

Lifelong Faith

the theory and practice of lifelong faith formation

Volume 4.3

www.lifelongfaith.com

Fall 2010

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Children's Faith Formation

Lifelong Faith

Lifelong Faith is published quarterly by LifelongFaith Associates, LLC.

ISSN #1939-5299

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Individual Subscriptions

One year (4 issues): \$36
Two years (8 issues): \$64
(Canadian residents add \$12)
(Other countries add \$20)

Group Subscriptions

2-5: \$32 per subscription
6-9: \$28 per subscription
10+: \$26 per subscription

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Next Issue

**Faith Formation with Baby
Boomers and Beyond**

Fostering the Spiritual and Faith Development of Children Today

Welcome to Fall 2010 issue of *Lifelong Faith* with the theme of "Children's Faith Formation." This issue presents a number of different perspectives to assist a congregation in its faith formation efforts with children.

David Csinos describes four styles of spirituality—*word, emotion, symbol, and action*—that he and his colleagues have identified, and presents a variety practical strategies for nurturing the spiritual life of children in each style. I have included a book excerpt from an excellent new book by **Catherine Stonehouse** and **Scottie May**, *Listening to Children on the Spiritual Journey*, which contains the results of their in-depth interviews with children and their parents over a multi-year timeframe and suggestions for fostering the spiritual growth of children. **Robert Keeley** presents a synthesis of James Fowler's stage of faith and their application to the faith formation of children and adults. "Influencing Children's Faith Now" offers insightful reflections by children's ministry experts from the book, *What Matters Now in Children's Ministry*. **Christy Olson** focuses our attention family life in her article, "Family Daily Living Faith Practices." The article is filled with insights and practices for daily faith-filled living at home. In the final essay, I provide a variety of perspectives and strategies for "Teaching & Learning with the iGeneration." I have included descriptions of the ways teachers and children are using the new Web 2.0 technologies in education.

I hope you find the variety of articles helpful in your ministry with children You can purchase additional copies by going to our online store at www.LifelongFaith.com. For prices on quantity orders, write me at jroberto@lifelongfaith.com.

John Roberto, Editor

P.S. I am pleased to announce two new books available through LifelongFaith Associates. The first is *The Spirit and Culture of Youth Ministry* that I co-authored with Roland Martinson and Wes Black. This book reports on an ecumenical study of effective practices in youth ministry. The second is *Faith Formation 2020: Designing the Future of Faith Formation*, a practical guide to creating faith formation using the four scenarios we developed through the Faith Formation 2020 Project. See the ads at the end of the journal for more information. You can purchase both books in the Lifelong Faith Store: <http://lifelongfaith.mybigcommerce.com>.



Saturated Spirituality: Creating Environments that Nurture All Children

David M. Csinos

Have you ever been so moved by a piece of music that you shed a tear or can't help but clap along? Are you passionate about making a difference or, as Gandhi said, being "the change you wish to see in the world?" Are you the sort of person who likes to go on long hikes and just spend time among nature? Do you love to learn and do you continually soak up information about the world around you?

Whatever type of person you are, it cannot be denied that you are a spiritual being who is capable of engaging in transcendence, of moving beyond the here-and-now, and connecting with God. Just as the questions I posed imply different ways of viewing the world and expressing yourself, there are also many ways to be spiritual. Yet amidst this diversity, four ways of expressing one's spirituality—four *spiritual styles*—emerge as legitimate and formational avenues for knowing God.

In this article, we will take a journey through what my colleagues and I have come to call spiritual styles. Spiritual styles are four distinct ways in which people encounter God and express their ultimate concerns. After a brief introduction to the concept of spiritual styles, I will describe some of the significant characteristics of each style. Drawing from the results of a six-month qualitative research project, I will move toward a discussion about how pastors, teachers, and leaders of children can create environments and ministries that nurture the spirituality and faith of children from each spiritual style. Our first task, however, is to explore what exactly I mean when I speak of spiritual styles.

Spiritual styles describe key ways in which human beings encounter God and express their inherent spirituality, faith, and ultimate concerns. More broadly, they speak of four manners in which people make meaning of themselves, the world around them, and their relationships with other individuals. Each of the four spiritual styles illustrates key aspects of our faith and our quests to transcend the here-and-now, connect with God, and understand our surroundings. They have the power to affect our very core and they act as lenses through which we see and make meaning of the world around us. My colleagues and I label the four spiritual styles **word**, **emotion**, **symbol**, and **action**.

David M. Csinos, Th.M. is a doctoral student in pastoral theology at Emmanuel College in the University of Toronto. He has written articles in journals and magazines and he is the author of a forthcoming book about spiritual styles and children. He has also served in children's ministry in a number of churches in southern Ontario.

Four Spiritual Styles

Each one of these styles speaks of general ways of experiencing God and expressing our spiritual lives through distinct yet fluid boundaries. Many people possess one dominant spiritual style, yet might be influenced by the other three in significant ways as well. And this is a good thing! A healthy spirituality should consist of a balanced tension between all four styles. When such a balance is not present in a person's faith life, there is a dangerous tendency to fall into an extreme form of one style.

Furthermore, a person's dominant spiritual style can change over time. Someone who expressed a word-centered approach today might become focused on emotions, symbols, or action later in life. While our dominant spiritual styles affect the way we see and interact with the world around us, our environment can in turn affect which of these four styles come to dominate the landscape of our inner lives.

I can certainly attest to the ways in which one's dominant spiritual style can change over time. As I look back on my life, I am able to highlight key times in which words characterized my spirituality and faith, times during which I focused on emotions, other moments that were based on symbols, and still other times that action was what seemed to matter most. And during many of these times, the faith communities and spiritual environments in which I found myself certainly had an impact on which spiritual styles I used to express myself, understand the world, and connect with God.

Joyce Bellous, a retired professor at McMaster Divinity College, Denise Peltomaki, a former children's pastor, and I worked together to design two self-assessment tools—one for adults and one for children—that measure the degree to which each spiritual style affects a person's life. Each assessment is made up of questions that assist people in identifying their dominant spiritual styles and understanding the styles that might not be so important to them. These assessments, available from Tall Pine Press (www.tallpinepress.com), ask a number of questions about common and sometimes overlooked assumptions focusing on topics such as prayer, relationships, money, learning, and communication. Based on one's selection of multiple choice responses, the tools measure the presence of the four spiritual styles in one's life. Many people

who have used these tools to assess themselves have found them to be incredibly helpful in understanding how they make sense of the world, how they engage in relationships with other people, and how they understand ministry and faith formation.

What does all this talk of spiritual styles have to do with children's faith formation? Through qualitative research and children's self-assessment, I have found that children readily use spiritual styles in their everyday lives. They encounter God, see the world, and experience the spiritual environments of their faith communities through words, emotions, symbols, and action.

This is an important point for children's ministers, leaders, teachers, and parents to keep in mind. Without an understanding of these four ways of knowing God, we might presume that our dominant style is the "correct" or "best" approach to spirituality and then form our ministries so that children experience faith formation according to our dominant style. This can leave some young people feeling as though something is wrong with them or that they are not welcome or included in their congregations. While pastors, teachers, and leaders certainly do not intend for these results, the feeling that they do not fit in their congregations can cut children off from having genuine encounters with God and engaging in life-changing faith formation.

It becomes imperative that those working with children—and parents who seek to nurture their children's faith—gain an understanding of the four spiritual styles, come to see what styles might dominate their spiritual lives, and nurture the faith formation of children in environments characterized by a balanced tension between all four styles. When these things happen, children will not only feel a sense of fit; they will also come to see that there are indeed many legitimate and formative ways in which people experience God and express their faith.

A Word-Centered Approach

A word-centered approach to spirituality upholds the importance of words in making sense of the world and experiencing God. People of this style focus on having the correct words in correct relationship with one another, as well as having words in the correct relationship with those things to which they refer.

People with a word-centered spirituality see faith formation and growth occurring through

increases in knowledge, understanding, and reflection on spiritual issues, often through the study of sacred texts. People of this style *know* God when they *know about* God. Thus, the accuracy of words matters because it demonstrates a well-grounded faith and conveys important propositional knowledge that can help others be formed in faith.

Spoken *and* written words are vital to people who express their inner lives through this style. The spoken word enables people to instruct, preach, and proclaim important information and interpretations that enable faith formation to occur. Written words act as sources of knowledge to be absorbed and interpreted. Scripture becomes highly valued as the Word above all words. God's instructions to Ezekiel (3:1) can be a mantra for this style. It calls people to "eat this book," to ingest scripture in order to grow in wisdom and knowledge and thus grow in faith. Additionally, people of this style tend to think of God in concrete ways, as revealed and able to be known.

A word-centered approach to spirituality tends to produce people who are engaged in scholarship and theological interpretation in order to delve into the content of faith and aid others in understanding theology and doctrine. Many great theologians throughout history—from Thomas Aquinas to Karl Barth—can be understood through this style. These individuals, like many word-centered people today, value the power of rational arguments to persuade others into adopting accurate interpretations of the faith. Conceptual clarity comes to be seen as the goal of spiritual development and faith formation.

An example of a contemporary tradition that appears to be focused on this style is the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.), a denomination that highly values having knowledge of proper doctrine and correctly interpreting scripture and theological texts. As candidates for ordination within the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) go through the process leading toward ordination, they must take a number of rigorous examinations that test their knowledge in areas like Bible, theology, and polity. In the denomination's own words, "The Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) considers basic knowledge of the content of the Bible to be an essential prerequisite for ministry. The Bible Content examination is intended to assess one's knowledge of stories, themes and pertinent passages in the Old and New Testaments." Clearly, this tradition values words and the knowledge that they can impart into the spiritual lives of human beings.

An Emotion-Centered Approach

A spirituality that is centered on emotions places one's feeling at the core of the spiritual life. The life of faith is nurtured through having and expressing deep feelings and emotions, which are seen as potent ways of connecting with God. While word-centered people might treat their emotions with suspicion, people of this style see their feelings as inherently good. Focusing on emotions is not a lazy substitute for rigorous academic work; it involves the hard work of getting in touch with one's inner self.

The arts are vital to the spirituality and faith of people with an emotion-centered approach to spirituality. Music, dance, and drama are especially important for their power to evoke the human emotions and connect one's affective nature with the transcendent. People of this style often place a priority on musical worship and encourage people to be free to express their emotions while making or listening to music.

While embodied expression and feelings are highly valued, oral witness or testimony is seen as an important way of expressing emotions as well as tapping into and capturing the feelings of others. Giving testimony to the power of God in one's own life can easily become an emotional experience, involving laughter and tears, deep sorrow and immense joy. Conversion experiences are often hallmarks of giving testimony and involve sensing that God is connecting with a person in order to change them from the inside-out. Oral witness is also understood as a way of persuading others through flashes of insight received from God rather than rational, intellectual arguments.

Relationships matter for their power to give people feelings of joy, fulfillment, and security. While the rationalism and intellectualism of word-centered spirituality might be suspect by people of this style, both styles share a focus on concrete expressions of God. For those with an emotion-centered approach to spirituality, God is here-and-now and can be reached and felt through emotionally-charged experiences. Jesus Christ is often conceived in relational terms, perhaps as the lover of one's soul or a nurturing and kind parent. The transformational goal of emotion-centered spirituality is the personal renewal of one's innermost self.

Pentecostal and charismatic traditions are vivid examples of this spiritual style. They demonstrate a

clear focus on emotions through their intense musical worship and personal testimony, as well as the freedom they give to divine expression through acts such as speaking in tongues and raising one's arms to God. Some of the core values of the Pentecostal Assemblies of Canada are "Pentecostal worship, every-member ministry, loving relationships, Holy Spirit-empowered evangelism, anointed proclamation and practical expression of Christian faith."² Terms such as "Holy Spirit-empowered," "anointed," and "practical expression" speak of this denomination's high esteem of connecting to God through the emotions.

A Symbol-Centered Approach

While both previous spiritual styles value concrete images of God, a symbol-centered spirituality moves from the concrete to the abstract through a focus on symbols, metaphors, and images. This is a mystical approach to spirituality and faith that views God as infinite mystery. As such, God is more sensed than spoken. People of this style hold that God transcends words as well as finite human understanding. In the words of popular author Rob Bell, "The Christian faith is mysterious to the core. It is about things and beings that ultimately can't be put into words. Language fails. And if we do definitively put God into words, we have at that very moment made God something God is not" (Bell, 32).

While God can not be completely understood, God can be sensed through symbols and rituals that capture and reflect God's transcendent nature. This way of sensing the presence of God is distinct from feeling God through an emotion-centered approach. It is a deep awareness of God that cannot be explained. After all, if it can be explained through words, these people might hold that it was not a true God-experience.

Artwork and the imagination are central to this approach to spirituality and faith. After all, we who are made in God's image have been given imaginations that can be used to connect with God and nourish our inner lives. Beauty, whether natural or made by human hands, is prized by people of this style for its ability to express God's infinite creativity and being. The great symbols and artwork that have been created throughout the history of the Christian church have the transcendent ability to tap into our inner selves and allow us to sense the presence of God. Many symbol-centered people might sense God simply by walking into a beautiful space, such

as St. Joseph's Oratory in Montréal, the Spanish Synagogue in Prague, or Hagia Sophia, the 1500-year-old basilica and mosque that was converted into a breath-taking museum in Istanbul. For others, the serene calmness of a river or meadow is enough to evoke a spirit-to-Spirit connection.

Since talk about God, faith, and the spiritual life is limited, symbol-centered people value silence, stillness, and solitude as a means of knowing God and experiencing transcendence beyond the here-and-now. Through silence, God can be heard and sensed deep within one's inner self, even though such experiences are unable to be expressed to others in words. Through stillness, people can wait for God's presence to surround them. Through solitude, they can retreat from the world in order to refresh their inner lives.

People who have a symbol-centered approach to spirituality value spiritual practices, such as listening or centering prayer, *lectio divina*, silent retreats, and meditating on icons. Practices such as these can help them attain the goal of faith formation: union with the transcendent, ineffable God.

There are many historic examples of traditions and individuals who portray a symbol-centered approach to spirituality, including the great English mystic and anchoress, Julian of Norwich, and the desert fathers who lived as monks, hermits, and ascetics. Contemporary examples include the Catholic Church, Orthodox Churches, and some emerging churches. These groups draw from traditional ways in which the church has mystically connected with God. Rites and rituals such as the Eucharist, the creation of beautiful spaces that speak of God's divine presence, and liturgies that are rich in symbolism are used in order to unite with a God that transcends ordinary time and space.

An Action-Centered Approach

The final spiritual style is centered on action. It is an approach to faith that focuses on what is being done in the world. Rather than what one thinks, feels, or senses, people of this style focus on what one does to evoke positive changes in the world. These people are activists who roll up their sleeves and get to work. The Lord's Prayer, which includes a request that "your kingdom come, your will be done on earth as it is in heaven," might be an appropriate motto or mantra for this style.

Prayer, for these people, is more lived than spoken. These people encounter God and nurture

their spiritual lives when they are actively working to transform the world. This is an approach to spirituality that follows the tradition of the prophets, who spoke and acted in order to bring about God's will and justice on earth and to provoke others to change their oppressive ways.

Yet, like many of the biblical prophets, action-centered people can be misunderstood and seen as single-minded or impatient. Their zealous passion can evoke negative responses from others, especially because they often act without taking time to explain the reasons for their actions. After all, for these people, words matter far less than action. Thus, they can often become isolated by faith communities, who might see them as eccentric, troublesome, and demeaning. On the other hand, action-centered individuals sometimes believe that those who are unwilling to help them are too blind to see what must be done or too cowardly to fight the system and change the world.

Nevertheless, motivated by a deep union with the needs of the world, these people often press on in their unswerving missions in order to bring about peace, justice, and wholeness even if they must do so alone. Clearly, the transformational goal for action-centered people is bringing about change and working to upset the destructive and harmful conditions in the world that God so loves.

Contemporary examples include Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., Mother Teresa, and Desmond Tutu, as well as some leaders within the emerging and missional church movements, including Brian McLaren and Shane Claiborne. Ron Sider, Founder and President of Evangelicals for Social Action, knows that value of getting things done in the world. In his bestselling book, *Rich Christians in an Age of Hunger*, he writes, "regardless of what we do or say at 11:00 a.m. on Sunday morning, rich Christians who neglect the poor are not the people of God" (Sider, 60). He is affirming that what matters more than informative sermons and emotional worship is how we live and act in the world around us.

Taking Spiritual Styles to the Extreme

While each of these four spiritual styles are formative and have the power to authentically connect people with God, each style can be taken to

the extreme. When they are not balanced by each other, rich and genuine ways of expressing one's inner life can become harmful aberrations of spirituality and faith.

For example, a word-centered approach, when taken to the extreme, simply becomes a faith characterized by cold, hard ideas and cannot sustain people during times of suffering and crisis. An action-centered spirituality that is not balanced by words, emotions, and symbols can become work devoid of empathy, love, and joy, and it can alienate people for "talking the talk" and failing to grasp visions while not taking the time to explain one's transformational goals.

A healthy spirituality is one that possesses a degree of balance between these four spiritual styles. Surely, most people will find themselves leaning in one or two specific directions and relying on a particular way of knowing God and making meaning of the world. Few people will possess a fairly equal balance of all four styles. But this does not mean that we can ignore the ways in which other people make sense, express their ultimate concerns, and connect with God. And let us remember that these styles are not hard-and-fast in the organic and evolving lives of human beings. People's styles can adapt and change over time.

It is important to continually engage in some soul searching to ensure that one is not drifting too far from a balanced tension between all four styles and developing a single-style approach to spirituality. When it comes to children's ministry, pastors, leaders, and teachers can create environments that help to nurture the faith and spirituality of all young people by including elements that speak to children that possess each spiritual style. In such an environment, children can encounter God through words, emotions, symbols, and action and no child will be left behind.

Creating Inclusive Environments

Ideally, congregations are places where people are welcomed, supported, encouraged, and challenged. They are places in which people ought to feel included in the life and practices of the community, where they sense a satisfactory degree of fit. So it is with children's ministries. All children ought to be welcomed, affirmed, and appropriately challenged

toward growth as they experience and engage in children's ministries and in the wider life of the congregation. Without this feeling of fit, their spiritual growth and formation in faith can be at risk.

Sadly, I have visited my share of churches, programs, and ministries that do not welcome all people into their midst and don't include all in their life of faith. During research that I conducted a few years ago, I had a number of conversations with children who attended children's ministry programs at different congregations. While some of the children had nothing but great things to say about children's church, Sunday school, and mid-week programs, others did not sense that they fit or were welcomed for who they were.

