

Lifelong Faith

the theory and practice of lifelong faith formation

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From the Editor

Welcome to Lifelong Faith!

Never have the challenges been greater for leaders engaged in the faith formation of the Christian community. The challenges facing us are inspiring innovative educators to create and implement new approaches and processes for educating age groups and the entire Christian community. All across the country more and more churches are embracing a lifelong approach to faith formation. Now there is a journal devoted exclusively to the theory and practice of lifelong faith formation in churches and homes. Quarterly, *Lifelong Faith* will bring you five or six feature articles, resource reviews, stories of best practices, and faith formation strategies that you can use to enhance your faith formation efforts.

Our first issue explores **Faith Formation through the Life Span** and we are delighted to bring you outstanding articles from Christian educators who are equally at home in the foundations and vision of faith formation, as well as its practice in churches.

In their essays *Karen Marie Yust*, *Tom East*, and *Joan Weber* take us on a journey from childhood through young adulthood, helping us understand the developmental capabilities at each stage of life, the social contexts in which people are growing up, and the kinds of spiritual and ministry practices that contribute to faith formation at each stage of life. *Richard Johnson* describes the sixteen fundamental tasks for faith formation with maturing adults. *Catherine Minkiewicz* offers a reflection on the challenge of adult faith formation, offering us inspiration from the Emmaus story in the Gospel of Luke. *Mariette Martineau* looks at how to educate all of the generations in the congregation by presenting the features, characteristics, and processes for intergenerational faith formation. You will also find reviews of recommended resources throughout the journal.

Lifelong Faith is a service of **LifelongFaith Associates**, a new organization whose mission is to promote the development of lifelong faith formation in churches and households. In addition to the journal, LifelongFaith Associates provides consulting services to churches and organizations, conducts training programs and workshops, and engages in research in lifelong faith formation. One of the major research and development projects in 2007-08 is the *Households of Faith, Learning, and Practice Project*, with funding from The Valparaiso Project on the Education and Formation of People in Faith. Future journal issues will provide more information on this important project.

I hope you find our first issue informative and helpful. Please let me know what you think by sending me your comments and suggestions at jroberto@lifelongfaith.com.

Thank you for supporting our new initiative!

John Roberto
President, LifelongFaith Associates

Lifelong Faith

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Being a Child, Becoming Christian

Karen Marie Yust, Ph.D.

It's a Sunday morning, and fifteen children, ages two to twelve, are gathered in a classroom for religious education. They have been exploring the biblical story of Ruth, and they are enthusiastic participants in a quest to learn about this faithful woman of God.

The older children have spent two weeks researching the context of the story and its characters, and writing a script for the video they are about to shoot. For “homework” two weeks previous, they had consulted Bible dictionaries and multiple Bible translations to expand their knowledge about Ruth’s cultural setting and the roles of women in her era. They also interviewed some adults after worship one Sunday to discover what others think about Ruth’s life and faith.

The younger children have heard the story of Ruth’s departure from her homeland and interactions with Boaz, and they have drawn storyboard murals and composed songs about Ruth’s faith journey. They’ve selected costumes and props for the video drama, in consultation with the other members of the class.

The preschoolers in the group have also heard the story on numerous occasions, and have decorated large drawings of the central characters. They have imaginatively imitated Ruth’s practice of gleaning wheat in Boaz’s fields, examined actual stalks of wheat, and explored the connections between the popular story of the Little Red Hen and Ruth’s story. Now the entire group is ready to recreate Ruth’s life on tape.

Two fifth graders wield video cameras borrowed from members of the congregation. Children of all ages assume their previously agreed upon roles, and a sixth grader walks them through a practice run with the narrated script. Some of the younger children pantomime the joy felt at weddings, then the sadness felt by the three central female characters when their husbands die and they must figure out what to do next.

As the play begins, Ruth and Naomi trudge along the road to a place where they can set up a new home. Ruth goes out into a field full of gleaners (played by preschool children) and searches for scarce leftovers. Boaz directs the other gleaners to a different part of the field and encourages his field hands (a pair of second graders) to drop more stalks of wheat than usual in Ruth’s section.

Karen Marie Yust, D. Theol. is associate professor of Christian education at Union Theological Seminary & Presbyterian School of Christian Education in Richmond, VA. Her work focuses on the spiritual formation of persons across the life-span and in a variety of roles and settings. Her major publications include *Attentive to God*, which proposes an alternative strategy for adult faith formation and leadership development; *Real Kids, Real Faith*, which opens a dialogue with parents about spirituality in the home; an edited volume, *Nurturing Child and Adolescent Spirituality: Perspectives from the World’s Religions*; and *Taught by God*, which explores the relationship between transformational learning theories and classical spiritual practices.

The drama continues through Ruth's flirtation with Boaz—an awkward moment for the two older elementary children in the roles, but an element they recognize as essential to the story.

The wedding scene, with crowds of celebrating preschoolers and a beaming Naomi hugging Ruth, is a near-riot. But order is restored, and the birth of a child brings the children's videotaped version of this biblical tale to a close. The director yells, "Cut!" and the videographers turn off their cameras.

Next Sunday, the older children will use digital editing software to make a final cut of the video, while younger children design and decorate screening announcements with scenes from the story. They will invite the entire congregation to view their production after the worship service that morning.

Following the screening, adults in attendance, with advance prompting from the pastor, will ask the cast and crew questions about their interpretation of Ruth's life and faithfulness.

When it is all over, the entire process will have deepened the children's engagement with the biblical narrative—and that of the adults involved as well.

Scripture scholar Walter Brueggemann has suggested that nurturing children's spirituality requires faith communities to weave together biblical stories and children's experiences so children discover that "this is *my* story about *me*, and it is *our* story about *us*" (Brueggemann, 31). Anne Streaty Wimberly advocates a similar approach, and because of her involvement with African American churches, she points as well to the power of cultural stories and testimonies to shape children's faith in conjunction with biblical and personal stories (Wimberly, 13).

Each new generation of congregational leaders and parents must find ways to help children discover the transformative relevance of faith stories for contemporary lives. To do so, we need to understand the developmental capabilities of children at different ages, the social contexts in which they are growing up, and the kinds of spiritual and ministry practices that contribute to faith formation. Children come to embody the gospel story through the interplay of these aspects of personal, communal, and religious life, and there is much that adults can do to shape this interplay so that children grow in faithfulness day by day.

hungers. If their primary caregivers go away and reliably return time and again, they begin to hold an image of those persons even when their loved ones are out of sight. If they touch and mouth an object over and over again, they discover it remains soft and squishy (or hard and noisy, or squeaky and knobby). They may not have the language to describe their experiences for us, but they have an internal sense of what is familiar and what violates the norms of their world.

Therefore, infants and toddlers call us to practice Christian hospitality with them. Their status as dependent "strangers" in adult-oriented societies and faith

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Infants and Toddlers

Very young children spend all of their waking hours taking in sensations and information from the world around them. They are learning about the permanence of objects, the trustworthiness of relationships, and the reliability of perceptions. Every interaction provides a bit more data about how the world works. If they cry and someone picks them up and comforts them, they learn that relationships of care and compassion are part of the world. If they are fed regularly, they discover that the world is a place that meets their

communities means that they can thrive only if we choose to extend our abundant resources and goodwill to them. We control the human capital of love, compassion, and care that young children so desperately need if they are to experience God's love for them through their interactions with God's people. Few Christians would begrudge a baby these things, and yet we may not be aware of the many ways in which some social practices of childcare diminish children's experiences of these crucial elements.

As a parent of three, I appreciate the many useful pieces of baby equipment that manufacturers have

developed over the years to make parenting easier. But I wonder if a child who spends much time tucked into a plastic baby carrier experiences human care differently than a child whose primary experiences are of being carried in human arms or wrapped close to a caregiver's body. For infants and toddlers, it is the bodily sensations that signal what is real and what should be expected from the world. When we think about Christian hospitality at home and among the faith community, we need to attend to the bodily sensations our practices evoke, so that we can teach young children about the depths and breadth of a gospel hospitality built on the stories of Jesus' healing touch and hands-on blessings.

We also control very young children's access to the central activities of our life together as Christians. In order for them to see, hear, taste, touch and smell what it means to be part of a Christian community, we must invite them to participate in congregational worship and outreach. Their dependence on us requires that we practice hospitality by bringing them to church and taking them with us to food pantries, homeless shelters, and hospice rooms. Otherwise, their earliest experiences of the faith community are restricted to segregated group care in the church nursery, which, however well done, cannot begin to imitate the depth and breadth of

Christian community. To avoid overburdening parents with the task of always negotiating between their own desire to worship and the needs of their young children for uninterrupted care, congregations might pair families with other adults who will take turns holding and walking little ones around the perimeter of the church during worship. Glassed "cry rooms" with audio feeds of the service also offer hospitality to unhappy infants and their stressed parents. Some congregations are providing cushioned play spaces in a corner of the church where young children and caregivers can participate in the liturgy without being cramped in a pew. How we welcome very young children into worship is variable; that we welcome them is an essential aspect of practicing a hospitable faith.

Contrary to popular belief, infants and toddlers also have the capacity for short- and long-term memory, so what is out of sight may not be entirely out of mind. Psychologist Patricia Bauer cites studies that demonstrate a capacity for forming memories in children as young as six months and a rudimentary system for storing memories in nine month olds (Meredith, 2). She finds that infants whose parents tell stories to them develop memory-making skills more quickly than other young children. Encouraging toddlers to tell their own stories, even if most of these stories come out in gestures and

unintelligible sounds, also builds memory capacity and memory-making skills. Bauer hypothesizes that this is the case because adult-child storytelling sessions involve children in "thinking about the past" in a kind of rehearsal of memories based on their experiences of the world around them (Meredith, 2).

Telling biblical stories and narratives of Christian spiritual practices, then, contributes to young children's generation of faith memories. Overhearing Scripture read and prayers said at liturgy contributes to these memories, as does regularly hearing about God and God's people from a children's story Bible or the Scriptures themselves. Repeating the story of a child's baptism roots that experience in the child's memory more firmly each time it is told, until the child may not be able to distinguish between what is known firsthand and known because of the telling.

The best-selling children's book, *On the Day You Were Born*, links a child's birth to a holy event that can come to exist, through the reading of the story, as a "real" moment in the child's memory. Carol Wehrheim's colorful board books for infants and toddlers share the gospel message in simple words and pictures, and Ralph Milton's *A Family Story Bible* provides more details for a child's religious memory landscape. Characters and the flow of events implant themselves in the young child's mind as persons and experiences alongside their personal stories of daily life, weaving them together in their similarities and intriguing the child through their differences. The goal of storytelling with this age is not rational understanding, but providing plenty of material with which children can populate their

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inner life and through which they can begin to interpret their environment.

Infants and toddlers also have an amazing ability to focus their attention on interesting objects in a form of rudimentary contemplation. Think, for example, of how an older baby plays with a favorite rattle: looking, shaking, mouthing, dropping, looking, picking up, banging, looking, mouthing, shaking, and looking some more. I have videotape of my daughter, at six months, playing happily with a set of plastic keys for over ten minutes and, at thirteen months, spending almost twenty-five minutes climbing on and sliding down a slide she had never seen before that day. Both the familiarity of keys as representative of something she regularly saw her caregivers using and the novelty of the slide and the sensations created by playing on it captured and held her attention.

The rituals of religious communities thus hold great potential for attracting young children's interest. If an older baby or toddler watches the ritual action of Eucharist at weekly liturgy, might not that child find a small, unbreakable chalice an object of interest? The chalice, like mommy's keys, is a familiar object that clearly has significance in the faith community, and thus, it is likely to provoke curiosity in children who witness its use regularly. For toddlers learning to drink from a cup, it is even more intriguing because people use it for the same purpose but in a different context from a high chair or dining table. Children wonder about the identity and use of common objects, and we can encourage this early form of contemplation by providing child-friendly access to items used in our religious rituals.

The cycle of the liturgical year also offers contemplative possibilities for young children. The lighting of Advent candles, the pageantry of Palm Sunday, and the waving of red streamers on Pentecost are a break in the usual worship routine. The novelty of these events attracts children's attention if they have been regular participants in more ordinary services of worship. Like a new slide, they offer opportunities to experience something different in the safety of a familiar context. Infants will follow the unexpected with their eyes, while toddlers will want to reenact the candle lighting, may squeal to march along in the palm parade, and wave their streamers with gusto once they figure out how to do so. "Agin', mommy, agin'," I heard a toddler cry after circling the church with his palm, and the obliging worship leader who overheard him signaled to the pianist to repeat the processional song so the congregation might go around one more time. This is childhood immersion in the reality of our faith, a form of contemplating who and whose we are from the inside of the Christian story.

Preschoolers

Children ages three to five continue to experience God and stories about God in the ways they have since birth, but they also exhibit new developmental capabilities for interpreting the relationship between faith stories and their personal stories. By this point in life, their keen observational powers have provided them with a fairly accurate perception of the basic structures of social systems. They know that bigger and older persons

have more power than smaller, younger people. They realize that certain words and actions elicit predictable responses. They anticipate the routines of various social settings (e.g., home, preschool or daycare, church, a grandparent's house) and can negotiate competently among the variety of rules and expectations represented by these familiar systems. They use what they have observed about the world as material for pretend play.

But because they are magical thinkers, preschool children are not bound by what they observe. They have active imaginations that allow them to reconstruct their observations in creative ways, turning an encounter with a grumpy store manager into a fantasy of a potential bogeyman, or an aunt's wedding ceremony into a princess's ball. When they tire of a particular fantasy, they can create a new one, using other material from their environment.

We can encourage the faithfulness of preschool children by nurturing both their observational skills and their imaginative play. They need regular opportunities to witness their faith community in action, which means they need to spend time every week in worship and in the midst of a congregation's activities. They need to hear the vocabulary and see the symbols of their faith tradition used frequently so they can identify the particular structures and practices that characterize this social system and distinguish it from other social settings in their lives. They need opportunities to explore the environment where they worship, learn, and serve, and chances to ask questions about objects used in worship and images in stained glass windows. They need our permission to participate in and reenact the

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many activities that constitute our life together as God's people.

Imagine for a minute that we want preschoolers to have the same kind of knowledge and experience of religious tradition as they have of the worlds of *Sesame Street*, *Dragon Tales*, or *Dora the Explorer*. How have they acquired their comprehensive understanding of these television worlds? Most preschoolers spend an hour or more a day watching their favorite characters on cable or DVD, play daily with toys based on these popular shows, and sing along with recordings of these characters' signature songs. They listen to books featuring these characters as bedtime stories and wear clothes depicting the characters or imitating their signature styles. We might say that they are immersed in the culture of *Sesame Street* or whichever other show fascinates them. Because of this immersion, they can enter into this fantasy world, create imaginative relationships with its characters, and participate competently in its life.

Sadly, preschoolers rarely have the opportunity to immerse themselves in religious communities in a similar way, particularly in more mainstream and liberal traditions. The busy schedules of many families preclude regular church attendance, and even parents who commit to weekly participation often limit their involvement to an hour on Sunday mornings. Aside from Noah's Ark toy sets, there are few widely available biblical playthings. Some

religious clothing options exist, but they typically depict religious slogans or other written text rather than characters or scenes from Scripture. The exceptions are toys and clothing connected to popular religious video series, such as *Veggie Tales* or *Bibleman*, but these items point to imaginative religious worlds rather than to the Bible and the Christian community itself. They are fun, but insufficient for preschool faith formation.

Rather than resign ourselves to this situation, religious leaders can seek to increase the amount of exposure preschoolers have to the world of their faith tradition. Computer graphics software, color printers and transfer paper make designing church t-shirts for children a snap. Children's religious book sales (by consignment or through a local bookseller) or the regular gifting of families with age-appropriate faith storybooks increase preschoolers' access to stories from the Bible. Inter-generational events, such as Advent and lenten workshops, which help parents celebrate these seasons at home, create additional opportunities for preschoolers' immersion in a religious world. Parent-child playgroups oriented around biblical storytelling, imaginative games and songs, and concrete advice for Christian parenting provide both experiences of religious culture and modeling for parents as religious leaders in the home. A high quality weekday preschool program with an explicitly religious curriculum can meet family daycare needs and also

immerse preschool children in their tradition's stories and practices Monday through Friday. At-home parents might welcome regular mission activities, story hours, craft projects, or other parent-child activities that make the religious world visible for preschoolers.

As we draw preschoolers further into the world of our faith tradition, we must appeal to their imagination by inviting them to engage in pretend play with the stories, symbols, and practices of the Christian community. Sometimes this pretend play can be structured by teachers and parents, e.g., planned reenactments of biblical stories (such as the story of Ruth described in the opening of this article), rehearsals of nativity scenes, and imitations of eucharistic or baptismal celebrations. Other times, we can provide children with a story or experience and the means for pretend play and let them move in that direction as they are inspired.

The Godly Play model of religious education incorporates this more informal approach. Children may use their response time following storytelling to recreate biblical tales they have heard using the wooden and felt story sets that are part of the curriculum. Even without the Godly Play approach, we can stock church school and play rooms with costume materials (such as varied lengths of cloth from discount fabric bins and elastic headbands) and evocative props, e.g., water tables with boats, figurines, plastic fruit netting, and plastic fish for reenacting stories of Jesus and the disciples at sea; sand boxes or tables with figurines, animals, sticks, and stones for recreating Exodus adventures; a small tent for traveling stories; and dolls dressed in biblical costumes (Yust, 37-38).

Younger Elementary Age Children

Children between the ages of six and eight are fascinated by religious stories in a different way from their younger friends. Because they are learning to read and write, they want to know more about the construction of stories. They pay greater attention to the development of characters and the organization of the narrative because they better understand the mechanics and challenges of good storytelling. But like younger children, their own egocentric view of the world has tremendous power to shape their interpretations of the gospel and Christian living. They work with data they have gathered from their world and then either find one-to-one correspondences between faith stories and their lives or imaginatively weave the two together according to various ideas they've picked up from their environment. Through this process they are developing the critical thinking skills necessary to genuinely question ideas, comprehend the logic of religious practices, and investigate the implications of being faithful for all of their actions.

The theological reflections of this age group can be fascinating because they are genuinely interested in interpreting the old, old story in new and contemporarily significant ways. An eight year old once explained to me that Jesus was crucified because people "forgot to use their words" instead of their hands when they became angry. She suggested that if people "had just taken a timeout," everyone would have cooled off and given Jesus another chance to explain what he meant by his teachings. Her theological thinking incorporated

her personal experiences with the common disciplinary practice of "timeout" (used by her mother and her school teachers), details from a recent retelling of the events of Holy Week, and her own ingenious integration of personal and biblical narratives into a meaningful explanation of the crucifixion. She concluded from this reflection that timeouts really could be important to relationship-building, since forgetting to use one's words can have disastrous consequences for everybody.

repeating their words when they realize their minds have started to drift into other thoughts.

Beginning with just a minute or two of centering prayer, most children this age can move toward extended periods of quiet contemplation. Quaker elementary schools cultivate twenty to thirty minute periods of silence in children as young as four by slowly increasing the amount of time spent in centering prayer or related contemplative practices. Children shaped by such experiences of ritual

The challenge for congregational leaders with this age group is to step out of our customary role as arbiters of faith concepts and moral points, and make room for younger elementary children to encounter the living God more directly through their own practices of theological reflection and contemplative prayer.

Her insight led me to share with her and several other children the practice of centering prayer as a means of taking a spiritual timeout to be with God. Younger elementary age children appreciate the simple structure of this ancient prayer practice. They are capable of selecting a simple word or phrase as a centering device and repeating that word or phrase slowly over and over again as they let their bodies relax. Six year olds sometimes need to whisper their chosen words, much like they move their lips while reading. Seven and eight year olds can usually repeat the words silently in their heads. They are often gentler with themselves than adults, willing to accept that distractions occur and to move easily back to

silence often miss these quiet times when they move out of the Quaker school environment and into a more conventional school setting. My kindergarten through second grade church school class complained about my periodic absences for the same reason: their substitute teacher didn't know how to practice silence with children and so would skip that practice each week she filled in for me.

Another prayer form younger elementary children can embrace is pausing to acknowledge God's presence in the world on a regular basis. This simple spiritual practice involves selecting a repetitive sound or event in one's day and then, whenever that sound or event occurs, stopping one's activity for a

moment to take note of God's presence. The common practice of saying grace before meals is an example of such acknowledgement, but practicing the presence of God is best extended to encompass other elements of the child's day. The signal might be a ringing sound, such as an alarm clock, telephone, or passing bell between periods at school. It might be a stop sign or red light, the sight of an airplane flying overhead, or the sound of a favorite song.

We can encourage children to pick anything that regularly occurs in their lives and ask them to develop a short (one sentence) prayer they will repeat whenever that signal occurs. Children I've known have prayed, "Thank you, God, for being here" each time they heard a bird singing and "God, you're amazing!" each time they saw someone riding a scooter. Because they get to choose the signal and the prayer, they are learning to take responsibility for cultivating a personal prayer life while acknowledging regularly God's nearness and activity in the world.

