
3. Use a variety of settings or environments for faith growth: independent, mentored, at home, small group, large group, intergenerational/whole church, and world.
4. 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).
5. Use a variety of methods: reading; writing/keeping a journal; storytelling and creating stories; watching feature films, TV shows, videos; creating a media project or video; viewing or creating art; viewing or taking photographs; watching drama or acting; listening to or creating a podcast; listening to or creating music; conducting a demonstration or exhibit; experiencing games, simulations, video games; analyzing or creating a case study; developing an apprenticeship or internship; experiencing prayer and rituals; creating prayer experiences; taking a field trip; participating in a mission trip; engaging in or creating a service/action project; developing a mentor relationship; and more.
6. The diagram on page 93 presents a format to develop Playlists for faith maturing characteristics. Select appropriate resources from the four types of resources. Not all types of resources need to be used for every characteristic. This provides a map of all the possibilities you can offer people when you publish and promote the Playlists.
7. 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,



	Getting Started	Growing	Going Deeper
Faith Maturing Characteristic	Intergenerational Experiences	Intergenerational Experiences	Intergenerational Experiences
	Family Experiences	Family Experiences	Family Experiences
	Age-Group Experiences	Age-Group Experiences	Age-Group Experiences
	Online and Digital Experiences	Online and Digital Experiences	Online and Digital Experiences

Wix, and Squarespace. All three have easy to use features and very reasonable subscription fees. For advanced users WordPress 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.

Here is an example of a Playlist for parents on reading and studying the Bible with children at home.

**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.
- 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 (from Faith Inkubators) 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.

There are examples of Playlists in the “New Generation” section of [www.LifelongFaith.com](http://www.LifelongFaith.com).

## 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 had curators more than 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 homegrown programming, they would search through

print resources, 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.

There are 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 high-quality resources for faith formation for children, adolescents, parents, and families.

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, and churches; and religious organizations' online faith formation content for children, adolescents, parents, and families. For a list of online resources for faith formation go to [LifelongFaith.com](http://LifelongFaith.com).

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](http://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, websites
- Museums
- Books (with study guides)
- E-books
- Apps
- Audio podcasts
- Audio learning programs
- Videos, feature films, 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 programs 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.

Following 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—children, adolescents, parents, and the whole family—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.

---

#### Online Resources

- For planning tools, activities, and resources go to the “New Generation” section of [www.LifelongFaith.com](http://www.LifelongFaith.com).
- For examples of Pathways and Playlists go to the “New Generation” section of [www.LifelongFaith.com](http://www.LifelongFaith.com).
- For a list of curated resources for faith formation go to: [www.LifelongFaith.com](http://www.LifelongFaith.com).

#### Works Cited

FAITH5: Melheim, Rich. *Holding Your Family Together*. Ventura, CA: Regal Books, 2013. (Also available as a download at [www.faithink.com/download/tour/Faith5BulletinInserts.pdf](http://www.faithink.com/download/tour/Faith5BulletinInserts.pdf))

## Example: Adolescent Faith Growth Pathway

Here is an example of an Adolescent Pathways Guide to help adolescents identify their strengths and areas of growth in their faith life. All of the items are based on the ten characteristics of faith maturing. Young people respond by answering the question: “How true is each statement 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. God cares for me in a special way.	1	2	3	4	5
2. I am keenly aware of the presence of God in my life.	1	2	3	4	5
3. I try to live my life as a follower of Jesus.	1	2	3	4	5
4. I have a real sense that God is guiding me.	1	2	3	4	5
5. My religious faith is important in my life today.	1	2	3	4	5
6. My life is committed to Jesus Christ.	1	2	3	4	5
7. I am developing a personal relationship with Jesus Christ.	1	2	3	4	5
8. I am discovering what Jesus' teachings mean for my life.	1	2	3	4	5
9. My faith shapes how I think and act.	1	2	3	4	5
10. I talk about my faith with others.	1	2	3	4	5
11. I read and study the Bible and seek its meaning for my life.	1	2	3	4	5
12. I use the Bible to discover how I should think and act.	1	2	3	4	5
13. I am growing in my understanding of the Christian faith—beliefs, traditions, and practices.	1	2	3	4	5
14. I ask sincere and searching questions about the nature of a life of faith in God.	1	2	3	4	5
15. I accept opportunities to learn how to speak naturally and intelligently about my faith.	1	2	3	4	5
16. I pray regularly.	1	2	3	4	5
17. I feel God's presence in prayer.	1	2	3	4	5
18. I seek out opportunities to help me grow spiritually.	1	2	3	4	5
19. I live my life and make moral decisions guided by Christian moral values that tell me what is right or wrong behavior.	1	2	3	4	5
20. My Christian faith helps me know right from wrong.	1	2	3	4	5
21. I am optimistic, trusting, and convinced that I can do much to make the world a better place.	1	2	3	4	5
22. I am involved in actions to serve those in need.	1	2	3	4	5