One nine-year-old boy who I shall refer to as Caleb clearly had a symbol-centered approach to spirituality. He loved mysteries like the Bermuda Triangle and Stonehenge and he felt close to God in the great outdoors. Caleb knows that the Bible is full of mysteries about God, but he feels as though the leaders of the children's ministry programs at his congregation attempt to explain away all the wonders and mysteries surrounding who God is. In his words, "they're explaining the wrong things." "I feel like they're saying that there are no mysteries of him...when I know there are." This boy did not feel as though these ministries welcomed him for who he was. Aware that his congregation was not meeting his spiritual needs, young Caleb began reading the Bible in solitude, not to gain answers to questions about God, but to revel in the sense of wonder and mystery that the Bible allowed him to feel.

Not all children might be as insightful or resourceful as Caleb. Some children in situations similar to Caleb's might come to see that the reason they don't feel included in their faith communities and their programs is because there is something wrong with them. This can lead to unwarranted crises in faith and spirituality and can close children off from faith formation and having formative encounters with the living God. None of us want to see this happen. But everyday, unaware of different ways of knowing God, leaders, pastors, and teachers develop programs that cater to their own spiritual styles and unintentionally leave children who know God differently to struggle as they try to make sense of why they do not have the same experiences as the children and leaders around them.

In order to help all children open themselves to connecting with God and being formed in faith, congregations must take into account the different spiritual styles through which young people can come to know and experience God. Aware of spiritual styles, those who develop and lead programs with children can intentionally create environments in which young people of all spiritual styles are included and experience a satisfying degree of fit. Joyce Bellous writes,

Inclusive teachers [and churches] provide for the study of words, so that children become precise and make cognitive gains; offer opportunities to learn through feeling and open up occasions for telling personal stories and explaining what they mean, using the arts; allow time for silence, wonderment and imagination to set the agenda for interpreting experience; and bring children into settings where they can take specific, focused action aimed at improving the world. (Bellous, 102)

Although churches surely attempt to create environments conducive to spiritual formation and that help people to connect with God, many miss the mark and fail to include children of all spiritual styles. Those who do not feel a sense of fit are at risk of keeping their spiritual experiences and sensibilities private, robbing others of the richness of spiritual diversity (Bellous, 102). Including elements that speak to children of each style is vital for environments in which every child is welcomed, included, and nurtured.

There are countless models, methods, and practices for ministries that nurture faith formation in children and that can be quite effective for nurturing the spiritual lives of young people. Although ministry models and techniques which prove to be effective with one congregation might be inappropriate or unproductive at another, I believe that these suggestions, when employed, work to create environments of intentional inclusivity. The ideas I present are grounded in the real life of children who spoke with me over a six-month period. Through our conversations, I was able to get a sense of how children from each spiritual style have their spiritual lives nurtured, engage in faith formation, and come to know God.

Practices

More than Just Talking Heads: Practices for Nurturing Word- Centered Children

One of the central concerns of a word-centered approach of spirituality is the illumination of the mind. With this in mind, it makes sense that welcoming and nurturing children with a spirituality dominated by words involves assisting them in their intellectual quest to understand God and the world around them. The following six practices all have this goal in mind:

1. Focus on the Bible, but don't be limited to the Bible.

Children with a word-centered approach to spirituality hold the Bible in higher esteem than children with other spiritual styles. The Bible is regarded as the inspired Word of God, the very words that God uses to speak to humanity. Ministries, programs, and lessons need to help children build their biblical knowledge through memorization, study, interpretation and exegesis. Limiting instruction solely to the Bible can rob children of gaining insight into many other important fields of knowledge. Include lessons that teach children about church history, theology, liturgy, and social issues. Word-centered children soak up information so that they can better make sense of and interpret the world around them. Let's give them all the knowledge we can.

2. Let the Bible read children.

Learning about the Bible cannot be the sole goal of ministry with word-centered children. After all, as we read the Bible, it has the power to read us, to form us as faith-full disciples of Christ. By using the Bible as a mirror for their own lives, children can better understand themselves and they can come to see the ways in which God has interacted with humanity in the past and how God continues to speak to us today. The words in the Bible are not just there for us to memorize and exegete. The Scriptures have the power to inform, form, and transform our lives and the lives of the children with whom we interact. We must allow them to "get

under our skin" so that we can be formed and transformed by them. As we exegete the Bible, the Bible helps us to exegete ourselves.

3. Be aware of human development.

Children learn in many different ways as they grow from newborn infants into teenagers. Having a basic, working knowledge of key theories of human development can help pastors, teachers, and leaders to shape lessons in ways that best suit the learning and developmental capabilities of young people across the life-span. While young children struggle to understand abstract concepts and ideas, older children are able to go well beyond the memorization of simple facts and begin to interpret texts and ideas for themselves. The cognitive capacities of children ought to affect the ways in which we teach them. When we know more about how children grow, develop, and learn, we can better assist word-centered children in knowing about God and in turn knowing God. (An excellent introductory resource for aspects of human development is *Human Development and Faith* edited by Felicity Kelcourse.)

4. Avoid "dumbing-down" lessons.

God created all of us to have brains and bodies that develop gradually over time and affect the way we learn as we grow and change. We need not "dumb-down" our lessons and ministries for children. When we do not give them the respect they deserve simply because they learn differently than adults, we implicitly tell children that they are not valued. Children with a word-centered approach to spirituality thrive as they make gains in their cognitive knowledge of God and they can become frustrated by "dumbed-down" lessons with word-searches and other menial activities.

5. Become co-learners and welcome questions.

As teachers, pastors, and leaders, we can learn right alongside the children in our midst. None of us has all the answers. If we open ourselves to receiving new insights, even the most familiar of Bible stories and passages can teach us something new about God, faith, and life. As we instruct children and help them learn more about God, let us remember that we are all finite beings with limited knowledge about an infinite God. We can become co-learners

on the journey to know more of God and we can welcome children's questions. We can be honest when we are unsure of answers to their questions and we can seek out answers with the children in our midst.

6. Keep a well-stocked church library.

Churches can provide inclusive environments and ministries for word-centered children by making sure that they have access to a wide range of resources in their church libraries. Many of these children most vividly hear God's voice through reading. During my conversations with children, I heard several young people tell me that they feel incredibly close to God in church libraries, surrounded by a great cloud of written witnesses. In fact, for several of these children, the library was where they felt closest to God.

By having access to a resource-filled church library, children can not only satisfy their spiritual needs through reading about God, the church, and other spiritual and religious subjects; they can sense the very presence of God. Let's not forget to make time to read with the children to whom we minister. Why not set up a reading corner in your Sunday school or have a weekly story time in your congregation's library? When we read together with children we can joyfully learn with one another.

More than Just Feeling Good: Practices for Nurturing Emotion- Centered Children

In *Children in the Worshipping Community*, David Ng and Virginia Thomas state that "Music and children are a natural combination" (Ng and Thomas, 102). Their words are particularly true for children with a spiritual style that is dominated by feelings. Therefore, inclusive churches make room for these children by intentionally including music and the arts in their curriculum, ministries, and activities. There are at least five key ways in which leaders and pastors can welcome and nurture emotion-centered children.

1. Don't be limited by fads.

The Christian church has been singing songs to God for two thousand years. We have a rich and vast tradition that includes a wide variety of chants,

hymns, and choruses that can be used to help children connect with God—from Gregorian chants to contemporary rock music, African American spirituals to the meditative songs of the Taizé movement. By drawing from a wide variety of musical traditions, we can help children appreciate how Christians of other times and places used the universal language of music to worship and experience the living God.

Don Ratcliff, a Christian education professor at Wheaton College, has noted that Christians "make associations between their music and their emotions through classical conditioning... Later, although the religious experience may have been forgotten, the association between the feelings and certain music selections may remain." The music that children listen to in their congregations can have a considerable impact them in the years to come, so it is best to expose them to a variety of different styles of music within an inclusive and accepting environment.

2. Don't forget the lyrics.

When selecting music for children, it is important to take the lyrical content of songs into consideration. Music can certainly evoke strong emotions, but it also conveys theological ideas through lyrics. Choose songs with lyrics that can be understood by children but also espouse deep theology that is appropriate for your context and tradition. Finding songs with lyrics that are simple *and* theologically rich can be difficult work, but it will help children to have emotional experiences that are enveloped within a theology that is upheld by their tradition and community. Perhaps you can introduce songs by explaining who wrote them, what they are about, and what words like "Hallelujah" mean.

3. Think about consumption and creation.

In today's mass-marketed world, children are often seen as consumers. They are the direct targets of advertisers, who seek to help them develop brand loyalty and learn to become good consumers. It can be easy to overlook the fact that young people are inherently creators as well. They are imaginative, artistic, and creative. We can help children write new lyrics to a familiar tune or provide simple instruments that even young children can use to make music to God. Whether they are a 21st-century Mozart or completely tone-deaf, all children are capable of making beautiful music to God.

4. Go beyond music.

While music may be a more common way to evoke emotional connections to God, it is certainly not the only way. Emotion-centered children can also be nurtured through other art forms, including drama and dance. Organize a drama or dance program at your congregation and allow the children involved in it to perform for their friends and family members or, even better, the entire congregation? One young boy that I spoke with said he felt closest to God when he was in front of his faith community performing in his church's Christmas pageant. Dance and drama can assist children in expressing their inner lives in creative ways and these art forms have the power to help children feel the presence of their divine Creator.

5. Make room in corporate worship.

Gretchen Wolff Pritchard wrote that “adults come to church on Sunday in order to worship; children come to Sunday school to acquire information” (Pritchard, 140-141). One of the most formative elements of the life of a congregation is communal worship. It is through worshipping as a congregation that the many different people come together as one to praise God. But children are not always present to participate in congregational worship.

If we include children in this formative practice that is central to the life of congregations, we can help them see that they are a part of something greater than themselves. We can show them that they are part of a great cloud of witnesses, that transcends space and time, who use their whole selves—including their emotions—to connect with God. By including children in our times of worship and praise, we help them become formed into members of our faith communities who seek out ways of authentically experiencing God.

More than Just Silence: Practices for Nurturing Symbol- Centered Children

It is not uncommon for people with a symbol-centered approach to spirituality to feel uncomfortable or unwelcomed in congregational programs and ministries. Since God is seen as ineffable mystery, churches and lessons that focus on learning about God can be seen as robbing God

of the very attributes that make God what and who God is. It is possible to create environments that nurture symbol-centered children. There are a number of practices that congregations can utilize in forming an environment to nurture children with this spiritual style.

1. Prayer matters.

A spiritual environment for children with a symbol-centered approach to spirituality can be formed through times and spaces that are intentionally dedicated to prayer. For these children, personal prayer is a key means for having intimate and personal connections with the transcendent God.

Leaders, pastors, and teachers can include several different types of prayer in their ministries, including quiet, inner prayer, “breath” prayers, or call-and-response prayers. Children can even be given opportunities to lead one another in different styles of prayer that they might prefer. One practice that I have found particularly helpful is to create a semi-private “prayer corner” by partitioning off a corner of a room with room dividers. Children can go to prayer corners to retreat from noise and crowds and to spend some time alone in quiet prayer with God.

2. Keep things open.

I have found that symbol-centered children are particularly affected by the spaces in which they meet for children's programs and ministries. It is not uncommon for them to be negatively affected by these spaces. They tend to prefer wide, open spaces. One young girl that I spoke with told me that her church's Sunday school rooms make her “feel all shoved up—like I'm being crammed inside of a locker.”

Whenever possible, provide children with large, open spaces. Should your church building not allow for enough space, try simple decorating tips like painting the walls a lighter color, using smaller furniture, and ensuring that the room is not cluttered. If the weather cooperates, why not hold programs and ministries outside, where children can be free from the obstruction of four walls?

3. Get back to nature.

Children with this spiritual style experience God among the natural world. They sense God's presence as they listen to water trickle down a river, smell the

aroma of wildflowers, or watch the snow fall on a winter's morning. If leaders and pastors wish to help children sense God's presence, they do well to go outside with them.

There are many practices that can help children to encounter God among God's creation: take children on nature walks, help them plant gardens and nurture vegetable plants, sit with them and quietly feel and listen to the wind, and have them share what they love about nature. All of these practices can combat what Richard Louv calls "nature-deficit disorder," a lack of exposure to the natural world. Spending time among nature reminds us not only of the beauty of God's creation, but also the fragility of nature. These practices can foster a sense of creation care among children.

4. Pay attention to pace and volume.

Thomas à Kempis once wrote, "In the silence and quietness of heart a devout soul profiteth much...that she may be so much the more familiar with God" (Kempis, 41). Nurturing children with a symbol-centered spirituality involves creating sacred spaces and times. This can be accomplished through a slow pace, a quiet environment, and an opportunity for stillness.

While some people might argue that quiet and stillness are tell-tale signs of boredom, symbol-centered children demonstrate the richness of a silence that allows them hear God's voice and a slowness that calms them enough to sense God's presence. Rather than leading to boredom, a quiet, calm pace of ministries can evoke a sense of reverence and wonder among young people. Why not try some breathing exercises to assist the children in becoming calm and getting in touch not only with God, but with their inner selves. Of course, the entire time of a ministry or program need not be slow and quiet. But it is important to, at times, create a calm, quiet, and tranquil space.

5. Nurture a sense of mystery, reverence, and awe.

Ministries that meet the spiritual needs of mystics approach God with mystery, wonder, reverence, and awe. God is seen as an infinite, transcendent, ineffable being that is worthy of our wonder and reverence. These children hold that God cannot be completely understood and they are content to marvel at the mystery that is God.

Instead of simply teaching children *about* God, pastors, teachers, and leaders can nurture these children by wondering together with them about the God who transcends words. Jerome Berryman has found that when adults express wonder, reverence, and awe toward God, it allows children time and space to do likewise (Berryman, 62). It allows the self to have spirit-to-Spirit connections to the God of wonders. An excellent resource for wondering alongside children is *Godly Play*. Created by Berryman, *Godly Play* is an "imaginative approach to religious education" that evokes a sense of wonder not only in children, but in people of all ages.

6. Saturate spaces with symbols and rituals.

Creating spaces that stir up a sense of mystery, reverence, wonder, and awe can include adding symbols and rituals to ministries and programs. Some traditions and congregations are already bursting with rituals and symbols. But we need to ensure that children have access to their richness. If your congregation is fairly free of rituals and symbols, you can try adding simple ones to your ministries and spaces. Rituals like foot washing, the passing of the peace, and candle lighting as well as symbols such as the cross, religious artwork, seasonal banners, and stained-glass windows can help children connect with God, feel included in the faith community, and form their identities as members of their communities of practice. Why not have children create rituals and symbols for their ministries and programs? They can think together about how to symbolize different aspects of faith and life through simple rituals and they can create their own symbols, like making stained-glass windows out of cellophane and tissue paper.

We can also help symbol-centered children connect with God by taking Brian McLaren's advice and begin "faithing our practices" (McLaren, 184). When we faith our practices, we connect simple elements of our everyday lives with God's cosmic presence and story. Passing out a snack can be a symbol for welcoming the stranger. Washing our hands can represent how God washes us clean. The possibilities are endless.

More than Just Getting Things Done: Practices for Nurturing Action- Centered Children

In browsing through the prepackaged, marketed curricula available from Christian bookstores and publishers, few (if any) seem to be geared toward satisfying the spiritual needs of children with an action-centered approach to spirituality. The “application-oriented” teachings of many mass-marketed curricula and programs too often focus on individual choices and personal morals and fail to nurture the world-changing drive of these children. These young people need to go beyond reminders to share their toys. They need to meet children who have no toys, go on “toy fasts,” organize toy drives, and fight for justice in the lives of the poor, oppressed, and marginalized.

Even through pre-packaged curricula that intentionally nurture action-centered children might be difficult to come by, there are a number of practices that, when utilized, can help action-centered children to be nurtured and feel included in their faith communities.

1. Provide opportunities to see the tears in their eyes.

Children with an action-centered approach to spirituality need to be in the world, being agents of change and helping bring about the fullness of God’s reign. Communities who wish to nurture and include these children do well to provide them with opportunities not only to serve those who are in need, but also to meet and get to know them, to see the tears in their eyes (Frost, 263).

Although this can be risky, helping children to have first-hand encounters with the poor, oppressed, and marginalized is incredibly meaningful to those who have an action-centered approach to spirituality. Through these encounters, children can become one with the “other” in solidarity against poverty, racism, oppression, and exploitation. These experiences of coming to know people they are trying to help can keep action-centered children grounded in reality and they can assist them in getting to know what needs to be done to truly help those in need.

2. Do it gradually.

Children need *gradual* opportunities to meet and serve those in need. In an article I wrote with Brian McLaren, Dan Jennings, and Karen-Marie Yust, we offer the following suggestion for gradually helping children to get to know those living in poverty or oppression:

A suburban preschool child might begin with her family sponsoring a child in Africa. In her elementary years, she might experience a summer exchange program with Native American children, leading to an inner-city immersion in middle school, followed by spending a summer among the urban poor in high school. Or a family might affiliate with a single helping organization, such as Habitat for Humanity, and involve their children first in limited contact activities (fundraising, food contributions), then at a moderate level (landscaping and words of support), and finally in full engagement (building alongside family members). (Csinos, et al., 19)

When teaching children about injustice by assisting them to meet those suffering from injustice, be careful not to do too much too soon. Start small, but don’t stay small. Keep in mind that we often grow when we are slightly out of our comfort zones. The spiritual formation of action-centered children involves providing them with opportunities to gradually get to know people who are poor, marginalized, and oppressed.

3. Don’t be overprotective.

Of course, we need to ensure that our children remain safe as they work towards a just and peaceful world. We don’t want to intentionally put our children in harm’s way. Pastors and teachers are, after all, charged with the task of helping to raise children in safe, loving, and nurturing environments. But safety need not compromise opportunities to make a difference. In fact, nurturing action-centered children might involve providing them with opportunities, when they are ready and willing, to step outside of their comfort zones.

Instead of completely sheltering young people from injustices in the world, we can teach children about God’s desire for them to bring about changes for the betterment of the global community. Often,

children are seen as too young to learn about the evils and struggles of the world. Ironically, however, too many children across the globe are not sheltered enough—they live as slaves, soldiers, and prostitutes.

Perhaps a first step is to educate our children about the injustices in the world and how to protect ourselves (and others) as we seek to eliminate these injustices. Be careful not to do too much too soon. We don't want to traumatize our children. While it is vital for us to protect our children, let's not make the all-to-common mistake of *overprotecting* them.

4. Do it in community.

None of us can do the difficult work of fighting for peace and justice by ourselves. Thus, one key way to help action-centered children get down to work and make a difference is to provide opportunities for them to be involved in service projects alongside a diverse group of adults.