The challenge for congregational leaders with this age group is to step out of our customary role as arbiters of faith concepts and moral points, and make room for younger elementary children to encounter the living God more directly through their own practices of theological reflection and contemplative prayer. Available curricular materials tend to script church school sessions in terms of specific meanings children should take from a story and particular behaviors they should exhibit as a result of the lesson. As a result, teachers unwittingly discourage creative and independent thinking, and children learn to provide the predictable and often overly

simplistic responses to each lesson intended by the curriculum writer.

The popular children's sermon joke, in which a pastor describes a furry animal with a long, bushy tail who likes nuts and a child replies, "Well, I know the answer is Jesus, but it sounds like a squirrel to me!" points to the dilemma younger elementary children face when they are capable of theological reflection and yet want to please the adults around them by providing the answer they've been taught to give. When we gift children with a different set of expectations through teaching sessions that incorporate wondering questions, dramatic improvisation, contemplative prayer practices, and experimental interpretative language, we create spaces in which children can try out different ways of integrating their experiences of the world and their encounters with God in Scripture, prayer, and daily life.

Older Elementary Age Children

Once children reach age nine or ten, they channel much of their energy into scientific forms of inquiry. Their weekday school teachers are inviting them to investigate natural, linguistic, and aesthetic phenomena that children previously accepted as simply part of how the world works. Science experiments involve testing the effects of different variables on plant growth. Language arts classes incorporate sentence diagramming and deeper explorations of the grammatical structures of sentences and the linguistic roots of new and familiar vocabularies. Art lessons move beyond the basics of primary and secondary colors to encounters with the concepts of perspective, shading, and abstraction. Their

increasing cognitive ability to engage in complex reasoning processes merges with their similarly increasing awareness that their social world encompasses multiple and competing systems of meaning and interpretation. They have schoolmates with different religious beliefs, witness social and political debates about public policy, recognize that friends' households have different rules from their own, and watch television shows in which characters negotiate relationships using a variety of social and moral expectations.

Simple cause-effect reasoning about morality (e.g., if I misbehave in the store, dad will get mad and won't buy me an ice cream cone) gives way to more complicated ideas about what is right and just (e.g., the school bully is doing something wrong, but since his mom is always yelling at him, maybe he doesn't know how to treat other people nicely and so I should try to treat him well even though he treats me badly). They are becoming sensitive to hypocrisy and better equipped to assess whether adults and peers are living according to professed values and commitments. Thus, their task as biblical interpreters is more complex than that of younger children because they need to use their nascent abstract reasoning skills to cultivate a personal theological perspective that can compete with the myriad other options they now realize are available to them.

Religious leaders support this task when we ask older elementary children to dialogue with the Bible by considering three different types of questions in relation to faith stories. We ask *clarifying* questions, which focus the child's attention on the biblical text itself. Who are the characters in the story? What happens in the beginning, middle,

and end of the story? What details are actually in the text, and are there elements missing that we expected to find (because of how we've heard the story before or our assumptions about typical characters or plots) but did not? These questions help children listen to the story in its own words.

We also ask *experiential* questions, which invite children to relate the story to their contemporary experiences. How are the characters in this story like you or someone you know? If Jesus was going to talk with people who are social outcasts at your school, who would they be? Who makes the rules in our community, and what happens if those rules are broken? These questions help children identify the ongoing relevance and connection of the Bible to contemporary life. They also transpose biblical stories from their classical keys into contemporary melodies.

We pair these two modes of inquiry with a third approach: *responsive* questions, which ask children to consider how the story might transform their lives and inform their beliefs and actions. Who will you reach out to in your neighborhood this week? What need in your community will you pray for each day until we meet again? How would you explain what "healing" is to your friend in the hospital? These questions invite children to live out faith stories in their own lives, to become the embodiment of the Scriptures in their interactions with others.

Creating spaces where all three types of questions are part of lively discussion and debate helps older elementary children develop a thoughtful inquisitiveness about their spiritual experiences and their faith tradition. Yet we need not explore these questions only

through words and conversation. Children ages nine to twelve continue to enjoy and require experiential learning opportunities. They can identify basic characters and plot movement by sketching out individual scenes from a biblical story on newsprint and then putting the scenes in order, or by writing dramatic scripts based on careful research into the people and historical period of the story. They might translate the story into contemporary times through skits, comic strip creations, or links to popular music or culture. Their response explorations might involve participating in outreach activities, composing intercessory prayers, developing blessing rituals, or covenanting in worship to hold one another accountable to personal and communal commitments. By drawing on their many intelligences to hear the story from the three perspectives of historical clarity, contemporary experience, and faithful response, we increase their ability to make meaningful connections between their personal story and God's Word in the midst of other value systems competing for their appreciation and loyalty.

The ancient contemplative practice of *lectio divina*, or holy reading, is also a helpful spiritual discipline to introduce to this age group. Because older elementary children's primary learning systems are skewed toward scientific modes of reasoning, they need the balance of a more mystical approach to

learning to prevent them from equating religious belief solely with right doctrine. *Lectio divina* consists of four movements. First, someone reads aloud a short Scripture passage (or other spiritual reading) and the group listens silently to the text. Then, the text is read a second time, and the leader asks the children to listen for a word or phrase that "speaks" to them. These words and phrases can be named aloud after the second reading concludes. The text is read a third time and the children listen for what God might be saying to them or calling them to do through the passage. A short period of personal journaling or small group discussion might follow this reading. A fourth reading of the text concludes the reflection time, followed by individual or group prayers for each participant, that she or he might fulfill God's call as it has been expressed through the Scriptures. As a companion experience alongside critical study of the Bible, this contemplative encounter with Scripture helps remind children that God's wisdom comes through both study and prayer.

Conclusion

Becoming Christian is a lifelong process. At every age and stage of childhood, girls and boys need adults in their lives who will encourage them to notice and

What they need most from us are not definitive answers to faith questions, but spiritual tools they can use to build and interpret their own relationships with God.

respond to God's presence and activity in the world. Children rely on parents and religious leaders to introduce them to the stories of their faith tradition and to guide them in exploring the connections between ancient tales of God's relationship with the world and the ordinary events of their contemporary lives. What they need most from us are not definitive answers to faith questions, but spiritual tools they can use to build and interpret their own relationships with God. Regular experiential encounters with biblical stories and communal teaching practices that encourage children's experimental and inquisitive integration of faith narratives and personal experiences provide such tools. They structure the foundational culture of infant and toddler lives, pique the curiosity and imagination of preschoolers, encourage personalized religious storytelling among younger elementary children, and challenge the investigative powers of nine through twelve year olds.

Because children's capabilities vary by age, we may be tempted to segregate them in narrowly graded classrooms "for their own spiritual good." But, as the opening description of a real children's church school class demonstrates, participating in a multi-age community can help children encounter God's Word through the intersection of many gifts and abilities. The preschool mind discovers new imaginative possibilities through the older elementary children's construction of the script for the Ruth drama. Younger elementary children shape the story for the rest through their costume and prop choices. Preschoolers interject different interpretations of gleaning, sadness, and joy through their personalized reenactments of various scenes. The questions adults pose at the video screening provide opportunities for younger children to give voice to their ideas and challenge older children to explain their thinking.

These multi-age encounters are examples of spiritual cross-

pollination, and their presence in children's lives helps to generate more varied spiritual fruit as the Church's youngest members are formed in faith.

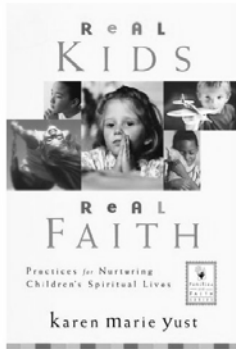
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Recommended Resources

Faith Formation of Children



Real Kids, Real Faith: Practices for Nurturing Children's Spiritual Lives

Karen Marie Yust (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 2004)

Drawn from a three-year study of children's spirituality and the best in theological tradition, Karen Marie Yust provides insights and a variety of helpful tips for nurturing children's spiritual and religious formation. She challenges the prevailing notion that children are unable to grasp religious concepts and encourages parents and educators to recognize children as capable of genuine faith. Chapters include: Creating a Spiritual World for Children to Inhabit, Telling Stories that Draw Children into a Life of Faith, Helping Children Name God's Presence in their Lives, Praying with Children, Supporting Children as They Grow in Spiritual Awareness, and Acting Out Our Spirituality with Children.



Making a Home for Faith: Nurturing the Spiritual Life of Your Children

Elizabeth Caldwell (Cleveland: Pilgrim Press, 2000)

Churches often assume that parents know what to do with their children in regard to nurturing them in a life of faith after baptism or dedication. Elizabeth Caldwell addresses this important need by offering parents and educators insights and ideas for nurturing the faith of children and creating a faithful ecology at home, at church, and in the world. Chapters include: Making a Home for Faith, Parenting for Faith Expression, Imprints of Faith, When Your Child Asks, and A Faithful Ecology.



The Power of God at Home: Nurturing Our Children in a Love and Grace

J. Bradley Wigger (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 2003)

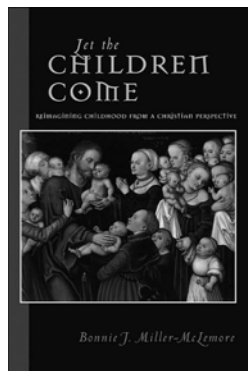
Written for parents and educators, Brad Wigger provides both a biblical model and practical suggestions for helping the entire family become aware of God's presence in everyday life. He reveals the powerful formative influence of family life and shows that homes are the places where some of the deepest, most important learning takes place. *The Power of God at Home* offers a refreshing perspective on family life, revealing families as potential bearers of God's grace and blessing, and providing church leaders with insights on how to nurture faith at home more intentionally and thoughtfully. Chapters include: The Spiritual Power of Learning, The Story of Home, The Joy of Practice, and Sacred Connections.



Welcoming Children: A Practical Theology of Childhood

Joyce Ann Mercer (St. Louis: Chalice Press, 2005)

“Sometimes families choose not to participate in the church because the church fails to welcome their children.” With these words Joyce Ann Mercer begins her search for a child-affirming theology and for a church that genuinely welcomes children, cares about their well-being, and advocates for them in situations in which they are marginalized or harmed. She writes about how Christian identity has the power to oppose the destructive identities consumer culture offers today, and how church leaders and families can nurture children into the Christian faith. Chapters include: A Way of Doing Theology of Childhood, Religious Ambivalence toward Children, Educating Children in Congregations, and Practicing Liturgy as Practice of Justice with Children.



Let the Children Come: Reimagining Childhood from a Christian Perspective

Bonnie J. Miller-McLemore (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 2003)

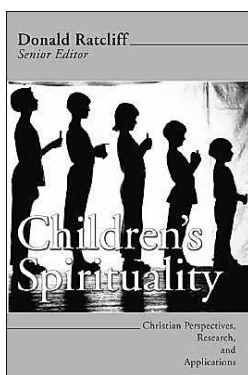
Bonnie Miller-McLemore writes about the struggle to raise children with integrity and faithfulness as Christians in a complex postmodern society. She shows that the care of children is in itself a religious discipline and a communal practice that places demands on both congregations and society as a whole. “This is a book about *how adults think about children* (a descriptive task) and about *how adults should think about children* (a prescriptive or normative task).” “Reimagining children, I am convinced, will lead to a renewed conception of the care of children as a religious practice.”



The Ministry of Children's Education: Foundations, Contexts, and Practices

Margaret Krych, Norma Cook Everist, Diane Hymans, Mary Hughes, Nathan Framback, Mary Hess, Nelson Stobert, Carol Jacobson (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2004)

This collection of essays presents a theological rationale for educational ministry with children, explores contexts in which contemporary faith is nurtured, and suggests strategies for creating programs that work in congregations, including practical guidance for designing and implementing specific programs. Chapters include: Theology of Christian Education for Children, Understanding Children's Development, Family Ministry, The Ministry of Children and/in Congregations, Growing Faithful Children in Media Cultures, and Teaching to Engage Children.



Children's Spirituality: Christian Perspectives, Research, and Applications

Donald Ratcliff, Senior Editor (Eugene, OR: Cascade Books, 2004)

A collection of essays, more academic and research-oriented in nature, that grew out of presentations at the first major conference to consider the spiritual development of children. The first section considers summarizes some views of the spirituality of children. The second section highlights children's spirituality in the Christian home. The third section reflects upon the spirituality of children in the church and how spiritual growth and experiences are nurtured in church settings.



Forming Young Disciples: Opportunities for the Faith Formation of Adolescents

Tom East

How can we form a living faith within adolescents that will empower them to know and live the faith today? Congregational leaders, pastors, youth ministers, religious educators, and parents are all asking this question. For some this is a concern forged with urgency because they sense that their current efforts are ineffective. Others perceive this as a challenge to make the Good News new and vital in the lives of today's teenagers.

At the Center for Ministry Development we have had the opportunity to be involved with hundreds of congregations over the past five years as we conduct research in youth ministry and faith formation. This research has put us in touch with ministry leaders, parents, and youth, and has demonstrated that adolescent faith formation

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is working in many faith communities, large and small, across the nation. These congregations are employing different approaches and using various resources, but there is a common factor in all: forming faith in adolescents is an intentional congregational effort and priority. These communities recognize the graced moment of standing with an adolescent as he or she prepares to move into young adulthood. As a faith community, they seize this opportunity to strengthen family faith conversations, engage youth in the congregation, and share ways for living the faith, day by day with youth in ways that are bold, challenging, and practical.

by providing an encounter with Christ and promoting discipleship.

- ♦ To inform, we nurture people's minds and hearts with knowledge of the Christian faith so that who they are and how they live is shaped and influenced by what they know.
- ♦ To form, we nurture people's identity and lifestyle as disciples of Christ.
- ♦ To transform, we promote the personal and social transformation of the world according to the kingdom of God that Jesus preached.¹ (Groome, 13-15)

of youth for Christian living that occurs in communities within relationships of trust. This formation has numerous contexts and dimensions.

Evangelization and Discipleship

The evangelization of youth and of the culture in which they live is the context for faith formation of adolescents. Youth are hungering to meet the living Christ, to come to know the good news, and to encounter a compelling vision for the Christian life. To facilitate this encounter, the faith community must help youth to meet Christ anew: (Our task in faith formation is to) "present Christ as the Son of God, friend, guide, and model who can not only be admired but also imitated." (*National Directory for Catechesis*, 199)

"The point of incarnational ministry is not to model Christ so youth will follow us but—to use Martin Luther's language—to become "Christs" for our neighbor, incarnating Christ's love transparently so that youth will follow him" (Dean, 28).

In his opening remarks for World Youth Day in Cologne in 2005, Pope Benedict XVI made this challenge: "Let Jesus surprise us during these days." Adolescence is a particularly rich and important opportunity to help young people be surprised by Christ and meet Jesus again for the first time. When I introduce my adolescent children to friends and relatives that they have not seen in several years, in a sense, they are meeting these people for the first time because they are meeting them as adolescents. Similarly, adults are now meeting an adolescent whom they knew as a child. Adolescent experiences are built on those of childhood but are also fresh, new,

. . . congregations are employing different approaches and using various resources, but there is a common factor in all: forming faith in adolescents is an intentional congregational effort and priority.

This article brings together research and practice in adolescent faith formation and explores this through a variety of themes: 1) aims of adolescent faith formation, 2) the world of the adolescent faith learner, 3) settings and models for adolescent faith formation, and 4) curriculum and methods.

Part I. Aims of Adolescent Faith Formation

Thomas Groome proposes that the aim of faith formation for people of all ages is to inform, form, and transform persons and communities

In other words, faith formation is intended to impact the head, heart, and hands of adolescents by helping them know, care about, and actively live the faith. This type of formation occurs within relationships. A web of relationships forms youth for Christian faith: relationships between youth and their family, youth with their peers and adult leaders, youth and the congregation. The congregation because of deep faith and a genuine affection for youth supports these relationships. These life-changing relationships are nurtured through the life of the congregation, including specific programs and strategies.

Understood in this way, adolescent faith formation is the intentional and informal formation

and surprising. These encounters are not one-time experiences; they happen again and again over time within the much larger process of evangelization, within which, youth strive to become disciples.

In the *General Directory for Catechesis*, the process for evangelization is described:

- ♦ transforming people and cultures through love
- ♦ bearing witness to the new way of life that characterizes Christians
- ♦ proclaiming the gospel and calling people to conversion
- ♦ incorporating people into the community by means of catechesis and sacraments
- ♦ continuous pastoral activity aimed at strengthening communion
- ♦ inspiring people to continue the mission of the Church, and sending them to proclaim the gospel through words and actions. (GDC, no. 48)

Maura Hagarty connects each of these phases to the practical dimensions of youth's journey in faith. A young person

- ♦ comes to know love
- ♦ is exposed to a new way of life through relationships with Christians, including peers and adults
- ♦ hears the gospel and is inspired to explore its implications
- ♦ is initiated through the sacraments and catechesis
- ♦ participates in the life of the community, including liturgy
- ♦ commits to continuing the church's mission. (Hagarty, 4)

Congregations can look at these steps and ask the practical questions: How can we help youth come to know the love of God? How can youth be exposed to a new way of life? How will they hear the gospel and explore its implications? How will youth be initiated into

Christian living? How will we promote youth participation in liturgy and worship? How can we

adolescence as creating an integrated sense of self-identity. Without this integration, a young

Youth are asking different questions: who am I? Where do I belong? What will I do with my life? Where can I invest my life and energies? Where is there an adventure large enough for me to be part of?

help youth to commit their lives in mission and service? "The challenge of evangelizing young people is clear: we are called to proclaim the Good News so that it responds to the lives and world of adolescents, invites their response, and empowers them to live as disciples today" (Ekstrom, 69).

Empowering youth as disciples of Jesus the Christ is the overarching aim for Christian faith formation. Adults who love youth are asking this question: how will we share a living faith with youth whom we care about? Youth are asking different questions: Who am I? Where do I belong? What will I do with my life? Where can I invest my life and energies? Where is there an adventure large enough for me to be part of? Youth are literally in the process of searching for the adventure of their life. As a Christian community we have the opportunity and the responsibility to present the good news and promote discipleship in Christ as this adventure.

Christian Faith Identity and Practices

In his classic work on adolescent development, David Elkind described the primary task of

person's self image is like the varied images displayed in a funhouse mirror. A young person behaves one way with his or her friends, another way at school, and a different way at home with family.

Faith identity is an important part of the identity that youth are forming through all of this. In fact, religious identity goes beyond the many functional identities that young people live with, since it is about their relationship with God. John Shea describes it this way: [Faith identity] "points to the ultimate identity of a people, formed in living relationship with a transcendent-immanent God, who has been revealed in Jesus Christ and who continues to be present in the Church" (Shea, 2).

As ministry leaders and religious educators, we sometimes worry that the youth who join us in prayer and faith sharing on Sunday act very differently at school on Wednesday. Yet this isn't just a problem for youth; inconsistency is part of the human condition. How can we help form a faith identity in young people that they can act on and live throughout their lives? After all, we don't want youth ministry or participation in the church to be one more competing activity in young people's already busy lives. To use a

computer screen as an analogy, we don't want "faith" to be just one more icon on the screen, something to click on and off. We hope that faith takes its rightful place in young people's lives. Faith is not another program or activity; faith is the operating system. It's the thing that makes everything else make sense.

For faith to become the operating system, youth must see and know people of vibrant faith. They also need to be immersed and formed in the practices of faith. Practices are actions and behaviors that have values embedded within them. If you wanted to learn to be a photographer, you could read books and study photography. But to become a truly great photographer you need to spend time with a great photographer. Through this mentoring, you would learn the little things and the disciplines that make someone excellent at their craft; you would learn the practices of photography.

Faith practices are like that; they are actions and behaviors we do as people of faith. Dorothy Bass describes it this way in *Way to Live: Christian Practices for Teens*: "We call these practices because they have to be practiced. Practices don't live on the pages of a book but in the bodies, hands, feet, eyes, and compassion of real people, and learning practices means doing them not just once but many times" (Bass and Richter, 9). Congregations, families, and youth ministry

communities form youth in the practices of faith as an integral part of faith formation.

Part 2. The World of the Adolescent Learner

To accompany youth on their journey of faith, we must understand their world, with its accompanying joys and challenges. Adolescents are on a journey that takes them from the protective environment of childhood to the choice-filled world of adulthood. The word "adolescence" comes from the Latin word *adolescere*, which means, "to grow up." Where once it referred to the teenage years, adolescence today is understood to begin at age ten or eleven and continue through the mid-twenties. During the first several years of this time frame, young people are experiencing the physical changes of puberty. Their social world is expanding and they are engaged in more complex social situations. Family continues to be a major influence and source of support even as peers and the community are becoming more important.

Over the course of these years, youth will encounter a variety of experiences, engage with a variety of communities, learn about many topics, and grow in a variety of skills and abilities.