23. I am involved in actions to care for creation.	1	2	3	4	5
24. I speak out and act against specific social injustices.	1	2	3	4	5
25. I feel God's presence when I serve people in need.	1	2	3	4	5
26. I see evidence that God is active in the world.	1	2	3	4	5
27. I worship God regularly at Sunday worship.	1	2	3	4	5
28. I feel God's presence when I worship on Sunday.	1	2	3	4	5
29. I am actively engaged in activities of my church community.	1	2	3	4	5
30. I practice my faith in Jesus by using my gifts and talents at church and in the world.	1	2	3	4	5

*Areas where I need to “get started” (1 and 2 ratings).*

*Areas where I need to “grow” (2 and 3 ratings).*

*Areas where I want to “go deeper” (4 and 5 ratings).*

**Correlation to the ten characteristics**

1. Developing and sustaining a personal relationship and commitment to Jesus Christ (numbers 1–7).
2. Living as a disciple of Jesus Christ and making the Christian faith a way of life (numbers 8–10).
3. Reading and studying the Bible—its message, meaning, and application to life today (numbers 11–12).
4. Learning the Christian story and foundational teachings of the Christian faith and integrating its meaning into one’s life (numbers 13–15).
5. Praying—together and by ourselves—and seeking spiritual growth through spiritual disciplines (numbers 16–18).
6. Living with moral integrity guided by Christian ethics and values (numbers 19–20).
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 (numbers 21–26).
8. Worshipping God with the community at Sunday worship, ritual celebrations, and through the seasons of the church year (numbers 27–28).
9. Being actively engaged in the life, ministries, and activities of the faith community (number 29).
10. Practicing faith in Jesus Christ by using one’s gifts and talents within the Christian community and in the world (number 30).

## Example: Parent Faith Growth Pathway

Here is an example of a Parent Pathways Guide to help parents identify their strengths and areas of growth in their faith life and as faith formers of their children and adolescents. All of the items are based on the ten characteristics of faith maturing. Parents respond by answering the question: “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 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, praying Scripture, daily 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.	1	2	3	4	5
13. I exercise moral responsibility by applying Christian ethics, virtues, and values to making moral decisions.	1	2	3	4	5
14. My Christian faith helps me know right from wrong.	1	2	3	4	5
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

*Areas where I need to “get started” (1 and 2 ratings).*

*Areas where I need to “grow” (2 and 3 ratings).*

*Areas where I want to “go deeper” (4 and 5 ratings).*



## Example: Family Practices Pathway

Here is an example of a Family Pathways Guide for parents to help identify their strengths and areas of growth as a family. All of the items are based on the ten characteristics of faith maturing. Parents respond by answering the question: “How true is each statement 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. 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, and standing up for each other.	1	2	3	4	5
7. I demonstrate a warm and affirming parenting approach.	1	2	3	4	5
8. I create a warm, caring supportive family environment.	1	2	3	4	5
9. I practice effective communication skills with my children/teens.	1	2	3	4	5
10. We talk about faith as a family.	1	2	3	4	5
11. We pray as a family (meal time, bedtime).	1	2	3	4	5
12. We pray as a family during times of struggle or crisis.	1	2	3	4	5
13. I encourage my children/teens to pray.	1	2	3	4	5
14. I provide moral instruction and how to decide right and wrong.	1	2	3	4	5
15. We celebrate meaningful traditions and rituals as a family (holidays, birthdays, accomplishments, etc.).	1	2	3	4	5
16. We read the Bible as a family.	1	2	3	4	5
17. We use the Bible as guidance for how we should think and act as a family.	1	2	3	4	5
18. I encourage my children/teens to read the Bible.	1	2	3	4	5
19. We serve people in need as a family.	1	2	3	4	5
20. We work to overcome injustice in our world as a family.	1	2	3	4	5
21. We engage in projects to care for the environment as a family.	1	2	3	4	5
22. I encourage my children/teens to talk about their doubts and questions about faith.	1	2	3	4	5
23. I talk about faith and our religious tradition with our children and teens.	1	2	3	4	5

**102 Faith Formation with a New Generation**

24. I ask about our children/teens perspectives on faith, religion, moral issues, social issues, and so forth.	1	2	3	4	5
25. We participate in Sunday worship as a family.	1	2	3	4	5
26. We participate in church activities as a family.	1	2	3	4	5
27. We celebrate the church year seasons at church (Advent, Christmas, Lent, Easter).	1	2	3	4	5
28. We celebrate the seasons of the church year at home (Advent, Christmas, Lent, Easter).	1	2	3	4	5
29. I encourage and support our children/teens to participate in church activities.	1	2	3	4	5
30. I encourage our children and teens to pursue their talents and interests.	1	2	3	4	5
31. I work with my children/teens to manage screen time and social media use.	1	2	3	4	5
32. 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
33. I challenge my children/teens by expecting them to do their best and live up to their potential.	1	2	3	4	5
34. 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
35. I treat my children/teens with respect, hearing their voice and including them in decisions that affect them.	1	2	3	4	5
36. 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

*Areas we are strong as a family (ratings of 4 and 5).*

*Areas we need to grow as a family (ratings 1, 2, and 3).*