For one young girl that I have come to know, working alongside her congregation as a legitimate and valuable member was a significant way in which she came to know God and feel included in her community. And when children serve the poor and advocate for the oppressed with caring adults and peers, they can feel safe as they step outside their comfort zones and experience growth. After all, they wouldn't be doing it alone.

5. Offer space for reflection.

Action-centered children can often get caught up in getting things done, in working to bring about positive changes in the world around them. They can forget about themselves and neglect the important work of self-care. In time, this can lead to burnout, personal crises, and severe doubt about one's life mission and vocation.

Leaders, pastors, and parents need to remind action-centered children of the importance of personal reflection and respite. There are several ways to help children express and reflect on their quests to change the world. They can write stories or poems, draw pictures, act out their experiences, and sing songs that express their desire for justice. Reflection can be personal or can occur in groups as children speak with one another about their desires to make a difference and how they are working to fight injustice. Having times of rest and reflection, when children can focus on what is going on within themselves as they help those around them, is a vital

aspect of faith formation. But it can be easily overlooked action-centered people who are focused on getting things done.

Concluding Thoughts

Creating inclusive environments in which all children can be nurtured based on their spiritual styles is not as complicated as one might think. Sometimes, the simplest approaches are also the most effective. Why deplete budgets on resources and curricula to create fast-paced, action-packed programs for children, when reading a good book, going on nature walks, singing simple yet meaningful hymns, or using one's imagination to wonder about God might be more effective at forming children in the faith?

Keep in mind the key goals in creating environments saturated with elements of each spiritual style: faith formation, spiritual nourishment, and encounters with our living God. The goal is not just to have children become knowledgeable, emotional, awe-struck, and focused on getting things done. When we forget about the ultimate objectives of children's ministry, we can become caught up in excessive intellectualism, emotionalism, mysticism, and encratism. But when we remember that knowing God and being formed in faith are the purposes of ministry, we can better make use of the many practices that nurture children of each style.

Some of the best ministries and most effective spiritual environments include contrasting characteristics of each spiritual style. Words alone are not able to meaningfully connect all children to God. But when words are balanced with actions, emotions, and symbols, every child involved can be welcomed and invited to encounter God according to their spiritual styles. And, in an important way, young people can also be challenged and stretched to move beyond their dominant styles and discover other ways in which children connect with God. While I fail to see how any one of the practices that I offered can be inclusive of young people of all spiritual styles, when practices for each style are juxtaposed, every child can feel a sense of inclusivity and fit within a balanced and welcoming spiritual environment.

It is crucial for leaders, pastors, and teachers to include practices for children of each spiritual style so that children can avoid becoming so embedded in

their dominant styles that they fall into one of the aberrations or extreme forms of spiritual styles. However, if a balanced tension between elements of all four styles exists, children are more likely to develop a balanced spirituality. They are also more apt to understand that there are many ways that people express what matters to them and connect with God in real and formative ways. Such a balanced sensitivity to the many ways of expressing spirituality and faith is a mark of churches that provide all children with a healthy sense of inclusivity and fit.

Notes

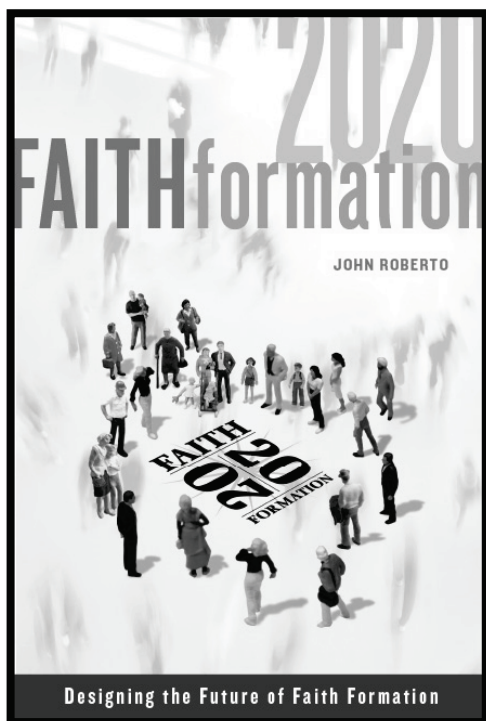
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Listening to Children in Changing Times

Book Excerpt from: *Listening to Children on the Spiritual Journey*

Catherine Stonehouse & Scottie May

“Well,” announced three-year-old Drew as he headed down the stairs to his grandpa’s office, “I’ve got to go do my paperwork.” A few hours later his family watched him on his toy cell phone, listened to one end of a “serious business” call, and smiled at this miniature reflection of Daddy or Grandpa at work. The adults in Drew’s family listened to him with pleasure, loving him for his cuteness. But there are many other reasons to listen to children.

Listening to children is a crucial part of our relationship with them. It brings pleasure, helps us know what the child needs, and can even teach us valuable lessons. *Listening to Children on the Spiritual Journey* is about listening to and learning from children. It grows out of many hours of listening to girls and boys talk about God, their experiences with and their efforts to understand God. We also listened to parents reflect on times when they caught a glimpse of their child’s spirituality and to adults reflecting back on their spiritual experiences during childhood.

Before beginning to listen, however, it is important to note that our perceptions of children influence what we hear in their words or see in their actions. Those perceptions are filters that cause us to notice some things and miss others. They also impact what we do with what we hear. Many factors contribute to the forming of our perceptions: our personal experiences, the philosophies and practices of our culture, and the theology we embrace, to mention a few. Much of this forming takes place subtly over time, and we are often unaware of the perspectives that make up our assumptions about girls and boys. As persons who care about children, it is important for us to examine our view of them and its influence on how we listen and learn from them. How did Jesus view children? How did his beliefs compare with the cultures around him? How have adults in past centuries viewed the young and with what results? What are common perceptions today? And why is it important for parents and adults who minister with children to listen carefully to them?

Catherine Stonehouse, Ph.D., author of the award-winning *Joining Children on the Spiritual Journey*, is the Orlean Bullard Beeson Professor of Christian Discipleship and dean of the school of practical theology at Asbury Theology Seminary. **Scottie May, Ph.D.** is associate professor of Christian formation and ministry at Wheaton College and co-editor of *Children Matter: Celebrating Their Place in the Church, Family, and Community*.

This book excerpt is taken from Chapter 1 in *Listening to Children on the Spiritual Journey: Guidance for Those Who Teach and Nurture* (Baker Academic, 2010). Used by permission.

The Importance of Listening in Changing Times

The Challenge of Change

At the close of the twentieth century and the beginning of the twenty-first, there has been an increased focus on the child within the religious traditions. Scholars have worked together to publish significant books exploring the spiritual development of children, the theology of the child and childhood, and children in the Bible. Also, thirty-three “doctors, research scientists, and mental health and youth service professionals” turned their attention to the question, “Why are so many children not thriving?” From the examination of their research and experience they concluded that many North American children lack deep connectedness to other people and to moral and spiritual meaning. They claimed that forming such connections requires intergenerational communities that embrace children and live out their faith and values together. Those of us responsible for the church’s ministry with children have a growing number of resources to help us understand the possibilities and challenges that we and our children face.

In recent years, leaders evaluating the church or ministering in it have called for a renewed emphasis on the importance of ministry with children. Some claim that new fast-paced, technologically enhanced methods are essential if the church hopes to interest and hold the attention of large numbers of twenty-first-century kids. At the other end of the spectrum, many churches are finding effective ministry with children through what we call a Reflective Engagement approach (*Catechesis of the Good Shepherd*, *Godly Play*, and resources prepared by Sonja Stewart are all expressions of this approach). Others, turning away from all structures and programmed approaches, want children just to be present with adults as they find their way into new modes of worship and faith community.

There is no doubt: we live in a time of rapid, major change globally and culturally and in the life of the church. As we face those changes we hear conflicting voices: some look at the culture and call for drastically new methods; others, reflecting on the past, warn us of what we have lost through the changes already made. And how are these changes

impacting children? Is anyone listening to the children? Are we discovering their spiritual potential, their love of being in God’s presence? Have we noted whether children and adults have quality time together in the faith community? Do we consider those realities as we plan ministries with them in the church?

A Metaphor for Our Changing Times

Since the late 1970s John Westerhoff III has been a significant spokesman on behalf of the young and their formation as Christians. As he reflects back on the modern era, particularly the twentieth century, he sees two ways in which adults have viewed children. He suggests the production line as the first metaphor. In this view the child is valuable raw material and adults are expected to know what the child should become and how, across time, to form her or him to that design. Parents and teachers do things “to” children, teaching them the information and skills they need. This instruction is assumed good for all children of a certain age and is usually given to a child in a classroom or a place and time designated for family devotions. The second perspective can be symbolized by a greenhouse. Children are valuable seeds to be cared for and nourished by parents and teachers who play the role of gardener. In this model adults do things “for” children so that the child’s potential can develop. They create a healthy environment and provide young learners with resources and experiences through which they can grow.

Westerhoff does not believe that either of these perspectives provides an adequate picture of formation. In a time of major change, he calls us to think of Christian formation as a pilgrimage. Children and adults are co-pilgrims sharing a journey and learning from each other. In this model adults do things “with” children. Together they enter into practices, rituals, stories, and events of life, and in those shared experiences they worship, learn, and are formed.

In the teaching of Jesus we also hear a call to this intergenerational interaction. Jesus charged adults with the responsibility to care about the faith of children, to not cause them to stumble, but to let them—to make it as easy as possible for them to—come to Jesus. On the other hand, Jesus challenged his disciples to learn from children how to enter the kingdom of God and live a life of greatness. Careful listening plays a crucial role in the dialogue that

contributes to the growth of children and adults, and it happens when adults are with children at play, in everyday life, and in worship.

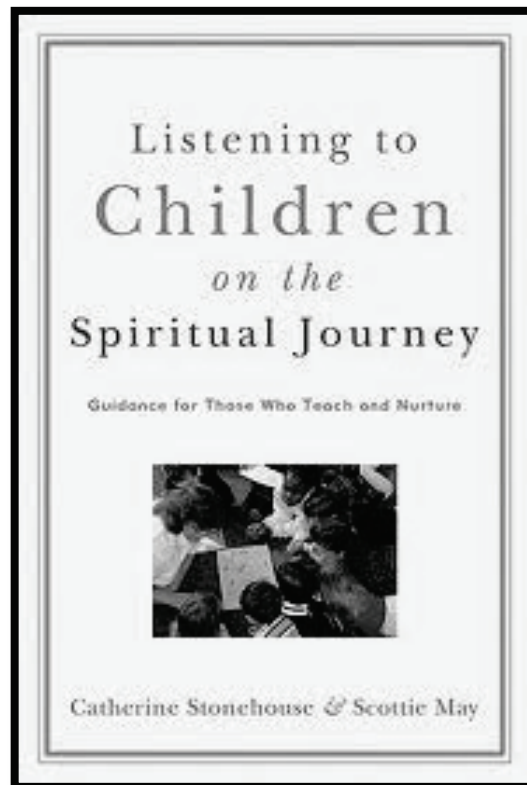
A Challenge to Listen and Learn

Across the past ten years, I (Cathy) have had the privilege of listening to girls and boys through the research project *Listening to Children*. I've heard them talk about how they picture and experience God, their growing relationship with Jesus, and how that relationship plays out in their lives. As I began studying the transcripts from the interviews with the children, I was amazed by the insights I found on those pages. But those nuggets of truth were not in lengthy, well-ordered theological descriptions. They often appeared within several pages of a child's free-flowing chatter. Discovering their thoughts was like panning for gold. As I reflected on those precious nuggets, I wondered how often profound insights or deep questions are dropped into the flow of a child's everyday conversation. How often do we fail to grasp the truth, or the struggle, in a comment because we are not really hearing what is being said? How often do we smile at a cute perspective or give a quick pat answer to a question without seriously reflecting on what the child said or wondering what was behind the comment or the question? In our fast-paced

busyness and distraction I'm afraid we miss important insights that we need to learn from our children. And we miss opportunities to help them sort through their questions and their fears.

When working with very young children, I (Scottie) have found that listening often has to take a different form—that of watching children. Children three, four, and five years of age often do not have the language to speak adequately about their perception of God, but through careful observation it is evident that they can be deeply spiritual. Some of my research involves this kind of "listening."

In this first decade of the twenty-first century we have become increasingly aware of the major changes going on in society and in the church. How should we respond to those changes? What do children need if they are to thrive as children of God, much loved followers of Jesus? We believe that finding answers to those crucial questions requires that we hear the voices of the children and let them help us understand the nourishment and companionship they desire on the faith journey. We invite you to join us in listening to children, learning from them, enhancing our listening and learning skills, and evaluating our ministries in the light of what we discover.





Faith Development and Faith Formation: More Than Just Ages and Stages

Robert J. Keeley

On Sunday evenings a year or so ago our church decided to engage the congregation in a study of worship. We got a book for the adults and teens to read and discuss but, while they were great for adults, we realized that we needed something else for the children. My wife, Laura, assembled some lessons on worship from a few other sources. The leaders of both the adult and children's groups enjoyed the study.

In one of the sessions Laura asked the children, ranging in ages from 3rd to 6th grade, to think about special events in their lives and place them on a time line. The children wanted to list "one-year-old birthday," "two-year-old birthday," and so on. Laura was looking for something else, though, so she said, "What about the first time you rode a bike or maybe when your baby brother was born?" But even with the examples that Laura gave the kids just couldn't do the task that she was asking them to do. Afterward we realized that we were seeing developmental theory in action. Kids of this age have a difficult time seeing that they have a personal past and a personal future. They can't see the big picture very well yet. As they grow older they'll be able to do that but they can't do it yet.

It was a good reminder of the importance of thinking about development in issues of faith formation and church ministry. It is very easy for us to think of development in terms of physical tasks: we would never, for example, ask a two year old to ride a two-wheeled bike without training wheels because we know that they don't have the balance to do that yet. But sometimes we don't think about other types of development and what impact that information might have on how we do things.

Robert Keeley Ph.D. is professor of education at Calvin College in Grand Rapids and co-director, with his wife Laura, of children's ministries at Fourteenth Street Christian Reformed Church in Holland, Michigan. He is the author *Helping Our Children Grow in Faith* (Baker Books, 2008) and editor/contributor to *Shaped by God: Twelve Essentials for Nurturing Faith in Children, Youth, and Adults* (Faith Alive, 2010). Bob's website is: www.calvin.edu/~rkeeley.

(This article is adapted from "Step By Step: Faith Development and Faith Formation" by Robert Keeley in *Shaped by God: Twelve Essentials for Nurturing Faith in Children, Youth, and Adults*, Faith Alive Christian Resources, 2010)

There are many types of development and a number of theories about how people progress through various developmental stages: theories of physical development, cognitive development (how we think,) psycho-social development (how we interact with others,) moral development and faith development. As we think about faith formation it is useful to think about development and how that might impact the way people interact with our ministry.

Faith Development: Insights and Cautions

Much of what we know about faith development comes from the work of John Westerhoff and James Fowler. Their theories of faith development are useful (although imperfect) tools to help us understand what we might expect as people grow in their faith. Both theories cover much of the same territory, but in this chapter we'll focus on Fowler's theory.

Before we begin, though, there are a few things that we should keep in mind.

First of all, faith is a gift from God—it is the result of the Holy Spirit's work in our lives and an amazing outpouring of grace. Turning it into series of stages through which we navigate is at best tricky and at worst a complete misrepresentation of the mystery and wonder of God's place in our lives. One reasonable response to this discussion is to despair that those of us engaged in it could easily miss what is really going on. So we need to do our work carefully and we need to continuously remind ourselves that all of this is nothing without the Holy Spirit's guidance.

Second, this theory is flawed. What's more we don't know exactly how it's flawed. So we need to be really careful when we apply this information. Fowler's theory has been criticized for being based on Western Christians and is not as universal a theory of faith development as he claims. So perhaps what Fowler says doesn't apply as well to Christians from non-Western Cultures. His faith development theory is also based on other developmental theories, those of Jean Piaget, Erik Erikson and Lawrence Kohlberg, all of which also have limitations. Those limitations will be part of the faith development theory as well.

Finally, all developmental theories recognize that while the order in which we move from stage to stage is fairly consistent the amount of time each person spends in each stage varies quite a bit. It's like the way children learn how to walk: we can say the general order in which things happen but we really can't tell when they're going to happen. So even though we can give approximate ages for each of these stages there are going to be examples of people who are doing the things associated with that stage at both older and younger ages. We also need to resist the urge to think of these stages as discreet—instead there is a gradual change from one stage to the next.

Having made all those disclaimers it might seem that we can hardly say anything at all about how we develop faith but that's not quite true either. It's been my experience, and the experience of others, that much of what we learn about faith development from studying these stages of faith ring true. They match our own experiences and the experiences that we have observed in others as we have watched them develop and grow in their faith. Thinking deeply about these stages will give us some insight into how we and others develop in our faith. Even with all the problems with the theory noted above, it is still helpful to think about how people in various stages can be nurtured in their faith. So let's look at Fowler's theory and consider what we can learn about faith formation from it.

Faith Development in Children

In his book, *Stages of Faith*, when Fowler considers the faith of very young children, children up to about age two, he calls their faith stage a "pre-stage" and refers to it as **Undifferentiated Faith**. This is a stage in which we form our first pre-images of God. Fowler suggests that, while we don't directly learn about God in this stage—at least we are not able to verbalize what we've learned—the things we learn set the stage for what will come later. Ministry to children at this age, therefore, should be about the very things that we would expect—care and safety. The best things that we can do for young children are to give them a place where they can be well cared for when their parents are in worship or in meetings and where both they and their parents feel comfortable. Erickson suggests that trust is one of

the primary issues that children of this age address. Making church a place where the warmth of the family of God is felt by young children and where children can learn to trust that they will be well cared for and loved is one of the most important things we can do for these young children and for their parents.

The next stage of faith, which Fowler refers to as the first stage, is *Intuitive-Projective Faith*. This stage is found primarily in preschool children and is, primarily, a reflection of parental faith. It would be easy for us to conclude that this isn't really a child's own faith since it is a reflection of someone else's faith but that is missing an important point: children of this age are generally not able to think abstractly, to take someone else's perspective on things or to think through complex ideas.¹ Their faith is not a "thought-out" faith. Rather, it is a faith based on impressions – impressions that they mostly pick up from their parents. It would be unrealistic for us to expect children of this age to give us any sort of logical or well-organized description of their faith. They're not wired for that yet. Their faith talk will reflect their thoughts—it will be impressionistic, based on the stories that they have heard and on the things they've picked up by being around people of faith in their home and in their church. It is, as Fowler's name suggests, intuitive.