The journey of adolescence takes young people on a path towards responsible adult living. As people of faith, we know that the path of this journey is not random; our loving God created each young person in love and has a plan for each one's life. We are called to accompany young people on this journey so that faith-filled youth will become faithful adult disciples. When Jesus accompanied the disciples on the road to Emmaus, he listened to their questions, he explained the truths of faith, he revealed himself to them in the breaking of the bread, and he sent them forth to tell others. This is the job description of the faith community, and in particular, the job of the ministry leaders and teachers, who are acting on behalf of the Christian community.

To walk with youth, we must learn their questions and understand their experiences. Each one's story will be unique, but many of the patterns of development are shared.

Young Adolescents and Their Families

The young adolescent, ages ten through fifteen years of age, is typically in middle school, junior high, or the first years of high school. During these years, they are experiencing the most rapid series of physical changes since infancy. The emotional and social changes that accompany puberty can be challenging, even overwhelming. Intellectually, young people are moving from concrete thinking towards abstract thinking. Abstract thinkers are able to imagine the consequences of actions and "what might happen if." Abstract thinking is critical for faith growth and moral development, as well as science, humanities, and math.

For faith to become the operating system, youth must see and know people of vibrant faith. They also need to be immersed and formed in the practices of faith.

This is a time when youth are beginning to develop their identity and express their individuality, even as they strive to belong within their peer group. This quest is often expressed in the clothes they wear and their physical appearance, as well as choices about styles of communicating and what peer groups to associate with. Friendship and belonging are of huge importance at this age. They are also experiencing faith in new ways; though young adolescents continue to experience faith primarily through their senses and their direct experiences, they are beginning to recognize God's presence in a new way within the community.

As the young person changes, likewise the family goes through a transition from being a family with children to being a family with youth. As Leif Kehrwald states, "The changes of adolescence—puberty, new ways of thinking, wider sphere of social activity and relationships, greater autonomy—present the entire family with a new set of challenges. In fact, it would be fair to say that the whole family experiences adolescence" (Kehrwald, 34)

This change means renegotiating patterns of communication, recreation, chores, and relationships. The task for these families in transition is to allow increasing independence while continuing to provide structure and close relationships.

Older Adolescents and Their Families

The older adolescent, ages fourteen to eighteen, is typically in high school and experiencing continued physical changes as well as encountering more complex social, intellectual, and emotional situations. This is a time when

youth are focused on developing their identity and are grappling with a variety of questions about authority, gender identification, and self-concept. They are finding themselves. As they develop their identity, they are looking for role models and mentors. They are developing a personal moral code and are growing in their capacity for mutual, more intimate relationships. Parents remain an important influence, but the approval of peers and people whom youth admire has gained in influence.

Because they are searching and exploring so many new domains in life, youth often question faith and assumptions they have held since childhood. In a sense, youth are unpacking the faith that has been handed to them by their parents and those who love them. In this process, they seek out consistency, and can seem negative or aggressive in their questioning. This experience can be disturbing and jarring to adults. We can see the questions as a rejection of faith. When youth question, they are not rejecting faith or the community; they are taking the necessary step of appropriating faith knowledge and practice into their lives. As a community of faith, we are called to surround them with love, care, and patience as we allow them to live the questions.

While youth are searching, adult family members are typically approaching midlife and are often in

the process of reflecting on their own lives and faith. Many families are beginning to provide care for the older generation, who are also in transition. In the midst of all of this reflection, re-sorting, and transition, the family seeks to continue to provide a spiritual home for all members. Congregations have the opportunity to minister to these families in this transition moment and provide resources so that family members can support each other with prayer, faith conversations, love, and care.

Adolescents and Brain Development

In recent years, scientists have learned a great deal about brain development. Some of these findings help us understand what a child and adolescent retains and what they lose in the learning process. You may have heard the saying, "it's like riding a bike; it just comes back to you." Yet it seems that this would depend on when you last rode a bike.²

Around ages eleven through thirteen, youth are experiencing growth in their frontal cortex, which is helping them develop the ability to have more control over impulses and make better judgments. This growth is accompanied by a period of "pruning" in which unused areas of the brain are cut off to strengthen the paths for areas that are used frequently. This pruning and

“ . . . most American youth faithfully mirror the aspirations, lifestyles, practices, and problems of the adult world into which they are being socialized ”

growth is an important stage in brain development. What youth choose to do or not do could impact them for life. Dr. Giedd calls this the “use it or lose it principle,” and explained further, “If a teen is doing music or sports or academics, those are the cells and connections that will be hardwired. If they’re lying on the couch or playing video games or MTV, those are the cells and connections that are going to survive” (Spinks, 3).

What does “use it or lose it” mean to us as we share faith with adolescents? Well, it sounds like if you rode a bike as a child but didn’t ride a bike as a young adolescent, you would lose that ability and memory. This makes this period of time all the more important for sharing faith and engaging youth in the practices of faith so that faithful living is an experience that is remembered and practiced for life.

Youth Knowledge and Practice of the Faith

Pastoral leaders and researchers are concerned about young people’s faith understanding and practice, as evidenced by numerous studies, conferences, and conversations. Christian Smith and Melinda Lundquist Denton at the University of North Carolina conducted an important national research study, “The National Study on Youth and Religion.” The results were reported in the book, *Soul Searching: The Religious and Spiritual Lives of American Teenagers*. Regarding young people’s participation and beliefs, the study found the following:

Youth and Participation

- ◆ The vast majority of American youth and parents of youth are religious and in particular, Christian.

- ◆ Though many have proposed that youth are “spiritual but not religious,” youth did not identify with this statement. Most youth do not seem to seek spiritual growth outside of denominational participation.
- ◆ Most youth intend to remain practicing in the denomination in which they currently participate.
- ◆ Youth who participate in a youth group, retreat, work camp and other programs have higher levels of faith understanding and practice.
- ◆ Youth who are very religious also have lower rates of at-risk behaviors and more positive family relationships.
- ◆ Some youth seem to be disenfranchised and do not participate in youth programs. This would include youth from non-practicing families, and segments of the population of Hispanic youth.

Youth and Beliefs

- ◆ Mainline Protestant and Catholic youth were found to be largely inarticulate in stating beliefs and doctrine when compared to conservative Christians and Mormon youth.
- ◆ Youth belief and practice mirrors the belief and practice of their parents.
- ◆ Researchers propose that for many youth and adults an alternative creed is emerging across denominations. This is not a separate religion; it is a watered down creed that inhabits most denominations. The researchers describe this belief system as “moralistic

therapeutic deism.” In this view, an impersonal God wants us to be happy, good, nice, and fair to each other. This creed omits much of the content of traditional Christian belief.

One of the images that the researches use to describe adolescent faith is a “mirror.” “American youth actually share much more in common with adults than they do not share, and most American youth faithfully mirror the aspirations, lifestyles, practices, and problems of the adult world into which they are being socialized” (Smith, 14).

This summary reinforces things that we know and draws attention to the challenges of faith formation in our time. If youth are mirroring the “whateverism” of their parents and the wider culture rather than embracing the deeper truths of faith, the scope of our task in faith formation is clear. The challenge goes beyond valid concerns about the formation of religious educators and ministry leaders who share faith with youth. The challenge goes far beyond the methods to use in the classroom or youth room. Our challenge is evangelizing youth and their families through a bold and dynamic faith that is lived in an exemplary and visible way by a congregation.

Part 3. Settings and Models for Adolescent Faith Formation

Two recent studies on youth ministry and faith formation came to the same conclusion in their overall finding: the life of the congregation itself is the heart of

faith formation for adolescents and their families. In *Effective Practices for Dynamic Youth Ministry*, this is described as becoming a “willing congregation.” These congregations are willing to fully engage youth within the community and surround youth with love, care, support and challenge:

[A community] that comes to know and treasure the youth in their midst will experience new ways of praying, celebrating, serving and learning. It is not about always letting youth have their way or about discarding the traditions of a community. But it is about letting youth have a way to truly belong. Youth and the community learn together and are transformed in the process. (East, 10)

In the “Spirit of Youth Ministry Project,” the key finding for effective faith formation of adolescents is described as “the culture or spirit of the congregation.”

A “culture” seems to emerge with its pervasive and distinct “spirit” and “atmosphere” that is more powerful than its component parts. It’s the combination of the core values, people, relationships, expectations, practices, and activities that seems to generate this spirit and atmosphere (Roberto, 3)

These communities form youth through the life and the lived theology of the congregation. Families are supported in sharing faith, and youth are gathered for youth ministry activities and programs. The heart of the formation is the life of the congregation itself. These communities identify and utilize the assets within their congregation to share faith with adolescents. These assets are different for each

community, which creates a very positive starting point for communities seeking to enhance faith formation of adolescents.

According to the asset-building approach, every congregation has faith assets; it is only a question of how many.

Congregations need to discover those that are already at work, and then chart a plan for developing more assets. An asset-building approach offers tangible qualities and practices that every congregation can adopt to nurture a maturing Christian faith for the youth in the congregation. (Roberto, 4)

These studies reinforce what we know from a broad variety of church documents and religious education theory: the faith community is the heart of faith formation. The life of the community sponsors Christian living. The community engages and includes youth, while at the same time providing faith formation for youth in age-specific ways, using the resources of the wider community.

Adolescents often rely upon all four of these settings: congregation, family, peers, and the wider community. For younger adolescents, the family remains the key place to explore and grow in faith, while at the same time, the peer group gains importance. Young people participate in congregational life and look for consistency between the faith they learn about and the lived practice of the community. Some young adolescents who are curious about faith topics explore these through books or web sites. Many more participate in events such as conferences, retreats, or service programs. Older adolescents tend to rely more on their peers and are able to engage in the life of the

congregation and use wider community resources more readily.

Experience of these settings also sets youth on the course to continue their faith growth as young adults, and adults.

1. **Family.** Families share faith through their lived practices and teachable moments of faith sharing and prayer.
2. **Age-specific peer group.** Congregations gather adolescents in peer groups to participate in youth ministry, religious education and sacramental formation. In these peer groups, youth learn the faith in ways that connect to their development and faith maturity.
3. **Congregation.** The life of the faith community itself forms faith in youth through worship, learning, community, and service. Adolescents strive to belong, and through their participation in the intergenerational community they learn and integrate faith.
4. **Wider community and individualized learning.** The wider community includes the variety of ways that youth learn and grow in faith using the resources in the wider community. This includes participation in inter-church and regional youth conferences and events. It also includes the resources for faith formation found in print and online media. An effective model for faith formation of young adolescents will take these four settings into account. Typically, a congregation will choose one of these settings as the primary setting for intentional faith formation, while strengthening and making connections to the other settings. For instance, a community might choose to have intentional faith formation occur primarily

within the peer group and would provide support for family faith sharing, promote congregational involvement, and encourage youth to learn on their own by providing resources and starting points. Another community might begin with intergenerational faith formation and complement these efforts with peer group gatherings and support for family faith sharing.

Effective Faith Formation for Youth

Three models for the effective faith formation of youth emerge from research and pastoral practice.

1. Intentional faith formation infused throughout youth ministry and involvement in congregational life. In these communities, the faith content needed by adolescents is communicated throughout the programs and strategies of youth ministry. Some themes are addressed during the weekly youth community gathering. Others are addressed within faith sharing series or retreats. Other aspects are built into experiences such as youth preparing for a summer service trip or incorporating Catholic social teaching into their preparation. Youth who become involved in worship and liturgical ministries experience formation as part of their practical preparation. The faith formation in these communities is planned and intentional although it is woven throughout a variety of gatherings and involvements.

2. Intentional faith formation is part of the whole community in an intergenerational model. In these congregations, people of all ages participate in faith learning as an intergenerational community. The life of the congregation becomes the

starting point as the community gathers to prepare for the events of Church life, and learn the faith in the process. Often times, these learning events begin with the whole community gathered and include time when age groups are divided for teaching and faith exploration among peers. In congregations that are employing the intergenerational model as their primary faith formation effort, youth ministries can count on the community to provide the intentional faith formation. Other aspects of formation needed in particular ways by young people can be addressed through other aspects of youth ministry.

3. Intentional faith formation is a distinct element of youth ministry. In these churches, the faith formation is a distinct element within youth ministry. Religious education programs are offered to youth on a regular basis. The youth who participate in these programs are encouraged to participate in other aspects of youth ministry.

- faith sharing series
- home-based faith sharing programs for youth and their families.

Whatever the model, effective congregations strive to provide faith formation in a way that is planned, intentional, and collaborative.

Part 4. Curriculum and Methods

Faith formation of adolescents includes witness of the community and instruction in the faith content. Both of these components create the curriculum for faith formation.

The word “curriculum” comes from a Latin word meaning to run a race. In current use, people generally think of the curriculum as “the course to be run,” which implies that it is not the actual running. Since the content of faith education is most clearly understood as the beliefs and practices of the people, then faith formation needs to be understood as an educational

... consider two kinds of curriculum. The general curriculum would include...the spirit or culture of the community. The specific curriculum would include the communities, programs, and strategies directed towards adolescents and their families.

Some of the methods used for these elements include:

- weekly classes at grade level
- sacramental preparation programs for Confirmation
- week-long religious education programs offered in the summer

ministry that is embedded in and involves the entire Christian community. Therefore, the opportunities and methods for developing faith are as diverse as the community of faith itself.

This perspective significantly shifts our understanding of

curriculum. In her book *Fashion Me A People: Curriculum in the Church*, Maria Harris emphasizes that we must consistently distinguish between the curriculum of education and the curriculum of schooling. She suggests that “curriculum” is about the mobilizing of creative educative powers in such a way as to fashion a “People of God” through the practices of the people. This is very different than the traditional notion of curriculum as stacks of teacher guides and student textbooks.

In planning for effective faith formation of adolescents, one should consider two kinds of curriculum. The *general curriculum* would include the community itself, the environment and hospitality, the team of ministry leaders, and the spirit or culture of the community. The *specific curriculum* would include the communities, programs, and strategies directed towards adolescents and their families. This would include the variety of efforts that promote faith learning, prayer and worship, justice and service, and community life. These efforts could occur within the whole community, a community of peers, the family, or for individual youth.

One way to think about this distinction is to consider the differences between non-verbal and verbal communication. General curriculum is like the non-verbal communication of a community. This communication is constantly revealing the authentic nature, message, and Word alive within the faith community. Specific curriculum is like verbal

communication, which is intentional and focused on communicating specific content and messages clearly.

Dynamic Faith Learning

Communities that are effective in forming faith in adolescents recognize their role as faith witnesses and provide the specific curriculum for adolescent faith formation through dynamic faith learning opportunities. The following three principles summarize what we are learning about dynamic faith learning from communities across the nation.

Principle 1: Effective faith formation helps youth enter into the experience of living faith.³ It engages them experientially—head, heart, and lifestyles—in the learning activity, providing them with direct, first-hand experiences; respects and incorporates their experience in the learning activity; and engages them in real-world learning and application, making the connection between learning and life, and faith and life.

When working with postmoderns, we can never underestimate the e-factor: experiential. Postmoderns will do most anything not to lose connection with the experience of life. (Sweet, 22) This principle addresses three key aspects for utilizing experience within faith learning. First, the learning process should be experiential, allowing youth to put themselves completely into the learning process and

providing youth with an experience of faith. Second, we should access the lived experience of adolescents and help them to name and claim these experiences as they learn and grow in faith. Third, we need to help youth apply what they are learning to their everyday choices and situations. Consider these ideas:

- **Connect youth to adult members of the congregation.** Identify members of the congregation who are living the faith in an exemplary way. Connect youth to these adult mentors to accompany them in their actions on behalf of faith.
- **Provide affective experiences of prayer.** Youth experience faith through their senses and through their experience of belonging within a community. Prayer provides a direct contact with the sacred and builds young people’s relationship with God.
- **Provide retreat experiences.** Retreats provide an incredible opportunity for youth to experience Christ’s presence within prayer, witness, community, and sacrament. The extended time of a retreat and the carefully chosen elements help youth to go deeper in their experience.
- **Provide opportunities for service.** One young person described her experience of service in this way, “when I was caring for the person who was hungry and lonely, I felt as though I was touching the Body of Christ.” Experiences of service to those in need are hands-on opportunities for youth to be in touch with Christ’s presence.

**When working with postmoderns,
we can never underestimate the e-factor: experiential.**

Principle 2: Effective faith formation uses a variety of methods that engage the senses. It incorporates a variety of multi-sensory methods to engage the whole person, such as art, drama, music, dance, storytelling, media, prayer, rituals; and engages them in construction, discovery, and exploration of the topic or concept.

This principle reminds us of the importance of engaging the senses and addressing a variety of learning styles. We are also challenged to move the faith learner from being a passive listener to being someone who is helping uncover and discover the faith content. Consider these methods for presenting and processing faith content:

- interviews
- panel presentations
- guest speakers
- movies, TV, popular songs, and story connections
- presenting content and faith sharing within prayer
- skits, drama, and Scripture re-enactments
- Scripture search
- murals, collages, posters, and slogans
- station-based learning activities
- “guided tour” museum-style presentations

Principle 3: Effective faith formation builds a faith learning community.

It utilizes collaborative and group-centered formats for study, inquiry, activities, and sharing; provides an environment that is characterized by warmth, trust, acceptance, and inquiry; and is participative and interactive, actively engaging them in the learning process.

In the *National Directory for Catechesis*, the United States Catholic Bishops describe the importance of a learning community. [Effective faith

formation] “involves group participation in an environment that is characterized by warmth, trust, acceptance, and care, so that young people can hear and respond to God’s call (fostering the freedom to search and question, to express one’s own point of view, and to respond in faith to that call)” (NDC, 201).

Youth are naturally going to learn and grow in faith more comfortably in a community where they feel safe, accepted and valued. This principle reminds us of the importance of building community as we promote faith learning. Consider these ideas for building a faith learning community:

- include community builders and team building activities within faith learning
- provide opportunities for youth to share and pray for each other’s concerns
- integrate prayer throughout faith learning
- change groupings: use dyads, triads, and different combinations of small groups to provide an opportunity for youth to get to know one another
- go off-site from the church grounds: participate together in a service project, “pilgrimage” to a place for prayer or take a field trip to a place to experience worship, community or service with another congregation.

Connected Learning

One of the most effective means of providing faith formation is to connect faith learning with other aspects of youth ministry and involvement in church life. Using this method, youth experience formation in Christian teachings on

justice before and after providing direct service. Some youth learn about worship before engaging in liturgical ministries. Other youth learn about specific faith and Scripture themes about leadership prior to becoming part of the youth ministry team.

This method of learning matches with ideas developed by Malcolm Knowles about andragogy, which is his term for the teaching methodology used in adult education. Knowles challenges common assumptions about education:

[Many educators believe that] if we simply pour enough knowledge into people: 1. they will turn out to be good people, and 2. they will know how to make use of their knowledge...we must define the mission of education as to produce competent people—people who are able to apply their knowledge under changing conditions. . . (Knowles, 18-19)

Using the principles of andragogy, we direct learning to close the gap between what the learners now know and what they need to know in order to do what they want to do. Providing connected learning motivates youth to learn the faith because there is something that they want to do, to which this learning is connected. This style of faith learning also helps youth become lifelong learners because they see the connections between faith and action. Other principles of andragogy can help shape faith formation with adolescents by involving youth in planning for their learning, utilizing the experience of learners and involve them in creating shared understanding, connecting learning to faith experiences and vice versa.

The adventure of discipleship begins with an encounter with Jesus Christ. This encounter can't be programmed or scheduled, but we can help youth create the time and space to recognize Christ in their midst. We can also engage youth with the congregation that listens to the Word and acts on it in bold and faithful ways.

Mike Theissen conducted research in the Diocese of Rochester, New York that reinforced this style of learning. He found that the most effective adolescent faith formation strategy was actually a Vacation Bible School program that involved thirty adolescents each year as team members. These youth learned key Scripture and faith themes in preparation for leading children through this week of study and celebration of faith. Many of the programs that they identified as effective had similar characteristics.

Based on his research, effective faith formation programs:

- ♦ creatively and fully engage young people in the learning process, often as teachers or peer leaders
- ♦ are intense and necessitate relationship building among the participants
- ♦ often offer something back to the community
- ♦ utilize the gifts of young people and actively involve the whole person (head, heart, and hands) (Theissen, 5)

Another aspect of this research was the intentionality of each program or gathering. Theissen suggests that communities ask critical questions prior to each gathered program or activity for youth.

1. How is God made more visible through this activity, program or model?
2. How will this activity, program or model bring young people into a deeper relationship with Jesus Christ?
3. How can I more fully involve young people in this activity, program or model?
4. How can I more fully partner with parents in this activity, program or model?
5. How can I model and share my own faith journey through this activity, program or model? (Theissen, 3)

Conclusion

The adventure of discipleship begins with an encounter with Jesus Christ. This encounter can't be programmed or scheduled, but we can help youth create the time and space to recognize Christ in their midst. We can also engage youth with the congregation that listens to the Word and acts on it in bold and faithful ways. Research about adolescents and faith formation points toward the need for congregations to name and claim adolescent faith formation as a priority.

Consider these directions to help you bring together youth, parents, staff, and ministry leaders in your community to create a shared plan for adolescent faith formation.