Knowing that children of this age are building a foundation for the type of faith they experience later we want to be careful with the impressions we give them at this early age. Kids learn stories from us in church but they also learn other things that might have an even larger impact, such as things that reflect the climate of the church. They'll get a sense if church is a place of warmth or of conflict. They'll begin to know whether their parents see church as a place of joy or a place at which they merely have an obligation. They'll quickly get a sense of whether church is a place where they feel comfortable.

Children this age also like a certain amount of repetition. When our children were younger they had their favorite audiotapes, videos and DVDs. In the case of our youngest child we saw more episodes of *Barney* then we could possibly enjoy but our daughter continued to watch them. We saw an example of this in our church a few years back. In our children's worship center for three-year-olds, we begin each Sunday with some time playing with Play-Doh. We saw this as a way to help the children settle down and get acclimated to the leader and to each other. It happened every week and the children

seemed to like it. One summer, we decided the change things up a bit and asked all the children, ages 3 through 3rd grade to come to a different room to hear a story together. The 3-year-olds were not happy. A few of them just couldn't figure out why we had changed things—they wanted their Play-Doh time! This reinforced to us the importance of Play-Doh for these children, but more broadly it reminded us just how important repetition and ritual are. This sort of ritual has been built in to many programs for children such as Jerome Berryman's *Godly Play* or Berryman and Stewart's *Young Children and Worship*.

To help children of this age grow in their faith, repetition shouldn't happen just in children's worship rooms, it should also happen in congregational worship and in their homes. Perhaps in congregational worship you could have certain songs that are sung every week (like the Doxology, "Praise God From Whom All Blessing Flow") or words of blessing that are the same from week to week. Certain congregations or denominations have this built-in, but for others this may be something they make a point of adding. At home you might have mealtime rituals involving prayers, sung blessings² or Bible reading. These are things young children can grab on to and they will come to expect every day or every week. Connecting what you do at home with what you do at church will help children see that faith is not something that's just in a certain building, it is a way of life.

As preschoolers get older they move into the next stage of development, *Mythic-Literal Faith*. This stage is found in those starting at around age six and it often lasts until age 11 or 12. In other words, this is the elementary school stage. These children can articulate their faith better than they could before, but that has as much to do with language development as it does with faith development. Their faith is still primarily a reflection of the faith of others their world has gotten bigger and so now people other than their parents also have significant influence.

I remember when my oldest daughter was in kindergarten. One evening at dinner I asked her to lead us in a prayer at the end of our meal and she prayed a prayer similar to the ones I had prayed at the table since she was old enough to pay attention, but then she added a request for one of her classmates who was sick. That event struck me because it was the first time I noticed her faith being influenced by someone other than my wife or me.

She was imitating what her Christian school teacher had done in class. She demonstrated in a small way what Fowler suggests happens ordinarily at this stage.

Children in this stage learn more and more of the stories of the Old and New Testaments. Kids begin to connect these stories together, but still don't see them as one large story. Story is important to all of us in our faith formation but it is especially important to children at this age. For one thing the stories catch their attention. While this is true for all of us, of course it is especially true for children of this age because they are not good at abstract thinking yet.³ This is one of the things we learned from Jean Piaget's work in cognitive development. This characteristic of their thinking makes story, as opposed to lessons that are built around concepts, particularly well suited to them.

Even more importantly, though, the stories of the Bible give children a sense of who they are and of what it means to be the people of God. These are our family stories and learning them is important at this stage in faith development. It gives children the pieces they will need so that, when they get to the next stage of development and can begin to put things together, they have the building blocks at their disposal already.

The church, then, has a wonderful opportunity to share the important stories of our faith to children at a time when they are developmentally ready to receive them. A dry transmission of these stories isn't going to do it, though. We need to use this opportunity to share these stories with them in a way that allows children to live inside of the stories.⁴ These stories are rich and deep and we should not use them as merely a vehicle to get to a moral lesson. If we do this we will be merely giving children a checklist of dos and don'ts instead of introducing them to the stories of God and his people.

Children in this stage don't usually ask questions about whether the faith that they received from their parents works or not. They pretty much still just accept it as the way things are. This is also true for adults who are still in this stage. Kenneth Stokes, in his book, *Faith is a Verb*, writes that adults who possess a faith that is "straightforward and literalistic" experience their faith this way. They will likely find themselves most comfortable in a church that emphasizes a highly literal interpretation of scripture and a strong sense of the authority of the church leaders. While they will likely not have the

same cognitive restrictions as elementary school children, they will come to their faith in the same unexamined way.

Faith Development in Adolescents and Young Adults

The next stage, *Synthetic-Conventional Faith*, begins around the time that students enter middle school and lasts throughout much of high school. Again, some people will remain in this stage for much of their lives. Anyone who has spent much time with middle schoolers knows that identity formation is a big part of what is happening at this time. Erickson's theory of psycho-social development helps us understand that this is one of the major issues that kids in this age. Piaget's theory of cognitive development suggests that this is a time in which children are more able to handle abstraction. The interaction of these two things has a number of ramifications in education as well in other areas. For example, these children and teens more fully realize that they have a personal past and a personal future. They are also capable of seeing things from the perspective of other people—a skill that they often use to look at themselves. This fuels the self-absorption—sometimes called adolescent egocentrism—that we see in kids at this age. Describing life with their teenage son, friends of ours said it was like "Caleb Radio—all Caleb, all the time." Because adolescents see the world through this relatively new lens of imagining what others think and because they are trying to figure out who they are they spend an inordinate amount of time thinking about themselves. Anyone who has spent time with middle school kids has seen this.

Self-absorption is not the only issue in this stage, of course. Because they are capable of more abstract thought is more possible, kids and teens are also to begin to put the Bible stories that they have been hearing for years into a larger story of faith. They can, for example, begin to understand the connections between the Exodus, the celebration of the Passover and the Lord's Supper. These connections, which help us realize that the Bible is one large story, are difficult for younger children to understand. Teenagers' ability to do this allows us to have deeper and more complex conversations about faith than we could when they were younger.

Two other interesting things, which may seem contradictory, are also going on at this time: a desire for independence and a strong desire to belong to a group. Since teens at this stage want to be independent they are at the point where they want to choose their own faith. For the first time, their faith is not merely a reflection of someone else's faith. They actually make some deliberate personal commitments. Their experience is still quite limited, though, and they want to be part of a group, for the most part they choose the faith of their parents. So, even though they make a choice, the list of options is usually limited to one—the faith they were raised in.

The importance of friends is great at this age. Because these teens are trying to figure out who they are they will try to differentiate themselves from their parents, at least to a certain extent, and they will align themselves with a group of friends who can also have a significant influence on them. Sometimes teenagers literally wear their identities on their sleeves—or at least on their clothes. You can often tell how they identify themselves based on the way they dress. Recently my wife and I passed two teenage boys who were pretty clearly communicating a few things about themselves without saying anything. The way they had their hair and the way they dressed identified them with a particular group of teens in our community who spend their free time skateboarding. Whether they realized it or not, these boys were carefully creating an image that showed that they were part of the skater group. To a certain extent, this is true of all teens: all teens are working on their identities and they often begin this by identifying themselves with (or against) certain groups.

Another important issue in both this stage and the next is the location of authority. For young children authority for many things is clearly located with their parents. Parents have control over many of their decisions, certainly their big ones. Early on, for example, parents pick out the clothes their children wear. As they get older they begin to make those choices themselves. Those first choices come from a limited set of options, usually chosen by their parents. Later the choices are completely their own. As children grow into teens and then into young adults the location of that authority shifts from being primarily external (with parents) to being primarily internal.

People who are in Fowler's synthetic-conventional stage of faith, whether they are teens

or much older, find their source of authority for their faith is primarily located outside themselves. Cult leaders use this sort of authority structure to help them control the people who follow them. Some Christian leaders who see themselves as having God-given authority over their flock may structure their church in a synthetic-conventional mode, depending on their followers to pretty much do what they say. While it is easy to paint these people in a purely negative light, there are, of course, a number of examples of Christian leaders who do not abuse this authority and who care deeply for the people in their congregations. But the point is the same—the people who are in the synthetic-conventional stage of faith give over much of the authority for their faith to someone else.

This is in contrast to the fourth stage, *individuating-reflective* faith. This is a stage that is characterized by what happens when we take control of our faith, when the authority for our faith comes to reside within us instead of with someone else. This often happens at the same time as other significant life changes like moving away from home. Again, the shift in the center of authority doesn't happen overnight. But moving away from home—perhaps moving away to college—can be a trigger to make it happen more quickly or it can initiate the beginning of such a shift. Sometimes this move merely results in a relocation of authority from parents to someone else and does not represent taking on that authority personally. For example, someone might leave a church that is very authoritarian and will move to a different group that still exerts great authority over their members. This is likely not a change in faith stage but is merely a change in the particulars of their faith experience.

But if there really is a change in the location of authority, these people examine their faith in a way that they really didn't before. They take a step back from the faith that they accepted when they were younger and they begin to ask if this faith really works for them. They perhaps engage questions that have been lurking under the surface for a while but hadn't really allowed themselves to address.

Although a number of college students find themselves here, this isn't just a phase for college students. Research has found that this stage happens for people throughout their adult lives. People in this stage are allowing questions to have a foothold in their faith. This can be a powerfully positive experience as people realize that the Christian faith has the sort of depth that holds up

well to their questions, especially when they have the opportunity to work through them with thoughtful, articulate people who don't give them easy answers. It doesn't take a theologian to know that God is bigger than we can imagine. It also makes sense that there will be questions for which we just don't have answers. But a person who listens carefully, thinks through the questions and explores the beginnings of answers with people in this stage of their faith can be a great help. Some people, according to Kenneth Stokes, are told simply not to question their faith (Stokes, 19). But this sort of response isn't helpful. People in this stage aren't going to be satisfied with a "because I told you so" faith—they want something that they can grapple with.

People in this stage of faith seek a church community that allows them to express their faith in their own way. At this point their faith is quite individualistic; for the first time in their lives, their faith belongs to them as a person instead of them as a group. A few years back I was talking to a student who told me that she really had her own personal beliefs that didn't match any church or organized group. Back then I found it remarkable that a person of this age could just assume that her 19 years of experience gave her insights that centuries of thought by thousands of people hadn't come up with! But really, she was simply giving voice to what this stage is all about. She needed to define her faith in her own way. It needed to make sense to her and accepting someone else's answers wasn't going to cut it.

What we sometimes see in this kind of faith, and what I saw in that student, is throwing off of the trappings of church—a desire to reinvent faith to get at the heart of what these people see as "what really counts." This might involve switching to another church where the faith is perceived as being "alive" or "authentic." It might mean getting involved more deeply in church education. It might mean staying in the same church but seeking additional places to grow in faith, whether that is through attending a Bible study at another church, attending lectures and worship services or just reading things that speak to the person's individual expressions of the faith. Of course, other factors might enter in to these decisions. Relationships formed over the years, for example, often keep people in their churches even if they feel that their needs aren't being met. But however it gets played-out, for many people

there will come a time when their previously unexamined faith gets put under the microscope.

Churches can respond to this stage of faith in a pre-emptive way by presenting the Christian faith to children in a way that invites questions. We want to give children a faith that shows that we grapple with scripture and seek to discover God's will for our lives.

One way we can do this is to give them the stories that show that biblical characters were not always "goody-two-shoes" types of people. I'm not suggesting that we tell first graders all the details of Judah and Tamar, but I do think it is good for them to know that David faced Absalom as well as Goliath, or that that Abraham trusted God with Isaac but wasn't so sure when he said that Sarah was his sister instead of his wife. As we get to see that the people in the Bible were just like us we can begin to see that we can worship and have a relationship with God just like they did. If we give children a mere shadow of the full story of God and his people then when they ask if the faith that they have followed for years actually *works*, they won't have a good answer.

Faith Development in Adulthood

In stage five, which Fowler calls *conjunctive faith*, the unsettled sense that exists in stage four settles down a bit. People in this stage can own the faith of the community in a way that they couldn't before. There are still questions but these arise in the context of a solid faith. There is a strong sense that the "my faith" that the person has developed earlier has become "our faith." People in this stage recognize that long-standing expressions of faith have depth and richness to them and they are ready to embrace them. They may be ready for significant encounters with Christian faith traditions other than their own. But unlike an earlier stage in which there is a desire to try out other ways of faith to see if they fit, this is a deep commitment to seeing if other traditions might have insights that can enrich the experience. This stage represents a faith that does not place authority in the hands of someone else but it is also not afraid to recognize the wisdom that others can share with regard to faith. Fowler cautions that this is not a "wishy-washy neutrality" but instead it represents someone who is open to

other perspectives because he or she is extremely well grounded in faith (Fowler, 186).

People in this stage of faith are often eager for insights that can give them a richer and fuller understanding of God and his work in the world. These people will be open to in-depth teaching and service opportunities as well as opportunities to work with other churches and faith groups while remaining deeply engaged in their home church. They are able to see the beauty of worship that is both progressive and ancient. They can see the complex in the simple. They can be part of a group without feeling like they are sacrificing their individuality.

Fowler adds a sixth stage, **universalizing faith**, to his list which we will only briefly mention here. This stage, according to Fowler, is a radical living out of your faith. The faith that has been solidified in stage five becomes something that has an even more significant impact on the life of a believer. The examples that Fowler gives changed their lives in radical ways for their faith, people like Gandhi, Martin Luther King, Jr., Dietrich Bonnhoffer or Mother Theresa. Fowler says that this stage is quite rare.

Conclusion

We should keep a few things in mind when we think about faith development and faith formation.

- It is important to articulate our faith to each other and to our children. In their book *Soul Searching*, Smith and Denton write that “religious language is like any other language: to learn to speak it, one needs first to listen to native speakers using it a lot, and then one needs plenty of practice speaking it oneself” (Smith, 133). We get better at understanding our faith by articulating it and we articulate it better when we practice. Giving children and others religious language will help in their overall development.
- Bible stories are a vitally important in helping children (and all of us) understand that our faith is much more than just a series of rules or moral lessons. God introduces himself to us in these stories and they help us know Him and know ourselves. They are

our family stories and we need to tell them often and well.

- People of all ages need to know that they have an important place in our church community. One way to do that is to give them an opportunity to participate in worship leadership. Senior citizens, young children and everyone in between should feel that the majority of church programs give them an opportunity to rub shoulders with each other. Having adults in the lives of younger Christians is good for everyone. Children learn that the faith that they received from their parents is shared by other important people as well; they get a first hand look at how older Christians live their lives and they see that all of church life—a not just the “kid’s part”—is for them. Older adults get to share their personal stories and they get practice articulating their faith. They are also reminded that the questions that teens and young adults have are an important part of the faith journey.
- The home is vitally important to the early years of faith development. Not only do children and teens spend more time at home than anywhere else, but the influence of parents on early faith development is hard to overemphasize. Churches should support parents in helping their children learn about God and how God work in their lives.
- All of these stages are best experienced in community. By being with other Christians in various stages of their faith development we have the chance to more fully experience our own faith. We were created to live in community and it is in community that our faith finds its best expression and our faith can grow. Giving children a strong sense of the Christian community is the best way to give them the support that they will need in various stages of their faith.

End Notes

- ¹ This comes from an understanding of Piaget’s Theory of Cognitive development.
- ² Ron Rienstra has written about sung meal table graces and included examples in Rienstra, Ron, “Table Graces: Connecting Sung Prayers in Church

with Meal Prayers at Home,” *Reformed Worship* 76, p16-17.

³ See Arthur, Sarah, “Distinguishing Dragons: The Importance of Story in Faith Formation” in Keeley, Robert J. (ed.) *Shaped By God: Twelve Essentials for Nurturing Faith in Children, Youth and Adults*, Grand Rapids, MI: Faith Alive Christian Resources, 2010, p37-46.

⁴ For an extended discussion of what I mean by this see Keeley, Robert J., *Helping Our Children Grow in Faith* Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 2008.

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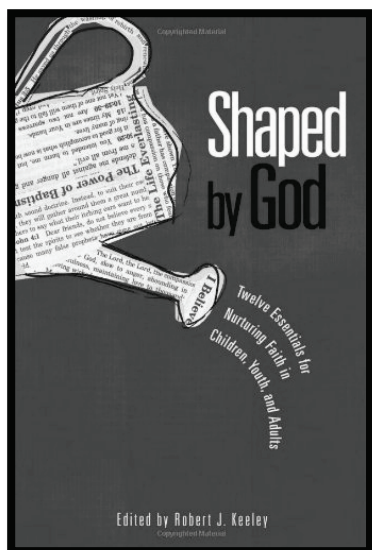
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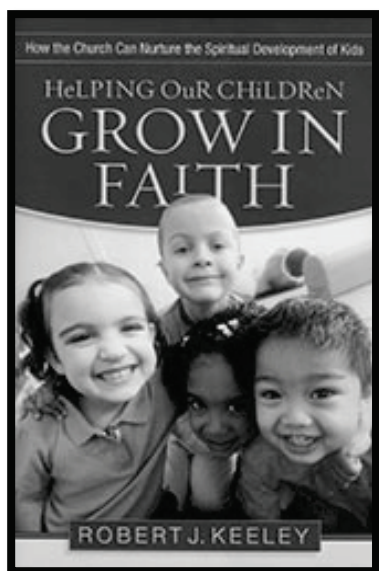
Faith Formation Resources by Robert J. Keeley



Shaped by God: Twelve Essentials for Nurturing Faith in Children, Youth, and Adults

Robert J. Keeley, editor. Grand Rapids: Faith Alive, 2010. [\$14.99]

Faith formation doesn't just happen—it's a Spirit-led lifelong process of shaping and reshaping. In this accessible anthology, twelve experts share their perspectives on faith formation at home, in worship, in education, in intergenerational contexts, in people with developmental disabilities, and more. Chapters include: Biblical Foundations of Faith Formation, Faith Formation through Faith Practices, The Importance of Story in Faith Formation, Faith Formation at Home, Faith Formation through Worship, Sacraments and Education, Fostering Intergenerational Christian community, Faith Formation and People with Developmental Disabilities, Recent Research, and Faith Formation in the Postmodern Matrix.



Helping Our Children Grow in Faith

Robert J. Keeley. Grand Rapids: Baker, 2008. [\$14.99]

Educator and children's ministry director Robert Keeley provides guidance for helping children develop a three-dimensional faith—a faith that involves their heads, their hearts, and their spirits. The book presents six practical principles for fostering faith in children. It shows how to integrate children into congregational worship, how to teach them the Bible while appreciating the mystery of God, and how to distinguish the difference between faith development and moral development. Chapters include: The Church as Community, Jesus Values Children, Dwelling in the Mysteries, The Power of Story, Obedience and Faith, Worship, and Creating a Child-Friendly Culture.



Influencing Children's Faith Now

Reflections from *What Matters Now in Children's Ministry*
Matt Guevara, Amy Dolan, Henry Zonio, and Friends

Introduction

What Matters Now in Children's Ministry: 33 Perspectives on How to Influence Children's Faith Now is the work of Matt Guevara, Amy Dolan, Henry Zonio, and Friends. "What matters now in children's ministry?" is a question that every leader in the field of children's and family ministry answers on a daily basis through their decisions, communication, meetings, programming, curriculum, recruiting, and schedule. This is the question that underscores countless hours of time and effort by pastors, faith formation leaders, support staff, and volunteers. This is the question that gets answered every time a church opens its doors to children and families. This question matters.

They asked leaders from a variety of denominational backgrounds in vocational church ministry, education, parachurch ministry, non-profit organizations, and business to answer the question with one word. The responses are as varied as the environments where the contributors serve. These unique one-word themes are colorful and catalytic, inspiring and conversational, innovative and foundational, timely and true. You can download the entire book from: www.corycenter.org/uploads/what_matters_now.pdf.

The following selections from *What Matters Now in Children's Ministry* serve as examples of the type of thinking and conversation we need to be having in faith formation. Download the entire book. Share selections with others. Use them with volunteers and staff members as a tool to answer the critical question in your own ministry context: "What matters now in my children's ministry?"

Empowerment

When reflecting on what children's ministry needs NOW, I kept returning to this thought: We need leaders who work under an empowerment model that is strength-based and family-centered. What does that mean? First, our ministries need to be empowered by the Holy Spirit. Second, and more practically speaking, we need leaders who work to build on the strengths of children, families, and volunteers to promote spiritual growth and development for everyone involved. Children's ministry provides an opportunity for children to develop their skills within a safe context and use them in ways that serve the church (I Timothy 4:12).

It also allows for relationship development that has implications for socio-emotional and spiritual growth. Further, this model helps leaders to partner with parents, building on family strengths to enable and equip them to be spiritual leaders at home. Finally, we can empower volunteers, plugging them into areas that are congruent with their passions and abilities. This approach increases commitment, consistency, and leadership potential. I believe that when we are empowered by the Holy Spirit and a commitment to build on the strengths of children, families, and volunteers, the impact of children's ministry programs will be amplified in both present and eternal outcomes.

Brianne Friberg (Ph.D) has a doctorate in Human Development and Family Studies from the University of Wisconsin. She is a passionate Christ-follower, wife, mother, professor, and children's ministry volunteer.

Encounters

Yes, encounters matter! Special encounters! Here are five encounters that can help kids grow and be formed in their faith.

First, children need to encounter voices from all generations. Of course that includes Mom and Dad, but it must also mean the whole faith family sharing faith stories with each other, worshipping and praising God together, sharing meals and playing together.

Second, kids need encounters with peers of faith—kids with whom they daily walk side by side on their faith journey.

Third, they need to encounter places where they can use their gifts and abilities to serve the whole faith community.

The fourth encounter children need is with God's love Story to them—the Bible. They need to recognize and own that they are in this story, finding their place in it.

Lastly, but most importantly, children each need encounters with God himself. (Even very young children have these but often in surprising ways and places.) To be intentional in these encounters requires sacred space—places where the pace and volume are slow and soft; where the spirit of the child meets the Spirit of God.

Flesh out with some colleagues how to facilitate these encounters. You, your kids, and your ministry will be enriched.

Scottie May teaches courses in children's and family ministry at Wheaton College. She is co-author of *Children Matter* and *Listening to Children on their Spiritual Journey*.

Justice

Social justice has gained sweeping importance throughout developed countries. Children are being exposed to the great needs around the world, yet if they only do these things because they are right and good, they will be left empty of lasting hope.

We must be leading the way in providing instruction and opportunity for kids to engage in social justice with right understanding. We need to teach them that when they give to the poor and care for the sick, God's Kingdom is being seen. We do not have to wait for heaven to see God's Kingdom. We can see it here and now. When justice is met, heaven and earth overlap, and we glimpse His Kingdom on earth.

Children can and should be involved with social justice. We MUST get them involved. We have a responsibility to teach them not to do justice for justice's sake, but to do justice for God's sake.

Megan Towell is the Director of Children's Ministries at Park Community Church in Chicago, IL. She coaches others in leadership development and oversees a multi-site, urban children's ministries.

Parenting

We must not ignore this fact: Nothing the Church does will influence children as much as what happens in their homes.

As one who loves the local church, I believe we must change our focus or lose a generation. The local church, I would argue, has more positive potential to influence the family than any other organization. In your community, that church is your church.

Your church stands in a unique position to speak into and care for families:

- To equip them
- To encourage them
- To partner with them

Your church has both the influence and the tools necessary to equip parents. Help them become the primary spiritual voice in the lives of this generation. What matters Now in Children's Ministry is that we continue the transition from providing childcare to equipping parents.

Here are some places to begin:

- Pray for God's direction
- Identify resources for heads of households
- Create classes, events, and programs that are family integrated
- Provide training
- Build community

Children today urgently need this one thing: Godly parenting. What will you do? Will you allow God to use you to equip and encourage parents as you partner with them?

Michael Chanley leads the Parenting Ministry at Southeast Christian Church in Louisville, Ky. He is the author of *Collaborate: Family + Church*.
Twitter: @michaelchanley; www.CMConnect.org

Mentalmorph

It's a made up word that influences the products we create, the ministry we lead and even the way we raise our families.

Mentalmorph describes the constant exercise of integrating head and heart knowledge with hands and feet knowledge in every area of our lives.

Mental—*preparing your mind for action* (1 Peter 1:13)

Learning Scripture is bigger than simply memorizing facts. It's knowing the Word and hiding it in our heart. An effective way to cultivate this in children is to help them apply the truth of Scripture in situations they face. Taking the time to stop and talk about circumstances in light of Scripture shows that Jesus is relevant, and it shapes and sharpens their biblical worldview in the process.

Morph—*put it into practice* (Philippians 4:8-9)

Wisdom is intelligence plus character: knowing what's right and doing it. To cultivate this, we must encourage children to allow the truth of Scripture to change the way they act. It's a never ending, daily practice that nurtures faith and strengthens their relationship with Christ.

It's this kind of radical and transformational living that gives strong evidence for a cluttered world to stop and notice Jesus in each of us.

Todd Hampson and **Sean Copley** are Timbuktoons, an animation studio dedicated to changing the world one cartoon at a time. They produce content for clients and media for children's ministry.

Community

All the Bible stories, catchy songs, classroom creativity, and fun snacks don't mean a thing without healthy Christ-centered relationships that connect our children to one another, to adults who care about them and to the God who loves them.

When children are part of a community that models unconditional love and acceptance, they have a glimpse of what it means to be loved by God. When children trust and commit to people whom they can see then they can begin to trust and commit to God whom they can't see.

Adults have a serious responsibility as part of the community helping to nurture children into a relationship with Christ. We are always teaching whether we've "signed on" to teach or not. We teach children when we do something as simple as learn their names (or not), when we include them in the worshiping community (or not), when we surround them with adults who are gifted and called to work with children (or not).

Community has never been a greater need for children because of this "hurry-up-and-fit-it-all-in" culture. The church needs to do community well for it to make a difference.

Liz Perraudis a Regional Advisor for The LOGOS Ministry where she supports churches through training, coaching, and resourcing into more effective ministry with young people (www.thelogosministry.org).

Parents

Parents. Every parent has a vision for their kids whether they know it or not. A vision for an education... from a Doctorate to simply an educational step higher than they achieved. A vision for a certain lifestyle... from multi-millionaire to simply a step above what they had growing up. A vision for opportunity... from NCAA athlete to simply more open doors than they had opened for them.

Some visions are more precise than others. In the end, parents want more for their kids. This vision drives decisions they make: where they devote their time, money and attention and where they lead their kids to devote their time, money and attention.

Parents in your church need a vision for their family.

A Family Vision

- ...that leads parents to dream about their child's pursuit of Jesus
- ...that encourages parents to lead by example
- ...that drives them through the challenges of everyday parenting
- ...that exceeds the external and embraces the eternal
- ...that lays the groundwork for successive generations to follow Christ
- ...that extends beyond the time they attend your church

Parents will pursue their dreams for their kids. Lead them to dream about a life lived for Jesus.

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Wonder and Jesus

I believe one of the most compelling questions in Scripture is the disciples' asking about Jesus, "What kind of man is this?" After a glimpse of his power, the disciples were driven to discover the answer. Our churches should instill that wonder in children and propel them to a lifelong adventure of finding out the truth behind that question.

When it comes to children's ministry, we all want engaging programming, flawless theology, deep relational communities, great tools to equip parents, etc. Ultimately, we want all that so we can point children to Jesus. Sometimes we do that by giving answers, other times by raising questions.

I wish that children would always leave churches with answers and questions, with a sense of wonder and amazement at the person and work of Jesus.

I hope that our ministries help children encounter Jesus in such a way that multiple times throughout the week they will, with a sense of wonder, ask themselves the question, "Who is Jesus?"

I pray that every child influenced by children's ministries everywhere will wonder so fully, so deeply, so passionately that they embark on a quest to know, "Who is Jesus?"

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Family Daily Living Faith Practices

Christy Olson

A baby is born. A child is welcomed. A family is formed. The great mystery of faith formation within the structure of family shivers with potential. God is present in this awe-filled adventure of lifelong faith that sprouts, stretches and produces an abundance of fruit.

Lifelong faith development is as basic as intellectual, physical, social and emotional growth. “Spiritual formation is not optional” say Marjorie J. Thompson author of *Family The Forming Center*. The experiences and relationships of the individual unfold and the family is placed into a role of support, nurturing and recognition of spiritual gifts. How the family interacts and what they identify as the importance of faith, is vital to formation.

Families self-define. Society, including religious organizations, has spent millions of dollars and hours trying to define a family from the outside. And, yet, as a child is born and placed in a family through birth, adoption or circumstance, the people surrounding that child become family. The relationships of those who provide economic, social/emotional and physical care of the child define themselves as family. In today’s society, we are just as likely to hear two parents and two children call themselves “family” as a grandparent, mother, step father and step sister. The question becomes whether or not that self-defined family understands their role and God’s presence in lifelong faith development.

Think of the faith potential in a single family. To those of us who wake up each morning feeling the presence of God, the potential is palatable. Most people do not feel the presence of God in their lives. How do we educate to something many have only a hint about? Do we take them on retreat? If so, who pays for that in today’s economically challenged society? How do families discern, the “right” retreat for them. Do we write a book? How does the book get into a household? Do we require congregational attendance three nights a week to “get spiritual”? What’s the best venue to help families know and understand God? Hmmmm...

Perhaps we need to relook at the delivery system for knowledge about faith practices. To honor the faith growth of the family within the household, we need to concentrate on family *in-sourcing*. *In-sourcing* is getting the information to families in their homes with someone who can help in the family discovery. The

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change in this is about the final goal. Rather than looking at the primary goal as getting the family to church, our goal is to deliver faith information to the family at the place where they live. A human being is the main delivery system with a steady stream of easy ideas and a place to ask questions.

The single most effective tool is the presence of one who cares deeply about the faith journey of the family. Relationships and experiences are the ingredients needed for faith development. No matter what tool is used, the delivery system should be a human being who knows the fertile soil of family life and understands the gift of daily living faith practices.

A creative church staff member once told me that she needed to walk everyday. So she created 20 different door hangers for the 100 homes immediately surrounding their church. These included a group home and a senior living building. As she tended to the daily needs of her body through exercise, she delivered the door hangers. The door hangers had an easy idea for a faith practice to add to the life of the household, church information, and a phone number to call if the household wanted to stop the door hangers. The person on the other end of the telephone number was *not* the over extended church secretary, but a home bound woman who had time to talk to the people on the phone. The 12 phone calls to stop delivery, all resulted in good, spiritual conversations.

The goal of outreach is to reach out to others. The goal for the congregations is to reach out and engage people so they are inspired to the point of involvement in an active spiritual life connected to God. When we think of getting the message of spiritual faith practices into families the words family *in-sourcing* best describe the goal. *In-sourcing* means meeting families where they are getting the resources into the families.

This is a reverse of what is presently occurring in congregational faith formation programs. Religious education has embraced the need for families to learn together but still continues to bring them to the place of “real learning.” I believe that the “real” place of learning is in the home and we need to start there.

In her children/adult book, *The God Seed*, Edith Armstrong celebrates the presence of God in each of us from the beginning of life. This is a point of entry for educating families about spiritual faith practices. Continuing the metaphor of “seed” we know that both the potential of the seed and the potential of

growth for families is sacred. God is present in all growth. Young families, new grandparents, new great-grandparents are all given an “a-ah,” God is “present” message at the birth of a child. Part of the a-ha is about dreams and hope for future growth and the child. Here’s a common story.

Once upon a time a family had a baby. They forgot to call the pastor that married them 2 years earlier. They were so excited and only in the hospital for a day and a half. After six weeks of sleepless nights, a baby who evidently did not like certain kinds of formula, learning to diaper etc. the parents said, “We should get our baby baptized (christened, dedicated).” Now the list for the new family had several things checked off: 1) Get pregnant at the best time for the adults, our jobs and the world; 2) Have baby; and 3) Oh, by the way, we better have that baby baptized (christened, dedicated). The parents call the church and say, “Hey, we want to baptize (christen, dedicate) our baby. We aren’t members, but we got married there. We think we should baptize our baby. Everyone says so, so we need to do this, how about next Sunday? That looks convenient for us.”

This story is fertile soil for introducing families to faith practices. A miraculous, awe-filled, once-in-a-lifetime event has occurred so families think, “maybe there is a God.” Families not only need guidance at this point of a child’s birth, but also are actually seeking answers. Our expectation should be presence with the family, modeling of faith practices and let the seed of faith germinate through the family. By building a relationship, when the family needs more information, we can *in-source* materials or offer possible ways to connect with other families through study or service.

The Fertile Soil of Families

The family offers fertile soil for faith practices. Parents yearn for a spiritual life for their children, but are unsure of how to make this happen. Many adults have unhappy memories of organized church or they feel marginalized for many different reasons. Hurt has happened and a building called church, temple or mosque has been blamed. With guidance, healing and spiritual growth can take place in the home through daily faith practices. Family fertile

soil is a place where growth can occur moment-by-moment and day-by-day.

The fertile soil of families involves several important components. Each of these components parallels fertile soil in nature. Fertile soil for faith development includes the organic material of relationships and experiences. (Think about the worms and their place in soil.) Fertile soil is balanced. (Too acidic and those petunias won't flourish.) Fertile soil is teeming with potential. (Fertile soil receives sacred seeds and helps them grow.) Fertile soil can be gracefully amended. (Think weeding, adding manure and aerating.) How can we help the family identify itself as fertile soil for faith development?

The fertile soil of families is about the organic material of relationships and experiences.

Take the time to sit outside a grocery store between the hours of 4:30 p.m. and 6:30 p.m. and you will know the status of families in America. Frazzled adults try to plan for dinner that night after working part time, full time or all the time. Tired adults push carts with tired children hanging on the sides. Arguing is the norm after being apart for part of the day or all of the day. Good decisions are not being made about food, behavior or attitude. Families are exhausted.

A parent attending a class I was leading, once said to me, "Stop the carousel and let me off. I need to feel the earth, and see, hear and smell the ways of my family. Please don't tell me I have to do something else to be the perfect parent." Of course, I was holding a six page two-sided hand out on what parents should do to develop the faith of her child. I understood exactly what the parent was saying. The urge is to tell parents about what their child needs. It is time to stop the carousel and help families use all their senses to identify the spiritually fertile soil that is their family.

Awareness of God's presence in the fertile soil of family relationships and experiences is a powerful way to understand God's gift of family.

The fertile soil of family life is balanced.

We ask families to practice spelling words, practice soccer, baseball, dance and piano. We ask families to attend worship, religious education and family

events. We expect that family events such as holidays, birthdays and anniversaries will be celebrated. With financial issues and housing issues, families are stretched to their limits. Spiritual faith practices are the key to balancing all this successfully. A pattern to life that centers around prayer, caring for self and others, and other faith practices will allow families to get off the carousel and be the sacred in the moment. The result is that the carousel still goes around and around but we are on it and in balance.

In her book *Busy but Balanced*, Mimi Doe writes, "I'm sure you feel this pull. Your days are jammed. You are living a life very much of this world. Perhaps you are struggling with how to balance work and family...rather than coming to a grinding halt, taking a sabbatical, and chanting in the woods for a week, you can create balance in your life. Indeed, this is the grace called balance." Keeping family life balanced in the home is a skill that aids in the discovery of faith practices in daily living.

The fertile soil of family has potential.

Soil by itself does not grow. Fertile soil remains ready for growth. This readiness is important when we are considering how best to introduce faith practices to the family. Growth happens more quickly when the family is ready and accepting.

God is present in what the fertile soil of family receives through relationships and experiences. When we help families to see God's presence in *all* of their daily experiences and relationship they will better understand faith practices. When we help families celebrate God's presence through faith practices we build spiritually resilient families. These spiritually resilient families will build strong faith communities become receiving agents for God's presence in all their relationships and experiences.

Fertile soil can also be gracefully amended.

Fertile soil is found in nature and in families. Germination happens at a certain temperature on a certain day. When this sacred timetable is fulfilled, growth is almost unstoppable. In families finding the best temperature for growth is a little trickier. It would be easier if we could just use a thermometer! The welcoming of a child or new family member is

one obvious time for germination. Sometimes the imbalance of death, illness or loss makes families more aware of the need to amend their lives to include spirituality. Or the potential of celebrations such as marriage, graduation or entrance into school provides the right place to gracefully introduce spiritual faith practices. Through gentle amending, the fertile soil of families becomes more receptive to growth in the area of faith practices.

Family Basic Skills for Using Faith Practices

There are several skill-sets that help families become more successful when working with spiritual faith practices. First, families need to be attentive to one another. This skill will help with faith practices like praying, caring for body and appreciating beauty. Families also need to understand the words and images around the word, “healthy.” This aids families as they begin to identify what dying well, eating well and celebrating life means. Thirdly, it is helpful for families to gather around good boundaries. Good boundaries aid families in serving others, participating in community, managing their household effectively, and doing justice in the world. Being attentive to one another, understanding the meaning of healthy, and identifying good boundaries, keep families in good relationship with self, each other and the world.

Families need to be attentive to one another.