1. Assess your community.

- Youth and families: Who are the youth and families? How are they currently involved?
- Strengths and assets: What are the strengths of our community that we can share with youth?
- Areas to grow: What are the areas we need to grow in order to provide dynamic and effective faith formation with adolescents?

2. Develop focused, innovative efforts.

- Choose or strengthen your model for adolescent faith formation.
- Identify your primary setting for faith formation and complement this strategy with other offerings and support in the other settings of faith learning.
- Utilize the assets in your community to provide new methods.

3. Provide connected learning.

Use the calendar for the congregation and youth ministry to create new opportunities for faith learning.

4. Make the most of each contact.

Utilize the five key questions suggested in this article to evaluate each gathering with youth.

5. Work with families.

Provide families of youth with resources to share faith and pray at home.

6. Empower people of vibrant faith to be bold, faithful, and alive in sharing faith and life with youth in the community.

Provide formation for religious educators and ministry leaders so that leaders are empowered to share faith effectively.

In the first section of this article, we named the starting point for faith formation as evangelization. What does it mean to become good news in the lives of adolescents? Good news is not theoretical and it is not general. Good news is something specific and personal. It is something that connects with the bad news in our lives. For someone who is unemployed, good news is the phone call from the employer offering a job. For a parent whose child is injured, good news is the ambulance arriving to help. For someone who is hungry, good news is a bowl of food.

For adolescents, the good news of our faith will be received when it connects with their lives and their world. What are the headlines that youth carry in their hearts? The starting point for any ministry with youth is a stance of listening and compassion for young people. As a faith community we can listen to youth, love them and provide the witness and instruction that guides a new generation of disciples towards bold and transforming faith.

Endnotes

- ¹ Adapted from Thomas Groome, "Of Silver Jubilees and the Ground Gained," *PACE* 25, January 1996, pages 13-20.
- ² See Sarah Spinks, *Frontline* producer, "Adolescent Brains are Works in Progress: Here's Why," www.pbs.org/wgbh/pages/frontline/shows/teenbrain/work/adolescent.html.
- ³ These principles were developed from findings from the Generations of Faith Project, which focused on effective learning and incorporated the work of Leif Kehrwald, Mariette Martineau, John Roberto, and Joan Weber (Naugatuck, CT: Center for Ministry Development, 2006). See www.generationsoffaitth.org.

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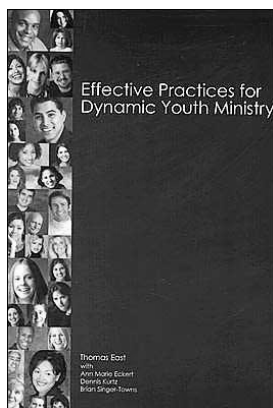
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Recommended Resources

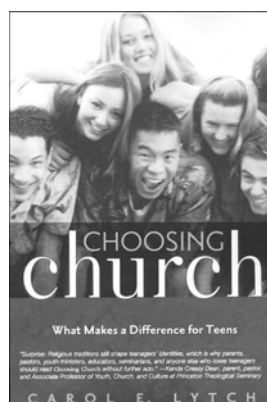
Faith Formation of Adolescents



Effective Practices for Dynamic Youth Ministry

Tom East with Ann Marie Eckert, Dennis Kurtz, and Brian Singer-Towns
(Winona, MN: Saint Mary's Press, 2004)

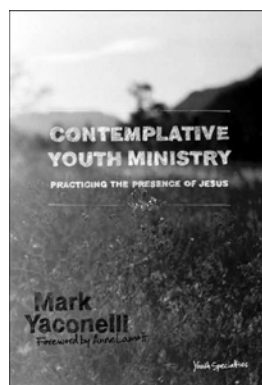
Based on nationwide research project of Catholic parishes with dynamic youth ministry, *Effective Practices for Dynamic Youth Ministry* presents the qualities and attitudes that support dynamic youth ministry, and the practices and activities that help young people grow spirituality and reinforce their Catholic identity. Chapters in the book are organized around the factors that contribute to the effectiveness of youth ministry: Parish Support, Qualities, Program Elements, Leadership, and Practices. Each chapter blends research findings with practical strategies for developing a more effective youth ministry. The research was conducted with Catholic parishes, but the findings will resonate and be helpful to all Christian churches.



Choosing Church: What Makes a Difference for Teens

Carol E. Lytch (Louisville: Westminster/John Knox Press, 2004)

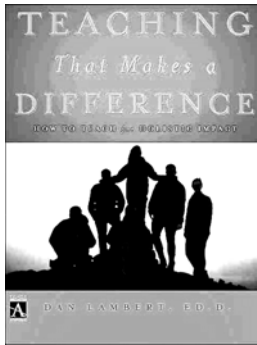
Carol Lytch presents this well-researched study of what attracts teenagers to the church and what keeps them there. Her research includes interviews of youth leaders, teenagers, and their parents in three congregations—mainline Protestant, evangelical, and Roman Catholic. Lytch explores ways that youth grow in their faith and in their relationship to the church. *Choosing Church* provides a description of the most effective ways that congregations and parents can foster faith in early teenagers that will help them value the church as a place to obtain identity, belonging, and growth. Chapters include: How Churches Attract Teens, How Churches Hold Teens, Seven Styles of Being Religious...or Not, and Nurturing Teen Religious Loyalty in the Family.



Contemplative Youth Ministry

Mark Yaconelli (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2006)

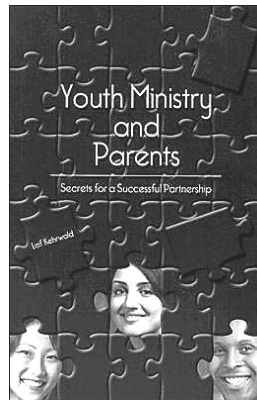
Mark Yaconelli spent hundreds of hours in small circles of people praying, listening, and discerning God's presence within churches and youth ministry programs. This book puts into words the experiences and wisdom he gained from these little communities of faith. He explains that youth ministers get too caught up in programs, curriculum, events, and what to say to teens to get them engaged, while many young people remain just as bored and unfocused as ever. *Contemplative Youth Ministry* is a more organic approach to youth ministry allowing ministers to create meaningful silence, foster covenant communities, engage kids in contemplative activities, and maximize spontaneity, helping young people recognize the presence of Jesus in their everyday lives. Through the application of contemplative traditions and authentic relationship building, a new style of youth ministry can emerge.



Teaching That Makes a Difference

Dan Lambert (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2004)

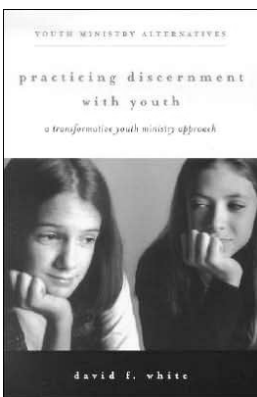
This comprehensive, one-of-a-kind, research-informed book presents the best theories and practices in teaching and learning with adolescents in church settings. *Teaching That Makes a Difference* analyzes historical, philosophical, and spiritual methods and includes a deconstruction of Jesus' teaching style. Chapters include What is Holistic Teaching?, Who Are Adolescents?, How Do Adolescents Learn?, What Should You Use to Teach?, How Can You Prepare to Teach?, What Teaching Methods Should You Use?, How Can You Know if You Are Making a Difference?, and How Might Jesus Teach Teens Today?



Youth Ministry and Parents

Leif Kehrwald (Winona, MN: Saint Mary's Press, 2004)

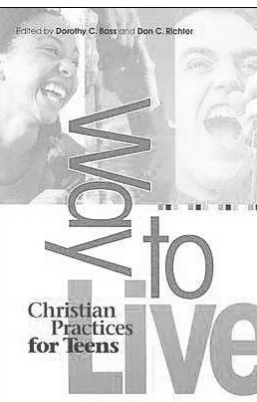
Because parents are the primary evangelizers of young people, they must be integrally involved in any successful youth ministry program. This book paves the way for youth ministers to create successful partnerships with parents of the teens in their church. It helps youth ministers understand parents of teens and gives youth program leaders concrete strategies for enlisting parental support, overcoming resistance, and using the parental support system to complement youth ministry programs. Chapters include: Partnership with Parents, Family Stages, Why Parents?, Understanding Parents of Teens, Families and Youth Faith Formation, A Christian Vision for Family Life.



Practicing Discernment with Youth

David F. White (Cleveland: Pilgrim Press, 2005)

David White calls for congregations to engage their own young people in practices of discernment that involve the gifts and problems of their unique context, bringing their lives more fully into partnership with God's work in their particular place. He models how to do this through historic discernment practices of Christian communities such as: Ignatian contemplative practices, Quaker clearness counsels, consensus decision making, and silence. Part One explore discernment as an approach to youth ministry including chapters on A Theological Vision for Youth Ministry, Cultural Forces and the Crisis in Contemporary Youth Ministry, and Reclaiming the Christian Practice of Discernment. Part Two presents a four movement process for discernment: Listening, Understanding, Remembering and Dreaming, and Acting.



Way to Live: Christian Practices for Teens

Dorothy Bass and Don Richter, editors. (Nashville: Upper Room Books, 2002)

Written for teens by teens and adults, *Way to Live* presents eighteen ancient Christian practices that provide ways for young people to deepen their awareness of God in their lives and in the world, and practice their faith in daily life. The eighteen practices include: The Story, Bodies, Stuff, Food, Creation, Creativity, Work, Play, Time, Truth, Choices, Friends, Welcome, Forgiveness, Justice, Grieving, Music, and Prayer. A free study guide is available from: www.practicingourfaith.org.



The Faith Formation of Young Adults: Opportunities and Challenges

Joan Weber

Imagine ten young adults serving at the local soup kitchen all day, then going to a popular pub for pizza and beer. As they eat, they talk about seeing the face of God in the people they served earlier. One young man brings up Matthew 25, and they all begin to make connections between the Gospel call and what they did at the soup kitchen. As they go deeper into the message of Jesus in the Gospels, they feel called to e-mail their state representatives about changes needed in state law in order to defend the dignity of the homeless and obtain affordable housing for them.

Imagine a group of young adults gathering in someone's condo at 9 p.m. on a Wednesday night, working through a lectionary-based small group resource on the upcoming Sunday Scripture readings. Picture that same group at Sunday worship, completely engaged in the songs, readings, and prayers of the liturgy, which they keep connecting to the themes they discovered in the readings five days earlier.

Imagine several young adults walking out of a movie theater, having an animated discussion about the values and morals of the movie's lead characters. Listen as one young woman describes the inspiration she got from the heroine in the story and how the movie itself made her feel a sense of holiness and closeness to God. Watch other young adults describe the movie as a faith experience for them, too.

Imagine a group of twenty young adults gathered at your church in a room with couches and comfortable chairs. There is a small table in the middle of the room with a colorful cloth icon of Jesus, and a lit candle. Listening in, you hear the young adults discussing the meaning and importance of the Eucharist in their lives. One poses a question that the group can't answer, so an adult catechism is opened to the section on sacraments, the answer is found, and the discussion continues.

Can you imagine these scenarios for the young adults in your church? Are they probable? Are they even within the realm of possibility? Does your church provide the opportunity for such encounters?

Joan Weber is project coordinator of young adult ministry services and project coordinator for the Institute in Lifelong Faith Formation at the Center for Ministry Development. She is co-author and editor of *Young Adult Works* (CMD) and co-author of two intergenerational programs: *Celebrating Sacraments* and *Responding in Prayer* (Harcourt Religion Publishers). She holds a Master's Degree in Pastoral Ministry from Creighton University and teaches courses in youth ministry, young adult ministry and lifelong faith formation.

The faith formation of young adults today presents unique challenges as well as graced opportunities for those in church ministry. It demands that we *think outside the box*, being open to ways of doing faith formation that have never been done before. It also requires humility on the part of the older generations, both the humility of realizing that previously “tried and true” methods need reshaping for a new generation of adults and the humility of letting young adults lead us in discovering what the new methods are. It means trusting that the Spirit is active in the lives of young adults who express their faith and their spirituality in ways that may seem foreign—perhaps even irreverent—to older Christians.

Young Adult Development and Faith Growth

In this twenty-first century, who are the young adults in our midst? They are people in their late teens, twenties, and thirties who “earnestly search for meaning in their lives; they value solidarity with the rest of humanity and seek to commit themselves to the cause of social justice” (NDC, 195). On the other hand, many young adults have been captivated and shaped by the consumerism and materialism of U.S. society.

Today’s young adults include two different generations of postmoderns: Generation Xers,

in their lives. Consequently, they were shaped by popular culture in an unprecedented way. While they are open to the Christian community providing them with a new opportunity for community, they will only come if they are accepted for who they are and welcomed unconditionally.

Unlike Gen Xers, Millennials were and continue to be shaped by huge disasters, both natural and man-made: the terrorist attacks in 2001, the tsunami in Southeast Asia, and Hurricane Katrina. Watching these tragedies unfold created in them a deep yearning for a safe haven in an unsafe world. Many of them see religion as that safe haven.

James Davidson, Dean Hoge, William D’Antonio, and their colleagues have researched generational differences among Catholics every six years since 1987. Their research highlights several key features of postmodern, Catholic young adults. While their research focuses on Catholic young adults, many of these features can also be seen in young adults in other Christian churches. The report states that young adult Catholics do not have a strong sense of Catholic identity, although they do identify themselves as Catholic. They feel very comfortable with picking and choosing which elements of the Catholic faith they believe and which they don’t. As an example, 64% of Catholic young adults surveyed by Hoge stated that they felt a person could be a good Catholic without going to Mass (Hoge, 54). When asked which elements of faith they see as essential, less than 50% of them included the following:

- ♦ having a pope (48%)
- ♦ having a daily prayer life (41%)
- ♦ private confession to a priest (32%)

The faith formation of young adults today presents unique challenges as well as graced opportunities for those in church ministry. It demands that we *think outside the box*, being open to ways of doing faith formation that have never been done before.

The grace of young adult faith formation lies in the reality that the goal of faith formation is what young adults yearn for: communion and intimacy with Jesus Christ, which leads them to live their lives in new ways as his disciples. In order to provide young adults with an environment in which conversion to discipleship can happen, we need to know the young adults in our faith communities, be they in the pews, in our own families, or just sleeping-in on Sunday.

born between 1961 and 1980, and Millennials, born after 1980. While they have much in common, their approach to faith is somewhat unique because of their different worldviews. Xers were the first generation in history to experience the weakening of community within the family through widespread divorce, a geographic disconnect from the extended family, and their experiences of being latchkey kids. In their hunger for community, they often made television families their communities (e.g., *The Brady Bunch*). Media became a focal point

- ♦ teachings that oppose the death penalty (22%) (Hoge, 203).

Consequently, the boundaries of Catholic identity have become porous for this generation. What Catholicism meant for older generations was clear and defined; that is just not true for young people today, who see Catholicism as a religion of choice rather than obligation. And many of them see it as one choice among many other viable choices.

Traditional foundations for faith formation, which we took for granted with pre-Vatican II and Vatican II Catholics (also known as the World War II and the Baby Boom generations), cannot be counted on with post-Vatican II Catholics. Many of them haven't gone through what John Westerhoff called the first ring of faith formation, experiential faith, because they were brought up in a secular culture. Their experiences of Catholicism were haphazard at best. They were not apprenticed into the faith the way their parents and grandparents were. Does this mean that the affiliative, searching, and owned faith stages that Westerhoff also described are somehow postponed for young adults?

Another challenge to the faith formation of young adults is what Dennis Doyle describes as the bifurcation of spirituality from organized religion in his article "Young Catholics and their Faith: Is Being Spiritual Enough?" He named the reality that many young people today actively pursue spiritual experiences, but do not identify with or participate in a particular religion. He concluded, "This bifurcation is problematic, since an unmoored spirituality runs the risk of offering insufficient institutional challenge or direction." How then do we draw young adults into our faith formation efforts so

that they have the knowledge and support they need to moor their spirituality? How do we help them experience the Gospel critique of popular culture and the direction that only a faith community can truly provide?

Many young adults have a deep and abiding faith. They are in need of ongoing faith formation and support over the lifetime journey of conversion. Many other young adults are in need of a "new evangelization" that is directed to "the baptized who were never effectively evangelized before, to those who have never made a personal commitment to Christ and the Gospel, to those formed by the values of the secularized culture, to those who have lost a sense of faith, and to those who are alienated" (NDC, 47).

Today's young adults are pragmatic. They want to know why: why they should believe, what's in it for them, how it will help them in their everyday lives. They are technologically savvy, used to getting information instantly and succinctly, consumer-driven, and very spiritual. No matter where young adults are on the journey of faith, they are called to conversion and discipleship. The challenge for churches in the twenty-first century is determining how to support their conversion and continually echo Jesus' call to young adults to come and follow him.

Characteristics of Faith Formation with Young Adults

In 1997, the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops published *Sons and Daughters of the Light: A Pastoral Plan for Ministry with Young Adults*. The pastoral plan addressed all aspects of ministry with young adults, such as evangelization, pastoral care, and community life. The most effective faith formation with young adults takes place in a church where a comprehensive ministry understands the concerns of young adults, and candidly addresses the questions they ask and the problems they face. There are four goals for this comprehensive ministry with young adults:

1. to connect young adults with Jesus Christ
2. to connect young adults with the Christian community
3. to connect young adults with the mission of the Christian community in the world
4. to connect young adults with a peer community who share their values and beliefs.

Our goal is forming young adults in Christ and teaching for discipleship. This echoes Christ's proposal to the young man: "Come, follow me." We must find ways to let young adults know that "Christ

Many young adults today have a deep and abiding faith. They are in need of ongoing faith formation and support over the lifetime journey of conversion. Many other young adults are in need of a "new evangelization" . . .

loves them and needs them and that they are vital members of the Body of Christ, the Church” (NDC, 198).

Inviting young adults to explore the Christian faith the way Jesus invited the apostles to examine his values and beliefs makes sense with a generation brought up to “try before they buy” in all other aspects of their lives. Consider the following suggestions for inviting young adults into a life of discipleship.

- 1. Environment:** Provide a non-threatening place where they can freely express their questions, doubts, and even disagreements with Christian teachings, where those teachings can be clearly articulated and related to their experience. Every church owes this type of forum to its young adults. Creating an environment in which they can explore their faith through lively discussions and interaction, through questions and applications to their daily lives, through debate and rebuttal, can only lead to stronger, deeper adult faith.
- 2. Contact:** Provide significant points of contact for young adults with the faith community. The more young adults intersect with the life of the church, the more likely they are to experience the Christian faith. Mentoring and an apprenticeship in the faith is an excellent way to introduce or enhance young adults’ experience of church life.
- 3. Vocation:** Assist young adults in examining their lives and discerning their life vocations. The average age for marriage in the U.S. today is twenty-seven for men and twenty-five for women. Consequently, most

people choose their vocation in young adulthood. This offers a challenge to teach young adults what discernment is (especially the difference between deciding and discerning), how to do it well, and how to apply it to all major life decisions, particularly in the choice of life vocation.

- 4. Decision-making:** Help young adults make moral decisions in light of the teachings of Christ and the Christian tradition. Provide them with a process for prayerful decision-making. Engage them with the Gospel message of love and fidelity, justice and forgiveness. Expose them to Christian teachings.
- 5. Liturgy:** Draw them into the liturgical life of the Christian community. Learning about and through liturgy—which includes the experience of liturgy as well as understanding—has such rich potential for the ongoing conversion of young adults. Challenge them to live as disciples—to be committed to Christ’s mission of making the kingdom of God a reality.
- 6. Adaptation:** The distance young adults may feel from the church can be bridged by an adaptation and approach to the language (mentality, sensibility, tastes, style, and vocabulary) employed in learning. The Christian community needs to speak the language of young adults, be that language Spanish or English, technology or music, instant messaging or art.

Guidelines for the faith formation of adults, in general, apply to *young* adults as well, even though many church leaders only think of middle-aged and senior

adults when designing adult faith formation. Effective religious formation of young adults takes into account and draws out their previous experiences of God to guide them deeper into their faith. It trusts that as adults they are self-motivated learners who are able to identify their spiritual and learning needs and, with the help of leaders and mentors, plan ways to meet those needs. It engages adults in a variety of learning experiences that include liturgy, Scripture study, prayer, home activities, and large and small group methods. Faith formation efforts should involve young adults themselves in the learning process so that they can teach and learn from one another.

Specifically, faith formation with young adults should have the following characteristics:

- 1. Knowledge:** Studies of young adults as well as personal interviews with them point to a genuine lack of knowledge about Christian identity and the faith tradition. At the Woodstock Forum in Washington, DC, James Davidson commented, “Belonging is not a problem; they [young adults] feel comfortable calling the church home. And I don’t think serving is a problem. It’s the believing that’s the problem.” Churches need to find ways to help young adults gain clarity about what it is we, as Christians believe. Thus the Creed provides a natural starting point for young adult faith formation.
- 2. Variety:** Offer a variety of both topical and programmatic formats, such as a series of evening classes, special one-evening presentations, retreat days, discussion groups, Bible study groups, and mentoring

relationships. These options should respond to the needs of the local young adult community. Variety is vital to a generation that has been exposed to interactive and dynamic learning processes from childhood.

themes such as formation of conscience, education for love, vocational discernment, Christian involvement in society, missionary responsibility in the world, the relationship between faith and reason, the existence and

peer teaching and mentoring makes sense.

Pastoral Approaches and Strategies for Faith Formation with Young Adults

Today's young adults did not, for the most part, get faith by osmosis. It is good for church leaders to think strategically, utilizing both systematic and *carpe diem* strategies for the faith formation of young adults. It is also important to remember that faith formation doesn't happen exclusively in classrooms or organized programs.

Young adults need opportunities to reflect, learn, question, and share their faith experiences across all the arenas of their lives, including the workplace, the home, recreational spaces, and the church community.

Churches that strive to be more responsive to young adults in their faith formation programs should examine their adult faith formation efforts to determine how effective these programs are. It is helpful to ask the following questions:

- When do we offer this program? Are the times conducive to young adult attendance?
- If we are offering a series, such as a lenten program on the six Wednesdays of Lent, do we let people know that if they can't make all six sessions, they are still welcome to come to whichever they can make?
- Is our promotion of the program attractive to young adults? Do we personally invite young adults to participate through one-on-one contacts or e-mails?

...we need to train young adults to share the faith with people their own age. Since older generations never experienced life the way young adults of today do, peer teaching and mentoring makes sense.

- 3. Culture:** Use adult-centered methods that work within the culture of the participants. The culture of young adults includes both their ethnicity as well as the popular culture in which they live. "The inculturation of the Gospel is also a key criterion for the pastoral presentation of the Christian message because the Good News of Jesus Christ is intended for people of all cultures" (NDC, 82).
- 4. Media:** Take advantage of media and technology to share faith with young adults by making available print resources, audio and video programs, and online resources and communities. Young adults prefer short, to-the-point reading. Podcasts and other new innovations in technology can be used while traveling, exercising, or at home in the evening.
- 5. Themes:** Choose themes for faith formation that explore the Bible and Christian tradition around

meaning of God, the problem of evil, the relationship between man and woman, and the social teaching of Christ and the church. Also explore more personal themes and their connection to the gospel and Christian tradition, such as relationships, intimacy, sexuality, family life, culture, workplace ethics, morality, personal faith, and dealing with life's pain.

One final principle for young adult faith formation that has not been universally implemented was articulated at a national Catholic symposium on ministry with young adults in 2000. Leaders in ministry with young adults were asked to create an image of outreach to young adults for the new millennium. One group painted a word portrait of peer teaching and peer mentoring. The team described it in this way: we need to train young adults to share the faith with people their own age. Since older generations never experienced life the way young adults of today do,

- Do we engage learners in the process? Do we utilize shared Christian praxis or a similar method that connects the faith story to the daily lives of participants?
- Do we use media and technology to communicate the message?
- Do we have young adults on the design team for the learning session?

“Theology on Tap,” a national program developed in the Archdiocese of Chicago over twenty-five years ago, remains the most effective and widely used faith formation program for young adults. What makes it so successful? First of all, it takes place on neutral territory: in a bar, a coffeehouse, or some other place where young adults feel comfortable. Secondly, it includes a focused amount of input from a guest speaker on a topic of interest to young adults. It creates a climate in which the young adults can engage in dialogue with the speaker, asking questions, challenging assumptions, and acquiring answers. It is a chance for young adults to come together with their peers, particularly peers who are seekers like themselves. The opportunity for socializing after the formal part of the session is also a plus. A very attractive feature of “Theology on Tap” is that it doesn’t require a long-term commitment. Most sites offer a four or six-week series, then take time off before another is offered. And young adults know that they aren’t “required” to attend all six!

Many churches across the country have created their own faith formation format for young adult programs. A church in Omaha, NE has monthly Welcome Nights in which a guest speaker gives a presentation, then interacts

with the young adults through questions and answers. This is followed by informal social time. The church consistently draws fifty or more young adults to these monthly sessions. The young adults themselves choose the topics.

Because young adults are so hungry for the connection between their faith and their lives, church leaders need to be somewhat flexible and spontaneous in selecting topics for young adult faith formation. To do this churches offer evenings of discussion and input on topics that connect to the everyday lives of their young adults. One way of doing this is by watching what is in the news *right now*. As an example, a church in the San Francisco area held a session on just war when the U.S. went to war in Iraq.

Announcements were made at Sunday worship that war from a Christian faith perspective would be discussed on Tuesday night. With just two days notice, the church drew 180 young adults to the dialogue. Another way to achieve this goal is to just listen to what young adults are talking about—their fears, doubts, and dreams.

Whatever the topic, the method of delivery for young adult faith formation needs to be one that connects the young adult’s life experience to the faith story. The Shared Christian Praxis methodology of Thomas Groome does this effectively. The focusing

activity reminds us that we must first give young adults a reason to learn their faith. With Gen Xers, this needs to be fairly pragmatic, answering the “why should I” and “what will I get out of it” questions that young adults pose. The five movements of praxis surround the teachings of the Bible and Christian Tradition with the learners’ own experiences, moving the teaching from head to heart to hands and feet. The first two movements, experiencing life and reflecting on life, invite the young adults to examine an issue of living, such as suffering, faithfulness, or justice, in their own lives. The third movement, sharing the faith story, provides the teachings of the Bible and Tradition. Movements four and five invite the learners to integrate the faith story into their own lives through reflection and action.

Contemplation

A significant element of faith formation that supports young adults in their conversion is contemplation. One of the things young adults yearn for is quiet—probably because there is so little of it in their everyday lives. As Michael Hayes of Busted.Halo.com puts it, “We need to have moments of contemplation and awe that evoke deep mystery within the hearts and minds of the young faithful.”

A significant element of faith formation that supports young adults in their conversion is contemplation. One of the things young adults of today yearn for is quiet—probably because there is so little of it in their everyday lives.

Providing young adults with opportunities like *lectio divina*, Taize prayer experiences, and retreats is critical. But it's also important to think of the delivery system for these experiences in new ways. For example, most young adults would probably see themselves as too busy for a traditional weekend retreat. But we can direct them toward podcasts of the daily Scripture readings (uscgb.org/nab) or a complete Ignatian retreat online (creighton.edu/collaborativeministry).

Because there is often a disconnect between religion and life in the minds of young adults, teaching them the art of theological reflection is an effective way to support them on their faith journey.

We need to assist young adults in examining their lives and engaging them in dialogue about the great questions they face, to help them make these crucial decisions in accord with God's will and their faith. Churches would do well to offer young adults retreat-like evenings in which they follow a process for reflection:

1. Choose a topic that you hear young adults wrestling with in their own lives.
2. Invite them to come for one evening of reflection on the topic. (It is important to emphasize that this is not a series or an ongoing commitment on their part.)
3. Do good welcoming and hospitality.
4. Share a story from your own life of how you reflected on the topic.
5. Invite the young adults to identify and share the voices in their lives that give an opinion on what they should do about the issue, including their families, friends, colleagues at work or school, the popular culture, their

ethnic culture, and finally, their faith.

6. Engage them in prayerfully listening to God's voice among all the other voices bombarding them with suggestions. Ask them what Scripture passages come to mind. Provide copies of theologically sound resource material related to the topic. Encourage them to search for guidelines to help them hear God's voice.
7. Invite the whole group into reflective prayer, lifting up their remaining questions and asking God for the courage and wisdom to make the right decision about the issue.
8. Close with social time for those who wish to stay.

struggling to alleviate makes sense. It also respects the busy lives of young adults. Rather than doing a service project and a separate learning program on the Christian teaching on hunger or racism or immigration, weaving the teachings into the service experience makes good use of time. The pastoral circle method of engaging in the topic, doing social analysis of the injustice, reflecting on the scriptural and Christian social teachings about the issue, and choosing a course of action is an effective technique for this.

Another strategy for faith formation is to capitalize on times when young adults come to the church for the celebration of a sacrament, such as marriage or the baptism of their child. There is an openness on the part of young

The first decade of the 21st century has created unique challenges and unprecedented opportunities for fostering the faith development of young adults. It would be tragic if Christian churches wrote off this generation as impossible to reach.

Opportunities for Faith Formation within Existing Programs and Ministries

One key strategy for faith formation with young adults is building on strengths rather than weaknesses. Since service is a passion among today's young adults, weaving faith formation into a service project sets churches up for success. Introducing gospel stories and Christian social teachings *in the context* of whatever injustice the young adults are

adults who voluntarily come to the church for a sacrament, and we should take advantage of that openness to share the Good News. For example:

- ♦ Use the Christian initiation (RCIA) of young adults to engage involved young adults as their sponsors. In doing so, they receive a deeper sense of their Christian identity.
- ♦ Use marriage preparation as an opportunity to connect young adults with Jesus and with the church community. This

includes situating the actual marriage preparation within the larger themes of God's love, fidelity, covenant, etc.

- ♦ Use preparation for infant baptism to strengthen the faith of the parents (young adults) and their relationship with church community. Young adults often confess that it took having a baby to recognize their lack of a faith identity and the need to learn more in order to pass on a faith tradition to their children.

Because there is a hunger for community and belonging in young adults, small faith-sharing groups are one way in which churches have gathered them to explore topics like Scripture, connecting faith and work, spirituality, and other themes. In addition to gathered strategies, there are many opportunities for supporting the ongoing formation of young adults that don't require gathering them. Taking advantage of young adults' familiarity with technology, we can share the Gospel message through e-mail, podcasts and viral videos of inspiring stories of faith and fidelity, and web sites that engage them in prayer and reflection.

In addition to inviting young adults into adult faith formation, engaging them in the inter-generational experiences of the community is a powerful opportunity for ongoing conversion. Young adults can share their life experiences of God with younger members of the community, particularly teenagers who see those in their twenties and thirties as role models. Young adults also bring fresh perspectives on faith to the older generations. At the same time, young adult faith is enriched by the faith of children (some of whom are their own little ones) and the wisdom and fidelity of the elders.

These are just a few of the many possibilities for faith formation that churches can consider.

Conclusion

Faith formation of young adults must begin and end with Jesus Christ. Its purpose, like all faith formation, is intimacy and communion with Christ that leads to a life of discipleship. Therefore, it is always relational and leading outward.

The first decade of the twenty-first century has created unique challenges and unprecedented opportunities for fostering the faith development of young adults. It would be tragic if Christian churches wrote off this generation as impossible to reach. They are the leaders we need to take the Christian Church into the future. They hunger for a personal relationship with Christ, and they want to transform the world. Each church should ask itself what it can do to support young adults in fulfilling their call to a living relationship with Christ, as well as to holiness, community, and service.

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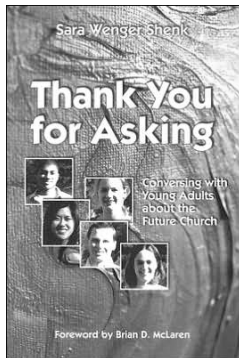
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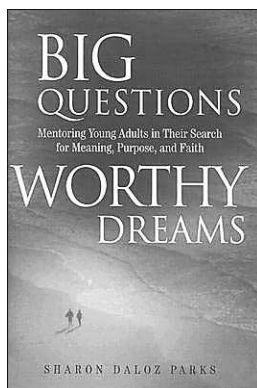
Faith Formation of Young Adults



Thank You for Asking: Conversations with Young Adults about the Future Church

Sara Wenger Shenk (Scottsdale, PA: Herald Press, 2005)

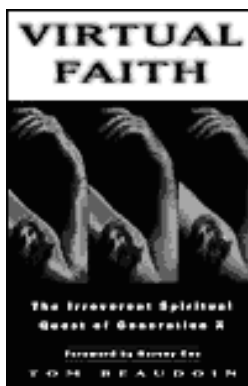
This is a book of stories—the stories of young adults as told to their peers. Perhaps better than many of us, these young adults are sensing the shape the future church will need to take to be real, down-to-earth, and life-giving for their generation in the twenty-first century. With a team of young adults Sara Wenger Shenk explored the practical, real-life dimensions of formative stories and practices as described by young adults. Part 1 looks at young adults today: characteristics, search for a unifying narrative, and practices that become a way of life. Part 2 explores formative narratives: childhood, church, Bible, and Jesus. Part 3 examines practices and Part 4 explores young adults' vision for the future church. The young adults in this book invite pastors, parents and friends into a potentially transformative dialogue about the stories and practices we use to make sense of our world and to form a way of life.



Big Questions, Worth Dreams: Mentoring Young Adults in their Search for Meaning, Purpose, and Faith

Sharon Daloz Parks (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 2000)

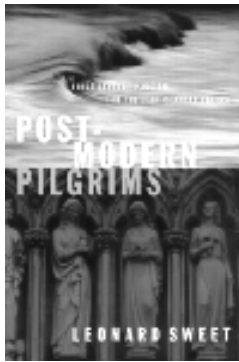
Building on her classic 1986 work, *The Critical Years*, Sharon Daloz Parks presents a smart and compassionate look at the challenges young adults face in their search for a place of belonging, integrity, and contribution—and a call to thoughtful adults to actively mentor the next generation. She reexamines the twenty-something years and shows how crucial it is to create mentoring environments that recognize, support, challenge, and inspire the promise of young adult lives. Chapters include: Young Adulthood in a Changing World, Meaning and Faith, Becoming at Home in the Universe, It Matters How We Think, Imagination: The Power of Adult Faith, The Gifts of a Mentoring Environment, and Mentoring Communities.



Virtual Faith—The Irreverent Spiritual Quest of Generation X

Tom Beaudoin (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 1998)

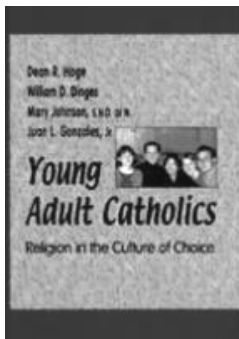
In one of the first books to explain the deep and pervasive search for meaning that haunts Generation X, Tom Beaudoin explores fashion, music videos, and cyberspace concluding that Generation X has fashioned a theology radically different from, but no less potent or valid than, that of their elders. He uncovers four key themes: all institutions are suspect—especially organized religion, personal experience is everything and every form of intense personal experience is potentially spiritual, suffering is also spiritual, and Generation X sees ambiguity as a central element of faith.



Postmodern Pilgrims—First Century Passion for the 21st Century World

Leonard Sweet (Nashville: Broadman & Holman, 2000)

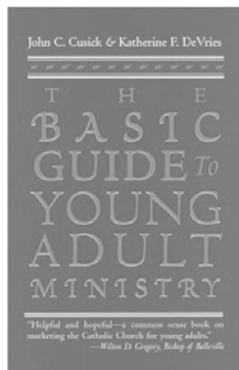
In *Postmodern Pilgrims* Leonard Sweet provides a succinct and popular introduction to postmodern culture and how churches can respond to the spiritual needs of postmodern young adults. He presents an EPIC model of doing church: Experiential, Participative, Image-driven, and Connected. “*Postmodern Pilgrims* is an attempt to show the church how to camp in the future in the light of the past.” Sweet argues that ministry in the twenty-first century has more in common with the first century than with the modern world that is collapsing all around us.



Young Adult Catholics—Religion in the Culture of Choice

Dean R. Hoge, William D. Dinges, Mary Johnson, S.N.D. de N., and Juan L. Gonzales, Jr. (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 2001)

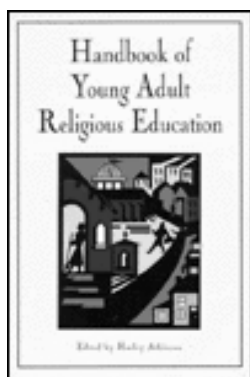
Based on a 1997 national survey of Catholic young adults and supplemented by interviews with 800 young adults, this book presents a profile of the religious attitudes, beliefs, and needs of the current generation of Catholics in their 20s and 30s. The authors underscore observations that include the strength and tenacity of Catholic identity in spite of many challenges, the high level of personal decision-making among young adults, and the readiness of young adult Catholics for institutional reforms. The conclusion describes five problematic issues facing the Catholic church and provides recommendations to church leaders from young adults and the research team.



The Basic Guide to Young Adult Ministry

John C. Cusick and Katherine F. DeVries (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Press, 2001)

The *Basic Guide to Young Adult Ministry* offers a practical, pastoral approach for inviting young adults in the 20s and 30s, married and single, into greater participation in the life of the church. Part One looks at who young adults are, their affiliation with the church, what they seek, and why a ministry directed specifically to them makes sense. Part Two presents information about effective young adult ministry at the local church level. Part Three discusses young adult ministry beyond the local church—both as an areawide outreach in which several churches combine resources and as a regional outreach or citywide outreach.



Handbook of Young Adult Religious Education

Harley Atkinson, editor. (Birmingham, AL: Religious Education Press, 2001)

Even though this was published in 1995, it remains the most complete and thorough book available on young adult religious education. It integrates research, theory, and practice. It helps the religious educator truly understand the many internal and external forces impacting on the young adult so that ministry to the young adult can be made as compassionate and as successful as possible. Essays in the *Handbook* are organized in five sections: Foundations of Young Adult Religious Education, Characteristics of Young Adults, Educational Procedures, Religious Education for the Diversity of Young Adult Life Situations, and Program Planning.



Shaping a New Vision of Faith Formation for Maturing Adults: Sixteen Fundamental Tasks

Richard P. Johnson, Ph.D.

For years, we've heard predictions that "the elders are coming." Now they are here. And these maturing adults are here to stay in ever advancing numbers that are fueled by downward shifts in worldwide fertility rates and dramatically increased longevity.

Today's maturing adults are different from those who came before. Sociologist Dean Hoge of the Catholic University of America, says they are more motivated by a desire for personal purpose; also, they tend to be more participatory, more interested in being actively involved with issues that "matter."

Yet maturing adults are perhaps the least understood of any group within churches today. They are also the group that receives the least amount of focus on faith formation. There are many reasons for this: a general fear of aging; an historical preoccupation with the educational and sacramental needs of our youth; the relatively small numbers of maturing adults in the overall composition of many congregations (although in others, maturing adults

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may make up the majority of the community; a lack of faith formation curricular materials for maturing adults; and the perception that maturing adults don't need further faith formation. All of these reasons have conspired to create a generally anemic approach to faith formation in the maturing years.

But the situation is changing. Today, we better understand the prejudice of ageism. Churches see the need for faith formation efforts at every phase and stage of life and are willing to make room for these efforts in budgets. Additionally, we are beginning to see curricular materials and resources targeted to the needs of maturing adults. All of this points to the need for a new vision of faith formation for maturing adults.

Developing this new vision requires a fundamental change, one that includes a transformation in the way spiritually maturing adults understand their role as children of God, and a grounded shift in how we, as leaders, "do" ongoing faith formation. We can and must become more intentional in our work with the maturing adults. We can and must become more proactive, more assertive, and more focused on incorporating faith formation for maturing adults into our plans and programs.

This article outlines sixteen fundamental tasks, overarching units of faith-work, which serve as the scaffolding for comprehensive faith formation programs for maturing adults. These tasks not only guide church leaders in constructing fundamental and functional faith formation ministries, they also act as spiritual development handholds for maturing adults as they work toward a greater realization of God's presence in their lives. These sixteen tasks help illustrate a sense of

purpose for maturing adults in the Christian community, and give leaders the necessary vocabulary to conceptualize and converse about maturing adult faith formation in entirely new ways.

Ongoing faith formation for maturing adults must be intentional, purposeful, organized, and developmental. Too often, faith formation efforts for this age group seem to lack direction, structure, and an integrative framework. In many churches, lifelong faith formation is little more than a hit-or-miss proposition that satisfies no one: not congregational leadership, not the faith formation coordinator, and certainly not maturing adults themselves. No one feels good about the "program"—if indeed it can be called a program! Yet this is no one's fault, since up until now there has been little guidance available for articulating a clear curriculum structure for maturing adults.

Recently, I had a personal experience that illustrated the need for new guidance in what constitutes faith formation for maturing adults. While giving a seminar at what could only be considered an otherwise forward-looking church, I mentioned, somewhat astonished, that some churches actually included bus trips to the local casino as an accepted event in their ministry to senior adults. Imagine my surprise when I returned from lunch that day to find a flyer on my lectern, from that very community, announcing a bus trip to the local casino! Please understand: there is nothing wrong with trips to casino, and other social activities for maturing adults. But we must be clear that these activities are socialization, and not faith formation.

Faith Formation Builds on Nature

Each stage and phase of life is ordained by God and therefore has a purpose. Each and every season of our lives offers a cornucopia of opportunities for growth on all levels: body, mind, and spirit. We grow in never-ending spirals of change, as the progression of our lives ebbs and flows, with the Spirit nudging and guiding us always. There is no one phase of life that is more important than another: each has its place; each is equally essential.