Today’s families are focused. They are focused on singular pieces of their lives. The assumption being that the more focused, the more control. The feeling seems to be if they are focused on making money or being fit or going to school, they will get what they want. Think of the new parents who have a child and are focused on the child being spiritual. They may start with baptism, christening or dedication of the child. They are focused on that event and when it is complete, it is checked off the list. How does this differ from being attentive?

Being attentive is being open to God’s presence and trusting our own interpretation of the sensory information we receive. Rather than checking-off baptism, christening or dedication off a list, we are open to the possibilities of the experience.

Attentiveness does not have a single answer, but is open to the question and knows that God is present. If the question for a young parent is “how do I start my child on a spiritual path,” most churches will focus on a single answer “have them baptized, christened or dedicated.” If instead, we visit families in that first week of the life of their child and say, “your child is a created being of God, they are already spiritual. Watch them for miraculous behaviors and capture those moments in word or image. Get to know them and their cycles and uniqueness. Then when you truly know that they are spiritual beings created by God, bring them to public worship to be joined to a community of believers,” then we are modeling attentiveness to really knowing their child.

This is not easy task. Many who are well educated in the spiritual life, have trouble being attentive. Being attentive requires us to adjust our priorities and to show that through language and action. We need time to rethink how we look at one another. Do we look at our 7-year-old daughter and say, “your skirt doesn’t match your shirt” or “Wow, God has blessed you with the gift of creativity today.” First comes the change in heart and then comes the change in language. When the skill of being truly attentive to those in our family is fully integrated, we are open to God’s presence every moment of our family relationships.

Once a young teenager told me her Mom didn’t look right. The girl went on to say that her Mom was a funny color. When her mother expressed unexplained pain one evening, her daughter called 911. Her mother ended up having a heart attack but the paramedics were already there. The heart attack was minimal and caused no heart damage. This young woman was able to get beyond herself to be attentive to her mother’s health. She was open and attentive to her mother’s entire being. This attentiveness needs to be fostered in families as a basic skill.

Families need to understand what “healthy” means.

If you ask a four year old where a carrot comes from, the child will most likely answer “the store.” Their image of a carrot is 4 inches long and completely smooth. A 6-year old’s favorite dinner will most likely be in a box with a toy and received at a drive in window. A 14-year-old girl will be sure that the average “good” size to be is a 1 or 3. A 15-year-old boy

will say that being 6 feet or taller is the best. These are the images of healthy that the media provides to families today.

The ability to work towards a life centered on daily faith practices can only happen when we understand the context of the word healthy. It would be better to think of health as a way of life. Health is the attitude that helps mold decisions about lifestyle. Health is a practice that has a cumulative affect. Families need to understand that health does not have a single answer like take this supplement or walk today, but a long-term result of daily practice. Understanding the attitude of health as daily practice in the context of family, involves early education and experiences.

Reconnecting ourselves to the growth processes of our own food is an important part of this education. The family's disconnection from their food separates them from understanding health. Families need to understand their place in the food cycle as a stepping-stone to their ability to understand daily faith practices. We are created beings and God's plan is health.

Good boundaries within the family are also a basic skill for families.

Families sometimes get privacy mixed up with good boundaries. Within the structure of family privacy is a privilege that allows us to be free from the attention of others. Boundaries involve concepts like space and information. For instance, a child might ask for privacy for the evening while they work on a project. Think about what would happen if they tried to be private in the front of the television. No one in the family would be happy with that boundary. A good boundary for privacy involves a certain agreed-upon space. Boundaries are limits that are definable and agreed upon by all. Good boundaries allow family members to be involved in private moments with God.

Sharing comes under the scrutiny when discussing boundaries. Is sharing by all of everything an assumption in family? Good boundaries help siblings understand that yelling, "John's not sharing," at the top of your lungs does not result in getting to take John's truck. All family members need to understand the boundaries of goods and boundaries of space. If Grandpa is asleep in the recliner, that becomes his space. Jumping into the chair while he is sleeping is not a good boundary

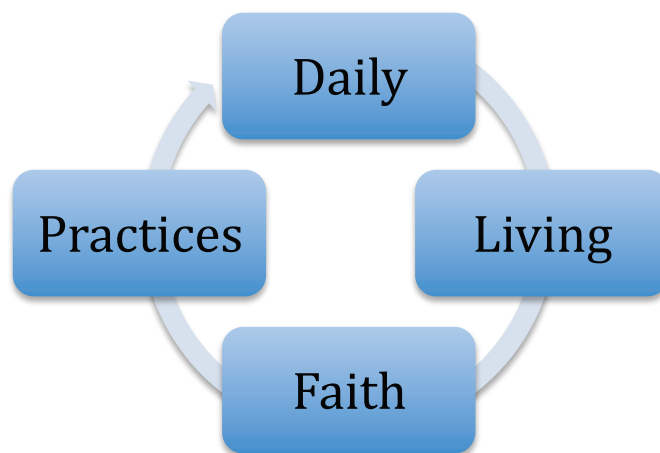
choice. This is daily living but without the good boundary it is hard to emphasize individual and family faith practices.

Boundaries are also important when sharing the stories of the family. Sharing stories is something we all do. The world encourages learning through the stories of others. The wisdom of others comes to us through story. Being a kindergarten teacher taught me about the necessity of helping children understand when there needs to be limits on what is shared. While books and television have caused us to laugh about limitless stories shared by young children, some of the information can be hurtful to others. And of course, the first thing we do is laugh, which models all the wrong lessons.

Language boundaries need to be processed as they happen. It is most often the child whose has not discussed sharing day at kindergarten and what it means, who tend to offer comments like, "Daddy hates Mommy's new dress and Mommy cried." Language boundaries can be solved through being proactive. If a family event happens and the family feels it needs to stay within the context of family, calmly discuss the boundary. This is not about keeping secrets it is about boundaries. To fully participate as a family into daily faith practices, all members of the family must understand and agree upon good boundaries is language and space.

Faith Practices and Families

I like to think of faith practices as wrapping around today's families and presenting protection against the arrows of the world.



The words “daily,” “living,” “faith,” and “practices” can be in any order and still result in enveloping the family in God’s presence. Whether we talk about “faith practices daily,” “practices daily living,” “daily living faith,” or “living faith practices” these phrases represent a profound change in how the family and faith connect. Faith becomes not something we go and get or read about, but something that we connect to in daily life each moment and each day. The most important thing about daily-living-faith-practices is that they are easily accessible, low cost or no cost and proactive. This connects well with over extended, financially challenged, and reactive families.

The problem is that often families look at a list of faith practices and say, “Prayer, well we’ve got that one. We pray at meals. And look this faith practice says ‘knowing beauty,’ didn’t I just spend an entire day at the spa?” This is why *in-source* experiences and relationships are needed to help families identify the meanings and depth of the faith practices. In the May/June 2010 issue of *Spirituality and Health* Thomas Moore says, “Spiritual practice that is purely abstract, mental, or moral isn’t sufficient. It has to be tangible, evocative, and beautiful to make spiritual sensibility fully present and effective.” These words are life-changing when the checklist mentality is replaced with sensory experiences that are beautiful and evocative.

Families practice intellectual development through spelling words and reading and a million other ways. They practice emotional/social development in relationships through many venues. Families practice physical development through walks, teams, biking and lessons. Families are used to goals and “times per week” to accomplish practice. Spiritual practice is continual and cumulative. The outcomes are long range rather than short range. Lifelong faith practice is the goal and there is not a test you can take and hand in or a single skill to accomplish. The concept of moment-by-moment, day-by-day spiritual practice is new to most families and quite intimidating. Helping families to connect daily living to faith practices will make spiritual practice more attainable.

By *in sourcing* with families, we can help them identify ways that they are already involved in daily faith practices. Through mapping their days we can show them how brushing their teeth is taking care of their body. We can look at daily schedules and see the ways that each member of the family supports the caring for their home. By being with the family

in their home we can help them understand how taking a time of Sabbath helps everyone function better. Walks through the family’s neighborhood, will help families identify places of beauty outside of themselves. Partnering with a family as they explore faith practices is a good way to explain lifelong faith as a daily gift from God.

There are several wonderful life stages to meet families and aid them in exploration and discovery around faith practices. One I call the “sprout” stage. This is the stage of young families who are growing so fast and coping daily on the little pieces of their children’s life. These families are yearning for a spiritual life for their family, but have no idea what that means or how to start. They look for books and places of information and are often confused by messages that are contradictory. With a trusted mentor, families are surrounded by the miracles of growth and are open to new information.

Another stage of life for introducing faith practices is the “harvest” stage. This is a transitional stage where the crop is brought in and people are looking ahead but need something to fill their time since harvest is over. I think of Mothers whose last child goes to full day school or couples whose last child gets married or even elders when a spouse dies well and redefinition of family is happening. Harvest stage encompasses all ages along the journey where there is change in the structure of the family. Helping families identify how they can redefine their spirituality as life changes.

Daily Living Faith Practices: Experiences

Pilgrimage

Families understand the idea of journey. They go to the store, school and to the library. Beautiful things happen when we bless the beginning of our journey and the thank God as we return home. The threshold of our home is a place of many rituals that have deep meaning. Hospitality happens on the threshold as well as messages of love and celebrations of safe returns. Wonderful holiday traditions happen at doorways such as the Polish Feast of the Three Kings when Christmas is over and K+M+B+ is inscribed on the door in chalk to represent the three kings. The doorway is often thought of as a place where we can look backwards

as well as forward. Doorways hold hope, acceptance and love in our daily living. Doorways begin a journey and are sacred.

The sacred journey toward God is more difficult to understand. Pilgrimage is not always concrete. We can take a sacred journey toward God through meditation, prayer or by using a labyrinth. We can walk, drive or ride bike to sacred places as we journey toward God. Historically, the act of pilgrimage, or taking a sacred journey toward God, is one of the oldest forms of faith practice. Dr. Ed Sellner, professor of the History of Christian Spirituality at the University of St. Catherine in St. Paul, Minnesota, says, "We are naturally drawn to places and people who reveal the goodness of God, the beauty of creation, the sacred dimension of our lives." Dr. Sellner's deep understanding of pilgrimage is explored in a book, *Pilgrimage*. Pilgrimage for faiths all over the world is often to a sacred place specified by the spiritual traditions. A sacred place for pilgrimage could be a well in Ireland or a monastery in the mountains. A family cabin that has crossed generations, can be a sacred place where at certain seasons, the family takes a pilgrimage. All sorts of sacred places bring us through a journey, closer to God.

From a small age, the faith practice of journeying toward God can be learned through use of a three-circuit labyrinth. The three-circuit (or circle) labyrinth is simple and can be painted on a 6-foot tarp or canvas (see resources for ordering). The labyrinth is then folded away and brought out at times when discovering God through a journey is the goal. These times might include "looking for God" in a loss or a new accomplishment. By making an intentional journey to God with the labyrinth, families are reinforcing the idea that daily living, faith practices and God are uniquely linked.

Around the sacred space of the labyrinth, the family can explore the faith practice of journeying towards God together. This helps all members of the family understand the way we open ourselves up to the presence of God. The labyrinth represents the journey to God in a safe place. By using the labyrinth in the daily life of the family, the concept of the sacredness of each journey is discovered as well as an understanding of greater journeys in the lifelong faith of the individual. To have siblings gathered around the sacred space rather than the computer, toys or television, changes the family dynamics greatly.



There are a few general "suggestions" around using a 3-circuit labyrinth in the family. First, we open the labyrinth and fold the labyrinth together. In the sacred act of placing the labyrinth among our family we emphasize that our family is also sacred. Secondly, is that the space is sacred so we take off our shoes before walking. And lastly, we use quiet voices and silence as our means of communicating.

Activities surrounding the use of the three-circuit labyrinth in the family are in three general categories. First, activities can simply acknowledge the sacredness of the journey and the parts of beginning, arrival and ending. For the youngest family members this is enough. An example of such as activity might be as follows. (Materials needed: 3-circuit labyrinth, small bell.)

Stand together and hold the labyrinth as it is folded. One person reads these directions. This does not have to be an adult. "Close your eyes. Feel the presence of God and know that you are one of God's special creations. Pause Open your eyes. Look at your family. Think of something your family shared recently. I wonder if anyone in the family made you smile, laugh or cry." Pause.

"Today we will have new experiences with our family and God is here. Let's open the labyrinth carefully and place it on the floor together." Remind everyone to take off shoes.

"Let's look at the circles on the labyrinth. There are three circles. Think about how they connect. Does anyone want to share what you see about

the circles on the labyrinth?" Allow any members to share. "Now let's talk about how we get into the labyrinth. Where is the opening in the circles?" "Where are we going if we walk the path?" "Why is it important to follow this path?" "I have a bell here. The bell is to ring so that we know you have entered the labyrinth. As soon as you hear the bell, we are all quiet until we hear the bell again to know that the person walking has left the labyrinth." "Who would like to walk the labyrinth first?" As each person enters and leaves the labyrinth, ring the bell. Allow family members to move as slowly or quickly as they wish. After the bell is rung at the close of one journey, allow a little pause before someone else uses the labyrinth. If any member of the family uses the time in the labyrinth to be silly or showing off skills, use a quiet voice to bring that person back to the presence of God. "Doug is really being silly. He is showing us how God created him uniquely. God is present and knows what Doug is feeling in his heart." Close the time together by carefully folding the labyrinth together and again holding it between you. No follow up questions are needed because processing happens in each individual heart. Prayer at the end offered by anyone is also appropriate.

Labyrinth activities, like the above, emphasize God's presence on the journey. This is easily transferred into the daily journeys of the family. The labyrinth can also be used to help families be thankful for creation. A family creation walk can result in the labyrinth becoming a place to put offerings from the walk. Individual members walk to the middle and put what they are thankful for in creation. This kind of activity helps families understand that the beauty in the world is also a gift from God.



Labyrinths are most often used as a place of prayer. The physical journey brings us closer to God. Families can use labyrinths as a form of prayer. On a family day of sabbath, open the labyrinth in shared space. By leaving the labyrinth open during the family time, it helps to emphasize the inherent sacredness of family. Prayer can happen by walking individually to the center for quiet time. Or a group family prayer can happen to begin the day. The message becomes that sacred space for prayer and reflection is not some place we have to go, but is where we already are.

As families use this faith practice of journeying in their daily life, the journeys that they take at other times will change. Families will begin to see that a trip to the grocery store is a special time where God is present. The safe return of a parent from work each day becomes a visible blessing. This is the purpose of daily faith practices in the family. Our goal is to help families see that their daily activities are sacred and important to God, moment-by-moment and day-by-day.

Made in God's Image

Caring for our bodies is another good way to help families identify daily living with faith practices. We discussed previously the importance of defining "healthy" for most families. Families do try to teach healthy habits. Homes and schools teach cleanliness and basic health of teeth, hair and bodies. These are often areas of disagreement in families. Two adults get together and their health habits are different. Children are taught habits and quickly pick up on the fact that one adult did not brush their teeth today. How does this change if the health and cleanliness of our bodies is associated with the faith practice of caring for our God given bodies?

Our bodies are our oldest friends. They are truly miraculous the way they heal all the abuse we give them. God put together all our systems and gave just us this special and unique body. When we remind families that these bodies are God's gift, it changes how they react to media descriptions of what their body "should" look like. Going through a day in our life as we care for our God-given bodies, is one way to help families explore the practice of caring for our sacred bodies. (Materials needed: 1 piece of paper with each person's name, bubbles to blow, coloring materials)

At supper, have this discussion with the family. "Tomorrow we are going to have a day of celebration. We will celebrate the gift of our bodies, from God to us. Let's try something. Who would like to blow bubbles?" Allow one person to blow bubbles. "What parts of your body do you use to blow bubbles? What do you feel on the inside when you breathe? What do we see on the outside of your body when you breathe? God gave us the gift of breath and we use our whole bodies to breathe. Breathing reminds us that each part of our body is a gift from God." Time for everyone to blow bubbles and celebrate this gift of breath." Pass out pages with each person's name. Explain that tomorrow we will encourage each other to remember our bodies as a gift from God. Instead of saying, "Time to get up," we will say, "God gave you the gift of sleep to heal and grow. Let's get that special body moving." Remember that brushing teeth, combing hair, putting on clothing is all about our bodies. Each time a family member says a statement that recognizes the gift of their body, they color/draw something on their sheet of paper. Share pictures at dinner and process the day using these wondering questions. "I wonder why God gave us our bodies. I wonder why all our bodies look different from the outside. I wonder if our bodies are more alike on the inside. I wonder how we can honor God by taking care of our bodies."

The results of this activity are both internal and external and will be evident immediately. A day to celebrate our bodies can happen more than once. Family physical activities done together, such as walking, can become a time to remind everyone that our ability to walk includes many working systems that God gave us. A birthday is a time to celebrate the gift of breath when someone is blowing out candles. Even getting over a cold is a wonderful time to talk about the gift of healing that God has given us. Each time we emphasize within the family that God created all of us and we are sacred, we are living faith practices.

Holy Routines and Sacred Patterns in the Home

There is a daily routine to family life. Today's culture hits families with a million things they should do to become a successful family. Schools, media, and our

own need to be like others, fill our days with lessons, shopping, appointments, group meetings and social events. There seems to be a societal expectation that an over-filled calendar equals a happy family. The challenge is to help families know that they are God's creation and *being* family is more important than *doing* family.

Daily sacred patterns help us connect to God and all parts of life. There is a pattern of birth, procreation and death for all God's beings. There is a pattern to growth and development. There is a pattern for learning skills. There is a pattern for growing food, harvesting food, cooking food and eating food. The orderliness that comes from patterns is another blessing from God. We need to aid families in identifying the healthy daily living patterns and place God into their pattern.

To help families understand the need for patterns and routine in family life, do a Backwards Day. (This works best on a non-school day when everyone is home.) Agree the night before that the entire day will be done backwards. There will be a list on each door in the house of how the day will go. At breakfast, you will discuss the day and process what you learned.

- *Alarm goes off. Go back to sleep.*
- *Get up and get dressed in your dirty clothes.*
- *Kids pack lunches.*
- *Eat supper kids cook (serve a dinner menu).*
- *Adults do the kids homework.*
- *Eat a snack.*
- *Kids pay the bills or clean the kitchen.*
- *Eat lunch (serve a lunch menu).*
- *Kids do the laundry.*
- *Eat breakfast (serve a normal breakfast menu).*
- *Get dressed in clean clothes.*
- *Brush your teeth/wash your face.*
- *Go to bed, dressed.*

Process this activity with this discussion. "Why do we have a routine to our day? How does having a pattern to our day help us? How did it feel to have the routine uncertain? How does it feel when we have so many extra activities that it is hard for our family to find a routine? What if we had one day a week when we stayed home as a family? How would that day look? How about the different jobs we do to help each other keep the house clean? How did it feel to do different

chores? How does it feel when someone doesn't do a part of the job? What if there are not any clean clothes? What if we can't find things we need around the house? How is God present in a house that is orderly?"