Like our lives, ongoing faith formation throughout life supports a spirituality that is constantly growing, ever changing. Ongoing faith formation brings us closer to God, closer to our true selves, our holy selves, the Christ within us. It is best practiced as a sequence of faith formation experiences, some intentional and some quite unexpected, that generate deeper and deeper insights about our true nature and relationship with God. These experiences flow quite naturally from our God-ordained developmental path, the sequence of life stages and transitions that make up our total life experience.

Ongoing faith formation is most effective when it's directly linked to our maturation process. The developmental tasks of life provide us with the framework and essential opportunities for living our lives with a purposeful, intentional, and integrative response to the grace that God continually showers on us.

The best ongoing faith formation is built on life experience. As such, a comprehensive program needs to include all groups and subgroups that make up the larger population of maturing adults in the church. This includes, but is not confined to:

the pre-retired or “Boomers,” the already retired or “Builders,” and the physically diminishing or “Elders.”

This ministry also needs to focus on those who work with maturing adults, whether they are part of the staff or volunteers. As such, we need to construct or adopt an ongoing education program that parallels and extends the ministry of faith formation for our maturing members, especially those elders who are homebound.

When faith formation for maturing adults becomes fully operative, all church members naturally come to see themselves as sharing their own personal faith journey with the whole community. Interacting with maturing adults is a special calling; this only becomes apparent when a congregation has adopted an intentional adult faith formation process.

Perhaps the biggest reason why maturing adult faith formation has not yet become a “true” comprehensive ministry is because there hasn’t been credible investigation into the spiritual needs of maturing adults. We haven’t yet awakened to the need for what Jane Regan of Boston College calls “an adult church.” In the absence of a clear understanding of the developmental stages in later life, precious few curricular materials exist that are specifically targeted for maturing adults—the Boomers, Builders, and Elders. Consequently, many churches have yet to grow beyond what I call “buses, bingo, and brownies,” a tongue-in-cheek description for an anemic approach to ministry for maturing adults.

Slowly this lack of material is now being addressed. There does appear to be an emerging body of knowledge that combines the best from adult development research,

the behavioral sciences, and church documents, tradition, and theology to form what one writer calls “spiritual gerontology.” This emerging body of work can serve as the underpinnings of a curriculum for faith formation that is personal, practical, and relevant for the ongoing needs of maturing adults.

A Framework for the Ongoing Faith Formation Needs of Maturing Adults

If faith builds on nature, then stimulating a deepened spiritual awareness in maturing adults can best be served by looking at the specific issues of life and love that concern them most. These issues are taken from their everyday lives, the ordinary and extraordinary “stuff” that weaves together the fabric of their hearts and minds. Here we find evidence of the work of the Spirit, and the most potential for spiritual awakening.

Faith formation for maturing adults is best constructed around a solid understanding of each facet of modern life. From this perspective, grounded in the faith and tradition of our Church, we can best grab the attention of maturing adults by helping them make the connections between their life experiences and the transcendent power of God.

Here are sixteen tasks, essential competencies for spiritual development taken from everyday life, that together form a framework of fundamentals for a faith formation curriculum for maturing adults.

1. Develop basic faith formation competencies with a strong spiritual base.

All maturing adults need to have some basic information, such as common misconceptions about aging, the fundamental emotional needs of elder adults, common reactions to loss, lifestyle adjustments that come with aging, ways to build relationships that are both nurturing and spiritually, and so on. This information helps form the foundation for the process of “holy aging.” The following story illustrates this goal. Three bricklayers, who were working on a church, were asked what they were doing. The first said, “I’m laying bricks.” The second responded, “I’m building a church.” The third replied, “I’m helping to build heaven on earth.” Maturing adults need a new vision of aging that is faith-based, and not simply secular.

2. Define a new personal paradigm for aging that is built on a spiritual framework.

Too often, maturing adults see the aging process simply as the secular world sees it, as something that happens only to our bodies. Yet the entire maturation process is an extension of the lifelong developmental process, which is ordained by God and therefore, is good. Again, I want to emphasize that aging is a spiritual process every bit as much as it is a physical and mental process. In order to understand and personally “own” this expanded view of aging, maturing adults must be given the tools to help them deal positively and constructively with all the issues that aging brings.

3. See retirement as a holy journey of peace and purpose.

Maturing adults can often define a spiritual path through the transition we call retirement. They need to know that retirement isn't an end, but a new beginning.

Retirement has a unique spirituality, one that can enhance growth at both a spiritual and personal level. It offers a new balance to life that can invigorate, rather than diminish. We have the responsibility of clearly articulating a challenge to maturing adults: that this time of life offers a unique opportunity to use their specific gifts and talents in service to their families and friends, their churches, and their communities, as well as for their own advancing faith formation. Maturing adults need the skills and competencies that enable them to live their retirement "on purpose."

4. Build spiritual companionship skills into the intergenerational patterns of the Christian community.

Maturing adults can enhance their ongoing faith formation by learning and practicing relationship skills that go beyond the normal patterns of social interaction. By forming relationships with diverse groups, across lines of age and other categories, maturing adults can become more aware of the movement of the Spirit in their own lives and in the lives of others. For example, helping maturing adults form mentoring relationships with younger members of the congregation can be a source of positive growth for all involved.

5. Develop ways to see illness through a lens of faith.

Over eighty-six percent of persons over sixty years of age have at least one chronic ailment. Maturing adults can grow to see their illness

as a normal part of growing older, and as an opportunity to embrace God's love more dearly. Sometimes, personal impairment can come more from the way people *see* their illness than from the sickness itself. Why do some maturing adults live a full and rich life in spite of their sickness, while other seems to make a lifestyle out of being sick? Illness doesn't need to be debilitating, certainly not from a spiritual perspective.

6. Understand wellness as a spiritually holistic concept.

Wellness is more than the absence of disease; it's a state of being where one is functioning in an optimal manner, physically, mentally, emotionally, and spiritually. Maturing adults need a personal wellness program, a framework that gives them specific guidance on how to achieve wellness *regardless of the condition of their objective health.*

7. Learn the essentials of giving care in a way that encourages spiritually growth.

Many of your maturing adults will be called to caregivers. As such, they should know and practice the competencies of caregiving that have proven effective. Caregiving is so much more than performing tasks; it's an engagement of the heart as well as the mind, an illumination of the spirit as well as an activity of the soul. Caregivers need to know that their role is a ministry, an opportunity for spiritual growth. Without this dimension, caregivers risk becoming overwhelmed, falling prey to motivational failures and burnout.

8. Understand the connection between spiritual growth and good mental health.

About twenty percent of maturing adults eventually struggle with

what have been termed "chronic problem" or "difficult" personalities. The five most common of these personalities are: depressed, anxious, dependent, delusional, and angry.

These five personalities can cause many problems for the person, as well as for their families, friends, and fellow church members. It is imperative that those who work with maturing adults have a firm grasp on how to identify tendencies toward these problem personalities, while at the same time learning how they can best serve and give care to these struggling, yet sometimes exasperating, individuals.

9. Link the experiences of the middle years with God's grace.

The middle years, generally thought of as between ages forty-five to sixty-five, are filled with potential turmoil. Yet this very turmoil can be the soil for faith growth. Maturing adults in the middle years are "charged" with setting down the foundation of the second half of their life, a process that includes confronting their own mortality. What came before our middle years was a prelude, preparation for a fantastic journey of interior growth and psycho-spiritual alignment that uses the rest of life to advance our spiritual authenticity and quest for God.

10. Connect the experiences of the maturing years with God's grace.

The maturing years, those beyond the middle years, offer a time of graced and gracious growth. As the body slowly diminishes and shows the signs of physical "dis-integration," the heart and soul have the potential to more fully integrate. It's been said that with age, one's body slows down while one's spiritual pace quickens. The road to spiritual development in the

maturing stage is not an easy one; walking it requires continual guidance and enlightenment. This is where your ongoing faith formation program can rise to the occasion.

11. See all relationships as opportunities for expressing the love of Jesus Christ.

Jesus commanded us to love God and one another. This is the central message of Christianity, a message that challenges us daily throughout life, no less so in our maturing years. Yet how can we love best? What guidelines can we follow in our everyday lives that help us to love better? Maturing adults need, and perhaps even crave, the warmth and connection of relationships regardless of whether they are married or single, living at home or in a care setting. Faith formation for maturing adults can raise-up all relationships, regardless of how difficult they can sometimes be, as reflections of God's love in action. Maturing adults need to hear the message of love accented again and again so they can reflect the light of Christ in their everyday lives.

12. Stimulate a new openness to the ongoing work of the Spirit.

Change stimulates growth, and its pace quickens as we advance in age. Our maturing years ask that we enter into a continuous progression of change, unparalleled to what we may have experienced in previous years. The more we can embrace change as a beneficial force in our lives, the better we can reap the harvest of our years lived in the Spirit.

13. Rise to the role of spiritual mentor-coach.

Younger persons in the faith community need the spiritual wisdom of maturing adults. At the same time, maturing adults need the

encouragement and skills to carry out the role of mentor-coach. The role of the mentor-coach is to couple with younger people who can benefit from the spiritual life experience of the maturing adult. The mentor-coach models the work of Jesus Christ, and shares her or his life in Christ with the rest of the faith community.

14. Recognize the innate power in one's own spiritual story.

One of the most profound faith formation tasks of the elder years is to realize that Christ has been present in and guiding one's life all along. This awareness ushers in a renewal of faith that can emancipate maturing adults from spiritual shadows and compulsions that constrict communion with Christ. Instead, a new innocence and simplicity emerges that lubricates any tired or worn spiritual mechanisms and coaxes them into finer operation. Such profound discernment comes only from a deep consideration and contemplation of soul, the result of which leads to new abundance of life.

15. Enter into a renewed practice of prayer.

Prayer reminds us who we are; it reiterates our essential core, illuminates our inner reality, and activates our true self. In our advancing maturity we discover new urges to find more intimate communion with the divine, and a desire for deeper connection with Jesus. Prayer, our continuous connection with God available 24/7, brings us ever further into the mystery of life, while providing the means for a more peaceful and secure existence.

16. Recognize the essential wonder of our advancing walk with God.

Paradoxically, as we mature we become more different from and yet more alike every other person. As our walk with God progresses, we more clearly come to recognize our inner light, more tenderly appreciate our essential inner attractiveness, and more confidently validate our innate distinctiveness. These three characteristics—light, beauty, and uniqueness—constitute the core elements of our divine ordination.

Focusing This Work

Essentially, maturing adults are asking for two things from the Christian community:

- ♦ **Personal relevancy:** They want to make a difference and tackle some of the social injustices in our culture
- ♦ **Interior growth in faith:** They want guidance and direction so they can activate their contemplative nature; they desire clear connection between their world experience and the higher call to God.

We need to listen to this new call by re-defining the ministry and mission to maturing adults. There must be more two-way communication between church leadership and maturing adults, with an emphasis on the potential for empowerment, and a deeper discovery of our spiritual nature through the process of ongoing faith formation. We can see this emerging group of maturing adults as a source of new vitality, people who can tap into their essential faith, loosen inhibiting constraints, and raise the standard of expectation for both active involvement and interior contemplation.

Such lofty goals take a commitment to action from all levels of the church. We need to:

- ♦ Educate ourselves about the value of aging, its purpose and its promise, so we can clearly understand the needs, wants, and desires of maturing adults at all stages of development.
- ♦ Make room in church budgets for addressing the needs of this group.
- ♦ Build a comprehensive curriculum that connects the everyday concerns of all maturing adults—Boomers, Builders, and Elders—to their ongoing spiritual journey. This requires a new scope and sequence of content relevant to their faith formation needs.
- ♦ Construct and expertly manage ministerial structures in each church that can focus the vast energy and talent of our maturing members on the myriad needs of our culture.

Let's embrace the challenge to develop a new model of faith formation for maturing adults. We can chart a new course and a set a new direction, well beyond the old model, dominated by socialization, that is so common in "senior groups" today. We can incorporate the ideas of psychosocial development into the practices of adult faith formation. We can capture and incorporate a new vibrancy, a new vitality, and a new vision into what a maturing life in the Spirit can and should be today.

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Adult Faith Formation at a Crossroads: A Reflection

Catherine Minkiewicz

A significant anniversary passed quietly in November 2006. Seven years ago, the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops published *Our Hearts Were Burning Within Us* (OHWB), its pastoral letter on adult faith formation. With over 60,000 copies sold, this document has proven to be one of the better-selling publications of the USCCB, and it has done much to raise awareness of the need for adult faith formation. To date, many Catholic dioceses and parishes have implemented significant parts of the recommendations of *Our Hearts Were Burning Within Us* in their pastoral plans, and despite financial constraints in many locations, there has been generous funding for realizing the goals of the pastoral plan.

Yet one question persists with regard to this document: how do we move beyond the vision into application? How do we truly situate adult faith formation at the heart of church life without compromising other areas of faith formation? The *National Directory for Catechesis* reminds us that “the catechesis of adults is the principal form of catechesis” and that it is “the *organizing principle*...the axis around which revolves the catechesis of childhood and adolescence as well as that of old age” (188, 197). Adult faith formation is not “remedial religious education,” as some have suggested, nor can it be satisfied by a lecture series or lenten mission. What is called for is an integrated approach to all activities, including liturgy and stewardship, with the goal of forming a faith for adults that is living, explicit, and fruitful.

Nibbling at the edges of the faith formation process, or tinkering with a program here and there will not realize the vision for an integrated approach. It can only be enabled by adopting a paradigm shift, a whole new way of thinking about faith formation and church life and its about the practice of faith formation. Although many congregations today have started to think differently, the fact is that changing patterns of thinking and behaviors

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is hard to do, even in the best of situations. Think about how much effort it takes to move from driving a stick shift to an automatic; chances are your left foot still goes for the clutch whenever you brake. Or consider what happens when you suffer the loss of a close family member or friend; it can take weeks, months, or even years before you really start to understand that they are gone.

When we decide to move from the theoretical to the practical, we ask questions such as: How are we going to do this? What steps do we need to take to go from a child-centered classroom model to a more community-based model? How do we prepare the congregation for this change? Some simply change the focus of faith formation from children to adults. This can be a good start, but it doesn't use an integrated model that allows each and every person in the community to be formed at the best and appropriate level. Also, when serious efforts have been made to present programs that truly recognize "the parish is the curriculum" (OHWB, no. 118), there can be great resistance from the community. Content may be stressed over methodology, texts over context, and parents protest that they can't just "drop off" their children. The solution is still a way off.

Although for most churches a holistic approach to faith formation—one that incorporates parish, family, school, and community—is a new undertaking, there have been inroads made that we would do well to consider. Of particular interest is the movement to connect faith formation with everyday human activities, as described in the book *Practicing Our Faith*, a series of essays edited by Dorothy Bass and Craig Dykstra.

This approach calls for a personal reflection on our daily routines, and asks us to consider how we bring the ordinary to holiness, how we recognize the divine in the ordinary. Practices such as offering hospitality, honoring the body, asking for and granting forgiveness, keeping Sabbath, making economic and political decisions, asceticism, discernment, healing, testimony, singing, and dying well all resonate with a sacramental imagination and provide a lens through which we can re-examine our lives in the light of the holy.

We regularly employ bread, wine, water, oil, fire, incense, embracing, laying on of hands, anointing, procession, darkness, and silence in our worship. Why not bring our awareness of these elements into our daily life? For example, how do we start our day as we emerge from the darkness of sleep? How do we show forgiveness to our spouse, our children, or those in the workplace? Is welcoming strangers to our community as easy for us as inviting guests to our home? How do we mark departures and returns? What care do we take with our bodies? How, when and with who do we eat our meals? What are our evening routines as we prepare for sleep? Do we embrace and offer a blessing before saying goodnight? Seemingly ordinary actions are sacramental in essence: bathing can be a baptismal act, reminding us that we are created in the image of God; gathering at table to share meals and stories of our lives echoes the Eucharist; speaking openly and charitably with those who have hurt us recalls the sacrament of reconciliation.

One year, while I was taking a class at the Weston Jesuit School of Theology, I would walk from my job, across Harvard Yard to Weston. As I walked each week, I

began to notice the pattern that a crabapple's shadow cast on a rough concrete wall; how students regularly gathered at a particular fountain; even certain cracks in the pavement were familiar markers of my passage. After a few weeks the walk became a joy-filled meditation. An ordinary activity was transformed into a holy moment.

And so we are faced with a pastoral question: how do we help people, whether they are in the pews or not, come to an awareness of the holy richness of their daily lives, and act upon this awareness? There is a need at a grassroots level to empower people to open themselves to learning from the ordinary. And because all faith formation begins with evangelization, this may prove to be the catalyst for tapping into that holy yearning felt by so many people today.

A Meditation on the Road Ahead: Luke 24:13–35

I would like to invite you to join me in reflecting on the passage from Luke's gospel that inspired the title of the Catholic bishops' pastoral plan, *Our Hearts Were Burning Within Us*. My own experience with this passage is that with each reading, a new insight usually surfaces. When I use this reading in a group setting, I usually script it for four voices: Jesus, the two disciples, and a narrator. As the readers become comfortable with their roles, an immediacy and inner understanding comes to life. So let it be with us. I invite you to become these voices, to listen with the ears of the heart, as we continue our mission to make the vision of adult faith formation a reality.

Come away and journey once again down a dusty road, following that first Easter.

Now that same day two of them were going to a village called Emmaus, about seven miles from Jerusalem. They were talking with each other about everything that had happened.

We see the two disciples, distraught, their hopes and perhaps even their ambitions destroyed, brought to nothing, leaving Jerusalem for the safety and shelter of home. Like most people in crisis they are turned inward, looking for answers. One of their own has betrayed Jesus, their beloved leader and teacher, bringing him to humiliation and a brutal execution. As close associates of the accused, they fear for their own lives. Their frame of reference has been destroyed and most of their relationships, even their own self-identity, called into question. Nothing seems to have any rational meaning. They are fleeing for the safety of the familiar.

Faith formation is a journey, one that is rarely smooth. Our faith goes through “seasons, some apparently dormant, others fruitful” (OHWB no. 50). These days, the Christian Church itself is in crisis, and many are retreating to the nostalgic and familiar. It is a troubling time, one in which many look for instant answers rather than live with the discomfort of unanswered questions. Yet this crisis offers an opportunity to challenge leaders to consider new ways of being church, to explore new means of evangelization and faith formation.

As they talked and discussed these things with each other, Jesus himself came up and walked along

with them; but they were kept from recognizing him.

On first reading this passage, as with other resurrection accounts, we may be surprised that the two disciples did not recognize Jesus. What was it about the resurrected Christ that made him beyond recognition to those who knew him best? At the same time we see the hospitality offered by the disciples to a stranger whom they encountered along the road. Although these two had been traumatized by the death of their friend Jesus, they were nevertheless moved to show hospitality to the stranger.

Formation takes place in community, whether in the church or at home or among friends. Ultimately, this is where we all encounter Christ. We need a safe place to tell our story to those whom we trust, who may or may not have shared in our experience. We need someone to walk with us as we try to make sense of that experience. This is an essential part of the catechumenal model (GDC, no. 59). And so like the two disciples, we must consider how we practice hospitality in our homes, churches, schools, and communities. Are we open to new ideas, new social situations, new practices and people?

He asked them, “What are you discussing together as you walk along?”

Faith formation need not be a complicated matter. Sometimes all it takes is a simple question, like the one posed by Jesus to the disciples, to enter into dialogue. The key action here is listening. This is a prime component of hospitality, and means that we open ourselves to the concerns and questions of other

people. At times we want to rush in with our own message, what we consider to be the absolute truth; yet others may not be ready to hear what we have to say. They may not be at the same point in their faith journey that we are, and so we need to adjust our pace to theirs. We need to listen and be open to learning their truth.

If Jesus had not taken the time to ask a question and listen to the answer, his message might have been as unrecognizable to the disciples as his personal appearance. What are we doing to instill in our congregations and ourselves the practice of deep, active listening?

They stood still, their faces downcast. One of them, named Cleopas, asked him, “Are you only a visitor to Jerusalem and do not know the things that have happened there in these days?” “What things?” he asked. “About Jesus of Nazareth,” they replied. “He was a prophet, powerful in word and deed before God and all the people. The chief priests and our rulers handed him over to be sentenced to death, and they crucified him; but we had hoped that he was the one who was going to redeem Israel. And what is more, it is the third day since all this took place. In addition, some of our women amazed us. They went to the tomb early this morning but didn’t find his body. They came and told us that they had seen a vision of angels, who said he was alive. Then some of our companions went to the tomb and found it just as the women had said, but him they did not see.”

When I use this text with a group, I usually script it for four voices: the narrator, Jesus and the two disciples. This interchange, full

of pain and urgency, just can't be read in a calm or neutral voice. There are so many troubling details, starting with the disciple's incredulity that this stranger was unaware of what had transpired in Jerusalem during the last three days. Wasn't he coming from there as well? The details of the past days' events came tumbling out from the mouth of Cleopas: the weakness of the Roman leaders when faced with the mob, the apparent deviousness of the high priests as they sought to eliminate a challenge to their power, the ordeal of Jesus' torture and execution. How could the stranger not have known about all this?

Then there was the other extraordinary event that had occurred: the empty tomb with angels who told the women who had come to the tomb that Jesus was not there; he was alive! It was suspicious testimony to be sure, but even the prompt investigation of several apostles couldn't disprove it. As we develop our programs for adult faith formation, how are we shaped by the delivery of the message? Are we as excited and energized by the joy of salvation as were the women who delivered the news of the empty tomb? Or do we recount the good news as if we were reading the phone book out loud?

Here is another question for consideration: what if, as some Scripture scholars argue, the two disciples on the road to Emmaus were a husband and wife? Perhaps the wife was one of the Marys who, along with Clopas, are depicted as standing at the foot of the cross in John's account. The spelling of the man's name—Clopas vs. Cleopas—is slightly different than in the Gospel, but there could be any number of reasons for that. Could we accept that a woman might have been considered a disciple? As we do faith formation, are we willing to

look forward past the issues of marginalization, along lines of gender, class, race, and belief, that have been a part of our history?

He said to them, "How foolish you are, and how slow of heart to believe all that the prophets have spoken! Did not the Christ have to suffer these things and then enter his glory?" And beginning with Moses and all the prophets, he explained to them what was said in all the scriptures concerning himself.

I am heartened at those times when I see Jesus somewhat short of patience, as he appears to be in this passage. It gives me hope for myself. How can we start to weave the treasure of our Scriptures throughout our faith formation initiatives? How can we facilitate the practice of regular, informed reading of the Bible in the households that we serve? How can we enrich the preaching in our congregations? We have at our disposal these sacred texts that many are still so ignorant of and yet so hungry for what they hold! At the same time, there needs to be a clarification of that which is truly the Christian Tradition, not just favored customs and practices. How slow we have been in seeing that Scripture and Tradition complement each other. At the heart of each is Christ himself.

As they approached the village to which they were going, Jesus acted as if he were going farther. But they urged him strongly, "Stay with us, for it is nearly evening; the day is almost over." So he went in to stay with them.

This passage suggests the question, "What if...?" What if the disciples had not invited Jesus to

stay with them? Did they ever consider asking Jesus where he was headed? Would they have gone with him? How central was the disciples' invitation to all that followed! This stranger that they had met on the road shared with them knowledge on a far deeper level than simply recounting the occurrences of the past few days. He had assuaged their fears and confusion; he had renewed their thirst for spiritual knowledge.

We need to welcome strangers on their terms, and appreciate what we can learn from them. As St. Paul says, "We have gifts that differ according to the grace given to us..." (Rom 12:6). Each of us has something of value to offer the Christian community as a whole, and we must accept and nurture this gift of diversity. In his Rule, Benedict writes, "All guests to the monastery should be welcomed as Christ," (no. 53) and even stipulates that each meal should have a choice of dishes because not all can eat the same. How flexible are we in our approaches to faith formation? Is it "my way or the highway," or are we open to different styles, different ways of teaching and learning?

When he was at the table with them, he took bread, gave thanks, broke it and began to give it to them. Then their eyes were opened and they recognized him, and he disappeared from their sight. They asked each other, "Were not our hearts burning within us while he talked with us on the road and opened the scriptures to us?"

As we said before, everyday life carries the greatest potential for faith formation. What could be more basic than sitting down at table and breaking bread? Formation starts at home, taking time to prepare a meal and share it

together with family and friends. It carries over to the church, as care is taken to ensure that all have an opportunity for full, active, participation in the liturgy. It involves providing opportunities for preparing the liturgy, including familiarizing the assembly with the Scripture readings and encouraging a sensitivity to the liturgical seasons with attention to the environment and the music.

There is a fine line between education and liturgy; the best formation takes place when the two are seen as parts of one whole. Education both prepares the community for liturgy and takes place within the liturgy itself. In turn, a community that is knowledgeable and, as such, can encourage that community to go out into the world and continue the action of Eucharist enriches the liturgy. In many ways, this is the pinnacle of the work of faith formation.

With the disciples' recognition of the risen Christ, his work of instruction was done. In the words of Augustine, they had received that which they were: the Body of Christ. Liturgical formation for and through liturgy, empowers us to continue Christ's ministry. This is truly a momentous event. And it starts with sharing a meal.

They got up and returned at once to Jerusalem. There they found the eleven and those with them, assembled together and saying, "It is true! The Lord has risen and has appeared to Simon." Then the two told what had happened on the way, and how Jesus was recognized by them when he broke the bread.

It should come as no surprise to anyone involved in faith formation that the two disciples had little rest.

They were driven on by the energy and joy they felt in being called to testify to the Lord's presence. In this Gospel account, we see evangelization and conversion taking place simultaneously in Jerusalem and at Emmaus. Faith formation involves a similar cyclical dynamic: we evangelize in order to catechize or educate, and then go out again to tell others about the good news. A word of caution to those who think that by evangelizing, they may be "bringing faith" to the uninitiated: we arrive only to find that God is already there. Our task is to recognize and affirm the action of the Spirit in people's lives.

Our journey is far from over. Like the disciples who re-gathered in Jerusalem, we have many paths ahead from which to choose. Yet no matter which path we take, we move ahead with the firm conviction that Christ travels with

us and that ultimately, this is his journey. We gather strength and inspiration from the saints in our midst, while the fools bring the impossible into consideration. Let us remember to be grateful to both.

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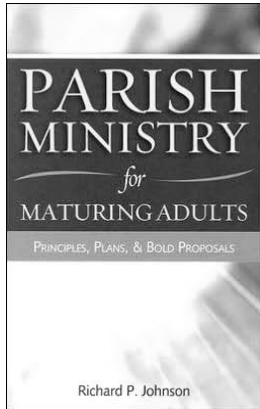
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Questions for Reflection

1. A paradigm shift is not unlike conversion: it calls us to set aside the old ways of doing things and not resist the new. What are the areas for conversion in your faith formation? What can you let die, and what might you embrace for a more integrated approach to adult faith formation in
 - a. your personal life?
 - b. the local church?
2. What are the practices and life-patterns within which you can more intentionally encounter God? What needs to change in these? What opportunities have been missed?
3. How can the liturgical life of your church become the focus of adult faith formation, as well as faith formation for children and teens? What will be the points of resistance?
4. What support do you have for adult faith formation efforts? How can you take advantage of this support; or if it does not exist at present, what can you do to encourage support for adult faith formation?
5. How is lay ministry recognized and encouraged in your church? What methods of preparation are in place? What else may need to happen in this regard?

Recommended Resources

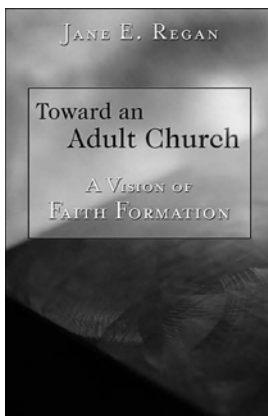
Faith Formation of Adults



Parish Ministry for Maturing Adults: Principles, Plans, & Bold Proposals

Richard P. Johnson (New London, CT: Twenty-Third Publications, 2007)

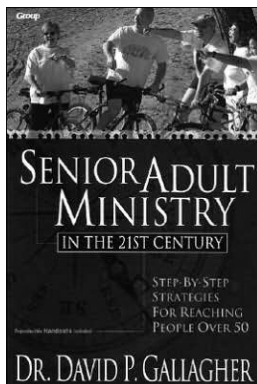
Richard Johnson wants churches to become more active, more assertive, and more focused on the fundamentals of ministering to those in their maturing years. This includes a greater appreciation that this time of life has immense spiritual purpose when people draw closer both to God and their true selves. He calls for a new vision of ministry with maturing adults that moves beyond social activities to a new model of spiritual growth and personal development. Maturing adults need the nurturance of the church's care and compassion; the understanding of their real needs as they are now; the necessary help in discerning the call of God today; encouragement to continue their spiritual pilgrimage; and direction to reach out to others in new ways.



Toward an Adult Church: A Vision of Faith Formation

Jane E. Regan (Chicago: Loyola Press, 2002)

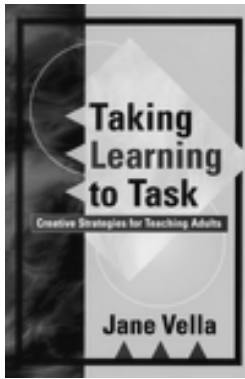
Jane Regan explores the current structure of parish faith formation. Basing her ideas on contemporary theory and traditional practice, Regan sets forth an intriguing argument: the vitality of the Church depends on establishing a new educational paradigm—one that is focused on adults. How can parishes design a framework for adult faith formation? Will such programs be accepted by local church communities? Where does children's faith formation fit into the new structure? Regan answers these questions and offers ideas for developing a balanced approach to faith formation—one that addresses the ongoing faith life of adults. Chapters include: Toward an Adult Church, The Adult as Person of Faith, Transformative Learning, Forming a Learning Community, Adult Formation: From Vision to Presumptions to Structures, and Leadership for Change.



Senior Adult Ministry in the 21st Century

David Gallagher (Loveland, CO: Wipf & Stock Publishers, 2006)

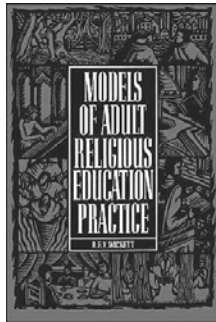
Over one quarter of Americans are age fifty or older. This sizable group has unique needs and requires specialized ministry. In this resource, pastor to senior adults Dr. David Gallagher offers invaluable insights, practical ideas, and successful strategies for ministering effectively to people over 50. This book offers a fresh framework of ministry goals and vision, as well as the practical insights to accomplish them. It includes steps for effective senior adult ministry, characteristics of senior adults, ways to involve senior adults in ministry, and practical strategies and activities for senior adult ministry.



Taking Learning to Task: Creative Strategies for Teaching Adults

Jane Vella (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 2001)

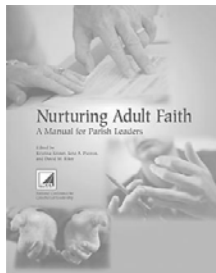
In *Taking Learning to Task*, Jane Vella shifts the spotlight from teaching tasks to learning tasks. Unlike traditional teaching methods, learning tasks are open questions leading to open dialogue between teacher and learner. She provides seven steps to planning learning-centered courses, four types of learning tasks, a checklist of principles and practices, critical questions for instructional design, key components for evaluation, and other tools. She also shares real-world examples of successful learning programs, including online and distance-learning courses. *Taking Learning to Task* is a hands-on, practical guide to designing effective learning tasks for diverse learners and diverse content. (See also *Learning to Listen, Learning to Teach—The Power of Dialogue in Educating Adults* by Jane Vella, San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 1994.)



Models of Adult Religious Education Practice

R. E. Y. Wickett (Birmingham, AL: Religious Education Press, 1991)

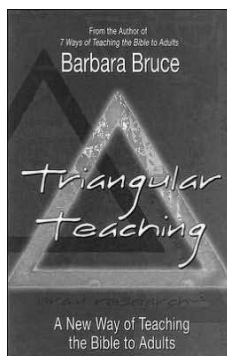
This is one of the only books available that presents theoretical perspectives on religious education practice and descriptions of proven models and procedures for successful adult religious education. It groups these models and procedures into categories: traditional models, individual learner models, group learning models, community models of learning, and distance education models. Unfortunately the book was written before the internet era and the advent of online learning models.



Nurturing Adult Faith: A Manual for Parish Leaders

Kristina Krimm, Jane Pierron, and David Riley. (Washington, DC: NCCL, 2003)

Nurturing Adult Faith is a handbook that provides theoretical models, practical helps and essential information for organizing adult faith formation programs. The manual includes ways to understand the parish a formative community of adults, descriptions of adult development and faith growth, processes for organizing and planning adult faith formation, and a compendium of concrete approaches for adult faith formation.



Triangular Teaching: A New Way of Teaching the Bible to Adults

Barbara Bruce (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 2007)

Triangular Teaching helps teachers and leaders to engage their adult students with Scripture so that it becomes life-changing. This practical, hands-on book trains Christian educators in the methods of “triangular teaching,” an integrated approach involving multiple intelligence theory, brain research, and creative and critical thinking. It includes a section explaining triangular teaching methods and Bible lessons that illustrate the methods. The book includes helpful triangular teaching tips for Bible lessons and an appendix with worksheets. Bruce’s approach can be used to teach any content area. (See also her *7 Ways of Teaching the Bible to Adults: Using Our Multiple Intelligences to Build Faith*, Nashville: Abingdon, 2000.)

Things We Know About Adult Learning

1. Things we know about adult learners and their motivation and retention.

- ♦ Adults are motivated to learn when *they* identify they have a need to learn.
- ♦ Adults learn best when they feel the need to learn and have input into what, why, and how they will learn. They perceive the goals of a learning experience to be their goals.
- ♦ Adults can be motivated to learn when the *benefits* of a learning experience outweigh their resistance.
- ♦ Adult learners can also be motivated by appealing to personal growth or gain.
- ♦ Adults use their knowledge from years of experience as a filter for new information and *don't change readily*.
- ♦ Adults learn best from their own *experiences*.
- ♦ An adult's experience is a filter that can function as a *catalyst or barrier* to learning something new.
- ♦ Ninety percent of what adults learn and retain in long-term memory is tied to previous knowledge.
- ♦ Adults like tangible *rewards and benefits* from training.
- ♦ Adults retain learning that they *discover* and forget much of what they are told.

2. Things we know about designing learning programs for adults.

- ♦ The learning experience should be life-centered, problem-centered, or task-centered.
- ♦ Preprogram assessment is important.
- ♦ Program design should account for learning-style differences among adults and incorporate a variety of learning methods which respect their varied learning styles.
- ♦ The learning design should promote information integration.
- ♦ Exercises and cases should be realistic and involving, stimulate thinking, and challenge the adults.
- ♦ Design should accommodate adults' continued growth and changing values.

- ♦ Feedback and recognition should be planned. Adults learn best when they have a sense of progress toward their goals and can see the results and rewards of the learning experience.
- ♦ Build-in transfer strategies to help adults apply the learning to the real-world.

3. Things we know about adult methods and the environment for adult learning.

- ♦ Some adults like some lectures. All lectures won't be liked by all adults.
- ♦ Adults like *small group discussion* and a variety of interaction with the instructor and other participants.
- ♦ Adults enjoy *practical* problem-solving. Adults want *practical* answers for today's problems.
- ♦ Adults learn best in a safe and comfortable environment. Adults learn best when the learning environment is characterized by physical comfort, mutual trust and respect, mutual helpfulness, freedom of expression, and acceptance of differences. Adults appreciate breaks, which convey *respect* to the learner.
- ♦ *Practice* is a part of the learning process, not the result of it.
- ♦ *Assess* the learners' interest in your topic; don't assume interest.
- ♦ Adults *expect* assistance with technical problems.
- ♦ Adults hate to have their *time* wasted.

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Faith Formation across the Generations

Mariette Martineau

Growing up in rural Saskatchewan, I was surrounded by many caring and supportive family and community members of all ages. Though the school we attended had the typical grade-level classrooms, the school's population was small enough that many activities were undertaken together. Being a farming community, most of the families in town lived close to their extended families, so aunts, uncles, grandparents and so on were a weekly if not daily presence in our lives.

On a social level, we often gathered as extended families to share meals and socialize. Church life was a regular part of our intergenerational existence, as well. Our grandparents and parents often had visible leadership roles in the community, lecturing, cantoring, and so on. Church socials were an important place where the generations gathered: young and old all worked together to host the church fall suppers, to prepare funeral lunches for the family of the deceased, and to participate in the seasonal clean-ups and church maintenance. Adults and young people shared easy conversations in the local store, and cheered each other on at the hockey and curling rinks.

Life was not perfect, but relationships between the generations were naturally nurtured and respected. Values were shared, stories were told, and experiences were created together. Though we would never have defined it like this, we were a eucharistic community, diverse yet of one body.

As the parent of three young children, living in our current world, I have to create or seek out opportunities for them to intentionally relate with other generations. Their lives are mostly spent in an age-segregated context, whether in their classrooms at school, in their sports programs, or even in religious education at the church. Like many families of my generation who relocate to find work, my children's grandparents and extended family are far away. And so there are few contexts for them to interact with older or younger generations. They have few teens or adults in their lives who share faith with them, and they often wonder why we as a household are believers.

Before we initiated intergenerational learning in our community, church for them was often perceived as something they were brought to once a week, and where they had little interaction with the people around them. In relation to church, my children often talked about one thing: the intergenerational learning events that they had experienced at our previous church. They often talked of the people they had met there and of the learning they had participated in, and they often expressed a longing to have those experiences again.

Mariette Martineau is project coordinator for family and intergenerational services at the Center for Ministry Development, author of the *People of Faith Coordinator's Manual* and co-author of two intergenerational volumes of intergenerational programs: *Celebrating Sacraments* and *Responding in Prayer* (Harcourt Religion Publishers). She has a Masters in Pastoral Studies from Loyola University of Chicago and teaches courses in lifelong faith formation.

It took a few years of watching and waiting before we were ready to suggest intergenerational learning to our new church. But eventually we did, and it has meant a new awakening for the Christian community as a whole.

Now, once a month, something different happens in our church. Imagine that it is Thursday night at Notre Dame Parish, and people are starting to gather in the hall for the monthly intergenerational learning session. The population resembles a family reunion with a diversity of households gathered. There are whole extended families gathered together—grandma, grandpa, mom, dad, and children. There are single older adults; there are moms and/or dads with one or two children; and there are even a few teenagers and young adults in the group. Everyone sincerely greets one another and seats themselves for a meal. Beyond the Sunday worship experience, it is one of the few times that our congregation intentionally gathers as an intergenerational community. Time is taken to nurture relationships, to pray and worship, and for an in-depth learning experience that engages all the learners.

No one is there as a bystander; all participate actively in the evening's activities. There is even a visitor from a neighboring church attending this evening, because the they are wondering what is going on at Notre Dame. The visitor is skeptical about whether children, youth, and adults can really learn together. It has been so engrained in us that learning can only happen in an age specific context that we have forgotten how natural it was for many of us to live and learn in intergenerational communities.

Over the past ten years, the Center for Ministry Development, where I work, has been working

with Catholic parishes to enable them to see how intergenerational learning is a critical part of lifelong faith formation. We believe that learning in this context is essential to the spiritual health of families, and that it makes a significant contribution to the overall health of the Christian community. Intergenerational learning nurtures important relationships between people of all ages, and it supports and guides members to better practice their faith at home, at work, and at school.

Here are comments from parishes who have practiced intergenerational learning for several years:

and fill in the gaps in their formation. More adults are participating in faith formation.

- ◆ Families are enjoying the opportunities to pray, learn, and be together through intergenerational learning. Families are growing in the ways that they share faith. Intergenerational learning creates an environment in which participants feel safe to learn, ask questions, and grow in faith on a deeper level. Participants are engaged in a variety of learning activities that are experiential, multi-sensory, and interactive. Sharing faith and

We believe that learning in this context is essential to the spiritual health of families, and that it makes a significant contribution to the overall health of the Christian community. Intergenerational learning nurtures important relationships between parish members of all ages, and it supports and guides members to better practice their faith at home, at work, and at school.

- ◆ Participants are building relationships across all ages as people learn from each other and grow in faith together. Intergenerational learning is strengthening the church community through relationship building and participation in parish life. People take time to talk and share with each other. The entire community is benefiting.
- ◆ Intergenerational learning is addressing the hunger of adults to learn more about their faith

personal experience are an important element of learning.

- ◆ People of all ages are finding ways to use the activities in the home kit [a send-home tool for intergeneration learning] as part of their daily life and home life. Families are beginning to incorporate faith-sharing activities in family life.

(Generations of Faith Project: Summary Report)

Being a Truly Christian Community

I have often wondered how we are able to fully understand the meaning of Christian community when we live in such a divided world. We divide believers and non-believers, we segregate young and old, we distinguish between cultures and languages and needs. In fact, we manage to creatively divide ourselves up at every opportunity. Yet our Christian faith challenges us again and again to witness the hope and possibility of being community in the world. Through the celebration of Eucharist we seek to proclaim that all are welcome, all belong, all are united together through the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ. We can serve together, we can heal together, we can pray together, and we can build community together, all because we are of one faith, called to be disciples in every moment of our lives.

The *Catechism of the Catholic Church* states, “In Christian usage, the word “church” designates the liturgical assembly, but also the local community or the whole universal community of believers. These three meanings are inseparable. “The Church” is the People that God gathers in the whole world. She exists in local communities and is made real as a liturgical, above all a eucharistic, assembly. She draws her life from the word and the Body of Christ and so herself becomes Christ’s Body.” (no. 752)

If we believe we are the People of God, we need to embrace the call to relationships that being a people demands. Not just relationships of the same, but relationships of the diverse. It is important for a young

person to try and understand the perspective and stories of an older person. In the simple witnessing of their faith, many a child has softened the heart of the older generation, thus enabling the Spirit to enter. The faithful testimony of a young adult can move young people to re-evaluate their priorities and directions. One isn’t a “people” alone!

evident through all members of the community gathered together to learn and share faith together. Whether it be the joy of a household welcoming a new baby or the witness of faith in an older person whose spouse has just been moved to a nursing home, intergenerational faith formation can be the nurturing place for Christian identity and values, where the long-held faith

Intergenerational learning creates centers of dialogue for exploring faith.