In times past, the holy daily routine was necessary. If families did not tend their vegetable gardens and animals, they did not eat. If families did not take care of their possessions, they could not go buy more. There were no mini storage facilities. Lack of transportation other than walking or riding made activity with others a treat but not the norm. These daily realities allowed families to follow growth patterns set by God. Thomas Howard in his book *Splendor in the Ordinary*, says, "a third possibility would be to accept the fact that life comes tumbling at us nowadays, but that it is nonetheless possible for us to see our ordinary daily routines as proceeding among the hallows, so to speak." Daily routines and patterns are a blessing from God and hallowed ground.

Daily Service to One Another and In the World

Service to others has become big business. There are entire corporations involved in helping connect us to others in need. We can go on trips to far away places and help those with less. Service learning has been added to education at all levels. Many college degree programs require internships or service learning. There are 112,000,000 listings on Google under "service learning." What does the faith practice of service others mean in the daily life of families?

Service happens in the family among family members and out in the world. By serving others we are serving God. Families that help one another daily can more easily get involved in service to God in the world. They serve God by serving one another. One skill builds on another. If a family member takes an expensive trip to "learn" how to serve others the skills may not be applied in the home. If a family practices service within the family on a daily basis, the faith practice will be more easily applied in the world.

The reason service learning is now found in schools is that service fulfills a basic component of a human being. We want to give to others. This is basic to life. With websites, blogs and online video

possibilities, people are more easily connected to those in need. Volunteering is a culturally acceptable way to spend time. Families who learn to help one another daily and translate that into helping in community need to remember that they are serving God by serving others.

Helping all family members identify what services they do for the good of the family, is a good place to start. A "mom for a day" or a "kid for the day" role reversal experience might help family members be more sensitive to the needs of each other. Then list little ways that each family member could be served to help them function better in their responsibility to the family. Place the list in a prominent place where everyone can see it. For non-readers, draw illustrations to go with the list of ways to serve one another. Be inclusive so that each member of the family, whether adult or child, has ways that they can be served.

When the family begins to understand how they can serve one another, look for ways to serve others. Announce "open the door for others" week or "what can I carry for you" week. Every opportunity to help another through a doorway will be found during the week. Or every place when someone needs help carrying is explored. Process these experiences at a meal. Use questions like, "why is it important to serve others by helping them carry things or open the door?" or "how does it feel to serve other people?"

Neighborhood service opportunities are everywhere. Elders or sick neighbors that need help with yard work, picking up trash, or maybe just a smile each day are a great way to help families do service. Storm clean, raking or shoveling leaves, and snow or delivering "no reason at all" items to the neighbors are ways to serve others in the neighborhood. Serving one another daily at home and in the neighborhood, results in a better understanding of the faith practice serving. Interestingly, there does not seem to be an age applied to the skill and basic understanding of serving others. Quite often the youngest members of a family understand this concept better than older members. Placing serving others in the context of daily family life, helps everyone become a serving member of our community.

Conclusion

Families define themselves. Each family is a unique gift from God and fertile soil for lifelong faith. Families are bombarded with messages that tell them how to fill their days with things that will make them better families. Faith practices that emphasize the holy and sacred in daily life help shield the family from negative messages. Families are choosing to identify faith practices in their daily life.

In church leadership, we need to spend less time trying to get families to a building to be spiritual and more time, helping them identify ways they are already spiritual. There are times in the life of families that are organic (birth of a child, celebrations, transitions) and these times are open for *in-sourcing*. In-sourcing allows us to join with the family help them see how their daily lives are filled with opportunities to express the holy. *Daily Living Faith Practices* are the key to helping families find God in their midst.

Identifying journey as sacred, celebrating the holy act of daily routine, knowing the family members are made in the image of God and service to each other and the world are all important daily living faith practices for families. Once families begin to recognize and name their daily lives as sacred, they will begin to produce fruit that is abundant. This sacred fruit of family daily living faith practices has the potential to feed the world.

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Teaching & Learning with the iGeneration

Perspectives, Strategies, and Ideas

John Roberto

M eet the iGeneration! The Internet generation. The iPod, iTouch, iPhone, iPad, iEverything generation. They are the first generation to have grown up with digital tools at their fingertips. They are immersed in a media-saturated, digital, Web 2.0 world. They can get the information they want when they want it, follow an idea in ways that have meaning for them, and jump from one thing to the next as the inspiration hits them. They value communication, collaboration, creativity, and community.

Matt Guevara, KidsWorld Group Life Director at Christ Community Church and webmaster at the Cory Center for Children's Ministry (www.corycenter.org) is a passionate evangelist for digital learning. He observes,

Research makes it clear that the generation of children in our ministries today is vastly different than any other group of children the Church has sought to reach. They engage and edit media, experiment with culture, and experience community in new ways. They are fluent in the language of technology. They collaborate, teach, connect, and relate using a network of individualized digital tools. They prefer a unique learning experience with parallel processing, multitasking, feedback, and relevance. They navigate the digital world deftly and quickly. They blur the lines between the physical and virtual. They are open to the truth of God's Word.

It is clear that this generation is fundamentally different than any generation that the Church has ever faced. This generation requires agile leadership, renewed teaching and learning processes, openness to change, and creative resources. Such change will bring about a completely rewired children's ministry, poised to connect children to the community of faith, teach children the truth of God's Word, and help children grow in relationship with God.

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Larry Rosen, author of *Rewired: Understanding the iGeneration and the Way They Learn*, observes, “Little research has been done on these preschool and elementary school-aged children, but our interviews with parents of more than 2,000 of them show that they are embracing technology and media much earlier than their older brothers and sisters. To put it simply, children have grown up in an environment where technology is everywhere and much of it is invisible. Most children and adolescents have grown up with the largest storehouse of information in history—the Internet—and from an early age they learned to play online games, send e-mail to grandma and grandpa, and watch videos.”

Rosen identifies several distinct traits of the emerging iGeneration:

1. introduction to technology, literally at birth
2. constant media diet
3. adeptness at multitasking
4. fervor for communication technologies
5. love of virtual social worlds and anything internet-related
6. ability to use technology to create a vast array of “content” (web pages, videos, art, photography, music)
7. unique learning styles
8. unique personalities: need for constant motivation, closeness to family, confidence, openness to change, need for collective reflection, desire for immediacy

It is precisely these unique qualities of the iGeneration that portend a new, invigorated attitude toward education. As long as educators understand how to reach these students through all of their technologies and media, they will devour new material as fast as it can be dished out. They *want* to learn, but our current teaching models simply bore them to sleep. Education should excite and stimulate them and it will if we made radical changes in our conceptualization of teaching and learning. This is a generation that learns differently, and unless we recognize and accept those differences, we will turn them off to education. They are ready and willing to be the future, but we have to engage them in ways that we have never imagined could be part of school. (Rosen, 49)

Part 1. iGeneration Learning Styles

The youngest generation in America may look pretty much the same on the outside, but inside they are different. Their brains are adapting to accommodate all the media and technology they spend so much time surrounded by. Many researchers say that they are actually neurologically wired differently than adults. Children are changing in very substantial ways, and they are no longer the people our educational programs were originally designed to teach

In *Understanding the Digital Generation*, Ian Jukes, Ted McCain, and Lee Crockett, identify eight learning preferences of digital learners.

1. **Digital learners prefer receiving information quickly from multiple multimedia sources.** Digital learners operate at twitch speed due to exposure to video games, hand-held devices, hypertext, etc., and as a result, digital learners have had more experience processing data and high speed information quickly than we have. Many of our teachers today haven’t had that experience and, as such, feel comfortable processing at the same conventional speed they have learned and taught with all their lives. Imagine how the digital learner feels. After wandering the digital landscape while managing chats, updating Facebook, watching a video, and listening to music, students come to school and are confronted by the awesome power of the projector and the whiteboard.
2. **Digital learners prefer parallel processing and multitasking.** Digital learners like to multitask and absorb through parallel processing. They are comfortable doing several things at once. Multitasking is technically “continuous partial attention,” and we all do it. We can be driving, listening to music, thinking about the day and looking at billboard. But with the digital generation, it all happens much faster. We were told growing up that the best way to study was to isolate ourselves from the outside world and its ambient

distractions, and focus solely on the task at hand. Walk into a child's bedroom today, and what do you see? He or she is working at the computer, burning a CD, doing homework, listening to music, and searching online, while managing 14 instant messenger conversations—and still bored.

3. **Digital learners prefer processing pictures, sounds, color, and video before text.**

For generations, graphics have been static images accompanied by text for clarification. The images were there to complement the text. Today, advances in interactive digital imagery and animation has put the text into the secondary role. Since childhood, the digital generation has been exposed to TV, videos, and computer games offering high-resolution color images and expressive graphics with little or no accompanying text. These images are powerful enough to get the message across on their own. Digital bombardment has sharpened kids' visual abilities, which reinforces the point that today's students are primarily visual learners.

4. **Digital learners prefer random access to hyperlinked multimedia information.**

Many educators provide information in a traditional way—linearly, logically, sequentially, and very left-brained. The digital generation is first to experience hypertext and “clicking around” in electronic applications. This new information structure has increased their awareness and ability to make new connections, freeing them from single-path thought. This is generally a good thing, but it can be argued that hyperlinking may make it more difficult for students to follow a linear train of thought. Their rationale says, “Why should I read something beginning to end and follow someone else's logic when I can explore and create my own?” The truth is that both sets of skills are essential. Following one's own path is important, but so is understanding someone else's logic. We must find a balance.

5. **Digital learners prefer to network simultaneously with many others.** When we were students, we were generally

required to work and be evaluated independently of others. Out of school, the primary ways of communication were either face-to-face or by phone. Digital students have grown up with dozens of ways to communicate—cell phones, texting, email, blogs, social networking sites, and Twitter, just to name a few. They need and expect to be able to communicate with others using the digital weapons of mass collaboration.

6. **Digital learners prefer learning “just in time.”**

Educators are saying you have to learn this “just in case” it happens to be on an exam, “just in case” you might need it to pass the course, “just in case” you may want to become an engineer, or a historian, or a writer. Digital learners, however, want to gain an understanding of what they need to know, but they want to acquire these skills “just in time” to play a new game, play the piano, or something else they don't know how to do. “Just-in-time” learning is about learners having the skills and habits of mind that allow them to learn and adapt “just in time” for that next window of opportunity that opens up to them.

7. **Digital learners prefer instant gratification with immediate and deferred rewards.**

Many educators prefer to delay gratification. The idea is that if you study hard and keep focused, you'll eventually be rewarded with a good grade or acceptance at a good school. Are you beginning to understand why digital culture resonates so strongly with today's kids? It provides them with what they need most. Just like we did, they want affirmation, attention, and the chance to distinguish themselves. Video games and digital technology tell the user that if they put the time in, they will be rewarded with the next level, a win, or a place on the high score list. What they do determines what they get. New technology is all about instant feedback, and the feedback is extremely clear.

8. **Digital learners prefer learning that is relevant, active, instantly useful, and fun.** Many educators are compelled to teach strict

memorization of curriculum content in order to prepare students for standardized testing. The aim isn't what it should be—cultivating the higher order thinking skills these kids will need when they leave school. The digital generation is often criticized for being intellectual slackers, when the truth is they are a very intellectual problem-solving group. In fact, many video games contain the complex thinking, spatial relationships, and problem-solving tasks they enjoy. The digital generation wants learning to be useful and relevant. They want to know what connection it has to their world. Most of all, they want learning to be enjoyable.

(Source: "Understanding the Digital Generation" Keynote Presentation, www.21stcenturyfluency.com)

Part 2. iGeneration Learning Experiences

Learning experiences for the iGeneration need to be experiential, image-rich, multi-sensory, interactive, engaging, and varied in learning style. Research is demonstrating that they learn more deeply when they apply knowledge to real-world problems and when they take part in projects that require sustained engagement and collaboration. Active learning practices have a more significant on learning than any other variable. The iGeneration is a creative and multimedia generation. They think 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 reach these students. They are also a generation of "content creators" who live to create, and given the chance to do so they will merge multiple media into one complex but comprehensive whole.

- Integrate the eight **multiple intelligences** into learning experiences thereby provide a greater variety of ways for the iGeneration 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).

- Apply research on **learning styles** to learning experiences by incorporating a diversity of learning activities and methods in a learning experience, recognizing that some people learn best through direct, hands-on, concrete experiences, some through reflective observation, some through an exploration and analysis of knowledge, theories, and concepts, and others through active experimentation with the new knowledge and practices.
- Engage the iGeneration in **active, in-depth learning** through well-designed projects, problems, and design tasks that focus learner inquiry around central questions in the disciplines and engage learners in *doing* the work of writers, scientists, mathematicians, musicians, sculptors, and critics.
- Incorporate **project-based learning** which 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 the learners to encounter central concepts or principles of a discipline; 2) focused on a constructive investigation that involves inquiry and knowledge building; 3) learner-driven, in that the learners are responsible for making choices and for designing and managing their work; 4) authentic, by posing problems that occur in the real world and that people care about. Encourage the iGeneration to **create**, merging multiple media into one project or expression. Allow children to select the medium of the content: art, music, video, etc. Allow them to personalize the project.
- Engage the iGeneration in **collaborative learning**—working in small, non-competitive groups—where they can discuss and process together what they are learning, work together on projects and activities, and practice and present what they are learning. Learning spaces are organized for learners' participation in a "learning community"—recognizing that learning takes place in a social context and relies

on communication and interaction with others. Create group projects that are done face-to-face and through online collaboration using safe, membership-based virtual environments. Even the youngest children are using online social networks (such as PBS Kids, Club Penguin from Disney, Panwapa from Sesame Street, and MyGrapple from Group Publishing).

- Engage learners in **practicing** and **performing** what they are learning by incorporating real life application activities into the learning experience. Practice is a part of the learning process, not the result of it.
- Develop **visual literacy** in all learners: learning to “read” or interpret visual images and learning how to use visual images to communicate. The need to learn visual literacy arises because images were relatively rare until recently. The rise of electricity made movies, television, and the digital era possible. 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.

Part 3. iGeneration Digital Learning Tools

Over the last few years, our relationship with the Web has been changing dramatically. Simple new technologies like blogs and podcasts are allowing us to not only create content like text, audio, and video more easily, they are also allowing us to publish and share that content on the Web with very little effort. Instead of a “read only” Web, we’re entering the age of the Read/Write Web, where contributing knowledge is as easy as consuming it. Here are several of the digital learning tools that you can use to engage children in creating, collaborating, and communicating. The examples focus on education in school settings, but they can easily be applied to faith formation with children in congregations.

1. Blogs

Blogs are one of the most popular tools of Web 2.0. A blog makes sharing ideas online as easy as sending an e-mail, and that’s why today there is a new blog created every second. Bloggers don’t need to know HTML or how to get their files online; they only need an Internet connection and something to say.

Blogs have a variety of uses and objectives. They can provide commentary on a specific subject or serve as a personal, online journal. Most blogs combine text, images, and links to other blogs, websites, and related media. Moreover, blogs provide their readers with the capacity to leave comments and remarks. They can be designated as private and allow feedback only from specified individuals.

Blogs are blooming in education classrooms all over the world as more and more teachers discover their potential as learning tools with students of every age. While many refer to blogs as simple online journals, in practice they are much more. They can be tools for peer collaboration, public or private conversation, reflective online portfolios, and lifelong-learning spaces.

Teachers and learners of every discipline are using blogs—to deliver their curricula, interact with experts and peers, and much more. There are history teachers whose students have hooked up with students half a world away to share ideas about the Holocaust; literature students who, with the author’s participation, have created online reader’s guides for the books they are reading; and math teachers who use blogs to post pictures of geometric shapes so students can identify and discuss their structures. In addition, some schools are building their websites on blogs, encouraging communication and collaboration among teachers, students, parents, and community.

To Get Started (Free Services)

Blogger: www.blogger.com

WordPress: <http://wordpress.org>

Examples of Children’s Classroom Blogs

The Brainwaves (2nd Grade): http://classblogmeister.com/blog.php?blogger_id=148947

Mr. C’s Class Blog (5th Grade):

<http://mrcsclassblog.blogspot.com>

Kindergarten Tales Blog:

<http://kdgroom102.blogspot.com>

The Kinder Kids Blog: http://classblogmeister.com/blog.php?blogger_id=51141

Mrs. Perry's Fourth Grade Class Blog:
<http://mrsperrysblog.blogspot.com>

The Year Two Smarties:
<http://thesmarties2.blogspot.com>

Examples of Blogs for Leaders

Catechist's Journey Blog (Joe Paprocki):
www.loyolapress.com/blogs-catechists-journey.htm

Children's Ministry Blog (Christine Yount Jones):
www.childrensministry.com/blogs/childrens-ministry-blog

Edutopia Blogs (various writers on educational innovation): www.edutopia.org/blogs

KidTech Blog (Matthew Guevara):
www.corycenter.org/pages/page.asp?page_id=40475

Ministry-To-Children Blog (Tony Kummer):
<http://ministry-to-children.com>

The Religion Teacher Blog (Jared Dees):
www.thereligionteacher.com

Weblogg-ed (Will Richardson): www.weblogg-ed.com

2. Wikis

We think of Wikipedia as the epitome of a wiki because it is the most familiar. Technically, a wiki is a collaborative writing space that allows users to read, add, and edit text and files. These files can include sound, movies, and even links to other websites. Children can post ideas and get feedback from other students with whom they are working. They can bounce ideas back and forth expanding or narrowing their original concepts. They can discuss their ideas, share research, and collaborate. And peer editing takes on new meaning when they can discuss improvements in real time.

Wikis are used in the "real world" (outside of K-12 schools) by people collaborating on projects or trying to share things online, such as family information and photos, technical information from users of a product, data from a research and development project, wine expertise, travel journals from abroad, club or specialty information, or projects like collaborative cookbooks.

There are a variety of uses for a wiki in educational settings:

- Resources: publish notes, articles, images, and PowerPoint presentations; embed video and audio
- Activities: publish activities for children to do on their own, with other children, and with their families
- Publish: products of the children's work: words, images, audio, video
- Group Projects: build collaborative pages, start discussions and encourage comments among the children
- Parent Outreach: post information just for parents and at-home activities for children and the whole family
- Student Portfolios: give children their own page to post content and share their work
- Expand Horizons: share and interact with other children or groups across town or around the world

To Get Started (Free Services for Education)

Wikispaces for Teachers:

www.wikispaces.com/site/for/teachers

PBWorks for Education: <http://pbworks.com/content/edu-classroom-teachers>

Information about Educational Wikis

TeachersFirst Wiki Walk-Through:

www.teachersfirst.com/content/wiki/index.cfm

Weblogg-ed (Will Richardson):

<http://weblogged.wikispaces.com/Wiki+Links>

Examples of Children's Wikis

Ms. Lew's Looney Land of Literacy Wiki (Middle School): <http://mslew.wikispaces.com>

Ms. Jensen's Class Wiki (6th Grade):
<https://msjensenclass.wikispaces.com>

Ms. Webster's Class Wiki (2nd-3rd Grade):
<http://mswebster.wikispaces.com>

Mr. Monson's Grade 5 Thousands Project Classroom Wiki: <http://monsonclassroom.wikispaces.com>

Examples of Educational Wikis:

<http://educationalwikis.wikispaces.com/Examples+of+educational+wikis>

3. Podcasts (Audio and Video)

Multimedia content creation on the Web increased at the rate of 3200% last year, and it shows no rate of slowing down. From audiocasts to screencasts to video, there are all sorts of ways that students and

teachers can take advantage of the easy creation and publishing tools for podcasts.

Podcasting allows children to create audio and video content and distribute it on the Web.

Podcasting (audio and video) can be used in a variety of ways:

- producing audio or video reports of projects
- research a topic and produce an audio or video podcast
- doing interviews with people, locally and around the world
- documenting observations on a field trip or museum tour
- creating and distributing a news show or a radio show
- hold a debate
- producing children-written and -read audio books, poetry, or stories
- creating a video to accompany a song
- writing a script for a drama and producing a video

Creating an audio podcast requires a computer, a microphone, and editing software, such as Audacity (free at <http://audacity.sourceforge.net>) and GarageBand (free with all Macs). The software will allow you to record your show, and then later on edit it. Get hosting for the podcast as it needs a place on the internet to be stored (free hosting at www.PodBean.com). You can even submit your podcast to iTunes, by going to the iTunes music store, and select “submit podcast.”

Creating a video podcast and publishing it on YouTube involves making a movie using a digital camera, web cam, or cell phone. Edit your movie with software programs such as iMovie (Mac) or Movie Maker (Windows). Resize the video so it looks best in YouTube. The site accepts QuickTime .MOV, Windows .AVI, or .MPG files at 340x240 resolution. There’s a 100MB size and 10 minute length limit. Create a YouTube account. Click on Upload Videos in the upper right corner of the home page. Create a title, description, tags, category, and set language. The more information the better to help people find the video. (To learn how to make a YouTube video go to: www.youtube.com/video_toolbox.)

4. Social Networking

Children are already using social networking sites. First they use them in “friendship-based ways.” They stay connected to the people who they know in their physical spaces, such as friends at school, and people they meet through sports and activities. Second, they are using social networks to explore interests and find information that goes beyond what they have access to at school or in their local community. In these “interested-based” interactions, they are connecting to peer and adults outside of their physical spaces, people who they don’t know but with whom they share a passion. They become at once teachers and learners in these spaces. In both examples, children engage in self-directed peer-based learning that looks very different from most of their experiences in school.

For an example of a children’s social network go to **Panwapa**, created by the Sesame Workshop (www.Panwapa.com). It is an interactive site where children explore the world and its various cultures through creatures and characters that Sesame Workshop is known for. Panwapa leverages the abilities of social networking while being designed from the start as a robust educational tool. It has a teacher’s guide, printable activities, and online communities.

Creating a Social Network

Ning (www.Ning.com)

Ning is the leading online platform for the world’s organizers, activists and influencers to create social experiences that inspire action. Ning offers an easy-to-use service that enables people to create custom branded social networks. With more than 300,000 active Ning Networks created across politics, entertainment, small business, non-profits, education and more, millions of people every day are coming together across Ning to connect around the topics they are passionate about. Although not specifically created for classroom use, Ning’s personalization and privacy settings have been quite successful in education. Teachers can create their own private social network housed within the Ning site. In this way, the teacher can designate who is and is not able to participate in their social network. There are many great examples of schools and classrooms already successfully implementing these sites in the classroom. Ning has been shown to be

excellent for facilitating group projects using those tools.

Examples of Ning Education Sites

<http://stjoeh20.ning.com> (Marine Biology)

<http://107voices.ning.com> (English Class)

<http://i-classroom.ning.com> (History)

Edmodo (www.edmodo.com)

Edmodo is a free social learning network that provides a safe and open interactive space, where students and teachers can interact without having to share personal information. Edmodo is a social networking environment that is friendly for classroom learning. It is accessible online or using any mobile device, including Droid and iPhones. It provides a secure and easy way to post classroom materials, share links and videos, and access homework, grades and school notices. Edmodo stores and shares all forms of digital content: blogs, links, pictures, video, documents, presentations, and more.

5. Collaborative Learning

To engage children in working together on projects and activities, make collaborative tools part of your practice. **Sync.in** (<http://sync.in>) is a handy tool for collaborating on a document in real time. It's free and there's no registration required. One click opens a new page (with its own URL) where you'll see a chat window and space for word processing. Multiple authors can work simultaneously, and you'll see each other's edits and additions.

Google Docs, part of Google for Educators (www.google.com/educators/tools.html), is another useful resource for managing collaborative work. After students set up free accounts, they'll be able to access their spreadsheets, documents, and presentations anytime, from any connected computer. Students can use Google Docs to view and respond to one another's work while it's in progress. That's helpful for collaborative tasks such as doing peer reviews, sharing notes, or developing a project presentation together.

If students are working together on videos or other projects that are heavy on graphics, they may need a solution for sharing large files. **Drop.io** (<http://drop.io>) and **Dropbox** (www.dropbox.com) are two examples of file-sharing sites. Some teachers

also use these sites for collecting homework and other student assignments.

6. Social Media

Creating a classroom back channel is a new-media strategy for inviting everyone into the conversation. Think of a back channel as a private chat room just for your classroom. When students use an instant-messaging tool like **iChat** or **Twitter** (twitter.com) for micro-blogging, they can pose questions, make observations while watching a video or student presentation, or share a dissenting viewpoint. To spark conversation, you might pose a prompt that students respond to in the back channel. The archived chat offers a valuable artifact that can help you understand what your students are thinking. Tools for creating a secure back channel for the classroom include **Chatzy** (www.chatzy.com). **CoveritLive** (www.coveritlive.com) is a live-blogging tool. (See also: "Thirty Interesting Ways to Use Twitter in the Classroom," www.edudemic.com/2010/07/the-30-newest-ways-to-use-twitter-in-the-classroom/.)

7. Presentations with New Media

Once upon a time, being a good presenter meant polishing your public speaking skills. These days, students can choose from a variety of tech tools to help them craft a compelling presentation. **Glogster EDU** (<http://edu.glogster.com/>) is a classroom-friendly (ad-free) version of a popular site for making multimedia posters. "Glogs" can incorporate text, graphics, images, links, audio, video, and more. Because digital content can go deep and be organized in layers in these online posters, Glogster offers a useful tool for documenting big projects. The site also includes a showcase of student work.

Prezi (<http://prezi.com>) is an online tool for producing dynamic digital presentations. There's no software needed, which means students can work on presentations from any computer that has Internet access. Unlike other presentation tools that arrange slides in a linear order, Prezi starts with a blank page. You can move between elements however you choose—zooming in, changing directions, or creating new paths between features.

Imagine asking students to display their understanding of history, art, or a controversial current topic by selecting a few key artifacts and

explaining their importance. **Museum Box** (<http://museumbox.ezbn.org/>) enables users to do just that. Inspired by abolitionist Thomas Clarkson, who carried a box of props to support his anti-slavery speeches, Museum Box is a good fit for projects that ask students to make arguments and defend their choices.

If students are working on complicated projects, they may need help staying organized. **LiveBinders** (<http://livebinders.com>) allows users to create virtual three-ring binders and organize digital documents in one place. Students might create a single LiveBinder to present one project, or they can combine several projects into a digital portfolio.

8. Apps

Because they work on mobile devices, apps enable learning both inside and outside the classroom. From math games to vocabulary flash cards to anatomy visualizers, there's an app for every subject and every level of instruction — from preschool to higher education. Apps help personalize instruction, address a variety of learning styles, and create highly interactive classrooms. Since most students are familiar with the iPod (and iPhone and iPad) they can start using them right away. (Go to www.apple.com/education/apps for examples of apps for education.)

BCN Multimedia has created a Children's Bible app which contains comic books about the Bible for children of all ages. Every month you can read a new free episode of the Children's Bible in comic or buy the full comic books with all the episodes. The contents of the Children's Bible cover the most important passages of the Old and the New Testament. The Children's Bible is in 7 languages: English, French, Spanish, Italian, German, Portuguese and Catalan. (For more information go to: <http://itunes.apple.com/us/app/childrensbible/id341311361?mt=8#>.)

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Websites

21st Century Fluency Project:

www.21stcenturyfluency.com

Classroom 2.0: www.classroom20.com

Classroom Learning 2.0:

<http://classroomlearning2.csla.net>

(*Learn how to use Web 2.0 tools through tutorials on: social networking, wikis, video, podcasting, and educational game sites.*)

Cory Center for Children's Ministry:

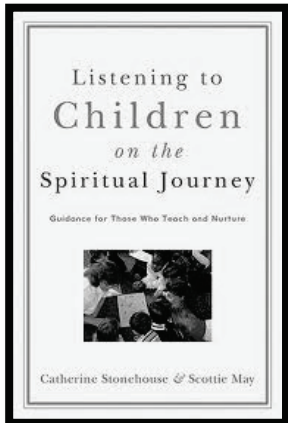
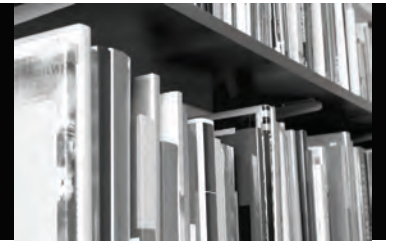
www.corycenter.org

Digital Catechesis: <http://digitalcatechesis.ning.com>

Edutopia: www.edutopia.org

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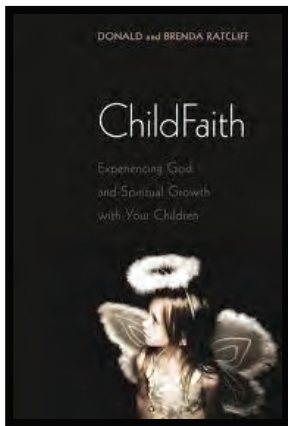
Children's Faith Formation



Listening to Children on the Spiritual Journey

Catherine Stonehouse and Scottie May (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2010) [\$17.99]

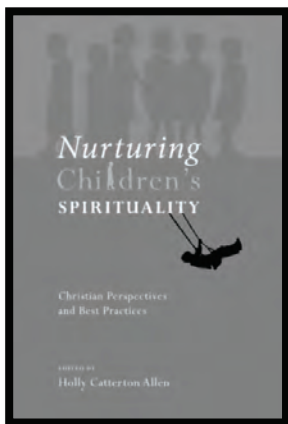
Throughout more than a decade of field research, Catherine Stonehouse and Scottie May listened to children talk about their relationships with God, observed children and their parents in learning and worship settings, and interviewed adults about their childhood faith experiences. *Listening to Children on the Spiritual Journey* weaves together their findings to offer a glimpse of the spiritual responsiveness and potential of children. It provides insight into children's perceptions of God and explores how they process their faith. It suggests how adults can more effectively relate to and work with children to nurture their faith. Chapters include: Why Listen to Children?, Knowing God in Childhood, Experiencing God in Everyday Life, Children Experiencing God at Church, The Formative Power of God's Story, Let the Children Come: Loving, Knowing, and Following Jesus, Celebrating Compassion, and The Church Partnering with Parents.



ChildFaith: Experiencing God & Spiritual Growth with Your Children

Donald and Brenda Ratcliff (Eugene: Cascade Books, 2010) [\$22]

Parents can encourage the spiritual growth and experiences of their children through activities both inside and outside the home. *ChildFaith* provides the foundation for parental nurture of children's spirituality as well as for children's influencing their parents' spirituality. This book explores a wide variety of methods that can encourage mutual spiritual growth of parents and children, including reading Bible stories, celebrating rituals and biblical holidays, participating in church activities, and taking family field trips



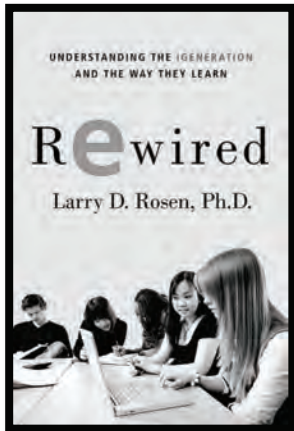
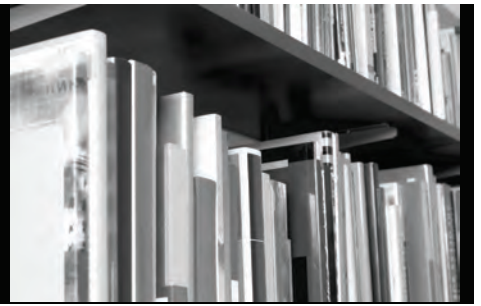
Nurturing Children's Spirituality

Holly Catterton Allen, Editor (Eugene: Cascade Books, 2008) [\$46]

Nurturing Children's Spirituality is a collection of the best materials from the 2006 Children's Spirituality Conference. The first half of the book addresses definitional, historical, and theological concerns related to spiritual development in children. The second half explores best practices for fostering spiritual growth of children—in families, churches, Christian schools, and among special populations of children—from a wide spectrum of Christian scholars and practitioners. The book closes with John Westerhoff's keynote address and Catherine Stonehouse and Scottie May's culminating address. *Nurturing Children's Spirituality* provides a rich cross section of the current research and writing on children's spirituality.

Resources

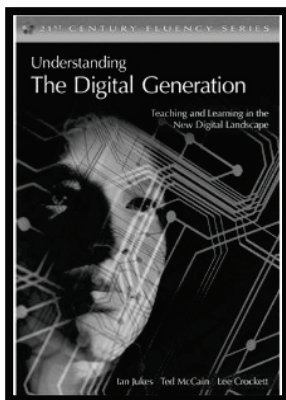
Teaching & Learning with the iGeneration



Rewired: Understanding the iGeneration and the Way They Learn

Larry D. Rosen (New York: Macmillan, 2010) [\$17]

Look around at today's youth and you can see how technology has changed their lives. They lie on their beds and study while listening to mp3 players, texting and chatting online with friends, and reading and posting Facebook messages. How does the new, charged-up, multitasking generation respond to traditional textbooks and lectures? Are we effectively reaching today's technologically advanced youth? *Rewired* helps educators and parents teach to this new generation's radically different learning styles and needs. This book will also help parents learn what to expect from their "techie" children concerning school, homework, and even socialization. In short, it is a book that exposes the impact of generational differences on learning while providing strategies for engaging students at school and at home.



Understanding the Digital Generation: Teaching and Learning in the New Digital Landscape

Ian Jukes, Ted McCain, and Lee Crockett (Thousand Oaks: Corwin Press, 2010) [\$29.95]

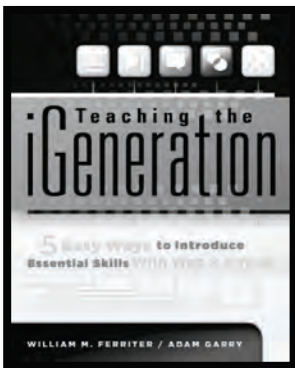
Today's world is different for our children. The technologies we take for granted or simply don't understand have become a part of our children's identities. This digital bombardment is shaping who they are and who they will become. We must realize they live in a different world, and speak a different language. This book and its subsequent DVD explore the characteristics of the new digital generation, and how education can be modified to enhance their learning experiences while supporting both traditional literacy and essential new 21st century fluencies. You'll see how the digital generation thinks, learns, views the world and interacts as we follow them through this vast digital landscape. If we want to take part in nurturing those who will be the architects of our future it's up to us to learn their language and step into their world, so that we may truly understand the digital generation. This book and DVD are both part of the 21st Century Fluency Series, providing a wealth of resources to educators aimed at making learning relevant in our technological age. (www.21stcenturyfluency.com)



Blogs, Wikis, Podcasts, and Other Powerful Web Tools for Classrooms (3rd Edition)

Will Richardson (Thousand Oaks, CA: Corwin Press, 2010) [\$31.95]

The book provides real examples from K–12 teachers around the world who are at the forefront of bringing today’s Web tools into their schools and to their students. This book is filled with practical advice on how teachers and students can use the Web to learn more, create more, and communicate better. This fully updated resource opens up a new technology toolbox for both novice and tech-savvy educators. Will Richardson provides clear explanations of specific teaching applications, with how-to steps for teaching with: weblogs, wikis, Really Simple Syndication (RSS) feeds and aggregators, social bookmarking, online photo galleries, Facebook and Twitter. Updated with materials on Web publishing and information literacy, this invaluable handbook helps students and teachers use Web tools within the classroom to enhance student learning and achievement.



Teaching the iGeneration: Five Easy Ways to Introduce Essential Skills With Web 2.0 Tools

William M Ferriter and Adam Garry (Bloomington: Solution Tree, 2010) [\$34.95]

Teaching the iGeneration seeks to help teachers find the natural overlap between the work that they already believe in and the kinds of digital tools that are defining tomorrow’s learning. Each chapter introduces an enduring skill: information fluency, persuasion, communication, collaboration, and problem solving as well as a digital solution that can be used to enhance, rather than replace, traditional skill-based instructional practices. These solutions include blogs, wikis, content aggregators, asynchronous discussion forums, web conferencing software, video editing applications, and social bookmarking and annotation tools. The book includes a wealth of handouts and activities focused on each skill and digital tool.



Podcast Solutions: The Complete Guide to Audio and Video Podcasting

Michael Geoghegan and Dan Klas (Berkeley: friends of Ed, 2007) [\$24.99]

Podcast Solutions is a comprehensive and perceptive guide to all things podcasting, covering the entire world of podcasting whether you want to use podcasting to inform, educate, entertain, or inspire, whether you are a complete novice or an experienced professional. In this book you’ll learn 1) how to find and download audio and video podcasts to your computer or portable media player, 2) how to develop, format, produce, edit, encode, and upload your audio or video podcast, 3) how to set up an effective audio studio, and 4) how to create great video.