We are not formed or fashioned into a people in isolation. It is only in community, through the grace and power of the Trinity inherent in the whole community that we can be the People of God. The *General Directory for Catechesis* makes it clear: “In giving attention to the individual, it should not be overlooked that the recipient of catechesis is the whole Christian community and every person in it” (no. 168).

The nature of intergenerational faith formation stands as a countercultural witness to the consumer-driven society that plants the seeds of need, using “things” to fill the need of relationships, purpose, and meaning. Intergenerational faith formation calls us to remove the blinders of assumption from our eyes and to call forward the best from one another as we explore our call to be disciples of Jesus Christ in today’s world. It provides a setting in which to learn compassion, to learn how to listen, to celebrate the gift of faith in the hope found in others.

Through intergenerational learning the life, death and resurrection of Jesus Christ is

traditions of the Christian community are shared.

Our faith formation programs need to provide opportunities for intergenerational learning that includes all ages and generations in the community. This type of learning provides an opportunity to gather the whole community together to learn, pray, celebrate, and share. It has tremendous benefits for the community and for individuals.

Intergenerational faith formation:

- ◆ builds community and meaningful relationships across all the generations in a church
- ◆ provides a setting for each generation to share and learn from the other generations (their faith, stories, wisdom, experience, and knowledge). The parent and grandparent generations pass on the traditions of family and faith to the younger generations, while the younger generations share their faith, energy, and new insights with the parent and grandparent generations.

- ◆ provides an environment where new ways of living one's faith can be practiced
- ◆ provides adult role models for children and youth.
- ◆ promotes understanding of shared values and a common faith, as well as respect for individuals in all stages and ages of life.
- ◆ helps to overcome the age-segregated nature of programs in both our parishes and society.

Intergenerational Learning: Features

Intergenerational learning is much more than different ages learning the same thing at the same time or in the same place. Sometimes called cross-generational learning, it includes intentional opportunities for learners to “cross” their generational boundaries and learn, pray, serve, and be in community with a variety of ages.

Through intentional community building, learners of all ages feel comfortable with one another studying and celebrating the rich traditions of the Christian faith. Intergenerational learning provides opportunities for young and old to teach one another. For example:

- ◆ Scripture takes on a new meaning for the elderly as they listen to a young person's research on the Isaiah passages in preparation for Advent.

- ◆ Children grow in their understanding of discipleship as they listen to their parents or other adults talk about the challenges of being a person of justice.
- ◆ Parents and grandparents pass on traditions of family and faith to the younger generations, while the younger generations inspire others with their energy, enthusiasm, and fresh insights.

Intergenerational learning creates centers of dialogue for exploring faith. Through these conversations we are all nurtured and challenged to live out our baptismal commitments. Cross-generational faith sharing helps us celebrate the presence of God throughout our diverse life experiences. We help one another with our questions, and occasionally offer inspired answers.

Intergenerational learning provides role models and mentors who inspire our hearts so that we can live out our faith to the fullest. How awe-inspiring it is to hear

- ◆ an eight-year-old talk about her plan to help the homeless in her city
- ◆ a thirty-year-old mom share how she seeks to find the face of God in every person she meets as she takes her children to the playground each day
- ◆ a middle-age man share his struggle to find God's presence as he journeyed with his dying wife

- ◆ a seventy-year-old couple talks of their committed love through the sacrament of marriage that they have shared for fifty years.

Intergenerational learning provides opportunities to practice one's faith as each person better learns how to pray, how to read Scripture, and how to relate to people of different ages and cultures. Imagine Christians of all ages practicing together to be church.

Intergenerational Learning: Characteristics

Intergenerational learning incorporates the best of what is important about learning. People of all ages and generations learn best when the learning program engages them experientially, through their heads, hearts, and lifestyles. Students of all ages learn best when their own experiences are honored and respected. Multi-sensory methods to engage the whole person—art, drama, music, dance, storytelling, media, prayer, rituals—are key building blocks for effective intergenerational learning experiences. One need only imagine Jesus, and how he taught through story and images, to realize that learning is broader than lectures and presentations.

Intergenerational learning is enriched through the use of collaborative and group-centered formats for study, inquiry, activities, and sharing. Today's generations of learners are accustomed to interactive learning that actively engages them in the learning process.

Good learning always has real-world application, making the connection between learning and life, and faith and life. When

Cross-generational faith sharing helps us celebrate the presence of God throughout our diverse life experiences. We help one another with our questions, and occasionally offer inspired answers.

learners leave the intergenerational learning sessions they need to be ready to live out their faith in new and renewed ways. Good learning involves more than just receiving content; it also involves integrating that content into daily practice.

Intergenerational Learning: Process

The following learning process, and its many variations, is being used by thousands of churches across North America to design and facilitate intergenerational learning programs.

Part One: Gathering

Registration and Hospitality

Registration may be needed before the learning event takes place in order to determine the number of people who plan on attending. Registration may also be needed as the learners gather for the session to distribute nametags, handouts, home kits, and perhaps collect outstanding fees.

Hospitality is critical toward creating a vibrant learning community. If learners are welcomed warmly, they will more readily participate in the learning program. People learn best in an environment characterized by trust, acceptance, and inquiry. Beyond the gathering, hospitality is critical throughout the entire intergenerational learning experience.

Program Overview

People of all ages like to know how they are going to be spending their time together. As you begin your session, give the learners an overview of the program. Post the agenda on flip chart sheets, use a PowerPoint presentation, or

distribute small pieces of paper for individual learners to carry with them. You may choose to bundle the handouts and take-home materials into a small booklet, placing the program agenda on the front cover.

Group Formation and Community Building

Depending on the learning model or activities chosen, learners are divided into groups: family clusters, intergenerational groups, or age-specific groups. The grouping choices depend on the topic for the session, the physical space, the leadership available, and the number of participants. Community building helps participants feel safe, comfortable, and welcome. Many churches start their learning experiences with a snack or meal.

Opening Prayer Service

The opening prayer service launches the learning experience, as it introduces the theme and roots participants in the community of the Trinity. In some sessions, the opening prayer experience is expanded to serve as the “All-Ages Learning Experience.”

Part Two: All-Ages Learning Experience

The All-Ages Learning Experience provides participants with a multigenerational experience to engage them in the topic of the session. All-ages learning experiences equalize the ages, so that listening to music or singing, watching a dramatic presentation, making an art project, watching a video, hearing a story, participating in a ritual, or praying together are things that different-aged people do at the same time and place, and in a similar manner. Shared experiences are absolutely critical for intergenerational learning.

Part Three. In-Depth Learning Experience

In this, the longest portion of the intergenerational experience (usually about 90 minutes), learning formats are selected according to audience, facilitation, physical space, and topic. A church may use one format one month and a different format the next, depending on the topic being explored. A community may even blend the whole group and age group formats at the same learning session. For example, families with children separate so that the parents have a brief catechetical session on the topic while the children participate in music or crafts related to the topic. The families are then reunited after 15 to 20 minutes to continue to participate in the learning experience together. Here follows an overview of the three learning formats.

Whole Group Format

The Whole Group Format gathers all participants into one large space and guides them through each learning experience at the same time. Imagine a large church hall or adaptable worship space in which tables (preferably round) and chairs have been set up and people of all ages are gathered. Some of the table groups appear to have two or three families working together on a project, some have teenagers or adults working together, and other table groups have people of all ages at them.

At the front or middle of the room is a large-group facilitator (emcee) giving instructions to the groups, and guiding them through the learning experience. Circulating throughout the room are leaders in brightly colored T-shirts assisting the table groups as needed, or who

have been assigned to help facilitate the learning at one of the table groups.

Some of the younger children are participating in the learning experience with their families, while others have chosen to attend the preschool learning option being offered in the vestibule of the church.

The Whole Group Format is a good choice for intergenerational learning when a church has:

- a large physical space with good acoustics and sound system, and appropriate furniture to comfortably accommodate the learners
- a competent large-group facilitator (emcee), capable of providing clear instructions, and able to manage the dynamics and energy of a large group
- a group of facilitators who feel comfortable moving through the assembly offering assistance, or a large enough team of table leaders to assign one facilitator to work with each table group
- a learning topic that lends itself to everyone learning the same thing at the same time but in different ways in the same space.

Timing is crucial. The various table groups must be able to accomplish the learning tasks in a similar timeframe to prevent some table groups having to wait long periods for other groups to finish.

Age Group Format

The Age Group format provides for three or more separate parallel learning groups to focus on the same topic through the use of learning activities best suited for their learning abilities.

Imagine the learning assembly has just completed their All-Ages Opening Experience and participants are moving into various spaces in the church facility.

Families with preschool children have moved to the carpeted space of the school library for their learning time. Families with school-aged children have moved into one of the church halls for their learning, and the teen and adult groups have also found a comfortable learning space. For the next hour or so all of the learning will take place in these parallel learning groups.

The Age Group Format is a good choice for intergenerational learning when a church has:

- an adequate number of meeting spaces for the various groups to gather
- an adequate number of competent facilitators to work with each group
- a topic that is best explored through age-specific learning. Some topics are best explored using different activities for different groups.

The number of age groups may vary depending on your total number of participants. The following age groups are recommended. You may decide to have fewer groups—such as putting all teens together, or putting young adults and adults together—if your overall numbers dictate such a choice.

- Three years old and younger: child care
- Four and five year olds, with or without parents: preschool program with one or more teachers
- Parents with children in grades 1-5. We know that parents and children need time to learn together, to learn how to share faith and

talk about faith with one another. Times for parents of teens to learn with their teens should also be offered at varying learning sessions.

- Middle school: grades 6-8
- High school: grades 9-12
- Young adults (single, married couples): 18-39 years old
- Adults: 40 years and older.

Learning Activity Center Format

The Learning Activity Center Format provides structured learning activities at a variety of stations or centers in a common area. Imagine groups of learning teams, whether they are age-specific or inter-generational, busy at a variety of learning activity centers in the church complex. After a twenty-five minute learning period, the church complex erupts into temporary chaos as the learning groups move from one learning center to the next.

The learning activity center format is a good choice for intergenerational learning when a church has:

- a large physical space where multiple learning centers can be set up without each center being too noisy or distracting for other centers, or a church complex that has multiple meeting or classrooms in which the centers can be hosted
- an adequate number of facilitators to guide the learning at each center, or activities that are simple enough for learners to guide themselves
- a learning focus that lends itself to exploration through a variety of shorter topics that are facilitated through a variety of methods, such as a scripture drama and

discussion, making a project together like an Advent wreath, a video with a response activity, and so on.

Part Four. Sharing Learning Reflections and Home Application

This portion of the learning event helps participants share what they've learned with each other, and to discover ways to apply the learning to their lives.

Whole Group Sharing

The whole group sharing experience provides an opportunity for each learning group to share some highlights of their in-depth learning experience with the rest of the community. Groups may describe the project or activity they created, give a verbal summary, share a symbol of their learning, offer a dramatic presentation, and so on.

Whole group sharing can be conducted in small groups (e.g., families with children, youth, young adults, adults) sharing their learning activities, or conducted with presentations to the entire learning assembly.

Reflection

Through reflection, participants can integrate what they have learned into their lives. Only then will they experience change and growth.

In the "present," you will ask participants to reflect on their learning experience by responding to simple open-ended sentence, such as "I learned..., I discovered..., I was surprised by..., I was moved by..." After a period of reflection, they share with a partner or table group.

For the "future," you might give participants a postcard in their home kit with same open-ended sentences. After participating in the church event that the learning

session was preparing them for, they fill out the card and drop it in the collection basket. Their learning may be shared anonymously with the whole community through the church bulletin and other means.

Home Application

Participants are given an opportunity to craft a concrete action plan for how they will live out what they have learned. This may be done in a simple format such as a to-do list or a pledge card. The learners are also given, with explanation and guidance as needed, any tools and resources they will need to continue the learning, praying, and serving at home.

Part Five. Closing Prayer Service

The closing prayer service reminds participants what the learning is all about: celebrating and building the kingdom of God. Symbols and responses like pledge cards, prayers of intercession, action plans, and so on can be incorporated into a closing prayer service.

Opportunities for Intergenerational Faith Formation

Use intergenerational learning to prepare for significant happenings in church life. For example, offer an intergenerational learning session on solidarity to prepare the community for Lent, or a session on faithfulness to prepare everyone for the annual blessing of married couples. Offer an intergenerational church-wide retreat, such as a daylong or weekend retreat focused on an event or topic important to your faith community, or an intergenerational vacation Bible school program.

Intergenerational faith formation is integral to our churches as we seek to nurture lifelong faith formation in our communities. The possibilities are endless. What opportunities can you provide for your community to strengthen their call to be the People of God by learning together?

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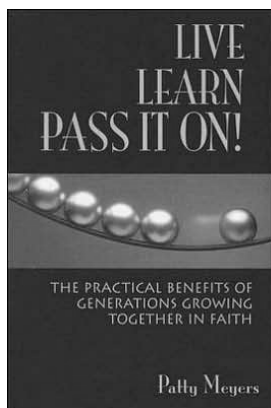
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Recommended Resources

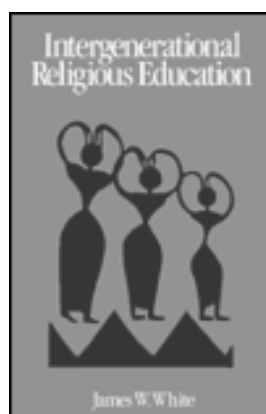
Intergenerational Faith Formation



Live, Learn, Pass It On!—The Practical Benefits of Generations Growing Together in Faith

Patty Meyers (Nashville: Discipleship Resources, 2006)

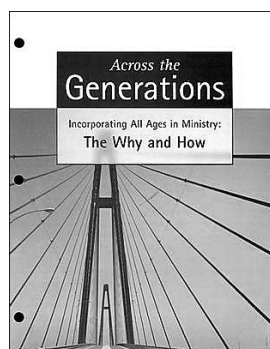
Congregations are intergenerational, but many fail to make the most of the amazing gifts of generations learning together. Instead, peers are segmented from the whole to talk about faith and help each other grow spiritually, creating an unintentional disconnect within the congregation. *Live, Learn, Pass It On!* is written to help the church build on its greatest asset, people... as they pass on understandings of faith and discipleship to the next generations. “This books attempts to honor the God-given strengths and life experiences of people of every age and encourage them to use these for the good of others and to the glory of God,” writes Meyers. She provides a practical overview of multi-generational learning that includes models, stories, biblical and theological foundations on which to build an effective, holistic ministry for all in your congregation.



Intergenerational Religious Education

James W. White (Birmingham, AL: Religious Education Press, 1988)

This is classic work on intergenerational faith formation. It is the most comprehensive, well-researched, and most inclusive of any book on intergenerational religious education (IGRE) published to date. It includes workable models, solid theoretical foundations, and concrete practical prescriptions for effective inter-age religious and community living and learning in the faith community. It includes a variety of viewpoints, models, programs, and methods of IGRE. The spirit of this book resonates so well with the direction of faith formation today: the whole faith community together in which persons of different age groups work interactively and productively to help each other grow religiously



Across the Generations: Incorporating All Ages in Ministry Resource Manual with CD (Minneapolis: Augsburg Fortress, 2001)

Across the Generations integrates foundational information, practical “how to” advice, and proven plans and programs that you can use in cross-generational ministry. The first three chapters provide the foundations, while the next ten chapters provide practical ways to do cross-generational ministry—service, worship, learning, summer ministries, retreat and camping ministries, support ministry at home, drama, and media. Contributors include experts in cross-generational ministry including Roland Martinson, Diane Shallue, Nathan Framback, Paul Hill, Dick Hardel, and David Anderson. The CD contains reproducible program formats, planning tools, and guides for developing your own cross generational programs.

Ways to Utilize Intergenerational Learning

1. Develop a faith formation curriculum for the whole community using intergenerational faith formation as the primary learning model.

Many churches across the country have adopted intergenerational faith formation as their primary learning model. The intergenerational curriculum becomes the core faith formation curriculum for the whole Christian community, supplemented by age-specific topics for children, teens, and adults. For example, many churches offer monthly intergenerational learning sessions for the whole faith community. They may offer the same intergenerational program several times each month to accommodate the number of people in the church, using different days and times to make it easy for people to participate.

Here is an example of topics for an entire year of intergenerational learning focused on Jesus and discipleship. This example makes clear the intimate connection between faith formation, Sunday worship (with a special focus on the lectionary), and the liturgical seasons.

November-December	Birth of Jesus
January-February	Called to Discipleship
March-April	Death of Jesus
April-May	Resurrection of Jesus
June-Summer	Living as Disciples
September-October	Identity of Jesus

2. Extend a topic or theme being featured in the faith formation program for children or adolescents, to the whole community through intergenerational learning.

A topic that the children are studying can be extended to the whole community through intergenerational learning. For example, if the children are studying about Jesus, consider offering an intergenerational program on the identity of Christ. Schedule it within the same timeframe that the children are studying the unit on Jesus.

If the young people are preparing for a service project or mission trip, use the opportunity to conduct an intergenerational session on Christian service, and get everyone engaged in supporting the teenagers. Intergenerational learning provides a common

learning experience for the whole community that can support age group learning programs. Examine your age group curriculum and look for the opportunities and topics for extending age group learning to the whole community.

3. Replace a topic in the children or adolescent faith formation program with intergenerational learning on the same theme.

Intergenerational learning can provide a different learning model for teaching the same content that would have been taught to the children. For example, replace the children's sessions on prayer with one or more intergenerational sessions on prayer for all members of the community. Children will benefit greatly by learning together with their parents and the other generations of the Christian community.

4. Add intergenerational learning to sacramental preparation and sacramental celebrations.

Sacrament preparation offers a marvelous opportunity to offer intergenerational learning for the whole community and/or the extended family of the one preparing for the sacrament. The celebration of a sacrament, such as baptism or Eucharist, is an opportunity to enrich the faith of the whole community. For example, your church can offer intergenerational learning each year around the celebration of First Communion, focusing on different aspects of the Sunday liturgy within the context of the sacrament. During the Christian initiation formation process (RCIA), intergenerational sessions can be offered on initiation themes, such as the baptism and conversion. In addition, many Catholic parishes conduct intergenerational learning programs to prepare the community for the celebration of the sacrament of reconciliation in Advent or Lent.

5. Conduct intergenerational faith formation before major church year feasts and seasons, as well as church events.

The church calendar is rich with possibilities for intergenerational learning for the whole community. Conduct intergenerational programs to prepare all generations for major liturgical feasts and seasons, such as Advent, Christmas, Lent, Holy Week, and

Pentecost, as well as significant events in the life of your church, such as the anniversary of the founding of the church, stewardship Sunday, or a ministries fair. There are dozens of opportunities for preparing the whole community to participate more intentionally and meaningfully in church events.

6. Add intergenerational learning to a vacation Bible school or summer program.

Many churches sponsor summer programs for children. This is another opportunity to add an intergenerational learning program for the whole community. Take a theme from the summer program and offer an intergenerational program on that same theme for families of the children and the whole community. For example, if the focus of the program is being a friend of Jesus, the church can sponsor an intergenerational program on becoming a disciple or living as a disciple.

7. Conduct intergenerational learning around local, national, and international justice issues, events, and action projects.

Justice issues, events, and action projects provide opportunities to engage the whole community in the work of justice and service, as well as learn about the biblical teachings on justice. For example, prepare the community for a justice and service project, such as

helping to feed and clothe the poor in your community, with an intergenerational program on poverty and the needs of the poor. Celebrate the national holiday for Martin Luther King, Jr., by conducting an intergenerational program on racial equality or peace and nonviolence, and then engaging in an action project. Enlist the whole community in supporting the work of national and international organizations by adopting an organizations' project, such as building homes through Habitat for Humanity, and then conducting an intergenerational program on housing and poverty.

8. Sponsor an intergenerational retreat for the whole community.

Many churches conduct a community-wide retreat or mission over several days each year, usually with weekend and evening sessions. This is a great opportunity to enrich the faith of the whole community. Organize your retreat by conducting intergenerational sessions, rather than sessions for individual groups. Develop a focus for the mission, such as following Jesus, or growing in prayer, or what we believe as Christians. Select individual topics for each session of the mission and provide participants with materials to continue the retreat at home.

People of Faith Intergenerational Faith Formation Resources

Six Volumes: Jesus, Creed, Sacraments, Morality, Justice, and Prayer

Developed by the Center for Ministry Development

Authors: John Roberto, Mariette Martineau, Joan Weber, and Leif Kehrwald

Published by Harcourt Religion Publishers

www.harcourtreligion.com

